

## “That Arduous Invention”: Middlemarch Versus the Modern Satirical Novel

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**A**MONG the neglected charms of *Middlemarch* are its benevolent adaptations of Wordsworth and the sharp correctives it administers to Flaubert, Carlyle, Arnold, and especially Dickens. The essential point to remember about George Eliot's masterpiece is that the society it depicts still works. Characters mature, society is reformed and novels are made by a process which Lydgate calls “arduous invention.”<sup>1</sup> Writers who were beginning to argue to the contrary become the ultimate targets for George Eliot's satire. Instead of developing into the melancholy novel some critics have made it, *Middlemarch* bristles with literary rebuttals. George Eliot parodies pessimists who find life fundamentally unsatisfactory or palliate their discontent by creating scenes that are unrealistic and sentimental. *Middlemarch* is never modern and satirical simultaneously, for George Eliot's satire is best seen as Victorian and reactionary. She is seldom as modern as Dickens or as cynical as Flaubert. George Eliot directs her satire against characters who expect too much from life, but it falls heaviest on writers who commit the same error, particularly two forerunners of the phenomenon I have elsewhere described as the modern satirical novel.<sup>2</sup> In *Middlemarch* George Eliot satirizes satirists. She must withstand the world views put forth by Dickens and Flaubert if her optimism about personal relations in a society she considers advantageously secularized is to survive.

In the memorable passage outlining Lydgate's commingled notions of scientific research and great literature,

Eliot laments that "Many men have been praised as vividly imaginative on the strength of their profuseness in indifferent drawing or cheap narration . . . "

But these kinds of inspiration Lydgate regarded as rather vulgar and vicious compared with the imagination that reveals subtle actions inaccessible by any sort of *lens*, but tracked in that outer darkness through long pathways of *necessary sequence* by the inward light which is the last refinement of *Energy* . . . [For Lydgate] was enamored of that *arduous invention* which is the very eye of research, provisionally framing its object and correcting it to more exactness of relation; he wanted to pierce the obscurity of those minute *processes* which prepare human misery and joy, those invisible thoroughfares which are the first lurking-places of anguish, mania, and crime, that delicate poise of transition which determines the growth of happy or unhappy consciousness. (p. 122, Italics added)

Lydgate subsequently complains about stories featuring "very poor talk going on in distant orbs" or "Lucifer coming down on his bad errands," but Dickens, not Milton and his outdated concerns, is the chief villain among George Eliot's "Many men." He is a charlatan, she the devoted scientist. Unbridled inventiveness cannot rival a combination of intensity and patient analysis.

Good writing for George Eliot is akin to scientific experiment, perhaps even more rigorous. She enlists for her art a researcher's eye so sensitive no lens can compete with it. If the Victorian artist is as methodical as the scientist, George Eliot's analogies imply, there can be no counterpoint between art and life, as happens continually in Flaubert. Along with Darwin and T. H. Huxley, George Eliot pursues truths too "subtle" for the naked eye, actions "inaccessible" to the less observant, "minute processes" protected from scrutiny by their "obscurity." These processes, synonymous with the secrets of life, can be enlarged and magnified until the workings of provincial Middlemarch illuminate the macrocosm. Arduous research and the inspiration that comes only after much preliminary tracking — these are George Eliot's prerequisites for the exploration of character, not the "cheap" and shallow "profuseness" displeasing to her in Dickens.

One suspects that George Eliot finds "vulgar" and "vicious" any broad indictment of the life process not founded on absolute exactitude. Satirists do not search for the inaccessible, the minute and the obscure. Only a novelist who believes that life is basically sound can operate that way in quest of its hidden laws. Writers who follow Lydgate's prescription are virtually barred from writing most varieties of satire, especially the kind found in the modern satirical novel, where the human condition is considered deplorable and something appears fundamentally wrong with the nature of things. The satirical novelist who finds fault with the workings of life must be vividly imaginative, he must distort rather than magnify, and as he wields his scalpel he can have slight interest in correcting a provisional framing until it is "more and more" exact, the way one adjusts a lens.

Lydgate's views have an unmistakable positive bias that is ultimately as conservative as it is initially experimental. Research implies discovery, the inevitability of answers and explanations, not bafflement or disgust. The effort expended may be painful, that is, arduous, but never the results; on the contrary, Lydgate reveals George Eliot's sense of exhilaration at the prospect of piercing obscure processes. This is the only cutting she allows. Human failure, anguish, mania, crime — one travels these thoroughfares, too, but the reasons for such miseries become clearly discernible, and the satisfaction of discerning them leaves no room for satirical disapproval or general disappointment with life. Unlike Emma Bovary, Dorothea Brooke will never exclaim that nothing works. She will not demand to know why life is "so unsatisfactory." She will never complain that everything she leans on crumbles instantly to dust, that "nothing was worth looking for: everything was a lie!"<sup>3</sup> Society's basic processes are admittedly microscopic, yet "processes" — a term germane to chemistry and manufacture — are very different from Huxley's sense of fragmentation, Waugh's comic

absurdity, or Dickens' fear of "the perpetual stoppage." Life provides as many "necessary sequences" as the patient realist, a sort of laboratory scientist, requires.

Modern satirical novelists fashion satirical images for life to emphasize their disillusionment, Huxley's being the impossibly complex human fugue of eighteen hundred million parts, Waugh's the spinning disc, a modern wheel of fortune, one can ride at Luna Park. George Eliot's metaphor for life is flowing water, an image of progressive flux with which the aptly named reformer, Miss Brooke, however modestly, finally allies herself. *Middlemarch* betrays no sense of an underlying barbarity on which civilization precariously rests. The assumptions that underwrite George Eliot's world are positive; the momentum, no matter what the pace, is forward. Even without the failed Lydgate's advice, Middlemarch society will not slide backward into the primal slime.

George Eliot is the sociologist of provincial life. As she speaks about her craft through a scientist and in scientific terms, she reflects the shift in perception among enlightened, doubt-free Victorians from a predominantly religious view of the world to an outlook more tentative, highly secular, less spectacular but more scientific. By contrast, Dickens' scientific imagery throughout *Bleak House* is used satirically to support an anti-progressive, anti-evolutionary view of society. George Eliot's use of science in *Middlemarch* is in part a refutation of Dickens' abuse of it in *Bleak House*. She must reclaim contemporary science from Dickens' attempts to employ its findings as a satirical weapon.

As happens repeatedly in *Middlemarch*, George Eliot dismisses Dickens' practice and attitude on grounds that they are old-fashioned. Despite her scientific currency, however, George Eliot's determination to bring life under her lens is basically a Victorian impulse, an integral part of her conviction that society works by discoverable laws. She seems more modern in terms of her age but less so

than Dickens in our own.<sup>4</sup> One cannot imagine a Megalosauruss waddling up some provincial equivalent of Holborn-hill, but the London-based narrator of *Bleak House* would not be surprised to observe this antediluvian spectacle. George Eliot's contempt for the Dickensian mode emphasizes her scientific accuracy over his precipitate satirical inventiveness, but her scientific modernity now qualifies as modern mainly in Victorian terms; it is progressively Darwinian. Dickens' anti-evolutionary satire anticipates Aldous Huxley's zoological fiction and the derisive animal imagery that is one of the hallmarks of most modern satirical novels. It invests *Bleak House* with a mistrust of the life process that foreshadows the modern's sceptical view of evolution and history.<sup>5</sup> George Eliot inhabits and reflects an evolving, ameliorable world in which some single far-off event, such as Tennyson posited, can still be foreseen.

In place of flowing water, Dickens offers the primeval mud and the flood waters that threaten Chesney Wold. Life is not working itself out in Dickens, and some punitive act of God or nature — flood, fire — is needed to clear the ground. George Eliot's scientific imagery comes from Darwin and the laboratory; Dickens' is apocalyptic, prophetic and biblical. His world is run by Dedlocks and Smallweeds — fossils and predators. He would like to believe that change is the universal law but is compelled to satirize forces that appear able to thwart it. Many powerful people, he fears, do not "receive any impress from the moving age."<sup>6</sup> Unlike George Eliot and in a manner she scorns, Dickens calls for divine judgments to be carried out by biological processes. He is not that far removed, George Eliot insinuates, from Milton's fascination with a fantasy world of divine wrath and infernal errands. Dickens' apocalyptic tone, his sense of a judgment to be rendered at the appointed time, suspends his world between Deluge and Armageddon.<sup>7</sup> Such a world

often seems more modernist than George Eliot's with her more accurate and strictly scientific imagery.

To exalt arduous invention over Dickens' satiric imagination, George Eliot reworks in *Middlemarch* several famous Dickensian scenes and situations. These are best examined concurrently with an analysis of Dorothea's conversion, her progression from outmoded ideals to an appreciation of a profane world that needs her assistance. Since George Eliot feels more at home in the world than Dickens did, she has fewer difficulties with the rampant secularization that is characteristic of late Victorian culture and continues in our own. In all instances where she attacks Dickens, George Eliot finds Boz either too cynical and satirical to be realistic or grossly sentimental, both of which failings stem from his reluctance sufficiently to admire life as found.

When George Eliot introduces Lydgate as a man "at a starting point," someone "still in the making," she divulges her evolutionary definition of character as "a process of unfolding" (p. 111). This is how society and individuals advance. Unfolding also has affinities with the way research problems are solved. Inherently static, the majority of Dickens' characters indirectly disclose his anti-evolutionary bias. *Middlemarch* engages the reader in a process of discovery involving the fates of individuals who are ongoing experiments when the author first presents them. In *Bleak House*, once drawn into Chancery's labyrinth, readers must search with Inspector Bucket and the novel's many amateur detectives for the concealed relationships that impede meaningful community. Characters in Dickens' masterpiece who develop do so mainly with the help of inner resources superior to the obstacles life offers. In *Middlemarch*, characters who fail meet defeat through insufficient internal fortitude; the strengths of those who triumph, however, receive support from other members of the community-at-large and find in it ample room for exercise and growth.

At the root of Dorothea's character is a timeless yet acutely Victorian dilemma: she cannot connect her spiritual life with her earthly existence. As the crumbling of orthodoxies increased the gap between spiritual and secular, it made the latter seem banal and pointless. Dorothea, George Eliot observes,

could not reconcile the keen anxieties of a spiritual life involving eternal consequences, with a keen interest in guimp and artificial protrusions of drapery. Her mind was theoretical and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there; she was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have those aspects. . . . (p. 6)

Dorothea's "lofty conception of the world," utopian and impractical, reflects Louisa Gradgrind's "struggling disposition to believe in a wider and nobler humanity than she had ever heard of."<sup>8</sup> Initially, Dorothea is on the side of Sissy Jupe and the adherents of Fancy, but George Eliot, unlike Dickens, strongly disapproves. Dorothea's imagination is always ahead of the facts. For George Eliot, the fanciful are idle dilettantes, whose dissatisfaction, an end in itself, never takes life forward. Thus Mr. Brooke and Sir James must curtail Dorothea's enthusiasm for building tenants' cottages by reminding her that she knows nothing of economics.

Mr. Brooke warns Dorothea that her enthusiasms "may carry [her] a little too far — over the hedge in fact." His reminder that "life isn't cast in a mould — not cut out by rule and line" makes him thoroughly non-Gradgrindian. George Eliot rewrites a scene from *Hard Times*. In Dickens' anti-Utilitarian tract, the father-villain personifies a ruthless practicality, while Louisa, his daughter, senses within herself a suppressed capacity for imaginative life and warm physical relationships. Dorothea's uncle objects to all moulds which the mind imposes upon life, including unrealistic romantic frameworks that can be as confining as Utilitarian ones. His warning ought to have deterred Dorothea from a marriage generated by

bovarystic fantasies, one that proves as cold as Louisa's.<sup>9</sup> In *Middlemarch*, the equivalent of fact-accumulation and dry-as-dust statistics is a classicist whose studies of mythologies have no practical bearing on the problems society faces.

Comparison of father-figures and daughter-figures reveals the Victorian in George Eliot disagreeing with the Romantic and the malcontent in Dickens. Dorothea's case seems more realistic to George Eliot than that of a healthy young girl frustrated by parental Benthamism. Dickens regards the preservation of Fancy as a way of checking a world that is becoming statistically minded. George Eliot sees Dorothea's fancy as something that must be integrated with real life and fruitfully utilized. Mr. Brooke's words undermine the Shelleyan pursuit of false universals in *Middlemarch*: Dorothea's for a vague ideal or lofty conception, Casaubon's for the key to all mythologies, perhaps even Lydgate's for the primary tissue. These pursuits are misguided efforts to find in the extremely relative temporal world secular equivalents for the vanishing general truths once inculcated by the major religions.

Since the imagery associated with Dorothea always comes from religion and the Bible, she is attracted to Casaubon, a writer of religious history. Unfortunately, she does not see Casaubon any more clearly than Emma Bovary initially sees Charles. She describes him as a "modern Augustine" and decides that living with him would be "like marrying Pascal." From the moment Dorothea confesses that she would like to have married Milton, one knows she will accept Casaubon; he has bad eyes. "The really delightful marriage," Dorothea reflects, "must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew if you wished it" (p. 8). This is bovarysm at its worst. Dorothea's problems continually invite comparison with Flaubert's heroine.<sup>10</sup> Emma cannot address God in language other than what



she lavishes on her lovers; Dorothea can envision her husband only in terms reserved for God. Dorothea is linked mock-heroically with the Virgin, and the marriage she longs to duplicate, including the Hebrew tutorial, is not unlike the one heralded by the Annunciation.

Regrettably for Dorothea, Casaubon is constantly associated with death.<sup>11</sup> His classicism, like her brand of aspiring romanticism, is left over from another age. Their marriage parodies the symbolic fusion of eras and temperaments Goethe achieved by wedding Faust to Helen. Externally Casaubon classifies scholarly material but internally, cut off from life, he resides in the tomb of his own self-doubt. He begins to rely on Dorothea only when his physical death is imminent. Ironically, Casaubon starts to emerge from his tomb shortly before death. This abortive resurrection unsatisfactorily approximates the god-like capabilities with which Dorothea mistakenly invests him. Casaubon expresses the hope that his key to mythologies, hardly the document required in a time of social change, will stand as a "tomb" to his memory.

The religious imagery that described Dorothea's expectations also serves to detail her disenchantment with Casaubon. When Will Ladislaw's artist-friend asks Casaubon to pose for a painting of the head of Thomas Aquinas, nothing could have pleased Dorothea more, George Eliot notes, "unless it had been a miraculous voice pronouncing Mr. Casaubon the wisest and worthiest among the sons of men." In that case, "her tottering faith would have become firm again" (p. 159). Dorothea hopes for a repetition of the biblical scene in which the heavens open and God pronounces Himself well pleased with His Son. Parodies of biblical scenes in *Middlemarch* do not merely satirize Dorothea's delusions. They firmly separate the real Victorian world, in which one must live and toil, from poetic accounts of past eras, when the interpenetration of temporal and supernatural was evidently still credible.<sup>12</sup> Confronted with a secularized world, George

Eliot expresses her preference for what remains over what has been lost.

Her satirical point is not James Joyce's or Evelyn Waugh's. She does not see the present as a feeble parody of past greatness, a case of Bloom imitating Ulysses. Secular experience demands no mythical method to hold it together. The 1830's, in which *Middlemarch* is set, and the 1870's, when it is being written, were the two decades of the nineteenth century most synonymous with reform. These decades are real and challenging for George Eliot; partings of the heavens and annunciations are not. Unlike Waugh, for whom the profane world has become a parody of its former, more religious self, she parodies the sacred to enhance the secular. Life's unwillingness to duplicate scenes from the New Testament compromises the relevance of that text; the real world is not discredited. Dickens successively commissions Pickwick, Oliver and Nell as Principles of Good, thereby endowing them and their opposition with cosmic alignment. He wishes to determine whether the pseudo-religious qualities they personify have any survival value in an increasingly corrupt secular world. George Eliot conducts a different experiment. She wishes to determine whether Dorothea can convert nebulous romantic aspirations into the practical activities a secular, confining but improvable society demands.

The central event in the widowed Dorothea's re-orientation is her love for Will Ladislaw. Although he commences as a somewhat shiftless Romantic, Will becomes a useful, but minor, advocate of reform. Initially, Will is waiting for some indication of what profession to choose. Genius, Ladislaw says in a prosaic paraphrase of Wordsworth's "wise passiveness," "may confidently await those messages from the universe which summon it to its peculiar work, only placing itself in an attitude of receptivity . . ." (p. 61). The link between Casaubon and Dorothea was founded on a mutual desire for the dead past, but

Dorothea and Will discover in each other a mutual appreciation for living things. Ladislav's summons comes jointly from society and Dorothea; there are no climactic equivalents of the Annunciation for him either.

No longer a case of aspiration without suitable purpose, Dorothea furnishes Ladislav with stability. He awakens in her a practical emotional life. Dorothea moves from transcendental to more secular concerns, from the "vividly imaginative" life of a Sissy Jupe or Emma Bovary to a more commonplace yet exhilarating existence based on untiring individual effort. Will and Dorothea help to unfold each other's personality. Each furnishes the other with character traits necessary for betterment and completion. Dorothea and Will constitute a clear case of the intercourse of character that George Eliot considers essential for the improvement of society. When Dorothea defends Lydgate against the charge that he conspired with Bulstrode in the death of Raffles and furnishes the doctor with enough money to erase the debt that tied him to the banker, she performs a generous action that is frankly monetary and more practical than the good deeds Dickens' ministerial angels perform for their consort-patients. Dorothea is filled with "the idea of some active good within her reach." "There is nothing better I can do in this world," she remarks (p. 559). Her decision, unlike Sydney Carton's "far, far better thing," is not melodramatic, and it is this-world oriented. Lydgate concludes that Dorothea "has a heart large enough for the Virgin Mary" (p. 563). Her association with the Virgin, like her resemblance to Saint Theresa, is taken seriously once she has curtailed, that is, secularized, her grandiose expectations.

Dorothea's new interest in the world around her prompts her to study economics, the dry science she lacked earlier when proposing the construction of tenants' cottages. Interest in this discipline signals her liberation from the impractical. It also takes the story of her development

strikingly in the opposite direction from Emma Bovary's and Tom Gradgrind's, or from J. S. Mill's and Tüfelfs-dröckh's. To a capacity for feeling formerly wasted on airy enthusiasms, Dorothea adds a working knowledge of things. Looking out the window at Lowick, Dorothea notices that

On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving — perhaps the shepherd and his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining. (p. 598)

A broadening of Dorothea's field of vision is apparent. Her eyes (her ability to see) are no longer as bad as Casaubon's. She observes and accepts the romance of real life.

The vital words here are "largeness" and "manifold." Stripped of its metaphysical extension, this world becomes larger, not smaller. Labor and endurance become agreeable values, quite modern ones in fact, but not absolutes or consolations. Dorothea considers herself at one with the world in a sense that is provisionally Wordsworthian but entails a reformer's involvement. Dorothea will not be a "mere spectator" as Wordsworth occasionally appears to be. The "luxurious shelter" she abandons is not merely the tranquil life she has led up to this point; it is also the veil of disengagement an unfounded idealism can place between the self and the remediable ills of life. Dorothea's is admittedly a mundane, low key epiphany, but that is its point.

Dorothea's name means "gift of God." As with Stephen Dedalus, another convert to profane beauty, the clue to vocation is in the name all along. Dorothea has expected revelations when she is one herself. She need not look beyond her own inestimable abilities for proof that this world and human endeavor were made for each other.

This is the truest of the many marriages in the novel, so that Dorothea's suitability for Lydgate is irrelevant. A novel expressing greater confidence in the efficacy of human effort is difficult to imagine. Dorothea discovers that there will be no divine interventions or extra-terrestrial influences more powerful than her own. Although the day of supernatural revelations is over, calm epiphanic discoveries insure that the life process remains benevolent: Dorothea is Will's message from the universe and he is hers.

By mentioning the scene's "palpitating life," Dorothea reveals how much of Ladislav's romantic outlook she has incorporated. The palpitations, however, are "involuntary," not indications that Nature is somehow God's living garment. What happens to the pulsations of a world now seen to be excitingly alive is strictly up to human determination. One of the "manifold wakings" has been Dorothea's. Less climactic than the Ancient Mariner's blessing of the water snakes or Carlyle's progression from indifference to affirmation in *Sartor Resartus*, the passage stands as another Victorian experience of conversion. This conversion, like Dedalus', goes in reverse, from the sacred and transcendental toward the profane and actual. The passage is an amazing blend of modern and Victorian elements. It marks the birth of a social consciousness and hence of a good Victorian. It pinpoints an important stage in the modern triumph of secularity. By adapting Wordsworth to a new set of circumstances,<sup>13</sup> it voices an acceptance that enables the Victorian Sibyl to talk back to the greatest Victorian Sage: Dorothea's yea-saying, unlike Carlyle's, confirms the value of work without positing an invisible spiritual reality which the material phenomena of this world conspire to conceal.

Contrary to the termination of a Dickens novel, where a character like Oliver Twist comes into his inheritance, Dorothea forsakes hers to marry Will. She outgrows the boundaries set for her by the restriction in Casaubon's

codicil. Dorothea forsakes a false heritage, a past as useless as Casaubon's studies. She foregoes outmoded ideals and a guaranteed income to commit herself to the life process here and now. The better it becomes, the better will be the quality of her life. One cannot imagine an Aldous Huxley character similarly consecrating himself to the human fugue or an Anthony Powell character dedicating himself to time's dance. Dorothea comes into her true inheritance: she inherits the earth.<sup>14</sup> As she modifies Wordsworth and rebukes Dickens, George Eliot rewrites the Beatitudes: the committed and the aware are earth's true heirs. Oliver, one recalls, will forfeit his legacy if he is sullied by too much contact with the world. Dorothea willingly bypasses hers to have as much involvement with this world as possible. It is no longer the time of the Apostles, but new, secular apostolates await the worthy.

In *Bleak House*, Esther Summerson is providentially spared marriage to Mr. Jarndyce to wed instead the capable doctor, Allan Woodcourt. When George Eliot reworks this situation, she insists on the January-May marriage, then refuses to allow Lydgate to duplicate Woodcourt's role. She substitutes her realism for Dickens' romance. But the social process in *Middlemarch* remains healthy despite individual disappointments, while the reverse is true in *Bleak House*, despite individual satisfactions. Dickens' romance, George Eliot might argue, is related to his sentimentalism: both violations of artistic decorum stem from a satirical despair with real life. Personal happiness for Esther and Woodcourt is lost amid a welter of squalor and misery. Disenchanted with society and the myth of social progress, Dickens offers the consolation of individual happiness to a chosen few. More confident of the fundamental rightness of things, George Eliot can absorb failure and compromise without despair. Esther and Woodcourt cannot unclog life's "perpetual stoppage," but Will and Dorothea are a step forward for society.

Although union with Rosamond causes him to shrink as a scientist, Lydgate's contact with Dorothea expands and ennobles him. It purges from his character his "spots of commonness" (p. 111). She gives him a glimpse of true nobility, a higher level of existence, and he provides her with another opportunity for practical action. Their contact results in an exchange of personality traits that may prove of longer duration than bridal vows. The inter-course of character which George Eliot celebrates is more important than the Victorian convention that expects a novel's hero and heroine to wed.

Dorothea's two marriages constitute a shift from a mythologist to a reformer. Like many of the marriages in Dickens, hers have a symbolic aspect. The movement from a mythographer husband, preoccupied with worn-out creeds, to one involved in the needs of the present is a progression George Elliot herself made intellectually in her views on religion and morals. She seems to recommend this progression to her century. The new humanism of duty and practical concern offers few transcendent goals but provides greater opportunity for individual development. The "medium" for "ardent deeds" is "for ever gone" (p. 612); but the medium for arduous ones, in literature as well as life, remains. For all its occasional approximations of modernity, therefore, *Middlemarch* remains securely a nineteenth-century novel, an optimum statement of Victorian humanism. Its author has a distinctly Victorian sensibility, a confidence in social relations and the advancement of society. This makes her less anticipatory of the modern outlook than are Dickens and Flaubert.

A passage in George Eliot's rather romantic "Finale" bears out this conclusion. This time it is a very practical romanticism meant to contrast sharply with the tale of Saint Theresa in the "Prelude." George Eliot attempts a significant revision of Gray's "Elegy," which in turn leads to another assault on Dickens. The narrator asserts that

“the growing good of the world” — and for George Eliot it is demonstrably growing — “is partly dependent on un-historic acts.” If things are “not so ill as they might have been,” George Eliot concludes, it is “half owing to the number who have lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.” Reformers of Will’s and Dorothea’s caliber may not be in the same class with Mill, Bentham, Carlyle and Ruskin, but they are equally important. They are never mute and inglorious because the life process benefits from their exertions. George Eliot alters Dickens’ romantic realism. To his fascination with the mysteries inherent in familiar things, she annexes a mandatory code of duty. Wordsworth maintained that the finest portion of a man’s life consists of his unremembered acts of kindness and love. George Eliot’s reference to “unhistoric acts” indicates that she believes him. She rejects the Carlylean adage that history is exclusively a record of the deeds of great men and enlists Wordsworth for the cause of social activism. Pushing Gray and Carlyle aside, she adapts the Romantic Laureate to the needs of the new humanism.

Dickens’ devotion to Wordsworth also had its reformist thrust. The message of *Bleak House* and *Lyrical Ballads*, especially “We Are Seven,” is basically the same: life, Dickens argues, is a matter of perception; most separations, seen correctly, are an illusion, a question of correcting one’s point of view. But Dickens’ version of Wordsworth, his favorite nineteenth-century poet, is sour and embittered by the 1850s, the irony hard and caustic. Dickens’ tone invites comparison with Aldous Huxley’s when Beatrice and Burlap take a bath together at the end of *Point Counter Point* and the author observes: “Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.” It requires a minor plague from Tom-All-Alone’s to prove Wordsworth right in *Bleak House*. Twenty years after Dickens’ masterpiece, George Eliot is still using Wordsworth with little hint of disillusionment or reservation. To her he still seems easy



to apply. She rescues him from Dickens' ironic, almost parodic usage. Dickens' voice, which George Eliot found too vivid and unrealistic, has its cynical and disenchanting moments when it speaks to moderns more articulately than hers. *Bleak House* presents life as an interminable jail sentence or a law case that never ends. The only alternative to a society as stagnant as the contents of a junk shop is obliquely presented through the misfortune that befalls Krook: it is to explode institutions like Chancery by spontaneous combustion, which is Dickens' concealed metaphor for revolution, the dedicated reformer's last resort. No matter how reluctantly Middlemarch changes, spontaneous combustion, which George Eliot, as did her husband, would find scientifically ridiculous, never becomes part of Will's and Dorothea's program for reform.

Despite some hedging ("not so ill," "half owing," "partly dependent"), the "hidden life" Dorothea and Will elect is a viable alternative to Arnold's discontent with a buried life and Dorothea's initially sheltered one. George Eliot's characters seldom suffer from "nameless feelings" as do Arnold and, for that matter, Flaubert's Emma. Burial is a definite motif in *Middlemarch*, but ways of avoiding it prematurely or being reconciled to it at last seem numerous. One need not recite Gray's lament in George Eliot's graveyard. When Dorothea announces her intention to marry Casaubon, Ladislaw warns that she will "be shut up in that stone prison at Lowick" and "buried alive" (p. 163), perhaps like Dickens' Doctor Manette. His prophecy proves correct, yet Dorothea experiences resurrection and is recalled to a useful life. Poor Casaubon is entombed once and for all. Emma's death, like her life, is tragedy and farce simultaneously. Those who are converted to the reform cause, it appears, act like the saved and rise from the dead. Dorothea and Will do not walk with Arnold between two worlds, "one dead, the other powerless to be born." They are part of a new

dispensation. Together they are responsible for keeping the world's heart beating.

When Nell dies in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Dickens is perplexed by the problem death poses in a secularized world deprived of its confidence in the life to come. He searches for some way to be secularly satisfied and religiously consoled. By writing Nell's death as a kind of Nativity,<sup>15</sup> he implies that death may be a means of re-birth into a better world but is spared the necessity of saying so. The reverse of George Eliot, Dickens tries to Christianize secularity. He sentimentally employs a religious aura to make the secular world bearable, to attribute to it a metaphysical significance it can no longer explicitly claim. For this deceptively Christian but ultimately futile tactic, Evelyn Waugh never forgave him: Dickens becomes for Waugh the final stage in the failure of organized religion to hold the line against secular advance. As does Joyce in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, George Eliot often uses a Christian aura similar to what Dickens employs, but she distinctly secularizes Christianity. Dorothea will be a secular saint of the new humanism just as Dedalus becomes a priest of the imagination. George Eliot desires to make the secular world preferable, not to soften the sense of loss, as in Dickens, but to deny any loss at all. She turns her readers from the absolute toward a bright new world of unlimited development through personal effort. Resurrection is still possible in George Eliot, if taken to mean the re-orientation of one's life from outmoded to more practical concerns. Annunciations still call the receptive to worldly vocations. Although Dorothea is initially satirized for desiring an Annunciation, she has its secular equivalent at the window at Lowick when life speaks to her and enlists her aid. Dickens sends Amy and Arthur Clennam down into the streets of London with little hope that they can be leaven enough to influence the social uproar. George Eliot dispatches Will and Dorothea from

Middlemarch confident that reformation, for her another acceptably secular revision of what was formerly a religious phenomenon, will go forward.

Unhappy with the life process, the satirist in Dickens paves the way for the sentimentalist. Dickens tries to derive a purely secular satisfaction from the earthly good he imagines as a consequence of Nell's death. The famous passage spoken by the school-master is an attempt to insure some kind of immortality first for the little scholar and subsequently, when rephrased by Dickens, for Little Nell:

There is nothing, . . . no, nothing innocent or good, that dies, and is forgotten. Let us hold to that faith, or none. An infant, a prattling child, dying in its cradle, will live again in the better thoughts of those who loved it; and play its part, through them, in the redeeming actions of the world, though its body be burnt to ashes or drowned in the deepest sea. There is not an angel added to the Host of Heaven but does its blessed work on earth in those that loved it here. Forgotten! oh, if the good deeds of human creatures could be traced to their source, how beautifully would even death appear; for how much charity, mercy, and purified affection, would be seen to have their growth in dusty graves!<sup>16</sup>

The "dusty graves" may have been in George Eliot's mind when she described the final resting places of Will and Dorothea. The Ladislaws' tombs, though neglected, are still sacred; they are shrines connected with the world's improved condition. Similarly, the graves of the scholar and Nell would be in full bloom if, like the children in "We Are Seven," Dickens' readers could see invisible connections, such as the link between the entombed and the good works of the living. Both novelists are concerned with "redeeming actions" and the possibility of exerting influence from beyond the grave in a secular age.

In a world without confidence in a heaven and hell to serve as reward and punishment, it is difficult to establish the worth of human acts. George Eliot's consolation in the "Finale" is realistic, secular, even somewhat Utilitarian. Her position satirically counters Dickens'. The world will not be saved by children or songs of innocence about them. George Eliot rejects the notion of idle inno-

cence exercising any influence for good. She ridicules Dickens' treatment of Nell as an insult to the obvious. One does good before one's death, not after. Nell goes to her grave and then good deeds transpire, a clear instance for George Eliot of *hysteron proteron*. Will and Dorothea do good and then take an earned rest. Dorothea is reborn while at the window at Lowick, but once she and Will die they are very dead indeed. However, George Eliot hastens to add, the good they do is not interred with their bones. Will and Dorothea are immortal in that the benefits they conferred upon society survive long after they themselves are forgotten. This, George Eliot decides, is immortality enough.

The society George Eliot anticipates will be a better place for the persons in it even though they have no personal recollections of the Ladislaws. Saintly though they are, George Eliot stubbornly refuses them the personal immortality that canonization in the minds of others would bring. She must have secular saints, no matter how obscure, to confirm her argument that Victorian humanism offers as many job opportunities as did the old orthodoxies. The influence Will and Dorothea exert, however, must be impersonal or they become cult figures and compromise her trust in the cumulative effect of unhistoric acts. Dickens needs secular saints as compensatory substitutes for what has been lost: they help him to make the profane world more sacred.

When Dickens makes the secular more Christian and George Eliot secularizes Christianity, they come at times surprisingly close to doing the same thing, to making life better than it is, something the modern satirical novelist cannot tolerate. Huxley and Waugh rule out intercession by Christ-like children.<sup>17</sup> The parade of heartless *femmes fatales* in their novels debunks intervention by adult angelic women, whether it be Dickens' Agnes, George Eliot's Dorothea or Bloomsbury's pseudo-mystical pantheon of Mrs. Ramsay, Mrs. Wilcox and Mrs. Moore. For

the modern satirical novelist, life cannot be secularized or facilely Christianized to any advantage. A substitute Christ-child, like Nell, or a secular mediatrix, like Dorothea, is out of the question. Neither can set the life process to rights. When Waugh offers readers a saint, he is Guy Crouchback's father, a pious Catholic. Huxley's many saints — Propter, Rontini, Miller, Dr. MacPhail — are steeped in the traditional wisdom of the East. Saints in Huxley and Waugh may seem anachronistic, but they are definitely not secular facsimiles, contrived versions of the real thing. Generally they have few illusions about the value of this world. No matter how socially active they choose to be, detachment is their common assumption.

Given the confining nature of this world, it is no disgrace for Dorothea or George Eliot to be interested in people who have "slipped below their own intention" (p. 363). Such slippage may be inevitable. But George Eliot believes it is bearable. Mr. Farebrother earns approval with his declaration, made appropriately to Lydgate: "I used often to wish I had been something else than a clergyman, but perhaps it will be better to try and make as good a clergyman out of myself as I can" (p. 375). This is quite different from Flaubert's sad but cynical realization that even sorry women-chasers dream of Oriental queens and that "in a corner of every notary's heart lie the moldy remains of a poet."<sup>18</sup> If Dickens was one of the many men made famous by a gift for cheap invention, Flaubert must be one of the "gentlemen" who George Eliot claims "have made an amazing figure in literature by general discontent with the universe as a trap of dullness into which their great souls have fallen by mistake" (p. 473). General discontent with the universe underlies much of the satire in the modern satirical novel. George Eliot challenges the world views of Dickens and Flaubert, two of its principal nineteenth-century progenitors. But hers is mainly a holding action because the future belongs to their progeny.

Flaubert's novel and George Eliot's have similar subtitles: "Patterns of Provincial Life" and "A Study of Provincial Life." Yet Dorothea and Will are to be in the vanguard of the reform movement, not trapped in some backwater where the deficiencies of one's first husband cannot be remedied by a succession of inadequate lovers. "Patterns" suggests something binding and inescapable, as happens when Emma discovers that adultery can be as banal as marriage, but "Study" is more open-minded. Dorothea finds outlets for her yearnings, but Emma cannot because Flaubert suspects none exist. Dorothea learns to accommodate ideas to realities, mind to matter. Flaubert's contention is that accommodation is impossible because neither half of the counterpoint between fancy and fact is itself desirable. It is not simply that Emma is less intelligent than George Eliot's heroine. She has a mind less noble but also inhabits a less workable world. There are touches of bovarysm in Dorothea, Will, Lydgate and Rosamond, but the first pair and to a lesser extent even the second can outgrow them. Dorothea is a potential Emma Bovary who shapes up, a female Quixote who reclaims her sanity as she matures. As does Flaubert, George Eliot senses that provinciality may be a metaphor for life. This is as close as she comes to putting forth a satirical proposition. Provinciality is perhaps the best metaphor for life because the human situation is never as exciting or nearly as perfect as the mind's ideals. Emma struggles in vain to experience vision, ecstasy and love, all of which she expects to be shattering and violent. Dorothea achieves a moment of awareness that is both visionary and calmly photographic. Emma wants to be flooded with love, a fanatic's desire; but Dorothea learns quietly to overflow with it, a mystic's achievement.

Flaubert accentuates the drama of incommunicability — Emma cannot express her love convincingly to Rodolphe, nor Charles his to Emma. Characters in George Eliot, unlike many in Dickens, converse more successfully. In

*Adam Bede* the eponymous hero states George Eliot's belief in "sincere converse,"<sup>19</sup> a necessary concomitant for the unfolding of character and the beneficial exchange of personality traits. Since mind can adjust to matter, speech in George Eliot is never "like a cracked kettle on which we tap crude rhythms for bears to dance to, while we long to make music that will melt the stars."<sup>20</sup> To champion George Eliot along with Flaubert as a pioneer of the modern novel is a mistake.<sup>21</sup> From the French novelist comes the sense of life as tragic-farce, a hybrid mode inherited by Huxley, Waugh and their followers among the moderns. The essence of this mode is a contrapuntal mixture of moods: life would be more tragic if only it were not simultaneously comic and ridiculous. Dorothea in her Blessed Virgin outfit and Lydgate as a student of gout — both have their brush with this important modern mode, but George Eliot's attitude toward her characters and the life process is never cynically disrespectful, sarcastic or contemptuous. Lydgate's exile to a continental watering place is not as painful or as ludicrous as Tony Last's entrapment in the Brazilian jungle, where he will end his days reading Dickens to a madman.

George Eliot is conventionally Victorian, closer to Scott than to Flaubert, in her evident belief that patterns of illusion can be outgrown, for there is an acceptable reality to put in their place. Mary Garth echoes Flaubert when she observes that "people were so ridiculous with their illusions" (p. 232), but George Eliot allows some of her people to transcend them. For Flaubert there is no "delicate poise of transition" between "happy or unhappy consciousness." Unhappiness for Emma is never in doubt; it is a foregone conclusion, part of being human. Flaubert anticipates Huxley's hatred for the human condition, in which, as the French novelist sees it, the drabness of reality spurs one on to the disastrous delusions of fantasy. Flaubert forces one to choose between inner illusion (romanticism) or outer desolation (reality). This proves

to be an unresolvable counterpoint, a stalemate as vicious as the tension between passion and reason in Huxley. Reality in *Madame Bovary* repeatedly undercuts romance, while the first, even after innumerable defeats, continues to reveal the dullness of the second.

When Emma gazes from her window in Yonville the way Dorothea looks out from Lowick, she can only see a personification of Flaubert's basic counterpoint: a "crowd of yokels" gathered for market day and, in their midst, a "dressy" gentleman in a green velvet coat and yellow gloves. The yokels stand for the mediocrity of daily life and Rodolphe, soon to be her lover, for the meretricious attractions of fantasy and romance.<sup>22</sup> Far from being a secular saint, Emma is a tragicomic martyr to a human situation Flaubert does not consider changeable. After her death, only the impressionable adolescent, Justin, visits her grave. Lestiboudois, sexton and grave-digger, mistakes the grief-stricken youth for a potato thief. Emma lives on in Charles' memories and dreams but as an adverse influence. As the deluded Charles adopts her tastes and ideas, Flaubert decides that "she was corrupting him from beyond the grave" with her fancy.<sup>23</sup>

According to George Eliot, the counterpoint between the intensity of one's internal life and the apparent banality of the quotidian is an overplayed dilemma. Seated at her window, Dorothea satisfactorily resolves it. The disparity between the richness of one's imagination and the daily tasks real life imposes need not distress Dorothea as naggingly as it pestered Keats and Tennyson and thoroughly disillusioned Flaubert. George Eliot envisions no insurmountable difficulty in finding engaging activities to perform in and for society. She rewrites Flaubert. The counterpoint between inner and outer, she reveals, has a variant form, one that is peculiarly Victorian rather than Romantic: it is harder, she finds, to regulate one's personal life, to arrange domestic affairs, so that one's private life does not impede or hypocritically contradict one's



public role. In place of Flaubert's counterpoint of inner fantasy versus outer reality, George Eliot installs and solves a tension between public and private.

Dorothea begins with a problem similar to that of Keats and Tennyson but ends by making a marriage that seems as workable as George Eliot's relationship with Lewes. Lydgate's case, by contrast, is closer to Dickens' with Kate Hogarth or Copperfield's with Dora Spenslow. The doctor's problems with Rosamond make his domestic situation a refutation of his professional stance. The most difficult struggle, George Eliot suggests, is not to suit aspirations to reality but to establish a private life that will support one's public endeavor. This is no vague ideal but an essential for any secular, humanistic age. Fortunately, Dorothea's second marriage, unlike practically every union in the modern satirical novels of Huxley and Waugh, solves two problems simultaneously: union with Will satisfies and secularizes (that is, directs toward this world) her aspirant nature; it also brings her the invaluable unity of private life and public effort. This makes possible a unification of her sensibility — thought with deed, feeling with ideas. Even David's second marriage to the angelic Agnes is not this helpful. Emma's to Charles is paradigmatically a counterpoint of fancy to dull fact, just as Philip Quarles' to Elinor personifies the opposition between intellect and emotion and Pennyfeather's to Margot Beste-Chetwynde would have been a collision of Apollonian and Dionysian (static and dynamic).

If Dorothea is George Eliot's model for success, Lydgate is her story of how not to do it.<sup>24</sup> Lydgate consistently fails to apply his professional ideals to everyday life; he cannot bring his outer and inner worlds together. Lydgate never becomes another Wakley. He never matures as a medical reformer because his public and private lives are constantly at odds. As George Eliot phrases it, "that distinction of mind which belonged to his intellectual ardour, did not penetrate his feeling and

judgment about furniture and women." For all his practical abilities, he proves less capable than Dorothea of connecting events that have "eternal consequences" with "guimp" and "drapery."

Dorothea's love for Will and her social idealism can be conveyed by the same imagery: she is always saint and apostle, but she learns effectively to secularize these roles. Lydgate has "two selves within him" (p. 113). The fatal split in Lydgate between public life and private concerns is adumbrated by the tension between images of him as a lover and images of him as a potential Columbus. Lydgate's relation to medical science is that of a lover to his lady. The inadvisability of marriage to Rosamond becomes more striking because Lydgate is already figuratively married to his profession. Once involved with Rosamond, however, his private life as a lover interferes with his public endeavors to become the Columbus of modern pathology. Lydgate and Dorothea marry twice. Both of her unions are an expression of her aspirant nature, while his first marriage, the figurative wedding to science, is superior to his second and undermined by it. Before Rosamond, there is no opposition between his role as lover and his potential as a discoverer. Dorothea successfully transforms the energies behind her private fantasies to the public arena she belatedly discovers. Lydgate cannot bring to his private life the acumen and intensity he values as a scientist.

Only in his profession is Lydgate able to perform with the arduous invention he praises. This is a variant form of Dorothea's ability at first to exercise her strongest feelings only in bovarystic fantasies. As debt encircles Lydgate, the doctor compares himself to Vesalius, who began a new era in anatomy. Vesalius, Lydgate reflects, "got shipwrecked just as he was coming from Jerusalem to take a great chair at Padua." Lydgate and Rosamond, after they have ceased to love one another, are "both adrift on one piece of wreck." In Lydgate's desire to

appear a tragic Vesalius one detects an admixture of the mock-heroic initially employed for Dorothea's vision of herself as another Virgin Mary. Lydgate and Dorothea exchange roles: at the end it is he, not she, whose existence seems quixotic. After learning that Madame Laure, his first love, really meant to kill her husband, Lydgate, one recalls, returned to his studies "believing that illusions were at an end for him" (p. 114). It is a mistake that he, like Emma Bovary, makes several times.<sup>25</sup>

Yet Lydgate's story is not quite the tragedy of a man made for better things. George Eliot colors his pretensions and softens his defeat with a comic irony subtler than anything expended on Dorothea. Lydgate is made better in the course of his misfortunes. His fate is further alleviated by the opportunity his distress provides for Dorothea's development. Lydgate goes backwards: he begins as a reformer and ends as a gentleman doctor, more decorative than useful; he is not to be the new type of doctor in Victorian fiction — one concerned with public health — but a practitioner among the rich and an expert on gout, an ailment monopolized by the wealthy. His, too, is a conversion in reverse, but not the secular miracle it was for Dorothea. Lydgate and Dorothea both expand by shrinking, but the curtailing of Dorothea's fantasies paradoxically enlarges her world. The causes of Lydgate's decline are as traceable beneath the author's lens as the reasons for Dorothea's rise. They do not constitute sufficient cause for an adverse criticism of life.

Despite his admiration for literature written by the arduously inventive, Lydgate privately succumbs to actresses, first to Madame Laure and then to an even shallower Rosamond, the perpetual thespian of private life. The collisions that Maggie Tulliver traces to a "contrast between the outward and inward,"<sup>26</sup> the fundamental catastrophe in Flaubert, are never in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* the inevitable and mutually destructive cancellations the French satirist painfully relishes.

Although Lydgate fails, Dorothea triumphs. George Eliot often shares in modified form Flaubert's conception of the human predicament, but her modernity ends there because, like Dorothea, she believes that the arduous individual can still contrive to hold internal and external, public and private, together.

*Middlemarch* reveals an essentially Victorian optimism about human relations. For George Eliot society, even provincial society, still works as structure, process and co-operative effort. Life to her still makes good secular and scientific sense, which is rarely the case in *Bleak House* or *Madame Bovary*. In Dickens' masterpiece, George Eliot's "web" of social interrelationships is a labyrinth of shunned responsibilities. In Flaubert's, the choice lies between Emma's romantic aspirations, foolish and non-realizable, and provincial reality, which is drab and unimprovable. Flaubert offers no real choice because he makes *realism* and *romanticism* nihilistically cancel out. Had *Madame Bovary* and *Bleak House* followed *Middlemarch*, they could be read as superb parodies of George Eliot's world view. Generally, it is the modern satirical novelist who parodies his overly optimistic contemporaries. At it happens, George Eliot's novel reads like a corrective to theirs, an effort to forestall their apprehensions. She tries to satirize and discredit less sanguine outlooks destined to win out in the modern satirical novels of the present century. George Eliot shares the modern satirical novelist's fondness for parody, but it is an unusual instance of parody being used not against cockeyed optimists, who disguise the real nature of things, but against the overly critical and cynically irreverent. By redoing situations from Dickens and Flaubert, George Eliot attacks novelists who imply that life itself is often a parody of what sensitive and rational people expect.

Modern in many ways for her times, George Eliot can also be seen as a holdout against modernity, one of the

last great champions of viable society and perhaps the most confident advocate of secularization her century produced. After her, only Bloomsbury has been able even to approximate her faith in social intercourse and personal relations. In *Middlemarch* one finds no underlying sense of futility, no despair with the historical process. Using the biologist's lens, George Eliot reveals the fundamental soundness of life. If religion has failed to submit an enduring explanation, the secular, philosophical novelist, a sociologist painstakingly imitating the scientific researcher, can still account for the human condition effectively. George Eliot offers herself and her art as living proof.

The argument that George Eliot's characters possess an evolutionary force that urges them to realize their potentialities is not invalid,<sup>27</sup> but this force is not entirely self-generating, nor is it purely internal. It is also at large in society. Hence the importance of adapting oneself to the community. It is not simply a case of pruning aspirations to accommodate local values. Dorothea and Will move away from *Middlemarch*, as do Lydgate and Rosamond. However, the intercourse of character George Eliot's lens has searched out is not confined to the provinces, nor are the lessons Dorothea and Lydgate learn there. On the contrary, the fusion of marriage and vocation that Will and Dorothea exemplify, the union of private lives with public concerns, may prove the couple's best contribution to the reform movement they will join. Unlike Emma's movements,<sup>28</sup> none of which improves her condition, the departure of Dorothea and Will starts them "on the way to the new Jerusalem," the earthly utopia Dorothea thought she could enter by marrying Casaubon. George Eliot's confidence in social relations distinguishes her work from modern novels. The traits needed for a character's self-realization in *Middlemarch* are evolved in the sense that they are often borrowed from another character or activated with another's help. George Eliot's

characters initially have chapters to themselves. Their stories start separately, but their fates gradually become interrelated as they voluntarily play parts in each other's lives.

Preserved in *Middlemarch* and magnificent to watch is George Eliot's belief in the worth and beauty of social intercourse, a process as important to her for human development as sexual fulfillment becomes in the novels of D. H. Lawrence. There can be no substitute in *Middlemarch* for arduous invention — the intercourse of character upon which the furtherance of society depends. Dickens, George Eliot felt, was no realist. By her implied definition, no imaginative satirist can be. Furthermore, Dickens was insensitive to the beauty of the life process, so George Eliot builds into *Middlemarch* many of the criticisms of Dickens Lewes was simultaneously voicing in the *Fortnightly Review*. In supporting the cause of a scientific and sociological realism, Lewes and George Eliot do not repudiate imagination entirely, but they do strap down its wings. It is difficult to have flights of fancy while focusing a microscope. George Eliot rules out the kind of satirical discontent that complains about the very nature of things. So enormous an indictment, she feels, cannot have a realistic basis. Dickens' anti-evolutionary satire, Flaubert's sense of the world as a boring trap, any novel that is pervasively satirical — these are aberrations that George Eliot's assumptions forbid her to entertain. She brands them unrealistic. In correcting Dickens and Flaubert, George Eliot also does her best to prevent Kafka and Beckett.

When George Eliot's researcher's eye makes provincial Middlemarch yield up its secrets, including reasons for Dorothea's success and Lydgate's failure, a life process is unveiled whereby characters correct, improve and complete one another. This process is society's primary tissue. Life may not offer a surplus of opportunities for Lydgate to become another Columbus or Dorothea to emulate Saint

Theresa, but it furnishes protagonists with the degree of clash and convergence needed to redeem their characters. Protagonists in *Middlemarch* remedy each other's deficiencies by putting finishing touches to one another's personalities. This process of arduous invention few novelists since George Eliot have been able either to equal or credit.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Gordon Haight (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Roverside Editions, 1956), p. 122. Subsequent references to this volume are noted, when advisable, in the text by page numbers in parentheses.
- <sup>2</sup>See Jerome Meckier, "The Case for the Modern Satirical Novel: Huxley, Waugh and Powell," *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature*, 14 (Fall, 1974), 21-42.
- <sup>3</sup>Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, trans. by Francis Steegmuller (New York: The Modern Library, 1957), p. 322.
- <sup>4</sup>My position runs contrary to Henry Auster's in "George Eliot and the Modern Temper." See Jerome H. Buckley, ed., *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 75-101.
- <sup>5</sup>In *Point Counter Point*, Rampion's satirical sketch comparing Wells' outline of history with his (and Huxley's) own could as easily be a comparison of Dickens' with George Eliot's. See Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter Point* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1928), p. 291.
- <sup>6</sup>Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Duane DeVries (New York: Crowell Critical Library, 19971), p. 157.
- <sup>7</sup>See William F. Axton, "Religious and Scientific Imagery in *Bleak House*," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 22 (March, 1968), 357. For a full discussion of George Eliot's imagery see Barbara Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 218-226.
- <sup>8</sup>Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, eds. George Ford and Sylvere Monod (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 127.
- <sup>9</sup>The name of Casaubon's estate, Lowick, is a tag name as blatant as Bounderby. Doubtless, it describes Casaubon's capacity for physical ardor.
- <sup>10</sup>Dorothea's inability to see Casaubon's unattractiveness recalls Emma's ridiculous enchantment with the old Duc de Laverdière, a deaf, pendulous-lipped, dissipated profligate who may have been Marie-Antonette's lover between Monsieur de Coigny and Monsieur de Lauzun. To Emma he seems "extraordinary and august": "He had lived at court! He had slept with a queen!" See Flaubert, pp. 54-55.
- <sup>11</sup>Casaubon admits that he lives "too much with the dead" and is "buried" in his books.
- <sup>12</sup>While living a quiet provincial life, George Eliot researched the origins of Christianity and concluded that miraculous inter-

- ventions were not to be expected in the course of nature. See Asa Briggs, "Religion and Science" in Richard A. Levine, ed., *Backgrounds to Victorian Literature* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 89-90.
- <sup>13</sup>Throughout *Middlemarch* George Eliot revises Wordsworth, but more is at stake than what Michael Squires calls a post-Wordsworthian pastoralism in which realism is brought to bear upon rural life. This is the argument of *The Pastoral Novel: Studies in George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and D. H. Lawrence* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974).
- <sup>14</sup>The inheritance theme also involves Will. He and Dorothea are more fortunate than Fred Vincy, would-be heir of Stone Court. Will may be said to shrink from aspiring Romantic to practical political journalist, but for him, "to have within him such a feeling as he had towards Dorothea, was like the inheritance of a fortune."
- <sup>15</sup>Malcolm Andrews offers this accurate observation in the introduction to his edition of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 29. Nell perishes in a little country town after a hard journey. It is mid-winter. Their belated arrival identifies Kit, Mr. Garland and the single gentleman as Dickens' secular Magi, guided to Nell by "one single solitary light" tha substitutes for the biblical star.
- <sup>16</sup>Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop* (New York: Dolphin Books, 1961), p. 378. The passage is rephrased by Dickens after Nell's death, p. 504.
- <sup>17</sup>See the gruesome deaths of Little Phil in Huxley's *Point Counter Point* and young John in Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*.
- <sup>18</sup>Flaubert, p. 329.
- <sup>19</sup>George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (New York: Signet, 1961), p. 18.
- <sup>20</sup>Flaubert, p. 216. Even in translation, the satirist's felicitous statement of the predicament works against his contention.
- <sup>21</sup>The most recent instance is Barbara Smalley, *George Eliot and Flaubert: Pioneers of the Modern Novel* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 19976).
- <sup>22</sup>Flaubert, p. 143.
- <sup>23</sup>Flaubert, p. 388.
- <sup>24</sup>Clearly, George Eliot considers the stories of Dorothea and Lydgate variations on a theme. Joan Bennett discusses the decision to combine "Miss Brooke" with the Lydgate material in *George Eliot: Her Mind and Her Art* (Cambridge: University Press, 1962), pp. 160, 163. Gordon S. Haight also re-creates the genesis of the novel in *George Eliot: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 432. The fullest account, including a discussion of the "Finale," can be found in Jerome Beaty's *Middlemarch from Notebook to Novel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960).
- <sup>25</sup>"By the time Charles first appeared at Les Bertaux," Emma "thought that she was cured of illusions — that she had nothing more to learn . . ." Or again after her involvement



with Rodolphe: "There were no illusions left now!" See Flaubert, pp. 44, 194.

<sup>26</sup>George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (New York: The Pocket Library, 1956), p. 251.

<sup>27</sup>This is the major thesis in Bernard Paris, *Experiments in Life: George Eliot's Quest for Values* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965).

<sup>28</sup>Emma moves from Tostes to Yonville to excursions to Rouen but one senses no broadening of horizons or opportunity. Dorothea initially has Emma's tendency to equate happiness with a particular person or locale.