

SELF AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

— A VIEW OF *Middlemarch* —

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I

The novel *Middlemarch* has many aspects. It can be seen as a sort of *Bildungsroman* with the mental development of Dorothea Brooke as its centre. Again, it can be studied as the social history of an English provincial town around the year 1830. And also, it can be considered as a study of the hypocrisy to be found in every human heart in varying degree. In the present essay, I am chiefly concerned with the relationship between the ego and its surroundings.

The keynote to the theme may be caught in the following passage:

We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves: ... (XXI).

Every character in this novel has his or her own supreme self. To adduce some examples, Edward Casaubon has devoted all his life to the study of ancient myths and is trying to write a vast book to be called "The Key to All Mythologies". He expects the world, especially the academic world, to offer him the esteem due to his scholarship. Doctor Tertius Lydgate has great confidence in his ability to innovate medical practice and also in his research in fundamental units of organic systems. He believes himself above the vulgar world and in marrying the beautiful Rosamond Vincy he imagines that he has added to his splendour.

Nicholas Bulstrode is apparently a religious man of business but his assumed devotion is a means to self-importance.

Bulstrode's standard had been his serviceableness to God's cause: "I am sinful and nought—a vessel to be consecrated by use—but use me!"—had been the mould into which he had constrained his immense need of being something important and predominating (LXI).

To him his neighbours are useful only to set off his spiritual excellence. He looks on "the rest of mankind as a doomed carcass which is to nourish [him] for heaven" (XVII).

Mr. Brooke is an easy-going landowner who is quite satisfied with himself.

He had never been insulted on his own land before, and had been inclined to regard himself as a general favourite (we are all apt to do so, when we think of our own amiability more than of what other people are likely to want of us)(XXXIX).

Peter Featherstone, another landowner, wallows in accumulated riches and misanthropy. This misanthropy has a strong ego at its foundation and its last affirmation is seen in his leaving all his property to the least expected Rigg to the great disappointment of other relations.

To turn to the female characters, Rosamond Vincy is conscious that she is extremely beautiful and never ceases her endeavours to impress it on society. She marries Lydgate only to attain to a higher social station where she might queen it over others, for "what she liked to do was to her the right thing, and all her cleverness was directed to getting the means of doing it" (LVIII). Dorothea Brooke has a plan of bettering the living conditions of poor people, but egoism is discernible beneath her benevolence, for she wants people to be poorer so that she may have a wider scope for her activity.

... her mind had glanced over the possibility, which she would have preferred, of finding that her home would be in a parish which had a larger share of the world's misery, so that she might have had more active duties in it (IX).

Celia, Dorothea's sister, seems to be practically wise and to have sound judgment. She once warned Dorothea of her quixotic tendency saying, "You always see what nobody else sees; it is impossible to satisfy you; yet you never see what is quite plain. That's your way, Dodo" (IV). But this Celia herself loses her head as soon as her baby is born. She comes to regard the baby as a "centre and poise of the world" and thinks all others are to serve the baby. Dorothea's young widowhood is not deemed regrettable but convenient by Celia who thinks now that she can ask her sister to nurse the baby. It does not occur to Celia that her

baby does not mean as much to Dorothea.

Dorothea would have been capable of carrying baby joyfully for a mile if there had been need, and of loving it the more tenderly for that labour, but to an aunt who does not recognise her infant nephew as Bouddha, and has nothing to do for him but to admire, his behaviour is apt to appear monotonous, and the interest of watching him exhaustible (LIV).

Each of other characters in the book also thinks himself a being of some account. Things would go all right if the world shared the same opinion of their worthiness. The world, however, has its own ways and is too often contradictory to an individual's desire.

II

The most conspicuous trait of the world is that it is reluctant to recognize people's merits. One person's glory is supposed to throw a shadow on other people. So every time a person seems to be approaching any success either mental or material, the society around him is shaken in its complacency and tries to disregard the triumph. For instance, when the young couple of Vincies publish books, the world pretends to doubt the authorship. In other words, Fred Vincy's book on the "Cultivation of Green Crops and the Economy of Cattle-Feeding" is considered to have been written by his wife Mary, while Mary's book called "Stories of Great Men, taken from Plutarch" is attributed to Fred. "In this way it was made clear that Middlemarch had never been deceived, and that there was no need to praise anybody for writing a book, since it was always done by somebody else" (Finale).

To cite another instance, when Doctor Lydgate succeeds in bringing dying patients back to life, people are not necessarily impressed with his medical proficiency but hold that his effort might interfere with providential favours. The author comments on the derogatory inclination of people as follows:

Mortals are easily tempted to pinch the life out of their neighbour's buzzing glory, and think that such killing is no murder (XXI).

Another characteristic of society is its conservatism. It does not like to accustom itself to new ways. For example, people in Middlemarch cannot stand Doctor Lydgate dissecting bodies. They insist that a good

doctor should know the patients' troubles without prying into their insides after death. Besides, Lydgate is reported to let patients die only to get subjects for dissection.

Their conservatism is also seen in their objecting to the building of railways in the neighbourhood or in their unfavourable feeling toward the Reform Bill.

Their conservatism does not allow them to accept strangers or outsiders into their society. Will Ladislaw is not given a fair hearing because he comes from abroad and has a strain of Jewish blood. Bulstrode is regarded with suspicion, too, because he is from a distant town and his past life is unknown. Doctor Lydgate would have a hard time of it, even without his plan of innovation just because he was educated in Paris and is a sort of outsider in Middlemarch.

The third characteristic of the world is that people are hasty in judging others. They want to decide things to be black or white without tolerating ambiguity, and they are not discreet enough to inquire into motives or processes of human conduct. To a world with such an attitude, the mental struggle and growth of Dorothea through her first and second marriages has no intrinsic value, and she is talked of as a girl "who married a sickly clergyman, old enough to be her father, and in little more than a year after his death gave up her estate to marry his cousin—young enough to have been his son, with no property, and not well-born" (Finale).

In a similar manner, people do not hesitate to make irresponsible surmises—as Mr. Brooke says, "People say what they like to say, not what they have chapter and verse for" (XLIX). So, they are ready to find a connection between individual things and do not mind whether it is true or false. It is through these characteristics of the people that Lydgate is suspected of poisoning John Raffles. Bulstrode gives Lydgate the loan of a huge sum of money when the latter is deeply in debt. Soon after that, Raffles dies under Lydgate's care. It is known that Raffles has been blackmailing Bulstrode. So people quickly infer that Lydgate must have drugged Raffles at the instigation of Bulstrode.

... this vague conviction of indeterminable guilt, which was enough to keep up much head-shaking and biting innuendo even among substantial professional seniors, had for the general mind all the superior power of mystery

over fact. Everybody liked better to conjecture how the thing was, than simply to know it; for conjecture soon became more confident than knowledge, and had a more liberal allowance for the incompatible (LXXI).

Thus, people jump at a conclusion without waiting for satisfactory data, and what is worse, once the conclusion is formed, it is very hard to disprove it. Mr. Vincy says, "People will talk... even if a man has been acquitted by a jury, they'll talk, and nod and wink—and as far as the world goes, a man might often as well be guilty as not" (LXXIV). And Lydgate says, "Even if I could be cleared by valid evidence, it would make little difference to the blessed world here" (LXXIII).

III

An individual needs the world's appreciation in order to pamper his supreme self.

Who can know how much of his most inward life is made up of the thoughts he believes other men to have about him...? (LXVIII)

But, as seen above, the world at large has several traits unfavourable for the maintenance and growth of self-esteem. The question arises, then, how the contradictory tendencies in an individual and the world are to be compromised. As an answer to this, the author applies the image of a mirror:

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 parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person... (XXVII).

Thus, an individual's self-complacency is bred by the illusory support of the world. So the shock is very great if some incident reveals to a person that the world is indifferent to him, or in a worse case, that the world bears a decidedly unfavourable opinion of him. "Even our own persons in the glass are apt to change their aspect for us after we have

heard some frank remark on the less admirable points" (XXXIX).

Several cases of frustration caused by the revelation of reality is depicted in this novel. Bulstrode, for instance, has to collapse and be carried away on Lydgate's shoulder when the philanthropic committee of the town decides to refuse his attendance because of his supposed guilt. When his wife came into his private room, he even "looked smaller—he seemed so withered and shrunken" (LXXIV); so puffed up had he been depending on people's veneration.

For another example, Doctor Lydgate seems to be quite confident of himself and to despise the vulgar way of the world.

He was but seven-and-twenty, an age at which many men are not quite common—at which they are hopeful of achievement, resolute in avoidance, thinking that Mammon shall never put a bit in their mouths... (XV).

In spite of this self-assurance and apparent disregard of the world, he secretly desires it to be "known (without his telling) that he was better born than other country surgeons" (XV). This "commonness" in his make-up renders him the more vulnerable when he is financially persecuted and finally becomes a subject of suspicion aroused by the sudden death of Raffles.

When Lydgate came in, she [Dorothea] was almost shocked at the change in his face, which was strikingly perceptible to her who had not seen him for two months. It was not the change of emaciation, but that effect which even young faces will very soon show from the persistent presence of resentment and despondency (LXXVI).

IV

In the relationship between self and the outside world, one's spouse plays a delicately ambivalent part, being both one's "better half" and the concrete representative of the world. It is one of the main subjects of this novel to trace the modification of one's self-esteem caused by the response of one's spouse. We will here consider some outstanding examples.

Rosamond Vincy is incessantly aware of the radiance she casts on the world. "Every nerve and muscle in Rosamond was adjusted to the consciousness that she was being looked at. She was by nature an

actress of parts that entered into her physique" (XII). Her sole aim in life is to act her part, even "her own character" so well as to outshine all her neighbours. For her performance, she needs a better theatre than the bourgeois society her family affords—"she disliked anything which reminded her that her mother's father had been an innkeeper" (XI). She marries Lydgate because she hears that he has noble relations, not because she feels the slightest interest in his profession of medicine. Lydgate, in short, is a means of raising her position in society. Things, however, turn out contrary to her expectation, and she bears a grudge against her husband as the cause of her social debasement; Lydgate runs deeply into debt and the home is incessantly annoyed by creditors. In this crisis, Lydgate's noble uncle does not comply with Dorothea's earnest petition for a loan. Even then, her vanity does not allow her to think of mending her extravagant management of the home, which has been the cause of the annoyance. Indeed, she feels great resentment when Lydgate proposes moving to a smaller house in order to economize. "The poor thing saw only that the world was not ordered to her liking, and *Lydgate was part of that world*" (LXIV) (*Italics mine*). She is disgusted with her husband and wishes she had never seen him.

In fact there was but one person in Rosamond's world whom she did not regard as blameworthy, and that was the graceful creature with blond plaits and with little hands crossed before her, who had never expressed herself unbecomingly, and had always acted for the best—the best naturally being what she best liked (LXV).

On the other hand, Lydgate, betrothed to Rosamond, innocently imagined that he found in her "an accomplished creature who venerated his high musings and momentous labours and would never interfere with them—who was instructed to the true womanly limit and not a hair's-breadth beyond—docile, therefore, and ready to carry out behests which came from beyond that limit" (XXXVI). He should have learned more from his past love affair with Laure, the actress, who killed her husband in order to go back to her native town. Instead, he still relies on information "by literature, and that traditional wisdom which is handed down in the genial conversation of men" (XVI), and in the marriage he is to be as deeply disappointed at Rosamond's callousness as Rosamond is at his helplessness. Rosamond never tries to understand Lydgate's problems and

every time he thinks out the means of getting out of debt, she is ready to undo the plan. "It seemed that she had no more identified herself with him than if they had been creatures of different species and opposing interests" (LVIII). His appeal for her co-operation meets only with her cold rebuff.

"What can *I* do, Tertius?" said Rosamond, turning her eyes on him again. That little speech of four words, like so many others in all languages, is capable by varied vocal inflexions of expressing all states of mind from helpless dimness to exhaustive argumentative perception, from the completest self-devoting fellowship to the most neutral aloofness. Rosamond's thin utterance threw into the words "What can *I* do!" as much neutrality as they could hold. They fell like a mortal chill on Lydgate's roused tenderness (LVIII).

In this scene, the wife is no more than a representative of the cold world.

To take up another couple, Casaubon expects the same kind of veneration from Dorothea as Lydgate does from Rosamond, though, judged by a third party, he does not deserve it. For instance, Celia hates him because he scrapes his spoon, blinks before he speaks and has two white moles with hairs on them. And to Ladislav, Casaubon is no more than "a bat of erudition, a dried-up pedant and an elaborator of small explanations about as important as the surplus stock of false antiquities kept in a vendor's back chamber" (XXI). Sir James, on hearing about the betrothal, cries out:

"Good God! It is horrible! He is no better than a mummy!... What business has an old bachelor like that to marry? He has one foot in the grave" (VI).

But Casaubon, of course, thinks of himself otherwise. He does not think it undue that he should be loved by a young, beautiful girl. He is "not surprised (what lover would have been?) that he should be the object of her childlike unrestrained ardour" (V).

Mr. Casaubon, too, was the centre of his own world; if he was liable to think that others were providentially made for him, and especially to consider them in the light of their fitness for the author of a "Key to all Mythologies", this trait is not quite alien to us, and like the other mendicant hopes of mortals, claims some of our pity (X).

Shortly after getting married, Casaubon is infuriated at Dorothea's

suggestion that he should show her how to help him compile the vast material collected for his book. It is because he has inwardly been irritated at the slow growth of the leading idea to arrange the data and because Dorothea's words objectify his uneasiness.

We are angered even by the full acceptance of our humiliating confessions—how much more by hearing in hard distinct syllables from the lips of a near observer, those confused murmurs which we try to call morbid, and strive against as if they were the oncoming of numbness! And this cruel outward accuser was there in the shape of a wife—nay, of a young bride, who, instead of observing his abundant pen-scratches and amplitude of paper with the uncritical awe of an elegant-minded canarybird, seemed to present herself as a spy watching everything with a malign power of inference (XX).

A wife is supposed to stand on the side of her husband serving as a comfortable barrier against the cold world. But here Dorothea is, in Casaubon's regard, "a personification of that shallow world which surrounds the ill-appreciated or desponding author" (XX).

As for Dorothea, in marrying Casaubon, she seems to be performing a noble act of devotion for the sake of her husband's religious research. But in reality, she expects him to help her in finding principles of life. "Those provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to her a standing-ground from which all truth should be seen more truly... she wished, poor child, *to be wise herself*" (VII) (Italics mine). This egoism of hers keeps her from seeing Casaubon as he really is. Instead, she sees reflected in Casaubon's mind "every quality she herself brought" (III).

Will not a tiny speck very close to our vision blot out the glory of the world, and leave only a margin by which we see the blot? I know no speck so troublesome as self (XLII).

Both Casaubon and Dorothea seek their own gratification and both are disappointed. Casaubon is dissatisfied at Dorothea's lack of veneration for him, and Dorothea learns too soon the vainness of his personality. The disparity between them grows bigger as Casaubon suspects a clandestine love between Dorothea and Ladislav. Casaubon is tormented with jealousy and Dorothea is disgusted at the meanness revealed in Casaubon's suspicion.

In contrast to Rosamond's coldness to Lydgate and to Dorothea's critical observation of Casaubon, we find Harriet Bulstrode, Rosamond's

aunt, shows whole-hearted commiseration for her husband when he is forsaken by everybody else.

The man whose prosperity she had shared through nearly half a life, and who had unvaryingly cherished her—now that punishment had befallen him it was not possible to her in any sense to forsake him.... She knew, when she locked her door, that she should unlock it ready to go down to her unhappy husband and espouse his sorrow, and say of his guilt, I will mourn and not reproach.... When she had resolved to go down, she prepared herself by some little acts which might seem mere folly to a hard onlooker; they were her way of expressing to all spectators visible or invisible that she had begun a new life in which she embraced humiliation. She took off all her ornaments and put on a plain black gown, and instead of wearing her much-adorned cap and large bows of hair, she brushed her hair down and put on a plain bonnet-cap, which made her look suddenly like an early Methodist (LXXIV).

This scene stands out in relief against that where Dorothea takes off her mourning for a new dress and a new bonnet to go out to see the Lydgates in Chapter LXXX. In a sense, Harriet can be called more faithful to her husband than Dorothea is to Casaubon, to say nothing of Rosamond in relation to Lydgate.

V

As seen above, most of the chief characters in *Middlemarch* experience disappointment at the hands of their spouses. When they need the spouses' support most badly, the spouses side with the world and make the wounded pride bleed more profusely. The spouses' betrayal is sometimes merely imaginary, as in the case of Casaubon's fury at Dorothea's proposal of help, but the unhappy effect is just the same.

The point to be noticed here is that some people cannot recover from the damage, while others get to profounder understanding of things through the experience. For instance, Casaubon is possessed with "that proud narrow sensitiveness which has not mass enough to spare for transformation into sympathy, and quivers threadlike in small currents of self-preoccupation or at best of an egoistic scrupulosity" (XXIX), and cannot understand Dorothea's mentality until he dies in the despondency of disappointed expectation. Dorothea, on the other hand, is to gain a sort of wisdom through her suffering. In the first shock of disillusion,

indeed, "she was as blind to his [Casaubon's] inward troubles as he to hers" (XX), but gradually she awakes to the existence of another centre of self than that of her own.

...she [Dorothea] had felt the waking of a presentiment that there might be a sad consciousness in his [Casaubon's] life which made as great a need on his side as on her own (XXI).

She is clearly aware how barren Casaubon's academic attempt is, but she feels the more pity for the man.

...when she looked steadily at her husband's failure, still more at his possible consciousness of failure, she seemed to be looking along the one track where duty became tenderness (XXXVII).

Several months after the marriage, Casaubon's health declines and Doctor Lydgate advises him not to work too hard. Dorothea feels serious concern for him, consults Lydgate secretly and, following his suggestion, tries to keep her husband from worries. Her tenderness for Casaubon now is not that of an uncritical, innocent wife, but that of a human being for the suffering of another human being. Nevertheless, she is to be seriously disgusted after Casaubon's death, when she learns that he has bequeathed his fortune to her on the condition of her not marrying Ladislaw. This meanness of the dead husband's codicil is a strong factor in her determining not to take up the unfinished work left by him. Her experiences throughout married life have been bitter enough; but she has learned a great deal through it.

As a girl, she "was disposed rather to accuse the intolerable narrowness and the purblind conscience of the society around her" (IV), and she "knew of no one who thought as she did about life and its best objects" (V). In those days, she stood haughtily apart from the world and criticised it in detachment. Even her plan of building comfortable houses for cottagers had the increase of her self-esteem as its covert aim. But now, through her conjugal hardships and the subsequent contact with Ladislaw, she has realized the existence of other selves claiming a share of recognition equal to her own and the actuality of the world which is composed of a myriad of selves. And also she has got rid of her former abstract rigidity and come to judge ideas from the stand-

point of their practicability in the world. She says:

"I have always been thinking of the different ways in which Christianity is taught, and whenever I find one way that makes it a wider blessing than any other, I cling to that as the truest—I mean that which takes in the most good of all kinds, and brings in the most people as sharers in it. It is surely better to pardon too much, than to condemn too much" (L).

Dorothea has come to see herself as involved in the world and the sufferings of people in it are felt as her own. She is "interested now in all who had slipped below their own intention" (L). It is in this mentality that she determines to evince her confidence in Lydgate and to dispel gathering suspicions from him, for she is convinced that people are "almost always better than their neighbours think they are" (LXXII). Probably it is a lesson she has learned from being suspected herself by Casaubon as to her relationship with Ladislav. She goes to encourage Lydgate and says to him, "I know the unhappy mistakes about you. I knew them from the first moment to be mistakes. You have never done anything vile. You would not do anything dishonourable" (LXXVI). These are words nobody else in the world, not even Lydgate's wife Rosamond, has uttered to him. Dorothea's attitude is just opposite to that of the world in general seen above.

During the interview with Lydgate, Dorothea learns that Rosamond has grown cold toward him, and she determines to persuade Rosamond of his worthiness. This may be, as Celia once called, the revelation of her quixotic straightforwardness. Visiting Rosamond's home, Dorothea sees her cherished Ladislav in tears, taking Rosamond's hand. This is too great a shock for her, and she comes home without a single word. But even this shock does not keep her long from hoping the good of the Lydgates.

She [Dorothea] opened her curtains, and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond, outside the entrance-gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her babe; in the field she could see figures moving—perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining (LXXX).

Dorothea's mental view is now spotted with labouring living people, and this view propels her to go to see Rosamond again.

Dorothea's confidence in Lydgate forms a contrast to Caleb Garth's desertion of Bulstrode. Originally, there existed a certain degree of mutual appreciation between Bulstrode and Garth. Garth has been requested to manage Bulstrode's land and accepted the charge with pleasure. But when he hears about Bulstrode's past guilt from the ruined Raffles, he immediately declines to have anything to do with Bulstrode, without even inquiring into the truth of the report. Garth is an honest, hard-working man, indeed, but he may be called indiscreet in this judgment. Bulstrode's ultimate incrimination does not diminish the rashness of Garth's decision. In his unsympathetic rigour, he is like Adam Bede before his repentance.

By the way, Mary Garth, Caleb's daughter, has the same kind of austerity as her father's. When the vivacious but somewhat irresponsible Fred Vincy asks her if she will marry him provided that he becomes an independent worker, she replies that "he ought not to put such questions until he has done something worthy, instead of saying that he could do it" (LII). This rejoinder works well in putting Fred on the firm way to industry, but it is doubtful if her simple integrity can meet such a tangled problem as Lydgate's.

VI

To return to the question of Dorothea's encouragement of Lydgate, how far does she succeed in this attempt of hers? Emotionally, it is true, her support has great effect on Lydgate.

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

But this heartening influence is neither penetrating nor enduring enough to efface the "creeping paralysis" from Lydgate's mind. When Dorothea proceeds to offer him a financial help and ask him to continue the work at the municipal hospital, he replies:

"No;... I am no longer sure enough of myself—I mean of what it would be possible for me to do under the changed circumstances of my life.... I

might be obliged to go away after all.... I can think of nothing for a long while but getting an income" (LXXVI).

Why is he not "sure enough of" himself? It is because, in my opinion, he has begun to see himself through the eyes of the world. The world's criterion of esteeming people is represented by the following words of Garth's:

"...No matter what a man is—I wouldn't give twopence for him... whether he was the prime minister or the rick-thatcher, if he didn't do well what he undertook to do" (LVI).

Thus, the world does not believe in a man who has not given definite guarantees. But the man usually believes in himself in spite of his lack of objective guarantees. He aspires to accomplish something even if he has not accomplished anything yet.

Now, to Dorothea's continued proposal of help, Lydgate answers:

"It is good that you should have such feelings. But I am not the man who ought to allow himself to benefit by them. I have not given guarantees enough" (LXXVI).

In this scene, the self and the outsider have interchanged their positions. Dorothea persists in believing in Lydgate, while Lydgate declines to believe in himself. He has lost his "supreme self", having been treated by the world too roughly. The fire of his inner candle is blown out and the scratches of the pier-glass are deprived of a centre to arrange themselves. Consequently he has lost his will and he cannot help using the roundabout expression in abnegation: "I might be obliged to go away after all," instead of firmly declaring: "I will stay". He further complains, "After all, there is no evidence for me but people's opinion of me beforehand," and the following words show that he has entirely succumbed to the world:

"I must do as other men do, and think what will please the world..." (LXXVI).

The "supreme self" may be the cause of stupidity, but a mere renouncement of self is not a safeguard against stupidity. Lydgate has completely dissolved his self into the world, and now every time he thinks of a new way of life, he must think of Rosamond as the representative of the world. For instance, he says, "...if Rosamond will not mind, I shall

take an apprentice" (LXX). The author comments on his conversion ironically :

As the years went on he [Lydgate] opposed her [Rosamond] less and less, whence Rosamond concluded that he had learned the value of her opinion ; on the other hand, she had a more thorough conviction of his talents now that he gained a good income, and instead of the threatened cage in Bride Street provided one all flowers and gilding, fit for the bird of paradise that she resembled. In brief, Lydgate was what is called a successful man (Finale).

Lydgate calls Rosamond his "basil plant," which is supposed to flourish on a murdered man's brains. Indeed, Rosamond has killed Lydgate mentally just as his first love Laure killed her husband actually.

VII

The failure of Dorothea's attempt to rehabilitate Lydgate's self-esteem indicates the limit of her wisdom. Describing the interview between Dorothea and Lydgate, the author writes as follows :

A smile broke through the gloom of Lydgate's face. The childlike grave-eyed earnestness with which Dorothea said all this was irresistible—blent into an adorable whole with her ready understanding of high experience. (Of lower experience such as plays a great part in the world, poor Mrs. Casaubon had a very blurred shortsighted knowledge, little helped by her imagination) (LXXVI).

Her ignorance of lower experience keeps her from sounding the depth of Lydgate's despondency. As Miss Stump has pointed out,¹ "Dodo", the pet name for Dorothea, suggests a simpleton, for the dodo is "an extinct bird with a massive clumsy body and small wings of no use for flight"² and the name is derived from a Portuguese *duodo* meaning "silly". Dorothea's imagination does not help her fly far and she simply believes that moral support and financial reinforcement will be enough to save Lydgate.

Dorothea's lack of true wisdom is also seen in her intention of marriage with Ladislaw whose equipments are dubious. Indeed, he has some merits to recommend him. He once augured the barrenness of Casaubon's study on the basis of the latter's ignorance of German scholars. He disdained the hush money offered by the half-contrite Bulstrode. He is

1. Reva Stump: *Movement and Vision in George Eliot's Novels*, p. 174
2. *The Oxford English Dictionary*

artistically minded and also he knows the trend of politics beyond the limitation of Middlemarch consciousness. But he is rather reckless though vivacious in his conduct as is seen in his too close friendship with Rosamond. He is sometimes infirm of purpose as when he fluctuates in the determination of leaving Middlemarch for a fresh world. And he has no regular occupation. He may seem particularly likable to Dorothea after her hard experience with the sombre Casaubon, but there are few assurances that their marriage will turn out prosperous. So her intended marriage is not regarded favourably by her friends and relatives. Sir James makes the following remark on the incompetence of Ladislaw :

“A man so marked out by her husband’s will, that delicacy ought to have forbidden her from seeing him again—who takes her out of her proper rank—into poverty—has the meanness to accept such a sacrifice—has always had an objectionable position—a bad origin—and, I *believe*, is a man of little principle and light character” (LXXXIV).

It might be wiser for Dorothea to submit to this sort of opinion, because in her marriage with Casaubon, things developed just as the world had predicted. We remember that they commented on her engagement with Casaubon: “She looks up to him [Casaubon] as an oracle now, and by-and-by she will be at the other extreme” (X). But Dorothea believes that this time she is not acting the same way as in the former case. She relies on herself in spite of her past error and maintains a critical attitude to the world. She says :

“I still think that the greater part of the world is mistaken about many things. Surely one may be sane and yet think so, since the greater part of the world has often had to come round from its opinion (LIV).

She sticks to her supreme self, making light of others’ depreciation. And even if her way is that of a simpleton, it may be more desirable for average human beings, because the other way is headed for the impasse of Lydgate.