

«Lizentiatsarbeit»  
University of Basle  
English Seminar  
Prof. Dr. B. Engler (Referent)  
Prof. Dr. W. Brönnimann (Korreferent)  
August 11, 1999

“... to be Shapen after the Average and Fit to be  
Packed by the Gross”

Tertius Lydgate and Will Ladislaw as the  
Outsiders in George Eliot's Middlemarch

---

1. Introduction	1
2. Middlemarch as George Eliot’s Sociological Laboratory	4
2.1 “This Petty Medium” and “This Particular Web”	8
3. “As if they Were so Many Animated Tax-Pennies...”	10
4. An Analysis of the Characters Tertius Lydgate and Will Ladislaw in their Role as the Outsiders in Middlemarch	13
4.1 Their Interaction with the Medium of Middlemarch	13
4.2 Choice and Circumstance in Will Ladislaw and Tertius Lydgate	15
4.3 Tertius Lydgate: The Medical Outsider in Middlemarch	16
4.3.1 Lydgate’s Choice of Rosamond	18
4.3.2 Lydgate’s Alliance with Bulstrode	21
4.3.3 “Grounded by Middlemarch” and Butchered in Slaughter Lane	23
4.3.4 Whose “Spots of Commonness”?	25
4.4 Will Ladislaw: The Socio-Political Outsider in Middlemarch	30
4.4.1 Will Ladislaw’s Career as “an Ardent Public Man”	31
4.4.1.1 “Language is a finer medium”	36
4.5 Unity versus Fragmentariness	38

---

5. “Who can Quit Young Lives after Being Long in Company with them ...”	41
5.1 The Outsiders’ Lot in the Finale	43
5.1.1 Tertius Lydgate	43
5.1.2 Will Ladislaw	44
6. Conclusion	46
6.1 Outlook	46
Bibliography	48
Primary Sources	48
Secondary Sources	49

# 1. Introduction

My concern in this thesis is with characters. More precisely it is with the two outsiders, Tertius Lydgate and Will Ladislaw, in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* that I will deal with in my paper. This of course begs the question as to the reasons for my indulgence in what has often been criticised as "a regression to discredited and unscientific nineteenth-century practice" (Adam (1975: x–xi)).

For George Eliot the increase of supportive feelings towards one's fellow human beings was undoubtedly one of the main aims of her novel writing as well as constituting an essential principle of her view of human evolution. This outlook she shared with Ludwig Feuerbach (1957: 82–83) who wrote in the *Essence of Christianity*, a seminal work by this "higher critic" which George Eliot had translated from German in 1854.

My fellow-man is the bond between me and the world. I am, and I feel myself, dependent on the world, because I first feel myself dependent on other men. If I did not need man, I should not need the world. I reconcile myself with the world only through my fellow-man. Without other men, the world would be for me not only dead and empty, but meaningless. Only through his fellow does man become clear to himself and self-conscious; but only when I am clear to myself does the world become clear to me. A man existing absolutely alone would lose himself without any sense of his individuality in the ocean of Nature; he would neither comprehend himself as man nor Nature as Nature. The first object of man is man.

... The ego, then, attains to consciousness of the world through consciousness of the thou. Thus man is the God of man. That he is, he has to thank Nature; that he is man, he has to thank man; spiritually as well as physically he can achieve nothing without his fellow-man. Four hands can do more than two, but also four eyes can see more than two. And this combined power is distinguished not only in quantity but also in quality from that which is solitary. In isolation human power is limited, in combination it is infinite.

... Only where man has contact and friction with his fellow-man are wit and sagacity kindled; hence there is more wit in the town than in the country, more in great towns than in small ones. Only where man suns and warms himself in the proximity of man arise feeling and imagination.

One means of showing such growth of sympathies was in her detailed portrayal of the feelings of her fictional characters. In the course of her progress as a novelist, George Eliot gradually shifted her focus from "simple" commonplace characters such as Silas Marner to rather more complex and sophisticated figures such as Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda; Tertius Lydgate and Will Ladislaw.

There are "two antipodal types of characters" in *Middlemarch*. There

are those able and willing to realize, attaining vision and a grasp of wider reality, and those who are unwilling or unable to gain insight into the workings and demands of society, consequently punished by deterministic sequences or obscurity.

Hesse (1996: 406)

Will Ladislaw and Tertius Lydgate are representatives of the antipodes of this typology and this fact alone can justify a close analytical involvement with them.

Any typology, however revealing and useful, by being a simplification of a complex reality, betrays certain shortcomings and this fact also applies to the one just mentioned. George Eliot's portrayal of these two outsiders in *Middlemarch* is no simple illustration of successful adaptation of the individual<sup>1</sup> to circumstances and to his social medium in the light of experience (Will Ladislaw) on the one and moral failure due to certain flaws in character revealed under the influence of strong social pressure (Tertius Lydgate) on the other hand. I would rather argue that George Eliot's portrayal of characters in *Middlemarch* in general is—as W. J. Harvey (1967a: 27) in his essay on the intellectual background of *Middlemarch* put it—“much more tolerant of muddle, contradiction and paradox”. With George Eliot one should never expect characters to be dull embodiments of certain doctrines. Just as her intellectual outlook cannot be reduced to one particular strand or another, but should rather be described as “a nexus of ideas”, it is precisely this “muddle” or “tangle” that lends her fictional characters realistic depth.

The main gist of my argument is to show that the adaptations of the two outsiders Tertius Lydgate and Will Ladislaw to their environments are never complete, perfect or permanent. This is first of all due to apparent inconsistencies in George Eliot's representation of the development of these two characters. The wider and more interesting implication of this observation is, however, that for the delineation of these two characters under consideration George Eliot—rather than strictly following Comtean doctrine and thereby reducing *Middlemarch* to an illustration of his view of social change—followed a Darwinian “master” model<sup>2</sup> according to which everything is conditional and variation in the individual is the key to human development.

Imperfection is a condition of time. ... Perpetual change is the universal law of creation. ...  
Darwinian interpretation is historical. We must learn, Darwin says, “to regard every production of nature as one which has had a history”.  
Levine (1998: 112)

Moreover I wish to show that Will Ladislaw's—in stark contrast to Tertius Lydgate's—development is an illustration of the contention that through changes in the individual the negative aspects of “Gesellschaft”<sup>3</sup> can be alleviated and that in spite of the tendency of the social organism to become increasingly complex, there is an affirmative sense of social renewal at the end of the novel.

Such an “idea of an organic Gesellschaft that could accommodate the most positive values of Gemeinschaft” (Graver (1984: 16)) can never flourish in a community such as *Middlemarch*, how-

---

<sup>1</sup> Mason (1971a: 169) draws attention to the historical importance of the process of “adaptation in the organism” by calling it one of the greatest nineteenth-century scientific discoveries.

<sup>2</sup> cf. also chapter 4: *Darwin's Revolution: From Natural Theology to Natural Selection* in George Levine's (1998: 84–118) outstanding book *Darwin and the Novelists. Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction*.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Tönnies (1994).

---

ever, where the sheer inflexibility of customs by which this community defines itself renders the intrusion of external influences and ideas deeply suspect.

In the Darwinian battle for survival “success belongs to those organisms with the highest powers of adaptation” (Shuttleworth (1984: 150)). That opportunism plays a predominant role in this process of selection, is a fact that is often overlooked. Although

One may say there is a force like a hundred thousand wedges trying [to] force every kind of adapted structure into the gaps in the economy of nature, or rather forming gaps by thrusting out weaker ones.

Freeman (1974: 212–213)

This does not necessarily imply that “settlers” who “came ... with an alarming novelty of skill” (MM; 11: 78) are automatically going to be successful on the *Middlemarch* scene. The newcomers with their “flighty, foreign notions, which would not wear” (MM; 26: 216) are certainly not going to replace the inhabitants of *Middlemarch*<sup>4</sup> and their “time-honoured procedure” (MM; 45: 366).—The newcomers together with their plans for reforms are rather driven away and things in *Middlemarch* become again as they had always been.

---

<sup>4</sup> for this contention, cf. Shuttleworth (1984: 150).

## 2. Middlemarch as George Eliot's Sociological Laboratory

In *Middlemarch* George Eliot assumes the role of a literary natural scientist, or—more precisely—of the biologist studying the organism of society<sup>5</sup> in a scientific way. It is indeed as though—as David Maria Hesse (1996: 342) so succinctly stated it—

the novel were a petridish, the provincial town of *Middlemarch* her agar-agar surrogate, historic and fictional realities parameters of her testing, and the characters individually or collectively scrutinized for their social abilities in this medium.<sup>6</sup>

George Eliot creates a provincial town geographically far removed from London and thus—in metaphorical analogy—equally far removed from the centre of contemporary cultural and political discourse. In this fictional scale-model of a thriving Midlands town we are presented with a cross-section of the English population at the time of the struggle for political reform leading to the passage of the First Reform Bill<sup>7</sup> forty years prior to the book's composition.

*Middlemarch* has a strong feeling for historical development because George Eliot sustains in our attention, by implication and by many explicit allusions, a sense of the interval between the time of the book's action and of its composition. One development in this period she has her eye on is the growth of 'knowledge', which naturally includes the advance of science. Lydgate's researches are part of the beginning of this development.

Mason (1971: 151)

---

<sup>5</sup> *Middlemarch* can thus be seen as an embodiment of the idea of fiction as “a biology of society” (Mason (1971: 156)).

<sup>6</sup> Many critics have commented on the fact that even for a work of its period *Middlemarch* is deeply permeated by science. “But if this pervasiveness of science suggests an obsession it is one that had been thoroughly considered by the author. Because of many years of contact with scientific work and problems in scientific discovery George Eliot's attitudes to science were intelligently developed when she came to write *Middlemarch*. The use of science is largely coherent, and certainly related to the book's deep concerns” (Mason (1971: 151)). In this respect one also has to consider that “major scientific writers of the nineteenth century, such as the geologist Charles Lyell, the physiologist Claude Bernard, and the natural historian Charles Darwin, still shared a literary, nonmathematical language in their texts with other educated people of the time. As a result metaphors, ideas, and myths could move rapidly and freely to and fro between scientists and non-scientists.” (Beer (1980: 131)) Furthermore she points out that “writers, like all of us, live in the space and time organized by current scientific theory.” Thus it follows that “works of fiction ... can never create a world cleansed of all allusion to them. ... fiction is never innocent of science.” Through the figure of Lydgate, *Middlemarch* as a work of fiction indeed has “particular recourse to the analogy with scientific method and scientific theory”.

<sup>7</sup> Jerome Beaty (1957: 173) in his essay *History by Indirection: The Era of Reform in Middlemarch* states that “the events in MM are supposed to take place between 30 September 1829 and the end of May 1832”.

Proceeding in accordance with the methodology to which Lydgate in the novel adheres<sup>8</sup> George Eliot then exposes the characters—the fictional specimens—in her virtual laboratory to various well-thought out experiments, observing and analysing their reactions to the “trying and mysterious dispensation of unexplained shocks” and based on the scientific conclusions she draws from her analyses either leaves them “to some repose” or goes back to her “galvanism again” (MM; 15: 124).<sup>9</sup>

Having mentioned Lydgate's approach to science as being representative of Eliot's fictional methodology I would suggest to have a closer look at it. Lydgate's technique of scientific investigation can be described along the lines that Freeman (1974: 213) regards as characteristic of Darwin's way of observation:

... keenness of observation, his capacity to pose probing questions, and his recording of pertinent facts enabled him to return ... with a collection of scientific materials of quite exceptional significance.

Constitutive of Lydgate's as well as Eliot's investigations is the testing of a hypothesis developed on the basis of prior observations. The mind has to go “beyond ... the dead hand of fact and its perversions and formulate a hypothesis” (Carroll (1975: 76)). Their research is fuelled by the conviction of “the presence of permanent, yet hidden laws of nature” (Beer (1980: 136)) and it is informed by a

willingness to explore the significance even of that which can be registered neither by instruments nor by the unaided senses; the same willingness to use and outgo evidence.  
Beer (1983: 151)

Theirs is a perceptive 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, capable of bathing even the ethereal atoms in its ideally illuminated space .  
MM; 16: 135

Medical and social laws are, as already stated, concealed and thus cannot be read off the facts until the research scientist has created an “ideally illuminated space”.<sup>10</sup>

Discoveries of such laws<sup>11</sup> have to be preceded by “a terrific effort of imagination in framing hypotheses and their consequences” (Mason (1971a: 160)). The researcher needs to have an accurate

---

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of how science permeated the language, structure and fictional methodology of the Victorian novel and how the social and moral issues of *Middlemarch* are directly related to contemporary scientific concerns, cf. Shuttleworth's (1984) excellent book *George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Science*.

<sup>9</sup> Mason (1971: 157) in his essay *Middlemarch and Science: Problems of Life and Mind* in this respect draws attention to the important fact that “George Eliot intervenes in her own person in *Middlemarch* more than in any previous novel, and it is plausible to associate this with an enlarged view of the witness's participation in empirical observation.”

<sup>10</sup> cf. also Eliot's web metaphor in chapter 15, quoted in its full length later on, where “all the light” that the narrator “can command must be concentrated” on the object under observation.



imagining before his research can be started. There has to be “that delightful labour of the imagination” and “the exercise of disciplined power” (MM; 16: 135) characteristic not only of Lydgate’s research methodology, but also of that of the narrator in her role as the observer of the protagonists’ fates.

Constantly modifying the observational conditions George Eliot creates ever new test procedures, “provisionally framing” her characters in new situations in which their behaviour is tested and “correcting” them to “more and more exactness of relation” in order to determine whether the empirical data which she gains during her observations are indeed compatible with the provisional working hypotheses she had formulated beforehand.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike the depositor of “small monumental records” or “Parerga” (MM; 29: 230) whose “acquisitive sensibility ... tabulates, collects, and reduces”, but has yet to produce the first chapter of his opus magnum *The Key to All Mythology*, George Eliot in common with her characters Tertius Lydgate and Will Ladislaw shares a “creative sensibility” (Beer (1983: 175)) which by means of the active use of the imagination not only perceives, but also makes vital connections between the observed objects and their environments. Like Tertius Lydgate she is no passive “swallower” who “waits ... at his receipt of custom” (MM; 6: 49), but rather an active and inventive participant in her research. Thus she cannot perceive the simple collection of impressive amounts of factual data, vide Casaubon, as an ultimate goal in itself. Such strict and unimaginative empiricism without the help of a guiding a priori hypothesis cannot lead to new insights.

George Eliot in *Middlemarch* borrows Herbert Spencer’s seminal idea of society as an organism.<sup>13</sup> Since this ‘biological analogy’ is so important for an understanding of the complex interaction between the characters and society in *Middlemarch*, I would like to quote the relevant passage in Spencer’s work in its full length:

Let us now ... sum up the reasons for regarding a society as an organism. It undergoes continuous growth. As it grows, its parts become unlike: it exhibits increase of structure. The unlike parts simultaneously assume activities of unlike kinds. These activities are not simply different, but their differences are so related as to make one another possible. The recipio-

---

<sup>11</sup> In the conception of such a coherent set of permanent and necessary laws which has to be discovered by means of scientific investigation, the general Victorian disposition to treat science as an ideal and unproblematic source of authority is evident.

<sup>12</sup> Thereby George Eliot makes use of both modes of hypothesis-confirmation prevalent at the time; the observer might seek to verify her scientific hypotheses “through experimental practice, as did Bernard, or through analogy and history, as Darwin was driven to do” (Beer (1980: 138)).

<sup>13</sup> For an obtrusively biased assessment of Herbert Spencer’s influence on George Eliot, cf. Paxton’s (1991) book *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer. Feminism, Evolutionism, and the Reconstruction of Gender*. Herbert Spencer in his autobiography appraised his influence on George Eliot as follows: “It may be ... that she was influenced all along by my books. ... But it never occurred to me to consider the effect so great as you suppose. Her powers in respect of introspection and sympathetic insight into others were naturally extremely great and I think her achievements in the way of delineation of character are almost wholly due to spontaneous intuition.” (Quoted in: Paxton (1991: 6)). I’m convinced that the last sentence is one to which every reader or scholar of George Eliot can unreservedly subscribe.

cal aid thus given causes mutual dependence of the parts. And the mutually dependent parts, living by and for one another, form an aggregate constituted on the same general principle as is an individual organism. The analogy of a society to an organism becomes still clearer on learning that every organism of appreciable size is a society, and on further learning that in both, the lives of the units continue for some time if the life of the aggregate is suddenly arrested, while if the aggregate is not destroyed by violence, its life greatly exceeds in duration the lives of its units. Though the two are contrasted as respectively discrete and concrete, and though there results a difference in the ends subserved by the organization, there does not result a difference in the laws of the organization: the required mutual influences of the parts, not transmissible in a direct way, being, in a society, transmitted in an indirect way.

Quoted in: Carneiro (1967: 8)

For George Eliot society is subject to universal laws applicable to all organisms, and therefore susceptible of analysis by scientific methods<sup>14</sup>.

Such laws had always existed, but they had long been ignored, and were only now, through the study of history as applied to human and social development, being discovered.<sup>15</sup>

Graver (1984: 46)

But similar laws also apply to society and equally to the individual as a constituent part of society. Because of the vast complexity and heterogeneity of such a system as society, however, laws governing it, in order to deal with it in an adequate way, have to the very same degree be highly elaborate, too.

The evolution of society, being a continuation of organic evolution, involves an increasing specialization of parts; individuals become more distinct in their natures, but at the same time more dependent on each other, since all are increasingly differentiated in function. There is thus, on the one hand greater mutual dependence of individuals, but also greater individuation in the progress of society. Applied to *Middlemarch* greater mutual dependence means that every single inhabitant is inextricably affected by the forces of change and evolution, so that even persons who stand “with

---

<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that such laws are often seen as principles of order which acted as a “painkiller” in the whole process of secularisation by which scientific thought displaced religion in the nineteenth century. Tönnies (1991: 210) describes this process as follows “die Denkungsart der einzelnen Menschen wird allmählich durch Religion immer weniger, durch Wissenschaft immer mehr eingenommen”; cf. also Levine (1998: 37 ff.). In the same vein Feuerbach (1994: 33) in his preface to the second edition of *Das Wesen des Christentums* wrote: “das Christentum [ist] längst nicht nur aus der Vernunft, sondern auch aus dem Leben der Menschheit verschwunden, ... es [ist] nichts weiter mehr ... , als eine fixe *Idee*, welche mit unsern Feuer- und Lebensversicherungsanstalten, unsern Eisenbahnen und Dampfwägen, unsern Pinakotheken und Glyptotheken, unsern Kriegs- und Gewerbschulen, unsern Theatern und Naturalienkabinetten im schreiendsten Widerspruch steht.”

Seen in terms of Comte's dogma of historical stages first a theological world view and second a metaphysical one are being “replaced in turn by a positive, scientific outlook” (Scott (1972: 60)). Such a scientific outlook together with “the gradual emergence of new positive sciences” made the scientific study of human society possible.

<sup>15</sup> That George Eliot often confuses the idea of a “Law of Nature”, “denoting observed uniformities in the occurrence of phenomena, with the ethical interpretation of “Law” as expressing “what ought to be” (Beer (1980: 147) is a mistake common amongst Victorian theorists.

rocky firmness amid all this fluctuation, were slowly presenting new aspects in spite of solidity” (MM; 11: 78).

There is also a tendency in the novel of growing interdependence on a higher level. The provincial town of *Middlemarch* is increasingly making crucial economic, social and political contact with the surrounding country and the large cities.

*Middlemarch*, in summary, then, is a detailed study of a society seen as a living organism and the individuals that populate it. But most importantly it is a study of the determining influence of this society, this medium, on the individuals and vice versa.

## 2.1 “This Petty Medium” and “This Particular Web”—Two Master Images in Middlemarch

George Eliot often applies the word medium to denote what *Middlemarch* society signifies for her characters, namely the environment in which they either prosper or gradually wane. The medium

determines subtly and firmly the way in which life is interpreted and whether individuals are sacrificed or redeemed  
Carroll (1975: 79)

and constitutes one of the key concepts in *Middlemarch*. The characters in *Middlemarch* cannot be abstracted from their surrounding media; individual identity is largely determined by this larger social entity with which the characters constantly interact.

G. H. Lewes (quoted in: Ashton (1979: 154)) considered

the constant correlation of ... an organism and a medium (understanding by medium the whole of the surrounding circumstances necessary to the existence of the organism)

as an essential presupposition of life. Thus medium refers to the existence of a reality that is always strongly related to a historical dimension. It is a reality separate from the individual and outside the realm of the self. The individual within each period in history can be regarded as an organism in a dependent relation to its environment, its medium.

General social development requires the ‘gradual consentaneous development’ of both the individual and the mass. No development takes place if the organism tries to outstrip the degree of growth which its conditions permit.  
Mason (1971: 155)

In *Middlemarch* George Eliot strives to attain a full vision of the medium in which a character moves. In this respect we are also to understand by this concept the moral universe of the novel. It is in this sense of the term that we have to interpret Lydgate’s frustration with “this petty medium of *Middlemarch*”. This moral universe—as Mark Schorer (1967: 15) in his essay *The Structure of the*

---

*Novel. Method, Metaphor and Mind* maintains—"binds the book together in a unity not of place but of moral scene".

The other master image in the novel is the metaphor of the social web by means of which George Eliot describes the structure of the relationships between individuals in *Middlemarch*. Each individual in *Middlemarch* is related to every other individual. The characters are entangled; they are "woven and interwoven" into this complex structure and thus there is a strong social interdependence amongst them.

I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe.

MM; 15: 116

George Eliot saw "this particular web" as a highly complex entity in which all characters are intricately related to each other. For the narrator in *Middlemarch* individual characters can never be regarded in isolation; they are always embedded in a social web. Thus "it was not more possible to find social isolation in that town than elsewhere" (MM; 31: 241).

### 3. “As if they Were so Many Animated Tax-Pennies...”—Some Remarks on Characters in Middlemarch

In *Middlemarch* the characters' fate is set against a pattern of escape versus adaptation<sup>16</sup>. Within a “climate of restriction versus opportunity the characters”, like Darwinian organisms, “have to learn and adapt” to both “concrete claims of individuals surrounding them” as well as to “abstract demands of society in all its implications” (Hesse (1996: 356)). Individuals have to subordinate their wishes and ambitions to society's needs.

George Eliots Interesse gilt also nicht den grossen “welthistorischen Individuen”, sondern den unbekanntten Menschen, die mit ihren “unhistoric acts” an der Erlösung aus der Herrschaft des Bösen mitarbeiten.  
Greiner (1993: 53)

Compared to the Comtean *Grand Etre*, i.e. Humanity as the all-incorporating Being, the individual in his or her very non-heroic insignificance only possesses the status of a theoretical construct, “society alone possessing concreteness”. “Comte's conclusion was the necessary establishment of a society which denied individualism” (Hesse (1996: 20; 62)). This adaptive subordination of a character to the *Grand Etre* is shown in *Middlemarch* as never being complete or perfect.

George Eliot's stance on Comte and positivism was ambivalent.<sup>17</sup> One might safely agree with Wright's (1981: 272) critical opinion that Comte's ideas were in the creative process of George Eliot's writing “completely transformed”.

What appears ridiculous in his system certainly becomes more acceptable in her novels. But the whole subject requires much closer study than it has so far received.

One of the predominant reasons for George Eliot's position of not wanting to bind herself to Comtean social doctrine was the influence which Feuerbach's idea of the individualisation of society,

---

<sup>16</sup> cf. also Hesse (1996: 15–16).

<sup>17</sup> cf. Scott (1972: 59; 75–76): “George Eliot's response to Comte and Positivism was compounded of pronounced respect and persistent reservations. She studied Comte's works, attended lectures on his system, fraternized with his English disciples, and occasionally donated money to the advancement of his reputation. Yet she resisted joining the Comtean coterie . . . . She shared Comte's sensitivity to social causation and thought that fiction would profit from more careful historical concern.” In general it seems that—as Wright (1981: 271) asserts—“from *Romola* onwards, Comte's ‘philosophic system’ can be seen to have played an integral part in the planning and composition of all George Eliot's novels.” Undoubtedly Comte's doctrines offered her spiritual and intellectual guidance; she never submitted unconditionally to them, though.

... in regarding himself as the object of God, as the end of the divine activity, he [, i.e., man,] is an object to himself, his own end and aim.

Feuerbach (1957: 289)

a notion which is diametrically opposed to Comte's assertion that individuality has a merely abstract conceptual status. Hesse (1996: 48) summarises the essential differences between Comte's and Feuerbach's conceptions of the "new religion of humanity" as follows:

Comte's Religion of Humanity, which in one version of it was also George Eliot's, has as its god-head Humanity and thereby substitutes Jesus by a strictly secular concept. Strauss, and Feuerbach, united the divine and the human in humanity, humanity was their embodiment.

Another reason for her wish to keep independent of any social doctrine was certainly that the rather cruel exclusiveness of any arbitrary dogmatic system such as Comte's was utterly incompatible with her vision of a creative artist.

I would suggest that this ambivalent attitude of being on the one hand an interested disciple of Comtean Positivism and on the other hand an astute critic of its tenets, can be gauged by an analysis of her characters in *Middlemarch*—and here in particular of her outsiders.

Characters in *Middlemarch* can only be comprehended fully if their histories are known and it is left to the narrator, who assumes the privilege of possessing an objective point of view, to render their different individual histories lucid to the reader. This does not imply, however, that George Eliot's portrayal of characters follows fatalistic principles. She is at great pains to show that her characters' fate is to a large degree of their own making.

All of the characters in *Middlemarch* are shown to be at least to some degree "born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed [their] supreme selves" (MM; 21: 173), however. In their self-centredness they have "only a limited access to the sum total of reality" (Hesse (1996: 126)), namely only to these parts of reality which are compatible with their egocentric preconceptions.

Moreover they are—as Mr. Farebrother in his often-quoted dictum points out—"not cut in marble". A character is a dynamic entity and thus

is not something solid and unalterable. It is something living and changing, and may become diseased as our bodies do.

MM; 72: 602

Change and development are inherent properties of characters; humans are malleable organisms. There is, since decline is as likely a state in the history of the individual as progress is, no immanent teleology leading to a character's ultimate harmonious perfection discernible. But although the individual never reaches a state of personal perfection, he or she can by means of altruistic deeds ac-

---

tively contribute toward the slow and gradual improvement and progress of mankind. This is in Eliot's *Weltanschauung* the telos inherent in human history.<sup>18</sup>

There is of course an obvious difficulty inherent in this tenet of identifying a teleological tendency towards the melioration of humankind in social evolution. While it is possible to speak of the progress of science, which in *Middlemarch* is a phenomenon that is often hinted at, as there exist objective criteria according "to which scientific theories and methods are judged successful or unsuccessful" (Burrow (1966: 268)), such objective criteria do not exist as far as the total life of man in society is concerned.

---

<sup>18</sup> In many ways Eliot's self-confident view on mankind's development is characteristic of later Victorian theories of progress in that it is "also a way of avoiding the unpleasantly relativist implications of a world in which many of the old certainties were disappearing" (Burrow (1966: 98–99)). Such theories provided for George Eliot as well as for the social theorists of the Victorian age "an intellectual resting place, a point of repose at which the tension between the need for certainty and the need to accommodate more diverse social facts, and more subtle ways of interpreting them, than the traditional certainties allowed for reached a kind of temporary equilibrium" (Burrow (1966: 263)).

## 4. An Analysis of the Characters Tertius Lydgate and Will Ladislaw in their Role as the Outsiders in Middlemarch

### 4.1 Their Interaction with the Medium of Middlemarch

Mason (1971b: 421) in his essay *Middlemarch and History* points out that

For George Eliot, as for many Victorians, the two unmistakable contribution of her age to society were the democratic movement and the development of sanitation and medical welfare.

I would like to suggest that George Eliot in *Middlemarch* situates these two seminal innovations in politics and in medical sciences within the two outsiders Tertius Lydgate and Will Ladislaw. These newcomers to the *Middlemarch* scene are the characters who are most critical of present conditions as they find them. Will Ladislaw opposes and speechifies “by the hour against institutions which had existed when he was in his cradle” (MM; 46: 378) and Tertius Lydgate, who “has lots of ideas, quite new, about ventilation and diet, that sort of thing” (MM; 10: 75), objects to the current medical system and in his use of strictly empirical research methods he has a forward-looking, “prophetic function” (Mason (1971b: 422)).

In this respect the settlers form a distinguished elite and through them we can distinctly perceive a glimpse of how George Eliot imagined the protagonists of Comte’s patrician elite, the “priests of humanity”, to be shaped like. These newcomers are able to offer solutions to the new range of problems—caused by monumental social, political and scientific changes—with which the community is faced.

As Eliot depicts the Midlands community, change is apparent at every turn: the railways advertize the mechanization of society; talk of Catholic Emancipation shows a weakening of the Anglican Establishment; the wide-ranging debate on the Reform Bill underscores the growing prestige of town over country as well as the advancement of democratic attitudes. Meanwhile, the rick burnings<sup>19</sup> emphasize more sinister aspects of social unrest.

Scott (1972: 64)

Such “charismatic” personalities as Ladislaw and Lydgate can often give a necessary “push” to the creation of new institutional structures.

That reforms are necessary is apparent in Eliot’s portrayal of the landed gentry as being incompetent to deal with the social and political situation at the time. This is particularly apparent in Mr

---

<sup>19</sup> There are allusions to “the machine-breaking and rick-burning” (MM; 3: 22) as early as chapter 3!



Brooke of Tipton, who, after all, dubs himself a reformer. In a not entirely unwarranted attack he is described in the Tory *Trumpet* in a not particularly charming way as follows:

If we had to describe a man who is retrogressive in the most evil sense of the word—we should say, he is one who would dub himself a reformer of our constitution, while every interest for which he is immediately responsible is going to decay: a philanthropist who cannot bear one rogue to be hanged, but does not mind five honest tenants being half-starved: a man who shrieks at corruption, and keeps his farms at rack-rent: who roars himself red at rotten boroughs, and does not mind if every field on his farms has a rotten gate: a man very open-hearted to Leeds and Manchester, no doubt; he would give any number of representatives who will pay for their seats out of their own pockets: what he objects to giving, is a little return on rent-days to help a tenant to buy stock, or an outlay on repairs to keep the weather out at a tenant's barn-door or make his house look a little less like an Irish cottier's. But we all know the wag's definition of a philanthropist: a man whose charity increases directly as the square of the distance.

MM; 38: 314

In his essay *George Eliot, Positivism, and the Social Vision of Middlemarch* Scott (1972: 69) points out that

the feudal mode of social organization ... has proved increasingly unable to withstand the currents of modernism .... Comte's insights into the demise of feudal culture ... also seem implied in the way she [i.e., George Eliot] herself handles the landed elite of *Middlemarch*.

*Middlemarch* is not ready for this necessary "push", however. Lydgate's and Ladislaw's fight for reform is seen as a threat to "the rationale of the system". While the medical and political establishment views the outsiders and their plans for innovations as a hostile challenge to the prevailing customs and speaks of the impertinent offensiveness of their "ostentation of reform, where there is no real amelioration" (MM; 45: 366), the unanimous *vox populi*, which can be heard at the Tankard in Slaughter Lane, is not less critical.

*Middlemarch* society acts indeed as a mediating power in shaping and qualifying the behaviour of the two outsiders. But Eliot's two fictional organisms do not adapt to their external medium as Paxton (1991: 184) in a rather idealistic vein had imagined organisms in general to do.

The organism adjusts itself to the external medium; it creates, and is in turn modified by, the social medium, for society is the product of human feelings, and its existence is *pari passu* developed with the feelings which in turn it modifies and enlarges at each stage.

The social medium of *Middlemarch* does not conform to the standards of the organic social ideal in any observable way. Far from being a healthy and harmonious environment for furthering the growth of the individual it

possess[es] all the vices of a capitalist economy, and the social antagonisms of a class-ridden society. ... The Middlemarchers may be bound together in relations of vital organic interdependence but they remain alien and ill-understood

Shuttleworth (1984: 171; 157)

not only to each other, but even more as regards their attitude towards newcomers.

*Middlemarch* as a matter of fact displays every single negative characteristic constitutive of “Gesellschaft”, which in Tönnies’ (1991: 44; 34; 4) definition<sup>20</sup>

... wird begriffen als eine Menge von natürlichen und künstlichen Individuen, deren Willen und Gebiete in zahlreichen Verbindungen zueinander, und in zahlreichen Verbindungen miteinander stehen, und doch voneinander unabhängig und ohne gegenseitige innere Einwirkungen bleiben. ... Die Theorie der Gesellschaft konstruiert einen Kreis von Menschen, welche, wie in Gemeinschaft, auf friedliche Art nebeneinander leben und wohnen, aber nicht wesentlich verbunden, sondern wesentlich getrennt sind, und während dort verbunden bleibend trotz aller Trennungen, hier getrennt bleiben trotz aller Verbundenheiten. ... hier ist ein jeder für sich allein, und im Zustande der Spannung gegen alle übrigen. ... Keiner wird für den anderen etwas tun und leisten, keiner dem anderen etwas gönnen und geben wollen, es sei denn um einer Gegenleistung oder Gegengabe willen, welche er seinem Gegebenen wenigstens gleich achtet. ... die menschliche Gesellschaft wird als ein bloßes Nebeneinander voneinander unabhängiger Personen verstanden.

It is apparent that in the community of *Middlemarch* social cohesiveness and concord, both distinguishing features of “Gemeinschaft”, have already suffered almost complete decay.<sup>21</sup> There is no

Gegenseitig-gemeinsame, verbindende Gesinnung, als ... besondere soziale Kraft und Sympathie, die Menschen als Glieder eines Ganzen zusammenhält.  
Tönnies (1991: 17)

## 4.2 Choice and Circumstance in Will Ladislaw and Tertius Lydgate

Many critics<sup>22</sup> have—often in the context of a discussion of Eliot’s deterministic world view—pointed to the seminal idea that in both Lydgate and Ladislaw there are significant “conflicts between choice and circumstance”. In Will’s case “circumstances never free him to choose” (Schorer (1967: 14–15)). In chapter 79, when Lydgate informs him of his resignation to settle in London, Ladislaw is described as

sliding into that pleasureless yielding to the small solicitations of circumstance, which is a commoner history of perdition than any single momentous bargain.

Both outsiders find themselves

<sup>20</sup> For an elucidation of Tönnies’ Gemeinschaft versus Gesellschaft dichotomy, cf. Miner’s (1968) essay “Community–Society Continua”.

<sup>21</sup> Yet we can perceive at least vestiges of personal habits typical of “Gemeinschaft” in the altruistic behaviour of Dorothea Brooke, Farebrother and the Garths.

<sup>22</sup> cf. critics of the late fifties Carroll (1959) and Hardy (1959) and later on in the eighties Graver (1984) and Shuttleworth (1984); cf. also Schorer (1967).

on a perilous margin when we begin to look passively at our future selves, and see our own figures led with dull consent into insipid misdoing and shabby achievement. Poor Lydgate was inwardly groaning on that margin, and Will was arriving at it. It seemed to him this evening as if the cruelty of his outburst to Rosamond had made an obligation for him, and he dreaded the obligation: he dreaded Lydgate's unsuspecting good-will: he dreaded his own distaste for his spoiled life, which would leave him in motiveless levity.  
MM; 79: 640

Ladislaw, however, after having spoken in desperation of having “our life maimed by petty accidents” (MM; 83: 662) is by the end of the book no longer a victim of circumstances, but free to choose because of the profound changes in his life brought about by Dorothea's assertion that

We could live quite well on my own fortune—it is too much—seven hundred a-year—I want so little—no new clothes—and I will learn what everything costs.  
MM; 83: 663

In contrast to Ladislaw, Lydgate “chooses consciously” (Schorer (1967: 15), but the narrator makes abundantly clear that his choice is compromised by his “spots of commonness” and, in addition, by “the hampering threadlike pressure of small social conditions, and their frustrating complexity” (MM; 18: 148) characteristic of a hostile environment.

### 4.3 Tertius Lydgate: The Medical Outsider in Middlemarch

Lydgate arrives in *Middlemarch* with a plan of his future activities which he sums up in these terms: “to do good small work for Middlemarch, and great work for the world” (MM; 15: 122). His aim is to follow in the footsteps of the pioneer of vaccination, Edward Jenner, whose discovery that inoculation with cowpox gives immunity to smallpox was one of the greatest medical breakthroughs in the eighteenth century. Lydgate's ultimate aim is to “win celebrity, however slowly ... by the independent value of his work” (MM; 15: 120).

His other personal hero is Bichat<sup>23</sup>, the founder of histology, the scientific study of tissues, and a pioneer of research medicine. Bichat by means of dissection had identified 21 types of tissues

... and now at the end of 1829, most medical practice was still strutting or shambling along the old paths, and there was still scientific work to be done which might have seemed to be a direct sequence of Bichat's.  
MM; 15: 122

This medical trailblazer had claimed that these 21 different tissues were the irreducible elements of life. Lydgate, using an even more radically reductionist approach tries to isolate and identify the one

---

<sup>23</sup> Pratt and Neufeldt (1979: 144), in a commentary on Eliot's notebook entry, contend that “for Tertius Lydgate of *Middlemarch*, Bichat is first an inspiration, then a model, finally an ironic foil who exemplifies what Lydgate might have become.”

tissue, the “cellular archetype” (Knoepfmacher (1975: 51)) so to speak, that is common to them all.<sup>24</sup>

If Lydgate’s generalisation had proved to be correct, it would have given humanity a great new insight into the structure of the organs and the ways in which they are affected by disease. However, as Beer (1983: 154)—by drawing an unwarranted analogy between Lydgate’s vital and Casaubon’s entirely futile research—put it laconically “there is not one ‘primitive tissue’, just as there is not one ‘key to all mythologies’”.

A seminal requirement for Lydgate is to find “a medium for his work”, i.e., the right social environment for his sphere of action. Indeed this is “what he really cared for” (MM; 18: 147). Lydgate’s idea of the ideal medium is closely related to the *milieu intérieur*, a concept formulated by the French physiologist and founder of experimental medicine Claude Bernard. His discovery of the digestive input of the pancreas, several functions of the liver, and the vasomotor nerves led him to the notion that the stability of the *milieu intérieur* is crucial to good health. In analogy to Bernard’s conception a social milieu “away from the range of ... intrigues, jealousies, and social truckling” (MM; 15: 119) appears to Lydgate most suitable to his own well-being.

Lydgate, however, does not possess the capacity for the necessary adaptive metamorphoses to conform to the possibly not very healthy milieu of *Middlemarch*. This narrow-minded “petty medium of Middlemarch” (MM; 18: 153) turns out to be all too powerful for him. This is the ultimate reason why Lydgate, who in many respects represents—to be consistent with Mason’s (1971b) terminology—“incarnate technological advance” fails so miserably in the end.

At the centre of his failure is ultimately Lydgate’s ignorance that he as an individual is, as Levine (1962: 272) points out

at the center of a vast and complex web of causes, a good many of which exert pressure on him from the outside and come into direct conflict with his own desires and motives. ... A refusal to accept responsibility for the claims that society puts upon one leads to destruction or dehumanization.

Lydgate’s “fatal” encounter with the medium of *Middlemarch* can in my opinion be “ideally illuminated” by an analysis of his interaction with the two characters that are to “determine” his fate most: Rosamond Vincy and Nicholas Bulstrode.

---

<sup>24</sup> In his essay “Casaubon and Lydgate” Harvey (1967a) noted the striking similarity between Casaubon’s and Lydgate’s research in their obsession with finding a basic atomic key that would shed an explanatory light on everything. Both protagonists are looking for a unity underlying the apparent diversity. The quest for a unifying theory which would bind together disparate parts can as a matter of fact be seen as the intellectual *leitmotif* of the novel. Yet while Lydgate is (literally and metaphorically!) very much “at the cutting edge” of scientific research medicine, Casaubon’s approach has already been discredited in the relevant scientific German literature on mythology.

### 4.3.1 Lydgate's Choice of Rosamond

The narrator depicts Lydgate's injudicious choice of Rosamond Vincy as his wife as a direct causal consequence of the blemishes in his psychic make-up<sup>25</sup>. Rosamond, this "bird of paradise" (MM; Finale: 680), to whose

social romance, which had always turned on a lover and bridegroom who was not a Middle-marcher, and who had no connections at all like her own ... , a stranger was absolutely necessary  
MM; 12: 96

is according to Lydgate's sentimental non-scientific fancy<sup>26</sup> not only "grace itself", but—quite in consonance with the bird metaphor—she also "produce[s] the effect of exquisite music". But, as Knoepflmacher (1975: 49) concisely points out,

although his private canary bird warbles back at him, there is neither soul nor understanding in her song.

Thus already from the outset it is difficult to imagine how such a creature could possibly give melodic encouragement to Lydgate's work in the dissecting laboratory<sup>27</sup>.

While Lydgate regarded

plain women ... as he did the other severe facts of life, to be faced with philosophy and investigated by science

Rosamond, who to him "seemed to have the true melodic charm" (MM; 11: 77), is of course exempt from unbiased scientific investigation. When contrasted to his personal maxim

Dogma gives a charter to mistake, but the very breath of science is a contest with mistake, and must keep the conscience alive.  
MM; 73: 606

one cannot fail to notice a subtle irony.—Lydgate falls prey to his own romantic and highly speculative conjectures.

G. H. Lewes (quoted in: Beer (1983: 162)) in his treatise *Problems of Life and Mind* commented on this as follows

In our eagerness for an explanation we readily accept conjectures as truths. The anticipatory rush of Thought prefigures qualities and foresees consequences: instead of pausing to ascertain whether

---

<sup>25</sup> Greiner (1993: 50) analyses Lydgate's "conceit" with great accurateness thus "seine Gefühlsstruktur und seine Urteilsfähigkeit bleiben geprägt von gängigen Vorurteilen, getrübt durch Standesdünkel und durch Eigendünkel".

<sup>26</sup> "As if a woman were a mere coloured superficies!" (MM; 19: 157).

<sup>27</sup> Haight (1992: 50) draws attention to the fact that Lydgate's idea of a wife's function is "little better than Casaubon's".

our anticipations do or do not correspond with fact, we proceed to argue, to act on them as if this mental vision were final.

Lydgate in his judgement of Rosamond fails to acknowledge certain constraints of his senses and does not sense “the actuality of phenomena beyond the scope of our unaided perceptions” (Beer (1980: 133)). Lydgate’s frame of mind betrays all the weaknesses that the French physiologist and methodologist Claude Bernard saw as constitutive of human beings. Man for him is essentially proud and metaphysical, expecting the ideal creations of his intelligence, which correspond to his feelings, to represent reality as well.

Lydgate is “blind to the extent of the *present*, the phenomena by which he is laterally surrounded” (Beer (1983: 21)).

... if falling in love had been at all in question, it would have been quite safe with a creature like this Miss Vincy, who had just the kind of intelligence one would desire in a woman—polished, refined, docile, lending itself to finish in all the delicacies of life, and enshrined in a body which expressed this with a force of demonstration that excluded the need for other evidence. Lydgate felt sure that if ever he married, his wife would have that feminine radiance, that distinctive womanhood which must be classed with flowers and music, that sort of beauty which by its very nature was virtuous, being moulded only for pure and delicate joys.

MM; 16: 134

Lydgate’s senses are tricked by the attractiveness of outward appearances. They are also tricked into large financial expenditure on appropriate furniture and crockery for the new home.

The dinner-service in question was expensive, but that might be in the nature of dinner-services. Furnishing was necessarily expensive; but then it had to be done only once.

MM; 36: 289–290

There are, however—as Lydgate should be aware of from his use of the microscope in his own research—“multiple unseen worlds by which we are surrounded” (Beer (1975: 101)). These hidden worlds are beyond his imaginative reach. In exact analogy to the famous and ubiquitously cited pier-glass metaphor

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

MM; 27: 217

Lydgate’s egotistic single focus on the physical and melodic attractions of Rosamond “produces the flattering illusion” of her being a perfect wife. Clearly Lydgate does not “look closely and carefully at

the facts in whatever form they appear”, this being the way in which—according to Carroll (1975: 74–75)—the characters should deal with external material.

Beer (1980: 144) asserts that

Lydgate goes astray because he does not use the full powers of his imagination on ‘the complexities of love and marriage’ as he does on his study of pathology.

This is, as I have tried to show, only one of the causes for his failure, however. It is that Lydgate is seduced by his sensual perception into formulating the hypothesis that aesthetic and bodily attraction can furnish reliable indications as to the state of the psyche of a female creature. In this we do perceive not the scientific observer guided by reason, but the aristocratic aesthete with his naïve belief in an analogy between beauty and intellect.

Lydgate’s reason is in the case of Rosamond “extinguished and [superficial] fact [is] given predominance”. Under such a constellation Beer (1980: 140–141) in her discussion of Bernard’s methodology of science

the scientist would fall ... into the domain of the indeterminable, that is to say, the occult and the marvellous. ... il a pu croire que les créations idéales de son esprit qui corespondent à ses sentiments représentaient aussi la réalité.

Indications that Lydgate’s hypothesis is utterly incompatible with all the empirical data are plentiful and they appear very early in the novel. The following text passage in chapter 45 might be taken as representative of such empirical indications. Furthermore this dialogue also reveals Rosamond’s utter ignorance of Lydgate’s aims and medical ambitions in life.

“I am thinking of a great fellow, who was about as old as I am three hundred years ago, and had already begun a new era in anatomy.”

“I can’t guess,” said Rosamond, shaking her head. “We used to play at guessing historical characters at Mrs. Lemon’s, but not anatomists.”

“I’ll tell you. His name was Vesalius. And the only way he could get to know anatomy as he did, was by going to snatch bodies at night, from graveyards and places of execution.”

...

“... They called him a liar and a poisonous monster. But the facts of the human frame were on his side; and so he got the better of them.”

...

“Very well, Doctor Grave-face,” said Rosy, dimpling, “I will declare in future that I dote on skeletons, and body-snatchers, and bits of things in phials, and quarrels with everybody, that end in your dying miserably.”

(MM; 45: 374–375)

For the “lovely anencephalous monster” adorned with her ornamental purple amethysts seminal anatomic research can only evoke the inhuman horrors of the Gothic novel. Her response is reminiscent of respectable Mrs. Dollop’s, who in chapter 45

became more and more convinced by her own asseveration, that Dr. Lydgate meant to let the people die in the Hospital, if not to poison them, for the sake of cutting them up without saying by your leave or with your leave

Both of them ignore the “fac” that—according to Bernard<sup>28</sup>—in order to gain new essential scientific insights “on ne peut parvenir qu’en passant par une longue et affreuse cuisine”.

For Lydgate there are far-reaching implications in his being associated with the macabre and supernatural world of gothic fiction. He in fact

becomes Frankenstein ... hunted down by this inflexible monster [, i.e., Rosamond] who submits him to his own experiments of maceration and control.  
Carroll (1975: 85–86)<sup>29</sup>

### 4.3.2 Lydgate’s Alliance with Bulstrode

In his imprudent alliance with Bulstrode, Lydgate ignores the sound assessment of Farebrother, who had always urged Lydgate to avoid any personal involvement with the banker

I don’t like the set he belongs to: they are a narrow ignorant set, and do more to make their neighbours uncomfortable than to make them better.  
MM; 17: 144

As in his wrong assessment of Rosamond’s qualities, Lydgate’s perception in the Bulstrode case proves to be flawed, too. He similarly fails to see things with “the sturdy neutral delight” (MM; 30: 239) as they present themselves and thus arrives at a wrong conclusion.<sup>30</sup>

The “relation of personal indebtedness to Bulstrode was what he had once been most resolved to avoid” (MM; 70: 584), but averse financial circumstances and deficiencies in his judgmental capacity eventually force him into this dangerous alliance.

<sup>28</sup> cf. Beer (1980: 143)

<sup>29</sup> Interestingly enough in the Victorian didactic novels, especially in those by “silly” lady novelists, an atheistic scientist “figures conventionally as ‘the shocking example’ to be killed in the last chapter of the last volume under particularly horrible circumstances—or else converted” (Henkin (1962: 264)). Lydgate is carried off to an early grave, too, but in rather more “pleasant” circumstances than his fictional colleagues.

<sup>30</sup> One has to note, however, that from the standpoint of Comtean Positivism this partnership between the scientist and the capitalist appears to be predetermined. Strong common interests between the high priest of science and the banker who would act as “the civic organ for inaugurating the more important connections of science with industry” (Scott (1972: 70)) will bind them inevitably together in a successful partnership. In *Middlemarch* this partnership is doomed and Mr. Toller’s remark to Mrs. Taft that “Bulstrode had found a man to suit him in Lydgate; a charlatan in religion is sure to like other sorts of charlatans.” is a reliable index of the public sentiment regarding this alliance. Here again we find evidence of George Eliot’s profound reservations about the Positivist conception of social change. “Of course, the upshot of Lydgate’s involvement with Bulstrode is completely at odds with Comte’s *Système*, leading not to the renovation of *Middlemarch* but to the defeat of the doctor’s most cherished professional ambitions.” (Scott (1972: 71))



Alas! the scientific conscience had got into the debasing company of money obligation and selfish respects.

MM; 73: 606

In his relationship with Bulstrode we can see a lucid illustration of the mechanistic working of cause and effect. Lydgate's dire financial situation, which is at least partly caused by the extravagances<sup>31</sup> indulged in by his "animal of another and feebler species" (MM; 65: 546), leads to an undesirably close personal entanglement with Bulstrode whose use of glib formulaic diction

on reconsideration, I esteem it right that I should incur a small sacrifice rather than leave you unaided

MM; 70: 578

in the financial transaction with Lydgate is an unfailing indication of his ulterior motives.

Lydgate fails to realise that every single act is

related in some way to every other, the most apparently unimportant act may have important ramifications

and thus he comes to realise too late that the thousand pounds that Bulstrode lent him create certain obligations he had wished to eschew on all accounts.

Nothing ... happens accidentally, and a belief in the possibility of some kind of occurrence not usually produced by the normal workings of the laws of nature [i.e., the sudden swing in Bulstrode's opinion as to the desirability of granting Lydgate the desperately sought-after loan] became to her [i.e., George Eliot] one of the positive signs of moral weakness.

Levine (1962: 272)

Reflecting on the undesirability of his situation after the Town Hall meeting, which has seen Bulstrode's nervous breakdown, it becomes clear for Lydgate that

Bulstrode had been in dread of scandalous disclosures on the part of Raffles. Lydgate could now construct all the probabilities of the case. "He was afraid of some betrayal in my hearing: all he wanted was to bind me to him by a strong obligation: that was why he passed on a sudden from hardness to liberality. And he may have tampered with the patient—he may have disobeyed my orders. I fear he did. But whether he did or not, the world believes that he somehow or other poisoned the man and that I winked at the crime, if I didn't help in it.

MM; 73: 605

He finds himself in a precarious position in which "the circumstances would always be stronger than his assertion" (MM; 73: 605) that he did not take the money as a bribe for administering certain measures of euthanasia to Raffles.

---

<sup>31</sup> The "prodigal habits" (MM; 67: 560) that run in the Vincy family as Bulstrode would have it.

But the news that Lydgate had all at once become able not only to get rid of the execution in his house but to pay all his debts in Middlemarch was spreading fast, gathering round it conjectures and comments which gave it new body and impetus, and soon filling the ears of other persons besides Mr. Hawley, who were not slow to see a significant relation between this sudden command of money and Bulstrode's desire to stifle the scandal of Raffles. That the money came from Bulstrode would infallibly have been guessed even if there had been no direct evidence of it.  
MM; 71: 588

There is—as the narrator makes clear—“a benumbing cruelty in his position” (MM; 73: 605). Due once again to the unsympathetic nature of the medium of *Middlemarch* where “his own treatment would pass for the wrong with most members of his profession” (MM; 73: 605–606) and where

they will all feel warranted in making a wide space between me and them, as if I were a leper ... it would be playing the part of a fool to offer his own testimony on behalf of himself  
MM; 73: 606

given these hostile prejudices against him in the public opinion.

Instead of being freed from burdens and able “to recover a firm stand” (MM; 70: 578) Lydgate is left in “motiveless levity” (MM; 79: 640). There are further indications, too, that “this petty medium of Middlemarch” is “too strong for him” (MM; 18: 153)<sup>32</sup> and eventually crushes him. Lydgate, the “spirited young adventurer” exploring “the dark territories of Pathology” (MM; 15: 121) to his great surprise has to discover that

the ordinary, the commonplace, the superficial, the quotidian is the very mystery most inaccessible to reason and explanation and method  
Beer (1980: 140)

### 4.3.3 “Grounded by Middlemarch” and Butchered in Slaughter Lane

Walter Greiner (1993: 40) in his article “‘Shapen after the Average’: Zur Macht der Mediokrität in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*” points out that the “wretched” medium of *Middlemarch*

stellt nicht nur die Existenzbedingungen für die Charaktere bereit, [es] ist auch fortwährend bestrebt, die Charaktere nach den Vorstellungen der *Middlemarch*-Durchschnittlichkeit zu formen.

A common medium can bend individuals totally unlike each other to look and act alike in the end. Nowhere is Lydgate's insight into this process more apparent as in his disillusioned understanding that

“I must do as other men do, and think what will please the world and bring in money; look for a little opening in the London crowd, and push myself ...”  
MM; 76: 628

<sup>32</sup> A point Lydgate had noticed as early as chapter 18 in the affair of the chaplaincy.

He comes to realise that “the workaday world possesses him”. In his treatment George Eliot

powerfully demonstrates the kinds of adjustments that are necessary—adjustments that depend on recognizing one’s own immersion in the everyday, responding with imaginative sympathy to the ordinary difficulties others experience ... .

Graver (1984: 140–141)

This analysis might be appropriate in a case where there is a social medium that corresponds to the organic “Gemeinschaft” ideal where

Verständnis ist ... der einfachste Ausdruck für das innere Wesen und die Wahrheit alles echten Zusammenlebens, Zusammenwohnens und -wirkens.

Tönnies (1991: 18)

The community life in *Middlemarch* displays, as has already been noted, none of the peaceful and harmonious unity of this ideal. *Middlemarch* might indeed be more appropriately described as the battleground on which the Darwinian battle for survival takes place.

It is no surprise then that Lydgate does not encounter the convivial workplace he had anticipated to find in *Middlemarch*, but faces open hostility from his colleagues, for some of whom his medical practice and his enthusiasm for medical reform constitutes an act of quackery. The hostility of his medical brethren towards him is manifest as early as chapter 26 in which the slighted Dr Wrench, seeing his diagnosis of Fred Vincy falsified by his younger “rival”

threw out biting remarks on Lydgate’s tricks, worthy only of a quack, to get himself a factitious reputation with credulous people. That cant about cures was never got up by sound practitioners.

MM; 26: 216

And later on more colleagues are to join the choir.

They [, i.e., his colleagues Dr. Sprague and Dr. Minchin] implied that he was insolent, pretentious, and given to that reckless innovation for the sake of noise and show which was the essence of the charlatan.

MM; 45: 371

Lydgate in Knoepflmacher’s (1975: 44) memorable expression

becomes grounded by *Middlemarch*. ... he becomes a ‘middle-marcher’, a creature who lives for the present only because he is incapable of channelling the energy that would convert that present into a conduit between past and future.

For Lydgate the act of “becoming grounded” entails the dreary realisation that all his creative energy and imagination is ultimately thwarted by humdrum triviality and the sheer mediocrity of the *Middlemarch* milieu with its ignorance of wider spiritual and intellectual worlds that can only flourish in metropolitan places which, according to Tönnies (1991: 211), are an aggregate of

lauter freien Personen, die im Verkehre einander fortwährend berühren, miteinander tauschen und zusammenwirken.

The cosmopolitan life in such a conurbation is

based on the ultimate expressions of rational will—science, informed public opinion, and control by ‘the republic of scholars’.  
Miner (1968: 175)

Lydgate discovers that the range of intrigues and other social vices are of a far more stifling nature in *Middlemarch* than they could ever possibly be in metropolitan London. “Things”—medical reform, his marriage and his financial problems—“come to a dead-lock” (MM; 46: 381) for him. In his mounting frustration and self-contempt he is “getting unlike his former self” and is “beginning to do things for which he had formerly even an excessive scorn”. He misapplies his power of imagination and takes—among other things—to gambling

Playing at the Green Dragon once or oftener might have been a trifle in another man; but in Lydgate it was one of several signs that he was getting unlike his former self. He was beginning to do things for which he had formerly even an excessive scorn.  
MM; 70: 583

Initially convinced that his marital and pecuniary difficulties and the general hostility with which he meets are “only a narrow swamp that we have to pass in a long journey” (MM; 64: 536), Lydgate, when faced with the omnipresent phenomena of the quotidian, can’t—in spite of his elaborate scientific research methodology with which he habitually investigates natural phenomena—get his “mind clear again”.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4.3.4 Whose “Spots of Commonness”?

Lydgate has often been seen as one of the egoists in *Middlemarch*; Ashton’s (1979: 162) comment in which she describes him as

an example of a man with his passion not mastered, of a clear idea missed in the surrounding unfavourable conditions and in the ‘spots of commonness’ in his nature.

is in many respects representative of the canonical opinion of literary criticism as concerns Lydgate’s shortcomings. Surely the following passage adds credence to this stance:

---

<sup>33</sup> Ashton (1979: 161) in this respect notes that “references to ‘clear ideas’ belong partly to the terminology of nineteenth-century optimism, of Comte and his idea that successive stages of thought and investigation bring an increase in clarity and positiveness.” But there is equally a Feuerbachian angle to be considered here; Feuerbach in *The Essence of Christianity* (1957: 82–83; passage quoted in the *Introduction*) maintains that it is through one’s fellow man that an individual becomes clear to himself.

But it had never occurred to him that he should live in any other than what he would have called an ordinary way, with green glasses for hock, and excellent waiting at table. In warming himself at French social theories he had brought away no smell of scorching. We may handle even extreme opinions with impunity while our furniture, our dinner-giving, and preference for armorial bearings in our own ease, link us indissolubly with the established order. And Lydgate's tendency was not towards extreme opinions: he would have liked no barefooted doctrines, being particular about his boots: he was no radical in relation to anything but medical reform and the prosecution of discovery. In the rest of practical life he walked by hereditary habit; half from that personal pride and unreflecting egoism which I have already called commonness, and half from that naivete which belonged to preoccupation with favourite ideas.

MM; 36: 286

Lydgate, the medical innovator, is right from the outset predestined to be a member of a Comtean elite.

His continental education, his flirtation with French social science, his esteem for Xavier Bichat (one of Comte's personal heroes) and other pioneers of research medicine, his contempt for all his pill-peddling associates in *Middlemarch*: these preferences announce his cultural novelty.

... The doctor's scientific expertise and orientation to social service mark him for membership in Comte's patrician elite, in fact, place him among the "priesthood of humanity".

Scott (1972: 69–70)

His socialisation had taken place in a thoroughly blue-blooded fashion, however. Once shaped in this aristocratic mould, for George Eliot, no matter what his choice and circumstance, he "remains substantially a product of his prior acculturation" and "therefore can modify his heritage only a little" (Levine (1962: 278)). In Lydgate's destiny it becomes apparent how the power of heredity and early environment permanently shape a character's psychic structure. Lydgate is predetermined by his history before he even enters the *Middlemarch* scene. His "spots of commonness", the innate moral flaws in his character, ultimately predominate in his nature.

Derived from "hereditary habit", they are responsible for the prejudices that cause Lydgate to separate himself from his fellow men, whether by viewing their "petty obstacles" and "trivial" business with aristocratic disdain, or by feeling humiliated when anxieties of an "everyday" sort force him to solicit "men with whom he had been proud to have no aims in common".

Graver (1984: 140–141)

The past by being always implicit in the present is a permanent and seminal part of Lydgate's character. It is a chimera to assume that Lydgate can act as an autonomous individual in relation to external *Middlemarch* society. "The social drama is merely that of his psychological constitution writ large" (Shuttleworth (1984: 153)). In Lydgate's psychological make-up George Eliot shows that the present and the past is within a character's psyche conclusively joined by an unbroken chain of causation. This in turn suggests that

one can never make a clearcut break with the society in which one has been brought up, with one's friends and relations, with one's past.

Levine (1962: 272)

Earlier on in this paper I referred to Farebrother's famous dictum that "character is not cut in marble" and following his line of reasoning pointed out that character rather than being a static and unalterable entity it should be seen as a dynamic one. In Tertius Lydgate George Eliot clearly does not adhere to this dynamic model of character, however.<sup>34</sup>

It is astounding to find that most modern literary critics have tended to gloss over these inconsistencies in Eliot's portrait of Lydgate<sup>35</sup>. George Eliot's underlying thoroughly deterministic implications of her showing "Lydgate's relations with *Middlemarch*" as "merely the analogue of his prior psychic structure" (Shuttleworth (1984: 171–172)) have in my opinion never been adequately problematised. This is not the place for an extensive discussion of Eliot's artistic inadequacies of on the one hand propagating a dynamic model of character, while on the other hand simultaneously undermining this model by a rigid adherence to a static and thoroughly deterministic dogma.<sup>36</sup>

What I would like to suggest, here, however, is that—although I have in the introduction drawn attention to the fact that George Eliot followed Darwinian thinking in accepting the prevalence of imperfection in the process of adaptation—Eliot's portrayal of Lydgate's downfall is not consistent with such a Darwinian model. Lydgate's "spots of commonness", which are ultimately responsible for his failure, are, as Scott (1972: 71) makes clear, "vestiges of his aristocratic upbringing". These vestiges in the notoriously famous passage in chapter 15 in *Middlemarch*

lay in the complexion of his prejudices, which, in spite of noble intention and sympathy, were half of them such as are found in ordinary men of the world: that distinction of mind which belonged to his intellectual ardour, did not penetrate his feeling and judgement about furniture, or women, or the desirability of its being known (without his telling) that he was better born than other country surgeons. He did not mean to think of furniture at present; but whenever he did so it was to be feared that neither biology nor schemes of reform would lift him above the vulgarity of feeling that there would be an incompatibility in his furniture not being of the best.

MM; 15: 123–124

Adaptation of an organism to its medium never being complete or perfect, George Eliot takes refuge in moralistic explanations to elucidate Lydgate's ruin, thereby falling into the trap of confusing natural laws with moral laws.

It is striking how minor these aristocratic vestiges are compared to the sacrifices Lydgate was prepared to make in following his vocation as a physician. Reverberations of how outrageously bold

<sup>34</sup> Greiner (1993: 42) describes Eliot's pre-conception of Lydgate as "ein männliches Versagermodell".

<sup>35</sup> This sense of inconsistency in Eliot's portrayal of Lydgate is apparent, however, in many contemporary reviews of the novel; it is certainly there in Henry James' famous *Galaxy* review of the novel in 1873. For more contemporary reviews of the novel, cf. the reprints in Carroll's (1971: 286–359) *George Eliot. The Critical Heritage*.

<sup>36</sup> I am strongly tempted to speak of a Hardy-esque "character is fate"-fatalism that is at stake here.

his violation of aristocratic caste was taken to be can be felt in certain passages of the letter that Sir Godwin Lydgate sent as a reply to Rosamond's request for financial help

But I have nothing to do with men of your profession, and can't help you there. I did the best I could for you as guardian, and let you have your own way in taking to medicine. You might have gone into the army or the Church. Your money would have held out for that, and there would have been a surer ladder before you.

MM; 65: 543–544

Surely there is a strong pressure on the reader to understand Lydgate's failure as being—at least partly—self-incurred.—According to such an interpretation the values that taint Lydgate's character are taken to be deficiencies and prejudices that are inscribed within his very personality and it is only through self-knowledge that he can gain insight into his shortcomings.—“Nosce te ipsum!”

If one is to follow in this deterministic train of thought, it will also become clear that Lydgate's<sup>37</sup> heroic plan for the future, “to do ... great work for the world” (MM; 15: 122), which suggests an individual potential “to shape the range of his influence, his own heroism and renown” (Hesse (1996: 364)), must be thwarted, because, once again, this is a blemish in his psychic structure totally incompatible with the “universal” dogma of consentaneous gradualism.

Search for any type of heroism, then, is unacceptable, and is portrayed in *Middlemarch* as a misleading hope.

Hesse (1996: 369)

The heroic for George Eliot is inevitably combined with egoism.

No man is entitled to expect much personal gratification from so complex a universe running according to invariable laws which apply indifferently to all men.

Levine (1962: 270–271)

Lydgate's fate thus ironically parallels that of another “revolutionary”, who, like Lydgate at the end of the novel, ended up being a fashionable Spa physician.

“You remember Trawley who shared your apartment at Paris for some time?”

...

“By the way,” he [i.e., Lydgate] said, “what has become of Trawley? I have quite lost sight of him. He was hot on the French social systems, and talked of going to the Backwoods to found a sort of Pythagorean community. Is he gone?”

---

<sup>37</sup> Scott (1972) traces the genesis of Lydgate, the medical man, to a series of letters George Eliot exchanged with Frederic Harrison, a distinguished member of the Comtean coterie, in which he induced her not only “to write a story dealing with the Positivist conception of social change” (Scott (1972: 61), but also already “nominated a capitalist and a physician for heroic roles” (Scott (1972: 63) as the new culture-bearers in this fiction. Scott concludes that given Lydgate's genealogy his eminent failure can be seen as George Eliot's intellectual rejection of the Comtean concept of the emergence of a new cultural and social elite.

“Not at all. He is practising at a German bath, and has married a rich patient.”  
MM; 17: 142

As regards his work as a scientist, there is no direct causal link between Lydgate’s social and professional failure and his wrong hypothesis (, i.e., “put[ting] the question—not quite in the way required by the awaiting answer” (MM; 15: 122)) in his histological research project<sup>38</sup>.

While being aware of the danger of becoming tedious I would like to finish this discussion by once again hinting at the acute infectious nature of the medium of *Middlemarch*, an image that is clearly implied by Eliot’s consistent use of metaphors of disease and infection.

Starting in chapter 15 (italics are mine) the narrator speaks of the existence of “a good number who once meant to shape their own deeds and alter the world a little” but undergo drastic changes in the whole process.

Nothing in the world more subtle than the process of their gradual change! In the beginning they *inhaled it* unknowingly: you and I may have sent some of our breath towards *infecting* them ...  
MM; 15: 119

This image is partly taken up in chapter 58 when Lydgate becomes

conscious of new elements in his life as noxious to him as *an inlet of mud* to a creature that has been used to breathe and bathe and dart after its illuminated prey in the clearest of waters.  
MM; 58: 478

Once again the poisonous influence is external. Then in chapter 71 in the infamous meeting in the Town-Hall a sanitary question linked to “the occurrence of a *cholera case* in the town” (MM; 71: 593) is discussed. Cholera is caused by a bacterium transmitted in contaminated water. This image is marvellously consistent with the metaphor of the “inlet of mud”. In chapter 74 Lydgate tells Mrs Bulstrode that “There is often something *poisonous* in the air of public rooms” (MM; 74: 611). That “something” not only infected her husband, but through his dependence on the former it had the same contagious effect on Lydgate himself. And finally in the Finale the narrator tells us that Lydgate “died prematurely of *diphtheria*” (MM; Finale: 680).

Diphtheria is an infectious disease in which a membrane forms in the throat, threatening death by suffocation; the pathological details are consistent with the overall imagery.

To the necessity of self-knowledge an organism at the same time has to gain a profound knowledge of his (potentially poisonous) environment.—“*Nosce medium tuum!*”, recognise

---

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of Lydgate’s mistake in terms of “an accident of history”, cf. Harvey’s excellent essay “The Intellectual Background of the Novel. Casaubon and Lydgate.” “... the irony of Lydgate is that he is just too soon for the real work [on cell-theory] to be done, again by German scholars, in the near future.” (Harvey (1967a: 36)). There are some hints in the novel of the more advanced state of empirical knowledge forty years later.



the pinched narrowness of provincial life at that time, which offered no conveniences for professional people whose fortune was not proportioned to their tastes.

MM; 58: 481

one is tempted to say.

#### 4.4 Will Ladislaw: The Socio-Political Outsider in Middlemarch

It has been a commonplace of *Middlemarch* criticism up to the 1970s to find fault with Will Ladislaw, who has been described as an “irksome mongrel” (Haight (1992: 49)) in the opinions of many critics. Henry James (1873; 1971: 355–356), who was one of the forerunner of this tradition in criticism, in his famous review of the novel in *Galaxy* in 1873 wrote:

Our dissatisfaction here is provoked in a great measure by the insubstantial character of the hero. The figure of Will Ladislaw is a beautiful attempt, with many finely-completed points; but on the whole it seems to us a failure. It is the only eminent failure in the book, and its defects are therefore the more striking. It lacks sharpness of outline and depth of color; we have not found ourselves believing in Ladislaw as we believe in Dorothea, in Mary Garth, in Rosamond, in Lydgate, in Mr. Brooke and Mr. Casaubon. He is meant, indeed, to be a light creature (with a large capacity for gravity, for he finally gets into Parliament), and a light creature certainly should not be heavily drawn.

James’ objections to Ladislaw are mainly on aesthetic grounds; this is strikingly apparent when he contrasts this “eminent failure” to “the noble, almost sculptural, relief of the neighboring figure of Lydgate, the real hero of the story”<sup>39</sup>.

Most often, however, Will’s diletantism was generally singled out as the most inadequate trait of his character. Another popular thread common in *Middlemarch* criticism was to see Ladislaw as simply a foil to the noble and vigorous Dorothea. Arguing along these lines it could be shown that he was no mistake “in the artistic whole of *Middlemarch*”. Ladislaw in fact, “to fulfill George Eliot’s purpose, had to be a deficient and unsatisfying character in the novel” (Luecke (1964: 56)).

Haight’s (1992b) essay “George Eliot’s ‘Eminent Failure’, Will Ladislaw”, first published in 1975, was groundbreaking in its attempt to defend the virtues of Will Ladislaw’s personality and to portray him as a “modern” and dynamic figure.

Today both Ladislaw’s curls and his habit of stretching himself at full length on the rug are accepted more sympathetically by the young with whom his contempt for stuffy convention ranks him as modern. They can understand, too, his experiments with fasting and with drugs. ... There was something of the gypsy in him, a rebellious spirit that hated conventional restrictions. How-

---

<sup>39</sup> Haight (1992b: 49) in his vindication of Ladislaw draws attention to the homo-erotic component involved in James’ disdain of Ladislaw’s lack of masculinity and his admiration for characters with strong and healthy bodily frames such as Lydgate.

ever one feels about this character, it is absurd to pronounce it vague or impalpable.  
Haight (1992: 41)

A positive effect of this essay has been that more recent criticism has by and large tended to find rather less fault with this young man.

The changing attitudes towards the figure of Will Ladislaw in the history of *Middlemarch* criticism may certainly be taken as a revealing illustration of the changing evaluative predilections of *Middlemarch* scholars.

In the following discussion of Will Ladislaw in his role of the socio-political outsider in *Middlemarch* I will not be mainly concerned with passing in the light of the critical opinions just discussed my own meek value judgement on this protagonist; rather I shall be much more interested in Will's function as an ardent public man, trying to indicate how through his political career he comes to enact a process of adaptive integration with his environment.

#### 4.4.1 Will Ladislaw's Career as "an Ardent Public Man"

Will Ladislaw's career as a public man originates from his wish to be close to Dorothea. But he becomes so enamoured ("the easily-stirred rebellion in him helped the glow of public spirit") to his new "vocation" that—having once and for all abandoned his aversion to a steady profession—"self-culture" ceases to be his guiding principle in life and he begins to study

the political situation with as ardent an interest as he had ever given to poetic metres or mediaevalism  
MM; 46: 377

Ladislaw by combining in a political syncretism the idealistic—and at times utopian—outlook of the artist with contemporary evolutionary theories is accurately to be described as a Romantic materialist<sup>40</sup>. His political aim is not to strive for the attainment of social perfection, but for broad social progress. He does not aim for a perfect state of society but an evolutionary, gradualist one. In this respect Will differs considerably from the stereotypical *Man of the Future*, that

mysterious being who will look back across a dim gulf of time upon imperfect humanity of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with just such kindly and half-incredulous scorn as we now condescend to bestow upon our own club-wielding, ape-like ancestor.  
Henkin (1963: 233)

as he was pictured in contemporary Victorian utopian fantasies of science.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> cf. also Beer (1983: 152)

<sup>41</sup> In the Victorian era contemporary evolutionary theories contributed immensely to the imaginative literature. Such theories attained a "mythical" power of the Victorians' imagination. "Other problems and interests held the close attention of the age—political reform, social evils, colonial policy, imperialism— but none had such wide ramifications in the field of thought and few such widespread reflection in the literature of the time." (Henkin (1963: 260))

In the Finale Will's political career is described by the narrator as follows:

Will became an ardent public man, working well in those times when reforms were begun with a young hopefulness of immediate good which has been much checked in our days, and getting at last returned to Parliament by a constituency who paid his expenses.

MM; Finale: 680

In this passage the narrator quite delicately eschews the positive implications—progress and improvement—commonly associated with social development and presents us with a notion which is far closer to the older concept denoted by the French term ‘transformisme’<sup>42</sup>, which does not assume a progressive pattern, but can accommodate both progression and retrogression, and “could give almost as much emphasis to the possibilities of degeneration as to those of improvement” (Beer (1983: 15)).

If we put the stress on the adjective in the narrator's statement, however, and thus speak of the “hopefulness of *immediate* good which has been much checked” then the remark appears to be compatible with a conception of evolution that “has loosely acquired those [ideas] of improvement and progress” (Beer (1983: 18)). Perceived in this way political and social evolution as envisioned by Ladislaw implies gradual progress. There is no place for saltational changes in this whole evolutionary process, however; there are increments of change, but these tend to be minute and often imperceptible in their nature.

Herbert Spencer in the most general terms argued that the process of evolution of society spontaneously leads to social betterment and must not be interfered with if the best results are to be achieved. To interfere with this process by producing premature development in any particular direction would inevitably disturb the true balance of societal organization by causing somewhere else a corresponding atrophy.

On the one hand George Eliot by assigning her protagonist Will Ladislaw the role of the artist turned zealous reform politician, who is “in the thick of a struggle” (MM; Finale: 680) against existing wrongs, consciously challenges Spencer's social ideology; on the other hand one should not ignore the melioristic gist of the narrator's statement. Reforms that were initiated in the wake of the First Reform Bill didn't lead to *immediate* social advances. Former enthusiastic notions of fast social development turned out to be an utopian chimera. In this respect the statement carries a truly Spencerian postulate: society, being an organism, must be allowed to “grow gradually from a germ” instead of being tinkered with by officious legislators. “Until spontaneously fulfilled a public want should not be fulfilled at all” (Simon (1961: 297)).

The theory of “modification”, one of the development hypotheses vital to the nineteenth-century concept of Social Dynamic, and one to whose tenet George Eliot was certainly no stranger, however, stated that natural phenomena, though subject to universal laws, are modifiable by man's

---

<sup>42</sup> cf. Beer (1983: 15) for a discussion of how this concept has in the history of terminology been gradually replaced by the term ‘evolution’.

intervention; and that of all such phenomena the conditions of social and psychological life are the most modifiable. It was argued that the very complexity of such phenomena

make them especially susceptible to social influences and to human desires and actions. The laws of natural phenomena could not be overturned, but the process of change inherent in the nature of man and society could be quickened and intensified through modifications in individual and social life acting upon one another.

Graver (1984: 47)

The vigorous reform politician Will Ladislaw embodies an incarnate fusion of Spencerian postulates and the theory of “modification”. As a political reformer Ladislaw can quicken and influence certain social developments and processes, but seminal changes can only be achieved gradually and in strict accord with the needs of the social organism<sup>43</sup>.

Reform is ultimately brought about by a power far above the individual will. There is an inherent progressive tendency of societies towards their own perfection<sup>44</sup> and although political and social reformers “seem the prime movers, [they] are merely the tools” (Burrow (1966: 112)). Saltational changes brought about by individuals are incompatible with Eliot’s gradualist “*Middlemarch* vision”; throughout her novel there is a focus on individuals being shaped by social life. Activists such as Will Ladislaw, the narrator suggests, can actively add to the “growing good of the world” by means of an adjustment of their idealism to outer realities, however.

Mason (1971a: 156) remarks that the organicist and radical evolutionary theories<sup>45</sup> of Comte, Spencer and (to some degree) Lewes, which in many ways are indeed the central philosophical building blocks of *Middlemarch*, imply that there is no

real place for intervention, central or otherwise, in the evolution which the changes in provincial England represent ... matters proceed very much with indifference to individuals.

For a radical organicist theorist the single individual or even the single species can never act as an agent of transformation<sup>46</sup>, as this would be a major assault on the belief in organic processes of gradual historical growth.

---

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of the problems raised by the impossibility to determine with certainty as to what constitutes a social need, cf. Graver (1984: 65 ff.).

<sup>44</sup> In this respect George Eliot’s view of the evolution of society is ultimately far closer related to Spencer’s now discredited Lamarckian doctrines, including that of human perfectibility, than to Charles Darwin’s conviction that no innate tendency to progressive development exists in organisms and that there is subsequently no necessary progress in human beings.

<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of the rise of evolutionary social theory as an endeavour to emulate in the study of society the achievements of biology, geology and philology, cf. Burrow’s (1966) book *Evolution and Society. A Study in Victorian Social Theory*.

<sup>46</sup> Clearly this theoretical tenet constituted a major “narrative challenge” to George Eliot and other novelists for whom on the one hand “the individual was a central form for interpreting experience” (Beer (1980: 135)), but on the other hand is “trapped in the determined pace of successive historical moments” (cf. Beer (1983: 155)).

Pushed to its logical conclusion, the organicist theory of Comte, Bernard, and Lewes undermined theories of individual autonomy.

Shuttleworth (1984: 204)

I would suggest—in agreement with Shuttleworth’s (1984: 22; xi) analysis—that for George Eliot organicist premises, although they

were associated in social and psychological theory with a decline of belief in individual autonomy ... [they] did not, as is commonly assumed, offer a single image of society. Indeed, social interpretation of the organic idea varied in accordance with the physiological premises each theorist adopted. ... The power of the organic idea as a conceptual model lay, in fact, in the diversity of possible interpretations it offered. The movement of organicism in nineteenth-century thought should be regarded, therefore, less as a single idea than as a language that imposed a uniform structure on all who attempted to extend its vocabulary.

Thus, and Ladislaw’s active involvement in politics is a proof of this assertion, matters do *not* proceed entirely with indifference to individuals. George Eliot in *Middlemarch* only excludes the possibility that individuals can cause sudden, heroic changes, since every individual

is a part of Nature, and Nature is a vast and complex system of which the parts are subordinate to impersonal forces governing the whole, she [, i.e., George Eliot] felt as well that the individuals that belong to such a system cannot be heroes.

Levine (1962: 271)

In the same vein Herbert Spencer argued that cultural and political change can be far better explained in terms of the operation of socio-cultural forces than as the result of the actions of individuals. Society for him was “a growth and not a manufacture” (quoted in: Carneiro (1967: xxvi)).

Surely one cannot help to see Ladislaw’s political actions as diametrically opposed to Spencer’s thoroughgoing prophesy of *laissez-faire* economics with its restriction of government activity to the bare minimum<sup>47</sup>. From what can be gleaned of Will’s—which for the sake of simplicity I take to coincide on most issues with Dorothea’s—political convictions<sup>48</sup> it emerges that for him one of the duties of government is to ameliorate the physical and moral state of the great body of the people—and this can undoubtedly be viewed as a truly *anti-laissez-faire* stance.

---

<sup>47</sup> But cf. Francis (1978: 317) for a critique of this “indissoluble” link of Spencer to the *laissez-faire* ideology; cf. also Carneiro (1967: xlvi) who states that “his treatment of society as an organism, on the one hand, and his championing of *laissez faire* and political individualism, on the other, led Spencer into a serious inconsistency”. Gordon (1968: 547) in his essay on *Laissez-faire* points out, however, that “the age of “laissez-faire” as anticipated by Spencer was, in fact, the beginning of the modern welfare state (and even the planned economy). The political philosophy of liberalism ... gradually evolved during the nineteenth century into its modern form, in which the state is regarded as a useful, indeed indispensable, instrument of human progress.”

<sup>48</sup> cf., e.g., chapter 46 “... in politics he would have been sympathizing warmly with liberty and progress in general” (MM; 46: 377).

Lydgate's political stance on the role of government can well be taken to reflect that which the radical economist F. W. Newman had expressed in his *Lectures on Political Economy* (quoted in: Francis (1978: 324)), a work George Eliot was most likely familiar with. Newman viewed the role of government in the following impassioned terms

to shelter the houseless, to strengthen the weak, to teach the ignorant, to reconcile the quarreling; to unite its citizens in firm bonds, to secure that society shall be cemented by mutual duty, and shall perform the offices of mutual kindness.

This feeling is undoubtedly equally shared by Dorothea whose keen sense of existing social wrong in *Middlemarch* society is apparent very early on in the novel.

I think we deserve to be beaten out of our beautiful houses with a scourge of small cords—all of us who let tenants live in such sties as we see round us. Life in cottages might be happier than ours, if they were real houses fit for human beings from whom we expect duties and affections.  
MM; 3: 26

Behind such a statement one can discover the idea of planned ameliorative community development involving the acceleration of economic, technological, and social change. Its ultimate aim is to create

a physical and social environment that is best suited to the maximum growth, development and happiness of human beings as individuals and as productive members of their society.  
Sanders (1968: 171)

In Will Ladislaw we are presented at the end of the novel with a protagonist who, having transcended his egoism, can unite his quest for self-fulfilment with his contribution to the gradual development of the larger social whole.<sup>49</sup> He stands as an illustration of Levine's (1972: 277–278) statement that “a character, for George Eliot, becomes what he makes himself”. Will indeed is a character who does not “surrender hopelessly to ... the pressures of external circumstances” and as a result can to a certain degree move “counter to the push of external circumstance”.

The moral question of whether individualistic desire and social duty can ever be harmonised, a theme which George Eliot explores in all of her novels, is resolved to great satisfaction. In Ladislaw's career as politician George Eliot celebrates “the marriage between individualism and organicism” (Graver (1984: 153)). As a politician with a firm commitment to social duty he is, as Shuttleworth (1984: 5) put it, “an organic part of social life”. In exemplary organicist and gradualist—and thus anti-individualist—fashion Ladislaw, though personally “rather enjoying the sense of belonging to no class” (MM; 46: 377), a stance by which Sir James once felt the traditional structure of society threatened, is looking for a balance of power, involving the considerations of different (class) interests.

---

<sup>49</sup> Ladislaw's political activities have to be always seen against the historical background of the England of the Reform era in which old social structures were being threatened by industrialism and capitalism on the one and new political faiths on the other hand.

“But that is what the country wants,” said Will. ... It wants to have a House of Commons which is not weighted with nominees of the landed class, but with representatives of the other interests.  
MM; 46: 376

Will Ladislaw is indeed the true fictional embodiment of the moral predominance of political altruism and his efforts are contributing to the bourgeois “revolution” which reached its peak in the final passing of the Reform Bill of 1832. This “revolution”

based in Bentham’s principle of the “greatest happiness for the greatest number” ... not only established change as the characteristic element of the cosmos but added direction and progress as well.

Lewontin (1968: 209)

Sociologically it marked the coup de grace to a static hereditary society and in its place “a system of dynamic stability” was established.

According to Comte’s conception of historical progress such a critical epoch as that ending with the First Reform Bill is followed by an organic epoch in which a society is determined to preserve “any type of inherited order”. Comte attributes to this alternation of critical and organic epochs

a directional character tending towards progress. ... When an organic epoch succeeds a critical one, this is not simply the recommencement of an earlier existing order, but a “restoration of the collectivity’s organic nature in keeping with higher principles of social life,” based on transformed experience gained during the critical epoch.

Hesse (1996: 66–67)

A political reformer like Will Ladislaw of course has to be aware of such complex cyclic “laws” that rule historical growth. Political progress can only be achieved in strict accordance to those laws and thus it becomes apparent why “the hope of *immediate* good” as expressed in the Finale turns out to be a political illusion.

#### 4.4.1.1 “Language is a finer medium”

In the dialogue between Will Ladislaw and Naumann in the Vatican, the former speaks of language being “a finer medium” than Naumann’s painting and Plastik, which

are poor stuff after all. They perturb and dull conceptions instead of raising them. ... Language gives a fuller image ... After all, the true seeing is within; and painting stares at you with an insistent imperfection.<sup>50</sup>

MM; 19: 157

For Ladislaw the dynamic nature not only of social and political, but also of aesthetic and historical processes have to be captured through an “internal” (“the true seeing is within”) medium. Within

---

<sup>50</sup> This remark is entirely unwarranted at this stage in the novel, however. Will Ladislaw’s output as an artist and dabbler in dilettantism could at best be described as being of mediocre quality, at worst as poor stuff, too.

“the flexible medium of language” (Shuttleworth (1984: 168–169)), Will finds the required dynamic qualities “to capture” these processes.

Behind Ladislav’s thoughts on language lurks Feuerbach’s conception of the social and political power of language.

The word is the imaged, revealed, radiating, lustrous, enlightening thought. The word is the light of the world. The word guides to all truth, unfolds all mysteries, reveals the unseen, makes present the past and the future, defines the infinite, perpetuates the transient. ... All power is given to the word: the word makes the blind see and the lame walk, heals the sick, and brings the dead to life; —the word works miracles, and the only rational miracles. The word is the gospel, the paraclete of mankind. ... The word has power to redeem, to reconcile, to bless, to make free. ... The word makes man free. ... To speak is an act of freedom; the word is freedom. ... where language is cultivated, man is cultivated.

Feuerbach (1957: 78–79)

Ladislav, having gained insight into his unfitness for an artistic profession in which he could use language creatively, is eventually able to find in the political sphere the suitable framework for the use of his “finer medium”. In his function first as a political journalist and newspaper editor and later as a Member of Parliament the use of language as a social and a communicative medium for expressing his political ideas is of vital importance. Language for Will “does not just reflect the inner world”, as it does for the egotistic characters such as Rosamond, Bulstrode, Casaubon and—to some degree—Lydgate, “but turns outwards, actively creating bonds and connections” (Shuttleworth (1984: 168)).

For the characters in the novel “the primary connecting bond is the shared linguistic medium”, too. It is through this shared medium that “they articulate both their individual and communal identity” (Shuttleworth (1984: 148)).

In *Middlemarch* the primary linguistic bond between the inhabitants is gossip, however, and it is through the use of this very “medium” at Dollop’s in Slaughter Lane and elsewhere that Lydgate is, metaphorically speaking, “slaughtered”. Also Will’s image is grossly distorted by *Middlemarch* gossip; he is generally seen in not particularly charming terms as alternately “an Italian with white mice” (MM; 50: 401) by Mrs. Cadwallader or in even more damnable terms as a “cursed alien blood, Jew, Corsican, or Gypsy” (MM; 71: 588) by Mr Hawley.

There is a striking discrepancy between Ladislav’s highly idealistic concept of language and the rather less idealistic and far more contemptible linguistic reality of the *Middlemarch* medium. Once again we can perceive clearly that George Eliot in *Middlemarch* presents no simplistic affirmation of theories of organic social harmony, but rather admirably explores the complexities and contradictions within the whole organicist social (and linguistic) theory.



## 4.5 Unity versus Fragmentariness; Revolution of Consciousness versus “Political Hocus-Pocus”

A central intellectual concern of the two outsiders in *Middlemarch* is with visions of unity<sup>51</sup>. Such visions seek to reduce the fragmented and heterogeneous diversity of the universe to a single unifying principle.<sup>52</sup>

An illustration of such a vision that has often been remarked upon is found in the Rome chapter, in which Will Ladislaw speaks of

the enjoyment he got out of the very miscellaneousness of Rome, which made the mind flexible with constant comparison, and saved you from seeing the world's ages as a set of box-like partitions without vital connection.

MM; 22: 174

While for Dorothea “this stupendous fragmentariness heightened the dreamlike strangeness of her bridal life”, Ladislaw is able to look at Rome

with the quickening power of a knowledge which breathes a growing soul into all historic shapes, and traces out the suppressed transitions which unite all contrasts.

MM; 20: 158

Will's mind is stimulated by the “dead” fragments of Rome. Combining “raw imagination with genuine knowledge” (Knoepflmacher (1975: 63)) he is able to give coherence and unifying meaning to “this stupendous fragmentariness”.

What has been consistently overlooked in *Middlemarch* criticism is the existence of a vital connection of the narrator's description of Will's responses to Rome's heterogeneity and George Eliot's commitment to social and political regeneration by means of a reshaping of thought and feeling. Graver (1984: 3) makes clear that “social theory by itself” was inadequate to this task and that “works of imaginative literature might be absolutely central” in influencing “the sensibilities of their contemporary readers”.

It is precisely through a depiction of her protagonist's passionate flexibility of mind in his reaction to what appears as heterogeneous fragments seemingly deprived of any meaning that George Eliot can emphasise the need for such a regeneration. There have to be changes in thought and feeling, so that the fundamental unity underlying the disordered fragmentariness can be perceived and resuscitated. Will's creative energy, which by uncovering “through constant comparison the vital in-

---

<sup>51</sup> Casaubon with his futile unity-seeking search for the *Key to all Mythology* has of course a warranted claim to membership in this group of protagonists, too.

<sup>52</sup> The continual tension between fragmentariness and visions of unity can be viewed as being characteristic of George Eliot's fiction in general.

terdependence of apparently fragmented parts” (Shuttleworth (1984: 164–165)), does speak of such a transformed consciousness at work.

In another highly relevant passage in chapter 46 Will Ladislaw is seen discussing current political issues concerning the Bill with Lydgate. The latter,

inclined to be sarcastic on the superstitious faith of the people in the efficacy of “the bill,” while nobody cared about the low state of pathology  
MM; 46: 379

during their conversation strongly censures the former for being a rabble-rouser with the pen.

“That is the way with you political writers, Ladislaw—crying up a measure as if it were a universal cure, and crying up men who are a part of the very disease that wants curing.”  
MM; 46: 380

And later on Lydgate blames Ladislaw for

“... encouraging the superstitious exaggeration of hopes about this particular measure, helping the cry to swallow it whole and to send up voting popinjays who are good for nothing but to carry it [i.e., the Reform Bill]. You go against rottenness, and there is nothing more thoroughly rotten than making people believe that society can be cured by a political hocus-pocus.”  
MM; 46: 380–381

Ladislaw, although acknowledging some points in Lydgate’s political analysis to be valid, defends his stance by contending that

“... your cure must begin somewhere, and put it that a thousand things which debase a population can never be reformed without this particular reform to begin with.”  
MM; 46: 381

The relevance of having chosen these passages from the Rome chapter and from chapter 46 for a discussion is that they highlight perfectly well George Eliot’s endeavour to fuse private mental revolution and public political concepts<sup>53</sup> within the figure of Will Ladislaw. Yet, as the excerpts, with Lydgate’s criticism pointing strongly towards contradictions and discrepancies in Will’s political creed, and with Will’s well-known personal dilemmas clearly laid out in his psychic structure, should make manifest, there are limitations to the harmonious fusion of these concepts. In particular it is hard to conceive how essential differences between gradual public outward change and personal inward transformation can be reconciled so that these two notions do not impede each other.

---

<sup>53</sup> Graver (1984: 310) sees the striving for “fusions that involved integrating concepts and methods traditionally kept apart” as a constitutive trait in the rationale of contemporary social theorists by which George Eliot was influenced. George Eliot does, in contrast to these theorists who exclusively stress “organic wholeness and equilibrium”, in her portrayal of *Middlemarch* society not retreat from conflict, “irreconcilable antagonisms” and “the presence of violent self-assertion and uncontrollable aggression”. *Middlemarch* does exhibit all of these social vices.

George Eliot in *Middlemarch* is not determined to *resolve* these conflicts.—In creating protagonists such as Will Ladislaw she is able to fully explore the complexities of reconciling such conflicting “visionary and practical, individual and social values” (Graver (1984: 311)), however.

## 5. “Who can Quit Young Lives after Being Long in Company with them, and not Desire to Know what Befell them in their After-Years?”

There has been a tradition in *Middlemarch* criticism to take exception to the melioristic and ambivalent outlook of the Finale and it has often been claimed, especially by contemporary Victorian critics, that its “melancholy scepticism ... is at odds with the reader’s sense of the work as a whole” (Ashton (1979: 159)). Sidney Colvin’s (1873; repr. 1971: 337–338) review might be taken as representative of the general feeling of dissatisfaction that many Victorians felt.

There is no sense of triumph in it; there is rather a sense of sadness in a subdued and restricted, if not now a thwarted destiny. In this issue there is a deep depression. ... that feeling of uncertainty and unsatisfiedness as to the whole fable and its impression which remains with the reader when all is done . . . . As it is, he does not feel clear enough about the point of view, the lesson, the main moral and intellectual outcome.

In more “recent” criticism there has been a shift towards rather more optimistic interpretations of the Finale. Mason (1971a: 155) for instance assures us that

An age is foreseen, which, like the Middle Ages, will offer a satisfactory adjustment of spontaneous individual impulse to that of the environment, under the common ideal of ‘Knowledge’.

In such an age—to use Will Ladislav’s description of the poet’s soul—knowledge in the individual would “pass instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge” (MM; 22: 183).—An idea that is undoubtedly very alluring, though it is rather heavily tinged by Romanticist ideas. One is tempted to reply to Mason’s notion with Mr Brooke of Tipton’s famous words

“Yes, yes, my dear,” ... “It is easy to go too far, you know. You must not let your ideas run away with you”  
MM; 72: 603

Also rather misleading, because it fails to take into consideration the fate of Lydgate and Bulstrode, the two protagonists clearly earmarked for membership in the Comtean intellectual elite, is Ashton’s (1979: 160) comment that the Finale endorses “a broadly Comtean view”.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> cf. Scott (1972) and Hesse (1996) for a more profound assessment of Comtean ideology and its influence on George Eliot’s fiction.

There are beyond any doubt strong indications that a new medium exists and that this new medium is not rigidly monolithic and invariably fixed, but

itself a matrix of possibilities, the outcome of multiple interactions between organisms and within matter.

Beer (1983: 23).

The existence of such a medium is—in spite of the narrator's allusion to the potential stifling of Ladislav Junior's political opinion—given credence in the following passage in the Finale:

It became an understood thing that Mr. and Mrs. Ladislav should pay at least two visits during the year to the Grange, and there came gradually a small row of cousins at Freshitt who enjoyed playing with the two cousins visiting Tipton as much as if the blood of these cousins had been less dubiously mixed. Mr. Brooke lived to a good old age, and his estate was inherited by Dorothea's son, who might have represented Middlemarch, but declined, thinking that his opinions had less chance of being stifled if he remained out of doors.

MM (Finale; 681–682)

The two outsiders are also located “out of doors” at the end of the Finale. Tertius Lydgate as a successful Spa doctor alternates his place of residence between London and the Continent; Will Ladislav's place of abode is the capital. These changes of habitation suggest—in analogy to public life that is equally becoming wider and more national—a strong shift towards the urban, the metropolitan.

For George Eliot such changes of habitation do not “disturb the local ties of traditional community” (Graver (1984: 90–91) as Tönnies would have argued. Rather she views them within the framework of a tradition of social and political thought intent on the rediscovery of community in modern (urban) settings. The perception of a breakdown in traditional communal values is overtly apparent in her depiction of *Middlemarch* community. This means that she has to locate her belief in a social regeneration of society outside of *Middlemarch* and also outside of the traditional representatives of social and political life in *Middlemarch*.

George Eliot proceeds from the assumption that society can indeed recover a sense of communality “through a revolution of thought and feeling”. Ladislav's political commitment, which helps to counteract

the fragmented, self-serving, and isolating tendencies of increasingly heterogeneous and complex societies

Graver (1984: 3)

has to be seen in this context. Finally, the fact that Ladislav's son takes after his father and becomes a public man, too, illustrates the importance of continuity; political projects “cannot rest in the present—they rely upon extension and futurity” (Beer (1983: 152)).

The whole Finale should properly be seen in the context of the theory of “modification”, to which I have already referred earlier on in my analysis of Ladislav as a reform politician.—There is

hope in the gradual evolution of society and “the marvelous finale” might therefore well be taken “as a hymn to gradualism” (Levine (1998: 256)).

## 5.1 The Outsiders' Lot in the Finale

### 5.1.1 Tertius Lydgate

In chapter 15 the narrator formulates a hypothesis as regards Tertius Lydgate's future interaction with his new medium:

Middlemarch, in fact, counted on swallowing Lydgate and assimilating him very comfortably.  
MM; 15: 126

The basis for this hypothesis forms data that have been empirically gained during prior observation earlier on in chapter 6.

... a stronger lens reveals to you certain tiniest hairlets which make vortices for these victims while the swallower waits passively at his receipt of custom.  
MM; 6: 49

The “tiniest hairlets which make vortices” is the adaptation pressure exerted by the environment (“the swallower”), the provincial medium of *Middlemarch*. Lydgate, having only “a weak lens” at his disposal merely sees “a creature exhibiting an active voracity into which other smaller creatures actively play” and thus—due to the inaccuracy of the instrument he uses—concludes erroneously that active and spontaneous interaction between individuals and their environments can be presumed.

Due to a change in parameters, i.e., his financial and marital problems together with the insurmountable resistance against necessary medical reforms, on the one hand and his initial wrong hypothetical assumptions about the nature of his new medium on the other hand, he “by-and-by” is “caught tripping too”. His “ungentlemanly attempts to discredit the sale of drugs” do indeed “recoil on himself” (MM; 26: 216)<sup>55</sup>. A “creeping paralysis” (MM; 76: 629) seizes his enthusiasm and he comes to feel increasingly checkmated by the medium of *Middlemarch*.

In the Finale his future career as a fashionable and highly successful Spa doctor is announced. “In brief, Lydgate was what is called a successful man” (MM; Finale: 680). At the same time he is shown to be a failure by his own high standards, however, an evaluation which renders his self-contempt psychologically plausible.

---

<sup>55</sup> As Mr. Wrench, one of the early harbingers of Lydgate's later doom, “reflected, with much probability on his side” in chapter 26.

Lydgate's hair never became white. He died when he was only fifty, leaving his wife and children provided for by a heavy insurance on his life. ... His skill was relied on by many paying patients, but he always regarded himself as a failure: he had not done what he once meant to do. His acquaintances thought him enviable to have so charming a wife, and nothing happened to shake their opinion.

MM; Finale: 679

### 5.1.2 Will Ladislaw

In the figure of Will and Dorothea we can perceive the incarnate moral potential for furthering the process of development in the interest of a more humane society. Will Ladislaw, the visionary outsider, is in this respect also a figure which embodies George Eliot's unwillingness to accept the social implications that some contemporary thinkers drew from the organic metaphor.<sup>56</sup> He together with Dorothea *is* indeed an eminent force for change. Their marital union completes the social vision of *Middlemarch* by indicating that a personal telos, which he had envisioned in chapter 51 as follows,

Then came the young dream of wonders that he might do—in five years, for example: political writing, political speaking, would get a higher value now public life was going to be wider and more national, and they might give him such distinction that he would not seem to be asking Dorothea to step down to him.

MM; 51: 415

can with the “wifely help” (MM; Finale: 680) of Dorothea finally be achieved.

*Middlemarch* is not the right medium for this marital constellation, however.

Die Ausgrenzung wird perfekt, und die Übersiedlung in die Hauptstadt London erfolgt mit dem Ziel, dort einen Handlungsfreiheit, d. h. Souveränität, gewährenden Lebens-Raum gestalten zu können, und damit Lebenszeit in sinnvoller Tätigkeit zu nutzen.

Greiner (1993: 46)

Will's escape to London makes abundantly clear that for him as a *homo politicus* no organic adaptation leading to a harmonious social integration into the traditional community of *Middlemarch* is possible, given its distinct hostility towards social and political change. Moreover, the concept of a “wider and more national” public life does not accord well with the ‘petty’ politics of *Middlemarch* where—as Mr Brooke asserts—Will would “never get elected, you know” (MM; 46: 376).—A purposeful political existence for Will is only possible beyond the limits of provincial life in the metropolis London.

For Tönnies (1991: 215; 3)

Zwei Zeitalter stehen mithin ... in den großen Kulturentwicklungen einander gegenüber: ein Zeitalter der Gesellschaft folgt einem Zeitalter der Gemeinschaft. Dieses ist durch den sozialen

---

<sup>56</sup> cf. Shuttleworth (1984: 9 ff.).

---

Willen als Eintracht, Sitte, Religion bezeichnet, jenes durch den sozialen Willen als Konvention, Politik, öffentliche Meinung. ... Gesellschaft ist die Öffentlichkeit, ist die Welt.

Will's emigration to London together with his public career seem at first sight to follow Tönnies' historic development theory. The provincial *Middlemarch* medium, however, lacks the "communitarian values, emotional ties, and affective habits and traditions" (Graver (1984: 124)) so characteristic of *Gemeinschaft*. There is no "vertraute[s], heimliche[s], ausschliessliche[s] Zusammenleben" (Tönnies (1991: 3)) in this community.

George Eliot saw a mixture of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* tendencies as constitutive of modern social life. Her "creation of a modern poetry of communities" (Graver (1984: 124)) allowed for genuine communitarian values, normally only found in rural communities ("das Landleben"), to exist in an urban setting.

... Such blendings of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* elements, no less than the separations between them, contribute amply to the tensions within George Eliot's fiction and participate in the struggle to affirm community.  
Graver (1984: 124)

In spite of Will Ladislaw's truly altruistic political support for democratic reforms, there still remain certain inadequacies of character with him that are only too obvious. Contemporary Victorian criticism has—in my opinion—highly exaggerated these flaws in his psychic structure; nevertheless they "speak of a world in which reform and reformer alike are far from perfect or complete" (Graver (1984: 222–223)). And thus they speak at the same time of the underlying Darwinian master model to which George Eliot adhered in the delineation of her protagonist.



## 6. Conclusion

In *Middlemarch* George Eliot subjects the outsiders Tertius Lydgate and Will Ladislaw, her two specimens under observation, to careful and thorough psychological scrutiny<sup>57</sup>. Having passed various test procedures set up by the narrator the two “intruders” at the end of the novel are shown to have arrived at their “moral” maturity and their development is conclusively assessed by the narrator.

For Tertius Lydgate, having had the ambition to shape his own heroic renown, “moral” maturity signifies having reached a state of disillusioned sobriety with a clear sense of his littleness in the universe. His alienation is portrayed as a clear causal consequence of his ignorance of the “invariable” laws that pertain universally to all individuals.

It always remains true that if we had been greater, circumstance would have been less strong against us.  
MM; 58: 478

In Lydgate’s case the circumstance has been downright Herculean.

In sharp contrast to Lydgate Will Ladislaw finds a strong partisanship in political activities, which enables him to direct his intellectual vigour towards noble humanitarian ends. Sociologically his getting elected to Parliament is a visible indication as to a democratic opening of society and an age is anticipated where the sons of “a high-spirited young lady and a musical Polish patriot” (MM; 71: 588) are deemed worthy participants in the political system.

Shuttleworth (1984: 142) in the context of her discussion of the implications of organicism for the individual states that

The perfect state will be one in which there is no disjunction between inner consciousness and the external social medium.

I would argue that neither Tertius Lydgate nor Will Ladislaw achieves this state of perfection.—Not least because the two protagonists—like Dorothea—had to struggle “amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state” (MM; Finale: 682).

### 6.1 Outlook

In this paper I have been exclusively concerned with two “major” outsiders in George Eliot’s novel *Middlemarch*. It is tempting to suggest a widening of the scope to include such “minor” outsiders as,

---

<sup>57</sup> There is an inequality in George Eliot’s examinations in that she subjects Tertius Lydgate to far more extensive and far more critical tests than Will Ladislaw, however.

---

e.g., Raffles for a basis for a comparative study of the various outsiders in George Eliot's novels.<sup>58</sup> "Are there primitive tissues" that are common to all of these figures? Putting the question in that way might not be in the way of the awaiting answer, but it could lead at least—very much in analogy to Farebrother's research—to a modest taxonomy of outsiders in George Eliot's novels.

---

<sup>58</sup> In *George Eliot's Originals and Contemporaries*, a compilation of essays by the eminent George Eliot scholar Gordon Haight (1992), we can find an essay on *George Eliot's Bastards* that is somewhat related to my suggested subject matter. The mentioned essay defines—as the title suggests—its topic from a genealogical and not from a sociological point of view, though.

---

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Eliot, George (1988). *Middlemarch*. The World's Classics. Edited with an Introduction by David Carroll. Oxford University Press. Oxford. Hereafter quoted as MM.

Ashton, Rosemary (ed.) (1992). *Versatile Victorian: Selected Writings of George Henry Lewes*. Bristol Classical Press. Bristol.

Carneiro, Robert L. (ed.) (1967). *The Evolution of Society. Selections from Herbert Spencer's Principles of Sociology*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago.

Comte, Auguste (1968–1971). *Oeuvres*. Introduction de Sylvain Perignon. Edition Anthropos. Paris.

————— (1910–1919). *La Philosophie Positive Resumé par Emile Rigolage*. Les Meilleurs Auteurs Classiques Francais et Etrangers. E. Flammarion. Paris.

————— (1957). *Catechisme Positiviste ou Sommaire Exposition de la Religion Universelle en Treize Entretiens Systematiques entre une Femme et un Pretre de l'Humanite*. Rio de Janeiro.

————— (1974). *Die Soziologie: Die positive Philosophie im Auszug. Auguste Comte*. Übersetzung von *La Sociologie*. Edited by Friedrich Blaschke. Alfred Kroener. Stuttgart.

Darwin, Charles (1959; first edition: 1859). *On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection*. A Variorum Text (ed. Morse Peckham). University of Pennsylvania Press. Philadelphia.

————— (1901; first edition: 1871). *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*. New Edition. John Murray. London.

Feuerbach, Ludwig (1854; reprinted 1957). *The Essence of Christianity*. Translated by George Eliot. London (first edition). Reprinted New York (1957).

————— (1849; reprinted 1996). *Das Wesen des Christentums*. Leipzig. Reprinted in the Reclam Universal-Bibliothek Nr. 4571. Stuttgart.

---

Haight, Gordon (ed.) (1954). *The George Eliot Letters*. Yale University Press. New Haven. Hereafter quoted as GEL.

Kitchel, Anna T. (ed.) (1950). *Quarry for Middlemarch*. University of California Press. Berkeley.

Pinney, Thomas (ed.) (1967). *Essays of George Eliot*. Columbia University Press. New York.

Pratt, John C. and Neufeldt, Victor A. (eds.) (1979). *George Eliot's Middlemarch Notebooks. A Transcription*. University of California Press. Berkeley.

Spencer, Herbert (reprinted) (1966). *The Study of Sociology*. Introduction by Talcott Parsons. The University of Michigan Press. Ann Arbor.

Spencer, Herbert (reprinted) (1966). *The Works of Herbert Spencer*. Otto Zeller. Osnabrück.

Tönnies, Ferdinand (1887; reprinted 1991). *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundbegriffe der reinen Soziologie*. Bibliothek klassischer Texte. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft. Darmstadt.

## Secondary Sources

Acton, H.B. "Comte's Positivism and the Science of Society". In: *Philosophy* (vol. 26; 1951: 291–310).

Adam, Ian (1975a). *This Particular Web*. University of Toronto Press. Toronto.

——— (1975b). "Introduction". In: Adam (1975a: ix–xv).

Ashton, Rosemary (1979). "The Intellectual 'Medium' of *Middlemarch*". In: *The Review of English Studies* (vol. 30; 1979: 154–168).

——— (1980). *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

——— (1983). *George Eliot*. Oxford University Press. Oxford.

Auster, Henry (1975). "George Eliot and the Modern Temper". In: Buckley (1975: 75–101).

---

Barker, Ernest (1945). *Political Thought in England 1848 to 1914*. Second edition. Oxford University Press. Oxford.

Beatty, Jerome (1957). "History by Indirection: The Era of Reform in *Middlemarch*". In: *Victorian Studies* (vol 1; 1957: 173–179).

————— (1981; original publication: 1960). *Middlemarch from Notebook to Novel*. Greenwood Press. Westport. Connecticut.

Beer, Gillian (1975). "Myth and the Single Consciousness: *Middlemarch* and *The Lifted Veil*". In: Adam (1975a: 91–115).

————— (1980). "Plot and the Analogy with Science in later Nineteenth-Century Novelists". In: *Comparative Criticism* (vol 2; 1980: 131–149).

————— (1983). *Darwin's Plots. Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Routledge & Keegan Paul. London.

Buckley, Jerome H. (1975). *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction*. Harvard University Press. Harvard.

Burrow, J. W. (1966). *Evolution and Society. A Study in Victorian Social Theory*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

Carneiro, Robert L. (1968). "Spencer, Herbert". In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968: 121–128).

Carroll, David R. (1959). "Unity through Analogy: An Interpretation of *Middlemarch*". In: *Victorian Studies* (vol. 2; 1959: 303–316).

————— (1971). *George Eliot. The Critical Heritage*. Routledge & Kegan Paul. London.

————— (1975). "*Middlemarch* and the Externality of Fact". In: Adam (1975a: 73–90).

Collins, K. K. (1980). "George Eliot and Herbert Spencer: An Unnoted Reference in *The Study of Sociology*". In: *English Language Notes* (vol. 17; Number 3; 1980: 199–203).

Colvin, Sidney (1873; reprinted 1971). "Review of *Middlemarch*, *Fortnightly Review*". In: Carroll (1971: 331–338).

- 
- Cugini, Carla (1998). "‘Fiction is never innocent of science’. The Web of Science and Literature Shown by George Eliot". Unpublished "Hausarbeit". English Seminar. Zürich.
- Dobzhansky, Theodosius (1968). "Evolution and Behavior". In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968: 234–238).
- Eisen, Sydney (1967). "Herbert Spencer and the Spectre of Comte". In: *Journal of British Studies* (vol. 7; 1967: 48–67).
- Eisenstadt, Shmuel N. (1968). "Social Evolution". In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968: 228–234).
- Ellmann, Richard (1977). "Dorothea's Husbands". In: Hornback (1977: 750–765).
- Flew, Antony (1984). *Darwinian Evolution*. Paladin Books. Granada Publishing. London.
- Francis, Mark (1978). "Herbert Spencer and the Myth of Laissez-Faire". In: *Journal of the History of Ideas* (vol. 39; 1978: 317–328).
- Freeman, Derek (1974). "The Evolutionary Theories of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer". In: *Current Anthropology* (vol 15; 1974: 211–237).
- Gordon, Scott H. (1968). "Laissez-faire". In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968: 546–549).
- Gould, Stephen J. (1986). "Commentary on Greene and Mayr". In: *Revue de Synthèse* (No 3; 1986: 239–242).
- Graber, Robert B. (1993). "Herbert Spencer and George Eliot: Some Corrections and Implications". In: *George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Studies* (1993: 69–83).
- Graver, Susan (1984). *George Eliot and Community. A Study in Social Theory and Fictional Form*. University of California. Berkeley.
- Green, John C. (1986). "The History of Ideas Revisited". In: *Revue de Synthèse* (No 3; 1986: 201–227).

---

Greiner, Walter (1993). "‘Shapen after the Average’. Zur Macht der Mediokrität in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*". In: *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* (vol. 41; 1993: 40–53).

Haight, Gordon (1992a). *George Eliot’s Originals and Contemporaries. Essays in Victorian Literary History and Biography*. Edited by Hugh Witemeyer. Macmillan. London.

————— (1992b). "George Eliot’s ‘Eminent Failure’, Will Ladislaw". In: Haight (1992a: 38–57).

Hardy, Barbara (1959). *The Novels of George Eliot. A Study in Form*. The Athlone Press. University of London. London.

————— (ed.) (1967). *Middlemarch. Critical Approaches to the Novel*. The Athlone Press. University of London. London.

————— (1975). "Middlemarch and the Passions". In: Adam (1975a: 3–21).

Harvey, W. J. (1967a). "The Intellectual Background of the Novel. Casaubon and Lydgate". In: Hardy (1967: 25–37).

————— (1967b). "Criticism of the Novel. Contemporary Reception". In: Hardy (1967: 125–147).

Henkin, Leo J. (1963). *Darwinism in the English Novel 1860–1910. The Impact of Evolution on Victorian Fiction*. Russell & Russell. New York.

Hesse, David Maria (1996). *George Eliot and Auguste Comte. The Influence of Comtean Philosophy on the Novels of George Eliot*. Peter Lang. Frankfurt am Main.

Hornback, Bert G. (ed.) (1977). *George Eliot. Middlemarch. An Authoritative Text. Backgrounds. Reviews and Criticism*. Norton & Company. New York.

Hulme, Hilda M. (1967). "The Language of the Novel". In: Hardy (1967: 87–124).

James, Henry (1873; reprinted 1971). "Unsigned Review of *Middlemarch, Galaxy*". In: Carroll (1971: 353–359).

Kiely, Robert (1975). "The Limits of Dialogue in *Middlemarch*". In: Buckley (1975: 103–123).

- 
- Knoepflmacher, Ulrich C. (1964). "George Eliot, Feuerbach, and the Question of Criticism". In: *Victorian Studies* (vol. 7; 1964: 306–309).
- (1969). "Mr. Haight's George Eliot: 'Wahrheit und Dichtung'". In: *Victorian Studies* (vol. 12; 1969: 422–430).
- (1975). "Fusing Fact and Myth: the New Reality of *Middlemarch*". In: *Adam* (1975a: 43–72).
- and Levine, George (eds.) (1980). "Special Issue: George Eliot 1880–1980". In: *Nineteenth Century Fiction* (vol. 35: 1980).
- Leavis, F. R. (1962; first edition: 1948). *The Great Tradition*. Chatto & Windus. London.
- Levine, George (1962). "Determinism and Responsibility in the Works of George Eliot". In: *PMLA* (vol. 77; Number 1; 1962: 268–279).
- (1998). *Darwin and the Novelists. Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction*. Harvard University Press. Harvard.
- Lewontin, R. C. (1968). "The Concept of Evolution". In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968: 202–209).
- Luecke, Jane M. (1964). "Ladislaw and the *Middlemarch* Vision". In: *Nineteenth Century Fiction* (vol. 19; 1964: 55–64).
- Mason, Michael Y. (1971a). "*Middlemarch* and Science: Problems of Life and Mind". In: *The Review of English Studies* (vol. 22; 1971: 151–169).
- (1971b). "*Middlemarch* and History". In: *Nineteenth Century Fiction* (vol. 25; 1971: 417–425).
- Mayhew, Leon H. (1968). "Society". In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968: 577–586).
- Mayr, Ernst (1986). "The Death of Darwin?". In: *Revue de Synthèse* (No 3; 1986: 229–235).



---

————— (1991). *One Long Argument. Charles Darwin and the Genesis of Modern Evolutionary Thought*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge.

Miner, Horace M. (1968). "Community–Society Continua". In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968: 174–180).

Paxton, Nancy L. (1991). *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer. Feminism, Evolutionism, and the Reconstruction of Gender*. Princeton University Press. New Jersey.

Polsby, Nelson W. (1968). "The Study of Community Power". In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968: 157–163).

Rohner, Heidi (1972). *Interaction between Character and Society in Middlemarch and Mansfield Park*. Licentiate Paper. English Seminar. University of Basle.

Sanders, Irwin T. (1968). "Community Development". In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968: 169–174).

Schorer, Mark (1967). "The Structure of the Novel. Method, Metaphor and Mind". In: Hardy (1967: 12–24).

Scott, James F. (1972). "George Eliot, Positivism, and the Social Vision of 'Middlemarch'". In: *Victorian Studies* (vol. 16; Number 1; 1972: 59–76).

Service, Elman R. (1968). "Cultural Evolution". In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968: 221–228).

Shuttleworth, Sally (1984). *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science. The Make-Believe of a Beginning*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

Simon, Walter M. (1961). "Herbert Spencer and the 'Social Organism'". In: *Journal of the History of Ideas* (vol. 21; 1961: 294–299).

————— (1964). "August Comte's English Disciples". In: *Victorian Studies* (vol. 8; 1964: 161–172).

Swann, Brian. "Middlemarch and Myth". In: *Nineteenth Century Fiction* (vol. 9; 1954: 262–279).

---

Swinden, Patrick (ed.) (1972). *Middlemarch. A Casebook. A Selection of Critical Essays*. The Macmillan Press. London.

Tax, Sol and Krucoff, Larry S. (1968). "Social Darwinism". In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968: 402–406).

Walter, Allen (1977). "Character and Environment in George Eliot's Fiction". In: Hornback (1977: 664–670).

Washburn, S. L. and Lancaster, Jane B. (1968). "Human Evolution". In: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968: 215–221).

Watt, Ian (1963). *The English Novel*. Penguin. Hammondsworth.

Wood, Anthony (1992; first edition: 1982). *Nineteenth Century Britain 1815–1914*. Longman. Essex.

Wright, T. R. (1981). "George Eliot and Positivism: A Reassessment". In: *The Modern Language Review* (vol. 76; 1981).

## **Erklärung zur Lizentiatsarbeit**

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich ausser der angegebenen Literatur keine weiteren Hilfsmittel benützt habe und dass mir bei der Zusammenstellung des Materials und der Abfassung der Arbeit selber von niemandem geholfen wurde.

Die vorliegende Arbeit ist noch keiner anderen Fakultät zur Begutachtung eingereicht worden. Ich bezeuge mit meiner Unterschrift, dass meine Angaben über die bei der Abfassung meiner Lizentiatsarbeit benützten Hilfsmittel, über die mir zuteil gewordene Hilfe sowie über frühere Begutachtung meiner Lizentiatsarbeit in jeder Hinsicht der Wahrheit entsprechen und vollständig sind.

Abgabedatum:

Unterschrift: