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The Best Match for Dorothea Brooke

A Study on the Literary Use of Marriage in Middlemarch

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Marriage, which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a great beginning, as it was to Adam and Eve, who kept their honeymoon in Eden, but had their first little one among the thorns and thistles of the wilderness. It is still the beginning of the home epic – the gradual conquest or irremediable loss of that complete union which makes the advancing years a climax, and an age the harvest of sweet memories in common.

Middlemarch, Finale.

Introduction

George Eliot's contribution to the *Bildungsroman* deeply influenced the development of the genre in England. *Middlemarch* is generally considered a Victorian novel of formation, marked by its psychological portrays and its peculiar realism. The book depicts Dorothea and Lydgate's lives in the provincial town of Middlemarch. George Eliot portrays their complicated web of relationships and marriages, while modernity is threatening the stability of the town. The prospect of a future world questions the survival of Middlemarch as well as that of its inhabitants. While the formation of the two youths unfolds, the plot investigates who will be more apt to survive in modernity.

As Virginia Woolf wrote, *Middlemarch* is: "One of the few English books written for grown-up people."[1] This thesis will discuss the role of marriage in the complex structure of Middlemarch and how George Eliot's treatment of marriage shaped a modern *Bildungsroman*. Indeed, the insertion of Dorothea and Lydgate's marriages and marital lives in the narration is what altered the traditional structure of the *Bildungsroman,* proposing a more complex development of the subgenre. Marriage was the prospect of many Victorian novels, and *Middlemarch* depicts a rich kaleidoscope of marriages. In English novels of formation, marriage usually happened once in the story and it generally concluded the narrative, enabling the youth's access to society. Contrarily, Dorothea marries twice in *Middlemarch*, and her first marriage occurs in a rather initial position in the book as well as Lydgate's. To establish who will survive to modernity, the authoress offers Lydgate and Dorothea's marriages. The analysis of their marriages will portray their true nature, revealing who will thrive in the modern world.

Chapter 1 provides the historical background. It discusses marriage and the role of women in Victorian society and literature, dealing with Victorian ideas and

[1] Woolf, V., *Pride and paragon: The life and work of George Eliot, "*Times Literary Supplement"*,* November 20, 1919*,* p. 3.

stereotypes about women. The chapter shows how women were educated to become wives and few options were left for those who decided not to marry.

Chapter 2 defines the *Bildungsroman* and presents its historical development. Then it focuses on *Middlemarch* in relation to the model of the *Bildungsroman*. As the chapter explains, critics usually consider *Middlemarch* a novel of formation. Despite its similarities with other novels of formation, the chapter discusses *Middlemarch* as an anti-*bildungsroman* for its peculiar conclusion in which Dorothea refuses to access the society of Middlemarch.

Chapter 3 examines George Eliot's use of marriage in *Middlemarch.* This chapter analyses Dorothea's first marriage and how it contributes to the narration and to her formation. Furthermore, the chapter discusses how the anticipation of marriage highlights Dorothea's peculiarity which makes her a modern and independent heroine. By comparing her to other forming youths, the chapter shows her independent approach towards life which will lead to her withdrawal.

Chapter 4 analyses Dorothea and Lydgate's marriages and a hypothetic union between the two. The chapter argues that Lydgate's spots of commonness will become an obstacle to his survival in modernity. On the contrary, Dorothea's unhappy and superficial union with Edward and her support to Lydgate and Rosamond will reveal Dorothea's peculiar nature, highlighting her modernity. The chapter then discusses Dorothea's union with Will, although it has been severely criticised, arguing that he is the only character who can grant Dorothea a future of happiness in modernity. Thanks to her marriage with Will she proves to have effectively concluded her process of formation and to have found her place in society happily. By analysing George Eliot's theories and ideas influenced by John Ruskin, the chapter shows also how the authoress seems to take Will's side in the text. Indeed, in the Finale, she will portray Dorothea's unconventional but happy life showing that she has overcome the Victorian female ideology of self-denial, following her real nature and desires.

To conclude, this thesis argues that George Eliot's anticipation of marriage in *Middlemarch* shaped a modern type of *Bildungsroman* and that her treatment of marriage made her a forerunner of novels of female development.

George Eliot wrote in a letter to John Blackwood in 1857 that: “Conclusions are the weak point of most authors, but some of the fault lies in the very nature of a conclusion, which is at best a negation.”[2] This thesis shows that thanks to the peculiar use of marriage, George Eliot does not deny Dorothea her happiness, creating a timeless masterpiece with no weak points.

[2] *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. G. S. Haight, 9 Vols., New Haven, Yale University Press, 1978, Vol. II, p. 324.

Contents

Chapter 1. Social Meaning of Marriage in the Victorian Age

"Since I can do no good because a woman,
Reach constantly at something that is near it."
***The Maid's Tragedy*, Beaumont and Fletcher**

(Epigraph to *Middlemarch*, Book 1, ch. I)

The role of women in marriage and courtship is at the core of most Victorian novels. This chapter aims at discussing why marriage was such an important social exchange during the Victorian era and why the role of women in marriage has always been a debated one.

Love in novels has great narrative powers since it allows intriguing plots with different perspectives. As Foster writes: "[For most] Victorian critics and novelists alike, affairs of the heart were the basic stuff of fiction."[3] It is a common assumption that a work is undoubtedly a novel when it deals with love affairs. Moreover, it should be considered that during the Victorian age, novels where the only source of knowledge about love, courtship and marriage available to young women. As George Eliot writes in *Adam Bede*, Hetty was ignorant about love because she has never read anything about it:

> […] she knew no romance, and had only a feeble share in the feelings which are the source of romance, so that well-read ladies may find it difficult to understand her state of mind. She was too ignorant of everything beyond the simple notions and habits in which she had been brought up, to have any more definite idea of her probable future than that Arthur would take care of her somehow, and shelter her from anger and scorn.[4]

Novels deeply shaped the opinions of their readers, so writers had to consider the didactic effects of what they wrote. However, it is remarkable to notice is that this

[3] Foster, S., *Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual (1*985*)*, New York, Barnes & Noble, 2012, p. 1.
[4] Eliot, G., *Adam Bede* (1859), ed. S. Gill, London, Penguin, 1985, Book V, Chapter XXXVI, p. 418. Hereafter referred to as *Adam Bede*.

didactic aim seems to have been directed mostly to a feminine audience. The importance of literature in male education was seldom made explicit in Victorian novels. Differently from Hetty's case, men were freer in making amorous mistakes than women. Their education was mainly based on experience rather than on literature, as novels show. Despite this inequality of gender in sexual and marital intercourse, George Eliot's novels still stress the importance of male education. Considering *Middlemarch,* which is the focus of this thesis, Lydgate's mistakes with women are stressed several times throughout the novel, presumably suggesting the necessity of a proper male education. This lack of a literary sentimental education for men can explain the great number of women both writing and reading novels. Women wrote best about what they knew or should have known best. Since the defining preoccupation of the novel is 'the elaboration of an intensely personal experience,'[5] the most obvious female personal experience was the one concerned with emotions within a domestic context. G. H. Lewes welcomed this new type of fiction which was proposing a "woman's view of life, woman's experience"[6] stating that "the domestic experience which forms the bulk of woman's knowledge finds an appropriate form in novels […] Love is the staple of fiction, for it forms the story of a woman's life."[7] Women writers proposed love in their fiction as they understood it and all its possible positive and negative declinations, not having the possibility of experiencing many other themes worth writing about. Furthermore, as several contemporary critics suggested, Victorian women writers may have focused on love and marriage also as a kind of consolation for personal dissatisfaction. In their narratives, women writers shaped others' lives, building parallel worlds in which they could reshape their lives, finding solace to their uneventful lives.

Another important element that is to be considered while analysing marriage in the Victorian age is Victorian morality in love matters. Marriage was the only possible realm for love since no other emotional intercourses were considered acceptable. Marriage allowed women to exercise their wifely and motherly functions, intrinsic

[5] Stubbs, P., *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920,* Brighton, Harvester Press, 1979, p. xi.
[6] Lewis, G. H., *The Lady Novelists, "*Westminster Review", vol. LVIII, July 1852, p. 131.
[7] *Ibidem*, p. 133.

element of the Victorian vision of the woman as the angel in the house. This popular image shaped the stereotype of the ideal woman who should possess the capacity of sacrifice, moral purity, and self-denial. These natural propensities were necessary to fulfil the functions assigned to her by nature and to become Coventry Patmore's angelic figure. In *The Angel in the House* (1856), Patmore writes:

> Her disposition is devout
> Her countenance angelical;
> The best things that the best believe are in her face so kindly writ
> The faithless, seeing her, conceive
> Not only heaven, but hope of it.[8]

Patmore also describes the world of the angelic woman and her confined home which is described as a heaven of domestic peace:

> On settled poles turn solid joys,
> And sunlike pleasures shine at home.[9]

In *Sesame and Lilies,* John Ruskin too, depicts another angelic woman and her realm as "a temple of the heart watched over by the Household Gods" who are "the tender and delicate women […] with the child at their breasts."[10] For what concerns their education, Maria Grey in her book *On the Education of Women*, quotes a passage contained in the Report of the Committee of Council:

> Girls fail much more frequently than boys in all subjects and in all standards. It does not necessarily follow that they are inferior to boys in capacity, but as a matter of fact, owing partly to the comparative indifference with which even sensible parents still

[8] Patmore, C., *The Angel in the House (1891)*, London, Cassell, 2014, Book 1, Canto IV, Prelude I, p. 40.
[9] *Ibidem*, Book 2, Canto VII, Prelude I, p.153.
[10] Ruskin, J., *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), Gloucester, Dodo Press, 2007, p. 58.

> regard the education of their daughters, the girls […] are as a rule far below the boys in attainments.[11]

In this light, it seems clear that very few women had the possibility of something different from a heaven of pots and stoves and most of them were brought up being truly convinced that this was the only path which could lead them to happiness. It is worth noting that it would be inaccurate to ascribe these traditional beliefs only to illiterate or poor women. Many women, and many women writers not only accepted this ideology but also tried to promulgate it. A clear example is that of Sarah Stickney Ellis whose books were considered guides to female conduct. In her novels, she wrote that it was women's responsibility to make a happy home where women should act as servants entirely devoted to others. Ellis remarked that women's lot was to fulfil "the domestic duties which call forth the best energies of the female character."[12] She implied that it was women's duty to maintain the sublimity of the marriage – if a union fails, Ellis wrote, the blame must be laid on the wife who misled her suitor during courtship. A woman was considered responsible of how the courtship would end and of the stability of her marriage. When invited at court to discuss a possible request of divorce, men could appeal to the responsibility of women, stating that they had been deceived by their wives during courtship. In contradictory terms, women were held responsible for actions that they could not perform since no woman could decide whom she wanted to court, how to perform the courtship and whom she would marry.

In Victorian society, rules regulated each step of the marital union. The proposal should come from a social equal, neither coming from an upper social level, nor from a lower one. Financial matters were settled in advance between both families and if everything was agreed, the second step was the official engagement. This phase was likewise defined by a strict code. The man should be introduced to the girl's family and to her peer group, not *vice versa*. The permission of marrying the bride was to be addressed to her father and only after receiving his approbation the proposal took place.

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[11] Grey, M. G., *On the Education of Women: A Paper, Read by Mrs. William Grey, at the Meeting of the Society of Arts,* London, Gale and the British Library, 1871, p. 19.
[12] Stickney Ellis, S., *The Women of England: their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits,* London, Fisher, 1839, p. 21.

There were no other possibilities of refusal except for the opposition of the girl's father since her opinion was not considered during the entire process. The proposal could be made either in person with a language that was to be clear to avoid misinterpretation by the girl, or by letter. A first refusal by the girl was considered acceptable, but not a definitive one, if not previously discussed and arranged with her father. Before the announcement of the engagement some time should pass and during this period only the closest friends and members of the family were allowed to know about the engagement. Once it was announced, a dinner was to be hosted by the bride's family to introduce the *fiancé*, usually followed by an evening party. Only after meeting the bride's family, the bride was introduced to the bridegroom's family. After these official announcements, the bride was expected to write to her friends, while her mother was in charge of the elders of the family. Engagements could last from six months up to two years and they were completed with a ring. After the engagement, the couple could enjoy more mutual affections, as they could stroll out alone, hold hands in public and exchange chaste kisses. However, they were expected to be obsequiously separated over nightfall until the wedding.

Although in all these social steps only men could have an active role, as Stickney Ellis wrote, women were generally considered responsible for the outcomes of those interactions. In the event that an engagement was broken the responsibility was laid most of the cases on the woman's conduct. Nonetheless, women were not afraid of any responsibility since they were brought up imbibed with the conceptions that the ultimate satisfaction for a woman might come only with the realization of wifehood and motherhood. To be considered responsible for possible negative outcomes was a little price to pay to see the realization of the purpose of their life. Moreover, it was clear to them that as women, they would not have many other opportunities to live proper moral lives without becoming wives. Therefore, a husband was essential for them and all their training was devolved in obtaining one. Without marriage, they would be considered abnormal, being "forced into what many considered a degrading sexual competition

which would bring them not only economic hardship but also a kind of social obliteration."[13]

Most of them were really looking forward to becoming wives and mothers since, without a marriage, there was no possibility of that heavenly home they read about in novels. Marriage was perceived as the apotheosis of womanly fulfilment. Thus, it became not only a Victorian literary case but also a fundamental passage in the life of every Victorian youth. Young women suffered a true psychological pressure to find a husband also because some demographical problems were registered during those years. As a matter of fact, the census of 1851 showed that there were 2,765,000 single women over the age of fifteen, and by 1871 this figure had increased to 3,228,700.[14] Due to demographical imbalance, by mid-century there were half a million more women than men. Therefore, it appeared that a considerable number of women could never experience marriage. The issue of marriage became a primary concern for Victorian women, trapped between pervasive ideology and countering fact. What made this pursuit even more demanding was the recognition that being single was a safer projection than being a wife since the abuses suffered by married women were notorious. To cite some of the limitations to their social and legal identities:

> Wives could not act independently in court proceedings; they were legally and economically subject to their husbands and could obtain divorce only with great difficulty and a great expense; if separated, they could gain custody of children under the age of seven, but had right of access to older children only at stated times.[15]

Furthermore, marriage was also a fundamental social exchange for the wealth of Britain. Thus, the State itself needed to regulated weddings. In this respect, an Act was introduced in 1753: The Marriage Bill. The purposes of the Marriage Bill were mainly to enlarge Britain's wealth, reducing the number of citizens who could not produce wealth not being either enough skilled or educated to benefit society. As a matter of

[13] Foster, S., *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[14] Banks, J. and O., *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1964.
[15] Foster, S., *op. cit.,* p. 7.

fact, this legislation was not promulgated to protect lovely lovers in exchanging their affection but to manage population in order to increase Britain's wealth.[16] These purposes can partially explain all the codes and *modus operandi* that were to be strictly followed in order to respect Victorian morality. Victorian moral rules guaranteed the state control over the quantity and quality of the weddings. Serious economic reasons are to be found behind the state intervention in wedding policies. Indeed, without weddings, agriculture, trade and manufactures could not have prospered. It is universally known how important the terms work and industry were during the eighteenth century, especially for Britain. As Adam Smith stated labour was the real measure of value, and the more weddings, the more children, the more hands, the more labour. However, a mere increase in the number of marriages was not enough to solve the problem of creating a prosperous society. If marriages had increased among people who were not able to sustain their children, those would have become a burden to the nation. For this reason, it was necessary that marriages were contracted between equal people who could provide laborious poor. As Bannet writes: "Marriages were the nation's manufactory for making children and children had become a source of wealth,"[17] under the condition that these children were brought up with the skills to support themselves. As Paley argues:

> In civilized life, everything is affected by art and skill. Whence a person is provided with neither (and neither can be acquired without exercise and instruction) will be useless; and he that is useless will be at the same time mischievous to the community. So that to send an uneducated child into the world is injurious to the rest of mankind.[18]

Therefore, one of the main purposes of the British government in planning The Marriage Bill was to grant the production of children apt to become useful

[16] Bannet, E. T., *The Marriage Act of 1753: 'A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex'*. "Eighteenth-Century Studies", Vol. 30 No. 3, Spring 1997, p. 235.
[17] *Ibid*.
[18] Cf. Paley, W., *The Works of William Paley, with a Life of the Author*, London, Jennings and Chaplain, 1831, p. 89.

Commonwealthmen. Furthermore, the Bill was meant to solve the problem of abandoned wives with children that were left to the care of the nation.

Before the Marriage Act, a man and a woman binding themselves to each other to live as a man and a wife was enough to bring the marriage into being.[19] If the exchange between the two took place in the present that was considered *a spousalia per verba de praesenti*, if the couple's words were expressing a future intention that was a *spousalia per verba de futuro* which would be considered valid after the consummation of the wedding. As Bannet comments: "The ceremony in Church or before witnesses was considered only a repetition and solemnization of the first act."[20] After the Marriage Act, a couple who contracted a marriage in the old way, without all the precise forms required by the Act was no longer a legal couple. This protected all those women who married in good faith and were then abandoned for a more advantageous settlement to a woman of better rank and fortune. As a matter of fact, women were social and economic inferiors and thus without protection and could be left by husband without having any right to claim. Women could be forced, persuaded and even robbed of their fortunes by husband who disappeared after seducing them.

The Marriage Bill acted also against polygamy, another problematical issue of Victorian society. Political economy decided that monogamous relationships were most apt to raise children who could produce wealth. Marriages therefore started to be performed publicly and started to be officially registered to prevent any further polygamous marriages. The Marriage Act acted like a copyright:

> as copyright ensured that texts could be attached and attributed to their authors, the Marriage Register ensured that women could be attached and attributed to a husband, and their children to a father.[21]

[19] See Elliott, H. G., *A History of Matrimonial Institutions*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1904.
[20]Bannett, E. T., *The Domestic Revolution, Enlightenment Feminisms and the Novel*, London, John Hopkins University Press, 2000, p. 95.
[21] Bannett, E. T., *The Marriage Act of 1753: 'A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex'*, cit., p. 240.

Finally, the Marriage Act sought to control every exchange between the sexes before marriage. It was argued that restricting sex to marriage would force men to marry in order to obtain it:

> Promiscuous concubinage discourages marriage, by abating the chief temptation to it. The male part of the species will not undertake the encumbrance, expense, and restraint of married life if they can gratify their passions at a cheaper price.[22]

Since wife and children were the price that men had to pay to purchase sex, the Marriage Act deeply punished women for "fornication" outside legal marriages, ultimately leading to the creation of the stereotype of the fallen woman. The new legislation left "women without any possible recourses when their illegal lovers left them with child, marking them as 'whores' and 'bastards'." [23] By offering them no supports outside a legal marriage, Victorian policy was trying to promote new marriages also as a possible protection for women. Despite their being usually young and naïve, women who did not respect legal procedures suffered a cruel treatment. This was justified by the fact that women were not sufficient to provide children with the education necessary for the higher purposes of a rational life. If abandoned by a man, they would both become a burden to the nation. As Bannet argues: "Women and children not respecting the new bill were turned into whores and bastards paying the social and economic price for any infraction of it."[24] Therefore, it was The Marriage Act that introduced the punishment on women sexual conduct and the concept that "the female cause was the cause of virtue."[25] Moreover, if the wedding did not respect the legal procedures, the judgement passed on women's reputation would be harsher than that passed on men's conduct. As explained above, women were responsible not only of the stability of the marriage but also of its legitimacy. In the case in which a man did not respect the steps of a legitimate marriage, anticipating an intimacy with the woman, her

[22] Paley, W., *The Works of William Paley, with a Life of the Author*, London, Jennings and Chaplain, 1831, p. 204.
[23] Bannett, E. T., *The Marriage Act of 1753: 'A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex'*, cit., p. 240.
[24] *Ibidem*, p. 241.
[25] Reeve, C., *Plans of Education*, London, Hookham and Carpenter, 1792, p. 138.

integration was lost, not his. Assuming that women and their conducts were held responsible for the morality of their marriages is tantamount to say that women were responsible also for their becoming either fallen or virtuous women. Yet it is important to highlight that the judgement passed on women's conduct highly depended on their social status. Society and politics judged less harshly women who acted more freely both in their sexual and romantic life if they were able to maintain themselves, either on their families' fortune or independently. However, there were very few remunerative works allowed to women who wanted to support themselves if they did not belong to rich families. Therefore, women who were not able to find a job and sustain themselves were forced to use the only property they had in exchange for their maintenance, binding themselves to matrimonial unions. In those cases, marriage became a sort of legal prostitution where women became symbolically and economically dead in the marital exchange. Considering George Eliot's female characters, what happens to Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede* and to Rosamond Vincy in *Middlemarch* seems to confirm the state of things mentioned above. Both young women do not belong to wealthy families and they do not have the prospect of a life of independence, being their social and economic conditions completely different though. They know they will be totally maintained by their future husbands and they have not been raised with the chance of a work of their own. Hetty will become the perfect example of the fallen woman not having respected the formality of the wedding. Whereas Rosamond will be regarded as an ordinary virtuous Victorian woman having followed the moral path offered by marriage.

Gradually, things improved for women. As in the case of The Divorce Act where the possibility for a woman to divorce appeared for the first time, although the disparity in the treatment of men and women still remained. As Foster argues:

> Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 making for easier divorces (though reforms in the areas of maintenance for the woman and wider grounds for separation did not occur

> until 1878 and after), and the married Women's Property Act of 1870 (expanded and made more effective in 1882) enabling wives to keep their property and earnings.[26]

As a matter of fact, divorce could be granted to a husband for his wife's adultery. But divorce to a woman could be granted only if adultery were aggravated either by incest, bigamy, rape in the husband's relationship with another woman, or by sodomy, bestiality, desertion for two years, or cruelty to the wife. However, these cruelties needed to be proved to grant divorce to a woman since women frequently used 'cruelty' to aggravate the accusation against their husbands without proving it. As Olive Anderson writes:

> Cruelty was alleged rather more often than adultery in wives' suits for judicial separation – not surprisingly, since from the 1860's matrimonial cruelty was an increasingly flexible offence that was comparatively easy to establish.[27]

Some measures protecting women were gradually introduced in legislation as seen above. Yet there were still large injustices which together with the possibility of potential brutalities made marriage very different from the prospect of a blissed life. As explained by Foster:

> The all-too-common hazards of frequent childbearing and the high infant mortality rate probably also caused many women to view the prospect of matrimony with some trepidation, particularly since contraception was not widely practised before the mid-seventies.[28]

Moreover, the fact that unmarried women could acquire possessions, sign contracts and be responsible for their own finances was an attraction for young women. However, on the other hand, spinsters were still considered controversial women in

[26] Foster, S., *op. cit.*, p. 8.
[27] Anderson, O., *State, Civil Society and Separation in Victorian Marriage.* Past and Present 163.1, May 1999, p.170.
[28] Foster, S., *op. cit.,* p. 8.

Victorian society. They were seen not only as individuals challenging the traditional ideologies but also as the kind of woman who "in some sort, missed her destiny."[29]

In the early and middle years of the nineteenth century "the Woman Question" appeared as an increasingly more debatable query. But the female response to this changing environment remained cautious. In an article in the radical "The Westminster Review", education of women was described as fundamental, since better-educated women could also become better wives. The article supported the idea that matrimony should not be a woman's unique means to obtain a social position. Women were invited to reconsider their independence as a fundamental part of their lives. As Mylne comments:

> Surely it is dangerous, it is wicked, in these days, to follow the old saw, to bring up women to be 'happy wives and mothers'; that is to say, to let all their accomplishments, their sentiments, their views of life, take one direction, as if for women there existed only one destiny, one hope, one blessing, one object, one passion in existence ; some people say it ought to be so, but we know that it is not so; we know that hundreds, that thousands of women are not happy wives and mothers — are never either wives or mothers at all.[30]

There were other radical feminists who attacked the doctrine of woman's 'separate sphere' as a too strict construct which needed to be overcome. Harriet Taylor denied the right of anyone to decide what was the 'proper sphere' for another and she invited women to consider that wifehood and motherhood should not be seen as the only possible female functions:

> It is neither necessary nor just to make imperative on women that they shall be either mothers or nothing […] there is no inherent reason or necessity that all women should voluntarily choose to devote their lives to one animal function and its consequences.

[29] Greenwell, D., *Our Single Women.* North British Review, vol. XXXVI, February 1862, p. 64.
[30] Mylne, M., *Woman and her Social Position,* "The Westminster Review", Vol. XXXV, January 1841, p. 37.

> Numbers of women are wives and mothers only because there is no other career open to them.[31]

Florence Nightingale mocked the virtues of wifehood and motherhood, rejecting marriage because it would obstacle her self-realisation, although she was not supportive of the feminist movement. Despite that, she was deeply convinced that until women freed themselves from the bondage of family and marriage, they could never be true individuals. Barbara Bodichon, an intimate friend of George Eliot, in her diary wrote in 1858 an emblematic passage against the patriarchal society, associating slavery to the condition of women:

> To believe in transubstantiation or the divinity of the Virgin is not so perverting to the mind as to believe that women have no rights to full development of all their faculties and exercise of all their powers, to believe that men have rights over women, and as fathers to exercise those pretended rights over daughters, as husbands exercising those rights over wives. Every day men acting on this false belief destroy their perception of justice, blunt their moral nature, so injure their consciences that they lose the power to perceive the highest and purest attributes to God. Slavery is a greater injustice, but it is allied to the injustice to women so closely that I cannot see one without thinking of the other and feeling how soon slavery should be destroyed if right opinions were entertained upon the other question.[32]

Barbara Bodichon took also part to the first movements to improve the situation of women, creating a petition which supported the "Married Women's Property Bill". This Bill tried to grant that "in entering the state of marriage, women no longer pass from freedom into the condition of a slave."[33] Even if Marian signed her friend's petition and shared also some copies of it, she was not a feminist writer who wrote only "about women from a woman's point of view, and more narrowly, about liberated women from

[31] Taylor, H., *Enfranchisement of Women*, reprinted from "The Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review", July 1851, p. 297.
[32] Bodichon Leigh Smith, B., *An American Diary*, 1857-58, ed. J. Reed, London, Routledge, 2016, p. 63.
[33] Burton, H., *Barbara Bodichon 1827-91*, London, John Murray, 1949, p. 102.

a liberated woman's point of view."[34] However, it is important to highlight that she was familiar with women's feminist movements while she was writing *Middlemarch.*

In this composite scenario, "the Woman Question" appears a controversial one.

Even though more literate members started to dispute about "the Woman Question", few women were ready to reject the traditions in which they had been brought up. Radical writers frequently contradicted themselves, not being entirely able to affirm that wifehood and motherhood were not fundamental aspects of a woman's life. Maternal instincts were undeniable and the most natural ones in women, so that the state of singleness was still considered as a second-best choice from the majority of women. Women's propension to become wives and mothers was still considered as a law of nature. Even the restricted set of employments proposed to the increasing number of spinsters was deeply concerned with this ideology of women as either mothers or wives. In fact, jobs considered appropriate for women were nursing, teaching children and helping the poor. In other words, all kind of employments which embodied quasi-maternal virtues.

This chapter has represented the composite scenario in which George Eliot wrote *Middlemarch,* discussing possible ideologies that may have influenced her novel. This thesis will now proceed by analysing *Middlemarch*.

[34] Austen, Z., W*hy Feminist Critics are Angry with George Eliot*, "College English", Vol. 37, No. 6, Feb. 1976, p. 556.

Chapter 2. A Further Development of the *Bildungsroman*

"'Dime; no ves aquel caballero que hacia nosotros viene sobre un caballo rucio rodado que trae puesto en la cabeza un yelmo de oro?' 'Lo que veo y columbro,' respondio Sancho, 'no es sino un hombre sobre un as no pardo como el mio, que trae sobre la cabeza una cosa que relumbra.' 'Pues ese es el yelmo de Mambrino' dijo Don Quijote."
***Don Quijote*, Cervantes**

(Epigraph to *Middlemarch*, Book 1, ch. II)

2.1 The Form of the *Bildungsroman*

As Marc Redfield writes: "Among the challenges the modern novel offers to genre theory, that of the *Bildungsroman* is remarkable on several counts."[35] Its very definition appears an arduous task as the English vocabulary lacks an equivalent term for the German *Bildungsroman*. To address this linguistic deficiency, critics usually adopt various English translations of the term such as life-novel, novel of apprenticeship and novel of formation. However, these alternatives can be frequently mistaken for other similar literary subgenres, such as developmental and educational novels, the novels of adventures and the picaresque novels. Thus, the first part of the chapter will attempt to define the subgenre.

The *Bildungsroman* arose with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in Germany and his publication of the *Wilhelm Meister* between 1795 and 1796. The novel is generally considered the *Bildungsroman par excellence* since its structure was adopted in many successive novels of formation. As in the case of Jane Austen, who started the genre in England where:

> The idea of *Bildung* was translated by Thomas Carlyle, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Matthew Arnold, J. S. Mill, and Walter Pater into the idea of Culture, an idea

[35] Redfield, M., *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the 'Bildungsroman',* New York, Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 38.

> concurrently and subsequently realized in fiction by Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, George Eliot, Meredith, Henry James […].[36]

The subgenre continued with Stendhal and ended with Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* and Eliot's *Middlemarch,* developing from the late eighteenth century, and flourishing throughout the whole nineteenth century.

Some difficulties in its definition may arise also from its similarities with other subgenres of the novel. Indeed, as Shaffner theorizes, there are other subgenres that border with the *Bildungsroman* which are the picaresque novels, the novels of adventure, the educational and developmental novels. Despite their similarities, *Bildungsromane* present some differences. The first concerns their young protagonists, who grow up, develop, and change throughout the narrative. Whereas in novels of adventures and in picaresque novels, protagonists remain heroes from the beginning to the end of their stories. For what concern developmental novels, they too may recall the structure of the *Bildungsroman* as they focus on the protagonists' development. However, in developmental novels, their growth is not presented gradually as in *Bildungsromane*. Readers receive fragments of the protagonist's life − images of the protagonists in their twenties, thirties and so on. Having analysed the differences from other similar literary subgenres, this thesis will now focus on its marking traits.

The *Bildungsroman* is defined as that subgenre of the novel which traces the formation and development or apprenticeship of its main character. Indeed, as Abrams writes, the *Bildungsroman* focuses on*:*

> The development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences – and often through a spiritual crisis – into maturity, which usually involves recognition of one's identity and role in the world.[37]

[36] Jeffers, T. L., *The Bildungsroman from Goethe to Santayana*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 4.
[37] Abram, M. H., *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, New York, Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999, p. 193.

Thomas Jeffers in his *Apprenticeship* offers us Jerome Buckley's definition of the *Bildungsroman:*

> Buckley defines the *Bildungsroman* by reference to an archetypal plot. A sensitive child grows up in the provinces, where his lively imagination is frustrated by his neighbours' – and often by his family's – social prejudices and intellectual obtuseness. School and private reading stimulate his hopes for a different life away from home, and so he goes to the metropolis, where his transformative education begins. He has at least two love affairs, one good and one bad, which help him revalue his values. He makes some accommodation, as citizen and worker, with the industrial urban world, and after a time he revisits his old home to show folks how much he has grown. No single *Bildungsroman* will have all these elements, Buckley says but none can ignore more than two or three.[38]

Alongside Jeffers and Buckley's theorizations about the *Bildungsroman*, Franco Moretti highlights that what all novels of formation have in common is that their heroes are young heroes. Indeed, as he writes, "youth is both a necessary and sufficient definition of these heroes."[39] Their young age offers the authors a peculiar perspective from which writers could analyse nineteenth century society. In previous ages and societies, being young meant simply not being an adult. Whereas in the *Bildungsroman,* youth is treated as a momentous passage in the formation of our identities. In previous literary productions, young heroes' attitudes were marked by:

> A passively visionary acceptance of ready-made, ever-present meaning. The world of meaning can be grasped, it could be taken in at a glance; all that is necessary is to find the *locus* that has been predestined for each individual.[40]

[38] Jeffers, T. L., *op. cit*. p. 52.
[39] Moretti, F., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, London, Verso, 1987, p. 4.
[40] Lukács, G., *The Theory of the Novel: a Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, London, The Merlin Press, 1988, p. 12.

According to Lukács, literary heroes of the past could easily know what their futures would be, and they found their '*locus'* simply by following their predestined paths. The '*locus'* in Lukacs's analysis can be interpreted as the social position, the proper collocation in society that young adults are usually trying to find. The same 'locus' is present also in novels of formation. However, what changes in *Bildungsromane* are the processes leading to this *locus*. In previous times, the path to the adult age was clearly indicated, youths should simply follow what their parents planned for them. Professions were passed down from father to son and women followed what their parents decided for them. Apprenticeship was referred to as that period in which the young boy learned his father's work. Whereas in *Bildungsromane*, apprenticeship refers to the youth's exploration of society. As Jeffers argues: "The hero is no longer 'ready-made' and, through all his shifts in fortune or social position, stable. He is what Bakhtin calls 'the image of *man in the process of becoming*'."[41] Indeed, in novels of formation, young adults face modernity which allows them the possibility to create their own future. Probably influenced by capitalism, this new society offers them different working alternatives besides the works of their fathers. They have more freedom than before, but they are alone in finding their way through this new world. The creation of their identities transforms into an on-going process, becoming the centre of the *Bildungsromane*. As Jeffers adds, the protagonist:

> must do work that will contribute to the commonwealth and […] compared to his forebears he has more freedom – it is both a burden and an opportunity – to choose how he will contribute.[42]

The psychological struggle which young characters experience while accessing modern society mirrors its turbulent situation. This new exploration of society performed by the characters in novels of formation moves parallel to the exploration of themselves. In this process of double discovery, youths usually appear full of innovative hopes at the beginning and they gradually end by feeling dissatisfied and disillusioned

[41] Jeffers, T. L., *op. cit*. p. 2.
[42] *Ibidem*, p. 53.

with the reality they meet. As Jeffers writes, the crucial theme in the *Bildungsroman*: "is precisely change – physical, psychological, moral."[43]As a matter of fact, Lukács agrees that except for this genre, in previous literary productions "it will always be impossible to find a psychology, whether of empathy or of mere understanding."[44] Considering again the hero of previous literary productions, he writes that: "a long road lies before him, but within him there is no abyss."[45] In other words, there is nothing that needs to be analysed in psychological terms inside his character and the entire story consists of the events that the protagonist encounters in the "road before him."

It is worth remarking that the heroes of novels of formation are, using an oxymoron, rather anti-heroic, nonetheless remarkable in their actions. Novels are no more the space for exceptions, for extreme actions and supernatural deeds and their heroes explore everyday life. As synthetized ironically by Hegel, the protagonist "in the end usually gets his girl and some kind of position, marries and becomes a philistine just like the others."[46] The *Bildungsroman*, as Moretti writes:

> has accustomed us to looking at normality *from within* rather than from the stance of its exceptions; and it has produced a phenomenology that makes normality interesting and meaningful *as* normality. If the Bildungsroman's initial option is always explicitly anti-heroic and prosaic −the hero is Wilhelm Meister, not Faust; Julien Sorel and Dorothea Brooke, not Napoleon or Saint Theresa (and so on to Flaubert, and then to Joyce) − these characters are still, though certainly all 'normal' in their own ways, far from unmarked or meaningless in themselves.[47]

Being a subgenre of the novel, the *Bildungsroman* shows the same hybridity of the novel which derives from its instability as a new literary attempt. Reflecting the contradictions of modern society, literature produced a hybrid genre, the novel, which

[43] *Ibidem*, p. 2.
[44] Lukács, G., *The Theory of The Novel: a historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature*, London, The Merlin Press, 1988, p. 12.
[45] *Ibidem*, p.13.
[46] Hegel, G. W. F., *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 593.
[47] Moretti, F., *op. cit*., p. 11.

could encompass all modern ambiguities. Thus, both genre and subgenre are characterized by contradictions and show a compromising nature. As Moretti argues:

> The *Bildungsroman* bears witness to a different solution to a modern culture's contradictory nature […] this other solution is *compromise*: which is also, not surprisingly, the novel's most celebrated theme.[48]

However, compromise in novels of formation does not only refer to its marking trait as a literary genre, but it also alludes to its young protagonists' approach. Indeed, compromise is precisely what they should learn to find in novels of formation. As Moretti writes, compromise is what youths should make between modern society and the creation of their selves to access adult age. Youths' initial idealistic views of life should compromise with the prosaic conditions of life offered by modern society which does not allow them a future of grandeur. They learn that to survive in modern society, they should renounce the epic lives they dreamed of at the beginning of the novel, compromising their idealistic desires with the concrete opportunities offered by the society. Therefore, in novels of formation, we do not find Kierkegaard's "tragic logic of the 'aut/aut', but rather the more compromising one of the 'as well as.'"[49]

Furthermore, the inner turmoil experienced in *Bildungsromane* by forming youths can be seen as a clash between two principles – that of self-determination and that of socialization. Characters should learn to find a compromise also between these two concepts. The first clearly refers to the determination of oneself which is one of the ultimate aims of the *Bildungsroman*. The concept of socialization indicates the proper collocation in society that youths should achieve to become adults. In novels of formation, youths should find a compromise between the two drives, developing both at the same time. Therefore, in most *Bildungsromane*, and especially in the English ones, the formation of the protagonists occurs when they enter society. By finding a compromise between self-determination and socialization, they become integrated parts of society.

[48] Moretti, F., *op. cit*., p. 9.
[49] *Ibidem,* p. 10.

In novels of formation, mistakes are vital to the protagonists' progression in the story. However, some conditions are necessary to allow the characters the possibility of making mistakes. The prior requisite is their freedom from an authority that might prevent them from doing wrong. The young protagonists have usually either lost their families, or in the luckiest cases, their parents are too weak to impose on them. In this respect, Austen's female protagonists are a perfect example. As in the case of *Emma*, where Emma's father seems rather her child than her parent and she becomes the unique authoritative figure in her life. Mr. Woodhouse is totally subdued to Emma's desires due to his excessive fondness of her. He is blind to her faults and to the fact that she is just a girl without any experience of life. He considers her judgement superior to that of anyone among their acquaintances and he never opposes her decisions. This passive attitude postpones Emma's maturity on the one hand, but on the other, it allows her *Bildung* to take place.

This chapter frequently mentions modernity and its important role in novels of formation. Thus, it is necessary to spend few words to discuss the concept of modernity. Europe entered modernity before shaping a correspondent modern culture. In other words, it accessed a situation without being equipped to face it. The literary response was prompt and took the form of the *Bildungsroman* which focusing on a liminal entity, the youth, was able to observe this new society from its edges. Indeed, Jeffers argues that:

> In the event-racked revolutionary years of the late eighteenth century, the emergence of the hero's character increasingly mirrored the emergence − socially, economically, politically, ideationally − of the world around him.[50]

However, the exploration of society in novels and in *Bildungsroman* excludes the moment of crisis. Therefore, by reading a B*ildungsroman,* we can witness that something is about to change in society, but we cannot directly read about the moments of crisis, be that wars or reforms. The *Bildungsroman* remains on the edge of society

[50] Jeffers, T. L., *op. cit*., p. 2.

and on the edge of its crisis, as their characters remain on the edge of adulthood. Moretti argues that the novel:

> usually stays 'in the middle', where it discovers, or perhaps creates, the typically modern feeling and enjoyment of 'everyday life' and 'ordinary administration'. Everyday life: an anthropocentric space where all social activities lose their exacting objectivity and converge in the domain of 'personality'. Ordinary administration: a time of 'lived experience' and individual growth – a time filled with 'opportunities' but which excludes by definition both the crisis and genesis of culture.[51]

The genre of the *Bildungsroman* Moretti adds:

> Withers away with 1848 in Flaubert's Sentimental Education and with the English thirties in Eliot's Felix Holt and Middlemarch. It is a constant elusion of historical turning point and breaks: an elusion of tragedy.[52]

Considering the structure of the *Bildungsroman,* all the heroes' developments are oriented to a unique and clear ending. Even if Hegel did not theorize precisely about the literary genre of the novel, the reflections in his *Aesthetics* can be applied also to this new literary form. If we consider the novel as "the whole", Hegel perfectly summarizes the importance of the conclusion:

> The true is the whole. But the whole is nothing else that the essence consummating itself through its development. Of the Absolute, it must be said that it is essentially a result, that only in the end it is what it truly is.[53]

As the absolute in Hegel's considerations, the entire process of formation acquires its meaning only in the end. The conclusion of the *Bildungsroman* expresses both the end of the story and the end of the time allowed to the evolution of the character. Without a

[51] Moretti, F., *op. cit*., p. 12.
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] Hegel, G. W. F., *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 11.

limitation of time, the development of the story would be everlasting but entirely without purpose. If characters could go wrong endlessly without being interrupted, there would not be their education and the process itself would lose meaning. In Jane Austen and in Goethe as well, the perfect conclusion for the process of formation lies in marriage − the social compromise which seals the youth's maturity. Marriage, or better the perfect marriage, offers to the new adults an advantageous compromise in which they lose their personal freedom, but they also gain a social identity. The act of marrying is a transposition of the pact between the individual and the world, as Moretti writes:

> It is not only the foundation of the family that is at stake, but that 'pact' between the individual and the world, that reciprocal 'consent' which finds in the double 'I do' of the wedding ritual an unsurpassed symbolic condensation.[54]

However, it can be argued, and it was argued in further developments of *Bildungsroman*, that marriage cannot always grant a happy ending. Indeed, marriage may also bring problematic limits to the self – as in *Middlemarch* − but in the classic form of the *Bildungsroman* these problems were still absent.

Going back to the narrative structure of this subgenre, it is largely built around the perspective of the protagonist since the story develops around his or her formation. Yet alongside the protagonist's point of view, readers encounter other characters in the story who may play a fundamental role in the protagonists' formation. However, these secondary characters usually remain flat characters who do not modify throughout the narrative and whose psychological analysis is not shared with the readers. Differently from secondary characters, the protagonist's reflections are entirely portrayed. In *Bildungsromane* the psychological characterization of the protagonists is so rich that by the end of the novel readers become their intimate friends. It is precisely this intimacy which allows us to understand the reasons behind their mistakes, arousing in us the curiosity to find out how their stories will evolve. In other words, intimacy becomes the

[54] Moretti, F., *op. cit.*, p. 22.

narrative propeller which incites us to continue reading. In some passages of *Bildungsromane*, the level of intimacy becomes so close that we share only the protagonist's viewpoint. In those cases, readers may misunderstand the situations in the story as the protagonists misunderstand them. But authors can equally choose to offer other perspectives throughout the narration. Receiving hints both from the author and from other characters in the story, readers can realize the protagonist's mistake before the character actually commits it. Despite this predictability in some passages, the curiosity to find out what will happen to the dear protagonist makes readers continue with the story. We go on reading as we would tenderly listen to the story of a friend telling us of a mistake, even if we predicted it. The author's handling of other points of view can have a double effect, as Gillian Beer writes:

> The league of reader and writer, the 'we', sometimes inveigles us into admissions we had not foreseen. At other times it forms an allegiance which deflates the characters.[55]

The importance of multiple points of view is made explicit by George Eliot who writes in this remarkable passage of *Middlemarch*:

> One morning, some weeks after her arrival at Lowick, Dorothea– but why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage? I protest against all our interest, all our effort at understanding being given to the young skins that look blooming in spite of trouble; for these too will get faded, and will know the older and more eating grief which we are helping to neglect. In spite of the blinking eyes and white moles objectionable to Celia, and the want of muscular curve which was morally painful to Sir James, Mr. Casaubon had an intense consciousness within him [..][56]

[55] Beer, G., "The Woman Question", in *Middlemarch*, edited by John Peck, London, Macmillan, 1992, p. 173.
[56] *Middlemarch*, Book 3, ch. VII, p. 278.

Having discussed the development of the genre and its marking traits, let us now proceed by examining George Eliot's contribution to the genre in the next part of the chapter.

2.2 *Middlemarch*, a *Bildungsroman*?

The second part of this chapter will analyse *Middlemarch* in relation to the *Bildungsroman*. However, before these reflections, it is necessary to discuss it as a novel of formation. Indeed, *Middlemarch* presents some peculiarities that may question its belonging to the subgenre of the *Bildungsroman*.

Dorothea's development unfolds while *Middlemarch* is about to experience modernity. As Enrica Villari writes:

> From the outset, in the 'Prelude' to the novel, the motif of late-born Saint Theresas indicates that the fate of a lofty vocation in an unheroic world will be the theme of *Middlemarch*.[57]

In *Middlemarch,* Dorothea is trying to find out whether she will be able to reconcile her "lofty vocation" with the modern unheroic world, recalling the same pattern of the *Bildungsroman.* Her dreams of great actions that can change the world makes her resemble a modern St. Theresas. George Eliot writes that:

> Her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there; she was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing whatever seemed her to have those aspects; likely to seek martyrdom, to make retractions, and then to incur martyrdom after all in a quarter where she had not sought it.[58]

[57] Villari, E., *Duty. Middlemarch,* "New Left Review", 90, November-December 2014, p. 92.
[58] Eliot, G., *Middlemarch* (1872), ed. R. Ashton, London, Penguin, 1994, Book 1, ch. I, p. 8. Hereafter referred to as *Middlemarch*.

But her dreams will soon collide with the reality of Middlemarch where her: "spiritual grandeur [will reveal to be] ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity."[59] Her desire of "spiritual grandeur", typical of protagonists of novels of formation, is confirmed in the: "form of hero-worship −'heroes as men of letters' in Carlyle's vision − which she directs at Locke, Pascal, Milton and every other great sage of the past".[60] Dorothea's task seems identical to Wilhelm Meister's since both are trying to reconcile their inner propensities to the reality of their worlds. Her enthusiastic but utopic plans for workers further confirms her as a forming youth:

> I have delightful plans. I should like to take a great deal of land, and drain it, and make it a little colony, where everybody should work, and all the work should be done well.[61]

Gregory Maertz, in his introduction to *Middlemarch*, inserts it in the tradition of the novels of formation, by writing that:

> Following Goethe, Eliot poses the problem to be confronted by her protagonists: can a man or a woman be the architect of his or her own experience? Can circumstances be altered to allow for the realization of epic ambitions? Can Dorothea Brooke, Tertius Lydgate, and Will Ladislaw bridge the divide between what is given and what can be achieved by sheer will, desire, or fantasy?[62]

According to Maertz, the answers that Dorothea should find throughout her *Bildung* are the same that youths should find in *Bildungsroman*. Furthermore, David Daiches defines *Middlemarch* as a *Bildungsroman*, writing that:

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[59] *Ibidem,* p. 3.
[60] Villari, E., *op. cit.,* p. 93.
[61] *Middlemarch*, Book 6, Ch. II, p. 550.
[62] Maertz, G., *Introduction* to Eliot, G., *Middlemarch* (1872), ed. G. Maertz, Toronto, Broadway, 2004, p. 17.

> From one point of view, and in one of its aspects, *Middlemarch* is a *Bildungsroman*, a novel that is in which the heroine (in so far as she is a heroine) is educated by life into a fuller knowledge of herself and her relation to her environment.[63]

Mary de Jong too argues that:

> Eliot's best-known Bildungsroman with women protagonists – *The Mill on the Floss, Middlemarch*, and the Gwendolen portion of *Daniel Deronda* – are 'novels of awakening.'[64]

Dorothea learns from her mistakes and develops in the narration following the classic development of a youth in a *Bildungsroman*. The gradual evolution of the character which is a marking trait of the genre is evident in Dorothea's narrative. She is someone else at the end of the book and this shows that she has become a different person throughout the narration. Thus, the idea of "becoming" which characterizes the *Bildungsroman* is perfectly embodied by the modern Santa Theresa.

In the light of the above considerations, one can infer that *Middlemarch* is a *Bildungsroman*. However, it can also appear to be an anti-*bildungsroman* to some extent for its peculiar development. For this reason, although it is usually classified as a novel of formation, it is also considered one of a peculiar kind. Dorothea ultimately abandons her epic ambitions as a proper protagonist of a *Bildungsroman*, but she never abandons her nature. If compared to Wilhelm Meister's, her process seems different. Dorothea realizes that there would be no place for a Santa Theresa in the modern world, but she also repudiates this world and in this she is completely different from Wilhelm. Dorothea grows up and changes throughout the narrative, understanding that her happiness will be impossible in Middlemarch. As Gregory Maertz argues:

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[63] Daiches, D., *George Eliot: Middlemarch***,** New York, Barren's, 1963, p. 10.
[64] De Jong, Mary Gosselink, *Romola – A Bildungsroman for Feminists*, "South Atlantic Review", Vol. 49, No. 4, November 1984, p. 74.

> Wilhelm ultimately gives up the wandering life of an itinerant actor to become a doctor. But in the world of Middlemarch such growth is not attainable. […] As indicated in the novel's denouement, all that is possible is withdrawal from society.[65]

Her withdrawal is what may give the impression of an Anti-*Bildungsroman*. Indeed:

> Even though Dorothea finds love and happiness with Will, choosing him over a more socially appropriate suitor, her choice does not, despite her epic vocation, lead to success in reforming the social reality of *Middlemarch*.[66]

Considering Jane Austen's *Bildungsromane*, the formation of the heroines is concluded effectively with their choice of the right marriage through which they access society. As in the case of Emma Woodhouse and Catherine Morland who choose the right man in the end, confirming that their process of growth has completed. Wilhelm too, by becoming a doctor can access society, concluding his process of formation. Whereas Dorothea does not choose what will grant her access to the society of Middlemarch as Will is not the man who can grant her the best life there. Thus, her *Bildung* cannot be entirely associated with that of other *Bildungsromane*. Dorothea seems to follow a similar path since:

> Initially, it seems that Dorothea's task is identical to Wilhelm Meister's: to discover the validity of the reality of this world, reconciling the poetry of the heart and the outer conditions of life as they find their way in a murky moral universe.[67]

However, this similar path leads to Dorothea's departure from Middlemarch, proving that for her: "the conventional arc of the *Bildungsroman* plotline, turns out to be an utter impossibility."[68] One may infer that *Middlemarch* "clipped her wings" as it

[65] Maertz, G., *op. cit*. p. 18.
[66] *Ibid*.
[67] *Ibid*.
[68] *Ibid*.

prevents her a future of grandeur, but it is Dorothea who decides to refuse an heroic life and she seems to be happy in refusing it.

Middlemarch is a peculiar novel of formation also because it presents two forming youths, namely Dorothea and Lydgate who are two major poles in the novel. In writing *Middlemarc*h, George Eliot joined two different sections, one about Lydgate and a different one about Dorothea. The doctor's part was written in 1869 and it consisted of Chapter 15. Dorothea's section was started in 1870 and it was entitled originally "Miss Brooke". As David Daiches confirms: "The two stories were fused early in 1871, and we can see the fusion very deftly carried out in the dinner-party gossip of Chapter 10."[69] It is well known that George Eliot was more interested in the narrative of the ambitious doctor rather than in that of a young naïve girl. Yet once the novel was finished, Dorothea's *Bildung* constituted the major plot of the novel. Her being an imperfect character, her incapacity of becoming a saint-like figure, her human nature and her maturation are what constitutes the dynamism of the story.

Furthermore, *Middlemarch* stands as a further development of the subgenre of the *Bildungsroman*. According to Franco Moretti, George Eliot's contribution to this subgenre was so great "as to bring [it] to its natural conclusion."[70] As Moretti argues, she modified the traditional *Bildungsroman* in many aspects:

> The first thing to change is the protagonist's intellectual physiognomy, in that now, thank God, they have one. Neither 'innocent' nor 'insipid', Felix and Dorothea, Lydgate and Deronda, all have a forceful and marked personality, which their world perceives as unusual.[71]

Due to their marked personalities, the protagonists of George Eliot's novels are perceived as disturbing elements by their society. Nobody could consider one of Jane Austen's heroines as a threat to her world. Some of them can be considered witty for sure, but they seem rather slow-witted in understanding the real nature of things and

[69] Daiches, D., *op. cit.*, p. 9.
[70] Moretti, F., *op. cit.,* p. 214.
[71] *Ibid*.

people around them. Emma and Catherine appear for most of the novels detached from their realities, spending much of the time lost in their thoughts. It seems clear that they cannot constitute a threat to the harmony of the enclosed world in which they live. They can only become a threat to themselves and to their happiness at most. On the contrary, Dorothea knows her worth and knows precisely to what aim she should devote herself. As Moretti writes, she is "aware of its own worth and devoted to solitary dream which, in one way or another, will make it hard to come to terms with reality."[72]

As in any other *Bildungsroman*, Dorothea learns from her experience, being free to make mistakes. Notwithstanding this resemblance to other formations, Dorothea's freedom in making her choices condemns her to unhappiness. In fact, as it will be argued in Chapter 3, Dorothea is the only responsible for the greatest mistake she commits in marrying Casaubon.

To sum up, *Middlemarch* is and should be considered a novel of formation since it focuses n forming selves. But it equally offers some alterations to the classic form of the *Bildungsroman,* presenting itself as a further development of the genre.

[72] Moretti, F., *op. cit.,* p. 214.

Chapter 3. The Displacement of the Marriage

"I would not creep along the coast but steer
Out in mid-sea, by guidance of the stars."

(Epigraph to *Middlemarch*, Book 5, ch. II)

3.1 An Unconventional Marriage

Up until nineteenth century women were educated only for "disinterested kindness"[73] as they were to become loving mother and faithful wives. However, during the nineteenth century, women started to question the role assigned to them by society. As hinted in Chapter 1: "woman's search for self becomes important and woman's soul becomes worthy of examination" so that in novels "emphasis on the interiorization of women came first."[74] In literature, this new "emphasis on the interiorization of women" resulted in the representation of women's marital lives which were usually excluded from the narration. Emma Woodhouse is the earliest example of this new interest. As Hoffman Baruch argues: "[Emma] is already beginning to hint at the Romantic importance of a woman's self."[75] Despite this innovation, Emma's *Bildung* remains a traditional one, excluding her marriage from her narrative. Indeed, as Lionel Trilling notices Emma's fault is "the classic one of hubris, which yields to the classic result of blindness"[76] and she needs a husband to correct her faults. For this reason, *Emma* has the structure of a traditional form of *Bildungsroman* where the young girl "accepts a guide to lead her"[77] and she marries him. As in many other contemporary novels, we do not know what happens after her marriage: "Although Emma marries for an educative reason, we do not see what happens to her after she makes her choice."[78] Choosing the right person to marry concludes her process of *Bildung,* so marriage was not considered worthy of examination. Mackenzie perfectly condenses this idea in his book *Julia de*

[73] Stickney Ellis, S., *op. cit.,* p. 69.
[74] Hoffman Baruch, E., *Women, Love, and Power*, New York, New York University Press, 2004, p. 124.
[75] *Ibid.*
[76] Trilling, L., *Emma*, "Encounter", Vol. 8, No. 6, June 1957, p. 54.
[77] Hoffman Baruch, *op. cit*., p. 124.
[78] *Ibid*.

Roubigné where he wrote that: "Comedies and romances, you know, always end with a marriage, because, after that, there is nothing to be said."[79] However, gradually in later novels, readers started to witness disastrous marital lives, as in the case of Emma Bovary and Isabel Archer.

The first part of this chapter discusses George Eliot's peculiar use of marriage and her anticipation of marriage in *Middlemarch*. As a matter of fact, at around one third of the entire length of the book, in Book III, Chapter 28, Dorothea and Casaubon have already come back to Middlemarch after their honeymoon. George Eliot writes that: "Mr and Mrs Casaubon, returning from their wedding journey, arrived at Lowick Manor in the middle of January."[80] Dorothea's unhappiness during the honeymoon in Rome suggests that something is not working properly between them. The happy ending sealed by marriage in Jane Austen's novels seems too much a fairy-tale-like possibility for a complex novel as *Middlemarch*. As Moretti writes, in *Middlemarch*, George Eliot will: "dismiss the judicial-fairy-tale model"[81] of *Bildungsroman*.

Thanks to the anticipation of Dorothea's first marriage, readers can understand the real reasons why she married, none of which proves to be related to love. Indeed, as Baruch argues: "most heroines are willing to give up all for love, for love is seen as the great developer of the self. Unlike Dorothea, who looks for an intellectual superior."[82] The true reason behind her choice of marrying Casaubon is that of finding a mentor, someone who can help her personal development. As Baruch confirms: "Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* most consciously seeks an intellectual development through marriage."[83] Baruch adds also that: "the heroine longs for a love marriage that will increase her knowledge, often in some wide experiential sense."[84] As Chapter 1 argues, women were educated through marriage and this is what Dorothea hopes will happen with Casaubon. She considers her marriage an opportunity to learn in which Casaubon,

[79] Mackenzie, H., *Julia de Roubigné* (1815), Miami, HardPress, 2017, pos. 1656 of 2378.
[80] *Ibidem*, p. 273.
[81] Moretti, F., *op. cit*., p. 214.
[82] Hoffman Baruch, E., *Women, Love, and Power*, New York, New York University Press, 2004, p. 133.
[83] *Ibidem*, p. 130.
[84] *Ibidem*, p. 123.

being a man, may teach her "masculine" subjects from which unmarried girls were excluded. As her reflections confirm:

> She would not have asked Mr. Casaubon at once to teach her the languages, dreading of all things to be tiresome instead of helpful; but it was not entirely out of devotion to her future husband that she wished to know Latin and Greek. Those provinces of a masculine knowledge seemed to her a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly. As it was, she constantly doubted her own conclusions, because she felt her own ignorance; how could she be confident that one-roomed cottages were not for the glory of God, when men who knew the classics appeared to conciliate indifference to the cottages with zeal for glory?[85]

Dorothea yearns for knowledge and Casaubon seems her possibility to learn:

> 'I am very ignorant – you will quite wonder at my ignorance', said Dorothea. 'I have so many thoughts that may be quite mistaken; and now I shall be able to tell them all to you and ask you about them.'[86]

As her marriage happens early in the narration when she has not completed her *Bildung*, she seems not ready to choose the right man. Furthermore, her confused ideas of marriage might have been influenced by the Victorian society in which she lived. Marriage is offered to her as an escape, as her only possibility to learn and to help others. As Cara Weber writes:

> Dorothea nevertheless participates in a view of marriage structured by an idealist conception of meaning that accords with both the conservative gender ideology of her time and the conception of selfhood as identity. This view of marriage is the ideal - cultural and religious - that is offered to her, as a woman, as the means to fulfilment.[87]

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[85] *Middlemarch*, Book 1, ch. VII, p. 64.
[86] *Ibidem*, Book 1, ch. V, p. 50.
[87] Weber, C., *"The Continuity of Married Companionship": Marriage, Sympathy, and the Self in Middlemarch*, "Nineteenth-Century Literature", Vol. 66, No. 4, March 2012, p. 507.

Her idealistic devotion to others may be another reason for her choice of Edward. By marrying him, she hopes she can help his weak constitution in completing his ambitious project. Casaubon, a religious scholar in his fifties, seems to offer her both possibilities – that of learning and that of helping others – which are her two greatest aspirations. Thus, she considers him the means to her realization.

By presenting others' impressions of Casaubon, the omniscient narrator suggests that Dorothea's opinion of him may be distorted by her inexperience. George Eliot offers an alternative point of view which seems far more objective than Dorothea's. Celia, her sister, provides us with her own impression of Casaubon, helping us to realize that Dorothea's marriage will soon reveal to be a blunder. In the book, Dorothea portrays him as the great philosopher Locke, associating Casaubon to an eternal source of knowledge. On the contrary, Celia mocks Dorothea's too idealistic description of Casaubon, by asking: "Had Locke those two white moles with hairs on them?"[88] Her down-to-earth comment seems to confirm that Dorothea's impressions are distorted by her idealistic desires. Indeed, Dorothea does not realize that Edward proposed to her merely because he desires some company in his last years and probably some help with his endless research. They never see the other as a person with feelings, thoughts and desires but they consider each other as a means to an end.

Dorothea's fellow-feeling is another reason which urges her to marry Edward Casaubon. The anticipation of marriage allows George Eliot to discuss her concept of sympathy, influenced by Ludwig Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity.* In his discussions, Feuerbach explains the importance of an exchange with others in the constitution of one's self, writing that a man:

> is entirely wanting the objective perception, the consciousness, that the Thou, belongs to the perfection of the I, that men are required to constitute humanity, that only men taken together are what man should and can be. […] Hence intercourse ameliorates and elevates; involuntarily and without disguise, man is different from what he is when alone. Love especially works wonders, and the love of the sexes most of all. Man and

[88] *Middlemarch*, Book 1, ch. II, p. 20.

> woman are the complement of each other, and thus united they first present the species, the perfect man.[89]

Few pages after, he adds that:

> The other is my thou, - the relation being reciprocal, - my alter ego, man objective to me, the revelation of my own nature, the eye seeing itself. In another I first have the consciousness of humanity; through him I first learn.[90]

Marian's conception of sympathy was deeply influenced by these ideas. As Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth writes: "This work influenced George Eliot directly and, through her translation of it, influenced many of her contemporaries as well."[91] Both Feuerbach and George Eliot agreed that the exchange with others produced by sympathy is necessary to our definition of the self: "clarity of self-definition depends upon contact with others; […] the 'I' depends upon exchange with 'Thou'."[92] This "clarity of self-definition" can be facilitated by marriage which requires a constant exchange with the other. As Weber argues:

> For Eliot marriage constitutes a particularly appropriate site to question ethical relation, both because of its pressure for intimacy, its presumed unifying of two selves, and because of its widespread actual existence as a situation of conflict and suffering.[93]

The importance of marriage in the definition of one's self may explain George Eliot's decision to anticipate it in *Middlemarch*. Through her marriage with Casaubon, Dorothea will understand their true natures and desires, allowing her formation to progress. As Cara Weber confirms "in Dorothea's experience the self emerges as a

[89] Feuerbach, L., *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), New York, Prometheus Books, 1989, Ch. XVI, Part 1, p. 183.
[90] *Ibidem*, p. 185.
[91] Deeds Ermarth, E., *George Eliot's conception of Sympathy*, "Nineteenth-Century Fiction", Vol. 40, No. 1, June 1985, p. 24.
[92] *Ibidem*, p. 41.
[93] Weber, C., *"The Continuity of Married Companionship": Marriage, Sympathy, and the Self in Middlemarch*, "Nineteenth-Century Literature", Vol. 66, No. 4, March 2012, p. 500.

process, an ongoing practice of expression"[94] where her first marriage plays a fundamental role.

Moreover, the anticipation of Dorothea's first marriage increases our level of intimacy with her. While reading *Middlemarch*, we witness her unhappiness as she shares with us her painful marital life. Sympathy intervenes again, but this time between Dorothea and us. The anticipation of marriage produces two sympathetic parallel responses, one inside the text - that involving Dorothea's and her development - the other involving readers.

By anticipating the marriage, George Eliot could also question the Victorian institution of marriage, although in a veiled manner. Early in the first book of *Middlemarch*, she writes that marriage was an institution: "being decided according to custom, by good looks, vanity and merely canine affection."[95] Contemporary literature contributed to a stereotypical image of women who, after the brief period of courtship, were always able to find the right man. On the contrary, according to her, that brief period of time was insufficient to know the other person. *In Middlemarch*, she wrote that:

> The fact is unalterable, that a fellow-mortal with whose nature you are acquainted solely through the brief entrances and exits of a few imaginative weeks called courtship, may, when seen in the continuity of married companionship, be disclosed as something better or worse than what you have preconceived, but will certainly not appear altogether the same.[96]

Cara Weber argues that:

> Eliot opposes the moments of contact in courtship − brief entrances and exits − to the continuity of married companionship, emphasizing that it is this very continuity, the ongoingness of interaction in marriage, that brings fuller light to one's knowledge of the other. A certain concretization of ongoingess − in the sheer length of Middlemarch, its

[94] *Ibidem*, p. 496.
[95] *Middlemarch*, Book 1, ch. I, p. 8.
[96] *Ibidem*, Book 2, ch. VIII, p. 195.

> accumulations of character, episodes, and experiences − enables the novel form to emphasize this aspect of human relatedness, serving as the corrective that Eliot sees as necessary to contemporary understandings of relationships, particularly marriage.[97]

The hypothesis of an implicit critique of the Victorian institution of marriage seems supported by George Eliot's private life. She was undoubtedly a woman ahead of her time who broke many Victorian codes in her life. She was born in Warwickshire to a local parishioner. From her very young age, she challenged Victorian female education and the religious education offered by her father. At the age of 22, she stopped attending to church since some readings had put doubts about her faith. This choice had disastrous consequences for her family life and it also complicated her private affairs since eligible bachelors discarded women who did not attended to church regularly. From an early age, she remained faithful to her beliefs which was the result of her active research and study. The question of marriage seemed not to worry her too much throughout all her life. Indeed, her well known love affair with George Henry Lewes always remained outside the marriage law. The couple lived together for 24 years, from 1854 until the year of George Henry's death, 1878. They considered themselves a husband and a wife, although George Henry was legally married to Agnes Jervis. They even visited a barrister to discuss the possibility of a divorce, but the process was so complicated that George Henry never asked for it. As hinted in Chapter 1 "divorce was expensive and nearly impossible to obtain prior to the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857."[98] In a letter to Barbara Bodichon, one of her closest friend, Marian wrote that the lawyer: "pronounces it impossible. I am not sorry. I think the boys will not suffer, and for myself I prefer excommunication."[99] As we can read in these private lines, her reaction to the impossibility of his separation was rather unconventional. She seemed not to care too much about an official marriage annulment between George Henry and Agnes.

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[97] Weber, C., *op. cit.*, p. 501.
[98] Williams, W., *Sexual Politics and the Poetess: George Eliot on Marriage in "How Lisa Loved the King"*, "George Eliot – George Henry Lewes Studies, October 2013, No. 64/65, October 13, p. 1.
[99] *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. G. S. Haight, 9 Vols., New Haven, Yale University Press, 1978, Vol. III, p. 366.

Despite her personal approach to divorce, the question remained a pernicious one in her life. She feared a possible social scorn for her decision to live with a man already married to another woman. For this reason, she seldom talked about her situation with George Henry in public. She expressed her ideas about love and divorce indirectly, either commenting others' opinion or in her poetic production. In her review of *An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton: with an Introduction to Paradise Lost* by Thomas Keightley, she supported Milton's innovative ideas on divorce. She also noted that Milton's precocious interest in divorce matters inexplicably brought him an "unreasonable prejudice" about his "blending of personal interest with a general protest."[100] This discrimination prevented her from revealing her avant-garde ideas about marriage and divorce openly. In her review, she even quoted Milton's words about divorce which she described as dense with pathos and force:

> And yet there follows upon this a worse temptation. For if he (the husband) be such as hath spent his youth unblamably, and laid up his chiefly earthly comforts in the enjoyment of a contented marriage, nor did neglect the furtherance which was to be obtained therein by constant prayers, when he shall find himself bound fast to an uncomplying discord of nature, or, as it oft happens, to an image of earth and phlegm, with whom he looked to be the copartner of a sweet and gladsome society; and sees withal that his bondage is now inevitable: though he be almost the strongest Christian, he will be ready to despair in virtue, and mutiny against Divine Providence.[101]

As George Eliot further commented, this scene scene was frequent in the seventeenth century and it remained so in Victorian times. In a second review of Milton, as Haskin wrote, "she endorsed a kind of courage that the conventions of anonymous reviewing did not permit her to exercise herself."[102] Eliot again supported Milton but this time as a father, referring implicitly to George Henry. As Haskin added: "The climactic work of

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[100] Eliot, G., *Life and Opinions of Milton*, "The Leader", vol. VI, No. 280, August 1855, p. 750.
[101] Milton, J., *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1644), https://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/ddd/book_1/text.shtml, ch. 3, p. 11.
[102] Haskin, D., "George Eliot as a 'Miltonist': Marriage and Milton in Middlemarch", in *Milton and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2004, p. 213.

the review was to present Milton not as the author of Paradise Lost, but as a stand-in for Lewes."[103] Her ability as a critic protected her opinion, hiding her ideas behind her anonymous reviews.

Later on, she started to express her opinions in her poetic production. Poetry allowed her a protection from censure since poetic images could easily hide inconvenient messages. Furthermore, when she dedicated to poetry, she had already become an affirmed authoress and her fame partially shadowed her private scandals. As Williams argues: "as a poetess with vatic authority, Eliot could subtly voice subversive messages while seeming to promote traditional values."[104] The poem "How Lisa Loved the King" is a clear example of that. This adaptation of the seventh tale of Boccaccio's *Decameron* tells the story of an obedient young girl who marries a man she does not love. This apparent simple plot hides George Eliot's discussion of the social role assigned to women in marriage. Although this poem dates back 1869, two years before the publication of *Middlemarch*, "the Woman Question" is presented differently in the two literary productions. Indeed, in the book, the authoress never condemns openly the patriarchal society in which she lived. As Gillian Beer argues:

> In the Cabinet edition she removed sentences from the Finale which include: 'society smiled […] on modes of education which make a woman's knowledge another name for motley ignorance – on rules of conduct which are in flat contradiction with its own loudly-asserted beliefs'.[105]

On the contrary, the poem shows Lisa's difficult position in a misogynist society which may recall that of many Victorian women. In her adaptation, George Eliot added a role reversal to the story, replacing Pedro, with Lisa. The original story devolved around a man, Pedro, who won Lisa's admiration during a tournament. But in George Eliot's version, Lisa is the central character. She falls secretly in love with the king, who will nonetheless settle her marriage with another man. Lisa becomes the hero, who worships

[103] *Ibidem*.
[104] Williams, W., *Sexual Politics and the Poetess: George Eliot on Marriage in "How Lisa Loved the King"*, "George Eliot – George Henry Lewes Studies, October 2013, No. 64/65, October 2013, p. 2.
[105] Beer, G., *op. cit*., p. 169.

her beloved and openly declares her feelings for him. Adopting the conventions of the courtly love, she declares that she is ready to die for her love, as Pedro does in Boccaccio's original version. Lisa seems free to express her love to the king, but her independence is just an illusion. Despite the gender reversal, Lisa is not totally autonomous in revealing her love. She is subjected to a male intervention to express it as Minuccio and Mico, a poet and a singer, are necessary to declare her love to the king. Differently from what she does in *Middlemarch*, George Eliot clearly highlights the fact that although Lisa's love is of a purest and kind, the management of love remains a male business. Poor Lisa never wins the king's love back and she will eventually sacrifice her will by obeying to the king until the end, marrying the man he chooses for her:

> But, as you better know than I, the heart
> In choosing chooseth not its own desert,
> But that great merit which attracteth it;
> 'Tis law, I struggled, but I must submit,
> And having seen a worth all worth above,
> I loved you, love you, and shall always love.
> But that doth mean, my will is ever yours,
> Not only when your will my good insures,
> But if it wrought me what the world calls harm:
> Fire, wounds, would wear from your dear will a charm.[106]

As Williams writes, Lisa's "epic ability to love does not result in her receiving love. Her love for one man results in marriage to another"[107] and this seems to confirm that she depends entirely on men's decisions. Williams adds few pages later that: "Lisa seems to be greatly influential in matters of love but has no influence over her own love life."[108] Considering "the Woman Question", it may seem that the poem allows George Eliot to discuss not only the role of women in marriage but marriage itself. Indeed, the

[106] Eliot, G., *How Lisa Loved the King* (1884), Boston, Berwick & Smith, 2007, p. 46.
[107] Williams, W., *op. cit*., p. 6.
[108] Ibidem, p. 8.

adaptation may seem to glorify marriage by ennobling Lisa's obedience to others' decisions, but to a deeper analysis it proves that marriage is nothing more than a financial matter arranged by men only. Lisa's father, another man responsible for her marriage is described with these words:

> He loved his riches well,
> But loved them chiefly for his Lisa's sake,
> Whom with a father's care he sought to make
> The bride of some true honorable man, -
> Of Perdicone (so the rumor ran),
> Whose birth was higher than his fortunes were,
> For still your trader likes a mixture fair
> Of blood that hurries to some higher strain
> Than reckoning money's loss and money's gain.[109]

Marriage is described here as an exchange of commons between men, Lisa's exchange will provide to her family an increase in their social rank. Love is never considered in men's formulations throughout the poem and Lisa's opinion is never asked. She is a property exchanged from her father to her future husband Perdicone.

In *Middlemarch*, George Eliot's critic of marriage is still present, although it is more veiled than in Lisa's poem. Dorothea's peculiar freedom does not require a harsh denounce from the authoress, so George Eliot avoided expressing her opinion about delicate questions publicly in the novel. However, to a closer reading, the authoress still addresses "the Woman Question". Marriage is the first mistake made by Dorothea and this mistake appears at the beginning, as in any other novel of formation. Her freedom in making mistakes may also recall the typical approach of a forming youth who lacks a strong authoritative figure. However, in this case, the mistake she makes is that of choosing the wrong man, making the greatest mistake of her life at the beginning of her process of formation. Dorothea's marriage with Casaubon may appear as any other mistakes made in novels of formation. However, it should be remarked that marriage

[109] *Ibidem*, p. 11.

seldom was a mistake in English novels of formation. As discussed above, heroines and heroes of novels of formation made a lot of blunders, but they were never wrong in choosing their own life companions since marriage sealed their maturity. By becoming adult, they were able to choose the right companion and enter society: "their very accomplishments are designed to win them the kind of mate who will finish their education."[110] On the contrary, George Eliot changed the usual position of the marriage in the narration, considering marriage as any other mistake made by a young character in a novel of formation. By doing so, she contributed to an innovative portrayal of Dorothea. George Eliot represents a different woman experiencing a different situation, providing readers with something new. Probably following some of the literary reactions of that time which were asking and proposing less stereotyped images of women, George Eliot decided to depict an unconventional woman.

Chapter 1 discusses that new considerations about the role of women in society started to arise in the nineteenth century. The anticipation of marriage acquires a fundamental importance if analysed in that light. Dorothea's early marriage allows us to witness the couple's marital life which, in Dorothea's case, is a debacle. A Victorian woman would be surprised of reading about a wrong marriage since marital unhappiness was nowhere to be found in books at that time. The fact that marriage could not always have a happy ending and that women could feel sometimes unsatisfied by their choices, was something that might open new possibilities to women. Women readers were observing, probably for the first time in those years, marital unhappiness described in real terms. Therefore, Dorothea's sorrow may have mirrored theirs. Differently from other previous novels, *Middlemarch* portrays a woman who finds herself trapped in an unhappy life, tied down forever to her husband.

It is important to remark that George Eliot never criticized the institution of marriage itself, she questioned the management of marriage. Marian considered marriage a sacred union and she remained faithful to George Henry for the whole life.
In Lisa's poem, it is men's intervention which generates a marriage of convenience according to her. In *Middlemarch*, the failure of Dorothea and Rosamond's marriage is

[110] Hoffman Baruch, E., *Women, Love, and Power*, New York, New York University Press, 2004, p. 127.

to be found in their choices of the wrong men. The authoress never questions the importance of marriage in the book, she discusses Dorothea and Rosamond's choices of their partners.

3.2 An Unconventional Wife

This second part of the chapter considers how this early marriage contributed to the creation of a non-conventional heroine. Dorothea not only survives to her sad marriage, but she is offered another possibility of happiness with another man, an option seldom available to Victorian women. To grant her a second marriage, George Eliot opted for an expedient, Casaubon's death, which could protect Dorothea from the strict Victorian morality. She introduced his death to compensate her lack in "confidence in the power of specific social measures to rectify women's lot."[111]

Despite this expedient, George Eliot inserted some obstacles to Dorothea's happiness after Casaubon's death, otherwise her formation would have ended with his exit. The greatest obstacle is the testamentary clause inserted in Casaubon's will which is also a fundamental evidence of Dorothea's peculiarity. Indeed, her reaction to this codicil will highlight her marked personality and her necessity of a different process formation. It is worth remarking that this codicil is strictly connected to the anticipation of her marriage, being a consequence of their early union. Without its anticipation, Dorothea's peculiarity would not have been so marked.

In *Middlemarch*, Chapter 49 is devoted to conjectures about how a woman such as Dorothea would react to her husband's will. Sir James Chettam and Mr Brooke agree about her peculiarity while discussing that they would prefer to hide Casaubon's desire from Dorothea, but Mr Brooke declares:

[111] Beer, G., *op. cit*., p. 169.

> That would be difficult, you know, Chettam, as she is an executrix and she likes to go into these things – property, land, that kind of things. She has her notions, you know.[112]

And then he goes on adding "and she would like to act – depend upon it, as an executrix Dorothea would want to act. And she was twenty-one last December, you know. I can hinder nothing."[113] One may argue that Mr Brooke's attitude towards her niece is nothing more than the classical relationship between the protagonist of the novel of formation and the non-authoritative relative. However, in *Middlemarch*, Dorothea is presented differently from a conventional protagonist of a *Bildungsroman*. Mr Brooke's description of Dorothea's peculiarity is more objective than that of a non-authoritative relative. His considerations seem more reliable also because they are confirmed by another character who is external to these parental dynamics. The fact that Mr. Chettam recognizes Dorothea's desire of perfect freedom supports Mr Brooke's ideas. In the next chapter, Lydgate will also confirm Dorothea's atypical personality. While talking to Sir James, he says: "Let Mrs Casaubon do as she likes. […] She wants perfect freedom, I think, more than any other prescription."[114] From the very beginning of the book, Dorothea expresses all her desire to act and to produce action. Her curiosity will help her to discover the unhappy codicil in Casaubon's will. After some time spent at Celia's house, Dorothea's desire to act and to know the truth will convince, as always, her weaker sister to reveal the truth:

> 'Celia', said Dorothea, entreatingly, 'you distress me. Tell me at once what you mean'. It glanced through her mind that Mr Casaubon had left the property away from her – which would not be so very distressing.
> 'Why, he has made a codicil to his will, to say the propriety was all to go away from you if you married – I mean'. 'That is of no consequence', said Dorothea, breaking in impetuously. 'But if you married Mr Ladislaw, not anybody else,' Celia went on.[115]

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[112] *Middlemarch,* Book 5, ch. VII, p. 483
[113] *Ibid*.
[114] *Ibidem*, Book 5, ch. VIII, p. 491.
[115] *Ibidem*, Book, 5, ch. VIII, p. 489.

When Dorothea chooses to act, discovering the codicil, she also decides to face her destiny. As a reward for this maturity, an epiphanic revelation follows her discovery:

> She might have compared her experience at that moment to the vague, alarmed consciousness that her life was taking on a new form, that she was undergoing a metamorphosis in which memory would not adjust itself to the stirring of new organs. Everything was changing its aspect: her husband's conduct, her own duteous feeling towards him, every struggle between them – and yet more, her whole relation to Will Ladislaw. Her world was in a state of convulsive change; the only thing she could say distinctly to herself was, that she must wait and think anew.[116]

In this passage, Dorothea sees things differently for the first time and she realizes that she needs to act to change her situation. This revealing instant foretells that her life will not be the same anymore, clearly marking the beginning of her formation. In feeling that a new life will start, she is also reflecting unconsciously about her process of formation. While recognizing it, the process of formation is also unfolding, creating a sort of 'metaformation'. As in metatheatre where theatre itself becomes the object of theatrical representation, here Dorothea's formation becomes explicitly the object of a passage of her formation. Through this process, she shows some awareness of 'forming', proposing a true innovative narrative pattern. Moreover, Dorothea is experiencing a momentous sentimental discovery which will reveal her true sentiments about Will Ladislaw. Until this moment, Dorothea has never thought of Ladislaw as something more than a friend, whereas here for the first time, she realizes something more about her feelings:

> Then again, she was conscious of another change which also made her tremulous; it was a sudden strange yearning of heart towards Will Ladislaw. It had never before entered her mind that he could, under any circumstances, be her lover: conceive the effect of the sudden revelation that another had thought of him in that light – that perhaps he himself

[116] *Ibidem*, Book 5, ch. VIII, p. 490.

> had been conscious of such a possibility, − and this with the hurrying, crowding vision of unfitting conditions, and questions not soon to be solved.[117]

This is, undoubtedly, a momentous discovery for Dorothea who, from now on, will see things from a different perspective, and in particular Ladislaw. All these revelations which are fundamental to Dorothea's formation occur in a rather initial position in the book thanks to George Eliot's anticipation of marriage.

Moreover, the anticipation of marriage influences Dorothea's conflict between self-determination and socialization already discussed in Chapter 2. In previous novels of formation, marriage frequently allowed the protagonist to solve the conflict between the two principles since characters, and particularly female characters, could acquire their position in society only through marriage, finding their happiness in it. On the contrary, in *Middlemarch*, Dorothea understands that she will not find happiness there. She does not find her role in society by marrying Casaubon or at least not the role she has desired. After realizing that the society of Middlemarch does not fit her, she chooses withdrawal, producing the opposite effect of a classic novel of formation. Thus, *Middlemarch* questions the possibility that the conflict between self-determination and socialization may remain unsolved through a wrong marriage, highlighting the limits of the previous examples of novels of formation.

Furthermore, in other *Bildungsromane*, mistakes acquired a meaning only because they led to a final act which was marriage, since as Franco Moretti writes "marriage is the definitive and classifying act par excellence."[118] But in *Middlemarch*, Dorothea's first marriage does not conclude her process of formation. Despite being offered a title and a social recognition, that of a wife and precisely Casaubon's wife, Dorothea's impressions after the wedding confirm that her process of formation has not ended there. Again, the anticipation of marriage allows to perceive that something in Dorothea's formation went wrong, or simply that she needed a different path to reach her maturity.

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[117] *Ibid*.
[118] Moretti, F., *op. cit.,* p. 7.

It would be improper to state that the anticipation of marriage anticipates Dorothea's formation for it starts at the same moment in which it would start in another novel of formation. What changes in *Middlemarch* is the type of mistake allowed to Dorothea and the consequent formation that she experiences. In her *Bildung*, Dorothea's character acquires deeper shades and we become even more intimate with her, witnessing the greatest mistake of her life. The anticipation of her wrong marriage reinforces her peculiar desire to act and to intervene actively since her sensation of 'not doing enough' is enhanced by her marital life. Dorothea's lack of an active involvement in his projects during their marriage and her subordination to his decisions will convince her that she is not contented with the traditional role of the wife.

In previous examples of *Bildungsromane*, young protagonists were able to understand their mistakes and to end the formation thanks to the final marriage. This final decision usually followed a momentous revelation in which characters recognized that up to that moment their life has been full of mistakes. Indeed, one major issue that forming characters faced in their novels was usually that of eventually making connections between events. To such an extent that sometimes readers or other characters may perceive them as long detached from their realities, as if they lived in a parallel world. This was simply caused by the fact that these youths were still reflecting about the shape of their lives and the direction to take. What is remarkable to notice is that this detachment from reality was usually unperceived by young protagonists, who did not realize their detachment, probably blurred by their exaggerate use of imaginative faculties. They lived imagining things so much that they easily confounded reality with imagination, believing what is abstract to be true and being blind to reality. In this, they may resemble Dorothea before her marriage with Casaubon. Her highly idealistic views of life spur her to choose Casaubon among her suitors since she confounds her idea of Casaubon with the reality of things. A clear example of this imaginative attitude can be found in *Waverley* by Walter Scott, a historical novel which also depicts a young man whose self is forming. Walter Scott dedicates an entire chapter entitled 'Castle-Building' to Edward's attitude of imagining. In the chapter, the omniscient narrator makes clear that characters in the book are aware of young Edward's tendency of

imagining rather too much, confirming the question of detachment. As the following words show:

> He was in his sixteenth year when his habits of abstraction and love of solitude became so much marked as to excite Sir Everard's affectionate apprehension. He tried to counterbalance these propensities by engaging his nephew in field-sports, which had been the chief pleasure of his own youthful days. But although Edward eagerly carried the gun for one season, yet when practice had given him some dexterity, the pastime ceased to afford him amusement.[119]

Notwithstanding his uncle's preoccupation, the dearest occupation to Edward is "to indulge in the fancies" triggered by the legends of their ancestors told by his relatives. Scott's description of young Edward perfectly describes this attitude:

> In the corner of the large and sombre library, with no other light than was afforded by the decaying brands on its ponderous and ample hearth, he would exercise for hours that internal sorcery by which past or imaginary events are presented in action, as it were, to the eye of the amuser.[120]

It has been repeatedly said over the preceding paragraph that the role of Jane Austen was pivotal in the establishment of the *Bildungsroman* in Britain. Considering her characters, imagination and the consequent misinterpretation of reality play a fundamental role in the development of her novels. Emma Woodhouse is emblematic in this respect since her imagination is both her refuge and her prison. Also in this case, Emma takes refuge in her imagination who offers her a distraction from the dullness of her enclosed life. The 'poor' young girl is left alone with her old father since the governess, who brought her up and has become her unique friend and consolation, got married and left Hartfield. Emma has no other consolation than turning to her imagination to occupy her long solitary hours. This imaginative faculty is surely the

[119] Scott, W., *Waverley* (1814), ed. Claire Lamont, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, Vol. 1, ch. IV, p. 15.
[120] *Ibidem*,Vol. 1, ch. IV, p. 17.

greatest merit of both Emma Woodhouse and Edward Waverley, but as any other principles, it needs to be controlled and balanced to become adults. The concept of compromise alluded to in Chapter 2 implies the necessity that young adults learn the balance of the equation between giving and obtaining. But compromise refers also to the necessity that they control their imaginative powers, abandoning a too imaginative approach to life to access reality. In fact, both Edward and Emma in the end will realize that there is no more space for their imagination and that they are asked to enter reality if they want to survive and be happy. This does not mean that they must necessarily abandon their qualities, but that they must learn to find a compromise to adjust them within reality. Scott's words help us in better understanding this psychological development:

> [Edward's] reveries he was permitted to enjoy, undisturbed by queries or interruption; and it was in many a winter walk by the shores of Ulswater, that he acquired a more complete mastery of a spirit tamed by adversity, than his former experience had given him; and that he felt himself entitled to say firmly, though perhaps with a sigh, that the romance of his life was ended, and that its real history had now commenced. He was soon called upon to justify his pretensions to reason and philosophy.[121]

In *Emma*, there are two great epiphanic moments similar to Edward's revelation which suggest that it is time to control her excessive imaginative faculty. However, Emma's first epiphany can be regarded also as a false epiphany. Indeed, it reveals that her behaviour was inappropriate, but the revelation has just a transitory effect. After Mr Elton's declaration of love, or better said, after Mr Elton's proposal, Emma for the first time refers to her usual occupation of match-making regretting her hobby, by saying "it was foolish, it was wrong, to take so active a part in bringing any two people together."[122] Emma is here only at about half of her journey towards maturity, she has just started to show some moments of awareness. The real moment of epiphany comes after the episode of Box Hill, during which Emma proves impolite towards a poor old woman. In the episode of Box

[121] *Ibidem,* Vol. 3, ch. XIII, p. 283.
[122] Austen, J., *Emma* (1815), ed. Fiona Stafford, London, Penguin, 2015, Vol. 1, ch. XVI, p. 129.

Hill, Emma's epiphany will follow Mr. Knightley's intervention as without him she would not have understood the gravity of her behaviour. Emma does not show any signs of awareness in being rude to Miss Bates, it is as if the rude remark has exit from her mind without reflecting or probably without realizing where she was, what she was saying and to whom she was referring to. Emma impulsively replies, seeming an alien to that English old society rooted on values such as kindness and sympathy towards the weakest ones. The episode of Box Hill is exemplary because it depicts the clash between the youth and the society in which he or she should enter. This clash is even more highlighted by the gentle traits of Highbury's society of which Mr. Knightley is the perfect representative. Although all the participants of the party coming from Highbury are surprised by Emma's answer, the only character who fully comprehends the gravity of her reply is her only social equal, again Mr. Knightley. He is the one who is entirely aware of Emma's lapse and he is the one who forces her to reconsider what happened when she reaches her carriage. From the passages of the two books, it appears clear that the tendency to overimagine of both Emma and Edward is the main cause of their mistakes. By learning to check their imagination, they will also learn to compromise their too idealistic prospects to the prosaic conditions of life.

In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea's process of formation is totally different because of the type of the first mistake: her marriage. Marriage is treated by George Eliot as any other mistakes. Therefore, an epiphany follows this great blunder as it happens in the case of Edward and Emma. However, due to the peculiarity of the mistake, the epiphany that follows is a peculiar one too. The main difference in her epiphany resides in the responsibility that she has in realizing that she was wrong. In *Emma* as in *Waverley*, there are some external agents which facilitate somehow the recognition of their mistakes, but what happens in *Middlemarch* is the exact opposite. Dorothea is the sole responsible for her epiphany since it follows a marriage which she has chosen, being the sole responsible for her formation. She realizes that she was wrong without the intervention of anybody since, as a married woman, Dorothea can rely only on herself to solve marital problems. This epiphany may appear as premature, nonetheless it is as constructive as Waverley and Emma's and even more so since Dorothea is the only agent. The moment in which

Dorothea is looking at the ruins in Rome is the precise fragment of time in which she perceives her mistake, without an external agency. Even if her reflections are induced by the surrounding ruins, the exteriority is interpreted according to her own feelings. Dorothea is not influenced by the ruins, what surrounds her is influenced by her mood. The epiphanic revelation should be attributed to her keen way of squaring things rather than to some external facilitator, be it either a character such as in *Emma*, or a romantic journey such as in *Waverley*. As George Eliot writes "Dorothea had no such defence against deep impressions."[123] It is her fervent sensibility which exposes her to reflections, but again, without her sensibility, the ruins would not have stimulated her momentous intuition. All what lies in front of her holds:

> 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 on her with that ache belonging to a glut of confused ideas which check the flow of emotion.[124]

The intervention of the narrator defines Dorothea's autonomous epiphany as an electric shock, highlighting the intensity of her premature epiphany. Furthermore, George Eliot's explanation about what is going on inside Dorothea's mind offers readers an unprecedented psychological portrait of a character in formation. The writer, after portraying the intensity of Dorothea's feeling, remarks that many shades were still present in her comprehension of reality which is typical of youth. The anticipation of marriage and the anticipation of her epiphany enable us to perceive hints of these shades, offering us a complete psychological portrait of the young Dorothea. Her first epiphany allowed George Eliot to make some considerations about the possibility of an initial period of incertitude following the wedding, writing that: "The early months of marriage often are times of critical tumult – whether that of a shrimp-pool or of deeper waters – which afterwards subsides into cheerful peace."[125] As

[123] *Middlemarch,* Book 2, ch. VIII, p. 193.
[124] *Ibid*.
[125] *Ibidem*, Book, 2, ch. VIII, p. 195.

we have already explained above, writers did not usually analyse the conjugal life in books, as if there was nothing really interesting to be said. On the contrary, George Eliot shows that conjugal life may offer interesting psychological analysis, especially at its very beginning. This may partly explain her narrative choice of anticipating Dorothea's marriage. The mistake of marrying Casaubon is so great that its consequences deserve to be analysed. Indeed, Dorothea's first marriage will totally change her development which is at the core of the book: "whatever else remained the same, the light had changed, and you cannot find the pearly dawn at noonday."[126]

This quote from *Middlemarch* is totally exhaustive for the considerations of this chapter. The anticipation of marriage is what makes *Middlemarch* a peculiar case of novel of formation and what makes Dorothea a peculiar heroine. George Eliot portrays a strong woman who married the wrong man for her lack of experience due to her young age. Anticipating the marriage, the authoress introduces the possibility that the person met several times during a period called courtship could not be the perfect companion for life. Furthermore, the anticipation of marriage enhances Dorothea's innovative approach to life, being an echo of hope for many women who were fighting for more independence.

[126] *Ibid.*

Chapter 4. Marriages and Possible Marriages in Middlemarch

"Let the high Muse chant loves Olympian:
We are but mortals, and must sing of man."

(Epigraph to *Middlemarch*, Book 3, ch. V)

4.1 Dorothea and Casaubon, the First Mistake of the Heroine

This chapter focuses on actual marriages and hypothetical unions in *Middlemarch.* In particular, the analysis will show how these marriages contribute to Dorothea's formation. Then it will be argued how her marriage with Will, despite being highly criticized, effectively concludes her formation and the narrative.

Dorothea and Casaubon's marriage is professedly a mistake, and this first part of the chapter will be dedicated to its discussion. The inclusion of the first marriage in the narrative might respond to a new literary interest in discovering the intricacies of marital lives which emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Moreover, this union allows some considerations about the role of women in marriage − another theme which gained attention in those decades. As Anna Jameson wrote:

> The press has lately teemed with works treating of the condition, the destiny, the duties of women. […]. The theme, however treated, is one of the themes of the day.[127]

Middlemarch depicts the condition of a woman, her destiny and what she thought was her duty. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Dorothea's condition – that of a young woman free to make mistakes – cannot be equated to that of thousands of Victorian women. Dorothea is free in her choice of marrying Casaubon and she even goes against her family who discourage their marriage. Her freedom is something that most of

[127] Jameson, A., *Memoirs and Essays: Illustrative of Art, Literature, and Social Morals,* London, 1846, Richard Clay, p. 156.

Victorian women could only dream of. However, despite this peculiarity, the misery she encounters in her marriage could be similar to that of many Victorian women.

Dorothea decides independently to marry the man she prefers, but the obstacles that she encounters in her first marriage will prove it to be the wrong one. Silence is probably the greatest difficulty they meet. This refers to the lack of communication between the two, as well as to the silent approach adopted by the authoress in the narration of their marriage. Indeed, readers may have the impression that George Eliot silenced some passages of the marital life for Dorothea's unhappiness remains somehow unexplained in some passages. At some point in the narration, while reflecting about her marriage, Dorothea compares silence to sorrow:

> Sorrow comes in so many ways. Two years ago, I had no notion of that − I mean of the unexpected way in which trouble comes, and ties our hands, and makes us silent when we long to speak. I used to despise women a little for not shaping their lives more and doing better things. I was very fond of doing as I liked, but I have almost given it up.[128]

However, the reasons behind her sorrowful reflections are not so easy to trace. Dorothea seems to refer to sorrow as if it were connected to silence. Sorrow comes in many ways and it seems to have reached Dorothea through her marriage, which silences her and ties her hands. The idea that this union brought silence and sorrow in her life is reinforced by the fact that she makes a clear reference of time: "two years ago." As a matter of fact, "two years ago," the inexperienced Dorothea had no idea of how sorrow might affect women. Furthermore, she refers to women who "do not shape their lives more," possibly alluding to the passivity that many women experienced in their marriages. Dorothea finds herself in their same unhappy situation for, after her marriage, she experiences the same sense of repression. Moreover, this passage shows George Eliot's silent approach in describing Dorothea and Casaubon's matrimonial issues. The sensation that the authoress left something untold is confirmed by the protagonist's

[128] *Middlemarch*, Book 6, ch. I, p. 545.

admittance that "sorrow makes [them] silent when [they] long to speak."[129] Even if silence cannot be equated to physical violence, it "equally operates as a central sign of hidden pain that disrupts rather than maintains an image of marital unity."[130] After an argument with Casaubon in which Dorothea suggests that part of their wealth should be given to Will Ladislaw, she finds herself silenced again:

> Poor Dorothea, shrouded in the darkness, was in a tumult of conflicting emotions. Alarm at the possible effect on himself of her husband's strongly manifested anger, would have checked any expression of her own resentment, even if she had been quite free from doubt and compunction under the consciousness that there might be some justice in his last insinuation. Hearing him breathe quickly after he had spoken, she sat listening, frightened, wretched −with a dumb inward cry for help to bear this nightmare of a life in which every energy was arrested by dread. But nothing else happened, except that they both remained a long while sleepless, without speaking again.[131]

However, the absence of violence does not necessarily imply an absence of trauma. In this episode, as Dowling observes: "silence is positioned as a sign of concealed psychological trauma."[132] The question of silence here appears as double-faced − it characterizes not only their union, but also the authoress's description, which does not fully explain Dorothea's dread. Indeed, she might fear their argument will result in the worsening of Casaubon's health issues. But it is equally possible that she dreads an aggressive reaction on his part following his harsh words:

> Dorothea, my love, this is not the first occasion, but it were well that it should be the last, on which you have assumed a judgment on subjects beyond your scope. Into the question how far conduct, especially in the matter of alliances, constitutes a forfeiture of family claims, I do not now enter. Suffice it, that you are not here qualified to discriminate. What I now wish you to understand is, that I accept no revision, still less

[129] *Ibid*.
[130] Dowling, A., *op. cit.,* p. 330.
[131] *Middlemarch*, Book 4, ch. IV, p. 375.
[132] Dowling, A., *op. cit.,* p. 330.

> dictation within that range of affairs which I have deliberated upon as distinctly and properly mine. It is not for you to interfere between me and Mr. Ladislaw, and still less to encourage communications from him to you which constitute a criticism on my procedure.[133]

Although Dorothea is never openly abused by Casaubon, his misogynist approach leads to her submission to his will. Indeed, soon after the wedding, the protagonist loses her initial freedom, finding herself trapped by her decision to marry Casaubon. Dorothea's repression is further confirmed by the releasement that she feels when Casaubon is absent:

> Dorothea had gathered emotion as she went on, and had forgotten everything except the relief of pouring forth her feelings, unchecked: an experience once habitual with her, but hardly ever present since her marriage, which had been a perpetual struggle of energy with fear.[134]

It is worth noting that Dorothea's relief follows her unburdening to Will, and it is strictly connected to his presence. When she is with him, she regains that feeling of being "unchecked […] once habitual with her" which is what youths usually experience in novels of formation.

Later on, while discussing Lydgate's marital issues, the protagonist reflects again about silence and its importance in the 'health' of a marriage:

> Dorothea refrained from saying what was in her mind – how well she knew that there might be invisible barriers to speech between husband and wife.[135]

Those "invisible barriers to speech" lead not only to a lack of dialogue but, most importantly, to a lack of mutual comprehension. This prevents them from sharing their

[133] *Ibid*.
[134] *Middlemarch*, Book 4, ch. VI, p. 389.
[135] *Ibidem*, Book 8, ch. V, p. 766.

own feelings with each other and it precludes their happiness together. Silence generates a physical as well as a psychological distance between the two.

Both silence and distance are intrinsically present from the very beginning of their marriage. Even during their honeymoon, the two remain separated. Only after five weeks of their honeymoon:

> Dorothea was seated in an inner room or boudoir of a handsome apartment in Via Sistina. I am sorry to add that she was sobbing bitterly, with such abandonment to this relief of an oppressed heart as a woman habitually controlled by pride on her own account and thoughtfulness for others will sometimes allow herself when she feels securely alone. And Mr Casaubon was certain to remain away for some time at the Vatican.[136]

The fact that the neo couple is spending their honeymoon apart is a clear sign that something is not working properly. However, neither Dorothea nor Casaubon seem to recognize it, probably for their inexperience in the affairs of the heart. Indeed, she thinks that she should let him write his important research and he presumes that she is happy to have some time to visit Rome by herself.

While discussing silence in Dorothea's first marriage, the lack of empathy in their union should be considered. Indeed, this deficiency might be a consequence of their miscommunication, but it can also be the cause of their silence. Empathy needs an emotional exchange with the other person which is absent in their relationship. As it is depicted in the book, Dorothea and Casaubon's relationship is entirely built on rationality and intellect. Casaubon's very proposal resonances with rationality:

> This is a happiness greater than I had ever imagined to be in reserve for me. That I should ever meet with a mind and person so rich in the mingled graces which could render marriage desirable, was far indeed from my conception. You have all—nay, more than all—those qualities which I have ever regarded as the characteristic excellences of womanhood. The great charm of your sex is its capability of an ardent

[136] *Ibidem*, Book 2, ch. VII, p. 192.

> self-sacrificing affection, and herein we see its fitness to round and complete the existence of our own.[137]

The impression of rationality is confirmed by George Eliot few lines afterwards, where she agrees that passion was entirely absent even in Casaubon's proposal. She comments his proposal as follows:

> No speech could have been more thoroughly honest in its intention: the frigid rhetoric at the end was as sincere as the bark of a dog, or the cawing of an amorous rook.[138]

Later on Casaubon, probably recognizing his frigidity, tries to mitigate it by using sweet epithets with his wife. However, his words sound unnatural and without a proper context, increasing their misunderstandings instead of smoothing them. An example of that can be found in the last quotation from the couple's argument, opening with his "Dorothea, my love". In the following passage, we receive another hint of this ambiguous approach: "'What is that my love?' said Mr Casaubon (he always said 'my love' when his manner was the coldest)."[139]

Moreover, the frigidity of the marriage may be attributed to Dorothea's erroneous approach to marriage. Indeed, the protagonist confuses her affection with learning. Probably influenced by her too idealistic view of love, she reproduces with Casaubon: "The mentor-pupil relationship in its male-female form" which presents "the man as teacher and the woman as pupil."[140] As Gillian Beer underlines:

> To Dorothea, passion and knowledge are identified. […] At the beginning of the book, Casaubon is irradiated for her by the light of his imagined knowledge.[141]

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[137] *Ibidem*, Book 1, ch. V, p. 50.
[138] *Ibid*.
[139] *Ibidem*, Book 2, ch. X, p. 225.
[140] Beer, G., *op. cit.,* p. 160.
[141] *Ibid*.

The critic's opinion is confirmed by Dorothea's early ideas on the perfect marriage: "The really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it."[142] Passion and love are entirely excluded from her future marital life:

> I should learn everything then", she said to herself, still walking quickly along the bridle road through the wood. "It would be my duty to study that I might help him the better in his great works. There would be nothing trivial about our lives. Every-day things with us would mean the greatest things.[143]

Dorothea does not seem to consider a possible lack of passion as a negative sign in a marriage. She even hopes to remove trivialities from their marital life where every effort should be dedicated to help his old husband. David Daiches writes that Dorothea is presented by George Eliot:

> With great delicacy but unmistakably, a nineteen-year-old girl who has completely sublimated her sexual instincts (of which of course she is wholly unaware) into an idealistic yearning for service.[144]

After their honeymoon and back in *Middlemarch*, the situation does not improve, they still do not listen to each other and they still do not comprehend each other. Their behaviour towards Will Ladislaw remarks the couple's distance. Indeed, Dorothea is totally unable to sense that her husband feels menaced by Will. As in other occasions, Casaubon should openly state what he thinks about Will to make Dorothea understand his point of view, since she is unable to perceive it. She keeps inviting Will to their house as she mistakes Casaubon's feelings. Ironically enough, Dorothea's marked altruism does not work with Casaubon and she remains insensitive to his thoughts and feelings. She seems to lose all her empathy when her husband is

[142] *Middlemarch*, Book 1, ch. I, p. 10.
[143] *Ibidem*, Book 1, ch. III, p. 29.
[144] Daiches, D., *op. cit.*, p. 15.

concerned. Both are unable to express and use their natural gifts when they are together. It is as if their talents and abilities were overshadowed by each other's presence.

Dorothea chose to marry Edward to devote herself to his help. However valid her philanthropist devotion might be in Victorian times; it is not enough for the success of the marriage. In *Middlemarch*, a parallel between Victorian times and Dorothea is drawn by the authoress, who writes with a note of irony:

> 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 some birth and fortune, who knelt suddenly down on a brick floor by the side of a sick labourer and prayed fervidly as if she though 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![145]

In this description, Dorothea seems ridiculed by the authoress, but George Eliot overturns her ironical tone a few lines afterwards, leaving the reader with an implicit critique of her society:

> Such a wife might awaken you some fine morning with a new scheme for the application of her income which would interfere with 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.[146]

George Eliot criticizes her patriarchal society which seems not ready to accept an unconventional woman as Dorothea. Indeed, a Victorian man would never "risk himself

[145] *Middlemarch*, Book 1, ch. I, p. 9.
[146] *Ibid*.

in such fellowship". David Daiches comments that George Eliot's ironical approach hides an admiration for her heroine:

> The irony is here turned right round, away from Dorothea to the society in which she lives and particularly to the male domination of that society. The other side of this irony is admiration for Dorothea.[147]

Besides the difficulties that Dorothea encounters since the very beginning of her marriage, her desire to do good overcomes the initial obstacles. She tries to be a good wife not only because she is legally bound to Casaubon, but also because she considers herself morally bound to him. She feels that being a good wife is her duty. But this duty has a high price: her happiness. Despite her efforts to do good, she will soon discover that she is allowed to give Casaubon just a small contribution. She will simply become his secretary, confined to secondary assignments which will destroy her joyful impulses and hopes. Her self-denying propensities will mortify her desires, forcing herself to express only kindness and patience towards her husband, forgetting herself. However, as the marriage continues, Dorothea learns to know herself and her necessities. She gradually loses her saintlike approach, rediscovering herself as a young woman, changing her behaviour towards Casaubon, from that of a dutiful wife to that of a generous and conscious woman. Gradually, she will manage to see her husband for what he is, a man with a poor health who realises in the end that the work of his entire life has come to nothing:

> When the kind quiet 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 lamed creature.[148]

Despite the difficulty of her situation, her initial anger and sadness will transform into pity after realising Edward's nature. David Daiches confirms:

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[147] Daiches, D., *op. cit.*, p. 13.
[148] *Middlemarch*, Book 4, ch. IX, p. 427.

> D. H. Lawrence believed that in realising the mystical core of true otherness in one's partner one finally achieved perfect sexual love. For George Eliot such realisation was linked not to love but to pity.[149]

Indeed, not even the realization of Casaubon's nature produces love. Her acceptance of the sad circumstances leaves place only for piety towards her husband. After recognising that her marriage is a mistake, she accepts her choice. She recognises that her nature and her true desires need to be sacrificed in the circumstances she has chosen for herself. Marriage thus acquires the very educative function mistakes have in *Bildungsromane.*

Another adjective which describes this marriage is lifeless. George Eliot uses many scientific metaphors to describe its lack of energy in the narrative. Her life was dense of cultural exchanges, not only in the literary field. She received insights in science, neuroscience, and psychology. Traces of a scientific influence may also be found in *Middlemarch*, precisely in her description of Dorothea's first marriage. Indeed, in Book 2, Chapter VII, she writes that:

> In watching effects, if only of an electric battery, it is often necessary to change our place and examine a particular mixture or group at some distance from the point where the movement we are interested in was set up.[150]

Both Spencer and Lewes, two men closely related to George Eliot, theorised about science and psychology, focusing on the relationship between causes and effects. According to them, the inseparability of cause and effect is what lies at the core of each human action. In *Middlemarch*, this causal link is what generates each behaviour. The prefatory quotation to Book 7, Chapter II, exemplifies this inter-relation: "All force is twain in one: cause is not cause unless effect be there […]."[151] The idea of force appears

[149] Daiches, D., *op. cit.,* p. 45.
[150] *Middlemarch*, Book 4, ch. VII, p. 399.
[151] *Ibidem*, Book 7, ch. II, p. 647.

central in George Eliot's depiction of Casaubon and Dorothea's marriage. Indeed, while describing Casaubon, the authoress writes:

> It is true that he knew all the classical passages implying the contrary; but knowing classical passages, we find, is a mode of motion, which explains why they leave so little extra force for their personal application. [152]

Energy and motion are what Casaubon lacks but, ironically enough, they are what Dorothea hopes to find in her marriage. Casaubon is unable to find "the Key to all Mythologies"[153] as he is incapable of creating life. As Shuttleworth writes: "Entangled in the labyrinth of history, the impotent Casaubon can produce neither Key nor child."[154] David Daiches argues too that Casaubon is: "spiritually starving as well as emotionally dead."[155] And Casaubon himself confirms it by saying to Mr. Brooke: "I feed too much on the inward sources; I live too much with the dead."[156] In an early stage of their relationship Dorothea portrays an image which seems the opposite of a lifeless couple:

> 'He thinks with me', said Dorothea to herself, 'or rather, he thinks a whole world of which my thought is but a poor two-penny mirror. And his feelings too, his whole experience – what a lake compared with my little pool!'[157]

Nonetheless, her marriage will entirely overturn her initial opinion about Casaubon. The metaphor of water, a *fil rouge* through the narrative, is appropriately adopted by David Daiches, who writes that Dorothea's "imagery is reversed, and Dorothea learns to see Casaubon not as a broad lake but as a dry and empty tomb."[158] Similarly, at the beginning of the book, the adjectives "ancient" and "museum" are used with a positive

[152] *Ibidem,* Book 1, ch. X, p. 85.
[153] *Ibidem*, Book 1, ch. VII, p. 63.
[154] Shuttleworth, S., *op. cit*., p. 126.
[155] Daiches, D., *op. cit*., p. 16.
[156] *Middlemarch*, Book 1, ch. II, p. 18.
[157] *Ibidem,* Book 1, ch. III, p. 25.
[158] Daiches, D., *op. cit.,* p. 19.

connotation, alluding to treasures coming from the past. Casaubon's devotion to ancient times appears remarkable in the first chapters. Gradually, the adjectives used to describe his work acquire a negative aura, implying death and fossilisation. James Chettam too will contribute to his still-life portrait, by defining Casaubon as "a dried bookworm towards fifty,"[159] who is "no better than a mummy."[160]

Labyrinthine is another adjective which may describe Dorothea and Casaubon's union which seems dispersive and unable to produce something real and positive. In describing the period of courtship, George Eliot uses the adjective labyrinthine to refer to what Dorothea thinks she has found in Casaubon:

> Dorothea by this time had looked deep into the ungauged reservoir of Mr. Casaubon's mind, seeing reflected there in vague labyrinthine extension every quality she herself brought; had opened much of her own experience to him, and had understood from him the scope of his great work, also of attractively labyrinthine extent.[161]

The adjective may allude to Dorothea's too idealistic and intricate approach to life typical of youths. But "labyrinthine" may also refer to Casaubon's attitude to his research of which he thinks he can manage the "labyrinthine extent." As in the case of protagonists of novels of formation, his very sin may be that of *hubris*, of excessive pride. He thinks: "that all the mythical systems of erratic and mythical fragments in the world were corruptions of a tradition originally revealed."[162] He is also convinced that:

> Having once mastered the true position and taken a firm footing there, the vast field of mythical constructions became intelligible. Nay luminous with the reflected light of correspondences.[163]

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[159] *Middlemarch*, Book 1, ch. II, p. 23.
[160] *Ibidem*, Book 1, ch. VI, p. 58.
[161] *Ibidem,* Book 1, ch. III, p. 24.
[162] *Ibid.*
[163] *Ibid.*

He thinks himself perfectly able to find that "tradition originally revealed", the only difficulty he acknowledges is time. It is ironical to notice that he shows the same excessive pride which urges Emma Woodhouse, Emma Bovary, Dorothea Brooke, Edward Waverley, Isabel Archer, and many other forming youths to make great blunders. Casaubon has not learned from his life, his *Bildung* has not concluded yet and for this reason, he cannot contribute effectively to Dorothea's. His mind is still marked by fragmentariness resembling a young man, as his never-ending projects confirm. It is as if "Casaubon's character and abilities are unequal to his ambition."[164] He needs some help to organise his work, his ideas, and his self, but Dorothea is far too young to do that. Furthermore, his incomplete formation might be due to his emotional sphere which has not entirely developed in his youth. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that he is at odds with his emotion. He experiences almost only negative feelings which he generally cannot control, as it happens with children. Indeed, as Gillian Beer argues: "Casaubon cannot experience emotion except as fear and anger."[165]

Contrarily, Dorothea recognizes her lack of experience: "I don't' feel about doing good in any way now: everything seems like going on a mission to a people whose language I don't know."[166] In realising that she needs an external help to grow up, she is an atypical forming youth. As Shuttleworth adds:

> Through her marriage to Casaubon, Dorothea hopes to find a language that will enable her to make sense of surrounding Middlemarch life, and the developing cultural history of the world.[But] It is Will who offers her this illumination.[167]

She is ready to sacrifice herself to his research, hoping that Casaubon may open her new possibilities of learning. However, Edward remains unresponsive to her hopes, suppressing her enthusiasm:

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[164] Daiches, D*., op. cit.*, p. 29.
[165] Beer, G., *op. cit*., p. 159.
[166] *Middlemarch,* Book 1, ch. III, p. 29.
[167] Shuttleworth, S., *op. cit*., p. 129.

> There is hardly any contact more depressing to a young ardent creature than that of a mind in which years full of knowledge seem to have issued in a blank absence of interest or sympathy.[168]

Moreover, Casaubon's self-centredness encourages Dorothea's insecurity and it confirms his lack of maturity. Although he is an adult, he can only focus on himself and on his needs as a young boy would do. He is too occupied in looking for his personal realisation to help Dorothea in forming hers, proving his realisation prior to hers. Their inequality collides with George Eliot's idea of a perfect marriage. Despite her peculiar relationship with George Henry, she believed marriage was a sacred union which should be respected throughout one's life. According to Marian, a good marriage was defined by the word equality – namely what Dorothea's first marriage is missing. But their inequality was exactly what Casaubon had always looked for in a relationship. Elizabeth Barret Browning offers us the portrait of the perfect wife for Edward Casaubon in the poem *Aurora Leigh*:

> I learnt my complement of classic French
> (Kept pure of Balzac and neologism)
> And German also, since she liked a range
> Of liberal education, - tongues, not books.
> I learnt a little algebra, a little
> Of the mathematics, - brushed with extreme flounce
> The circle of the sciences, because
> She disliked women who are frivolous. […][169]
> I read a score of books on womanhood
> To prove, if women do not think at all,
> They may teach thinking, (to a maiden aunt
> Or else the author)−books demonstrating
> Their right of comprehending husband's talk
> When not too deep, and even of answering

[168] *Middlemarch*, Book 2, ch. VIII, p. 197.
[169] Barret Browning, E., *Aurora Leigh and other poems* (1857), ed. Cora Kaplan, London, The Women's Press, 1982, Book I, 399-405, p. 50.

> With pretty ‘may it please you’, or ‘so it is’,−
> Their rapid insight and fine aptitude,
> Particular worth and general missionariness,
> As long as they keep quiet by the fire
> And never say ‘no’ when the world says ‘ay’,
> For that is fatal,−their angelic reach
> Of virtue, chiefly used to sit and darn,
> And fatten household sinners,−their, in brief,
> Potential faculty in everything
> Of abdicating power in it.[170]

Dorothea’s education stands opposite to all this, her peculiarity makes her a different woman and certainly not the perfect one for Casaubon.

Furthermore, Dorothea suffers a deep sense of guilt besides repression and humiliation in her first marriage. Indeed, she considers herself the sole responsible of its malfunctioning. While realizing the humiliation provoked by the misery of her matrimonial life, she feels guilty: “She was humiliated to find herself a mere victim of feeling, as if she could know nothing except through that medium.”[171] She even blames herself for some irrational reactions believing them the reasons of their unhappiness. As she does in Rome when she is left alone by her newly married husband. In an argument, she expresses her hope that she may be more useful to him in Lowick, but she receives only a sterile: “Doubtless, my dear” pronounced with “a slight bow.”[172] This impassivity generates an emotional reaction in her. She offers her help with her best hopes and he does not consider her for the umpteenth time. Therefore, a hysterical reaction arouses in her:

> ‘And all your notes’, said Dorothea, whose heart had already burned within her on this subject so that now she could not help speaking with her tongue. ‘All those rows of volumes—will you not now do what you used to speak of?—will you not make up your

[170] *Ibidem,* Book I, 426-41, p. 51.
[171] *Middlemarch*, Book 2, ch. VIII, p. 198.
[172] *Ibidem*, Book 2, ch. VIII, p. 199.

> mind what part of them you will use, and begin to write the book which will make your vast knowledge useful to the world? I will write to your dictation, or I will copy and extract what you tell me: I can be of no other use.' Dorothea, in a most unaccountable, darkly feminine manner, ended with a slight sob and eyes full of tears.[173]

Dorothea desires not only to help but also to be part of his project. This positive and highly energetic approach is entirely misinterpreted by Casaubon. As Richard Hutton writes:

> Her desire to share his deepest life makes him painfully conscious that he has no deepest life to be shared. Her ardour is a reproach to his formalism. Her enthusiasm is bewildering to his self-occupation.[174]

One last consideration about Casaubon needs to be done. Indeed, their future unhappiness is foretold by Casaubon's reflections before the marriage. Surprisingly enough, while waiting for the day of the wedding, Casaubon makes some odd considerations:

> For in truth, as the day fixed for his marriage came nearer, Mr. Casaubon did not find his spirits rising; nor did the contemplation of that matrimonial garden scene, where, as all experience showed, the path was to be bordered with flowers, prove persistently more enchanting to him than the accustomed vaults where he walked taper in hand. He did not confess to himself, still less could he have breathed to another, his surprise that though he had won a lovely and noble-hearted girl he had not won delight,—which he had also regarded as an object to be found by search.[175]

His early disillusionment seems to announce the disappointment they will experience until Casaubon's death. However, this sad event does not conclude their bond for he leaves an unanswered request behind him. After Casaubon's death, Dorothea decides to

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[173] *Ibid*.
[174] Hutton, R. H., *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, "The British Quarterly Review", Vol. 57, 1873, p. 417.
[175] *Middlemarch*, Book 1, ch. X, p. 85.

answer it by writing a symbolic note which puts an end to their relationship. While arranging some of Casaubon's books in Lowick Manor, she finds:

> The 'Synoptical Tabulation for the use of Mrs Casaubon' she carefully enclosed and sealed, writing within the envelope 'I could not use it. Do you not see now that I could not submit my soul to yours, by working hopelessly at what I have no belief in? – Dorothea.'[176]

Dorothea refers to Casaubon's work, but her words may allude also to their marriage. After his death, she regains her autonomy and her power to say no. She eventually confesses that she could not submit herself to him and to their marriage because she did neither believe in his work, nor in Casaubon, nor in their union. Dorothea's message acquires an even earnest tone when she confesses that she is at Lowick to meet Will. To some extent, Will becomes the agent which makes Dorothea confess her real feeling towards Casaubon.

Moreover, the marriage allows George Eliot to discuss "the Woman Question" more in detail. Indeed, it highlights the possibility that a woman might feel unsatisfied with her domestic life. Dorothea realizes that being a married woman is not enough for her personal fulfilment. In this light, *Middlemarch* echoes a cry of hope for women's potentiality. As Gillian Beer argues:

> As it is, the book forces us still to recognise exclusion, false consciousness, and atomism as part of daily experience for women, and for men and women in their relations with each other. At the same time the activity of the writing incarnates human potentiality; a potentiality which has its diffused 'origin' in a woman, Mary Ann Evans, Mrs Lewes, […] George Eliot.[177]

[176] *Ibidem*, Book 6, ch. I, p. 539.
[177] Beer, G., *op. cit*., p. 179.

4.2 Dorothea and Lydgate, Mutual Understanding but Lack of Eroticism

The second section of this chapter will discuss Lydgate's marriage with Rosamond and his hypothetical union with Dorothea. As hinted in Chapter 2, Lydgate's formation moves parallel to Dorothea's in *Middlemarch*. Besides that, the two have an unhappy marriage in common since Lydgate too will marry unhappily throughout the story. As in Dorothea's case, George Eliot adopted the same trick of anticipation also with Lydgate and Rosamond' marriage to portray another interesting marital life.

In their marriage, Rosamond is presented from the very beginning as in contrast with Dorothea. George Eliot portrays her as a traditional Victorian woman who was brought up to become an obedient wife, knowing her place and her limits. Maria Grey offers a satirical description of Victorian education for women which seems to describe Rosamond perfectly:

> They are not educated to be wives, but to get husbands. They are not educated to be mothers; if they were, they would require and obtain the highest education that could be given, in order to fit them for the highest duties a human being can perform. They are not educated to be the mistresses of households; if they were, their judgement would be as sedulously trained, habits or method and accuracy as carefully formed, as they are now neglected. They would not give, as Mr Bryce calculates, 5,520 hours of their school life to music against 640 to arithmetic; and social and political economy, which are scarcely thought of in their course of instruction now, would take the foremost place in it.[178]

However, Rosamond's traditional breeding may mislead our perception of her. Indeed, despite her education, Rosamond will be far from being submissive and passive in the

[178] Grey, M. G., *On the Education of Women: A Paper, Read by Mrs. William Grey, at the Meeting of the Society of Arts,* London, Gale and the British Library, 1871, p. 19.

narrative. From the very beginning she "makes" her match with Lydgate and the ensuing marriage, becoming her own matchmaker. As the following passage demonstrates, she is anything but naive: "Rosamond had registered every look and word, and estimated them as the opening incidents of a preconceived romance."[179] George Eliot also adds that: "It was part of Rosamond's cleverness to discern very subtly the faintest aroma of rank."[180] The authoress, being "subtly" ironical, may suggest that Rosamond premeditated her marriage. As David Daiches comments, Rosamond is:

> Oppressed by the bourgeois position of her own family and by her mother's vulgarity: marriage for her was to be an escape into a higher social world. She had no interest in Lydgate in himself, her concern was 'with his relation to her.'[181]

Her education is precisely what Lydgate looks for in a woman. Indeed, he confirms that he felt: "quite safe with a creature like this Miss Vincy, who had just the kind of intelligence one would desire in a woman −polished, refined, docile."[182] Rosamond is frequently associated in the text to an infantine candour, to a docile human being. Lydgate, who "used to be gentle with the weak and suffering,"[183] treats Rosamond as he treats his patients. This implicit mechanism appears during his proposal and it resembles Dorothea's sense of piety towards Casaubon. Rosamond's apparent candour is misinterpreted by Lydgate. Despite assessing each other carefully during courtship, the couple misunderstands each other, and their marriage fails, as in the case of Dorothea.

Lydgate's sexist approach to women is one of the reasons of this failure. In his belief, ambition can be realized only by men. Wives' ambition should be absorbed into their husbands'. Lydgate's words are unequivocally clear, while talking to his wife he

[179] *Middlemarch*, Book 2, ch. IV, p. 166.
[180] *Ibid*.
[181] Daiches, D*., op. cit.*, p. 31.
[182] *Middlemarch*, Book 2, ch. IV, p. 164.
[183] *Ibidem*, Book 3, ch. IX, p. 301.

says: “Haven't you ambition enough to wish that your husband should be something better than a Middlemarch doctor?"[184] As Kathleen Blake

writes about Lydgate’s ideas about women:

> Lydgate’s theory of women as beings providentially framed to live in and through their husbands in this way is met by the refuting irony that Rosamond does not identify with him at all, as becomes clear during his troubles.[185]

Lydgate’s expectations prove to be wrong with Rosamond. Despite her being the perfect wife on paper, she fails to identify with Lydgate throughout their relationship. After her marriage, she feels that something is missing in her life similarly to Dorothea. Rosamond does not find fulfilment in Lydgate’s results and she will eventually thrive to Lydgate’s expense. Lydgate arrives in Middlemarch, but he was not born there. He is considered by the inhabitants of Middlemarch as an external agent who may bring innovation. Nonetheless, he will prove to be rather traditional in his ideas about women. George Eliot alludes to this deficiency by calling it a “spot of commonness”. She argues that it results from his relationships with women “whom he regards as means of elegant recreation and at most also objects of continuing protective tenderness.”[186] Probably influenced by his previous experience with Laure, he shows a rather negative prejudice over independent women. Thus, he erroneously thinks he has found the perfect woman in the docile Rosamond:

> Lydgate thought that after all his wild mistakes and absurd credulity, he had found the perfect womanhood−felt as if already breathed upon by exquisite wedded affection such as would be bestowed by an accomplished creature who venerated his high musings and momentous labours and would never interfere with them; who would create order in the home and accounts with still magic, yet kept her fingers ready to touch the lute and transform life into romance at any moment; who was instructed to the true womanly

[184] *Ibidem*, Book 5, ch. I, p. 437.
[185] Blake K., *Middlemarch and the Woman Question*, “Nineteenth-Century Fiction”, Vol. 31, No. 3, December 1976, p. 303.
[186] Daiches D.*, op. cit.*, p. 27.

> limit and not a hair's-breadth-beyond−docile, therefore, and ready to carry out behests which came from beyond that limit.[187]

However, since his formation has not ended yet, he has not entirely learnt from his past. Therefore, he misinterprets Rosamond who will reveal to be similar to Laure. Lydgate's previous lover killed her husband as Rosamond will annihilate Lydgate. The apparently meek Rosamond will gain the power in their relationship, inverting the role assigned to her by her husband. In a grotesque metaphor, Lydgate alludes to Rosamond as a basil plant, feeding on his brain:

> He once called her his basil plant; and when she asked for an explanation, said that basil was a plant which had flourished wonderfully on a murdered man's brains.[188]

As in the case of Hetty Sorrel, Rosamond shows the same "moral deficiencies hidden under the 'dear deceit of beauty'."[189] Their beautiful appearance overshadows their nature, deceiving both Lydgate and Adam. Gradually Lydgate recognizes Rosamond's true nature as well as his mistake in marrying her, discovering "the terrible tenacity of this mild creature."[190] However, George Eliot's ability as a writer allows the blonde Rosamond with her "infantile fairness"[191] to maintain her innocent aura throughout the narration. As in the case of Hetty Sorrel, the authoress will never impute them malice and she will never associate their beauty with an evil nature. Indeed, she describes them as having "something quite charming in [their] pettiness [which] looked so much more like innocent distress than hill-humour."[192] In repeating Dorothea's pattern, she releases Rosamond from her unhappy marriage. As Miss Brooke, Rosamond is provided with another chance of happiness of which she spoke of "as a

[187] *Middlemarch*, Book 4, ch. III, p. 352.
[188] *Ibidem*, Finale, p. 835.
[189] *Adam Bede*, Book 1, ch. XVI, p. 200.
[190] *Middlemarch*, Book 6, ch. V, p. 586.
[191] *Ibidem*, Book 1, ch. XII, p. 112.
[192] *Adam Bede*, Book 2, ch. XXIV, p. 308.

reward."[193] In reading Dorothea's initial reflections, one would expect that her life would be different from Rosamond's:

> For a long while she had been oppressed by the indefiniteness which hung in her mind, like a thick summer haze, over all her desire to make her life greatly effective. What could she do, what ought she to do? − she, hardly more than a budding woman, but yet with an active conscience and a great mental need, not to be satisfied by a girlish instruction comparable to the nibblings and judgments of a discursive mouse.[194]

Yet the two women find themselves trapped in their marital unhappiness. In realizing Lydgate's true nature, Rosamond repents of her choice: "The thought in her mind was that if she had known how Lydgate would behave, she would never have married him."[195] Although Dorothea never expresses openly her regret in marrying Casaubon, "both are deluded in their belief that their husbands can gratify these other needs – or any needs at all in Casaubon's case."[196] It is worth noticing that their unhappiness is the only thing the two women have in common. Indeed, the reasons behind their misery are entirely different as well as their education. Dorothea's marriage with Casaubon fails her expectations since he does not allow her the active involvement in Middlemarch she dreamed of. On the contrary, Rosamond and Lydgate's marriage is unsuccessful because Lydgate exceeds Rosamond's hopes of a tranquil and wealthy domestic life. In other words, what he offers to her is unsuitable for her expectations. She does not appreciate his devotion to work, she is only interested in his pay. Lydgate's search for the original tissue does not interest her, she would probably prefer a more ordinary man who can grant her a wealthier future. The reasons behind Rosamond's marriage appear rather petty if compared to Dorothea's.

This thesis argued that Lydgate and Dorothea's developments go hand in hand in *Middlemarch* as they both are the centres of two narrative sections. Lydgate's realization of his mistake in choosing Rosamond reveals another parallel between him

[193] *Middlemarch*, Finale, p. 835.
[194] *Middlemarch*, Book 1, ch. III, p. 28.
[195] *Ibidem*, Book 6, ch. V, p. 596.
[196] Uglow, J., *op. cit*., p. 204.

and Dorothea. Between Rosamond and Lydgate there is a "total missing of each other's mental track"[197] as in the case of Dorothea and Casaubon. As Jennifer Uglow argues:

> Dorothea confuses her desire for learning with a feeling for Casaubon, and Rosamund Vincy mistakes her social aspirations for an attraction to Lydgate.[198]

Lydgate and Dorothea would have shared the same destiny without Will's entrance in the story:

> Lydgate has accepted his narrowed lot with sad resignation. He had chosen this fragile creature, and had taken the burthen of her life upon his arms. He must walk as he could, carrying that burthen pitifully.[199]

One may argue that the two youths would make a perfect match and many readers may have the same impression. Furthermore, the two characters develop a particular bond in the narrative. They unburden themselves with each other to the point that they become almost confidants in some situations. While reading *Middlemarch*, their union seems so obvious that readers might wonder why George Eliot has decided to avoid it. Thus, this second part will try to provide an answer or at least to discuss the absence of their marriage.

Their union seems impossible in the book due to its narrative structure. Indeed, the first time we meet Lydgate he is already flirting with Rosamond. One may deduce that George Eliot saw in Lydgate and Rosamond an interesting match to portray and for this reason she decided to exclude the idea of Dorothea and Lydgate together. The authoress needed a woman like Rosamond to represent the interesting role reversal of their marriage. David Daiches shares this view and indeed he writes that: "the

[197] *Ibidem*, Book 6, ch. V, p. 587.
[198] Uglow, J., *George Eliot*, London, Virago, 1987, p. 204.
[199] *Ibidem*, Book 8, ch. X, p. 800.

relationship between Lydgate and Rosamond is to provide one of the central elements in the total pattern of the novel."[200]

Moreover, Lydgate shows in his marriage his approach to women which constitutes another obstacle to the hypothetical union with Dorothea. Her innovative ideas of life would collide with Lydgate's traditional opinions about women and marriage. Dorothea seems a rather demanding companion for Lydgate, whose spots of commonness prevent her from being a possible match. Indeed, she should sacrifice her peculiarity to allow Lydgate's happiness. Thus, combining the two together, we would lose either Dorothea's development or his, and the novel would be impoverished.
Despite their similarities, there is a great difference between the two: Lydgate is denied a second chance of happiness. Probably due to those spots of commonness, his formation does not conclude effectively. As Jennifer Uglow argues: "His fate […] reveals how little he knows about himself, as well as how little he knows about women."[201] On the contrary, as Shuttleworth writes: "Dorothea follows, in fact, the unifying processes of both art and science,"[202] proving her formation successful. She even influences Lydgate's development and she makes him realize his nature and his desires. Thus, she becomes the centre of the narration, guiding Lydgate and her readers in the labyrinth of the narration like a modern Ariadne:

> Dorothea with her desire for a life both 'rational and ardent' is the narrative's Ariadne thread. It is she, not Lydgate, who is the novel's true physician; instead of searching for origins she offers, thorough her vision of social interconnections, actual 'guidance in action'."[203]

Dorothea exceeds Lydgate and he seems not to be able to accept it. Indeed, as George Eliot believed and wrote:

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[200] Daiches, D.*, op. cit.*, p. 27.
[201] *Ibidem*, p. 207.
[202] Shuttleworth, S., *op. cit.,* p. 134.
[203] *Ibid*.

> A man is seldom ashamed of feeling he cannot love a woman so well when he sees a certain greatness in her: nature having intended greatness for men.[204]

Moreover, his superficial approach to women leads him to discard Dorothea: "Plain women he regarded as he did the other several facts of life, to be faced with philosophy and investigated by science."[205] Despite his ability in medicine, he shows an emotional immaturity which resembles Casaubon's. Indeed, both lack an emotional education to be considered entirely adult and to access a modern society. Even their research is similar since Lydgate too is looking for the origins of things in the "primitive tissue". In this, he displays Casaubon's same childish presumption: "Lydgate's failure here is bound up with a certain lack of imagination which in turn is linked with his kind of pride."[206] His pride, which is another "spot of commonness", convinces him that he will always live a life of richness:

> But it had never occurred to him that he should live in any other than what he would have called an ordinary way, with green glasses for hock, and excellent waiting at table. [..] In the rest of practical life he walked by hereditary habit, half from that personal pride and unreflecting egoism which I have already called commonness.[207]

As in the parallel between Dorothea and Rosamond, their fates are similar since both cannot find happiness in Middlemarch, but the reasons of their failure are different. Casaubon is nothing more than a failed scholar and this prevents him to be happy. On the contrary, Lydgate manages to become a good doctor and he would have managed to live happily in Middlemarch without his spots of commonness. However, without his spots of commonness he would have survived only in Middlemarch. His education and ideas are far too traditional to belong to a modern character.

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[204] *Middlemarch*, Book 4, ch. VI, p. 389.
[205] *Ibidem,* Book 1, ch. I, p. 94.
[206] Daiches, D*., op. cit.*, p. 47.
[207] *Middlemarch*, Book 4, ch. III, p. 349.

4.3 Dorothea and Will, The Right Marriage

Despite being Dorothea's second husband, Will enters the narration rather early, precisely during her honeymoon in Rome. Their encounter follows her realization of unhappiness. From this very first moment, Will is characterized by action which contrasts with Casaubon's motionless attitude. Indeed, Casaubon is 'lost among small closets and winding stairs'[208] whereas Will enjoys what "made the mind flexible with constant comparison, and saved you from seeing the world's ages as a set of box-like partitions without vital connections."[209] Will's entrance in the story is also marked by his association to light which contrasts with Casaubon's paleness:

> The first impression on seeing Will was one of sunny brightness, which added to the uncertainty of his changing expression. Surely, his very features changed their form, his jaw looked sometimes large and sometimes small; and the little ripple in his nose was a preparation for metamorphosis. When he turned his head quickly his hair seemed to shake out light, and some persons thought they saw decided genius in this coruscation. Mr. Casaubon, on the contrary, stood rayless.[210]

Light stands for life and Will represents both in the novel. Indeed, he offers Dorothea a new existence based on freedom and activity, being an agent of awakening in Dorothea's path. From the very first meeting, Will interacts with her differently from other characters, providing her with new notions and new points of view. As in Rome where he offers her:

> Quite new notions as to the significance of Madonnas seated under inexplicable canopied thrones with the simple country as a background, and of saints with architectural models in their hands, or knives accidentally wedged in their skulls. Some things which had seemed monstrous to her were gathering intelligibility and even a

[208] *Middlemarch*, Book 2, ch. VIII, p. 197.
[209] *Ibidem*, Book 2, ch. X, p. 212.
[210] *Ibidem,* Book 2, ch. IX, p. 208.

> natural meaning; but all this was apparently a branch of knowledge in which Mr. Casaubon had not interested himself.[211]

Dorothea too will help Will to discover the world, contributing to his development. Therefore, the two appear as equals from the very beginning of their relationship. Indeed, as Shuttleworth argues "As Will illuminated the chaos of Rome for her, so she illuminates the life of Middlemarch."[212] But without him, she could not have been so luminous. Will is needed in the text to fully comprehend her character as she is needed to understand his. After Will's entrance in her life, Dorothea can find again her enthusiastic nature which makes her look brighter than ever. So bright to become an example also for other characters, as Lydgate will say:

> 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. That influence was beginning to act on Lydgate, who had for many days been seeing all life as one who is dragged and struggling amid the throng. He sat down again, and felt that he was recovering his old self in the consciousness that he was with one who believed in it.[213]

In Dorothea's relationship with Casaubon, empathy was absent. On the contrary, Will and Dorothea build a relationship of mutual support where they are fundamental to each other's growth: "Will Ladislaw always seemed to see more in what she said than she herself saw."[214] Will not only sees something more in Dorothea than what she herself sees but, most importantly, he helps her in realizing her own value. Thus, in her second relationship, she goes beyond her initial propensity to sacrifice and she recognizes that love does not imply martyrdom. Indeed, she ceases to look for the father figure she mistook for the perfect man.

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[211] *Ibidem*, Book 2, ch. X, p. 214.
[212] Shuttleworth, S. *op. cit*., p. 135.
[213] *Middlemarch*, Book 8, ch. V, p. 762.
[214] *Ibidem*, Book 4, ch., IV, p. 361.

Equality is concretely present in their couple as they actively help each other in their works and occupations. Their gradual falling in love shows that their love is based on communication, mutual discovery and concrete exchange. Finally, as Gillian Beer argues: "He and Dorothea educate each other, abandoning the model of mentor and pupil as a kind of father and daughter."[215] Furthermore, being equals allows them to communicate successfully. As shown in the next quotation, the two youths like to converse alone:

> 'I really came for the chance of seeing you alone', said Will, mysteriously forced to be just as simple as she was. He could not stay to ask himself, why not? 'I wanted to talk about things, as we did in Rome. It always makes a difference when other people are present? 'Yes,' said Dorothea, in her clear full tone of assent.[216]

What was missing in Dorothea's first marriage is here the core of their relationship. Silence is replaced by their desire to speak which unites the two from the very beginning. This enables them to understand each other, even better than we do. In the dialogue, Dorothea answers "yes", agreeing with Will, but the difference to which they allude remains unclear to us. Indeed, we may easily infer that being alone makes "a difference" since they like each other's company. However, this interpretation may not be that of a Victorian reader since Dorothea is still a married woman in the dialogue. It would be daring to think that George Eliot chose to portray Dorothea openly enjoying the company of another man. So probably, that "difference" alludes to an affinity, an innocent chemistry which was missing with Casaubon. Their mutual comprehension and similarity are confirmed in another passage where Will while talking to Casaubon says:

> 'If a man has a capacity for great thoughts, he is likely to overtake them before he is decrepit,' said Will, with irrepressible quickness. But through certain sensibilities Dorothea was as quick as he, and seeing her face, he added immediately, 'But it is quite

[215] Beer, G., *op. cit*., p. 161.
[216] *Middlemarch*, Book 4, ch. V, p. 363.

> true that the best minds have been sometimes overstrained in working out their ideas.'"[217]

Dorothea's quickness is similar to Will's, so he perfectly recognizes her change of attitude, softening his words. She feels so understood that she reveals to Will few lines after the reason why she married Casaubon and the purpose of her life:

> It always seemed to me that the use I should like to make of my life would be to help someone who did great works, so that his burthen might be lighter.[218]

Ladislaw will eventually help Dorothea to realize why Casaubon's projects remain inconclusive. He will explain to her that Edward's lack of knowledge of German constituted a great obstacle to his research, offering her an alternative point of view.

Moreover, Will's attitude may recall George Henry Lewes's. Differently from Lydgate and Casaubon, Will is less preoccupied with the origins of things, he does not show their proud approach to life. In this respect, the authoress writes that he would "prefer not to know the sources of the Nile."[219] The very metaphor of the river was adopted by George Henry in a letter to Marian where he compared the exploration of the sources of a river to the examination of phenomena. Lewes, as Will does, recognizes the importance of small things rather than focusing on the original source as in the following passage where he writes:

> The thread of light, the cloud of spray, the floating mist, and leaping cataract, the snow-flake, and the breaker, are embodied histories. Each successive form is a succession of events, each event having been determined by some prior group. This is the circulation of Cause. Causation is immanent Change.[220]

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[217] *Ibid*.
[218] *Ibid*.
[219] *Ibidem*, Book 1, ch. IX, p. 81.
[220] Lewes, G. H., *Problems of Life and Mind*, Boston, James Osgood and Co, 1874, vol. 1, p. 330.

Furthermore, Will seems the right match for Dorothea because he is the other real innovative character alongside her. He has seen examples of rebellious women in his life, differently from other men in the novel. He seems ready to accept a different prototype of girl as he was brought up by revolutionary women. This is shown also by his marked emotionality. He displays a clarity of feelings that exceeds even Dorothea's, embodying a new masculinity, more open and responsive to women. In his failures and in his difficulty to find his place in the world, he experiences what women experienced in Victorian times: "he is outside educational hegemony."[221]

However, it is worth noticing that despite all the positive images which George Eliot associates to Will, he has been widely criticized. He has been frequently accused of inadequacy if compared to Dorothea's extraordinary nature. Many critics as Henry James, Leslie Stephen, Lord David Cecil and Walter Allen accused George Eliot of having let her fondness for Will influence her writings too much. Blake reports that: "Jerome Thale blames her for a lapse in artistic control rather than a lapse in her taste in men."[222] The journalist Richard Holt Hutton wrote that Dorothea:

> Lavishes herself on Will Ladislaw as a sort of generous compensation for his own relation's coldness to him; and one feels, and is probably meant to feel acutely, that here, too, it is the 'meanness of opportunity' and not intrinsic suitability, which determines Dorothea's second comparatively happy marriage.[223]

Many readers expected to find an almost heroic ending in the *Finale*. However, when critics discuss Dorothea's loss in marrying Will, they seldom consider that Will's commitment to the political reform was remarkable and it gave Dorothea the concrete possibility to help him reforming society through the Reform Bill.

A possible reason behind Will's critics may be that the text can be misinterpreted. As in the case of the following passage:

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[221] Beer, G., *op. cit.,* p. 159.
[222] Quoted in *Ibid*, p. 306.
[223] Hutton, H. R., *op. cit.*, p. 418.

> This afternoon the helplessness was more wretchedly benumbing than ever: she longed for objects who could be dear to her, and to whom she could be dear. She longed for work which would be directly beneficent like the sunshine and the rain, and now it appeared that she was to live more and more in a virtual tomb, where there was the apparatus of a ghastly labour producing what would never see the light. Today she had stood at the door of the tomb and seen Will Ladislaw receding into the distant world of warm activity and fellowship— turning his face towards her as he went.[224]

According to Dorothea, "warm activity and fellowship" is a precious value. However, Will's devotion to these humble occupations may be misinterpreted as dilettantism. Shuttleworth argues that Will's simplicity cannot but offer Dorothea a simple future: "Will may irradiate light, but Dorothea, in marrying him, becomes only 'a wife and a mother'."[225] This impression of Dorothea's belittlement may be enhanced by the ambivalent tone adopted by the authoress in the *Finale*. The portrait of Fred and Mary living happy in the pastoral countryside of Middlemarch clashes with Dorothea's escape. Indeed, there is a general tone of regret in George Eliot's words:

> Many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother.[226]

However, to a closer reading, George Eliot does not seem to share this sense of regret. The subject "many" refer to those who may fell unsatisfied with Dorothea's finale. In *Adam Bede* and in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, George Eliot addressed readers' possible objections to her novels. Thus, she could have done the same in *Middlemarch* and she could have adopted that bitter tone to interpret the feelings of possible complainers. This seems supported by the fact that George Eliot never agrees openly with that sense of regret in the book. She rather seems to criticize those who condemned Dorothea:

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[224] *Middlemarch*, Book 5, ch. VI, p. 475.
[225] Shuttleworth, S., *op. cit*., p. 135.
[226] *Middlemarc*h, Finale, p. 836.

> But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done— not even Sir James Chettam, who went no further than the negative prescription that she ought not to have married Will Ladislaw.[227]

In this passage, George Eliot seems to defend her choice of Will and Dorothea together, proving that he is the right match for Dorothea. Indeed, as Jennifer Uglow argues:

> She may be 'only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother', but in the memory of readers she remains the powerful model of a passionate sister, defiant of authority.[228]

Many criticised Will's ordinariness as clashing with Dorothea's extraordinariness. However, it should be remarked that George Eliot repeatedly declared her interest for humble subjects. In August 1868, she wrote a letter to Clifford Allbutt, a friend of the Lewes in which she argued that:

> The inspiring principle which alone gives me courage to write is that of so presenting our human life as to help my readers in getting a clearer conception and a more active admiration of those vital elements which bind men together and give a higher worthiness to their existence.[229]

Thus, it is not surprising that she chose an ordinary man for Dorothea. In 1856, George Eliot commented Ruskin's theories which she adopted also in her narrative by writing that:

> The truth of infinite value that he teaches is realism – the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite substantial reality.[230]

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[227] *Ibid.*
[228] Uglow, J., *op. cit*., p. 216.
[229] Haight, G. S., *The George Eliot Letters*, vol.4, London, New Haven, 1954-5. p. 472.
[230] Eliot, G., *Art and Belles Lettres: Review of Modern Painters III*, "Westminster Review", April 1856, p. 626.

Her realism based on the "faithful study of nature" is made explicit in *Adam Bede* where she fully explains her narrative aim. She writes that she is: "Content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things seem better than they were; dreading nothing but falsity."[231] Few lines after, she uses all her ability to make us fully comprehend her narrative task:

> It is for his rare, precious quality of truthfulness that I delight in many Dutch paintings, which lofty-minded people despise. I find a source of delicious sympathy in these faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence, which has been the fate of so many more among my fellow-mortals than a life of pomp or of absolute indigence, or tragic suffering or of world-stirring actions. I turn without shrinking from cloud-borne angels, from prophets, sibyls, and heroic warriors, to an old woman bending over her flower-pot, or eating her solitary dinner, while the noonday light, softened perhaps by a screen of leaves, falls on her mob-cap and just touches the rim of her spinning-wheel, and her stone jus, and all those cheap common things which are the precious necessaires of life to her.[232]

She did not choose humble subject to respect the realistic literary canons, but because she thought she should provide her readers with a faithful representation of life. These words seem to me the perfect answers to those who judged Will not enough for Dorothea, expecting to find a life of grandeur and heroic actions in George Eliot's novels. If this were the case, she would not be the author of those books. In her faithful portrait of Dorothea, she finds her happiness with a man who has no heroic dreams and she refuses the unchangeable society of *Middlemarch*. In realizing that *Middlemarch* offers her no happiness and that she needs to leave, she completes her formation. The reason why she goes away, and she denies the society of *Middlemarch* is perfectly condensed in a passage of the book. While observing life from her window, she understands what her place in society will be:

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[231] *Adam Bede*, Book 2, ch. XVII, p. 223.
[232] *Ibidem,* Book 2, ch. XVII, p. 223.

> She felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining.[233]

In this scene, as Shuttleworth writes: "Dorothea transcends the narrowing limitations of egoism to accept the full responsibilities of her social role."[234] As in a traditional *Bildungsroman*, the *Finale* solves the equation between gains and losses. Dorothea and Will's marriage is the right one, but it requires sacrifice too. Dorothea has ultimately abandoned her idealistic desire of a life of grandeur to gain her happiness with Will. The balance of the equation between giving and obtaining is here established by Dorothea's adulthood. Dorothea has learnt that she must renounce something in order to obtain happiness, proving further that her process of *Bildung* ends through her marriage with Will. As Kathleen Blake argues: "Dorothea achieves the definite at the expense of her highest potential, which is too vague to do much good to her or the world."[235]
Furthermore, for the first time in the book, the characters talk about real love while discussing a marriage. Indeed, few lines after Celia asks her sister:

> 'Is he very fond of you, Dodo?'
> 'I hope so. I am very fond of him'.[236]

But the key piece of evidence that her union with Will is the perfect one for her comes at the conclusion of the chapter. For the first time, Dorothea, while describing what she feels for Will, alludes to something inexplicable. Throughout the novel, many characters searched for the key to all things. Lydgate, Casaubon and Mr Brooke are busy in the collection and organization of knowledge. A scientific approach is omnipresent in the novel and it is shared mainly by men. These men are there to label,

[233] *Middlemarch*, Book 8, ch. VII, p. 788.
[234] Shuttleworth, S., *op. cit.,* p. 136.
[235] Blake, K., *op. cit*., p. 306.
[236] *Ibid.*

to categorize information, knowledge, science and even history. But Dorothea and Will interpret life differently. She realizes that the inhabitants of Middlemarch, always looking for rational evidences, would never be able to understand their love and their choices. Celia stands as a representative of their approach, as Jennifer Uglow writes, she: "divides life neatly into zones of influence, but for Dorothea life is more complicated."[237] While talking to her sister, Dorothea recognizes Celia's difference and she distances herself from her as she does from Middlemarch. Indeed, she replies to her curiosity about Will as follows:

> Dorothea smiled, and Celia looked rather meditative. Presently she said, 'I cannot think how it all came about.' Celia thought it would be pleasant to hear the story. 'I dare say not,' said-Dorothea, pinching her sister's chin. 'If you knew how it came about, it would not seem wonderful to you.' 'Can't you tell me?' said Celia, settling her arms cozily. **'No, dear, you would have to feel with me, else you would never know.'**[238]

Dorothea answers to her sister as a real person would do and readers may have the impression of witnessing a dialogue between two existing women. Dorothea escapes her authoress's control and refuses to reveal Celia and her readers what she feels for Will. The omniscient narrator forces us to respect Dorothea's decision of omitting her story with Will. George Eliot treats her like a real person, and we do the same, reaching what "George Levine has plausibly called the 'summa of Victorian realism'."[239] Dorothea's last sentence is the conclusion of my entire argument. Dorothea acknowledges that no one in Middlemarch will ever understand her feelings and her love, not even her sister. The reason why Will is the right man is that there are no intelligible reasons why he might be that person. We should feel what she feels in order to understand. In other words, we should be Dorothea to fully understand her decision, but in that case, we would not be reading *Middlemarch*. Kathleen Blake adds that: "Dorothea would have been better if she had been in a position to do better."[240] But, I disagree with it.

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[237] Uglow, J., *op. cit*., p. 209.
[238] *Ibidem*, p. 822.
[239] Chase, K., *George Eliot: Middlemarch,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 22.
[240] Blake, K., *op. cit*., p. 306.

Dorothea would have been better if she had been a different person and she seems to confirm it:

> 'It is quite true that I might be a wiser person, Celia,' said Dorothea, 'and that I might have done something better, If I had been better. But this is what I am going to do.'[241]

She might be simpler than critics thought her, but this is her real nature. George Eliot confirms that Dorothea has found her place in the world and concluded her formation:

> Her finely-touched spirit had still its fine issues, though they were not widely visible. Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistorical acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.[242]

Dorothea finds her happy place in the world "among channels which had no great name on the earth", but this is what modernity allows her. Dorothea and Will alone are equipped to survive in a world where there is no space for heroic deeds because they are not interested in it. Despite being unheroic, Will and Dorothea's political commitment will change their social milieu through the Reform Bill. Moreover, their humble and prosaic lives are what we, and readers of all ages, share with them and what makes *Middlemarch* a timeless masterpiece.

[241] *Middlemarch*, Book 8, ch. XIII, p. 821.
[242] *Middlemarch*, Finale, p. 838.

Conclusions

This thesis has discussed George Eliot's contribution to the genre of the *Bildungsroman.* In particular, this analysis has shown how she modified the traditional novel of formation through the anticipation of Dorothea's marriage in *Middlemarch*. Indeed, George Eliot's innovative use of marriage "upgrades" the subgenre, allowing the authoress to depict modern characters facing modern situations. Despite being a traditional town, modernity is threatening the stability of *Middlemarch* where women start to question their role and their identities, doctors trust new scientific discoveries and men fight for the Reform Bill. In this pre-modern situation, Dorothea's *Bildung* unfolds clashing with the traditional society of *Middlemarch*. As the narrative progresses, we realize that she will hardly find her place in *Middlemarch* and questions arise - Will *Middlemarch* collapse to leave room for Dorothea? Or will Dorothea succumb there? As Sally Shuttleworth argues:

> The central question in Middlemarch is whether, as the Prelude despairingly suggests, Dorothea's energy will be 'dispersed among hindrances' or will attain, in the words of the Finale 'fine issues', 'channels' of positive social effect.[243]

Gradually, we witness the defeat of *Middlemarch* and of its inhabitants who refuse to adapt to modernity. Thanks to the anticipation of her marriage, Dorothea expresses her peculiarity proving to be the only character born in *Middlemarch* equipped to survive in modern times. Lydgate too appears as a possible survival in a modern world. But he will fail due to his spots of commonness, as argued in chapter 4. Only Will, the outsider, will reveal to be her perfect match as well as the only character who will survive in a modern world alongside Dorothea. Despite being highly criticized, he will effectively modify his reality through his commitment to the Reform Bill. Away from Middlemarch, Dorothea will find her possibility to cooperate with her husband and she

[243] Shuttleworth, S., cit. p. 158.

will too contribute to change her society. Changing the world through a reform may seem a bit prosaic, but it is nonetheless remarkable in its outcome. In *Middlemarch*, George Eliot adapts the genre of the *Bildungsroman* to represent an approaching modern world which offers no space to those who want to change the world heroically. To survive in this prosaic world, characters need to adapt to modernity, abandoning their heroic aspirations. Will has no great aspirations from the beginning, and this makes him a modern survival. On the contrary, Dorothea, who dreams of a life of grandeur, should learn to come to terms with her modern reality to survive. Her peculiar *Bildung* allows her this possibility. Thanks to the innovative anticipation of her marriage, she grows up and she understands that what she needs to be happy is also what she needs to survive in modernity: a life of "unhistorical acts [done] for the growing good of the world".

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