"MODES OF EDUCATION" IN MIDDLEMARCH

"MODES OF EDUCATION" IN MIDDLEMARCH: VICTORIAN FEMINISM AND THE CHARACTERS OF DOROTHEA AND ROSAMOND

By

FRANCES JANE IRWIN, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Frances Jane Irwin, B.A. (McMaster University)

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ABSTRACT

The title of this thesis is taken from a sentence, included in the first edition of Middlemarch, in which Dorothea's mistakes are attributed in part to "modes of education which make a woman's knowledge another name for motley ignorance". The thesis concerns the relationship between the Victorian feminist movement to allow women access to established systems of higher education and George Eliot's characterization of Dorothea Brooke and Rosamond Vincy. Dorothea and Rosamond are discussed with reference to the writings of influential feminists: Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, and Emily Davies. Relevant passages from George Eliot's letters and essays are also considered, as well as comparable characters in other novels by Eliot.

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For Richard

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A NOTE ON TEXTUAL REFERENCES

Page references, indicated in parentheses in the text, are to the Norton critical edition of Middlemarch, edited by Bert G. Hornback (New York, 1977).

References to other works by George Eliot, also indicated in parentheses, use the following abbreviations:

AB: Adam Bede, edited by John Paterson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968).

MF: The Mill on the Floss, introduction by David Skilton (London: Dent, 1977).

FH: Felix Holt, The Radical, edited and introduction by Peter Coveney (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

DD: Daniel Deronda, edited and introduction by Barbara Hardy (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).

Letters: The George Eliot Letters, edited by Gordon S. Haight, Volumes I-VII (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-1955).

Essays: Essays of George Eliot, edited by Thomas Pinney (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963).

The title of this thesis is based upon a phrase no longer included in Middlemarch. In the first edition of the novel, the penultimate paragraph of the Finale contains this comment about Dorothea's mistakes:

> Among the many remarks passed on her mistakes, it was never said in the neighbourhood of Middlemarch that such mistakes could not have happened if the society into which she was born had not smiled . . . on modes of education which make a woman's knowledge another name for motley ignorance . . . . (577, n.)

In the second and subsequent editions of the novel this remark is deleted. Specific social criticisms are replaced by the general observation that Dorothea's struggles occurred "amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state" (577).

CHAPTER I

"MODES OF EDUCATION"

In this paper we will be concerned with those "modes of education" which form "a woman's knowledge"; but let us first briefly consider George Eliot's attitudes towards education in general. In an early review of The Progress of the Intellect by Robert William Mackay (1851), Eliot described "education in the true sense" as "the recognition of the presence of undeviating law in the material and moral world". The revelation of this law of the "invariability of sequence" is "perpetually unfolding itself to our widened experience and investigation" (Essays, 30-31). Clearly, this "education in the true sense" results from our interpretation of our experience in the world and is not the exclusive product of lessons provided by professional educators. Nevertheless, systems of education play a significant role in preparing us to interpret and evaluate experience, and George Eliot had an abiding interest in the quality of education provided by such systems.

In another review article, on the writings of Thomas Carlyle, Eliot stated that "the highest aim in education" is "to obtain not results but powers":

> He is the most effective educator who aims less at perfecting specific acquirements than at producing that mental condition which renders acquirements easy, and leads to their useful application; who does not seek to make his pupils moral by enjoining particular courses of action, but by bringing into activity the feelings and sympathies that must issue in noble action. (Essays, 213)

The educator, in Eliot's view, does not merely convey academic information but stimulates his pupils' moral development. Such an education develops both the heart and the mind. Eliot was to explore this theme more fully in Daniel Deronda (1876); in that novel, characters who have an "emotional intellect" (DD, 572) are seen in contrast to characters whose stunted sympathetic powers are equated with stupidity. Gwendolyn Harleth, for example, is "selfish and ignorant" (DD, 502), and the narrator says of Grandcourt: "There is no escaping the fact that want of sympathy condemns us to a corresponding stupidity" (DD, 658). In Middlemarch, Rosamond Vincy is a character who has, partly in consequence of her inadequate education, an unnatural limitation of her reasoning powers and a corresponding limitation of her sympathetic understanding. Rosamond, like Gwendolyn, is "selfish and ignorant". The moral stupidity of these women is reinforced by their general ignorance.

In A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft protested against the limited instruction of women: "Without knowledge there can be no morality!

Ignorance is a frail base for virtue!"[1] Eliot chose to conclude her article on Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft (1855) with the following quotation on the same theme, from Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman: "I therefore agree with the moralist who asserts 'that women have seldom so much generosity as men' . . . but I contend that the heart would expand as the understanding gained strength . . . ." (Essays, 206).

Eliot, like Wollstonecraft, linked the education of the heart with the education of the mind. In a letter written in 1876, Emily Davies recorded a conversation with Eliot on the subject of girls' education:

> Then she hoped my friend would explain to the girls that the state of insensibility in which we are not alive to high and generous emotions is stupidity, and spoke of the mistake of supposing that stupidity is only intellectual, not a thing of the character--and of the consequent error of its being commonly assumed that goodness and cleverness don't go together, cleverness being taken to mean only the power of knowing.[2]

Of course, the systematic instruction of the mind is in itself neither indispensable nor sufficient for the education of the heart. Casaubon, for all his academic training, is merely an unsympathetic pedant. The narrator pities his lot, which is "to be what we call highly taught and yet not to enjoy . . . never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self . . . but always to be scholarly

and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dimsighted" (193). Dorothea, despite her academic deprivation, is able to develop her sympathetic intelligence in response to her experience of life. As she begins to correct her vain and illusory expectations about her marriage to Casaubon, she accomplishes her greatest feat of self-education in weaning herself from "moral stupidity". The narrator comments:

> We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves: Dorothea had early begun to emerge from that stupidity, but yet it had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling--an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects--that he had an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference. (146)

Dorothea has an "emotional intellect" capable of forming distinct concepts which are "no longer reflection but feeling". Thus, although her desire for "the completest knowledge" (17), is frustrated, she has some of the nature of "a woman of true culture". In "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists", Eliot describes the character of a truly educated woman "whose mind [has] absorbed her knowledge instead of being absorbed by it":

> A really cultured woman, like a really cultured man, is all the simpler and the less obtrusive for her knowledge; it has made her see herself and her opinions in something like just proportions . . . . In conversation she is the least formidable of women, because she understands you, without wanting to make you aware that you can't understand her. She does not give you information, which is the raw material of culture,--she gives you sympathy, which is its subtlest essence. (Essays, 316-317)

Dorothea has an abundant capacity for sympathy, but her deficiency in "the raw material", information, impairs her understanding and leads her into error. She is not completely "a woman of true culture". In a letter on the subject of Matthew Arnold, Eliot gives her impression of the meaning of "culture": "I have regarded the word 'culture' as a verbal equivalent for the highest mental result of past and present influences" (Letters, IV, 395). Since Dorothea has been deprived of a systematic education in the tradition of "masculine knowledge", her connections with the highest mental accomplishment of the past have been fragmentary.

The great virtue of this contact with traditional culture is emphasized in Eliot's "Address to Working Men" (1867). In this essay, Eliot assumes the persona of Felix Holt in order to present a message that is conservative as well as radical. "Felix" warns against the destruction by ignorant, uneducated working people of the "precious benefits" of "the common estate of society", of "a wealth of a more delicate kind" than that material wealth produced

by industry and commerce:

> I mean that treasure of knowledge, science, poetry, refinement of thought, feeling and manners, great memories and the interpretation of great records, which is carried on from the minds of one generation to the minds of another. This is something distinct from the indulgences of luxury and the pursuit of vain finery; and one of the hardships in the lot of working men is that they have been for the most part shut out from sharing in this treasure. It can make a man's life very great, very full of delight, though he has no smart furniture and no horses: it also yields a great deal of discovery that corrects error, and of invention that lessens bodily pain, and must at last make life easier for all. (FH, 621)

This manifesto includes many aspects of Eliot's attitudes towards the function and value of education, aspects that can be seen in her development of both male and female characters in Middlemarch. She is sharply critical of the harbouring of education as an exclusive preserve for a privileged class. She has no patience for so-called education which merely develops the taste for "vain finery", luxury and idleness.[3] The true life of the mind brings two great benefits: Eliot has a full appreciation, as all intellectuals must have, of the joy and delight felt when one's mind is active and engaged in the process of discovery, and she values equally the useful benefits to others which result from the "discovery that corrects error".

Felix Holt's address alludes to the need for

working people to have access to education. Middlemarch contains almost no reference to the need to educate the working poor; there is nothing comparable to Felix Holt's ale-house academy or to Bartle Massey's night-school. The narrator in Middlemarch merely makes a passing reference to the ignorance of the labouring people of Frick, and introduces an extended passage of commentary after Dagley 'has his say out' to Mr Brooke:

> Some who follow the narrative of his experience may wonder at the midnight darkness of Mr Dagley; but nothing was easier in those times than for an hereditary farmer of his grade to be ignorant, in spite somehow of having a rector in the twin parish who was a gentleman to the backbone, a curate nearer at hand who preached more learnedly than the rector, a landlord who had gone into everything, especially fine art and social improvement, and all the lights of Middlemarch only three miles off.[4] (274)

This passage offers us a brief glimpse of two solitudes; the "midnight darkness" of Dagley's ignorance is not illuminated by the glimmer of learning flickering somewhat feebly in the gentlemen of the neighbourhood. However, Eliot is less concerned in Middlemarch with the advancement of learning among rural workers than with the more particular cause of the education of women. The confrontation between Brooke and Dagley is, after all, an uncommon affair; 'learned' gentlemen rarely converse with their tenant farmers and therefore are rarely troubled by such educational discrepancies. A more pathetic and more

immediate problem is the discord that occurs between unequally educated men and women within the intimate confines of the family. In Eliot's fiction, there are several examples of the domestic disharmony consequent upon feminine ignorance. Felix Holt, for example, has to suffer the unending fretfulness of his mother, "that feminine darkener of counsel, poor Mrs Holt" (FH, 462).[5] But the most tragic form of domestic discord is the forced intimacy between two solitudes in a marriage relationship where there is no meeting of minds between husband and wife.

Walter Houghton has written that "at the center of Victorian life was the family"[6], and Victorian feminists are characterized by their concern for domestic harmony. John Stuart Mill deplored the difference "between the education and character of a woman and that of a man": "Nothing can be more unfavourable to that union of thoughts and inclinations which is the ideal of married life."[7] In Middlemarch the deficient educations of Dorothea Brooke and Rosamond Vincy contribute unfavourably to two disastrous marriages.

CHAPTER II

GEORGE ELIOT AND VICTORIAN FEMINISM

The activities of Victorian feminists centered upon the struggle to obtain for women access to established systems of higher education. The priority of the need for educational opportunities is indicated in a letter by Emily Davies, addressed to a daily newspaper in 1860:

> In considering the various means by which the present condition of women may be improved, the most obvious is that of extending the range of occupations open to them. It is manifestly necessary, however, to make at the same time some change in the mode of their education, as they are unable, under the system at present pursued, to accept a position, even when offered, in which special preparatory training is required.[8]

Davies was a pioneer in the movement to secure university education for women, and was the chief founder of the New College for Women (later Girton College and later still affiliated with Cambridge University). The New College was founded in 1869; in the same year, John Stuart Mill published The Subjection of Women, in which he declared that "the claim of women to be educated as solidly, and in the same branches of knowledge, as men, is urged with growing intensity, and with great prospect of success".[9] Davies was

one of those who most successfully urged this claim. In her many articles for various journals and in her public lectures she insisted that women should be educated in the same subjects and to the same standards as men. In 1868, in a discussion of "Special Systems of Education for Women", she observed that "the best girls' schools are precisely those in which the 'masculine' subjects have been introduced".[10] On the subject of examination standards, she cited the example of "the greatest of female novelists [who] have taken the precaution to assume a masculine nom de plume for the express purpose of securing their work against being measured by a class standard".[11]

Eliot corresponded and conversed with Davies on the subject of women's education, and she also contributed financially towards the founding of Girton College. Her essay on the "treasure of knowledge" from which working men were "shut out" was in fact written during a time when she was actively supporting the movement to give women access to this treasure.[12] In a letter to Davies (8 August 1868) Eliot emphasized her belief that women and men should share the same education:

> The answer to those alarms of men about [women's] education is, to admit fully that the mutual delight of the sexes in each other must enter into the perfection of life, but to point out that complete union and sympathy can only come by women having opened to them the same store of acquired truth or beliefs as men have, so that their grounds of judgment may be as far as possible the same. (Letters, IV, 468)

In a later letter, to Mrs Nassau John Senior (4 October 1869), Eliot used a similar image of shared access to a common wealth of acquired knowledge. Despite her doubts about "the difficult complications that beset every measure likely to affect the position of women", she did have "a strong conviction" on one point:

> And that is, that women ought to have the same fund of truth placed within their reach as men have; that their lives (i.e. the lives of men and women) ought to be passed together under the hallowing influence of a common faith as to their duty and its basis. And this unity in their faith can only be produced by their having each the same store of fundamental knowledge. It is not likely that any perfect plan for educating women can soon be found, for we are very far from having found a perfect plan for educating men. But it will not do to wait for perfection. (Letters, V, 58)

Several male characters in Middlemarch have obviously been educated on a plan that is far from perfect; but this paper will focus upon the special limitations of the education of Victorian women, as illustrated in the two central female characters, Dorothea and Rosamond.

Barbara Hardy points out that Dorothea shares with all the other heroines of George Eliot's novels "the ex officio disability" of being a woman.[13] But the feminist protest in Middlemarch is somewhat muted and qualified, as Hardy observes: "Any suggestion of a feminist moral is controlled and extended by the complex plot, which puts

Dorothea in her place as an example less of a feminine problem than of the frustrations of the human condition."[14] Perhaps we should say that what enables us to 'place' Dorothea is rather the implicit comparison with a great variety of complex individual characters. All of them struggle, like Dorothea, not merely "amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state" (577), but within a vast universe which makes no accommodation to the desires of their "supreme selves" (146). As Hardy states, "The more general and open statement" in the second version of the Finale "glances at Lydgate, and at Bulstrode, Casaubon, and all the others, not merely at Dorothea's handicap as a woman."[15]

Although Hardy acknowledges Eliot's "general sympathy with Victorian feminism"[16], she denies that Eliot "is writing as a proselytizing feminist"[17]. Similarly, Francoise Basch writes: "While woman's tragedy is harped on throughout [Eliot's] novels, this awareness never leads to militant feminism"[18]. Clearly, "proselytizing" and "militant" are adjectives that do not describe Eliot's habits of mind. Her intellectual insight, with its "large vision of relations" (MF, 255), made her aware that no simple or single reform could make a radical difference in the lives of individuals, for each life is influenced by the pressure of myriad general and particular circumstances. The militant and the proselytizer are motivated by a

single-minded faith that the victory or conversion which will crown their efforts will usher in a new world; whereas Eliot recognized that a complex network of action and reaction brings about gradual change. In an early essay (1855) Eliot referred to the intricate reciprocal relationship between proposed social reforms and the potential for improving human nature:

> On one side we hear that woman's position can never be improved until women themselves are better; and, on the other, that women can never become better until their position is improved --until the laws are made more just, and a wider field opened to feminine activity. But we constantly hear the same difficulty stated about the human race in general. There is a perpetual action and reaction between individuals and institutions; we must try and mend both by little and little--the only way in which human things can be mended. (Essays, 205)

In a letter written a few days before her death in 1880, Eliot echoed her early opinion on the gradual process of social change: "the reason why societies change slowly is, because individual men and women cannot have their nature changed by doctrine and can only be wrought on by little and little" (Letters, VII, 346).

Eliot's insight into the complexity of the process of social reform would in itself be sufficient to prevent her becoming a militant proselytizer for the feminist cause. But as a novelist she also had artistic reasons for choosing not to make her criticism of the position of women in nineteenth-century England unduly explicit or emphatic. In an

early review (1852) Eliot condemned a whole class of authors who wrote religious tracts in the guise of novels, and who aimed "at a didactic effect by an inflated style of reflection, and by melodramatic incident, instead of faithfully depicting life and leaving it to teach its own lesson, as the stars do theirs" (Essays, 301). And in a review of Charles Kingsley's Westward Ho!, Eliot made a similar criticism of this novelist's didacticism:

> the preacher overcomes the painter often, which, though creditable to the writer's earnestness and honesty, injures his work as a mere work of art . . . . We don't want a man with a wand, going about the gallery and haranguing us. Art is art, and tells its own story. (Essays, 123)

"The sociological novel", according to M. H. Abrams, "emphasizes the influence of social and economic conditions on characters and events; often it also embodies an implicit or explicit thesis recommending social reform."[19] The "sociological novel" label is inadequate as a description of Middlemarch, for Eliot's fiction comprises much that is not social analysis. Neither can it be said that social and economic conditions are unduly emphasized in Eliot's novels. Rather, social criticism is combined with individual moral analysis.[20] Eliot's characters are never merely hapless victims or puppets under the influence of social and economic conditions. In the Finale to Middlemarch, the narrator's final comments point to general social forces as significant determining factors: "there

is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it" (577). But this generalization must be weighed against the particular experience of individual characters. For example, Lydgate's experience of life illustrates "the hampering threadlike pressure of small social conditions" (124) that effectively frustrate a person's hope to find a medium for his or her energy and ability. Yet Lydgate is aware of his personal responsibility for his "lapse of slackening resolution, the creeping paralysis" which frustrates his hopes: "It always remains true that if we had been greater, circumstance would have been less strong against us" (405). This generalization seems to contradict the generalization quoted above; yet Lydgate's particular experience seems, paradoxically, to demonstrate the truth of both general statements. This is the achievement of an art that transcends didacticism and creates a faithful depiction of life; the work of art is allowed to tell its own story.

The novelist's artistic fidelity to life consists in the vivid creation of individual characters in particular circumstances. The proselytizer or polemicist, in contrast, may freely use generalizations and abstract arguments. In this paper we will be concerned with the influence of George Eliot's feminist sympathies upon her creation of two individual characters. Quotations from polemical and didactic prose writings by influential feminists--Mary

Wollstonecraft, Emily Davies, John Stuart Mill--and from Eliot's essays and letters will be presented in order to illuminate general themes of Victorian feminism, themes which seem particularly relevant to Eliot's characterization of Dorothea and Rosamond. Both of these women are complex, 'round' characters, not merely two-dimensional illustrations of a feminist thesis. Nevertheless, Eliot's feminist sympathies are present, underlying the creation of these characters. And her social criticism had no less influence upon the Victorian reader because it was implicit rather than explicit.

Mill's The Subjection of Women, published the year before Eliot began to write "Miss Brooke", presents a useful comparison with Eliot's method as a novelist. Mill's argument is presented in an abstract, theoretical manner that occasionally allows his great organizing intelligence to lapse into absurdity or contradiction. For example, his conjecture that men's brains are more plodding and persistent while women's brains work more rapidly but are sooner exhausted[21] is hardly less sexist than Mr Stelling's theory that girls have "a great deal of superficial cleverness; but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow" (MF, 139-140). (Mill, to his credit, repeats that his "speculation is entirely hypothetical",[22] whereas for Stelling it is an article of unquestioned dogma.) But the reader of Middlemarch may suspect that

Mill's theory has become incarnated in a surprising manner. Casaubon, with his "plodding application" and his "rows of note-books" (56), may be a caricature of what Mill designates as "the mental operations of men":

> the mental operations of men might be expected to be slower. They would neither be so prompt as women in thinking, nor so quick to feel . . . . And do we not find that the things in which men most excel women are those which require most plodding and long hammering at a single thought?[23]

In certain details, then, Middlemarch appears to be an "incorporate criticism"[24] of Mill's essay. But the situations of Dorothea and Rosamond may be directly related to Mill's central argument. Mill opens The Subjection of Women with the statement that the subordination of one sex to another is not only "wrong in itself" but also "one of the chief hindrances to human improvement."[25] By invoking the cause of "human improvement", Mill bases his appeal to the reader upon the Victorian idea of a progressive development of human accomplishment. Social reforms achieved during the nineteenth century resulted from sustained struggles against established traditions. Reformers saw traditional concepts as hindrances to the process of evolution towards a higher form of human capability--"the crowning race", in Tennyson's phrase.[26] The social tradition that Mill calls "the subjection of women", considered in an abstract, general manner, is seen to hinder "human improve-

ment" in two ways. First, the race tends to be deprived of the talents of one half of those with the greatest potential abilities. As Mill writes:

> In all things of any difficulty and importance, those who can do them well are fewer than the need, even with the most unrestricted latitude of choice: and any limitation of the field of selection deprives society of some chances of being served by the competent, without ever saving it from the incompetent.[27]

Secondly, even the talents of the privileged half of the race tend to be frustrated by the demoralizing influence of "unenlightened" women:[28]

> A man who is married to a woman his inferior in intelligence, finds her a perpetual dead weight, or worse than a dead weight, a drag, upon every aspiration of his to be better than public opinion requires him to be.[29]
>
> With such an influence in every house, either exerted actively, or operating all the more powerfully for not being asserted, is it any wonder that people in general are kept down in that mediocrity of respectability which is becoming a marked characteristic of modern times?[30]

The stories of Dorothea and Rosamond illustrate Mill's two-fold argument against the inferior education of women. The Finale of Middlemarch underlines the parallel between their particular cases and Mill's general thesis. Dorothea is a woman whose potential abilities are never fully developed for the service of society; she feels "that there was always something better which she might have done, if she

had only been better and known better" (575-576). Rosamond is a drag upon her husband's aspirations to be better than a respectable mediocrity. Public opinion deems Lydgate to be "a successful man"; "but he always regarded himself as a failure: he had not done what he once meant to do" (575).

If Eliot's intentions as a novelist were to create two women characters who would be incarnations of the abstract ideas of Mill's essay, the artistic difficulties involved in creating Dorothea would have been greater than in creating Rosamond. Mill's second argument met a more ready popular acceptance; it was apparently a common experience in Victorian England to observe a man's aspirations being blighted because he had married an unenlightened, ignorant woman. Even conservative men could become sensitive to this hindrance to the development of their potential abilities. Mill had merely to offer a modern modification of Francis Bacon's traditional wisdom: "Whoever has a wife and children has given hostages to Mrs. Grundy. The approbation of that potentate may be a matter of indifference to him, but it is of great importance to his wife."[31] In Tennyson's moderately feminist poem, "The Princess" (1847), the prince indicates his conversion to the cause in these words:

> The woman's cause is man's: they rise or sink
> Together, dwarfed or godlike, bond or free:
>
> . . . . . .
>
> If she be small, slight-natured, miserable,
> How shall men grow?[32]

This part of Mill's argument was more readily acceptable because it accorded with everyday experience. Since Rosamond was an individual example of a common type, establishing her credibility as a 'true-to-life' character would not be an especially difficult task for Eliot. The artistic challenge in Rosamond's case must have been to present her marriage as a dynamic tension between two flawed characters, rather than as a stereotyped battle between an ignorant wife and a brilliant husband.

Dorothea's characteriziation, however, presented a greater artistic challenge. It is difficult to believe in a potential which has not been realized. (Thus skeptics endeavour to prove the inferiority of women by asking why there has been no female Shakespeare, Michelangelo, or Newton.) For example, Victorians could see that it was possible for a woman to be an effective monarch, but most of them could not imagine a woman as Prime Minister. Even those who wanted to believe in the potential abilities of women had difficulty in imagining the realization of those abilities. The writers of 'women's novels' knew that their readers had daydreams of women becoming educated. But the learned heroines created by these popular novelists were

products of naive and wishful fancy rather than of a fully creative imagination. In "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" (1856), Eliot satirically commented on several novels of what she called "the mind-and-millinery species" (Essays, 301). The heroine of Compensation is a typical "phoenix":

> We are assured, again and again, that she had a remarkably original mind, that she was a genius, and 'conscious of her originality', and she was fortunate enough to have a lover who was also a genius, and a man of 'most original mind.' . . . Of course! Greek and Hebrew are mere play to a heroine; Sanscrit is no more than a b c to her; and she can talk with perfect correctness in any language except English . . . . Poor men! There are so few of you who know even Hebrew . . . and you are perhaps adoring women who can think slightingly of you in all the Semitic languages successively. But, then, as we are almost invariably told, that a heroine has a 'beautifully small head,' and as her intellect has probably been early invigorated by an attention to costume and deportment, we may conclude that she can pick up the Oriental tongues, to say nothing of their dialects, with the same aerial facility that the butterfly sips nectar. Besides, there can be no difficulty in conceiving the depth of the heroine's erudition, when that of the authoress is so evident. (Essays, 304-305)

It is obvious that Eliot enjoyed lampooning these absurd heroines, but her purpose in writing this article was to create "the vehicle of some wholesome truth as well as of some amusement" (Letters, II, 258). In the midst of her ridicule, she explicitly states her serious objection to 'silly' novels:

> The epithet 'silly' may seem impertinent, applied to a novel which indicates so much reading and intellectual activity as 'The Enigma;' but we use this epithet advisedly. If, as the world has long agreed, a very great amount of instruction will not make a wise man, still less will a very mediocre amount of instruction make a wise woman. And the most mischievous form of feminine silliness is the literary form, because it tends to confirm the popular prejudice against the more solid education of women. (Essays, 315-316)

Eliot is scornful of the pretentiousness of novels like Compensation, "which calls itself a 'story of real life'" (Essays, 304). Her Dorothea, in contrast to the silly intellectual heroines, is created with a fully imagined fidelity to real life. Eliot is careful not to present her heroine as a "phoenix".[33] Instead she undertakes a much more delicate task: Dorothea is presented as an exceptionally gifted young woman who does not fit the traditional definitions of feminine nature. Unlike her conventional sister, she cannot find "contentment" in the restricted life of a gentlewoman (17), but yearns to acquire 'masculine' knowledge as a basis for a life of noble and useful action. Her useful knowledge is not easily acquired, however, and her life as a result is a motley mixture of remarkable mistakes and "unhistoric acts" (578).

CHAPTER III

DOROTHEA AND "MOTLEY IGNORANCE"

Victorian feminists who proposed giving women access to the same education as men found that their opponents based their objection to this reform upon the belief that such an innovation would violate the 'natural' differences between the minds of men and women. In confronting this traditional opinion, feminists tried to discriminate between conventional usages of society and the dictates of nature; and they also observed that individual women frequently proved to be exceptions to the common generalizations about 'the natural limitations of women'. In The Subjection of Women, Mill states that "it cannot now be known how much of the existing mental differences between men and women is natural, and how much artificial; whether there are any differences at all; or, supposing all artificial causes of difference to be withdrawn, what natural character would be revealed."[34] He prefaces his cautious comments on the conjectural nature of contemporary psychology with the observation that history demonstrates "the extraordinary susceptibility of human nature to external influences, and the extreme

variableness of those of its manifestations which are supposed to be most universal and uniform."[35]

In a review essay written fourteen years earlier, Eliot had also emphasized "the extreme variableness" of those manifestations of human nature "which are supposed to be most universal and uniform":

> some of the best things [Margaret Fuller] says are on the folly of absolute definitions of woman's nature and absolute demarcations of woman's mission. 'Nature', she says, 'seems to delight in varying the arrangements, as if to show that she will be fettered by no rule; and we must admit the same varieties that she admits.' (Essays, 203)

Eliot's essay includes a long passage quoted from Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century (1855), about women's need for a wider range of occupation. When certain activities are forbidden, "because 'such things are not proper for girls', they grow sullen and mischievous. Fourier had observed the wants of these women, as no one can fail to do who watches the desires of little girls, or knows the ennui that haunts grown women" (Essays, 204).

We shall see that in discussions of "woman's nature", references to "Nature" conflate Darwinian theories of heredity and evolution with the personification of Mother Nature as an unpredictable woman who delights in thwarting expectations and breaking the rules. In The Mill on the Floss (1860), Fuller's discussion of the folly of absolute demarcations of woman's nature finds an echo,

although transposed into another key and another dialect, in the views of Maggie Tulliver's father. Mr Tulliver fears that Maggie's being "too 'cute for a woman" will bring her into mischief (MF, 8): "a woman's no business wi' being so clever; it'll turn to trouble, I doubt" (MF, 13). Although Tulliver has "the natural pride of a man who has a buxom wife conspicuously his inferior in intellect" (MF, 19), he is puzzled by the mysteries of natural inheritance. It appears, in fact, that Nature, like the lawyers, has been too many for him: "That's the worst on't wi' the crossing o' breeds: you can never justly calkilate what'll come on't" (MF, 8). Maggie seems to be a "small mistake of nature" (MF, 9). As Mr Tulliver confides to a friend:

> "It's a pity but what she'd been the lad--she'd ha' been a match for the lawyers, she would. It's the wonderful'st thing"--here he lowered his voice--"as I picked the mother because she wasn't o'er 'cute--bein' a good-looking woman too, an' come of a rare family for managing; but I picked her from her sisters o' purpose, 'cause she was a bit weak, like; for I wasn't a'goin' to be told the rights o' things by my own fireside. But you see, when a man's got brains himself, there's no knowing where they'll run to; an' a pleasant sort o' soft woman may go on breeding you stupid lads and 'cute wenches, till it's like as if the world was turned topsy-turvy. It's an uncommon puzzlin' thing." (MF, 15)

Maggie, like Dorothea, is an unusually intelligent woman whose aspirations are frustrated by conventional restrictions placed upon her by the mere fact of her being

a woman. In their variation from the conventional "definitions of woman's nature", Maggie and Dorothea are like the ugly ducklings of the Prelude to Middlemarch: "Here and there a cygnet is reared uneasily among the ducklings in the brown pond, and never finds the living stream in fellowship with its own oary-footed kind" (xiv). Eliot directs the reader's sympathies towards these cygnets who never escape the confines of their stagnant pond or find a shared companionship with their own spiritual kin. In Daniel Deronda (1876), however, Eliot presents a much less sympathetic vignette of an exceptionally gifted woman who has rebelled against the constrictions of the shallow pond and has attempted to gain the freedom of "the living stream". Deronda's mother uses a similar metaphor in describing her early ambitions: "I wanted to live a large life, with freedom to do what every one else did, and be carried along in a great current" (DD, 693). But this rebel has never found a living fellowship after her escape into "the wide world" (DD, 693).

The Princess Halm-Eberstein, unrepentant and embittered in her old age, seems to be a melancholy postscript to the militant optimism of early feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft. The words of the Princess seem even to echo a metaphor used by Wollstonecraft, who comments on how few women "have emancipated themselves from the galling yoke of sovereign man":

> --So few, that the exceptions remind me of an ingenious conjecture respecting Newton: that he was probably a being of superior order, accidentally caged in a human body. Following the same train of thinking, I have been led to imagine that the few extraordinary women who have rushed in eccentrical directions out of the orbit prescribed to their sex, were male spirits, confined by mistake in female frames.[36]

The Princess Halm-Eberstein is one of the few exceptional women who have rejected their prescribed satellite roles and chosen their own eccentric directions. Yet, despite her successful emancipation, she has been unable to escape "the galling yoke" of a bitter spirit. She feels that her male genius has been confined by mistake, or by a freak of nature, in a female frame. She tells her son: "You may try--but you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl" (DD, 694).

Her Jewishness complicates the picture by increasing the cultural and religious pressures upon her, but the burden of her complaint was familiar to Gentile women as well:

> 'To have a pattern cut out--"this is the Jewish woman; this is what you must be . . . ." That is what my father wanted. He wished I had been a a son . . . . But nature sometimes thwarts them. My father had no other child than his daughter, and she was like himself.' (DD, 694)

The expectations of her father, like those of Mr Tulliver,

have been thwarted by the unpredictable variety of Nature who seems, as Fuller says in Eliot's quotation, "to delight in varying the arrangements, is if to show that she will be fettered by no rule" (Essays, 203).[37]

The few extraordinary women whose natures cannot fit into the cut-out female pattern make life uneasy both for themselves and for their conventional friends. Since most people tend to accept the traditional social pattern as an expression of 'natural' order, they therefore see the exceptional few as sports of nature--as aberrations who spoil the 'natural' symmetry of the traditional pattern. Certainly the traditional view expressed by the prince's father in Tennyson's "The Princess" is symmetrical:

> Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
> Man for the sword and for the needle she:
> Man with the head and woman with the heart:
> Man to command and woman to obey;
> All else confusion.[38]

Those who accept the conventional view of a difference between the natures of men and women are inconvenienced by the occasional obvious exception to the general pattern, a woman whose individual nature upsets their confident 'scientific' predictions. Eliot introduces an ironic comment at the expense of these conventional generalizations in her discussion of the struggling "later-born Theresas" in the Prelude to Middlemarch:

> Some have felt that these blundering lives are due to the inconvenient indefiniteness with which the Supreme Power has fashioned the natures of women: if there were one level of feminine incompetence as strict as the ability to count three and no more, the social lot of women might be treated with scientific certitude. Meanwhile the indefiniteness remains, and the limits of variation are really much wider than any one would imagine from the sameness of women's coiffure and the favourite love-stories in prose and verse. (xiv)[39]

A similar comment occurs in Book IV, concerning Dorothea's preoccupation with the need for change in her uncle's management of his estate. In this passage, "the Supreme Power" of the Prelude becomes again a personified "nature". Will Ladislaw's reaction to Dorothea's eloquence is recorded first: "For the moment, Will's admiration was accompanied with a chilling sense of remoteness. A man is seldom ashamed of feeling that he cannot love a woman so well when he sees a certain greatness in her: nature having intended greatness for men" (269). (This momentary wavering in Will's usually unqualified admiration for Dorothea is a nice point of psychological observation, and should be noted by those readers who believe that Eliot is entirely uncritical of Will's character.) Then the ironic voice of the narrator continues: "But nature has sometimes made sad oversights in carrying out her intention; as in the case of good Mr Brooke, whose masculine consciousness was at this moment in rather a stammering condition under the eloquence of his niece" (269).

"The case of good Mr Brooke" is an especially interesting mixture of the commonplace and the mildly eccentric. In this scene he has just been dispensing his usual patronizing platitudes based on stereotyped views of the feminine incompetence: "We must not have you getting too learned for a woman, you know" (268). His response to Dorothea's eloquence is mixed; he recognizes the value of her criticisms but at the same time denigrates feminine judgment: "There is something in what you say, my dear, something in what you say--but not everything--eh, Ladislaw? . . . Young ladies are a little ardent, you know--a little one-sided, my dear" (269). Mr Brooke, in his vague, distracted way, knows some real truths: he knows for example that "Life isn't cast in a mould--not cut out by rule and line, and that sort of thing" (26). But he is nevertheless given to absent-minded formulary deprecations of female understanding which cause young Dorothea much pain and irritation.[40] At the first dinner for Casaubon, the susceptible Dorothea suffers from embarrassment and annoyance at her uncle's generalizations about young ladies: "Young ladies don't understand political economy, you know" (9) and "I cannot let young ladies meddle with my documents. Young ladies are too flighty" (11). This young lady fears that Casaubon will think that they are pertinent to her in particular. Brooke is an unconventional guardian for his unconventional niece. Yet paradoxically, despite

his affection for Dorothea and despite his reputation for eccentric thinking, his effect upon her is to confine her within the cut-out pattern of conventional feminine behaviour, while allowing her the unguided freedom to make the unconventional and most uncommon error of marrying Casaubon.

In her papers on "Female Physicians" (1861) and "Medicine as a profession for women" (1862), Emily Davies considered the role of the guardian or parents and friends, among other difficulties facing young women who wished to educate themselves for "a sphere of usefulness"[41] which had been traditionally limited to men:

> it would be folly to expect that girls of sixteen will eagerly press for admission into a profession, "into which," as they are told by "A Physician of twenty-one years' standing," "they are to be forced against the dictates of nature and all the usages and requirements of society." They may indeed suspect that their interest and delight in medical study and in doctoring (not merely nursing) is in itself a "dictate of nature," and that "the usages of society" are in this case, as they have sometimes been before, unreasonable and wrong. But modest, well-brought up girls are slow--can we wish them to be less so?--to act upon their own convictions against the authority of their more experienced friends, and for them to enter upon such a struggle unaided would be clearly impossible.[42]

> The real obstacles are the unwillingness of young women to incur the reproach of singularity and self-sufficiency, and the less excusable unwillingness of their parents and friends to aid them in overcoming difficulties which they cannot conquer alone . . . . no class are more sensitively alive to the influence of public opinion than the parents of daughters. Many people who would be favourable to women-physicians in the

> abstract, would shrink from giving the least encouragement to their own daughters to step out of the beaten path.[43]

Dorothea has no vocation towards the medical profession; nevertheless, she clearly is a young woman who incurs "the reproach of singularity" from her friends and community. She is one of those women who question "the usages of society" and who "step out of the beaten path"--perhaps only "until domestic reality [meets] them in the shape of uncles and [turns] them back from their great resolve" (xiii).

Most people accommodate themselves to the conventional "usages of society". But in a period of transition it is the exceptional person who indicates the need for altering traditional conceptions. In the evolutionary process, the mutant creature may be merely an anomaly who is sacrificed or may, more happily, be adapted to survival in altered environmental circumstances. For reformers interested in social evolution, the exceptional individual has a special importance. In Eliot's letter to John Morley (14 May 1867) on the subject of "Female enfranchisement", the parenthetical proviso is most relevant; one must always make allowances for "exceptional cases of individual organization":

> I do not trust very confidently to my own impressions on this subject. The peculiarities of my own lot have caused me to have idiosyncrasies rather than an average judgment. The one conviction on the matter which I hold with some tenacity is, that through all the transitions the goal to which we are proceeding is a more clearly discerned distinction of function (allowing always for exceptional cases of individual organization) with as near an approach to equivalence of good for woman and for man as can be secured by the effort of growing moral force to lighten the pressure of hard non-moral outward conditions (Letters, IV, 364-365).

Within the context of her community, Dorothea is an 'exceptional case of individual organization'. Whereas Mr Brooke, as a self-styled advanced thinker, prides himself on his reputation as an eccentric, the young Dorothea is oppressed by her sense of singularity, of being surrounded by people who are unsympathetic to her view of life. Hurt and agitated by Celia's objections to Casaubon, Dorothea expresses her unhappiness in the thought that "Of course all the world round Tipton would be out of sympathy with this marriage. Dorothea knew of no one who thought as she did about life and its best objects" (32).

Eliot defines the nature of Dorothea's eccentricity by comparing her with her conventional sister, Celia. This comparison is made explicit in the opening paragraph of Chapter I, in which Eliot presents the provincial view of "all the world round Tipton" about Miss Brooke: "She was usually spoken of as being remarkably clever, but with the addition that her sister Celia had more common sense" (1).

The antithesis between Dorothea's cleverness and Celia's common sense is developed dramatically through most of Book I and continues intermittently throughout the novel. Even in the Finale, Celia says of Dorothea: "And she will not know what to do with the baby--she will do wrong things with it" (576). Celia is a most effective foil for Dorothea; although she shares most of the "mixed conditions" which influence Dorothea's life (1), her different viewpoint is suggested in the first paragraph of Chapter I: "and Celia mildly acquiesced in all her sister's sentiments, only infusing them with that common-sense which is able to accept momentous doctrines without any eccentric agitation" (2). Celia's mild acquiescence is soon revealed as a covert and increasingly overt criticism of her sister's embarrassingly eccentric ways, for Celia's view of Dorothea is tinged with sibling jealousy as well as with sisterly love. Like Celia, we may feel a "mixture of criticism and awe" (7) towards Dorothea, but we cannot fully share Celia's common-sense viewpoint. Duckling standards are not entirely relevant to cygnets. "The rural opinion" is "prejudiced" against Dorothea and in favour of Celia because Dorothea's religious notions (and her large eyes) seem "too unusual and striking" (3). The narrator points to the irony of this general opinion: "Poor Dorothea! Compared with her, the innocent-looking Celia was knowing and worldly-wise" (3).

A. O. J. Cockshut has written that "The great blindness of the worldly wise is that they never realize that the occasional person is really different. Generalizations about how people behave, sound enough in their way as practical guides, will fail before the uniqueness of Thomas More or Dr. Johnson".[44] Dorothea is unique in her community, and her behaviour does not conform to the general pattern. As Celia says, "But poor Dodo never did do what other people do, and I think she never will" (197). Compared with Dorothea, Celia is "knowing and worldly-wise"; perhaps her worldly wisdom is somewhat limited, but her conformity to common-sense views is sufficient to blind her to Dorothea's way of seeing.

John Stuart Mill, in his essay on Jeremy Bentham (1838), made a neat distinction between the partial views of common and uncommon thinkers:

> The collective mind does not penetrate below the surface, but it sees all the surface, which profound thinkers, even by way of their profundity often fail to do: their intenser view of a thing in some of its aspects diverting the attention from others.[45]

Mill's general observation is dramatized several times in dialogues between the Brooke sisters. Celia, who sees all the surface that Dorothea fails to see, represents what Mill calls "the collective mind" and the conventional viewpoint; and Dorothea, aspiring to profundity, is very critical of her sister's merely superficial view:

> "Had Locke those two white moles with hairs on them?"
> "Oh, I daresay! when people of a certain sort looked at him," said Dorothea, walking away a little.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "It is so painful in you, Celia, that you will look at human beings as if they were merely animals with a toilette, and never see the great soul in a man's face." (11)

In a later sisterly quarrel, Dorothea objects to Celia's observations about Casaubon's noisy soup-eating and his habit of blinking:

> "Many things are true which only the commonest minds observe."
> "Then I think the commonest minds must be rather useful. I think it is a pity Mr Casaubon's mother had not a commoner mind: she might have taught him better." (31)

The justice of Celia's retort is somewhat marred by her attack on the unknown Mrs Casaubon, but the truth of her first statement very finely balances against Dorothea's rather lofty declaration. The elitism implicit in Dorothea's reference to "only the commonest minds" seems to indicate that she is under the influence of Casaubon's letter proposing marriage. His proposal has a lofty tone: "Our conversations have, I think, made sufficiently clear to you the tenor of my life and purposes: a tenor unsuited, I am aware, to the commoner order of minds. But I have discerned in you an elevation of thought" (27). We may assume that

this compliment from her husband-to-be has made a deep impression upon Dorothea's mind. She is flattered by this learned man's discernment of her superior mental abilities. Dorothea's "elevation of thought" is indeed admirable, but it is not an unmixed blessing. In Book VIII, the grateful Lydgate finds Dorothea's "childlike grave-eyed earnestness" and "her ready understanding of high experience" to be "irresistible" and "adorable" (528), and we can sympathize with his response to these qualities, considering their absence from his marital relationship. Yet the author qualifies Lydgate's response with a significant parenthetical reminder: "(Of lower experience such as plays a great part in the world, poor Mrs Casaubon had a very blurred short-sighted knowledge, little helped by her imagination.)" (528).

Dorothea's physical short-sightedness (19) is emblematic of her failure to see what is obvious to "the collective mind" of "the worldly wise". As her mind works innocently towards the further embitterment of her husband (256), the narrator points out the irony of her position: "She was blind, you see, to many things obvious to others --likely to tread in the wrong places, as Celia had warned her; yet her blindness to whatever did not lie in her own pure purpose carried her safely by the side of precipices where vision would have been perilous with fear" (257). Again there is a mixture of criticism and awe in our attitude towards Dorothea's lack of worldly wisdom; her

blindness brings her into danger, yet sees her safely through her perilous journey. Celia's warnings are correct but limited. When Celia overcomes her occasional awe to express a direct criticism--"You always see what nobody else sees; it is impossible to satisfy you; yet you never see what is quite plain" (23)--the narrator's comment indicates both the justice of the criticism and the narrow viewpoint of the critic: "Who can tell what just criticisms Murr the Cat may be passing on us beings of wider speculation?" (23).[46]

But as Celia becomes more and more confident in her criticisms, the reader observes that her opinions have less and less validity. Having "a new sense of her mental solidity and calm wisdom" after becoming a mother (339),[47] she repeatedly attempts to influence Dorothea's mind, to persuade her to let Sir James think for her (508), and finally to dissuade her from making another marriage contrary to the common wisdom: "Nobody thinks Mr Ladislaw a proper husband for you" (566).

> All through their girlhood [Celia] had felt that she could act on her sister by a word judiciously placed--by opening a little window for the daylight of her own understanding to enter among the strange coloured lamps by which Dodo habitually saw. And Celia the matron naturally felt more able to advise her childless sister. (565)

Nevertheless, Dorothea persists in continuing to see things by her own lights, and she defends her point of view

vigorously in the dialogue with the worldly-wise Mrs Cadwallader, who cautions her not to live alone:

> "You will see visions. We have all got to exert ourselves a little to keep sane, and call things by the same name as other people call them by . . . . "
>
> "I never called everything by the same name that all the people about me did," said Dorothea, stoutly. . . . "I still think that the greater part of the world is mistaken about many things. Surely one may be sane and yet think so, since the greater part of the world has often had to come round from its opinion." (371)

Dorothea's experience has made her realize that she has many blind-spots: "Perhaps I have been mistaken in many things" (299). But she feels no confidence in the adequacy of common opinion. She is an unconventional person, an individual who chooses the difficult task of clarifying her own perceptions, according to the lights available to her. Her adjustment to her marriage with Casaubon involves such a clarifying of her perceptions: "She was no longer struggling against the perception of facts, but adjusting herself to their clearest perception" (252). Even as Dorothea blunders in partial blindness she recognizes her need for greater clarity of vision: "The vision of all this as what ought to be done seemed to Dorothea like a sudden letting in of daylight, waking her from her previous stupidity and incurious self-absorbed ignorance about her husband's relation to others" (257). Although Dorothea is dazzled by this sudden daylight, the

common viewer may observe her still struggling in a very dim light, for the process of self-education necessarily involves much trial and error.

In the Prelude, the narrator speaks of "many Theresas" who have aspired to an "epic life", but who find for themselves "only a life of mistakes"; these mistakes are "the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity" (xiii). The first version of the Finale makes the social criticism implicit in the reference to "the meanness of opportunity" much more pointed. Dorothea's mistakes are among the "determining acts of her life" which were "the mixed result of young and noble impulse struggling under prosaic conditions" (577 n.). Middlemarch condemns her errors but never acknowledges that

> such mistakes could not have happened if the society into which she was born had not smiled . . . on modes of education which make a woman's knowledge another name for motley ignorance . . . . While this is the social air in which mortals begin to breathe, there will be collisions such as those in Dorothea's life, where great feelings will take the aspect of error . . . . (577 n.)

Dorothea's "motley ignorance" is the product of the fragmentary learning that is characteristic of the self-taught person. Her sympathetic intelligence is combined with a naiveté resulting from her narrow experience and her limited instruction. Her "theoretic" mind (2) is

hampered by her restricted opportunities of testing her theories by practical application, and her thinking also suffers from a lack of intellectual discipline which is traditionally imposed by a programme of systematic study.

Dorothea's mixture of cleverness and ignorance is comparable to that of other intelligent women, such as the Meyrick sisters (in Daniel Deronda), "whose various knowledge had been acquired by the irregular foraging to which clever girls have usually been reduced" (DD, 411).[48] This "irregular foraging" for knowledge is the focus of John Stuart Mill's discussion of intellectual errors to which women seem particularly prone:

> But the corrective to [these defects in women's capacity for theoretical thought] is access to the experience of the human race--exactly the thing which education can best supply. A woman's mistakes are specifically those of a clever self-educated man, who often sees what men trained in routine do not see, but falls into errors for want of knowing things which have long been known. Of course he has acquired much of the pre-existing knowledge, or he could not have got on at all; but what he knows of it he has picked up in fragments and at random, as women do.[49]

In Mill's estimation, only the occasional woman has chanced

> . . . to be as well provided as men are with the results of other people's experience, by reading and education, (I use the word chance advisedly, for, in respect to the knowledge that tends to fit them for the greater concerns of life, the only educated women are the self-educated).[50]

The role of chance is perhaps most evident in

Maggie Tulliver's process of self-education in The Mill on the Floss. Bob Jakin's gift of an assortment of books which happens to include a volume of the writings of Thomas à Kempis seems serendipitous. The marginal notes of the previous owner happen to point to passages relevant to Maggie's need (MF, 270), and although Maggie "knew nothing of doctrines and systems", she finds that this voice from the Middle Ages communicates directly to her (MF, 272). This voice brings to Maggie "a hope that helped her through years of loneliness, making out a faith for herself without the aid of established authorities and appointed guides--for they were not at hand, and her need was pressing" (MF, 273). Thus a fortunate coincidence introduces Maggie to a part of cultural tradition that seems to satisfy her pressing need.

But since she is directing her own course of study, she concentrates too exclusively upon her three holy books, completely relinquishing her "ambition to share the thoughts of the wise" as "vain", and rejecting "the old books . . . that wrinkled fruit of the tree of knowledge" as superfluous (MF, 274). She feels "a sort of triumph that she [has] risen above the need" for "any other material for her mind to work on" (MF, 274). But Philip Wakem makes a valid criticism of her narrow ascetism, asking her, "Why should you starve your mind that way?" (MF, 288). Maggie's proud rejection of more inclusive knowledge leaves her with

a preparation for life that proves to be too limited for her full experience.

Dorothea Brooke, like Maggie Tulliver, lacks an 'appointed guide' to alleviate her isolation. Dorothea's guardian is not likely to appoint a private tutor who might encourage her to carry her studies "a little too far" (9). She does not even have a "superior woman" to act as a "guide and companion" (4). Like Maggie, she lacks both the intelligent companionship of living people and that other contact with minds of the past which forms our cultural tradition. Both of these women are restricted to a very limited "culture"--that high mental result of past and present influences (Letters, IV, 395). Maggie has chanced upon a guide from the past, a "supreme Teacher" (MF, 271), but she also needs communion with present culture. The secret meetings with Philip offer her "books, converse, affection--she might hear tidings of the world from which her mind had not yet lost its sense of exile" (MF, 305). Dorothea is also starved for the companionship of someone "who could understand the higher inward life, and with whom there could be some spiritual communion" (13). She hopes that Casaubon will "deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance" and that he will act as "a guide who [will] take her along the grandest path" towards "the completest knowledge" (17).

Both Maggie and Dorothea feel keenly the limitations

of their "girlish subjection to [their] own ignorance". Dorothea's education, "on plans at once narrow and promiscuous" (2), has been insufficient and fragmentary. She is not yet twenty, "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" (17). The precocious Maggie Tulliver is only thirteen, but she has a "soul-hunger" comparable to that of Dorothea (17; MF, 268). Maggie's "girlish instruction" has also been inadequate for her "great mental need": "Even at school she had often wished for books with more in them: everything she learned there seemed like the ends of long threads that snapped immediately" (MF, 267).

Maggie's isolation and her random education are the subjects of this general comment by the narrator:

> Poor child! . . . she was as lonely in her trouble as if she had been the only girl in the civilised world of that day who had come out of her school-life with a soul untrained for inevitable struggles--with no other part of her inherited share in the hard-won treasures of thought, which generations of painful toil have laid up for the race of men, than shreds and patches of feeble literature and false history . . . but unhappily quite without that knowledge of the irreversible laws within and without her, which, governing the habits, becomes morality, and developing the feelings of submission and dependence, becomes religion. (MF, 269)

Maggie's superficial, fragmentary instruction has not prepared her for what Eliot, in her essay on Mackay,

called "education in the true sense"; her school-life has not trained her for "the recognition of the presence of undeviating law in the material and moral world" (Essays, 31). Maggie is aware of her lack of true understanding of the material and moral world, but she is quite naive in her concept of the ease of acquiring such understanding:

> no dream-world would satisfy her now. She wanted some explanation of this hard, real life . . . . [She] wanted some key that would enable her to understand, and, in understanding, endure, the heavy weight that had fallen on her young heart. If she had been taught "real learning and wisdom, such as great men knew," she thought she should have held the secrets of life; if she had only books, that she might learn for herself what wise men knew! (MF, 267)

Therefore she sets about trying to educate herself from Tom's old school-books, in the belief that Latin, Euclid and Logic will provide her with "masculine wisdom . . . that knowledge which made men contented, and even glad to live" (MF, 268). Dorothea Brooke also has a high esteem for the "provinces of masculine knowledge" which seem to her "a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly"; since she is excluded from these provinces, "she constantly doubted her own conclusions, because she felt her own ignorance" (42).

Both Maggie and Dorothea begin their 'masculine' studies with great confidence in their intellectual powers but become discouraged as they wander without effective guidance. Maggie finds that the fruit of the tree of

knowledge has a thick rind, and her resolution occasionally fails her, "as if she had set out towards the Promised Land alone, and found it a thirsty, trackless, uncertain journey" (MF, 268). Dorothea's studies are not much aided by the uninspired teaching of Casaubon, and she begins to have a discouraged sense of her own stupidity: "the answers she got to some timid questions about the value of the Greek accents gave her a painful suspicion that here indeed there might be secrets not capable of explanation to a woman's reason" (42-43).

Emily Davies, in her paper, "Some account of a proposed new College for women" (1868), emphasized the difficulties faced by women who attempted a programme of self-education:

> [Women] have to do for themselves in mature life, and in a difficult and abnormal manner, what ought to have been done for them in their youth. They are required to inflict upon themselves the discipline, and to gain for themselves the knowledge, which ought to have come to them as part of their education.[51]

Since very few students are apt to continue in this self-inflicted discipline, many women never developed mature powers of thought:

> Many a woman is as childish and undeveloped at twenty-eight as she was at eighteen. She has missed the intermediate stage of discipline between the necessary restraint of childhood and early youth, and the undivided responsibility which is the burden of mature years. Is it said that the education of life is more

> than that of books? That is most true. And if there is any stage in our history at which it is of primary importance that the education of life --in other words, the conditions and circumstances in which we are placed--should be wisely adjusted so as to favour healthy growth, it is surely during the transition period of youth. It is not natural to be "finished" at eighteen.[52]

Rosamond Vincy is an exemplary product of the conventional finishing school; she has no potential for change or growth after her artificial 'flowering' at the age of eighteen. Dorothea Brooke, in contrast, recognizes that she needs to grow in knowledge and wisdom. But her efforts to become learned in the 'masculine' tradition fail to promote her spiritual growth. Instead she wanders in the wilderness alone, like Maggie Tulliver. Dorothea's frustrated pilgrimage is comparable to the child-pilgrimage of Theresa and her brother in the rugged country of the Moors; her "passionate, ideal nature" searches for "an epic life" (xiii), but she does not find it by this route. Saint Theresa's true vocation was not to convert the Moors, but to reform a religious order. Dorothea, however, never finds her true vocation, and her failure is in part due to her isolation from a common tradition of knowledge. She is one of the "later-born Theresas" who try to "shape their thought and deed in noble agreement", but who are "helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul" (xiii).

Dorothea, like Maggie, is described as an enthusiast. Dorothea's "exalted enthusiasm about the ends of life" (17) is not unlike that of another dreamer who lives among people who "can't in the least understand his ideas", Mordecai Cohen in Daniel Deronda (DD, 628). But Mordecai's exalted vision of life has been developed by the intellectual discipline of study in Holland, Hamburg and Gottingen. He has at least been given basic training for his later solitary studies. And Deronda's initiation into his vocation takes the form of a programme of study under Mordecai's guidance. Dorothea's theoretic and enthusiastic mind also needs the nurture of intellectual guidance, but her circumstances offer her no such instruction.

> What could she do, what ought she to do? . . . The intensity of her religious disposition, the coercion it exercised over her life, was but one aspect of a nature altogether ardent, theoretic, and intellectually consequent: and with such a nature, struggling in the bands of a narrow teaching, hemmed in by a social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth of petty courses, a walled-in maze of small paths that led no whither, the outcome was sure to strike others as at once exaggeration and inconsistency. The thing which seemed to her best, she wanted to justify by the completest knowledge; and not to live in a pretended admission of rules which were never acted on. Into this soul-hunger as yet all her youthful passion was poured; the union which attracted her was one that would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path. (17)

Since Dorothea is a woman, her soul-hunger for "the

completest knowledge" to justify her actions in life cannot be nourished at the established institutions of higher learning. The only deliverance she can hope for is to marry a man who is "above [her] in judgment and in all knowledge" (26) and to whose intellectual vocation she may apprentice herself. Hence her naive daydreams about marrying Hooker or John Milton, or other great men unfortunately misunderstood by their wives: "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" (4). She is really yearning for a true Geistlicher, and therefore feels "some venerating expectation" for "the Reverend Edward Casaubon, noted in the county as a man of profound learning" (4). Given Dorothea's restricted experience and instruction, it is not surprising that this expectation fulfills itself in her mistaken perception of this man's "great soul" (11): "Dorothea was altogether captivated by the wide embrace of this conception [of Casaubon's Key to all Mythologies]. Here was something beyond the shallows of ladies'-school literature" (14).

Only after she is married will she sound the shallows of her husband's learning; it becomes "impossible not to be aware that [she makes] no way and that the sea is not within sight--that, in fact [she is] exploring an enclosed basin" (136). And she soon feels "with a stifling

depression, that the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband's mind were replaced by anterooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither" (136). She has merely escaped from one labyrinth of petty courses to another; she has not been delivered from her ignorance. Dorothea cannot, like other young matrons, fill up her days in riding and gardening; as she tells Will Ladislaw, "one's mind has other wants" (251). Even as a wife she feels suffocated by "the stifling oppression of that gentlewoman's world":

> "What shall I do?" "Whatever you please, my dear:" that had been her brief history since she had left off learning morning lessons and practising silly rhythms on the hated piano. Marriage, which was to bring guidance into worthy and imperative occupation, had not yet freed her from the gentlewoman's oppressive liberty. (189)

The motive for Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon is her intense desire for learning. The narrator informs us that Dorothea, "with all her eagerness to know the truths of life", retains "very childlike ideas about marriage" (4). But she is in fact as naive about the learning process as she is about marriage: "I should learn everything then . . . . It would be my duty to study that I might help him the better in his great works . . . . It would be like marrying Pascal. I should learn to see truth by the same light as great men have seen it by" (17-18). Her notion of her "duty" to help the great man with his work

is a self-deluding rationalization. Even during the courtship she partly acknowledges to herself her double motivation for becoming learned:

> it was not entirely out of devotion to her future husband that she wished to know Latin and Greek . . . . And she had not reached that point of renunciation at which she would have been satisfied with having a wise husband: she wished, poor child, to be wise herself. (42)

The naiveté of Dorothea's aspiration to find a place to stand in the "provinces of masculine knowledge" is underscored by the narrator's comments. The patronizing epithet, "poor child", seems to mock her ambition not merely to have a wise husband but to be wise herself. This sentence is followed by the rather superfluous observation that "Miss Brooke was certainly very naive with all her alleged cleverness" (42). Yet Dorothea's wish for an independent intellectual life is not an unworthy ambition. In a letter to Mrs Robert Lytton (8 July 1870), Eliot wrote:

> We women are always in danger of living too exclusively in the affections; and though our affections are perhaps the best gifts we have, we ought also to have our share of the more independent life--some joy in things for their own sake. It is piteous to see the helplessness of some sweet women when their affections are disappointed--because all their teaching has been, that they can only delight in study of any kind for the sake of a personal love. They have never contemplated an independent delight in ideas as an experience they could confess without being laughed at. (Letters, V, 106)

Dorothea's contemplation of "an independent delight in ideas" is not in itself laughable. But her naiveté is most apparent in her estimation of Casaubon as a mentor to guide her to the experiencing of such delights.

In Chapter X, Eliot presents Casaubon and Dorothea almost on the eve of their marriage; they will not be seen together again until Chapter XX. Although the narrator protests that "Among all forms of mistake, prophecy is the most gratuitous" (56), the juxtaposed marital expectations of Casaubon and Dorothea make it all too easy for the reader to predict their conjugal incompatibility. Casaubon feels no "expectant gladness" (57); Dorothea looks forward, if somewhat dimly, towards new vistas:

> For to Dorothea, after that toy-box history of the world adapted to young ladies that had made the chief part of her education, Mr Casaubon's talk about his great book was full of new vistas . . . . she was looking forward to a higher initiation in ideas, as she was looking forward to marriage, and blending her dim conceptions of both. (58)

She is confident that Casaubon will provide "that binding theory which could bring her own life and doctrine into strict connection with that amazing past, and give the remotest sources of knowledge some bearing on her actions" (58). For Dorothea, like Eliot, has no use for historical research that has no relevance to contemporary action. In her essay on Mackay, Eliot writes that great historians must combine "the faculty for amassing minute

erudition with the largeness of view necessary to give it a practical bearing" (Essays, 29). Her esteem for practical knowledge is illustrated by a statement which seems to find an echo in Middlemarch, written twenty years later: "It is better to discover and apply improved methods of draining our own towns, than to be able to quote Aristophanes in proof that the streets of Athens were in a state of unmacadamized muddiness" (Essays, 28). Dorothea is disappointed by Casaubon's response to "one--only one--of her favourite themes", but it is the theme most central to her (unrecognized) vocation, and Casaubon's lack of interest is foreboding: "Mr Casaubon apparently did not care about building cottages, and diverted the talk to the extremely narrow accommodation which was to be had in the dwellings of the ancient Egyptians, as if to check a too high standard" (21). Casaubon merely has the faculty of amassing minute erudition, and Dorothea's hopes for wider vistas giving a practical bearing to scholarship are doomed to disappointment.

The narrator carefully emphasizes that Dorothea does not value knowledge merely for its own sake, or learning that is merely superficial acquirement:

> It would be a great mistake to suppose that Dorothea would have cared about any share in Mr Casaubon's learning as mere accomplishment; for though opinion in the neighbourhood of Freshitt and Tipton had pronounced her clever, that epithet would not have described her to circles in whose more precise vocabulary

> cleverness implies mere aptitude for knowing and doing, apart from character. All her eagerness for acquirement lay within that full current of sympathetic motive in which her ideas and impulses were habitually swept along. She did not want to deck herself with knowledge--to wear it loose from the nerves and blood that fed her action . . . . But something she yearned for by which her life might be filled with action at once rational and ardent; and since the time was gone for guiding visions and spiritual directors, since prayer heightened yearning but not instruction, what lamp was there but knowledge? Surely learned men kept the only oil; and who more learned than Mr Casaubon? (58)

The rhetorical questions at the end of this passage emphasize the inappropriateness of Dorothea's expectations. Mr Casaubon is no keeper of the lamp of knowledge; perceptive onlookers recognize him as a creature of darkness, "a bat of erudition" (142), or a cuttlefish whose veins are filled, not with blood to feed his action, but with ink to cloud the pursuit of rival scholars (37). But the central theme of this paragraph, Dorothea's scorn of superficial cleverness, emphasizes the most admirable aspect of her desire for learning.

Later in Chapter X, Eliot presents the scene of the large and "miscellaneous" dinner-party which includes some of those circles beyond the neighbourhood of Freshitt and Tipton--circles whose "more precise vocabulary" is discriminated in the paragraph quoted above. This marks the transition from the story of "Miss Brooke" to the story in which the central female character is Rosamond

Vincy. From this point on the contrast between Rosamond and Dorothea is developed with ever-increasing strength and particularity. The first mention of Rosamond occurs in Mr Chichely's explicit comparison: "Between ourselves, the mayor's daughter is more to my taste than Miss Brooke or Miss Celia either. If I were a marrying man I should choose Miss Vincy before either of them" (60). Lydgate, noticing that Dorothea is "a little too earnest" (63), comes to a similar conclusion. The narrator makes the comparison explicit at the end of Chapter X and in the opening sentence of Chapter XI:

> Evidently Miss Brooke was not Mr Lydgate's style of woman any more than Mr Chichely's.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Lydgate, in fact, was already conscious of being fascinated by a woman strikingly different from Miss Brooke . . . . (63)

The narrator's final proleptic hint, just preceding the chapter that introduces Rosamond, intimates that Lydgate's experience will lead him to "modify his opinion as to the most excellent things in woman" (63). One of the opinions he needs to modify concerns the kind of intelligence that is admirable in a woman. For Rosamond is a woman whose cleverness "implies mere aptitude for knowing and doing, apart from character". Her "eagerness for acquirement" has no connection with a habitual "sympathetic

motive". She is quite ambitious to deck herself with knowledge and to wear it like a becoming garment. Her ready acquisition of superficial feminine accomplishments is antithetical to Dorothea's yearning for "action at once rational and ardent."

When Eliot decided to combine the "Middlemarch" manuscript with the "Miss Brooke" manuscript, the original antithesis between the two Brooke sisters receded and was supplanted by the more complete contrast between Dorothea and Rosamond. Celia is a less complete contrast to Dorothea for many reasons. She has shared her sister's unconventional education "on plans at once narrow and promiscuous" (2). Celia has, like Rosamond, developed "those light young feminine tastes which . . . gentlemen sometimes prefer in a wife" (49), but she lacks Rosamond's cleverness and has not had her education 'finished' at an institution like Mrs Lemon's. Celia is indifferent to learning of any kind and is content to trust to common sense. As cleverness seems to her to be "pitiable", she is quite happy to let her husband think and make decisions for her. Rosamond, on the other hand, takes pride in her cleverness, and she intends to benefit from her education. Like her brother Fred, Rosamond has been given an expensive education by her father, who has the good British ambition of raising his family (87). Just as Fred has been educated for the idle life of a gentleman, Rosamond has been schooled to

become a gentleman's wife. The teachers of young women's finishing schools, understanding that their function was to prepare their pupils for the marriage market, concentrated on decking the young women with showy accomplishments and superficial graces. And Rosamond has been a most apt student.

CHAPTER IV

ROSAMOND, "THE FLOWER OF MRS LEMON'S SCHOOL"

The reader's first vision of Rosamond is prefaced by the opinions of several admirers--Mr Chichely, Lydgate, and finally Mrs Lemon. Naturally the terms of Mrs Lemon's recommendation stress the ways in which Rosamond has benefited from her education:

> She was admitted to be the flower of Mrs Lemon's school, the chief school in the county, where the teaching included all that was demanded in the accomplished female--even to extras, such as the getting in and out of a carriage. Mrs Lemon herself had always held up Miss Vincy as an example: no pupil, she said, exceeded that young lady for mental acquisition and propriety of speech, while her musical execution was quite exceptional. (65)

Mrs Lemon's concise praise, in the tradition of teachers' comments on report cards, requires amplification, and the categories of Rosamond's scholastic excellence come under our scrutiny as we observe her practising her exemplary accomplishments. The nature of her "mental acquisition" is revealed to us primarily through her "musical execution" and her "propriety of speech".

We soon discover that Rosamond's "musical execution" is merely a mechanical skill. Her piano playing is

the result not of the development of her individual talent but of her instinct for precise mimicry. As her admirable playing captivates Lydgate, who begins "to believe in her as something exceptional" (110), the narrator provides this explanation of the "almost startling" effect of her skill:

> Her master at Mrs Lemon's school . . . was one of those excellent musicians here and there to be found in our provinces . . . . Rosamond, with the executant's instinct, had seized his manner of playing, and gave forth his large rendering of noble music with the precision of an echo . . . . A hidden soul seemed to be flowing forth from Rosamond's fingers; and so indeed it was, since souls live on in perpetual echoes, and to all fine expression there goes somewhere an originating activity, if it be only that of an interpreter. (110)

In order to echo so successfully her master's interpretation, Rosamond must combine technical dexterity with a suppression of her own natural response (if any) to the music. As a pianist, she is little better than a piano-roll for a player-piano; she does not interpret the music herself, but merely reproduces her teacher's original rendition. Although a "hidden soul" seems to flow from her performance, her part is unoriginal, impersonal, and superficial. Rosamond's voice is "also well trained" (110), but her eclectic repertoire--"she only wanted to know what her audience liked" (111)--betrays her indifference to music except as a means of publicly displaying her accomplishments.[53] Her musical skills, which are imitative

rather than genuine, are representative of her artificial 'flowering' at Mrs Lemon's school.

Immediately after the prologue of Mrs Lemon's report, Rosamond's excellence in "propriety of speech" is dramatized in the scene in the Vincy breakfast room. The family discussion of certain verbal expressions, which are labelled "vulgar", "common", "unladylike", and "shop-keepers' slang" (66-67), reveals the social discriminations which are the basis of Rosamond's aptitude for niceties of phrase. Eliot has organized the material in this chapter so as to prepare the reader for the revelation of Rosamond's motive for her acquisition of "all that was demanded in the accomplished female". Eliot places Mrs Lemon's tribute just after a paragraph of very general commentary on the constant shifting of "the boundaries of social intercourse" (64). The paragraph that follows Mrs Lemon's praise opens with the social position of the Vincy family; the Vincys are "old manufacturers" who have intermarried with families who were "more or less decidedly genteel" or who offered as a substitute for gentility "a cheering sense of money" (65). This paragraph ends with a shift to Rosamond's point of view, and we see her ambition to alter her particular "boundaries of social intercourse": "She had been at school with girls of higher position, whose brothers, she felt sure, it would have been possible for her to be more interested in, than in these inevitable Middlemarch

companions" (66).

Rosamond would prefer to forget that she is the daughter of a marriage between a manufacturer and an innkeeper's daughter. She observes critically that her brother, despite his expensive education, still exhibits vulgar tendencies, and she is determined not to reveal such tendencies herself. The only way that she can escape from the position to which she was born is by marrying a gentleman, like the brothers of the "girls of higher position" with whom she was acquainted at Mrs Lemon's. She intends to marry a man who can afford to keep a carriage--hence the importance of those "extras" of her superior schooling.

In order to acquire such a husband, she must learn the necessary graces, for she was not to the manner born. At her expensive finishing school she has learned what the narrator later describes as "that controlled self-consciousness of manner which is the expensive substitute for simplicity" (298). Whereas Dorothea has the gift of expressing herself with natural simplicity, Rosamond's expressions are learned. Her speech and her actions, like her music, are products of her talent for mimicry, and she is always conscious of the impression she makes upon her audience. Her habitual gestures may seem "as pretty as any movements of a kitten's paw", but even these gestures are premeditated rather than spontaneous. For

Rosamond is not in the least like a kitten: "she [is] a sylph caught young and educated at Mrs Lemon's" (110).

After her marriage, the socially ambitious young bride continues to exercise the "quick imitative perception" (244) that has made her the exemplary student of Mrs Lemon's school. Finding Captain Lydgate's "style" and accent quite agreeable because of his superior social status, Rosamond rapidly catches "many of its phrases" (403). We have already been told that it is "part of Rosamond's cleverness to discern very subtly the faintest aroma of rank" (114). Rosamond is bent on cultivating the acquaintance of Lydgate's relatives, and in her case, imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery. Even before she meets them, and immediately after meeting Lydgate for the first time, she has foreseen "the visits she would pay to her husband's high-bred relatives . . . whose finished manners she could appropriate as thoroughly as she had done her school accomplishments, preparing herself thus for vaguer elevations which might ultimately come" (81).

Rosamond is even clever enough to recognize the limitations of her imitative facility. For, unlike generations of Witwouds, she realizes that a good ear for other people's witticisms is no substitute for an original sense of humour: "And Rosamond could say the right thing; for she was clever with that sort of cleverness which catches

every tone except the humorous. Happily she never attempted to joke, and this perhaps was the most decisive mark of her cleverness" (109).

Rosamond's conversation, during which she displays her talent for saying the thing that "seems quite astonishingly right" (109), fills Lydgate with admiration for "this creature" who seems to him to show "so much ready, self-possessed grace" (109). The artifice underlying this appearance of self-possessed grace is analyzed in a later commentary by the narrator:

> But Rosamond was not one of those helpless girls who betray themselves unawares, and whose behaviour is awkwardly driven by their impulses, instead of being steered by wary grace and propriety . . . . For Rosamond never showed any unbecoming knowledge, and was always that combination of correct sentiments, music, dancing, drawing, elegant note-writing, private album for extracted verse, and perfect blond loveliness, which made the irresistible woman for the doomed man of that date . . . . She was not in the habit of devising falsehoods, and if her statements were no direct clue to fact, why, they were not intended in that light--they were among her elegant accomplishments, intended to please. Nature had inspired many arts in finishing Mrs Lemon's favourite pupil. (185)

The effort of Rosamond's conscious control is implied by the echo of "unawares" and "wary grace". She is "not one of those helpless girls" because she is determined to help herself. She performs in order to please the right people, especially to win the admiration of her "doomed man".

The summary of Rosamond's 'character'--she is "that

combination of correct sentiments", etcetera, "which make the irresistible woman . . . of that date"--reveals how completely she is "the pattern-card of the finishing school", in Mr Farebrother's phrase (442). Her behaviour, like her gowns, is cut to a fashionable pattern.[54] Rosamond's 'becoming knowledge' and her "elegant accomplishments" are very similar to those of Mrs Transome in Felix Holt; the narrator tells us: "When [Mrs Transome] was young she had been thought wonderfully clever and accomplished, and had been rather ambitious of intellectual superiority" (FH, 104). This comment introduces a devastatingly ironic synopsis of the intellectual superficiality, rather than superiority, of Mrs Transome, née Miss Lingon. Young Miss Lingon's confidence and self-satisfaction are tellingly contrasted with the disillusionment of the aging Mrs Transome:

> For Miss Lingon had had a superior governess, who held that a woman should be able to write a good letter, and to express herself with propriety on general subjects. And it is astonishing how effective this education appeared in a handsome girl . . . . But however such a stock of ideas may be made to tell in elegant society, . . . no amount of bloom and beauty can make them a perennial source of interest in things not personal . . . . [In] the long painful years since then, what she had once regarded as her knowledge and accomplishments had become as valueless as old-fashioned stucco ornaments, of which the substance was never worth anything, while the form is no longer to the taste of any living mortal. (FH, 105-106)

Although Rosamond and Mrs Transome have been

trained to fit the same general pattern, their individual circumstances differ: Ladislaw is not Jermyn, and Lydgate is not Mr Transome. But a potential for close general similarity does exist. Rosamond's flirtation with Ladislaw, like Mrs Transome's liaison with Jermyn, is the product of ennui. For despite the "superior" education and cleverness of both women, they have no substantial "stock of ideas" to give them "a perennial source of interest in things not personal". Rosamond is easily bored, unless she has a real or imagined appreciative audience for her accomplishments. When we first see her, she is sitting at her embroidery, contemplating it "with an air of hesitating weariness" (66).[55] Her designs on Lydgate give her a topic to think about; Lydgate becomes "a subject of eager meditation to Rosamond" (114). For, unlike Lydgate, she has no "studies to divert her mind from that ruminating habit, that inward repetition of looks, words and phrases, which makes a large part in the lives of most girls" (114). Therefore, "her thoughts [are] much occupied", not only with Lydgate himself, but also with "a handsome house in Lowick Gate" and with various styles of drawing-room furniture (184).

The romance that her mind creates about Lydgate also gives her a motive for polishing her talents; she diligently attends to "that perfection of appearance, behaviour, sentiments, and all other elegancies, which would find in Lydgate a more adequate admirer than she

had yet been conscious of" (115). Because Lydgate is "a more adequate admirer", Rosamond becomes "industrious", busying herself with sketching, practising her music, reading the 'best' novels, and learning "Lalla Rookh" by heart, "having always an audience in her own consciousness" (115).

Rosamond's craving for admiration has been confirmed by her schooling. All her acquirements have been for purposes of show, and she is dependent upon an appreciative audience to give meaning to these accomplishments. Her feeling when she loses her audience is that "There really is nothing to care for much" (415). Her subsequent decline into melancholy is illustrated by her failure to practise her acquired skills. She sits "down to the piano, meaning to play, and then desisting, yet lingering on the music stool with her white fingers suspended on the wooden front, and looking before her in a dreamy ennui" (531). Her only mental occupation is to fix "her mind on Will Ladislaw's coming as the one point of hope and interest" (531). Her flirtation with Will, significantly linked with her skill in "musical execution", springs from her discovery that married women need not stop collecting admirers. The narrator informs us that "vanity, with a woman's whole mind and day to work in, can construct abundantly on slight hints, especially on such a hint as the possibility of indefinite conquests" (301).

In A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Mary Wollstonecraft condemned traditional forms of women's education for promoting vanity rather than nurturing virtue: "while [women] have been stripped of the virtues that should clothe humanity, they have been decked with artificial graces that enable them to exercise a short-lived tyranny".[56] She protested that such a superficial education was not merely an inadequate preparation for domestic duties. In fact, the limitation of a 'feminine' curriculum produced wives who were less dutiful, for women whose minds were empty tended to occupy themselves with conquests and the "love of sway":

> An active mind embraces the whole circle of its duties, and finds time enough for all. It is not, I assert, a bold attempt to emulate masculine virtues; it is not the enchantment of literary pursuits, or the steady investigation of scientific studies, that leads women astray from duty. No, it is indolence and vanity--the love of pleasure and the love of sway, that will reign paramount in an empty mind. I say empty emphatically, because the education which women now receive scarcely deserves the name. For the little knowledge that they are led to acquire, during the important years of youth, is merely relative to accomplishments; and accomplishments without a bottom, for unless the understanding be cultivated, superficial and monotonous is every grace.[57]

Seventy-five years after Wollstonecraft's criticisms, women's education was no less superficial. A report of a Royal Schools Inquiry Commission in 1868 on "the general deficiency in girls' education" listed these almost univer-

sal complaints: "Want of thoroughness and foundation; want of system; slovenliness and showy superficiality; inattention to rudiments; undue time given to accomplishments, and these not taught intelligently or in any scientific manner".[58]

Criticism of marriageable women whose education was limited to the acquisition of showy but superficial accomplishments was a recurrent topos in nineteenth-century fiction; Jane Austen's Mrs Elton and Charlotte Bronte's Blanche Ingram are but two memorable examples. At least one contemporary reviewer considered Rosamond Vincy to be the vehicle of another fictional attack on "the general deficiency in girls' education". R. H. Hutton, in the British Quarterly Review (1873), wrote of Rosamond: "This exquisitely painted figure is the deadliest blow at the common assumption that limitation in both heart and brain is a desirable thing for a woman, that has ever been struck."[59] Hutton's feminist sympathies are clear, in spite of the unfelicitous mixture of metaphors.

What makes Rosamond "the deadliest blow" against the common preference for the limitation of intelligence in women? Mrs Elton is seen from Emma's point of view, and Blanche Ingram is described by Jane Eyre, who struggles to be impartial in her judgment of the woman she believes to be Rochester's chosen bride. The reader has little knowledge of the Elton marriage, and never sees Blanche

Ingram as a wife. But the reader of Middlemarch is intimately acquainted with Rosamond's limitations, as they are seen through her husband's eyes. Rosamond is seen from many points of view. She has many admirers; her brother Fred, Mrs Bulstrode and Mrs Plymdale are the only characters who abstain from the general approbation.[60] Lydgate begins as her most ardent admirer, but his experience modifies "his opinion as to the most excellent things in woman" (63). Intimate acquaintance with Rosamond forces him to see the inadequacy of "traditional wisdom" (113) about women and marriage.

CHAPTER V

LYDGATE AND "TRADITIONAL WISDOM" ABOUT MARRIAGE

It is in Lydgate's consciousness that the inadequacy of "the common assumption that limitation in both heart and brain is a desirable thing for a woman" is fully realized, as he comes to comprehend the truth about his marriage. In Lydgate's early view of Rosamond, that "common assumption" is vividly dramatized. For on the subject of love and marriage, Lydgate feels no need to apply a "testing vision of details and relations", but relies on "that traditional wisdom which is handed down in the genial conversation of men"(113). One of his "spots of commonness" (103) is that he relies much upon "the psychological difference between . . . goose and gander" (245). He makes an unscientific distinction between the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' minds.

The reader's introduction to Rosamond is prefaced by Lydgate's thoughts about her: "She is grace itself; she is perfectly lovely and accomplished. That is what a woman ought to be" (64). Lydgate feels that it would be quite safe to fall in love with "a creature like this Miss Vincy, who had just the kind of intelligence one would

desire in a woman--polished, refined, docile, lending itself to finish in all the delicacies of life" (112). He is satisfied that he has found an example of "perfect womanhood" (242), one "who was instructed to the true womanly limit and not a hair's-breadth beyond--docile, therefore, and ready to carry out behests which came from beyond that limit" (243). The reader can easily see the flaws in Lydgate's logic here: docility is not consequent upon limited instruction. Rather, as Wollstonecraft pointed out, "the love of sway . . . will reign paramount in an empty mind".[61] The problem with Lydgate's expectations about Rosamond is not merely that he mistakenly sees her as docile, ignoring the signs that she is stubborn. The feminist argument was that the traditional belief in a "true womanly limit" inevitably promoted feminine obstinacy and stratagem.

Although Lydgate is blind to the errors in his own "notion of necessary sequence", he is patronizing towards Rosamond's faulty logic; her words imply "a notion of necessary sequence which the scientific man regarded as the prettiest possible for a woman" (202). Lydgate does not suspect that while he infers this 'pretty' logic, his fiancée has her own private thoughts. Rosamond has a mind of her own. But for Lydgate, the 'feminine' mind has no private aspect; its function is merely to be decorative and agreeable. And in his opinion, "one of the prettiest

attitudes of the feminine mind" is "to adore a man's pre-eminence without too precise a knowledge of what it consisted in" (185). He anticipates a wedded bliss that will be a mixture of feminine affection and masculine intellect, an "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" (242).

In the free indirect discourse which represents Lydgate's pre-nuptial musings, "creature" seems a harmless enough epithet for Rosamond (109, 112, 242). "Creature" need not have a pejorative or patronizing implication, and may even be a term of endearment. But in conjunction with Lydgate's traditional views of the limitations of women, it may imply an unscientific belief that woman is a species distinct from man. Feminists, as we have seen, were sensitive to suggestions that there were 'natural' distinctions between the minds of men and women. In the Introduction to A Vindication of the Rights of Women, Wollstonecraft attributed the "false system of education" of women to the influence of men who considered females as feeble creatures rather than as fellow human beings.[62] She asserted:

> the minds of women are enfeebled by false refinement . . . [and] in the true style of Mahometism, they are treated as a kind of subordinate beings, and not as part of the human species, when improveable reason is allowed to be the dignified distinction which raises men above the brute creation . . .[63]

When Lydgate begins to confront the estrangement between himself and his wife, the "creature" epithet springs to life in his imagination: "It seemed that she had no more identified herself with him than if they had been creatures of different species and opposing interests" (412). The image that occurs to Lydgate as he is left "helpless and wondering" (412) amidst his marital troubles is a distorted echo of his playful words spoken during his early flirtation with Rosamond:

> "An accomplished woman almost always knows more than we do, though her knowledge is of a different sort. I am sure you could teach me a thousand things--as an exquisite bird could teach a bear if there were any common language between them. Happily, there is a common language between women and men, and so the bears can get taught." (110)

Lydgate's playful metaphor of bird and bear may seem meaningless as an analogy to a human partnership, but his marriage fulfils his words with an ironic appropriateness. This husband and wife lack "a common language", and neither is capable of learning from the other. Rather, they are "creatures of different species and opposing interests". Their relationship suggests, not an exquisite bird instructing a trained bear, but the competitive struggle between species, as in "Nature, red in tooth and claw". But this battle is not always to the strong: "[Lydgate] wished to excuse everything in her if he could--but it was inevitable that in that excusing mood he should think of her as an

animal of another and feebler species. Nevertheless she had mastered him" (461).

As Wollstonecraft had warned:

> Women are, in fact, so much degraded by mistaken notions of female excellence, that I do not mean to add a paradox when I assert, that this artificial weakness produces a propensity to tyrannize, and gives birth to cunning, the natural opponent of strength.[64]

For the epigraph to Chapter LXV of Middlemarch, Eliot chose another illustration of the same paradox. Chaucer's Wif of Bath, exploiting her 'feminine' logic, turns the rational order of the world "up-so-doun" in order to justify feminine "maistrie" over men:

> One of us must bowen douteless;
> And, sith a man is more reasonable
> Than woman is, ye moste be suffrable.

Lydgate is mastered by an unreasonable but cunning and obstinate woman, and he is eventually forced to recognize that a weak creature whose reason is artificially limited is not necessarily docile.

He has to discover "the complexities of love and marriage" (113) the hard way, through his own tragic experience. In his youth he had "felt himself amply informed by literature" on these subjects (113), but we may assume with some confidence that his reading has not included Wollstonecraft's works. In her article in the Leader on Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft (1855),

Eliot commented:

> There is in some quarters a vague prejudice against the Rights of Woman as in some way or other a reprehensible book, but readers who go to it with this impression will be surprised to find it eminently serious, severely moral, and withal rather heavy--the true reason, perhaps, that no edition has been published since 1796, and that it is now rather scarce. (Essays, 201)

Eliot stated that both Fuller and Wollstonecraft wrote "forcibly" on "the fact that, while men have a horror of such faculty or culture in the other sex as tends to place it on a level with their own, they are really in a state of subjection to ignorant and feeble-minded women" (Essays, 201). Following quotations from both women on this subject, Eliot presented her own opinion in a passage which seems to adumbrate her creation of Mr and Mrs Tulliver, as well as Mr and Mrs Lydgate:

> There is a notion commonly entertained among men that an instructed woman, capable of having opinions, is likely to prove an impracticable yoke-fellow, always pulling one way when her husband wants to go the other, oracular in tone, and prone to give curtain lectures on metaphysics. But surely, as far as obstinacy is concerned, your unreasoning animal is the most unmanageable of creatures, where you are not allowed to settle the question by a cudgel, a whip and bridle, or even a string to the leg. For our own part, we see no consistent or commodious medium between the old plan of corporal discipline and that thorough education of women which will make them rational beings in the highest sense of the word. Wherever weakness is not harshly controlled it must govern, as you may see when a strong man holds a little child by the hand, how he is pulled hither and thither, and wearied in his walk by his

> submission to the whims and feeble movements of his companion . . . . So far as we see, there is no indissoluble connexion between infirmity of logic and infirmity of will, and a woman quite innocent of an opinion in philosophy, is as likely as not to have an indomitable opinion about the kitchen. As to airs of superiority, no woman ever had them in consequence of true culture, but only because her culture was shallow and unreal . . . --mere acquisitions carried about, and not knowledge thoroughly assimilated so as to enter into the growth of the character. (Essays, 203)

Rosamond, whose reasoning powers have not been developed by a "thorough education" is a "most unmanageable" wife. Lydgate is so frustrated by her obstinacy that he is tempted to resort to harsh control of her weakness:

> since no reasoning he could apply to Rosamond seemed likely to conquer her assent, he wanted to smash and grind some object on which he could at least produce an impression, or else tell her brutally that he was master, and she must obey. But . . . he had a growing dread of Rosamond's quiet elusive obstinacy, which would not allow any assertion of power to be final . . . . As to saying that he was master, it was not the fact. (456)

Before and after he marries, Lydgate evaluates Dorothea and Rosamond by comparing their potential or actual capabilities for "wifely functions" (64). He begins by underestimating Dorothea, despite his appreciation of "her undeniable beauty":

> She did not look at things from the proper feminine angle. The society of such women was about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form, instead of reclining in a paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes, and blue eyes for a heaven. (64)

But Lydgate's experience as a "yoke-fellow" forces him to modify "his opinion as to the most excellent things in woman" (63). He finds that it is not at all "relaxing" to be married to a woman whose mind is bent on having her own way and whose mental activity consists in surreptitious cunning. For the rest of his abbreviated life, his wife continues to be "inflexible in her judgment, disposed to admonish her husband, and able to frustrate him by strategem" (575).

Stratagems are the secret weapons of women who want their opinions to be acted upon; such women strategically undermine the great defense mentioned in Chapter I in the narrator's discussion of customary expectations of marriage: "Women were expected to have weak opinions; but the great safeguard of society and of domestic life was, that opinions were not acted on" (3). Rosamond's activities as a wife demonstrate the weakness of this "great safeguard of society and domestic life". Her notions are more effectively subversive than the eccentric and suspect notions of Dorothea.

Men who have traditional views of society and domestic life tend, according to the narrator, to be "wary"

of women who reveal a troublesome tendency to independent thought (3). After a single conversation with Dorothea, Lydgate finds her not to his taste (64): "It is troublesome to talk to such women. They are always wanting reasons, yet are too ignorant to understand the merits of any question" (63). In Felix Holt, Harold Transome is also troubled by women who combine ignorance with curiosity. For this reason he prefers Oriental women: "Western women were not to his taste: they showed a transition from the feebly animal to the thinking being, which was simply troublesome" (FH, 454). Transome is a wary suitor and has doubts about the docility of Esther Lyon:

> She was clearly a woman that could be governed; she was too charming for him to fear that she would ever be obstinate or interfering. Yet there was a lightning that shot out of her now and then, which seemed the sign of a dangerous judgment; as if she saw something more admirable than Harold Transome. Now, to be perfectly charming, a woman should not see this. (FH, 525)

In Middlemarch, neither Lydgate nor Casaubon are as cautious as Transome during their courtship; both assume that their wives will be docile. Soon after his marriage, however, Casaubon discovers in Dorothea "the sign of a dangerous judgment", a sign that his wife is an independent and therefore troublesome thinking being. Casaubon's experience is in some ways parallel to Lydgate's; both men have conventional expectations of marriage, and both men

meet with disappointment. Casaubon courts Dorothea because he has

> . . . made up his mind that it [is] now time for him to adorn his life with the graces of female companionship, to irradiate the gloom which fatigue was apt to hang over the intervals of studious labour with the play of female fancy, and to secure in this, his culminating age, the solace of female tendance for his declining years. (41)

The latter unromantic motive--to have a nursemaid in his old age--is comparable to his other practical purpose, his hope that Dorothea "might really be such a helpmate to him as would enable him to dispense with a hired secretary" (192). He expects such a helpmate to be not only unpaid but also uncritical: "A wife, a modest young lady, with the purely appreciative, unambitious abilities of her sex, is sure to think her husband's mind powerful" (193).

Casaubon's greatest psychological need is to get "a soft fence against the cold, shadowy, unapplausive audience of his life" (140). It is painful for him to find that his wife voices criticism which he had expected her to muffle. He had assumed that Dorothea would have only "the purely appreciative . . . abilities of her sex", but he finds himself in a "close union which was more of a subjection than he had been able to imagine" (140). He had expected her appreciation to silence his own doubts and is angered to hear Dorothea's voice giving "loud emphatic iteration to those muffled suggestions of con-

sciousness" (139):

> And this cruel outward accuser was there in the shape of a wife--nay, of a young bride, who, instead of observing his abundant pen-scratches and amplitude of paper with the uncritical awe of an elegant-minded canary-bird, seemed to present herself as a spy watching everything with a malign power of influence. (139)

The attribution of "malign power" to Dorothea--almost the power of an evil eye--reveals how deeply disturbed Casaubon is by her criticism. His discovery of her independent mind never ceases to trouble him:

> There was no denying that Dorothea was as virtuous and lovely a young lady as he could have obtained for a wife; but a young lady turned out to be something more troublesome than he had conceived. She nursed him, she read to him, she anticipated his wants, and was solicitous about his feelings; but there had entered into the husband's mind the certainty that she judged him . . . . (289)

Although Dorothea plays the conventional wifely role very satisfactorily, Casaubon suspects that in her private thoughts she belongs to the school of the carping critics, the predatory scholars, Carp, Pike and Tench. Casaubon has a jealous temperament, but he does not doubt his wife's virtue: "What he was jealous of was her opinion, the sway that might be given to her ardent mind in its judgments" (290). And he suspects Will Ladislaw of alienating her judgment. Casaubon's jealousy of Ladislaw is intimately linked with his suspicion about Dorothea's disloyalty to

his intellectual labours on the 'Key to all Mythologies'. His half-acknowledged failures as a husband and as a scholar become confused as he tries to rationalize his attempt to control Dorothea even after his death:

> She is ready prey to any man who knows how to play adroitly either on her affectionate ardour or her Quixotic enthusiasm . . . . [Ladislaw][65] has evidently tried to impress her mind with the notion that he has claims beyond anything I have done for him . . . . he would make her believe anything; she has a tendency to immoderate attachment which she inwardly reproaches me for not responding to . . . . In knowledge he has always tried to be showy at small cost . . . . When was sciolism ever dissociated from laxity? I utterly distrust his morals . . . . (291)

In his anxiety to keep his prospective widow from defecting to the sciolist party,[66] Casaubon's paranoid mind confuses the two objects of his jealous anxiety, and he views Ladislaw as a predator, like Carp & Company: "She is ready prey to any man . . . . If I die--and he is waiting here on the watch for that--he will persuade her to marry him" (291). Casaubon's resentment of his wife's independent mind is coloured by his suspicion that her thoughts are not entirely her own, that her mind has been impressed by other notions. He suspects that <u>another</u> man might, by playing upon her "tendency to immoderate attachment", be able to sway and control her mind. The promise which he tries to extort from Dorothea is his last desperate attempt to force his control upon her mind, even posthumously. He expresses his view of the issue at stake very succinctly:

"But you would use your own judgment: I ask you to obey mine; you refuse" (331). Casaubon's judgment does not prevail; fittingly, it is Dorothea's request for time for reflection that enables her to escape the grip of his dead hand.

Sir James Chettam is another suitor in Middlemarch who makes a confident sexist distinction between 'masculine' and 'feminine' minds. But in comparison with Lydgate and Casaubon his traditional assumptions seem relatively benign. Chettam has "the rare merit" (12) of being willing to marry a woman whose talents are recognizably greater than his own. His confidence is supported by the traditional estimate of the advantages of the 'masculine' mind. But Chettam's botanical metaphor, based on different species of trees, has less aggressive implications than the zoological metaphors in Lydgate's view of Rosamond. Birches and palms do not usually thrive in the same environment, but at least there is a potential for peaceful co-existence:

> Sir James had no idea that he should ever like to put down the predominance of this handsome girl, in whose cleverness he delighted. Why not? A man's mind--what there is of it--has always the advantage of being masculine,--as the smallest birch-tree is of a higher kind than the most soaring palm,--and even his ignorance is of a sounder quality. Sir James might not have originated this estimate; but a kind Providence furnishes the limpest personality with a little gum or starch in the form of tradition. (12)

When the disappointed Sir James takes Celia as his

second choice, he is under no illusions about her; he knows that she is "not, as some people pretended, more clever and sensible than the elder sister" (13). Although "a man naturally likes to look forward to having the best" (13), he settles for what he recognizes as second-best. It may appear that Celia and Sir James are well-matched; certainly Celia appreciates that he talks "so agreeably, always about things which had common-sense in them, and not about learning!" (49). Their marriage is stable, but it does not live up to the Victorian feminist ideal. John Stuart Mill would not have described it as "a real enriching of the two natures, each acquiring the tastes and capacities of the other in addition to its own".[67] The conventional marriage of Celia and Sir James endures with moderate success because their home life is secure against the impediments and harrassments of circumstantial pressures.

The tragic marriage of the Lydgates, on the other hand, is troubled greatly by such impediments. These trials reveal that one of the major weaknesses in the marriage is the mental gap between husband and wife. The phrases chosen to describe the marital breakdown insist upon this mental gulf: "Between him and her indeed there was that total missing of each other's mental track" (405); "It was significant of the separateness between Lydgate's mind and Rosamond's that he had no impulse to speak to her on the subject" (414); "They lived on from day to day with

their thoughts still apart" (524); "There was evidently some mental separation . . . between this wife and the husband" (533).

The pathos of this mental separation is first evident in the scene in which Lydgate informs his wife of the imminent debt crisis. Lydgate's words are meaningful; he tells Rosamond that "there are things which husband and wife must think of together" (410). But these two are not capable of thinking together. Lydgate reacts to his wife's thoughts with irritated peremptoriness and wonders privately whether it is "of any use to explain" (411). During the later quarrel over the plan to let the house to the Plymdales, Lydgate openly scorns his wife's understanding; he asks her, "Is it possible to make you understand what the consequences will be?" (455). In the controlled anger of Lydgate's words and tones of speech, Eliot very convincingly presents his frustration at his inability to penetrate Rosamond's thought processes: "Lydgate uttered this speech in the curt hammering way with which we usually try to nail down a vague mind to imperative facts" (450). Rosamond's stratagems are based upon "reasons" which Lydgate's reason cannot influence. She 'explains' her action by telling him: "I had a very strong objection to it. I think that was reason enough" (455).

Lydgate's contempt for his wife's undeveloped mind becomes increasingly pointed; he asks himself: "What place

was there in her mind for a remonstrance to lodge in?" (460). The narrator comments that Rosamond is insensible to the justice in Lydgate's reproach; she has "no consciousness that her action could rightly be called false" (460). Later, Lydgate wearily resigns himself to his wife's limited range of thought and her small-mindedness: "in poor Rosamond's mind there was not room enough for luxuries to look small in" (484).

Rosamond's mind is small and impoverished despite her admired cleverness, for her cleverness has not been used in a way that could broaden her understanding. The egocentric focus of her mind has prevented her quick perceptive intelligence from becoming aware of the reality of certain facts in a world that is not centered upon her 'supreme self'. Lydgate's re-evaluation of Rosamond's cleverness begins when she refuses to acknowledge that her horseback riding has been responsible for her miscarriage. The comments of the narrator in this passage stress the egoism of Rosamond's cleverness: "No one quicker than Rosamond to see causes and effects which lay within the track of her own tastes and interests" (404). She sees her husband's interests as foreign to her own, and "of course she believed in her own opinion more than she did in his" (404). The narrator tells us, "What she liked to do was to her the right thing, and all her cleverness was directed to getting the means of doing it" (404).

Captain Lydgate's visit is the occasion of a "sad milestone" marking the distance Lydgate has travelled from "his old dreamland, in which Rosamond Vincy appeared to be that perfect piece of womanhood who would revere her husband's mind after the fashion of an accomplished mermaid . . . singing her song for the relaxation of his adored wisdom alone" (403). Lydgate is now waking up to the fact that a mindless mermaid is incapable of revering the work of anyone's mind. For Rosamond, his scientific research is of no more interest than if his talent were for "the fortunate discovery of an ill-smelling oil" (404). He must learn to accustom himself to her indifference to his intellectual pursuits, to "the blank unreflecting[68] mirror her mind presented to his ardour for the more impersonal ends of his profession and his scientific study" (405). He recognizes that Rosamond would prefer him to be less "a phoenix of cleverness" (403) and more like his "feather-headed" but gentlemanly cousin (402).

The disastrous visit of the baronet's third son is not merely a "milestone" but also a finger-post to the future. The muted conflict over the loss of their baby foreshadows the first open clash between husband and wife over their debt. But the finger-post also points down the road towards London and a Continental bathing-place. For Lydgate has now discovered that Rosamond married him for prestige (403, 404), and given Rosamond's "terrible tena-

city" (404), the fashionable practice serving wealthy gout patients is a predictable destination.

In her paper "On Secondary Instruction as relating to girls" (1864), Emily Davies presented a generalized picture of "the tendencies in the great mass of English homes of the middle class."[69] This picture seems to bear some relevance to the change of direction in the Lydgate home. She deplored the influence that uneducated middle-class women had upon the values of the family:

> The master of the house may discourse upon politics, or literature, or any other topic that may happen to interest him, but there can be no intelligent response, no interchange of thought, no pleasant discussion of things worth talking about . . . . He will learn unconsciously, but very surely, that the great thing for him to do is to stick to his business, think of nothing else, talk of nothing else, aspire after nothing else. Making money and getting on in the world by means of it, are things that his wife, and his mother, and his daughters, can understand and care for. They know all about the advantages of having a carriage and servants, and "a position", and plenty of money to do what they like with. If he wants to please them, the way is plain. It may not be the way he would have chosen. He may have had unselfish impulses, some "aptitude for ideas", some longings after a nobler career . . . . The man who was teachable, impressible, growing--hardens into the mere man of business, worldly-minded, narrow-hearted, self-satisfied.[70]

As a description of the tendencies of the Lydgate home, Davies's analysis is too generalized and simplified. Lydgate does sacrifice his aptitude for research and his idealistic professional ambitions in order to please his

wife by making money and getting on in the world; he tells Dorothea: "I can think of nothing for a long while but getting an income . . . . I must do as other men do, and think what will please the world and bring in money" (529-530). But he never merits Davies's last adjectives. He is bitter, rather than "self-satisfied" about the stunting of his capacity for growth and his hardening into a worldly-minded man of business.

This troubled marriage brings unhappiness to both husband and wife. As we have seen, Rosamond has only romantic daydreams to divert her mind in her ennui:

> In this way poor Rosamond's brain had been busy before Will's departure . . . . Since then the troubles of her married life had deepened, and the absence of other relief encouraged her regretful rumination over that thin romance which she had fed on. (520)

Lydgate has, in the beginning, a source of relief that his wife lacks. Rosamond has never discovered "that treasure of knowledge" that brings delight and a sense of being useful to others (FH, 621). Lydgate is the only character in Middlemarch who fully realizes this delight; the growth of his "intellectual passion" (98) is convincingly presented for us in Chapter XV. The sacrifice of that passion is the most pathetic aspect of his tragedy. For a time after his marriage, it is occasionally possible for him to find a temporary escape from his personal troubles in the delights of impersonal research: "He felt again some of

the old delightful absorption in a far-reaching inquiry" and a momentary "forgetfulness of everything except the construction of a new controlling experiment (453). But the "pressure of sordid cares" (447) increasingly interrupts "that placidity which comes from the fulness of contemplative thought" (315), and Lydgate becomes increasingly irritable:

> it was hardly possible for him to think unbrokenly of any other subject, even the most habitual and soliciting. He was not an ill-tempered man; his intellectual activity . . . would always, under tolerably easy conditions, have kept him above the petty uncontrolled susceptibilities which make bad temper. But he was now a prey to that worst irritation which arises not simply from annoyances, but from the second consciousness underlying those annoyances, of wasted energy and a degrading preoccupation, which was the reverse of all his former purposes. (447)

Even when his personal cares no longer leave Lydgate "free energy enough for spontaneous research and speculative thinking", his profession makes daily demands on "his judgment and sympathies" (462). His work is "a perpetual claim on the immediate fresh application of thought" (462) which draws him out of his preoccupation with his own troubles. Lydgate is one of the few who can benefit from the "wealth of a more delicate kind" spoken of in "Address to Working Men". Felix Holt's description of "that treasure of knowledge" fits Lydgate's potential very closely: "It can make a man's life very great, very

full of delight, though he has no smart furniture and no horses: it also yields a great deal of discovery that corrects error, and of invention that lessens bodily pain, and must at last make life easier for all" (FH, 621). Felix's words seem to be echoed in the narrator's introductory analysis of Lydgate: "He was certainly a happy fellow at this time . . . with ideas in his brain that made life interesting quite apart from the cultus of horse-flesh and other mystic rites of costly observance" (102). The thwarting of Lydgate's intellectual passion is the central element in his tragic fall from being "certainly a happy fellow" to being "very miserable" (509). The narrator comments:

> Only those who know the supremacy of the intellectual life--the life which has a seed of ennobling thought and purpose within it--can understand the grief of one who falls from that serene activity into the absorbing soul-wasting struggle with worldly annoyances. (509)

The "unmitigated calamity" (509) of Lydgate's marriage is that he is yoked with one who is unacquainted with "ennobling thought and purpose" and who is completely absorbed in the "mystic rites of costly observance" and worldly concerns.

In the essay on Fuller and Wollstonecraft, written sixteen years before Middlemarch, Eliot made a general statement that seems to be pertinent to Lydgate's particular marital situation:

> Men pay a heavy price for their reluctance to encourage self-help and independent resources in women. The precious meridian years of many a man of genius have to be spent in the toil of routine, that an 'establishment' may be kept up for a woman who can understand none of his secret yearnings, who is fit for nothing but to sit in her drawing-room like a doll-Madonna in her shrine. No matter. Anything is more endurable than to change our established formulae about women, or to run the risk of looking up to our wives instead of looking down on them. Sit divus, dummodo non sit vivus (let him be a god, provided he be not living), said the Roman magnates of Romulus; and so men say of women, let them be idols, useless absorbents of precious things, provided we are not obliged to admit them to be strictly fellow-beings . . . . (Essays, 204-205)

Lydgate indeed pays a heavy price for his early adherence to "established formulae about women". Unlike many men, he is at least capable of seeing the error of his first traditional views of women. He comes to value the woman who does not fit the standard pattern, who has the potential to be a fellow-being. If he had a second choice, we may feel confident that he would choose differently. But his first choice, his initial preference for Rosamond, is the crux of the question of Rosamond's education. Even when Lydgate intended not to marry for several years, Rosamond Vincy was "the woman he would have chosen if he had intended to marry speedily" (64), whereas "women just like Dorothea had not entered into his traditions" (200).

The chief purpose of Rosamond's studies at Mrs Lemon's school has been to make her to conform to

established formulae about women and marriage. She has absorbed the teaching of "all that was demanded in the accomplished female" (65). The delicate periphrasis of the impersonal construction, "was demanded", avoids any mention of the agent who requires these accomplishments. The precise identity of this agent cannot, in fact, be determined, for he is the unknown prospective husband, the suitor who will be selected by the eligible young woman from among the contenders for her hand. The purpose of the expensive finishing-school training is to 'polish' the marriageable young woman, to enable her to make the best show possible. In this way she hopes to attract enough suitors so that she may choose.

Rosamond has worked industriously to be at the top of this class, and her success is generally applauded:

> "The best girl in the world! He will be a happy fellow who gets her!" was the sentiment of the elderly gentlemen who visited the Vincys' and the rejected young men thought of trying again, as is the fashion in country towns where the horizon is not thick with coming rivals. (115)

Her craving for admiration is confirmed at Mrs Lemon's and persists after her marriage; she is "one of those women who live much in the idea that each man they meet would have preferred them if the preference had not been hopeless" (519). It is not surprising, then, that she "almost [loses] the sense of her identity" (537) when Will snatches

up her words and hurls them at her like "poisoned weapons": "Explain my preference! I never had a pre-ference for her, any more than I have a preference for breathing. No other woman exists by the side of her" (537).

Rosamond's dream world collapses, and her "vagrant fancy" (552) returns to the unsatisfying reality of life with a man who occasionally reveals his bitter regret that he has chosen to marry her. Rosamond has "a placid but strong answer" to Lydgate's regretful speeches: "Why then had he chosen her? It was a pity he had not had Mrs Ladislaw, whom he was always praising and placing above her" (575). Rosamond's response is merely a neutral question and an evasion of responsibility, like her earlier neutral question, "What can I do, Tertius?" (410). There is no place in Rosamond's mind for a consciousness that she is partly responsible for the failure of their marriage: "The poor thing saw only that the world was not ordered to her liking, and Lydgate was part of that world" (448). Her mind registers only her own innocence and the offences of her husband: "She was convinced of her having acted in every way for the best; and each grating or angry speech of Lydgate's served only as an addition to the register of offences in her mind" (457).

Rosamond has been trained to present a pleasing appearance, according to traditional expectations of women,

and her schooling continues to be effective. Her marriage to Lydgate appears to be admirable: "[Lydgate's] acquaintances thought him enviable to have so charming a wife" (575). But her mind has not been educated in a way that will enable her to make sense of the world or even of her own actions. She is ignorant of "the presence of undeviating law in the material and moral world" (Essays, 31). Since her uneducated mind is incapable of a real union with the mind of her husband, she can only be part of a superficial imitation of a true marriage.

CHAPTER VI

"THAT MARRIAGE OF MINDS"

In her essay, "Woman in France: Madame de Sablé" published in the Westminster Review in 1854, Eliot characteristically informed her readers that the story of Mme de Sablé's career "has not merely an historical interest, it has an important bearing on the culture of women in the present day" (Essays, 80). Her concluding paragraph is a peroration on the inadequacy of the education of women in nineteenth-century England:

> Women become superior in France by being admitted to a common fund of ideas, to common objects of interest with men; and this must ever be the essential condition at once of true womanly culture and of true social well-being . . . . Let the whole field of reality be laid open to woman as well as to man, and then that which is peculiar in her mental modification, instead of being, as it is now, a source of discord and repulsion between the sexes, will be found to be a necessary complement to the truth and beauty of life. Then we shall have that marriage of minds which alone can blend all the hues of thought and feeling in one lovely rainbow of promise for the harvest of human happiness. (Essays, 80-81)

In Middlemarch, the Lydgate marriage is a particular instance of the "discord and repulsion between the sexes" that can result from a lack of "a common fund of ideas"

and "common objects of interest" between men and women. Lydgate comes to imagine that "two creatures who loved each other, and had a stock of thoughts in common, might laugh over their shabby furniture" (484), but he cannot put his wife into this picture:

> Rosamond in a poor lodging, though in the largest city or most distant town, would not find the life that could save her from gloom, and save him from the reproach of having plunged her into it . . . . In the British climate there is no incompatibility between scientific insight and furnished lodgings: the incompatibility is chiefly between scientific ambition and a wife who objects to that kind of residence. (469-470)

Lydgate's reflections come too late, however, to save him from giving a hostage to Mrs Grundy.[71]

In Felix Holt, Eliot presents another soliloquy, by an individual very different from Lydgate, but bearing on the same general problem. Felix has resolved never to marry, rather than risk having to sacrifice his ideals and his unselfish purposes:

> "I'll never look back and say, 'I had a fine purpose once--I meant to keep my hands clean, and my soul upright, and to look truth in the face; but pray excuse me, I have a wife and children--I must lie and simper a little, else they'll starve!' or 'My wife is nice, she must have her bread well buttered, and her feelings will be hurt if she is not thought genteel.' That is the lot Miss Esther is preparing for some man or other. I could grind my teeth at such self-satisfied minxes, who think they can tell everybody what is the correct thing, and the utmost stretch of their ideas will not place them on a level with the intelligent fleas." (FH, 156)

Felix's eventual marriage to Esther Lyon is based not upon a change in his general views, but upon Esther's demonstration that she is not merely "a squirrel-headed thing" (FH, 153). She is educable, capable of growing beyond the ladylike accomplishments acquired at the French school. Felix comes to see that she has "enough understanding to make it wicked that [she] should add one more to the women who hinder men's lives from having any nobleness in them" (FH, 209), and it is he who educates her, stimulating her painful growth into "the possession of higher powers" (FH, 327).

The marriage of Felix and Esther seems to be an incarnation of the colourful prophecy in Eliot's essay on Mme de Sablé: "Then we shall have that marriage of minds which alone can blend all the hues of thought and feeling in one lovely rainbow of promise for the harvest of human happiness" (Essays, 81). Middlemarch ends with two marriages which promise a "harvest of human happiness". The marriage of Fred Vincy and Mary Garth is comparable to the marriage of Felix Holt and Esther Lyon, except that it is Fred who must prove that he is educable--that he is not merely a "squirrel-headed" idle gentleman--before the marriage can take place. Under Caleb Garth's practical tutelage, Fred "learn[s] the nature of things" (283) so that he can become both "a useful man" (283) and a husband who can achieve with his wife "a solid mutual happiness" (573).

The marriage of Dorothea and Will Ladislaw may seem to be less ideal. In Will, Dorothea is fortunate to find "a young companionship with one who was cleverer than herself, yet seemed ready to be swayed by her" (249). This companionship offers the reciprocal relationship of thoughts and interests which Victorian feminists considered necessary for a true marriage. Chettam had been willing to be swayed by Dorothea, but he could offer her no intellectual companionship; Casaubon had appeared to be clever, but was so insecure that he could not abide the presence of a judgment that varied from his own. Dorothea and Will are bound to each other by shared interests and ideas, as well as by "a love stronger than any impulses which could have marred it" (576); yet the narrator reports that many who know Dorothea regret that a woman of such "substantive and rare" talents has been "absorbed into the life of another" and is limited to "wifely help" (576).

Dorothea has much consolation in her life "filled with emotion" and with "benificent activity" (576). But the sacrifice of her potential abilities is indicated with quiet irony in the narrator's qualification of her benificent activity as one "which she had not the doubtful pains of discovering and marking out for herself" (576). The process of discovery, as Lydgate knows, has its delights as well as its "doubtful pains". Dorothea misses the happiness of seeing her "delightful plans" (380) put into

action. Throughout her life, she feels "that there was always something better which she might have done, if she had only been better and known better" (575-576). As Casaubon's widow, she would like to manage her property herself, but she does not know what to do with it (533). When Celia protests that the marriage to Ladislaw will prevent Dorothea from carrying out her "plans", Dorothea's response is a sad revelation of her limited circumstances: "'On the contrary, dear,' said Dorothea, 'I never could do anything I liked. I have never carried out any plan yet.'" (566). Because of her limited circumstances, Dorothea is not able to acquire the practical knowledge which comes from experience, as Caleb Garth has been able to do. There is a wistfulness in her early comment to Lydgate, who seems to her to have the knowledge to enable him to put his ideals into practice: "'How happy you must be, to know things that you feel sure will do great good! I wish I could awake with that knowledge every morning'" (304). She knows well the unhappiness of being unable to "do great good" because of her insufficient knowledge.

In the Prelude and the Finale, Dorothea is linked with Saint Theresa of Avila, whose "passionate, ideal nature demanded an epic life" (xiii). Dorothea is one of many unsuccessful counterparts to this celebrated and successful saint: "Many Theresas have been born who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant

unfolding of far-resonant action; perhaps only a life of mistakes . . . [or] perhaps a tragic failure which found no sacred poet and sank unwept into oblivion" (xiii). The elegiac tone of the narrator's reference to "these later-born Theresas" (xiii) is echoed in the concluding sentences of the Finale: "A new Theresa will hardly have an opportunity of reforming a conventual life . . . . the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is for ever gone" (577). The narrator seems to suggest that Dorothea was born too late; the modern era cannot sustain an epic or heroic life. The twentieth-century reader, however, may be inclined to believe that Dorothea was born too early. Undoubtedly Eliot did hope that the future would bring greater opportunities for women to enter wider spheres of usefulness. Nevertheless, speculations as to what an individual might have been had she been born in different circumstances--in another time or place, of another social position, or of the other sex--are exercises in futility.[72]

In the Prelude and Finale the narrator speaks generally of many Theresas, but in Middlemarch we are interested in an individual and in her struggle with her particular circumstances. Because Eliot is a great artist, Dorothea is a fully imagined character, not merely a two-dimensional illustration of the deficiencies of women's education in nineteenth-century England. As the narrator tells us in The Mill on the Floss, Tom Tulliver is "not a

boy in the abstract, existing solely to illustrate the evils of a mistaken education, but a boy made of flesh and blood, with dispositions not entirely at the mercy of circumstances" (MF, 158). Similarly, Dorothea's dispositions are not entirely at the mercy of her limited circumstances. "In spite of her small instruction" (331), Dorothea's judgment is truer than that of a man of learning like Casaubon: "for she looked with unbiassed comparison and healthy sense at probabilities on which he had risked all his egoism" (331).

It is because Dorothea has emerged from the "moral stupidity" (146) of egoism that she is able to have an "incalculably diffusive" effect on the lives of those around her (578). In spite of her small instruction, she has achieved education in the true sense. The narrator reminds us that many Dorotheas "may present a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we know" (578), for this woman has been able to make at least a small personal contribution to "the growing good of the world" (578).

NOTES

1 Wollstonecraft, pp. 107-108.

2 Quoted in Middlemarch, p. 603. Eliot may have been alluding to Charles Kingsley's well-known advice, "Be good, sweet maid, and let who can be clever", but the sentiment is a Victorian commonplace.

3 Cf. Fred Vincy, whose "expensive education", in the opinion of Mr Bulstrode, "has succeeded in nothing but in giving him extravagant idle habits" (86). Fred, like his sister, has only superficial acquirements to show for his exclusive schooling; he has "the accent and manner [and the handwriting] of a university man" (185).

4 Since Eliot has chosen to set her narrative in a time "when the world in general was more ignorant of good and evil by forty years than it is at present" (130), she is able to suggest ironically that educational reform has since ameliorated the ignorance that prevailed "in those times". An equally cutting irony is present in her parenthetical comment in Daniel Deronda: "(Deronda's undergraduateship occurred fifteen years ago, when the perfection of our university methods was not yet indisputable.)" (DD, 220). Also compare the commentary on Tom Tulliver's education: "All this, you remember, happened in those dark ages when there were no schools of design--before schoolmasters were invariably men of scrupulous integrity . . . . Education was almost entirely a matter of luck--usually of ill-luck--in those distant days." (MF, 155-156)

5 Rufus Lyon's phrase is Biblical, of course; Mrs Holt "darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge" (Job, 38:2).

6 Houghton, p. 341.

7 Mill, Subjection of Women, pp. 169-170.

8 Davies, p. 6.

9 Mill, Subjection of Women, p. 24.

10 Davies, p. 128.

11 Ibid., p. 126.

12 John Blackwood wrote to Eliot, asking her to write an Address to Working Men, on 14 November 1867; the Address was begun on 22 November. During the intervening week, Eliot invited Emily Davies to visit "for the sake of some conversation on the desirable project of founding a College for women". During this conversation, she advised Davies to prepare for "a great campaign" rather than attempt to begin "the great scheme" on a small scale. On 16(?) November Eliot wrote to Mme Eugène Bodichon: "I am much occupied just now, but the better Education of Women is one of the objects about which I have no doubt, and I shall rejoice if this idea of a college can be carried out." On 22 November, the day that she began to write the Address, she wrote to Sara Sophia Hennell:

> There is a scheme on foot for a women's college, or rather university, to be built between London and Cambridge, and to be in connection with the Cambridge university, sharing its professors, examinations and degrees! "Si muove."

This conjunction of Eliot's interests in giving to women and to working men a share in the treasure of knowledge and true culture is documented in Letters, IV, pp. 398-402.

13 Hardy, Novels of George Eliot, p. 47.

14 Ibid., p. 52.

15 Ibid., p. 52.

16 Ibid., p. 52.

17 Ibid., p. 51.

18 Basch, p. 94.

19 A Glossary of Literary Terms, third edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p. 113.

20 In his stimulating discussion of Eliot's fiction, Raymond Williams writes: "She develops the idiom of individual moral analysis into a world in which morality is both individual and social" (The English Novel, p. 65).

21 Subjection of Women, pp. 121-122.

22 Ibid., p. 122.

23 Ibid., pp. 121-122.

24 The phrase is taken from the narrator's description of Christy Garth as "an incorporate criticism on poor Fred [Vincy]" (394).

25 Subjection of Women, p. 1.

26 In Memoriam, Epilogue, l. 128.

27 Subjection of Women, p. 34.

28 Ibid., p. 70.

29 Ibid., p. 166.

30 Ibid., p. 169.

31 Ibid., p. 167.

32 "The Princess", VII, 243-244, 249-250.

33 Lydgate, however, is referred to as a "phoenix"--by those who hope that he will not rise again from his ashes. When Eliot incorporated the "Miss Brooke" story into Middlemarch, Lydgate became a useful parallel for Dorothea. It is easy for us to believe in the potential of this talented man, although the narrator qualifies our belief in his ultimate success by noting that Lydgate is at "an age at which many men are not quite common . . . [and] are hopeful of achievement" (97). Lydgate's sense of his vocation is substantiated by his professional training. His "initiation in make-shift called his 'prentice days" and "his studies in London, Edinburgh, and Paris" have not "stifled", but supported, his intention "to shape [his] own deeds and alter the world a little" (99). Because he begins by putting his ideals into practice, even if only for a short time, we find the frustration of his "intellectual passion" (98) both pathetic and credible. Dorothea's aspirations are thwarted at a much earlier stage, and her potential therefore remains somewhat nebulous.

34 Subjection of Women, p. 125.

35 Ibid., pp. 40-41.

36 Wollstonecraft, p. 70.

37 For Deronda's mother, Nature has a further ironical twist in store; for Deronda, despite his nurture, seems to inherit his grandfather's vocation.

38 "The Princess", V, 437-441. The prince himself holds slightly more progressive views; he points out to his father that individual women show as much variation as individual men:

> . . . but you clash them all in one,
> That have as many differences as we.
> The violet varies from the lily as far
> As oak from elm . . . .
> (V, 172-175)

Nevertheless, his classification of women as flowers and men as trees betrays his own adherence to conventional distinctions. The inappropriateness of his metaphor apparently does not occur to him.

39 Even so, Dorothea's unconventional coiffure and reading-habits are clearly emblematic of her variation from the normal "level of feminine incompetence".

40 In contrast, Mrs Cadwallader, lacking Dorothea's tender susceptibilities, is not at all hurt by Brooke's general aspersions on "you ladies" in the following typical specimen of his 'thinking':

> "Your sex are not thinkers, you know--varium et mutabile semper--that kind of thing. You don't know Virgil. I knew"--Mr Brooke reflected in time that he had not had the personal acquaintance of the Augustan poet --"I was going to say, poor Stoddart, you know. That was what he said. You ladies are always against an independent attitude --a man's caring for nothing but truth, and that sort of thing." (35)

41 Davies, p. 19.

42 Ibid., p. 26.

43 Ibid., pp. 39-40.

44 Cockshut, p. 41.

45 Mill, Bentham and Coleridge, p. 60.

46 In the satirical chapter LXXXIV, revealing the commonplace reaction towards Dorothea's second marriage, the narrator's assessment of Celia's limited judgment appears in another feline image: "Celia looked up at him [Sir James] like a thoughtful kitten" (565).

47 This maternal acquisition of wisdom is a matter of common knowledge. Cf. the traditionally minded father of Princess Ida in Tennyson's poem:

> A lusty brace
> Of twins may weed her of her folly. Boy,
> The bearing and training of a child
> Is woman's wisdom.
> ("The Princess", V, 453-456)

48 The narrator ironically observes, however, that Daniel Deronda, "with all his masculine instruction", is no less ignorant about Judaism than the Meyrick sisters (DD, 411). A comment on Deronda as a young child, sheltered from the usual experiences of boys, also touches on the theme of the "motley ignorance" of clever girls: "his mind showed the same blending of child's ignorance with surprising knowledge which is oftener seen in bright girls" (DD, 205).

49 Subjection of Women, p. 107.

50 Ibid., p. 106.

51 Davies, p. 102.

52 Ibid., p. 102.

53 Dorothea, in contrast, although she has hated her piano lessons (189), has a natural sympathy for music. She has a slight regard for "the small tinkling" of "domestic music" but has been moved by the grander music of the great organ at Freiberg (43).

54 Like Shirley Keeldar's cousins in Charlotte Brontë's Shirley (1849): "two pattern young ladies, in pattern attire, with pattern deportment". (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 375.

55 This embroidery is another indication that Rosamond has been educated in the same pattern as Mrs Transome:

> A little daily embroidery had been a constant element in Mrs Transome's life; that soothing occupation of taking stitches to produce what neither she nor anyone else wanted, was then the resource of many a well-born and unhappy woman. (FH, 176)

56 Wollstonecraft, p. 72.

57 Ibid., p. 253.

58 Quoted in Davies, p. 89.

59 Quoted in Fernando, "New Women" in the Late Victorian Novel, p. 44.

60 Mrs Plymdale seems to expect Rosamond to be like Austen's Mrs Elton, who immediately abandons her piano after marriage although she professes to be "doatingly fond of music" (Emma, Ch. 32). Mrs Plymdale believes that Rosamond has been "educated to a ridiculous pitch, for what was the use of accomplishments which would all be laid aside as soon as she was married?" (115).

61 Wollstonecraft, p.253.

62 Ibid., p. 31.

63 Ibid., p. 32.

64 Ibid., p. 36.

65 Eliot's fine psychological insight is evident in this interior monologue, for Casaubon never refers to "this man" by name.

66 In his letter to Ladislaw, attempting to veto his association with Brooke's political campaign, Casaubon objects to the association of "a somewhat near relative" with "the sciolism of literary or political adventurers" (256).

67 Subjection of Women, p. 173.

68 The "unreflecting" pun is an example of Lydgate's rather bitter sense of humour, like his later "basil plant" label for Rosamond.

69 Davies, p. 77.

70 Ibid., p. 76.

71 Mill, Subjection of Women, p. 167.

72 When Fred Vincy, indulging in self-pity, attempts to excuse himself in the subjunctive mood--"I should not have made a bad fellow if I had been rich"--Mary Garth's laughing retort expresses her healthy acceptance of reality: "You would have done your duty in that state of life to which it has not pleased God to call you" (93).

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