

DIVIDED MEN: THE MASCULINITY/MARRIAGE DILEMMA  
IN THE NOVELS OF GEORGE ELIOT

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the  
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## Abstract

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by

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Studies of Victorian masculinities have been primarily concerned with how men defined and were defined within the public sphere. This limited focus has ignored their private and domestic lives, itself an exemplification of the separate sphere theory. This dissertation explores what I called the masculinity/ marriage dilemma, a situation in which men feel that they must choose between a public life and a private one. George Eliot's male characters are divided, feeling themselves pulled in what they perceived as two different routes towards manhood. Related to this predicament are issues of power, particularly between men and women, men and other men, and within men themselves.

One of the misconceptions that most of George Eliot's male characters share is that masculinity is fixed and secure. However, she continually challenges this view, demonstrating that ideas of masculinities are always changing and unstable. Her novels, beginning with *Adam Bede* (1859) and ending with *Daniel Deronda* (1876), present a new set of external and internal circumstances that force her male characters to reconsider the ways of being a man. While some stubbornly persists on old ways, others emerge as "new men." Regardless of whether these characters succeed or fail, George Eliot reveals that male lives are both intricate and multilayered.

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## List of Abbreviations

<i>AB</i>	<i>Adam Bede</i>
<i>DD</i>	<i>Daniel Deronda</i>
<i>FH</i>	<i>Felix Holt</i>
<i>MF</i>	<i>Mill on the Floss</i>
<i>MM</i>	<i>Middlemarch</i>
<i>R</i>	<i>Romola</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Impressions of Theophrastus Such</i>

## Introduction

This work is a study of the major male characters in George Eliot's novels from *Adam Bede* (1859) to *Daniel Deronda* (1876). My focus is how these men experience and negotiate what I call the masculinity/marriage dilemma. Simply stated, it is the situation in which men assumed that a choice must be made between having a fully realized public or private life. Most of her male characters associate action with a public life and inaction with the private one. Finding it difficult to square a life of inaction with their preconceived notions of manhood, each struggles with making the choice. While many modern readers may realize that there is a way to accomplish both, most of George Eliot's male characters do not. In this regard, they are representative of some men of the Victorian era who felt divided between what they imagined were two separate demands. These characters are *divided men*,<sup>1</sup> a term that Martin Danahay uses to identify those men who experience a "conflict between the competing demands of masculinity in the public sphere and the private domestic affections" (17).

While there are many Victorian works and authors available for my purpose, I have chosen the novels of George Eliot and her male characters for a number of reasons. Her novels are detailed character studies, a view that E.S. Dallas expressed in his unsigned review of *Felix Holt* (1866) in *The Times* (26 June 1866): "She gets to the heart of her characters, and makes us feel with them, care for them, like to know about them, . . . [and] [w]hen we come to care for people—men or women—it really does not matter what their story is: it fixes our attention" (6; 264). As a realist, George Eliot worked

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<sup>1</sup> The division experienced by Victorian men is not a new concept. Masao Miyoshi in *The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians* (1969) writes about the self division that Victorian men of letters experienced and how they gave expression to it in their writing.

diligently to depict characters and their lives as they were, and as such, she presented ways of being a woman or man.

Furthermore, being a woman, George Eliot adds a new perspective on the scholarship on Victorian masculinities, which has been predominantly on male prose writers, poets, artists, and, occasionally, novelists.<sup>2</sup> Whereas these works have greatly expanded our understanding of the lives of Victorian men, unfortunately in their male-only focus, they have reinforced those troubling aspects of the separate sphere theory, which limited women to the private sphere. Like her male counterparts, George Eliot was concerned with what makes a man a man. A certain distance allowed her to remove the veil from the inner lives of male characters in a way that some of male contemporaries could not. It is my view that she was ahead of her time in understanding the complexities of masculinity, an insight that will be demonstrated through close analysis of her male characters.

Studies of Victorian masculinities arose out of the pioneering works of early feminist scholars<sup>3</sup> of nineteenth-century women. In raising our awareness of the conflicting ideas surrounding Victorian womanhood, they were also instrumental in first demonstrating that Victorian manhood was varied, complex, and unstable. *Manhood*<sup>4</sup> is not a fixed concept and never means the same thing for all people. Michael S. Kimmel

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<sup>2</sup> Herbert Sussman in *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (1995) analyzes the ways in which Victorian male prose writers, poets, and artists attempted to portray varied masculinities in their works; James Eli Adams in *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (1995) examines how Victorian male writers represented their intellectual vocations as accepted means of masculinity; Andrew Dowling's *Manliness and the Male Novelist in Victorian Literature* (2001) is one of a small number of works that discusses the conflict of male novelists, such as Dickens and Trollope, who attempted to reconcile being both a male and a novel writer, a vocation that was considered feminine at the time.

<sup>3</sup> See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), and Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), which are only two examples of the significant contributions made by these pioneers.

<sup>4</sup> See Peter Stearns who offers a general definition of manhood as "an evolving social construct reflecting some continuities but many more changes" (2).

reminds us that “manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological makeup; it is created in culture” (120). *Masculinities*<sup>5</sup> in the plural is an acknowledgment of the multilayered aspects of manhood for its usage recognizes that there is more than one way of being a man. However in the singular, *masculinity* is a precarious term with an abundance of meanings depending upon the user. It may function “as a shorthand for the personal aspects of oppression by men” (Roper and Tosh 6) or “as the flight from women, the repudiation of femininity” (Brod 126). Singular usage also implies that masculinity is uniform, simple, and constant—i.e. *hegemonic masculinity*, which is defined by the dominant class at any given time and is promoted through its influence on setting and reinforcing a masculine agenda either through ideological or, in some cases, repressive state apparatuses.<sup>6</sup> However, social historian John Tosh identifies the singular usage as one that takes in “all the attributes—physical, emotional, and social—which define a masculine identity, and in highlighting ‘identity’ it prioritizes the interiority of being, or feeling, a man” (*Manliness* 24). It is this definition that I use when discussing the masculinity of the individual male characters, concentrating on their experiences of being and feeling themselves men.

A man’s sense of his masculinity is often bound to power, particularly as it refers to issues of control (the ability to regulate) and social influence (the ability to effect

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<sup>5</sup> See R.W. Connell’s first chapter in *Masculinities* (1995) for an overview of the history of masculinity studies. Both *Men’s Studies* and *Masculinities Studies* are used to describe this interdisciplinary field; however, *Masculinities* is replacing *Men’s Studies*. Many articles and books refer exclusively to *masculinities*, while the Men’s Studies Press, which publishes *The Journal of Men Studies* beginning in 1992, retains the earlier terms, it premiered a new journal in 2009 entitled *Culture, Societies, and Masculinities*. Also an earlier journal, first entitled *Men’s Studies Review* published by Sage Productions changed its name to *Men and Masculinities*. One reason for this shift is that the word *men*, according to Herbert Sussman, implies a biological determinant instead of a social construction.

<sup>6</sup> Ideological and repressive state apparatuses are terms coined by Louis Althusser. The former are social practices, such as family, religious organizations, and schools that promote an acceptable identity; the latter in normal times are laws and courts; in extreme cases, they may be militaristic states where innocents are imprisoned or murdered for going against the state.

change). I use the term “power dynamics” to refer to the struggles that a man undergoes in his effort to attain power, as observed in three different types of relationships: (1) between men and women; (2) between men and other men; and (3) within men themselves. These contests may occur in many settings and under various circumstances, but the most common and recurrent ones involve some aspect of the private-public divide.

Separate-sphere theory, which has long been considered the marker of nineteenth-century gender relations, is an illustration of the power dynamics between men and women. John Ruskin in “Of Queens’ Gardens” (1864-65) marks a clear distinction between men’s and women’s power:

The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, . . . But the woman’s power is for rule, not for battle,—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision. . . . By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial:—to him, therefore, must be the failure, the offence, the inevitable error: often he must be wounded, or subdued; often misled; and *always* hardened. But he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her. (101-2)

The public sphere is thought to be the rightful site for a man, places such as the military, commerce, government, and school. They are the locations where men may clearly

exercise power. The private sphere (the house and home) is the birthright for a woman where she rules employing her domestic skills. While Ruskin grants the woman this authority, he uses the possessive “his” to indicate that the home is the husband’s property. One may argue that issues of power on some level have always existed between men and women. However, during certain historical moments, they are more evident. For example, “the woman question”<sup>7</sup> dominated both public and private discourse in nineteenth-century England. Essentially, it was a call for a renegotiation of power, an appeal that did not rest easily with many.

The struggle occurred between men in both the public and private spheres. In the above quote, Ruskin emphasizes the dangers that a man faces in the public sphere. Metaphors associated with the possible outcomes of a battle are used throughout (e.g., “wounded” and “subdued”). Men compete with other men for employment, promotion, elected office, and so on. In the private sphere, the object to be won was oftentimes a woman. While many fight fairly, others apply a strategy by which they demonize other males in an “attempt to orientate themselves to a notion of male power” (Dowling 3). Some of George Eliot’s male characters use this technique to further realize their own superiority. Even when a character is not using the approach, the presence of other males in a novel may create a situation that appears to privilege one over the other. Through the progression of George Eliot’s novels, a gradual shift can be witnessed in how these “demonized” male fare when it comes to issues of authority.

The struggle that a man has within himself may exist on many levels, but this work will focus only on the one that relates to the two spheres. Tosh argues that “much of

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<sup>7</sup> The “woman question” is the phrase most commonly used to describe the public debate about the role of women in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Among those issues discussed were suffrage, marriage, rights (e.g., legal, property, medical) and so on.

men's power has resided in their privileged freedom to pass at will between the public and private" (*A Man's Place* 2). It is this liberty, in my view, that causes conflict in George Eliot's male characters concerning their masculine status and their power over self and others. Masculinity, of course, exists in both spheres; however, the demands of each are different.

Public masculinity often depends upon homosociality—the social, nonromantic, and nonsexual relationship of people of the same sex. These associations have usually played a vital “role of peer approval in confirming masculine status, as well as the need for support networks for men who were seeking to survive and prosper in business or employment” (Tosh, “The Old Adam” 229). However, Eve Sedgwick draws attention to the sexual blurring that may occur as a result of these relationships. She demonstrates that they can be connected to homosexual desires and can never fully be repressed. Fear surrounding homosocial relationships emerged as a serious concern for the Victorians,<sup>8</sup> and thus marriage took on even more significance in the lives of Victorian men.

Marriage and private masculinity established a different set of demands that a man must meet: “To form a household, to exercise authority over dependents, and to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining and protecting them” (Tosh, *A Man's Place* 108). If these demands were successfully met, they served to elevate the masculine status: “The honour that a man gained through marriage was recognized by others in his community; from modes of address to church seating, marriage brought with it privilege and respect” (Foyster 46). Failure, however, could have the opposite affects, such as the

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<sup>8</sup> See James Eli Adams' *Dandies and Desert Saints* (1995), Sussman's *Victorian Masculinities* (1995), and Tosh's *Manliness and Masculinities* (2005) for a further exploration of this fear in the Victorian period.

criticism received by husbands whose marriages failed (e.g., John Ruskin<sup>9</sup>) or could not support their families (e.g., John Dickens, Charles' father<sup>10</sup>). Marriage also created a possible setting for the struggle between a man and woman, as evident in the lives of many of George Eliot's characters. Readers are excluded from the lives of her felicitous couples (e.g., Adam and Dinah, Felix and Esther, Will and Dorothea, and Daniel and Mirah), which is similar to Leo Tolstoy's famous opening of *Anna Karenina* (1877) where he indicates that there is no plot or formula for happy marriages and families: "All happy families are like one another" (17). We are only brought to the doors of the church; what happens after that, behind the doors of the home, is usually summarized in a conclusion or epilogue. However, for those couples whose marriages prove to be disastrous (e.g., Tito and Romola, Casaubon and Dorothea, Lydgate and Rosamond, and Grandcourt and Gwendolen), each misunderstanding, betrayal, and argument is painstakingly and vividly rendered.

By studying George Eliot's male characters, we gain insight into the masculinity/marriage dilemma. While some doggedly hold on to old ways of being a man, others emerge as "new men" who learn to balance the demands of a life in both the public and private spheres. Whether they succeed or fail, their inner lives are intricate and multilayered. My claim is that George Eliot was interested in portraying manhood as varied, complex, and unstable. Although the issues raised are still with us, George Eliot presents various ways of being a man that reflect a particular time period and external

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<sup>9</sup> John Ruskin's marriage to Effie Gray was annulled after six years because of non-consummation, which caused a public scandal. Ruskin's sexuality remains a subject of debate, an issue that a number of scholars and his biographers have analyzed. See John Batchelor's *John Ruskin: A Life* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2000); Tim Hillton's *John Ruskin: The Early Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) and *John Ruskin: The Later Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); and Mary Lutyens' *Millais and the Ruskins* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1967).

<sup>10</sup> Although John Dickens was only in Marshalsea Debtor's Prison for a few months, the effects of this period on Dicken's life are well known.

circumstances. To emphasize this historical importance, I discuss her novels in the order of publication and timeframe of their historical periods from the Georgian Era of 1799 in *Adam Bede* (1859) to the High Victorian Era of the 1860s in *Daniel Deronda* (1876).

In chapter one, I begin by examining Adam's (*Adam Bede*) and Tom's (*The Mill on the Floss*) quest for manhood in terms of what Herbert Sussman calls the masculine plot, "the narrative of manhood achieved and manhood lost" (13). He asserts that in most Victorian novels, this storyline is often unsuccessful because it opposes the marriage plot. Adam's and Tom's experiences reflect this inner struggle between a life of action and one of domesticity, which they associate with inaction. While each man's journey ends quite differently, I argue that in these early novels George Eliot presents an alternative masculine plot that combines both the masculine and the feminine and the public and the private spheres, a plot which her subsequent male characters all encounter as they attempt to negotiate the masculinity/marriage dilemma.

Chapter two is about the public masculinities that Tito Melema (*Romola*) and Felix Holt attempt to fashion. Although their motives are different, both men desire an active public life in the political arena. These aspirations, however, are consistently frustrated by their attempts to keep their private lives from encroaching on their public ones. Both fall victim to a belief in the separate sphere theory. In fact, marriage is secondary for each man, and he views it as something segregated from his public life. This separation is what heightens each man's dilemma as he struggles with other men, women, and, himself and leads to his failure.

Tito and Felix's failures offer a transition to the male characters of *Middlemarch* (1871-72). Chapter three considers the lives of Casaubon, Lydgate, Bulstrode, Fred

Vincy, and Ladislaw. *Middlemarch* has two central plots: vocation and marriage. For the male characters, their professions are often associated with the public while their relationships are with the private. Some attempt to keep these two separate and fail to see how important both are to their masculinities. Those men who succeed realize the connection while those who fail do not. Despite the different demands of masculinity and marriage, they are intricate in defining the whole man.

While the last chapter on *Daniel Deronda* addresses some of those same issues raised in previous ones, the historical moment is different and presents new challenges. Ideas concerning class, gender, and race are changing. Traditional methods and definitions are no longer valid. Each man's masculinity is revealed to be precarious as he struggles within the power dynamic. Marriage becomes the site where these contests culminate. However, the marriages in *Daniel Deronda* are utterly unlike any that we have seen in previous George Eliot's novels. They defy preconceived definitions and cause both characters and readers to look at masculinity in a new light.

Finally, the conclusion turns to *Silas Marner* (1861), which was published after *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and before *Romola* (1862-3). I discuss it last and out of publication sequence for two reasons. First, there is no set time period in the novel. Secondly and most importantly, it does something radically different with the character of Silas. He ultimately rejects both masculinity and marriage. Instead he chooses a third option, one that combines aspects of both, but also creates a unique and new way of being.

Chapter One: The Alternative Masculine Plot in *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*

*Adam Bede* (1859) and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) set the foundation for the examination of the masculinity/ marriage dilemma in George Eliot's novels. Each novel is set before the start of the Victorian Era.<sup>1</sup> *Adam Bede* spans from 1799 to 1807; *The Mill on the Floss* from the mid 1820s to just prior to the First Reform Act of 1832.<sup>2</sup> Although the First Reform Act is not the subject of *Adam Bede* or *The Mill on the Floss*, the mood of each novel, nevertheless, conveys an impending shift as the male characters attempt to redefine what it is to be a man. G.M. Young, in *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age* (1964), comments that "a boy in 1810 . . . entered manhood with the ground rocking under his feet" (2). George Eliot was keenly aware of this change as she portrayed male characters struggling to achieve manhood in a world that was altering around them.

In *Victorian Masculinities* (1995), Herbert Sussman identifies the masculine plot as a "narrative of manhood achieved and manhood lost" (13). It often has the following storyline for the achievement of manhood:

The young man must leave his mother, reject domestic life to enter a male community. In this new world, he is granted masculine wisdom by the males of the community and tested. Often the testing involves rejecting the sexual temptation of women, who are always presented as a danger to the male community and to the individual quest for manhood. The final achievement of manhood involves the rejection of the female or mother,

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<sup>1</sup> It can be argued that the era began with Queen Victoria's ascension to the throne in June 1837. However, the passage of the First Reform Act in 1832 signaled a shift in ideas, which have become synonymous with the age.

<sup>2</sup> Historians are generally divided on how positive the effects of the Act were. Some laud it as a watershed moment that ushered in a momentous shift in democracy, while others argue it did not do enough in effecting change specifically.

often figured by the casting off of female clothing, and bonding with the father or more often a surrogate father. This process of bonding involves first, ritualized rejection by the father, then acceptance by the surrogate father sealed by chaste bodily contact within carefully controlled rituals of male-male physicality. (47)

Although the above storyline does not outline how manhood may be lost, this outcome is unavoidable since the plot depends upon the complete rejection of the feminine and the full embrace of the masculine. However, it is a fanciful plot because it can never come to fruition in the Victorian novel since it “opposes the marriage plot, the hegemonic script of bourgeois manhood” (Sussman 47).<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, George Eliot did not perceive marriage as the negation of masculinity; she realized that both may coexist. However, her male characters, as we will see in *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*, struggle to reach this awareness.

Adam and Tom’s lives are characterized by those same “masculine plot” issues as outlined by Sussman: (1) domestic life; (2) male communities and masculine wisdom; (3) women; and (4) manhood. However, George Eliot adds complexity to these male characters and their reactions to these concerns. These complications shape her alternative masculine plot, a way of being a man that encompasses both the public and private sphere, a life of action and inaction, and one of masculinity and marriage. The alternative masculine plot becomes the measure of masculinity that all her subsequent male characters must negotiate.

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<sup>3</sup> See Sussman’s *Victorian Masculinities* for an analysis of Frederick Marryat’s *Peter Simple* (1834) (pp. 47-48) and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855) (pp. 64-66), two instances where the masculine plot is subordinated by the marriage plot.

This chapter is divided into five sections. While the focus of this chapter is primarily on Adam and Tom, an examination of the masculinities of other male characters in the two novels enables us to understand Adam's and Tom's masculinities. In the first section, the focus is on Adam's and Tom's difficult home lives, which initiates their quest to define and shape their masculinities. In section two, Adam's and Tom's experiences raise questions concerning the effectiveness of male communities and masculine wisdom in the shaping of masculinity. The focus then shifts in the third section to the supporting male characters of Seth and Arthur (*Adam Bede*) and Philip and Stephen (*The Mill on the Floss*) as they contemplate female companionship and the attraction of women (Dinah and Hetty in *Adam Bede* and Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss*). The fourth section examines Adam's emergence as a "new man" and Tom's demise as he sinks into notions of boyhood masculinity. Finally, and in conclusion, there is a brief outline of "George Eliot's Alternative Masculine Plot" as it is constructed in these two novels.

### **Domestic Life**

In the masculine plot, the young male's rejection of domestic life is expressed explicitly as a flight from the mother: "The young man must leave his mother [and] reject domestic life" (Sussman 47). Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman outline both the reasons and methods by which the young boy repudiates the mother:

First, he pushes away his real mother, and with her the traits of nurturance, compassion, and tenderness she may have embodied. Second, he suppresses those traits in himself, because they will reveal his incomplete separation from mother . . . .Third, as if to demonstrate the accomplishment of these first two tasks, the boy also learns to devalue all

women in his society, as the living embodiment of those traits in himself he has learned to despise. (127-28)

Nurturance, compassion, and tenderness are traits that appear to run counter to what the young male must develop if he is to do battle in the “open world” (Ruskin 101).

Furthermore, the assumption is that the woman-ruled home is one that is governed by mothers who distract the young male from realizing his proper role in the world. The intersexual narrators<sup>4</sup> of both novels imagine a male reader who will find in Lisbeth and Bessy traces of his own mother.

Adam’s mother is represented as an archetypical man’s mother who “once fretted our young souls with her anxious humours and irrational persistence” (*AB* 37). These characteristics are illustrated when Lisbeth insists that Adam have supper before completing his work: “[Her] voice became louder, and choked with sobs: a sort of wail, the most irritating of all sounds where *real* sorrows are to be borne, and *real* [italics mine] work to be done” (*AB* 39). Use and repetition of the adjective “real” indicates that Lisbeth’s sorrows and work are less important than Adam’s and serve to distract him from more serious masculine concerns. Bessy Tulliver is also described as interrupting the vital thoughts of men. We are introduced to her by the description of her fan-shaped cap, which causes the narrator, in the persona of a male, to launch into a discourse on fashion. This temporary diversion is later echoed in the scene with Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver. In discussing Tom’s education, Mr. Tulliver struggles to maintain the discourse

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<sup>4</sup> Questions about the gender of George Eliot’s narrators have long been the subject of debate. The narrators of both *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* occasionally speak as the persona of an older man who in addition to telling the characters’ stories is also reflecting on his own boyhood. Despite these moments of male narration, I choose to identify the narrators of these two novels as intersexual because the narrators possess both genders and may move between a male and female persona. It should also be noted that term, “intersexual,” is now preferred in medical science over the previous “hermaphrodite” (The Intersex Society of North America).

as Bessy introduces comments from preparing a fine dinner to not having any biases against men with moles. While these initial depictions of Lisbeth and Bessy may lead us to assume incorrectly that Adam and Tom desire to escape their mothers, the real difficulties of domestic life for each character actually involve the father.

The connection between the father and the hardships of home is alluded to by the respective chapter headings. In *Adam Bede*, we are introduced to the home life of Adam in the chapter entitled “Home and Its Sorrows,” and to that of Tom in book three of *The Mill on the Floss*, which opens with “What had Happened at Home.” Adam’s and Tom’s home sorrows are both a result of their fathers. While the role of biological fathers is not specifically addressed in the masculine plot, the implication is that these men have failed to give their sons the necessary tools for attaining manhood. As a result, Adam’s and Tom’s rejection of domestic life also involves fleeing from the father. In joining a male community, the young male bonds with a surrogate father, indicating that the biological father, for whatever reason, was not a suitable masculine model for the young man. Adam’s and Tom’s discontents with home are epitomized through their complex and troubling relationships with their fathers.

Initially, Thias Bede and Edward Tulliver were commendable fathers who strove to give their sons an advantage in the world. Furthermore, their sons admired them and took immense pleasure in the father-son relationship. Thias had taught both Adam and Seth a valuable trade, a point that Lisbeth has to remind Adam of when he becomes disgusted at his father’s later inactions: “He war a good feyther to thee afore he took to th’ drink. He’s a clever workman, an’ taught thee thy trade” (*AB* 39). Triggered by Lisbeth’s admonition, Adam reminisces about a fond boyhood memory of his father:

“When people asked Adam whose little lad he was, he had a sense of distinction as he answered, ‘I’m Thias Bede’s lad’—he was quite sure everybody knew Thias Bede” (*AB* 46). Similarly Edward Tulliver’s intentions are to provide for Tom’s future. Although misguided, he is insistent that Tom receive a good education. Likewise, Tom was proud to be the son of Edward Tulliver, a man who had “always [been] right, simply on the grounds that he was Tom Tulliver’s father” (*MF* 168). Adam’s and Tom’s boyish pride in their fathers shapes their earlier sense of self, but more importantly, it establishes a model of masculinity for each.

Despite these earlier positive associations, they are overshadowed by what they perceive as their fathers’ later failures. Disappointment replaces admiration. Firstly, Adam vividly recalls the first of many disappointments: “Adam remembered well the night of shame and anguish when he first saw his father quite wild and foolish, shouting a song out fitfully among his drunken companions at the ‘Waggon Overthrown’” (*AB* 46-7). The pub’s name is symbolic of the family unit being thrown into chaos, a situation that Adam takes upon himself to correct. Secondly, as Adam finishes constructing a coffin that his father should have completed, he realizes the burden that his father has become and will continue to be: “Father’s a sore cross to me, an’s likely to be for many a year to come. What then? I’ve got th’ health, and the limbs, and the sperrit to bear it” (*AB* 47). The coffin also represents the death of Adam’s boyish pride and heralds his ascension into manhood. He is now determined to do whatever is necessary to atone for his father’s weaknesses.

Tom also experiences his first disappointment in his father, Edward, following the family misfortunes: “For the first time Tom thought of his father with some

reproach” (*MF* 168). His father’s unreasonableness and quick temper plunges Tom into the role of provider. He becomes the man of the Tulliver household and must succeed where his father has failed. Edward’s financial and physical decline is instrumental in shaping Tom’s rigid approach to masculinity:

Perhaps his father might have helped bringing them all down in the world, and making people talk of them with contempt, but no one should talk long of Tom Tulliver with contempt. The natural strength and firmness of his nature was beginning to assert itself, urged by . . . the sense that he must behave like a man and take care of his mother. (*MF* 169)

It is apparent that Adam’s and Tom’s later frustrations cause both to reject the domestic model that their respective fathers provided. They assume the masculine roles of their fathers, and against this backdrop of a failed domestic life, both begin their quest for manhood.

Adam’s masculinity is described initially in terms associated with ideas of both Victorian and Christian manliness.<sup>5</sup> The first characteristic that we notice of Adam is his strong voice that is directly associated with his physical body:

[A] strong barytone . . . [which] could only come from a broad chest . . . belonged to a large-boned, muscular man nearly six feet high, with a back so well poised that when he drew himself up to take a more distant survey

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<sup>5</sup> Victorian and Christian manliness are complex terms that should be distinguished. Victorian manliness represents such characteristics as self control and discipline. Christian manliness is different and is a more reaction to what historians refer to as the feminization of Christianity in which Christian living became associated with the private and consequently, the feminine. Christian manliness was an attempt to establish a masculine identity that allowed for a man to maintain Christian virtues while still asserting his manhood. However, it was not a widespread concept.

of his work, he had the air of a soldier standing at ease. The sleeve rolled up above the elbow showed an arm that was likely to win the prize of strength. (*AB 2*)

His physical superiority is coupled with his pride in work, which can be attributed to his sense of control, reserve, and discipline, traits that Andrew Dowling identifies as the metaphors that best described the Victorian idea of manliness (13). Compared to the other men in Jonathan Burge's workshop, Adam emerges as superior. For example, while the other men go about their work half-heartedly, anxious for any distraction and are quick to lay aside their tools the moment the church clock strikes six, "Adam alone had gone on with his work as if nothing had happened" (*AB 7*). He chastises the other men for their lack of pleasure in their work: "I can't abide to see men throw away their tools i' that way . . . as if they took no pleasure i' their work" (*AB 7*). As he makes his way home after a good honest day of work, he hums the following tune:

Let all thy converse be sincere,  
 Thy conscience as the noonday clear;  
 For God's all-seeing eye surveys  
 Thy secret thoughts, thy works and ways. (*AB 9*)

Adam's song relates God with work, a comparison that Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall describe as belonging to Christian manliness: "Work was not to be despised, rather it was to be seen as doing God's duty in the world. Work was dignified, serious and a properly masculine pursuit" (111-12). Adam's attitude towards work adopts some of those characteristics of Christian manliness.

While Adam clearly possesses these traits, Tom fantasizes about them. On returning from the academy, Tom assumes a masculine stance as he willingly submits to his mother and Maggie's greetings but speaks "with masculine reticence as to the tender emotions" (*MF* 29). Before he departs for Mr. Stellings' place, his speech and thoughts are filled with the privileges that manhood will grant him: "When he was a man, he should be master of everything, and do just as he liked" (*MF* 111). His experiences at Mr. Stellings', however, check his vision of his future manhood. Tom faces great difficulties when it comes to his Latin. Walter Ong has argued, "learning Latin took on the characteristics of a puberty rite, a *rite de passage* or initiation rite: it involved isolation from the family, the achievement of identity in a totally male group (the school), the learning of a body of relatively abstract tribal lore inaccessible to those outside the group" (251). Maggie's proficiency in Latin "nullifie[s] his boyish self-satisfaction, and g[ives] him something of a girl's susceptibility" (*MF* 118). However, Philip's arrival enables Tom to regain a measure of that self-satisfaction. He perceives Philip as a deformed weakling. Thus when he compares himself to Philip, he is and will always be the better man.

Consequently, with his father's downfall, Tom (like Adam) is propelled into a code of manliness that forces him to pursue seriously those characteristics that he had only simulated at school. The boyish fantasies must give way to realities. Once in confronting Maggie, he tells her, "I have had feelings to struggle with; but I conquered them. . . . I had found my comfort in doing my duty" (*MF* 393). For both Adam and Tom, their dissatisfactions with their fathers lead them to a rigid masculinity based on conventional assumptions.

### **Male Communities and Masculine Wisdom**

Male communities and masculine wisdom in the masculine plot exist to prevent the young male from committing those same mistakes that Adam and Tom commit when left to shape their own masculinities. While both are essential qualities of the masculine plot, their effectiveness is suspect. Those places in *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* that appear to be all-male communities either are superficial or else fail to deliver. Opportunities to attain masculine wisdom, defined as instructions on how to be a man in any given society, abound in both texts; yet, the men in the position to impart it are either unsuccessful or reveal that they, themselves, also struggle with the complexities of the masculinity/marriage dilemma. Consequently, Adam's and Tom's experiences of both male communities and the attainment of masculine wisdom demonstrate their dubious nature.

Firstly, both *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* open with Adam and Tom, respectively, in what can be identified as all-male communities: Adam in Jonathan Burge's workshop and Tom in the academy at Ladyday. However, each man spends very little time in these communities. In fact, only the opening scene of *Adam Bede* has Adam in the workshop, and Tom's time at the academy is never described and occurs before the novel begins. Secondly, the dominant impression of each place is shaped by a feminine persona. While not physically in the workshop, Dinah is the center of the conversation as the men tease Seth over his infatuation for the preacher; Tom's academy is never given a name, but it is largely associated with its geographical location, Ladyday. Thirdly, Tom's school days at Mr. Stellings' are punctuated by Maggie's visits, which occur significantly in the middle and at the end of this period when she calls him home. Finally, Adam's and

Tom's experiences do little to provide each with masculine wisdom. Instead, they create situations that only reinforce their incorrect masculine assumptions.

There are surrogate fathers who can provide masculine wisdom for Adam and Tom, but these substitutes both prove ineffectual. For Adam, it is his relationship with Bartle Massey—a complex character whose words and actions are often in conflict. His diatribes aimed at the female sex reflect his own struggles with the masculinity/marriage dilemma. For Tom, it is his employment with his Uncle Deane, who affords him a male public model. While he receives useful instruction on how to survive in the public sphere, he receives little guidance when it comes to the private one. This neglect, however, is not because Uncle Deane denies the importance of a healthy private life. Instead, he realizes that Tom must be immersed quickly into the public sphere so that he can atone for Edward's failures.

Bartle Massey, a self-chosen bachelor,<sup>6</sup> abstains from most contact with women, claiming that it has allowed him to see the world more objectively than other men. However, this view and many of his statements reveal his own struggle to reconcile the public and private spheres. In warning Adam about the dangers of the female sex, he gives an example of his dog Vixen, making no distinction between her and womanhood:

What's the use o' law when a man's once such a fool as to let a woman into his house? . . . He always called Vixen a woman, and seemed to lose all consciousness that he was using a figure of speech. If I'd known Vixen was a woman, I'd never have held the boys from drowning her; but when

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<sup>6</sup> I used *self-chosen bachelor* to distinguish him from such bachelor characters as Seth Bede and Philip Wakem, who would have married had the object of their affections accepted them.

I'd got her into my hand, I was forced to take her. And now you see what's she brought me to—the sly, hypocritical wench. (*AB* 243)

Here, Bartle is referring to the occasion of Vixen having puppies and thus creating an additional hardship for him. Yet, despite this verbal attack, his actions demonstrate a deep and abiding love for Vixen and her brood. To mask the need for female companionship, he feigns frustration at all womankind.

Such pretense also displays his fear that the feminine may unsettle his assumptions and fantasies concerning male power. He depicts the Poyser's household as one filled with the unnecessary chatter of female voices:

It's a house I seldom go into, though I'm fond of the boys, and Martin Poyser's a good fellow. There's too many women in the house for me: I hate the sound of women's voices; they're always either a-buzz or a-squeak—always either a-buzz or a-squeak. Mrs. Poyser keeps at the top o' the talk like a fife; and as for the young lasses, I'd as soon look at water-grubs—I know what they'll turn to—stinging gnats, stinging gnats. (*AB* 244-5)

However, what Bartle does not convey is his attraction to such talk. Ironically, he and Mrs. Poyser are very similar; both enjoy being at the center of the conversation and neither is willing to admit a fault graciously. Towards the end of the novel, he is invited to the Poyser's for dinner. He and Mrs. Poyser are both “a-buzz” and “a-squeak,” and it is difficult to differentiate between their voices. The conflict between Bartle's words and actions reveals the complexity of his character as he also wrestles to reconcile the public

and private spheres. This struggle, however, allows him to support Adam when he is utterly distraught during Hetty's trial, which we will examine later.

Under the guidance of his Uncle Deane, Tom is so busy with work that he has little time for thoughts of the female sex. Furthermore, his new public life reaffirms his boyhood view concerning the inferiority of womanhood. When Maggie offers him money for his rabbits, he alludes to the privileges of manhood while also downgrading the female sex: "I've got a great deal more money than you, because I'm a boy. I always have half-sovereigns and sovereigns for my Christmas boxes, because I shall be a man, and you only have five-shilling pieces, because you're only a girl" (*MF* 31). He also shifts verb tenses, which acknowledges his future manhood and denounces Maggie's womanhood, keeping her forever locked as a girl in the present tense. When Maggie proves that she has a better understanding of Latin, he begrudgingly acknowledges her future womanhood but reduces her role to that of a silent entity: "Well, *you'll* be a woman some day' . . . so *you* needn't talk" [italics in text] (*MF* 122).

The constant threat facing Tom is finding that the superiority that he imagines possessing is often checked. Upon seeking a position with his Uncle Deane, he is told that his education has not prepared him for the real world. He has a moment where he doubts his masculinity: "Apparently he, Tom Tulliver, was likely to be held of small account in the world, and for the first time he felt a sinking of heart under the sense that he really was very ignorant and could do very little" (*MF* 192). His Uncle Deane secures him a place in the warehouse of Guest and Company and watches him closely. In time, his uncle begins to lecture him on the nature of business. Tom's success is a result of his "present abstinence and self-denial" (*MF* 252). Abstinence, here, is not directly

associated with the female sex, but could be interpreted that way. He is the one male in the canon of George Eliot's novels whose romantic interest in the opposite sex is not explicitly described within the narrative. However, while he is quite obviously attracted to Lucy, he represses these romantic impulses for the sake of his family. His self-sacrifice causes him to become more rigid. He enacts his frustration on Maggie and desires that she too sacrifice. While the public part of his masculine identity is successfully shaped, the private part suffers greatly. In not recognizing this weakness, he envisions his firmness and suppression as strength: "A character at unity with itself—that performs what it intends, subdues every counteracting impulse, and has no visions beyond the distinctly possible—is strong by its very negations" (*MF* 252). Consequently, despite his uncle's assistance in introducing him to a public life, Tom is left utterly alone as he struggles with his private existence.

### **Women**

Women are "tempting," used both a verb to indicate the act by which the young males contemplate them and as an adjective to describe the allure that certain ones hold for men. In keeping with the masculine plot, the sexual temptation of women is regarded as a threat to manhood. However, this interpretation needs clarification. The plot does not advocate a total avoidance of women and sex. Rather, it encourages the young man to choose wisely, something that many of George Eliot's male characters neglect to do.<sup>7</sup> An inappropriate choice can lead to an unsettling of masculine identity. This is the advice that Bartle Massey tries to convey to Adam but is unable to do so.

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<sup>7</sup>In fact, most of George Eliot's characters, male and female, choose unwisely. Only a select few are ever given a second chance in her novels.

Although Adam and Tom both have desires for women, they are able to keep these in check. Adam is clearly a sexual creature, but he does not act impulsively when it comes to Hetty or Dinah. Tom is similar to Adam in that he is waiting until he is ready<sup>8</sup> before seriously pursuing any romantic involvement. However, the other supporting male characters (Seth and Arthur in *Adam Bede*, and Philip and Stephen in *The Mill on the Floss*) rush headlong into these relationships to the detriment of both themselves and their female partners. When it comes to women, their mistakes are in stark contrast to Adam's and Tom's choices. Two extremes are presented: —that of Adam's and Tom's; and that of the other male characters. Yet, George Eliot advocates neither of these. There is a middle road that is discussed in the next section. However to comprehend fully that approach, we must appreciate the wrong choices of Seth, Philip, Arthur, and Stephen.

Seth Bede and Philip Wakem are characterized as being too gentle. Both are constantly described by their “delicate” and “womanish” nature, which causes the women in their lives to view them more like brothers than serious contenders for their romantic affections. Furthermore, Seth and Philip are often compared to Adam and Tom respectively both by other characters and within the texts. These comparisons mark them as male “others,” further distancing them from hegemonic masculinity.

Seth, for example, is described as being both physically and emotionally weaker than Adam: “Seth's . . . eyebrows have less prominence and more repose than his brother's; and his glance, instead of being keen, is confiding and benignant . . . . The idle tramps always felt sure they could get a copper from Seth; they scarcely ever spoke to Adam” (*AB* 2). Throughout the novel, Seth is often depicted as someone who is “easily touched [and] shed tears” (*AB* 204).

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<sup>8</sup> Adam and Tom wait mainly for financial considerations.

The weakness of his masculinity is related directly to his emotional attraction to Dinah. For instance, in thinking so much of her, his work suffers. He is the subject of the other men's jokes when he forgets to put the panels on his door. This is a telling contrast to Adam whose only interest, it seems, is work. Seth's obsession for Dinah "unmans" him in many instances throughout the narrative. On one occasion, as the two of them are walking after her preaching, "Dinah seemed almost to have forgotten Seth's presence" (AB 30). Nonetheless, Seth still uses this opportunity to propose to her. In his proposal, the power dynamics are switched. Power firmly rests in Dinah's hand with Seth placed in a subordinate position: "His cheeks became flushed as he went on, his mild grey eyes filled with tears, and his voice trembled" (AB 32). Dinah, on the other hand, exercises control, reserve, and discipline in her refusal. Her voice is calm, and she displays no visible signs of being affected by Seth's proposal. She tells him "whenever I tried to fix my mind on marriage, and our living together, other thoughts always came in—" (AB 33). Although she begins speaking of marriage in general, she shifts to specify that it is a marriage between the two of them that she cannot envision. While it is tempting to read Dinah's refusal in reference to a higher calling, the truth of the matter is that Seth is simply not man enough for her.<sup>9</sup>

Seth's inability to measure up to what Dinah most desires in a man is evident in the scene between her and Adam after the death of Thias. It is the first time that the two spend any considerable time together. Thoughts of Adam affect her far greater than those of Seth ever did: "Dinah for the first time in her life, felt a painful self-consciousness;

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<sup>9</sup> The Methodism of both Seth and Dinah plays an important role in the power dynamics of their relationship. It "was a religion of the heart which valued the spiritual feeling of the individual" (Tosh, *A Man's Place* 35). Seth allows too much of his heart to rule while Dinah exercises the more masculine characteristic of reason.

there was something in the dark penetrating glance of this strong man so different from the mildness and timidity of his brother Seth” (*AB* 117). This scene is charged with a sexual tension that threatens both Adam and Dinah. She is penetrated by his “keen glance” (*AB* 2) in a way that she had never been by Seth’s “confiding and benignant” (*AB* 2) one: “A faint blush came, which deepened as she wondered at it. This blush recalled Adam from his forgetfulness” (*AB* 117). Seth, once again, is compared to Adam and is found lacking in the masculine characteristics that would make him sexually attractive to the feminine sex. Although there is much to be admired in Seth’s character, his masculinity is weakened by Dinah’s rejection. He is willing to be near her in a nonsexual relationship, which furthers alienates him from hegemonic masculinity.

Finally, success in the masculine plot is exemplified by “the rejection of the female or mother, often figured by casting off of female clothing” (Sussman 47). At the end of *Adam Bede*, Seth is depicted as having completely donned female clothing. We no longer see him in the workshop. His homosocial bonds have been severed, and he has become part of the feminine makeup of the household. Indeed, the last image we have of Seth Bede is that of him waiting at home with his mother, sister-in-law, and his niece and nephew for Adam, the man of the house, to return.

Philip Wakem’s masculinity is largely associated with his deformity. He is first referred to as “the deformed lad,” a description that becomes the substitute for his proper name among the people of St. Ogg’s. Mr. Tulliver emphasizes Philip’s resemblance to his mother and the lack of any of his father’s features: “The lad’s a poor deformed creature, and takes after his mother in the face: I think there isn’t much of his father in him” (*MF* 133). His deformity is also equated with a sexual inability: “The disabled

body is one that, usually for males in Western societies, is often excused or excluded from carnal knowledge” (McIlvenny 104). Many of the citizens of St. Ogg’s excuse and/or exclude Philip from any carnal knowledge. This sentiment is first expressed by Mr. Poulter, Tom’s drilling master, at Mr. Stellings’. In response to Tom’s desire to have Philip present while he does his sword exercises, Mr. Poulter asks, “What’s the use of *his* [italics in text] looking on?” (MF 144). Mr. Poulter reads sword exercises as an analogy for instructions on how to wield one’s manhood. His view that Philip will gain nothing by being present enforces a belief that Philip will never achieve manhood and should even be denied the voyeuristic pleasure of looking on.

Furthermore, Philip’s frustrated desire for Maggie makes public his less than masculine characteristics. When Tom suspects that Philip has compromised his sister, he cannot imagine any woman desiring a deformed man: “Love for a deformed man would be odious in any woman—in a sister intolerable” (MF 277). Tom’s view is also shared by the world’s wife of St. Ogg’s who is unable to fathom how any woman, even Maggie Tulliver, could have any interest in Wakem: “It had been said that she was *actually* [italics mine] engaged to young Wakem . . . a deformed young man, you know!” (MF 397). Philip’s physical and sexual deficiencies are linked to what Tom perceives as moral ones. When Bob Jakins remarks to Tom, “there goes that *crooked* [italics mine] young Wakem” (MF 277), the description is simply a reference to Philip’s hunchback. Yet, when Tom follows and encounters Maggie and Philip in the Red Deeps, he uses “crooked” to refer to Philip’s moral character: “That’s your *crooked* [italics mine] notion of honour” (MF 280). Once again, it is Philip’s desire for Maggie that leads to a public denunciation of his masculinity.

Philip, similar to Seth, longs for a more intimate relationship with the female sex. He too is thought to be more of a brother than a serious romantic attachment. In his adulthood, he thinks of Maggie as lover instead of sister. Yet, he realizes that she still sees him as she did when they were younger: “There was not the slightest promise of love towards him in her manner; it was nothing more than the sweet girlish tenderness she had shown him when she was twelve” (*MF* 250). Despite this realization, Philip’s love for Maggie is strong. However, when he finally confesses it to her, he is placed in a subordinate position while Maggie exercises control in the scene, a characteristic that is common in most courting where a woman has power and which perhaps explain the popularity of courtship novels. Her response is almost a direct echo of Philip’s own thoughts: “But . . . but I had never thought of your being my lover” (*MF* 272). When he asks for a kiss, the one she gives is that of a child: “She kissed him almost as simply and quietly as she had done when she was twelve years old” (*MF* 273). To her comment that she wished “to make your life very happy,” Philip replies, “I am waiting for something else—I wonder whether it will come” (*MF* 274). He desires a true declaration of love from her—something that will never come.

Like Seth, Philip’s masculinity is weakened by Maggie’s rejection. He is further alienated and denied any type of role in society. In the opinion of the world’s wife, the best course for him is to go away: “That young Wakem nearly went out of his mind—he always *was* rather queer; but he’s gone abroad again to be out of the way—quite the best thing for a deformed young man” (*MF* 397). Due to his deformity, Philip is denied a place both in the homosocial and domestic world. He forever remains ostracized from both, symbolized by his solitary visits to Tom and Maggie’s tomb.

Arthur Donnithorne and Stephen Guest do not experience the same emasculation and alienation as Seth Bede and Philip Wakem. Both Arthur and Stephen succeed in having their affections returned. They possess a physical, sexual, and financial presence, which gives them an advantage when it comes to attracting the female sex. In fact, their economic status constitutes a major difference from Adam and Tom. The main challenge they face, however, is idleness. While Arthur has great plans for the estate when he will become landlord, he can do nothing until his grandfather dies. In the meantime, he must find ways to fill his free time. Stephen Guest shares this same dilemma. He is described as “the fine young man . . . whose . . . air of nonchalant leisure, at twelve o’clock in the day, are the graceful and odoriferous result of the largest oil-mill and the most extensive wharf in St. Ogg’s” (*MF* 293). Neither Adam nor Tom has the same leisure that Arthur and Stephen enjoy in abundance.

Both men become infatuated by the beauty of Hetty and Maggie, respectively. Arthur falls under Hetty Sorrel’s charm and beauty. It is also interesting to note that in *The Mill on the Floss*, the chapter in which Stephen Guest and Maggie meet is entitled “The Great Temptation.” The title is clearly a reference to the temptation that Maggie encounters when meeting Stephen, but also as that which Stephen feels towards Maggie. Almost instantaneously, he is bewitched by Maggie, who has come to live with Lucy Deane, his fiancée. Expecting her to be a carbon copy of Mrs. Tulliver, he is erotically surprised by her: “Stephen could not conceal his astonishment at the sight of this tall dark-eyed nymph with her jet-black coronet of hair” (*MF* 304). He blushes and acknowledges Maggie with “a very deep bow,” a first for her. Both Arthur and Stephen attempt to convince themselves that their attractions are to beauty in general. Arthur tells

Mr. Irwine that Hetty is merely an object d'art, a subject that he would paint if he were an artist. Stephen uses nearly the same logic by telling himself, "it was perfectly natural and safe to admire beauty and enjoy looking at it" (*MF* 309).

Each is clearly aware that he should not act on his desires; yet, neither can master their sexual energies. Initially, Arthur resolves not to see Hetty, but the attraction is so great that he cannot resist. Described as a rushing river, the allure is so forceful that it completely overtakes any self-mastery that he may have: "The desire to see Hetty had rushed back like an ill-stemmed current; he was amazed himself at the force which his trivial fancy seemed to grasp him" (*AB* 130). He tries to dam this energy, but any dams that he constructs give way to the pressure of his yearnings. Likewise, Stephen often puts himself in the company of Maggie. In these meetings, he constantly endeavors to win her glance even while pretending that this is not his desire. Once he finds himself alone with her, his sexual energies are stirred. He determines that he will never allow himself to be alone with her again and that "he will master himself in the future" (*MF* 331). Yet, he is never quite able to succeed in damming his increased desires for Maggie.

Arthur's decision to master his sexual temptation diverges from Stephen's in one important way. Once he has kissed Hetty, he realizes that he has gone too far: "I'd better not go any farther now" (*AB* 139). Literally, this "farther" is a reference to their walk, but figuratively, it refers also to their relationship. In coming out of the woods, he realizes that "he couldn't quite depend on his own resolution" (*AB* 140), so he decides to seek masculine wisdom from Mr. Irwine in rejecting sexual temptation. Coming to suspect that Arthur is in some moral danger, Mr. Irwine directly asks whether this is the case. Mr. Irwine's candor, however, causes Arthur to shy away from confessing. The

opportunity passes, and “the rope to which he [Arthur] might have clung drifted away [, and] he must now trust to his own swimming” (*AB* 177). However, Arthur drowns in his own desire. He gives up his struggle and continues his relationship with Hetty. Stephen, on the other hand, has no older man from whom to seek masculine wisdom. He is left to fight alone. Once again, masculine wisdom is shown to be suspect. Although Arthur seeks and attains it and Stephen does not, both men are unsuccessful in combating their passions.

The moment of truth for Arthur and Stephen arrives at a dance when each man abandons his struggles and sets in motion his quest for sexual fulfillment. At his twenty-first birthday celebration, Arthur arranges to meet Hetty the following day in the woods. In dancing with each other, both are tremendously happy and this dance is clearly foreplay for what will unfold in the woods: “It was the last weakness he meant to indulge in; and a man never lies with more delicious languor under the influence of a passion, than when he has persuaded himself that he shall subdue it to-morrow” (*AB* 295).

In a similar way, Stephen initially maintains a safe distance from Maggie at the dance. This effort eventually fails because “his eyes were devouring Maggie . . . and the possibility that he too should dance with Maggie, and have her hand in his so long, was beginning to possess him like a thirst” (*MF* 356). Stephen’s sexual longing is described by the use of bodily metaphors. To quench his thirst, he goes to Maggie whose own reaction can be read in terms of her own sexual awakening:

Her whole frame was set to joy and tenderness; even the coming pain could not seem bitter—she was ready to welcome it as part of life, for life at this moment seemed a keen vibrating consciousness poised above

pleasure or pain. This one, last night, she might expand unrestrainedly in the warmth of the present. (*MF* 357)

Later when the two decide to take a walk into the empty conservatory, Stephen succumbs to all the passions that have been mounting within him: “A mad impulse seized Stephen; he darted towards the arm, and showered kisses on it, clasping the wrist” (*MF* 358).

Whereas Maggie feels both rage and humiliation at these actions, Stephen is left “dizzy with the conflict of passions—love, rage, and confused despair: despair of his want of self-mastery” (*MF* 358).

In both relationships, the climax occurs in places that are symbolic of their struggles. Much of the romance between Arthur and Hetty has been conducted in the woods, which represent metaphorically Arthur’s mental state as he wrestles with his passions for Hetty. Early on after one of their meetings, he is literally lost “among the narrow openings in the fern, winding about without seeking any issue” (*AB* 139). Later, Adam discovers Arthur and Hetty kissing in the woods. Here, Adam challenges Arthur’s masculinity with words described “like scorching missiles that were making ineffaceable scars on him” (*AB* 306). This verbal confrontation escalates into a physical one when Adam calls for Arthur to “fight me like a man” (*AB* 307). There is more strength in the workman’s hand, and Adam subdues Arthur.<sup>10</sup> Despite this confrontation, Arthur resorts to the security and ease of leisure and leaves Adam to clean up the chaos he has left behind.

For Stephen, it is the river that symbolizes his mental state. On the same day that he and Maggie first meet, they embark with Lucy on a boat ride, which foreshadows the

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<sup>10</sup> Margaret Homans reads this fight as symbolic of “Adam’s rise and Arthur’s decline . . . [where] Arthur’s aristocratic assumption that he can always pay for damage to a lower-class person’s life . . . is refuted by Adam, who insists on confronting Arthur man to man” (22).

later and more disastrous one. Despite Lucy's innocent machinations to get Maggie and Philip together, Philip's unexpected illness forces Stephen and Maggie to make the boat trip alone. Although Stephen is at the oars, he has given the control of the boat to the tide: "Stephen, who has been rowing more and more idly, ceased to row, laid down the oars, folded his arms, and looked down on the water as if watching the pace at which the boat glided without his help" (*MF* 376). He had never intended to go past Luckreth, but once passed, he saw no reason not to go on. Having relinquished command of the boat and thus any mastery of his desires, he attempts to convince Maggie that all is for the best: "See how the tide is carrying us out—away from all those unnatural bonds that we have been trying to make faster round us—and trying in vain" (*MF* 337). Although there is never any sexual intercourse between Stephen and Maggie, this tide is symbolic of Stephen's sexual desires, and he has completely given himself over to his longings. Furthermore, he finds happiness in this submission. It marks his transformation "from a dandical figure of glib opinions into a man of assertively heterosexual impulses" (Kaye 124). However these impulses do not come to fruition. He sinks under Maggie's strong resolution that they must part. Defeated, he tells her to leave him and shrinks from her hand as she reaches to touch his before departing.

Evoking the privileges allowed as men of leisure, Arthur and Stephen respond similarly to the hardships that they have caused others. Both chose a temporary self-exile, and the blame and punishment for each man's indiscretion is visited on the women. The world's wife of *The Mill on the Floss* excuses Stephen's behavior while assigning most, if not all, of the blame to Maggie: "A young man of five-and-twenty is not to be severely judged in these cases—he is really very much at the mercy of a designing bold girl. And

it was clear that he had given way in spite of himself” (*MF* 398). However, both men do feel remorse and aim to right their wrongs. When Arthur learns of Hetty’s crime and her impending death sentence, he wins her release, convinces Adam to remain in charge of the woods, and encourages the Poysners to remain at Hall Farm. Finally, he exiles himself once again from Hayslope and the estates, thus cutting “off every plan of happiness. . . [he’d] ever formed” (*AB* 478). When Stephen fully grasps the severity of Maggie’s troubles, he writes a letter absolving her of any guilt; yet his letter proves fruitless since the majority of St. Ogg’s still holds her responsible.

Arthur and Stephen do not escape punishment entirely. In his encounter with Adam in the woods, Arthur felt as if Adam’s words were leaving “ineffaceable scars on him” (*AB* 550). When he returns years later, those verbal scars have been written literally upon his body as physical ones. Stephen’s punishment is more mental than physical. He has lost the great love of his life. On the last day of her life, Maggie receives a letter from Stephen in which he writes of his pain and injury, claiming that he has been banished from life and goodness. She merely need write “Come!” and he would be with her in two days time. Maggie struggles with this decision but in the end decides against it. In the conclusion which describes the two visitors to the tomb, we are told that “both felt that their keenest joy and keenest sorrow were forever buried there” (*MF* 422)—an indication that Maggie remains the source of life and goodness in Stephen’s life.

However, both Arthur and Stephen receive redemption. Arthur’s doctors believe that his return home will do much to improve the sickness that has ravaged his body. In acquiring the estates and channeling the energy that he foolishly wasted in his youth into something productive, he is given an opportunity to try again. Stephen also finds greater

redemption in being given a second chance at domestic happiness. In his first visits to Maggie's tomb, he is alone. However, in time, he visits "the tomb with a sweet face beside him" (*MF* 422). Whether this sweet face is Lucy Deane or some other woman matters not. Stephen is forgiven and his marriage is evidence that he recoups his masculinity. What we witness in these later visits is that Stephen too has found a way to channel his energies through the domestic. Richard Kaye identifies this process as the "taming of Stephen Guest . . . [by] which this upstart dandy is converted into a familiar fictional type" (132). In *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*, George Eliot effectively reforms these two men, demonstrating that men can change and that masculinity is not fixed.

### **Manhood Achieved and Lost**

For the masculine plot to succeed, the young man must bond "with the father or more often a surrogate father . . . [which is] sealed by chaste bodily contact within carefully controlled rituals of male-male physicality" (Sussman 47). In *Adam Bede*, this bonding is expressed through metaphors analogous to the communion rite. Unable to bring himself to witness Hetty's trial, Adam waits in an "upper room" while Bartle Massey attends. The upper room is a Biblical allusion to the location where the Holy Spirit (Bartle Massey) descended upon Jesus' disciples (Adam) on the day of Pentecost as described in the Book of *Acts*. In a moment of great emotional crisis, Adam calls out "O God," and then Bartle appears mystically. Here, he essentially offers Adam communion: "I must see to your having a bit of the loaf, and some of that wine Mr. Irwine sent this morning . . . . Drink a drop with me, my lad—drink with me" (*AB* 437). Adam takes the wine, but refuses the bread. In a last appeal, Bartle insists, "Adam, for

the love of me. See, I must stop and eat a morsel. Now, you take some” (AB 440). We would expect “for the love of God” here, but once again, the emphasis is on a bonding with the surrogate father, for Bartle has put himself in place of the host. In taking of the bread, Adam establishes a chaste bodily contact with Bartle under a carefully controlled ritual of male-male physicality. Bartle’s bread refreshes Adam and returns him to his former self: “He stood upright again, and looked more like the Adam Bede of former days” (AB 440).

The bonding that occurs in *The Mill on the Floss* is the reestablishment of the bond between father and son that once had been damaged. As Tom works to restore the family’s name and status, the connection between the two is symbolized through a male-only ritual. Each time Tom returns home with his earnings, he gives them to his father to put into the tin box. Father and son are further bonded through ritual when Edward instructs him to write the history of their (father and son’s) struggle with John Wakem in the family Bible. It is an intense moment that frightens Mrs. Tulliver and causes Maggie to tremble with fear as Tom is instructed to write the following: “Write as you’ll remember what Wakem’s done to your father, and you’ll make him and his feel it, if ever the day comes” (MF 220). The last unifying moment occurs when Tom announces that the debts should be paid off sooner than expected. The father asks for his son’s hand: “Shake hands wi’ me, my lad” (MF 286). Two days later upon his deathbed, Mr. Tulliver will once again ask for Tom’s hand: “Shake hands wi’ me again, my lad, before I go away from you” (MF 291). In these scenes, intense moments of male bonding are described where women are either denied any participation or can only sit in fear. These moments become the grounding principles of Tom’s life. In bonding with their father

figures, both Adam and Tom achieve an aspect of manhood as defined specifically by the masculine plot.

However, in the end, both men are also able to bond with women. It is only at Dinah's urging that Adam visits Hetty after she has received the death penalty. In seeing Hetty, Adam is able to do something that he has never been able to do before—forgive. Hetty's trial has been a process where the old Adam has given way to a new one: "Doubtless a great anguish may do the work of years, and we may come out from that baptism of fire with a soul full of new awe and new pity" (*AB* 436). Dinah is primarily responsible for this change. Even Bartle Massey, who has been the main advocate for Adam's rejection of the domestic, notes something extraordinary in Dinah: "If there must be women to make trouble in the world, it's but fair there should be women to be comforters under it; and she's one—she's one" (*AB* 468). Bartle's use of "comforter" is another allusion to the Holy Spirit. In the end, Adam returns to the domestic life that once it seemed he might abandon.

Tom's trial is one of water figured in the literal flood that ends *The Mill on the Floss*. He is trapped and helpless in the attic when Maggie arrives with the announcement, "Here is Maggie!" (*MF* 421), which carry religious overtones of salvation. He is surprised that his sister has managed the flood alone: "Alone, Maggie?" said Tom, in a voice of deep astonishment" (*MF* 421). Maggie's actions cause him to question both feminine and masculine strengths. As a boy, he had boasted to Bob Jakin that "when I'm a man, I shall make a boat with a wooden house on top of it. . . . And then if the flood came. . . I shouldn't mind" (*MF* 43). He comes to realize that he has been wrong in his ideas:

It was not till Tom had pushed off and they were on the wide water—he face to face with Maggie—that the full meaning of what had happened rushed upon his mind. It came with so overpowering a force—it was such a new revelation to his spirit, of the depths in life, that had lain beyond his vision which he had fancied so keen and clear—that he was unable to ask a question. They sat mutely gazing at each other: Maggie with eyes of intense life looking out from a weary, beaten face—Tom pale with a certain awe and humiliation. (*MF* 421)

The flood is both an external and internal force in relation to Tom. For the moment, it washes Tom clean of hardness of his old life, and he experiences a rebirth as he once again becomes a child: “At last a mist gathered over the blue-grey eyes, and the lips found a word that they could utter: the old childish –‘Magsie’!” (*MF* 421). In this final scene, he bonds with the feminine as he lets go of his past masculine superiority and embraces the feminine in the form of his sister: “It is coming, Maggie! Tom said, in a deep horse voice, losing the oars, and clasping her” (*MF* 422).

While Adam emerges as a new man through his marriage to Dinah, Tom’s quest has an ambiguous ending. Maggie and Tom’s deaths complicate the closure of their relationship.<sup>11</sup> Although his final moments are within the embrace of his sister and his recognition that he may have been too rigid in his masculinity, we remain uncertain as to whether his awakening is sincere or a reaction influenced by impending death. On the surface, it appears that Tom is rescued from his past hardness through Maggie’s death.

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<sup>11</sup> Maggie and Tom’s deaths have often been criticized as the tragic flaw of the work because for many, it is unrealistic. Others, however, argue that this ending was George Eliot’s original plan, citing the research she had done on floods. Furthermore, some scholars argue that it is necessary in order to bring sister and brother together eternally and to merge the male and female halves of George Eliot’s personality.

However, this only reinforces the long-standing view that the woman exists to “save” man from himself. Furthermore, Maggie’s sacrifice certainly lends credibility to Tom’s earlier assertions that she should forgo pleasures for the sake of family although, her demise is for naught since Tom also dies in the flood. His death indicates that this moment is temporary and should they survive, the old Tom would most likely resurfaced. For these reasons, Tom’s quest is unsuccessful.

Although it is tempting to compare Tom’s story to that of St. Ogg’s, the noticeable difference is that St. Ogg safely delivers the woman clad in rags across the river. Tom cannot transport Maggie or himself across the river let alone the tumult of his own life. Furthermore, he is not given the opportunity to embrace the domestic and to realize that a man must achieve harmony between the public and private spheres. When he takes the oars from Maggie, he is rowing towards Lucy and the Deanes. Yet, he never reaches this “domestic” shore. Rather, he sinks into the ideas of his boyhood masculinity. In those moments preceding his death, he reverts to his childhood referring to Maggie as “Magsie.” Furthermore, Maggie is rendered silent, reminding us of Tom’s earlier notions concerning women and why they need not speak. Despite the overwhelming sense of sadness that the scene evokes, it is definitely not one of salvation. Instead, it reveals the tragic results of what may happen when the young male is unable to balance a public and private life. Maggie dies because of Tom. His strict sense of masculinity is not merely a threat to himself but to everyone who is close to him.

### **George Eliot’s Alternative Masculine Plot**

Given the circumstances of the lives of those characters in these two novels, George Eliot’s alternative masculine plot is a work in progress. These first two novels

establish the basic components of the plot: domestic life, male communities and masculine wisdom, women, and manhood. Each subsequent novel adds a different level of complexity to previous ones. Yet what unifies all of her male characters' struggles is the call to balance these competing demands of the public and private spheres. The men of *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* are challenged by the traditional paths and the new ones that lie ahead. Their quests for manhood are bound up in negotiations concerning the masculinity/marriage dilemma. Ultimately, the men in George Eliot's novels come to their demise when they follow outdated ways, or they become "new" men by accepting that masculinity depends upon a balance between both spheres.

Chapter Two: Public Masculinity and the Masculinity/Marriage Dilemma in *Romola* and *Felix Holt*

*Romola* (1862-3) and *Felix Holt* (1866) are regarded as George Eliot's two "political" novels.<sup>1</sup> *Romola*, set in fifteenth-century Florence, opens with the death of Lorenzo de Medici in 1492, and *Felix Holt* commences shortly after the passing of the First Reform Act of 1832. Set against the political uncertainty of their times, these novels complicate further the male characters' struggles with masculinity. While the men in *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* wrestle with achieving manhood and defining their masculinity as private citizens, the men of *Romola* and *Felix Holt* are concerned with their public identities. In seeking public masculinity, they consistently undervalue the private sphere.

Great men in history are primarily known through the actions of their public lives while those of their "private and semipublic life becomes important—*becomes history*—only if it causes the public front to collapse" (Filene 104). This view helps us to understand Tito Melema's and Felix Holt's experiences as depicted in the novels. Public life holds the greater attraction for both men because they equate it with being more influential than a private one. Tito's and Felix's conceptions of public masculinity are influenced by their positive assumptions concerning this life. They are either unaware of the dangers or imagine that they are above them.

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<sup>1</sup> While these novels are not strict political ones, such as Benjamin Disraeli's *Coningsby* (1844) or Anthony Trollope's Palliser novels, there is a definite commentary on political events that runs throughout. See Morris Edmund Speare's *The Political Novel* (1924) where he credits Disraeli as the father of the political novel and offers the following definition of this subgenre: "It is a work of prose fiction which leans rather to 'ideas' than to 'emotions'; which deals rather with the machinery of law-making or with a theory about public conduct than with the merits of any given piece of legislation; and where the main purpose of the writer is party propaganda, public reform, or exposition of the lives of the personages who maintain government, or the force which constitutes government" (ix). He also includes a chapter on George Eliot's *Felix Holt* in his book.

Furthermore, these two fail to see the symbiotic relationship that exists between the two spheres, and which is conveyed by the narrator of *Felix Holt* who states that “there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life” (*FH* 45). While Tito and Felix subordinate their private lives to their desired public ones, their methods are quite different. Tito, on the other hand, attempts to live both a personal private life entirely unconnected to his open public one, employing any means to maintain this fragile separation. Felix, on the other hand, tries initially to reject any type of private life. Regardless of their individual views and methods, both men find that the two spheres often collide.

Elements of the masculine plot, as outlined in the previous chapter, are also essential to this discussion of Tito’s and Felix’s struggles. Furthermore, while Tito Melema and Felix Holt are the main male characters, others and their experiences are examined occasionally and reaffirm the main points outlined in the five sections of this chapter. Firstly, the focus is on Tito’s and Felix’s discontent and rejection of what I call their private fathers (for Tito, his adoptive father Baldassare and for Felix, his unnamed biological father). Dino (*Romola*) and Harold (*Felix Holt*) also experience displeasure with their fathers and separate from them. The second section, “Public Power,” concentrates on each man’s assumptions concerning his public life, his acceptance of public fathers, and his handling of power in the public sphere. In “Marriage and Public Masculinity,” I analyze Tito’s and Felix’s, as well as Reverend Lyon’s and Harold Transome’s (both from *Felix Holt*) experiences of women and marriage. The fourth section entitled “Spheres Colliding and Collapsing” is an exploration of Tito’s and Felix’s attempts at separation and/or rejection of spheres and how they each ultimately

fail. Finally, we conclude with the complex statement that George Eliot offers on separate spheres and public masculinity as experienced by Tito and Felix.

### **Private Fathers**

Relationships between fathers and sons in *Romola* and *Felix Holt* are as problematic as they are in *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*. Both novels open with a physical and mental estrangement between fathers and sons thus making Tito and Felix near orphans. Tito arrives shipwrecked in Florence, physically separated from Baldassare, while Felix's return to Treby Magna marks a mental separation since he has abandoned an apprenticeship to a country apothecary for which his father had provided money. These experiences of detachment from true fathers are echoed in the lives of Bernardino, Bardo's son in *Romola*, and Harold Transome in *Felix Holt*. While the specific reasons for these separations vary, the common discontent is related to ideas concerning their fathers' perceived masculinity and public standing.

Both Tito and Bernardino are raised by scholarly fathers whose masculinities do not correspond with what they most desire in their own masculine identities. Tito's physical separation from his father leads to a mental one as he ruminates on the hardships that his father has caused him. He faults Baldassare for his impulsive forthrightness, which has led to a life of economic uncertainty for them,—a sentiment that he expresses in his first meeting with Bardo de Bardi, who will become one of his public fathers: "He [Baldassare] made enemies—chiefly, I believe by a certain impetuous candour; and they hindered his advancement, so that he lived in obscurity. And he will never stoop to conciliate" (*R* 64). While Tito benefits from his academic training, he wants more than the mediocre life of a scholar that he has had with Baldassare. In shaping his own

masculinity, he develops traits that are the extreme opposite to those of his father. Instead of impetuous candour, he employs abrupt deception and does everything to appease, even if it means resorting to falsehoods. His life in Florence is marked with a succession of public fathers, each of whom is more powerful and wealthier than the last.

Bernardino also rejects the scholarly model but for different reasons from Tito. Bardo's great desire had been that he and his son would become renowned scholars. However, Bernardino associates his father's scholarly pursuits as futile and mere vanity—a view expressed through his deathbed premonition that he relates to Romola. Bernardino desires a life governed by a higher calling. While he renounces a life of study to become a Dominican friar, religion becomes his new father, manifested in both God the Father and Friar Girolamo Savonarola.<sup>2</sup> Unlike Tito, Bernardino is not motivated by public aspirations. While his intentions are admirable, he unintentionally creates a space for Tito whom Bardo will “adopt” as a substitute for the son lost to him.

Felix and Harold also find flaws in the models of masculinity presented by their fathers. George Eliot's narrator is unusually silent about the relationship, if any, that had existed between father and son. Felix's father died while he was boy, and we do not learn the age of Felix at the time of the death. And most revealing, Felix's father is never named. These narrative absences give considerable weight to the physical separation between Felix and his father. When he abandons the medical training his father had provided for him, he enacts a psychological parting as well. He faults his father for both his lack of medical and pharmaceutical knowledge, a criticism that he shares in a first

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<sup>2</sup> Girolamo Savonarola was a Dominican priest who emerged as a leader of Florence from 1494 until his execution in 1498. In 1494, Charles VIII of France landed in Italy to take over the Neapolitan throne. On the way to Naples, the French army overtook Florence and expelled the Medici, which left a power vacuum that was soon filled by Savonarola.

meeting with his public father, the Reverend Rufus Lyon: “My father was ignorant . . . . He knew neither the complication of the human system, nor the way in which drugs counteract with each other” (*FH* 55). He perceives “Holt’s Cathartic Lozenges” and “Holt’s Restorative Elixir” (remedies his father left behind) to be both a physical threat to those patients who have used them and a moral one to himself. His name is linked to them and any negative effects that will bear on both his private and public sense of self. Felix returns to sever the negative bonds associated with his private father and to establish his own sense of masculine identity independent of his father.

*Felix Holt* also features a second returning son, Harold Transome. Unlike the other male characters discussed in this section, he has two fathers. Mr. Transome is the man whom he believes to be his father. However, the lawyer Matthew Jermyn is his biological one who assumes a fatherly role towards him. Harold distances himself from both of these men. He and Mr. Transome have little interaction with each other, and their reunion is symbolic of their distant relationship. After his obligatory greeting to Mr. Transome, he remarks, “Gad! What a wreck poor father is! Paralysis, eh? Terribly shrunk and shaken—crawls about among his books and beetles as usual, though” (*FH* 18). While he does not blame his father for his physical condition or hobbies, Harold has little to do with him. In fact, his return appears to be motivated by the desire to sever any connection to his family’s past, which is symbolized by his political aspirations:

Harold Transome’s decision to run for Parliament as a Radical is due to no sympathy for the under-dog, or the downtrodden, but because, being a younger son who had carved out his own fortunes as a merchant in the Orient, he returns to England out of patience with his own hereditary

caste, and anxious to show that he is tied to no class conservatisms.

(Speare 222)

In avoiding his father and parting from his family's political identity, Harold attempts to shape a masculine and public persona of his own.

His relationship to Matthew Jermyn had always been a troublesome one. In fact, he considers Jermyn a parasite who has fed off of his family's fortunes and horribly mismanaged the family estates. Part of his reaction towards Jermyn is motivated by his latent anger toward his mother, who constantly attempts to present him as a suitable masculine role model for her son. Despite her machinations, Harold consistently ignores any advice that Mr. Jermyn offers. Harold also differs from Tito, Bernardino, and Felix in one major way. While these other men directly or indirectly attach themselves to public fathers, Harold is determined to go it alone. He categorically resists any assistance from any other male figure.

While each of these male characters withdraws from his private father for distinct reasons, his decisions are both a result of a conflict between their perception of ideal masculinity and the failed ones of their fathers. In this regard, their reactions are similar to those of Adam and Tom who, as we noted, also broke from their fathers as masculine role models. However, the difference is that the male characters of *Romola* and *Felix Holt* seek a public masculinity. It is a masculinity that either their fathers do not possess or have not developed to their sons' satisfaction. Separation from the father begins not only their quest for masculinity but also their entrance into the public sphere.

### **Public Power**

Admission into the public sphere is for both Tito and Felix an opportunity

to create their ideal public masculinities. This construction, however, is precarious and depends upon a number of factors, which cannot be easily controlled. Graham Dawson explains that “masculine identities are lived out in the flesh, but fashioned in the imagination” (118). Tito and Felix first imagine their public masculinities and then attempt to make them real when they enter the public sphere. The fashioning process is further complicated because of the need for advantageous homosocial relationships. Attaching oneself to appropriate men in society becomes imperative. If successful, it may lead to the public power that each desires. However, nothing is guaranteed, for life in the public sphere is always uncertain. Tito’s and Felix’s experiences in the public sphere differ in regards to their respective imagined identities, their actual ones, and their level of success. Despite these variances, their struggles underscore the dangers associated with masculinity in the public sphere.

Certainly, both Tito and Felix associate power with the public sphere. It is a life of action, which is in direct contrast to their perceived ideas of the private sphere. While both men seek power in terms of political influence, their reasons and the roles they intend to play differ. These reasons and roles shape and influence their imagined and actual masculinities and determine the outcome of their entrance in the public sphere.

Tito Melema is intriguing in that George Eliot depicts masterfully the conflict of a character who grapples with pleasing others and attaining his goals. His entire life has been that of an orphan, separated first from his biological parents and then from his adoptive father. In addition to these parental separations, he is also detached from his own sense of self. His washing up on the shores of Florence is symbolic of a new birth. Bruce Robbins compares orphanhood to youth, stating that both are “an irresistible

incentive to seek shelter, a sort of natural outside that innocently calls into being a narrative pointed toward some sort of entry, assimilation, accommodation—an exercise in social integration” (58). Although physically a man, he is mentally a boy seeking both acceptance and assurance in a new world. While his actions towards others are deplorable, they reveal a gradual shift as he moves from a sense of duty towards others to one of self preservation. Tito’s imagined masculinity follows the same lines. Having lived much of his life in uncertainty, he is determined that his new one will not be lived in the same way. He does not begin with a set notion of masculinity. Instead, he is constantly restructuring it as opportunities present themselves.

Tito’s entrance into the public sphere is not planned by him nor does it occur as a result of his own actions. Like the shipwreck that places him in Florence, he is thrust into it. Circumstances connect him with Nello, the first of his public fathers. Nello informs him that his barbershop is one of the most significant public spaces in all of Florence, if not the world: “If you want to know the flavor of our scholarship, you must frequent my shop: it is the focus of Florentine intellect, and in that sense the navel of the earth” (*R* 13). At Nello’s, men meet to discuss art and politics, but more importantly, to form masculine bonds.

Tito quickly realizes the potential of this offer, deducing that the easiest route to security lies in establishing relationships with the most influential men of Florence. Yet he is still a passive participant in his new public life. He is “adopted” by Nello who introduces him into the homosocial world of Florence. When Tito inquires about a patron to whom he might sell some antique gems, Nello acquaints him with Bardo who is able to secure him an audience with Bartolommeo Scala, the secretary of the Florentine

Republic. This meeting with Scala marks Tito's transition to a more active role in his quest. He is presented with a translation of a Greek epigram by Politian, a scholarly rival of Scala. Accurately reading the hidden agenda behind this test of his Greek, Tito discredits Politian's translation thus winning Scala's support. For his reward, he finds himself being "supported in a Greek chair" (*R* 96), a position which opens more doors for him, thus furthering his emergence into Florentine society.

Tito's accelerated rise into the public sphere lends some credence to Bernardo's (Bardo's friend and Romola's godfather) earlier claim that he will slip "easily into any nest he fixes his mind on" (*R* 74). While Tito's accession appears effortless, it is anything but easy. Each step depends upon his careful manipulation of his public fathers, telling each of these men exactly what it is they want to hear. The painter, Piero di Cosimo, first notices this latent characteristic in Tito when he envisions him as the perfect image for a painting "of Simon deceiving old Priam," explaining that

A perfect traitor should have a face which vice can write no marks on—  
lips that will lie with a dimple smile—eyes of such agate brightness and  
depth that no infamy can dull them—cheeks that will rise from murder and  
not look haggard. (*R* 42)

However, Tito has not always been what these men foresee in him. He becomes this "perfect traitor." This change in Tito reflects the dangers that Victorian authors associated with life in the public sphere. Competition with other men for power and dominance may force men to resort to methods otherwise foreign to their personalities.

Not only does competition threaten the homosocial bonds between men, it threatens the man's own sense of self. Tito's life is marked by constant struggle to satisfy

those various men in his life, but also to reconcile his own two important needs. Torn between a life of security and one of acceptance, he constantly questions his actions. Afraid that these opportunities may not come again, he submits to the current of his public life, allowing himself to be driven by external forces. Each new circumstance causes him to amend his public image, constructing and reconstructing it according to what he perceives others most desire of him. Throughout, it is an attempt to maintain the public power that has become so important to his sense of self.

Felix's imagined public masculinity is a reaction to what he perceives as the negative one of his father. Fearing the possible adverse effects of his father's medicines on the innocent, he desires to produce positive ones. While he has a clear vision of what he wishes to accomplish, he is never able to bring it to fruition. He does make minor forays into the public sphere, but he never achieves the significant influence that he imagines. He is unable to add flesh to his perceived masculinity because he is unwilling to do what is necessary to succeed in the public sphere.

The public world of men that George Eliot portrays in *Romola* and *Felix Holt* is permeated with unscrupulous actions. Tito succeeds in it because he is willing to sacrifice himself for its demands while Felix fails due to his refusal to embrace them. His aversion is in line with both his imagined masculinity and what he hopes to accomplish, as he explains to Rufus Lyon:

This world is not a very fine place for a good many of the people in it. But I've made up my mind it shan't be the worse for me, if I can help it. They may tell me that I can't alter the world—that there must be a certain number of sneaks and robbers in it, and if I don't lie and filch somebody

else will. Well, then, somebody else shall, for I won't. (*FH* 56)

Albeit a very commendable statement of his sense of self and goals, this runs counter to what a man must do to succeed in the masculine sphere.

Each time Felix steps into the public world, he encounters these “sneaks and robbers.” On his first visit to the Sugar Loaf, a public house, where he intends “to take a little knowledge and common-sense” (*FH* 65), he discovers that electioneering agents for Harold Transome, a Radical like himself, are bribing the non-voting men with alcohol for their vocal support at the nominations and polling. All his good intentions lead to naught. Although he alerts Harold to what is happening and even takes the speaker's box at the nomination of candidates to denounce these actions, his call for reforms falls on deaf's ears. Yet, he continues to try to do good in the world despite the obstacles.

Another cause of Felix's failure in the public sphere is that he does not make the appropriate homosocial bonds. While there is a surrogate father-son relationship between him and the Reverend Rufus Lyon, it does not advance his public needs. One of the complications of this relationship is that Rufus' masculine role in Felix's life is complex. While he is a public man in some respects, he is also a private one. Felix is initially attracted to the public side, finding in him a man who is also concerned with producing positive effects on the lives of others. Felix, however, neglects the private side by never asking about Lyon's personal life. It is a missed opportunity, which may have made Felix's journey easier.

Although Tito and Felix's experiences differ from each other, both reveal the precarious nature of the public sphere and its power. George Eliot presents the inherent conflict between the individual self and the demands of a male public life. In addition,

this internal struggle causes these men to neglect and/or subordinate their private lives to their public ones. In the following section, I analyze the complex connection between marriage and public masculinity as conveyed in the texts and as experienced by male characters in both *Romola* and *Felix Holt*.

### **Marriage and Public Masculinity**

No successful marriages exist in *Romola* or *Felix Holt*. In fact, the only marriages in *Romola* both belong to Tito—his unlawful marriage to Tessa and his lawful one to Romola, both of which end disastrously. Bad marriages are also a component in *Felix Holt* as evident in both the Lyons' and the Transomes' marriages. In addition to these marriages, many of the male characters of both novels denounce marriage either in words or actions. In this regard, *Romola* and *Felix Holt* appear as a polemic against marriage, particularly emphasizing the adverse consequences that it has on the public lives of men. While the actual marriages and diatribes against them serve to support this view, the role between marriage and public masculinity in these novels is much more complex. The disastrous ones will be shown to be a result of the husbands' failure to negotiate the public and private spheres. To their detriment, these males neglect and/or subordinate the private sphere in order to advance in the public one.

Tito's marriages and his relationships with women are motivated by the same desires that drive his quest for public power. Again, he is still the boy clothed in a male's body who craves acceptance and assurance. Marriage to Romola is advantageous to him because she is Bardo's daughter. This alliance will legalize the father-son bond he had already established with Bardo while also confirming him as an adopted citizen of

Florence. However, his affections for Romola are more complicated than such public social gains. He is genuinely in awe of Romola and discerns the divine in her:

He felt for the first time . . . that loving awe in the presence of noble womanhood, which is perhaps something like the worship paid to a great nature-goddess, who was not all-knowing, but whose life and power were something deeper and more primordial than knowledge. (R 95)

Tito elevates Romola to a figure of Goethe's "eternal feminine,"<sup>3</sup> which "draws us [men] to higher spheres" (Gilbert and Gubar 21). However, the pedestal upon which he places Romola is "a snare for women, elevating them to a graceful uselessness while their men grabbed the rewards of industrial society" (Stearns 81). In time, he will begin to use the pedestal as a justification to keep her from his public affairs.

Romola also fulfills another need for Tito. Measuring himself against her noble presence, he discovers what is lacking in his own personality: "He had an intimate sense that Romola was something very much above him" (R 95). His relationship with her presents the prospect of accomplishing good in life, thus righting his wrongs and ascertaining the goodness within himself: "Romola's life seemed an image of that loving, pitying devotedness . . . from which he had shrunk and excused himself. . . . [but] when she was near him, and looked at him with her sincere hazel eyes, he was subdued by a delicious influence" (R 118). So elevated is she in his estimation that he becomes doubtful that she will ever stoop to accept him. His affections for her are contradictory. On the one hand, she is a vehicle by which he may achieve the power and wealth that he so urgently desires; on the other, she is grace personified.

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<sup>3</sup> The vision of the "Eternal Feminine" (Das Ewig-Weibliche) is what concludes Goethe's *Faust* (1832) and in the words of Gilbert and Gubar, "presents women from penitent prostitutes to angelic virgins" (21).

While Tito's feelings towards Romola are motivated by lofty designs, his relationship and marriage to Tessa is the result of more rudimentary ones. He first encounters her when he arrives in Florence and is desperate for food and drink. Having no money, he determines that he "must get . . . [his] breakfast for love" (*R* 24). Tessa is awfully innocent of the ways of the world, particularly men. Tito is able to slip easily into Tessa's mind, convincing her that she means a great deal to him—and on some level, she does. He realizes that she can fulfill his basic needs for nourishment and sexual gratification. More significantly, he can secure acceptance and assurance from her without higher moral demands being placed upon him:

This creature [Tessa] who was without moral judgment that condemned him, whose little loving ignorant soul made a world apart, where he might feel in freedom from suspicions and exacting demands, had a new attraction for him now. She seemed a refuge from the threatened isolation that would come with disgrace. (*R* 145)

Tito's involvement with both Romola and Tessa are representative of the Madonna-whore complex, where Romola is a surrogate mother and Tessa a concubine.

Fearing that a marriage to Romola may not occur, Tito seizes an opportunity to "marry" Tessa. He is pleased when he finds her tired and hungry in the piazza during a *fierucola*.<sup>4</sup> After returning the favor of fulfilling her basic needs for nourishment, he takes advantage of her loving ignorance when a conjurer greets them with "ha! my children . . . you are come to be married" (*R* 148). Unaware that this offer is in jest, she accepts Tito's proposal and is soon "married." Tito constantly grapples with revealing the truth of their

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<sup>4</sup> A *fierucola* is an open market and/or fair that is usually held every third Sunday where peasants and owners of small companies come to sell their products.

marriage to her; however, he never does for fear of “robbing himself . . . of his only haven from contempt” (*R* 149). She is perceived as a refuge from his public life and the moral demands he feels in Romola’s presence.

Once the marriage to Romola occurs, he continues to maintain the one to Tessa because it gives him acceptance and assurance without demands. Both of his marriages, however, prove disastrous. While the one to Romola elevates him in Florentine society, it forces demands upon him that he is unable or unwilling to meet; the one to Tessa grants him unconditional love and admiration, but it provides little for Tessa. Any advantages of marriage in *Romola* are unmistakably Tito’s and prove to be short lived. Essentially, Tito neglects both his private spheres for success in the public. This neglect will later lead to his public collapse.

Romola and Tessa are the ones who are affected most negatively by these marriages. In fact, Romola had been warned against marriage by her brother, Bernardino, who, gravely ill, returns to San Marco monastery to die. Learning that her brother has returned, Romola visits him. On his deathbed, he delivers the dire premonition concerning her intended marriage, which is permeated with images of death, disappointment, and loneliness. Interpreting his entire vision, he warns Romola against marriage: “Romola, I believe it is a revelation meant for thee: to warn against marriage as a temptation of the enemy; it calls upon thee to dedicate thyself” (*R* 158). His warning is not limited merely to the blank face of the man, but marriage in general is viewed as the temptation of the enemy. For Bernardino, it is a distraction from one’s higher calling. He advises Romola to dedicate herself to higher aims that marriage will only serve to frustrate. Despite this advice, she proceeds with her marriage to Tito and, true to

Bernardino's prediction; the marriage disappoints Bardo, Romola, and Tito. This ominous warning and the two disastrous marriages in *Romola* presents an argument against marriage—not only for the male but also for the female.

In *Felix Holt*, marriage is also depicted as a distraction to a higher calling, and actual marriages prove to be disastrous. John Kucich posits that "*Felix Holt* is actually a novel about the avoidance of relationships. It is darkened by a supreme pessimism about the fruits of human intercourse" (173). Negative views of marriage held by both Harold Transome and Felix Holt serve to validate Kucich's claim. Harold has developed an extreme dislike towards marriage, grounding it in the abhorrence he finds in English wives: "I hate English wives; they want to give their opinion about everything. They interfere with a man's life. I shall not marry again" (*FH* 20). His aversion here is based on the separate sphere theory. For him, a woman's place is clearly in the private sphere, and she should have no influence in the public lives of men. His view is derived from the experiences of his parents' marriage and particularly the control that his mother possesses over his father: "When Mrs. Transome appeared within the doorway, her husband paused in his work and shrank like a timid animal looked at in a cage where flight is impossible" (*FH* 15). His father has been emasculated and his mother has, intentionally or unintentionally, hastened his decline. Harold firmly believes that women, including his mother, have no business meddling in public affairs. Once, when she attempts to offer him political advice, he informs her that "it doesn't signify what they [women] think—they are not called upon to judge or act" (*FH* 36). At other times, he either prevents her from uttering any statement, or he effectively nullifies any of her assertions

by reducing them to the irrational thoughts of a woman who knows nothing of the “real and public life” of men.

While Felix’s views are not as severe as Harold’s, they are also based on the same separation between spheres. He concludes that married life forces a man to act counter to his nature and faults marriage for the demands it places upon a man:

I’ll never marry, though I should have to live on raw turnips to subdue my flesh. I’ll never look back and say, “I had a fine purpose once—I meant to keep my hands clean and my soul upright, and to look truth in the face; but pray excuse me, I have a wife and children—I must lie and simper a little, else they’ll starve.” (*FH* 66)

As a single man, he knows that he can be self-sufficient; as a husband and father, he realizes that more will be required of him. To force his wife and children to live on raw turnips would be an abomination; therefore, he might be called upon to be immoral, however slightly, in order to maintain his family. The family then becomes a distraction to the man and interferes with a higher calling that involves more than merely meeting rudimentary needs.

Felix’s general assumption about women is that they fill a man’s lives with petty concerns. He states this as another reason for his resistance to marriage and expresses the hope that Esther will never become one of those “women who hinder men’s lives from having any nobleness in them” (*FH* 107):

I can’t bear to see you going the way of the foolish women who spoil men’s lives. Men can’t help loving them, and so they make themselves slaves to the petty desires of petty creatures. . . . That’s what makes

women a curse; all life is stunted to suit their littleness. That's why I'll never love, if I can't help it; and if I love, I'll bear it, and never marry.

(*FH* 109)

He speaks obviously as a young man who has neither loved nor been married. And while it may be tempting to dismiss his views against marriage, family, and women as the harangue of an inexperienced youth, they do have some validity when compared to the married life of Rufus Lyon.

In noticing the lack of physical similarities between Rufus and Esther, Felix assumes that Mr. Lyon must have “married foolishly,” an assumption that summarizes accurately Reverend Lyon’s marriage with Annette. Prior to his meeting the destitute Annette Ledru with her baby one winter evening, he was the successful pastor of a large independent congregation. Despite being advised to marry, he “did not wish to avail himself of that permission, finding his studies and other labours of his vocations all-absorbing” (*FH* 71). He perceives marriage as a distraction from the higher calling of his ministry.

However, when Annette enters his life as the great tempter whom he cannot easily resist, he is immediately averted from his aims as he begins to meditate on a future with Annette: “A terrible crisis had come upon him; a moment in which religious doubt and newly-awakened passion had rushed together in a common flood, and had paralysed his ministerial gifts” (*FH* 71). In this regard, he is similar to Arthur Donnithorne of *Adam Bede* and Stephen Guest of *The Mill on the Floss* who allow themselves to be carried away by the tides of their desires. So strong are these passions and subsequent paralysis that he will resign his ministry and relocate to a distant town.

Fearing that Annette could never love him, Rufus keeps secret his true affections for nearly a year. When he finally expresses his desire to marry her, her response is initially one of physical trembling and later utter misery. This scene is reminiscent of the ones between Seth and Dinah in *Adam Bede* and Philip and Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss* where the male characters are placed in a subordinate position by the object of their affections. Disheartened, Rufus ultimately understands that he has foolishly abandoned his ministry for naught. This revelation manifests itself as an emotional sickness, which converts to a physical one: “Under the shattering of his long-deferred hope his health had given way” (*FH* 78). Not only has his infatuation with Annette caused him to lose his profession, but it also puts his very health in jeopardy.

Grateful for the sacrifices he has made on her behalf, Annette nurses Rufus through his illness and submits to marriage in order to avoid negative public opinion. Chapel bells, however, are the death knell for Annette: “It was clear that Annette regarded her present life as a sort of death to the world. . . . She withered like a plant in strange air, and the three years of life that remained were but a slow and gentle death” (*FH* 79). Like Romola’s and Tessa’s marriages, Annette’s is also detrimental. After her death, Rufus returns to his ministry, and the disastrous Lyon marriage is reduced to a brief and insignificant interruption described simply as “that four years’ break in his life” (*FH* 80). The real events of Rufus’ married life, though unknown to the citizens of Treby Magna and to Felix, lend credence to Harold and Felix’s views concerning marriage as a distraction to the public lives of men. Felix is determined not to make the same mistake as Mr. Lyon and establishes a rigid view of women and marriage.

Similar to Romola, Esther is associated with the eternal feminine for both Harold and Felix. Initially motivated to court her because she is the true heir of Transome Court, Harold later detects in Esther's sweetness an "elixir" for life's hardships: "This sweet woman, for whom he felt a passion newer than any he had expected to feel, might possibly make some hard things more bearable" (*FH* 391). Despite refusing to marry him, Esther still proves to be a positive force in Harold's life. Under her influence, he reconciles with his mother and appears to be less rigid than he had been upon his return. Felix too falls under the power of Esther's sweetness. Motivated first by a boyish desire to "scold her every day, and make her cry and cut her fine hair off" (*FH* 65), Felix begins to perceive better and higher qualities in Esther. However, his perception resembles that of Tito's in relation to Romola. Felix equates her physical beauty to a spiritual one in which he glimpses her power to motivate men towards greatness: "I do believe in you; but I want you to have a vision of the future that you may never lose your best self. . . . And if it did save you, you might be that woman whose beauty makes a great task easier to men instead of turning them away from it" (*FH* 224). Felix's comment is somewhat conventional and belittling because he places Esther in a subordinate role where she exists merely to be an inspiration. Both Harold and Felix's impressions of Esther serve only to reinforce the ideas behind the separate sphere theory.

### **Spheres Colliding and Collapsing**

In their attempts to achieve public masculinity, Tito and Felix constantly strive to keep their public lives separate from their private ones. Despite their efforts, the two spheres often collide. Tito achieves both a level of both public and private success and manages for a time to keep the one world separate from the other. While he is able to

keep Tessa sequestered on the outskirts of Florence, he is not as successful when it comes to excluding Romola.

The chainmail that Tito buys with the sole purpose of protecting himself from Baldassare's revenge represents his attempt to keep the two parts of his private life (his father and his wife) separate from his public one. It also symbolizes the masculine control he tries to assert over Romola. Upon seeing something under his tunic, she asks, "What have you got on under your tunic, Tito? Something hard as iron" (*R* 249). His acknowledgment of "*It is Iron*" (italics textual) is the first sign of his effort to exert a strong hand over Romola. Klaus Theweleit argues that "what we see being portrayed in . . . armor [is the] separation from, and superiority over the interior" (Vol. 1, 434), where the interior is associated with the female and the exterior with the male. Tito realizes that his idea of Romola as the "eternal feminine" might interfere with his public success, and he must distance himself from those earlier thoughts by becoming "hard" with Romola. His new hardness is enacted when he admits to her that he has sold Bardo's library without consulting her. He argues that "the very care of a husband for his wife's interests compels him to take separate actions sometimes" (*R* 284). After this interchange, the two become quite separate from each other: "They were too hopelessly alienated in their inner life ever to have that contest which is an effort towards agreement. They talked of all affairs, public and private, with careful adherence to an adopted course" (*R* 399). For the moment, Tito has accomplished the separation he has desired, for the "adopted course" is set clearly by him, and Romola reluctantly agrees to follow.

In time, Romola begins to take an interest in the political affairs of Florence and particularly in the life of Savonarola. Learning that Tito might be involved in a plot concerning Savonarola, she confronts him. He feels that she has obviously overstepped her bounds when he responds strongly, “You shall not . . . I am master of you. You will not set yourself in opposition to me” (*R* 405). His statement proves to be a mistake when Romola later notices him at Nello’s barbershop, which Nello had earlier indentified as the most important public place in Florence. Realizing the power of the barbershop and its attendants, Romola decides that she will “compel him to speak before those men” (*R* 409). Tito’s masculine reputation is called into question by her very public act. Shocked and helpless, he is forced to openly declare Savonarola’s safety. Romola’s actions signal the beginning of the unraveling of Tito’s public success.

Tito’s downfall is ultimately a result of his betrayal of Baldassare. Once he has learned that Baldassare is alive and has been sold as a slave, he knows that he should use the florins from the sale of the antique gems to ransom Baldassare. This sale is connected to both his success and failure because they allow him entrance into the public sphere while at the same time solidifying the break with his private father. Unwilling to sacrifice his own success, he chooses to allow Baldassare to suffer. However, he must keep the truth concerning his father a secret for he knows that “the men around him would expect that he should immediately apply those florins to his benefactor’s rescue” (*R* 115-16). John Kucich describes Tito as someone who “has a complementary horror that others might look on him without favor, and this reflexive anxiety about the opinion of others eventually transforms his innocence into a scheming kind of corruption” (189). Complications arise when Baldassare is brought to Florence as a prisoner of the French

and is later freed by a young Florentine who desired a bit of mischief. When he publicly clutches Tito's arm in the Piazza del Duomo, Tito dismisses him as "some madman" (*R* 220). Yet later he seeks Baldassare's forgiveness in the private sphere,<sup>5</sup> but the request comes too late.

Tito and Baldassare will meet again in a very public setting. It is a scene where Tito's private life (his relationship with Baldassare) will collide with his public one. He has been invited to a supper thrown by one of the influential public men of Florence. Learning that Tito is present, Baldassare intrudes and makes public his betrayal: "I was father to him. I took him from beggary when he was a child. I reared him. I cherished him, I taught him, I made him a scholar. . . . And he left me in slavery; he sold the gems that were mine, and when I came again, he denied me" (*R* 349). Tito quickly lies by responding that his father is, in fact, dead, and that the man before them was a servant who had accompanied them to Greece but "was dismissed on account of misdemeanors" (*R* 350). The host, having been one of the purchasers of some of the gems, tests Baldassare on his knowledge of a subject from Homer, which was engraved on one of the rings. When asked to find the corresponding passage, Baldassare fails due to his diminished faculties. He is led away, and for the time being, Tito has succeeded in keeping this part of his private life separate from his public one.

The security that Tito has mustered within the public sphere is precarious. His success has been based on a complex web of lies that causes his public life to implode. To capitalize on the power inherent in the public sphere, he works as a triple agent, working for the Medici while pretending to be supportive of Savonarola and the

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<sup>5</sup> Tito has set Tessa up in lodgings where ironically Baldassare also finds accommodations after his escape in the Piazza del Duomo.

Compagnacci, a political group opposed to both the Medici and Savonarola. The Compagnacci, however, discern the truth and turn against him. He barely escapes them by jumping off the Ponte Vecchio and washing up unconscious on the banks—a scene that resembles the opening of the novel and his life in Florence. All that he has done to achieve public masculinity is negated for he is returned to the same precarious position with which he began. However, significantly, this “third birth”<sup>6</sup> delivers him into the hands of Baldassare. The betrayed father exacts revenge. The two, private father and public son, die together. When they are found, “it [is] not possible to separate them,” so they are carried together “into the great piazza” (*R* 584). The superb irony is that throughout his life in Florence, Tito has attempted to keep his private life separate from his public one. Through death, the two are brought together, and it is this communion that is displayed in the public sphere.

Felix’ story is not as tragic as Tito’s, but he too experiences a collision of both spheres and the collapse of any public life he had imagined. The collision occurs when Esther acting independently decides to testify on Felix’s behalf when he is on trial for manslaughter.<sup>7</sup> She has watched the trial uncomfortably, noting that not enough has been said to defend Felix. His witnesses all spoke about the public impression of his character and behavior. She, however, realizes that no one had spoken of his “behavior and state of mind just before the riot” (*FH* 377)—a private impression. Her testimony is important because she is able to reveal what Felix *intended* but was unable to do: “His mind was full of great resolutions that came from his kind feelings towards others” (*FH* 378). The narrator’s comment about the impact of her testimony reminds us of Felix’s

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<sup>6</sup> Tito’s first birth is his biological one, and the second is the shipwreck that brings him to Florence.

<sup>7</sup> On the day of the election, Felix had attempted to keep riots away from the town, but he is charged with manslaughter of a constable when he subdues the man who later dies from a spinal concussion.

earlier statement about her physical and spiritual beauty: “There was something so naïve and beautiful in this *action* [italics mine] of Esther’s, that it conquered every low or petty suggestion even in the commonest minds” (*FH* 378). Interestingly, there is here an emphasis on Esther’s active power compared to Felix’s inaction to cause positive change. Although Felix is still found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to imprisonment for up to four years, her testimony results in a meeting being called the day afterwards that results in “a very powerfully signed memorial [being sent] to the Home Secretary about young Holt” (*FH* 390). In delivering this news to Esther, Harold tells her, “I think you speaking for him helped a great deal. You made all the men wish what you wished” (*FH* 391). Esther is shown to have the power to sway public opinion, a realization that surpasses the limited role that Harold and Felix had earlier attributed to her “sweetness.”

On the surface, Felix and Esther’s marriage at the end of the novel appears to support Felix’s earlier view about the pitfalls of marriage and the public man. He “grumbles a little that she [Esther] has made his life too easy, and that, if it were not for much walking, he should be a sleek dog” (*FH* 402). He never achieves the future that he had once imagined for himself, but neither is his married and family life the one of lying and simpering that he had envisioned. The marriage is textually shown to be the desired outcome and in being so, it demonstrates that Felix was not the right man to wage political change, as Morris Speare indicates when he comments that “*Felix Holt, the Radical* is, in spite of its name, a political novel without a political hero” (222). Felix, however, still maintains that he could have done more and for this reason he does not emerge as a new man. What Felix must know on some subconscious level but refuses to

acknowledge candidly is that he does not possess the right temperament for a successful public life.

### **Separate Spheres and Public Masculinity**

Both Tito and Felix begin their search for a masculine identity with the belief that the public sphere is more important than the private. Each views his life as existing in two distinct arenas: the political and the personal. However, each man is on this account wrong. Felicia Bonaparte argues that there is no separation between Tito's life and Florence for "Tito's presence changes the political life of Florence, so Florence becomes an ingredient in Tito's nature, neither static, neither independent of the other" (*Will* 79). The same relationship exists when it comes to Felix, for his "personal life is a structural analogy of his political one" (Bonaparte, *Will* 151). Tito's and Felix's lives demonstrate what happens when one's private life affects the public and vice versa, and attempts to separate them are a practice in futility.

While George Eliot acknowledges the interconnectedness between the two spheres, she is also cautious of the different demands of each, and particularly the public one. In *Romola* and *Felix Holt*, the public is depicted as very immoral. It causes Tito to lie and betray those closest to him while it moves Felix to inaction because he refuses to do those things. In *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879), George Eliot offers a complex statement on both the relationship between the two and the inherent dangers of the public one:

Not for one moment would one willingly lose sight of the truth that the relation of the sexes and the primary ties of kinship are the deepest roots of human wellbeing, but to make them by themselves the equivalent of

morality is verbally to cut off the channels of feeling through which they are the feeders of that wellbeing. They are the original foundations of sensibility to the claims of others, which is the bond of societies; but being necessarily in the first instance a private good, there is always the danger that individual selfishness will see in them only the best part of its own gain. (TS 131-2).

Tito's marriages are clearly constructed for his own individual gains while Felix's earlier diatribe against marriage alludes to the fear of the negative consequences the two spheres may have on each other. The characters of Tito and Felix do not present us with a compromise between the two, and it is clear that *they* are not the male characters to live successfully in both spheres. On many levels, both men, while physically men, are mentally boys. Neither character develops into the new man of George Eliot's alternative masculine plot. *Romola* and *Felix Holt* raise the problems of life within both spheres. George Eliot returns to this dilemma in *Middlemarch* and offers a viable solution.

### Chapter Three: Intermingling Plots: Masculinity and Marriage in *Middlemarch*

*Middlemarch*(1871-2) offers the most comprehensive exploration of the masculinity/ marriage dilemma in George Eliot's novels. While the symbiotic connection between the two has always been central to George Eliot's concept of masculine identity, her previous male characters have either come late to this awareness or failed to realize it at all. Marriage had not been their primary preoccupation—an impression that the plots often reinforced. Furthermore, male voices in those novels often railed against it, advocating either complete avoidance or cautious entrance. However, these expressions are silenced in *Middlemarch* and replaced with ones that champion it as the great start. Yet, it is not a simple matter of choosing a wife and settling into domestic felicity. Uncertainty is present here as it is in all of George Eliot's novels. *Middlemarch* is set prior to the First Reform Act of 1832. Although the advance towards this legislation does not drive the plot, it is an undercurrent that runs through the lives of all Middlemarchers.<sup>1</sup> For her male characters, in addition to their own individual struggles, it presents the opportunity for improving on past models of masculinities.

All the major male characters have two principal quests. One is to find a suitable wife and marriage while the other is to acquire or advance in a vocation. With the exception of Nicholas Bulstrode and Caleb Garth, most are bachelors at the start of the novel but are or were married by its end: Edward Casaubon, Sir James Chettam, Tertius Lydgate, Will Ladislaw, and Fred Vincy. That the novel concludes with multiple marriages is not unusual since marriage typically closes many nineteenth-century English

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<sup>1</sup> Jan B. Gordon argues that “a number of Middlemarch residents . . . attempt to locate a single point of Origin from which reform—political, physiological, ontological, fictional—might be understood to have begun” (91).

novels.<sup>2</sup> *Middlemarch*, however, is unique for two reasons. Ordinarily, the relationships between married couples are not depicted, the belief being that after the marriage, “no comment is necessary because nothing more happens: all is serene” (Boone 79). What happens afterwards is regulated often to an epilogue, what Marianna Torgovnick identifies as a narrative device commonly employed by nineteenth-century novelists to achieve closure. While George Eliot is not the only novelist of the age to delve into the married lives of her characters nor *Middlemarch* the first novel where she has done so,<sup>3</sup> Casaubon’s and Lydate’s marital lives are essential to the novel and are vividly rendered.

The novel also complicates the way we traditionally read the marriage plot in regards to female and male characters. For better or worse, marriage

confers on the heroine her entire personal identity (as wife) as well as her social ‘vocation’ (as mother)” while for the male, it operates as “a kind of narrative scaffolding upon which to hang the various independent concerns, the innumerable events, of the hero’s growth to adulthood and social integration. (Boone 74)

For the female characters in *Middlemarch*, the above, unfortunately, holds. However, the male characters experience this plot differently. Instead of a subordinate component to their masculine identity, it is the dominant one—whether the individual characters realize it or not. All of their private and public actions are measured by the success and/or failure of their marriages.

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<sup>2</sup> Sharon Marcus’ *Between Women* (2007) provides an extensive overview of the uses of the marriage plot in the nineteenth-century novel. See also Joseph Allen Boone’s *Tradition Counter Tradition* (1987), and Tony Tanner’s *Adultery in the Novel* (1979) for an examination of the social function of the plot.

<sup>3</sup> In *Romola*, she briefly explores the married life of Romola and Tito. However, it is not the main focus of the narrative.

This relationship between the two is most apparent with the vocation quest. It is well known that “work” with all its manifestations was significant to the Victorians.<sup>4</sup> Alan Mintz argues that the search for a vocation was “one of the grand themes of the Victorian novel” (4), and *Middlemarch* addresses directly this subject by presenting female and male characters who attempt to find or redefine their life’s work. While scholars have previously examined vocation in George Eliot’s novels,<sup>5</sup> the focus in this chapter is on its connection to the public sphere and the masculine plot.

Identified as the journey to manhood, the masculine plot is also about work. Two major components of the plot are the young male’s leaving home and his acceptance into a community of men. And although this acceptance can be accomplished in various ways, the most common one was by entering the workforce. All of the male characters’ masculinities discussed in the previous chapters depend, in some part, on how well they achieve this goal. Adam’s and Tom’s work shapes their masculine identities as perceived by self and others; Arthur’s and Stephen’s lack of productive labor leads to innocent, but disastrous choices; and Tito’s and Felix’s obsession with it stifles their personalities. Jerome Thale asserts that “*Middlemarch* is one of the earliest novels to take work seriously, to make a man’s career central to his happiness” (118-9). I would add that this happiness is related also to his sense of masculinity. Male vocations are associated with the public sphere and a life of action, two concepts that all of George Eliot’s male characters desire.

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Houghton in *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (1957) famously writes, “except for God, the most popular word in the Victorian vocabulary must have been ‘work’” (242).

<sup>5</sup> See Dorothea Barrett’s *Vocation and Desire* (1989) for an examination of George Eliot’s female characters. See also Alan Mintz’s *George Eliot and the Novel of Vocation* (1978), which provides an analysis of the male characters, but deals primarily with *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*.

The intermingling of the two quests is part of George Eliot's intent to domesticate the epic in *Middlemarch*, a plan announced in the "Prelude" and summarized in the "Finale." Traditionally, the epic has been associated with larger-than-life characters (usually males) engaged in fierce battles with supreme forces in a public arena resulting in national or legendary significance. The masculine plot has implied epical qualities: young man leaves home, is tested, and, if successful, is elevated because of his achievements. In *Middlemarch*, George Eliot is concerned with both men and women. The "Prelude" begins with the life of Saint Theresa of Avila, who "soared after some illimitable satisfaction, some object which would never justify weariness . . . [and who] found her epos in the reform of a religious order" (*MM* 25). Dorothea is denied this life. And while she does not become a new Theresa, readers are asked to take comfort in the knowledge that the "world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts" (*MM* 896). This lesson extends to the lives of all characters in *Middlemarch* because "the relationship between epic life and domestic life . . . [are] explored throughout" (Torgovnick 25). In regards to the male characters in the novel, I read this connection as that of the masculinity/marriage dilemma.

In *Middlemarch*, George Eliot enhances the problem as articulated in her earlier novels. The private masculinities that Adam and Tom strive to achieve in *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* are interwoven into the public ones that Tito and Felix attempt in *Romola* and *Felix Holt*. George Eliot fuses the two quests into one where marriage and vocation are linked. Neither is given more significance than the other, and only when both succeed is the male character's sense of his masculinity complete. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have argued that "all the professional men of *Middlemarch* seem caught

in what Eliot shows to be the deathliness of nonbeing” (510). The male characters’ actions and inactions are driven by this fear of nonexistence, whether it is in their public or private lives. Marriage is that viable solution that George Eliot’s offers to this problem. In the “Finale” of the novel, we are informed that, “marriage . . . is still the beginning of the home epic—the gradual conquest or irremediable loss of that complete union which makes the advancing years a climax, and age the harvest of sweet memories in common” (*MM* 890). Despite this sentiment, not all male characters learn this lesson. Yet, it is evidently clear that it is one that they should work towards.

Will Ladislaw, Fred Vincy, Edward Casaubon, Tertius Lydgate, and Nicholas Bulstrode are the male characters examined in this chapter. And while Caleb Garth is the “ideal” man in the novel, I do not focus on him because his character is fully developed in terms of George Eliot’s “new man” when the novel begins. The chapter is divided into four parts. Part one begins with Will Ladislaw’s and Fred Vincy’s experiences; part two continues with Edward Casaubon’s and Tertius Lydgate’s, part three concludes with Nicholas Bulstrode’s. Part four is an analysis of the “Finale” and how it prepares us for *Daniel Deronda*. While the male characters discussed in the first three parts may be organized differently since their lives all comment on one another, my grouping is based on where they are in both the vocation and traditional love plots.<sup>6</sup> Will and Fred are at the beginning of their vocation quests, attempting to find a suitable profession. Casaubon and Lydgate have found theirs, but aim to reform them. Bulstrode, however, has chosen a vocation and seems content with its status quo. As to the love plot, Will’s and Fred’s

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<sup>6</sup> In *Tradition Counter Tradition* (1987), Joseph Allen Boone uses love plot, which allows him to distinguish among three different patterns: 1) the courtship plot, 2) the wedlock or domestic plot, and 3) the seduction plot.

experiences follow the courtship storyline with their marriages being delayed until the “Finale.” With Casaubon and Lydgate, the novel details their marriages and explores vividly what happens after the wedding day. Once again, Bulstrode is outside these plots having already married Harriet and settled into domestic life. In short, I arrange them in what I see as the start (Will and Fred), the middle (Casaubon and Lydgate), and the end (Bulstrode) of these experiences.

Part one is divided into three sections. In the first section, we revisit the concept of surrogate fathers. Both Will’s and Fred’s masculinities are shaped, in part, by their “adopted” male role models. Each man has a number of these figures, some who proved to be more instrumental than others. Regardless of their effectiveness, these relationships are influential in determining the type of man each becomes. “Tempting Women” examines how Will’s and Fred’s relationships to Dorothea and Mary, respectively, comment on their sense of masculinities. The final section develops from the last and is about the courtship plot, focusing on Will’s and Fred’s actions and/or inactions in removing the obstacles impeding their unions.

Part two is in three sections. Firstly, the connection between Casaubon’s and Lydgate’s professions and masculinities are analyzed in terms of their actions/inactions within their professional lives which contribute to the perception of their masculinities. In “Wives and Marriage,” we explore Casaubon’s and Lydgate’s views on wives and marriage as formed by the needs and demands associated with their professional lives. Lastly, “Domestic/Wedlock Plot and Masculinity” examines the domestic lives of both men and how the failures of their marriages adversely affect their masculinities.

Part three has only one section, entitled “Spheres Colliding and Collapsing,” a return to a topic raised in chapter two. Nicholas Bulstrode appears content in both his public and private lives. Yet, both of these have been built upon a carefully crafted façade, which reminds of us of Tito Melema from *Romola*. Bulstrode’s story combines many notions of separate spheres that previous male characters in George Eliot’s novels had held. His age is significant in that it reveals that marriage and masculinity are forever being constructed and reconstructed, regardless of a person’s age or social position.

Part four is about the “Finale” to the novel. In addition to summarizing the lives of the characters after the various plots of the novel, it links marriage to a person’s sense of identity. Yet this connection is neither universal nor eternal. It is appropriate for the historical moment that is *Middlemarch*. Life after reform will further complicate the issues and call for new solutions. The “Finale” prepares us for *Daniel Deronda*, a novel set in a world very different from any that George Eliot had explored.

### **Part One Will Ladislaw and Fred Vincy**

#### **Masculine Role Models**

As examined in the previous chapters, reaction to the father has been the catalyst for the young male’s quest for masculinity. He has rejected, either in part or whole, some characteristic of his father when he begins his search for his own identity. His father becomes the gauge by which he measures his own success or failure. *Middlemarch* problematizes this father-son connection because, with the exception of Fred Vincy, the

fathers of most characters are conspicuously absent from the text.<sup>7</sup> We enter into their stories with no or little knowledge of their pasts. There is a disconnection to their origins, which motivates many of their actions. For Casaubon and Lydgate, one's absence stimulates their professional reform while for Bulstrode it motivates his public and private pursuits. With Will Ladislaw and Fred Vincy, it compels them to seek out surrogate fathers. Surrogate fathers are essential to the masculine plot because they are *supposed* to provide masculine wisdom and confer masculinity. Will's and Fred's relationships with these men all involve finding a suitable vocation. Each appears to be searching for that man who will best direct him towards his calling.

Will Ladislaw's delay in choosing a profession is a result of two difficulties. First, he is uncertain as to what direction he should channel his energies. His search for this avenue is misunderstood by Casaubon who reads it as idleness and weakness: "Now he wants to go abroad again, without any special object, save the vague purpose of what he calls culture, preparation for he knows not what. He declines to choose a profession" (*MM* 97). Casaubon's view brings us to the second obstacle and that is Will's lack of belief in his own abilities, as he indicates to Dorothea in Rome: "And I should never succeed in anything by dint of drudgery. If things don't come easily to me I never get them" (*MM* 239). No one has ever truly believed in him nor given him an opportunity to prove himself.

Casaubon, Will's patron, is in the prime position to be that model. He has given Will the liberty to travel, explore, and dabble in a number of interests. Yet, Casaubon

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<sup>7</sup> In analyzing Virginia Woolf's well-known remark on *Middlemarch* being "one of the few English novels written for grown-up people" (172), Alan Mintz attributes her with calling "attention to one of the distinguishing features of the work: that the people of *Middlemarch* are adults above all else. Their parents are dead or unmentioned; their history as children is unrecorded; and their lives as progenitors of families have not begun" (81-82).

feels that it is time for Will to settle on a vocation. Of course, his own insecurities govern his attitudes towards Will and their relationship. Casaubon lives in perpetual fear that Will's potential achievements will eclipse his own. He expresses this angst in the letter that he writes to Will once learning of the editorship of the *Middlemarch Pioneer* that has been offered to him:

It is enough for me to point out to yourself that there are certain social fitnesses and proprieties which should hinder a somewhat near relative of mine from becoming in anywise conspicuous in this vicinity in a status not only much beneath my own, but associated at best with the sciolism of literary or political adventurers. (*MM* 406)

In addition to Casaubon's anxieties, the relationship is also strained because Will finds his cousin's personality and scholarship comical. "Will saw clearly enough the pitiable instances of long incubation producing no chick, and but for gratitude would have laughed at Casaubon" (*MM* 109); "He had never been fond of Mr. Casaubon, and if it had not been for the sense of obligation, would have laughed at him as a Bat of erudition" (*MM* 237). He cannot envision Casaubon as a suitable model for either masculinity or a vocation, and he sees no similarities between them, as he indicates to Dorothea: "He and I differ" (*MM* 239). In accepting the position of editor of the *Pioneer*, Will essentially detaches himself from Casaubon.

Will has more in common with Mr. Brooke, another of his surrogate fathers. In his youth, Mr. Brooke had spent his time traveling. Granted a financial security denied Will, he has drifted from one interest to the next, never settling on any one. He is the quintessential dabbler, entering one field of inquiry only until he becomes obsessed with

another. No project that he starts is completed as evident in the copious documents that he has collected, like Casaubon, but refuses to arrange. His restless tendencies are indicative of his “rambling habit of mind” (*MM* 30), which makes him a comical figure to most Middlemarchers. When Mr. Brooke speaks excitedly about the prospects of him and Will working together, he alludes to the central problem that Will faces: “He [Ladislaw] and I are alike, you know: he likes to go into everything” (*MM* 423). Will runs the risk of becoming another Mr. Brooke if he continues to flit from one interest to the next.

Despite his amusing deeds and sayings, Mr. Brooke has good intentions and occasionally offers perceptive advice, such as his warning to Dorothea about marriage to Casaubon. In extending the editorship of the paper to Will, Mr. Brooke supplies him with the tools that he most needs to reach his potential. It shows both a belief in Will and grants him the means to demonstrate his abilities. Even before he has begun, rumors about his skills spread among Middlemarchers: “I understand he has got a very brilliant young fellow to edit it, who can write the highest style of leading article, quite equal to anything in the London papers” (*MM* 393). Will’s restless energy is channeled finally into productive labor. Although it does not correspond to the lofty designs he once dreamed of, it satisfies in that “his nature warmed easily in the presence of subjects which were visibly mixed with life and action, and the easily-stirred rebellion in him helped the glow of public spirit” (*MM* 501). As editor, he delves into his different interests without being perceived as aimless. Public opinion about the new editor is mixed and tied to discussion of the Reform Bill.<sup>8</sup> Those who support reform have a

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<sup>8</sup> Will took editorship of the *Pioneer* in 1831, perhaps just prior to the introduction of the Reform Bill in the House of Commons by Lord John Russell on March 1, 1831.

positive view of Will while those in opposition do not. Despite Middlemarchers' position on reform, Will's articles and speeches thrust him into the public world of Middlemarch.

However, the alliance between Mr. Brooke and Will proves damaging when Mr. Brooke decides to stand for Parliament. Translating Mr. Brooke's ramblings into meaningful prose, Will has become his employer's mouthpiece. The obstacle, of course, is when Mr. Brooke must speak for himself as demonstrated through his awful performance on the hustings. This fiasco leads to the severing of their relationship. Mr. Brooke, true with everything he has done, decides to withdraw from the campaign and from the *Pioneer*. Will welcomes this separation, realizing that there are more disadvantages to their alliance than benefits. He chooses to act without male role models when he declines Brooke's offer to write him a letter of introduction to Viscount Althorp.<sup>9</sup> He responds, "I need not trouble you about the steps I shall take" (*MM* 551-2). While this refusal is specifically about the letter, it is also symbolic of Will's attitude towards most masculine role models; he decides that he needs to be independent of the will of others.

Nicholas Bulstrode also presents the possibility of another male bond in Will's life. Although it is not a mentor relationship, the financial compensation will have been advantageous in assisting Will to find his place in society. However, he realizes that accepting the money will be harmful to his sense of self. Any relationship with a male mentor links his life with theirs, and unless these men's characters match his ideal, he cannot afford such attachments. In refusing these models, he gains the autonomy to construct his masculinity as he desires. Although he has yet to find his chosen vocation

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<sup>9</sup> John Charles Spencer, Viscount Althorp was leader of the House of Commons (1830-1834) who, along with Lord John Russell, was instrumental in fighting for the Reform Bill of 1832.

when he refuses all three, he is certain that he does not want to be the men they are; the masculinity that he develops is shaped, in part, as a reaction against Casaubon, Mr. Brooke, and Bulstrode.

Will's view on marriage is crystallized through observing marriages around him deteriorate. First there is the Casaubon marriage, which he immediately perceives is doomed to fail. His prediction is affirmed when he learns that Dorothea is left alone for much of the Roman honeymoon while her husband spends time at the Vatican Library: "The idea of this dried-up pedant . . . having first got this adorable young creature to marry him, and then passing his honeymoon away from her . . . stirred him with a sort of cosmic disgust" (*MM* 237). He witnesses a disharmony in the Casaubon marriage, and he observes similar, though less severe, problems in the Lydgate marriage. He comes to the aid of Dorothea and Rosamond, offering in his companionship what their husbands cannot or will not do. However, his motives towards Dorothea are not purely altruistic for he develops deep feelings for her. While he never expresses an opinion on what marriage and a wife's role should be (as Lydgate and Casaubon will do), his perceptions, like his ideas of masculinity, are based on a rejection of what he observes.

Fred Vincy is not concerned initially that he lacks a vocation. He has no plans to do great things or change the world. In fact, he prefers to do nothing. Assured of his origins and status as a member of an old manufacturing family in Middlemarch, he "believes that his identity and place in the world will not have to be invented or achieved by his own efforts but rather will be given him" (Mintz 143-4). Expecting to receive his Uncle Featherstone's estate, and with it, a life of leisure, he develops no contingency plan for his future.

Although Mr. Vincy is a hard worker and is usually at the warehouse before Fred awakes, he is unable to pass this work ethic to his oldest son. It is Fred's brother, the second son, who goes to the warehouse with him in the mornings. Mr. Vincy imagines that the clergy is the easiest option for someone of Fred's character. Fred does not have the ability required for a career in law, medicine, or engineering nor does the family have the aristocratic connections needed for military, civil, or colonial services (Mintz). To enter the clergy, one must meet three qualifications: "One must have been to university and thus have some knowledge of Greek and Latin; one must assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Westminster Confession; and one must be a Christian gentleman willing to teach the doctrines of the church and represents its interests" (Mintz 142). While he knows that Fred has no deep religious calling, Mr. Vincy is certain that his son can meet these requirements.

There is little meaningful interaction between Fred and his father. Any advice that is offered is not followed. His uncle Featherstone is another masculine role model who occasionally gives Fred little lectures on improving himself. Fred always listens and agrees in words, but does not act on them. He lives under the assumption that his uncle will leave him free enough "that instead of needing to know what he should do, he . . . [would] know that he needed do nothing" (*MM* 376). This idle dream of the future is disappointed when he is left nothing, thus forcing him to consider seriously his life's work.

Camden Farebrother is the male mentor that Fred first seeks for advice. Just as Mr. Brooke represents a possible future for Will, Farebrother does the same for Fred. Farebrother had entered the clergy mainly because he needed to provide for his mother,

aunt, and sister. Natural History is his true passion as evidenced by his study, which includes a bookcase of expensive illustrated books on the subject and neatly arranged drawers of insects. His contact with the young Lydgate, who is at beginning of his profession, reminds Farebrother of his professional regrets. After showing the new doctor his study, he confesses that he is “not a model clergyman—only a decent makeshift” (*MM* 206). He also admits candidly that he often wishes he “had been something else than a clergyman” (*MM* 555). Having chosen his profession for the wrong reasons, he is in a position to prevent Fred from making the same mistake.

Farebrother, however, does not offer the stern admonition that we would expect. He perceives, as others do, that Fred does not have many options, but he is concerned that Fred chooses wisely. His questions are attempts to compel him to think seriously. This works to some extent when Fred reveals that it would be rather farcical for him, of all people, to preach to others about scruples. He also worries that people will fault him for his choice. Essentially, Farebrother tells him to let his conscience guide him. Yet to this remark, Fred admits his true reason for coming to Farebrother. He wants him to intercede for him with Mary, who has refused to accept him if he enters the clergy. Learning that Fred’s decision hinges completely on Mary’s opinion, Farebrother becomes forceful: “That is nonsense, Fred. Men outlive their love, but they don’t outlive the consequences of their recklessness” (*MM* 557). Despite his disapproval, he speaks with Mary concerning Fred’s profession. And while he is not directly responsible for Fred’s chosen career path, he influences him to think seriously about it.

Caleb Garth, Mary’s father, is the most instrumental masculine role model in Fred’s life. Of the male characters in *Middlemarch*, he is one of the few who is always

laboring and producing. He links a man's masculinity to attitudes towards work. Aware of Fred's and Mary's affections for each other, he takes an active role in shaping young Fred into a suitable man: "I've determined to take him and make a man of him" (*MM* 608). He introduces Fred to honest and hard work. Fred had expressed an interest in farming but knows that his father is unable to set him up in this profession. Caleb gives him the opportunity to try it, and Fred derives immense pleasure from that first day of work: "His spirits had risen, and he heartily enjoyed a good slip in the moister earth under the hedgerow" (*MM* 605).

Furthermore, Caleb lectures him on masculinity, drawing parallels between a man and his pride in work:

You must love your work. . . . you must not be ashamed of your work. . . .  
 You must have a pride in your own work and in learning to do it well. . . .  
 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. (*MM* 606)

Fred's labor with Caleb is not merely to pay back a debt, but he is also working to win Mary. His story bears similarities to the Biblical one of Jacob, who works for seven years for the right to marry Laban's daughter Rachel.<sup>10</sup> Caleb is able to achieve what Fred's previous masculine models cannot. He succeeds in both aiding Fred towards a vocation and instructing him on how to be a man.

Also, Fred looks to the Garths as the model for a successful marriage. Nearly every scene between Caleb and Susan is one of mutual respect. Furthermore, they discuss

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<sup>10</sup> In the Biblical story, however, Jacob is tricked into marrying the older daughter Leah, and he has to work an additional seven years for the right to marry Rachel.

issues with each other and never act without consulting or immediately informing the other. In time, Fred will adopt Caleb's views on marriage. Twice, Caleb acknowledges the benefits that marriage can bestow upon a man: "True love for a good woman is a great thing, Susan. It shapes many a rough fellow" (*MM* 609); "Marriage is a taming thing" (*MM* 744). His sentiments are a reference both to the advantages that he has received through his marriage and to those that he hopes Fred will receive. Fred patterns both his profession and married life on Caleb Garth.

In the chapter on *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*, I had argued that George Eliot shows that masculine wisdom is dubious. Much depends upon the man who is placed in the role of surrogate father. Will's and Fred's experiences with masculine role models emphasize this point. Those men in the position to provide that insight for Will are ineffective due to their own insecurities. Although Fred is surrounded by capable men, his difficulty is whether he follows their guidance. The difference of their responses is a matter of both their class status and the relation to their origins. Will is, in fact, classless and disconnected from his heritage. Fred, however, is not. Each man's response to these surrogate fathers is influential in fashioning the men they will become. Will's models are anti-models, men that he does not want to emulate while Fred's are one that he does.

### **Tempting Women**

In the masculine plot, the sexual temptation of women is read as a threat to manhood. The fear is that the young male is unable to control his sexual urges, which leads him to make disastrous choices. Arthur Donnithorne's relationship with Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede* and Stephen Guest's with Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*

are examples of such dread realized. In recommending rejection of women, the plot indicates that the young male, by nature, is powerless to master his desires. Will's and Fred's experiences with women, however, serve to counter this notion. Will's attraction to Dorothea and Fred's to Mary surpasses the sexual and is associated to each man's quest for a vocation.

Will's infatuation with Dorothea is based on the belief that she shows in him. After first meeting him at Lowick, she defends his inactions to Casaubon: "After all, people may really have in them some vocation which is not quite plain to themselves, may they not? They may seem idle and weak because they are growing" (*MM* 107-8). When she greets him in Rome, it is with an "exquisite smile of goodwill" (*MM* 236) that instantaneously registers within him:

His transparent complexion flushed suddenly, and he spoke with a shyness extremely unlike the ready indifference of his manner with his male companion, while Dorothea became all the calmer with a wondering desire to put him at ease. (*MM* 236)

To him, she approaches something close to the eternal feminine. He finds comfort in her, which allows him to disclose more to her than he does to anyone else.

While Will has had little success with masculine role models, he has more with Dorothea. Most of their conversations, as that first one in Rome, are about his search for a vocation. Although she does not set him on the course for his life's work, she does the next best thing by offering him a listening ear. To be near her is the main reason he accepts the editorship of the *Pioneer*, and he is constantly charged with a new energy whenever she is presence:

When Mrs. Casaubon was announced he started up as from an electric shock, and felt a tingling at his finger-ends. Anyone observing him would have seen a change in his complexion, in the adjustment of his facial muscles, in the vividness of his glance, which might have made them imagine that every molecule in his body had passed the message of a magic touch. (*MM* 422-3)

All his further actions are determined by how Dorothea will view him. He becomes dependent upon her. She marks the great turning point in his life because she helps him define the man he wants to be. Even though marriage between the two is impossible as long as Casaubon lives, Will intertwines their souls, thus elevating their relationship beyond the reaches of man and his laws: “Dorothea, he said to himself, was for ever enthroned in his soul” (*MM* 510).

Despite Fred Vincy’s lackadaisical attitude towards finding an occupation, the one quest that is important and constant is Mary Garth. Everything he does—or does not do—is done to win her hand. His chief anxiety is that she will never accept him, expressed during his bout with typhoid fever. To his mother’s statement that he may marry anybody he wants once he is master of Stone Court, he responds with tears, “not if they won’t have me” (*MM* 299). Certainly, the “they” here is a reference to Mary Garth. Fred’s story is essentially his mission to make himself a man worthy of Mary.

Mary has made a condition that Fred better himself. She has high expectations of both what a man and a marriage should be. These hopes have been formed in observing both her father and her parents’ marriage. When they caution her about Fred, she declares, “I will never engage myself to one who has no manly independence, and who

goes on loitering away his time on chance that others will provide for him. You and mother have taught me too much pride for that” (*MM* 291). She repeats her father’s view on idle men and marriage when Fred asks when they should be married: “My father says an idle man ought not to exist, much less be married” (*MM* 168). It is tempting to argue that she desires a man as superb as her father. However, she is under no pretenses that Fred will be another Caleb. She declines to accept him unless he recognizes and acts on his potential. Yet in this refusal, she discloses that she, more than perhaps anyone else, believes him to be better than he can imagine himself to be:

How can you bear to be so contemptible, when others are working and striving, and there are so many things to be done—how can you bear to be fit for nothing in the world that is useful? And with so much good in your disposition, Fred, --you might be worth a great deal. (*MM* 288)

Fred relies upon Mary’s faith in him. In time, he will measure all his actions by it—whether she will approve or disapprove.

Mary knows Fred well and indicates his apparent faults and why he should not become a clergyman. Yet, she also emphasizes his strengths, which are more suitable to other professions:

I could not love a man who is ridiculous. . . . Fred has sense and knowledge enough to make him respectable . . . in some good worldly business, but I can never image him preaching and exhorting and pronouncing blessings, and praying by the sick, without feeling as if I were looking at a caricature. (*MM* 560)

Most of her views about him follow this pattern. She is quick to indicate why he should not do something but is equally prompt to praise his hidden abilities. Having been given the opportunity to make his life easier if she had destroyed Featherstone's second will as he had requested, what she most desires for Fred is uncompromised manly independence.

Dorothea is tempting to Will and Mary to Fred because both women offer them something that they cannot find alone: belief in themselves. These relationships counter the notion of the masculine plot because Will's and Fred's masculinities only come to fruition through their alliance with these women. While neither Dorothea nor Mary are directly responsible for the path that each man takes in life, their influence contributes significantly to the men they become. We must, however, consider the effect of these bonds on the women themselves, which I will treat in the last section.

### **Courtship and Masculinity**

The conventional courtship plot details the series of barriers and misunderstandings that occur as characters set out to marry. Central to this storyline is "the systematic removal of those obstacles previously impeding union" (Boone 10). Will and Fred experience both external and internal hurdles. This section focuses primarily on the internal ones. But, let us first summarize the external ones and their resolutions. Will contends with two. First, there is Casaubon, who conveniently dies in what Anne Humpherys calls "divorce by narrative."<sup>11</sup> The second is income, which is eliminated by Dorothea having her own wealth. Fred also faces the problem with income, resolved by his Aunt Harriet, who appoints him to manage Stone Court for her. Both men are passive in the removal of these external obstacles, largely because they lie beyond their

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<sup>11</sup> It is a narrative solution to the problem of bad marriages in which "the unsatisfactory partner dies" (44).

immediate control. However, the internal ones afford both with an opportunity to be active.

Will encounters the same problem with courtship as he does in choosing a vocation. He is uncertain of himself and constantly postpones stating directly his intentions. Twice, he decides to leave Middlemarch but before doing so, he takes leave of Dorothea. Each of these partings become tense due to what is not said and a misunderstanding of what is. In the first, Dorothea assumes that Will knows of Casaubon's codicil; while in the second, she imagines that he loves Rosamond. He misreads her cold demeanor in both partings and acts rather impulsively. Both of these meetings also end prematurely when they are interrupted, thus resolution is delayed. These deferments keep Will in Middlemarch after the first parting and motivate his return after the second one. He cannot begin his new life until the unfinished business between him and Dorothea is addressed.

Despite being uncertain about Dorothea's love, he is confident that she has faith in him. His assurance, however, collapses when she misreads a scene between him and Rosamond: "I had no hope before—not much—of anything better to come. But I had one certainty—that she believed in me. Whatever people had said or done about me, she believed in me.—That's gone!" (*MM* 835). Through no immediate action of his, this confidence is restored and prompts his visit to Dorothea. Their conversation centers on the powerful effect of her faith in him: "You are sure to believe me better than I am in everything" (*MM* 867). He, however, maintains the opinion that the two of them should never marry:

We shall never be married . . . . What is the use of counting on any success

of mine? It is a mere toss up whether I shall ever do more than keep myself decently, unless I choose to sell myself as mere pen and a mouth-piece. I can see that clearly enough. I could not offer myself to any woman, even if she had no luxuries to renounce. (*MM* 869)

His statement reveals the self doubts he has about his abilities to make anything of his life. The fear about their livelihood is removed by Dorothea. She is the one who constantly acts while Will is largely passive when it comes to removing the obstructions of the courtship plot.

The internal obstacle in the Fred-Mary courtship has been explained in the previous section. Essentially, it is Fred's attitude towards finding a profession. Whereas Will simply accepts Dorothea's view of him, Fred acts on Mary's. Although not directly responsible for attaining the living at Stone Court, Fred's willingness to work proves to himself and others his masculinity. In the last chapters of the novels, we remain uncertain to Will's masculinity for he is still growing and the success or failure of his masculinity has not been decided. Fred, on the other hand, has achieved masculinity in his bonding with both the male (Caleb Garth) and the female (Mary Garth); it is the fulfillment of the George Eliot's alternative masculine plot.

## **Part Two Edward Casaubon and Tertius Lydgate**

### **Professional Masculinity**

Edward Casaubon and Tertius Lydgate are unlike the male characters that usually populate George Eliot's novels; they have passed that initial stage of their search for identity. Their vocational quests began in *medias res*, with them having already entered into them. We encounter them as they attempt to reform their professions, Casaubon

with his *Key* and Lydgate with his primitive tissue. Having come from precarious beginnings,<sup>12</sup> they are motivated by the need to secure both their present and future standing. Their masculinities, as perceived by self and others, are linked with their professions. Furthermore, this association dictates most of their actions in the public and private spheres.

Edward Casaubon's failure to produce his book is related to his manhood in the minds of many Middlemarchers. Disgusted with the thought of Dorothea tying her life to Casaubon's, Sir James thinks that Casaubon should "bring out his book, instead of marrying" (*MM* 96). This thought suggests that until Casaubon produces his work, he is not ready for marriage. While Sir James' opinion must be read first in the context of his disappointment in Casaubon being chosen over him, it does emphasize the importance of professional success to masculinity in the world of Middlemarch. Having failed to accomplish his vocational quest, Casaubon is perceived as a "shadow of a man" (*MM* 94). As to his work, he is viewed as boy in a man's body. Mrs. Cadwallader, the rector's wife, ridicules him on having made an abstract of "Hop o' my Thumb" as a boy and that "he has been making abstracts ever since" (*MM* 96). His countless hours of research and abstract writing for his *Key to All Mythologies* have been nothing more than scholarly self-delusion in which he has continuously exerted himself, yet produced nothing.

Casaubon is aware of what people think of him. He is "nervously conscious that he was expected to manifest a powerful mind" (*MM* 313). This presumption by others and himself disables him. His intellect goes "on fluttering in the swampy ground where it

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<sup>12</sup> Casaubon is a second son who only inherits the manor after his brother's death, and Lydgate is an orphan whose biological father had not left much for him and his two siblings.

was hatched, thinking of its wings and never flying” (*MM* 313). He refuses to hire a secretary for fear that the person will become aware of his deficiencies, and the pamphlets that he had released to the public to test his ideas had not “been seen in their significance” (*MM* 314). He imagines that the world is against him, which greatly affects his sense of masculinity: “In describing Casaubon’s anxiety George Eliot is describing the situation of all men whose sense of self-worth is entirely tied to vocational success” (Mintz 118). His thoughts and actions resemble those of a young boy who longs for security and acceptance by others. The narrator, who is somewhat sympathetic towards him, describes him as one of those people who are

Present at this great spectacle of life and never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self—never to be fully possessed by the glory [he] behold[s], never to have [his] consciousness rapturously transformed into the vividness of a thought, the ardour of a passion, the energy of an action, but always to be scholarly and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dim-sighted. (*MM* 314)

With his *Key*, he attempts to hide the starved trembling boy from the cruel world. Casaubon hopes that its success will grant him the masculinity that he is lacking.

Tertius Lydgate benefits from being relatively young (he’s twenty-seven) and new in Middlemarch. He is on the threshold of his quest, and the narrator informs us that “he was at a starting-point which makes many a man’s career a fine subject for betting” (*MM* 178). Most Middlemarchers find something positively uncommon in him as a country doctor—being a doctor in the 1830s is not a reliable occupation. The medical field was not well regulated; there were neither universally-accepted standards nor a governing

board that oversaw those who “practice.”<sup>13</sup> The dubious nature of the profession translates into an uncertain social position. Nineteenth-century medical men could be described as “marginal men because the man of medicine who had no established social status vis-à-vis his client was in an awkward situation” (Inkster 128). Lydgate is no exception. Although Sir Goodwin Lydgate, his uncle and guardian, is disappointed with his choice, viewing it as a lowering for someone of Lydgate’s family background, he does not interfere. Despite the problems of the profession, people forecast greatness for him, and his vocation and manhood are connected: “The man was still in the making, as much as the Middlemarch doctor and immortal discoverer” (*MM* 178).

Unlike Casaubon who is fearful that his true inabilities will be unveiled, Lydgate is too assured of himself as a doctor and a man. He expects to distinguish himself in both his private practice and the larger medical world. However, his approach proves detrimental. He longs to bring reform to the practice of medicine in Middlemarch, whether his patients desire it or not. When Reverend Farebrother advises him that he must please his patients, Lydgate’s sense of superiority is revealed in his response:

Don’t you think men overrate the necessity for humouring everybody’s nonsense, till they get despised by the very fools they humour? . . . The shortest way is to make your value felt, so that people must put up with you whether you flatter them or not” (*MM* 204).

Lydgate is, of course, not as arrogant as these words make him appear. Yet, his approach to medical reform meets with resistance that affects both his professional standing and his manhood.

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<sup>13</sup> This changed with the passing of the Medical Act of 1858, which established the General Medical Council (GMC). The GMC is charged with regulating the profession, including setting standards, accrediting medical schools, registering doctors, and so on.

His search for a “primitive tissue”—what he envisions as the single origin of life—is also connected to his quest to redefine himself. His vocational choice represents a symbolic severing from his family. He replaces his biological father and his uncle with his medical predecessors, such men as Marie François Xavier Bichat and Andreas Vesalius.<sup>14</sup> This substitution reveals the complexity of his character. While he is cognizant that he cannot achieve any advances in medical science without relying on his scientific predecessors, he fails to consider seriously the influence of both his own past and those living men around him; it is the reminder that Farebrother offers to him: “You have not only got the old Adam in yourself against you, but you have got all those descendants of the original Adam who form the society around you” (*MM* 203). In his quest to redefine his profession and his masculinity, Lydgate continually finds himself struggling against both his self and others.

### **Marriage and Wives**

Casaubon’s and Lydgate’s views on marriage and wives are influenced by their professional aims. Casaubon struggles unsuccessfully to leave his scholarly mark; marriage and a wife are both to compensate and console for a quest not yet realized and which may never come to fruition. Lydgate, on the other, perceives them as necessary to complete the full life of the successful man. Their beliefs conform to the separate sphere theory. Marriage must strengthen their professional masculinities, and their wives should know their proper place and follow her husband’s will.

Casaubon realizes that marriage is a requirement for men and notes that “he had done nothing exceptional in marrying—nothing but what society sanctions” (*MM* 312).

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<sup>14</sup> Bichat (1771-1802) was a French anatomist, who first viewed tissues as individual entities; and Vesalius (1514-1564) was an anatomist whose *De humani corporis fabrica (On the Structure of the Human Body)* (1543) is considered a groundbreaking medical text due to its superb illustrations of the human body.

Furthermore, he associates it with his scholarship: “Marriage . . . like authorship itself was fated to become an outward requirement, and Edward Casaubon was bent on fulfilling unimpeachably all requirements” (*MM* 314-15). This view of marriage implies feelings of aloofness. However, he does have positive expectations of a married life: “He should receive family pleasures and leave behind a copy of himself which seemed so urgently required of a man—to the sonneteers of the sixteenth century”<sup>15</sup> (*MM* 312). Unfortunately, the emphasis on “copy” draws attention away from family happiness. While clearly a reference to offspring, “copy” is also an allusion to the manuscript he has failed to produce and no one may copy until he does so. Although realizing that he is no longer living in the sixteenth century, he is saddened that he has left nothing behind to mark his existence in the world: “Times have altered since then, and no sonneteer had insisted on Mr. Casaubon’s leaving a copy of himself; moreover, he had not yet succeeded in issuing copies of his mythological key” (*MM* 312). His anxiety over his scholarship often overshadows any satisfaction that he might achieve from marriage.

While Casaubon’s thoughts about marriage deal with requirements and production, he does consider a wife for the fellowship that she can offer a scholar, whose work has isolated him from the joys of human society. In his pursuit of professional success, he has neglected relationships. Dreading later years of dark solitude and unease, he imagines a wife who will fill those years with light and comfort:

It was now time for him to adorn his life with the graces of female  
 companionship, to irradiate the gloom which fatigue was apt to hang over  
 the intervals of studious labour . . . and to secure in . . . his culminating

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<sup>15</sup> Ben Jonson’s “On My First Son” (1616) comes to mind here: “Here doth lie / Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry” (9-10).

age, the solace of female tendance for his declining years. (*MM* 87)

However, the emphasis is on Casaubon's wants and needs. It is not that the couple will bring ease to each other in old age, but that the wife will simply do this for the husband. For Casaubon, the wife is merely an adornment—another piece of household property, which will complete a man's home.

Lydgate's ideas on marriage and wives are not far removed from those of Casaubon's. He subordinates marriage to his professional career: "He should not marry for several years: not marry until he had trodden out a good clear path for himself" (*MM* 121). His plan is to do exactly what Casaubon had done in delaying marriage until a later age. Professional success comes first and then marriage. After observing both Dorothea and Rosamond, he defines the traits that his ideal wife must possess. Rejecting Dorothea because she does "not look at things from the proper feminine angle" (*MM* 122), he classifies her as one of those women who are "troublesome to talk to . . . [because] they are always wanting reasons, yet they are too ignorant to understand the merits of any question" (*MM* 119-20). Dorothea will distract him from his professional quest. Rosamond, on the other hand, represents the ideal woman: "She is grace itself; she is perfectly lovely and accomplished. That is what woman ought to be: she ought to produce the effect of exquisite music" (*MM* 121). Placing her on a pedestal, he does not expect her to trouble him. He cannot imagine Rosamond as that class of woman who wants to become involved in his professional life. Life with Rosamond will be like "reclining in a paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes, and blue eyes for a heaven" (*MM* 122). He has the precise idea that "taking a wife is something more than a question of adornment, however highly he may rate this; and Lydgate was disposed to give it the

first place among wifely functions” (*MM* 121-22). While Lydgate assumes that his wife will be an adornment, he expects her also to provide the comforts of home without burdening him with petty concerns.

Each man views a wife as someone to enrich his home and to grace it with all the comforts of a private life without interfering with his public one. While they understand the connection between masculinity and marriage, they desire to keep the two separate. Their ideas are similar to those of Tito from *Romola* and Felix Holt and Harold Transome from *Felix Holt*. Women are elevated to the eternal feminine, an immortal female presence that bestows peace and propels the man to a higher calling. She need merely to stand and wait upon her husband. Both men devote considerable time to thinking of the ideal marriage and choosing the woman whom they think would most likely fulfill those assumptions.

### **Domestic/Wedlock Plot and Masculinity**

Joseph Allen Boone identifies two types of plots that may occur after the success of courtship. In the domestic one, “the impasse of bad marriages generally reflects the tragic misjudgments of the individual spouses”; while in the wedlock plot, “troubled spouses generally undergo a series of misfortunes and threats analogous to those occurring in the courtship narrative before reuniting happily” (Boone 10). The Casaubon marriage is an example of the former, and the Lydgate one, although not happy, is a compromise where both make the best of a bad situation. Although there are many errors in these two marriages that may be analyzed, the focus is on those that derive from and affect Casaubon’s and Lydgate’s masculinities. Firstly, both Dorothea and Rosamond possess ideas concerning their husbands’ masculinities that the men cannot meet.

Secondly, despite desiring to keep their public and private lives separate, Casaubon and Lydgate cannot disengage their professional masculinities from their married ones. Finally, the marriages of both men influence how they and others view their masculinities.

Dorothea pictures a marital life to be analogous to what prelapsarian Adam and Eve experienced—man and woman living and working together side by side. Casaubon is a latter-day Adam, a teacher who will instruct her. Twenty-seven years her senior, Casaubon is attractive to her because of the great intellect that she perceives him to have:

Here was a man who could understand the higher inward life, and with whom there could be some spiritual communion; nay, who could illuminate principle with the widest knowledge: a man whose learning almost amounted to a proof of whatever he believed! (*MM* 44-45)

The world of study being denied her, she anticipates being Casaubon's pupil and aiding him in completing his *Key*: "It would be my duty to study that I might help him the better in his great work" (*MM* 51). When her Uncle Brooke warns her that marriage "is a noose" (*MM* 64), she speaks of its greater aims and duties: "Marriage is a state of higher duties. I never thought of it as a mere personal ease" (*MM* 64). Having no real model on which to base her ideal spouse, she resorts to a fanciful vision. It is a tall order for any man, but particularly for one of Casaubon's sense of self.

Rosamond Vincy's ideas are a direct contrast to those of Dorothea's. Her goal is to marry the best man, one who will gain her material comfort and social prestige. She cannot imagine such man being of Middlemarch stock. To her, it appears that fate places Lydgate in Middlemarch for the sole purpose that she may marry him. Here was a young

doctor and a gentleman who came from an excellent family, and much of her attraction to Lydgate is based on a misunderstanding of his relationship to his origins. When her Aunt Harriet warns her that the medical profession is a poor one, she is not concerned because she associates his family's wealth with his own. She has grown up accustomed "to an extravagant household" (*MM* 634), and she expects that Lydgate will be able to fulfill her wants and needs. Dorothea and Rosamond will realize that they have both chosen the incorrect reasons for marriage, but, more significantly, they have chosen the wrong husbands to fulfill their expectations.

The major disappointment in the Casaubon marriage is related to Casaubon's scholarship. Dorothea's impression of Rome as a city of "ruins and basilicas, palaces and colossi, set in the midst of a sordid present, where all that was living and warm-blooded seemed sunk in the deep degeneracy of a superstition divorced from reverence" (*MM* 225) will emerge as a metaphor for both her marriage and Casaubon's *Key*. They are all "shattered mummies, and fragments of a tradition" (*MM* 519). Possibilities for illumination abound, but without deeper understanding or explanation, all is reduced to relics. When she, out of the desire to be a dutiful wife, asks when he will decide on what part of his voluminous rows of notes he will use to begin his book, Casaubon responds angrily. As his scholarship is the most vulnerable part of his masculinity, he criticizes indirectly her inability to grasp the sophistication of his work, indicating that it "is not to be measured by the facile conjectures of ignorant onlookers. . . [who] discriminate judgments of which the true subject-matter lies entirely beyond their reach" (*MM* 233).<sup>16</sup> The difficulty rests with the incomprehensible nature of the work itself, not the observer.

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<sup>16</sup> Casaubon's statement here bears similarities to Lydgate's reasons for rejecting Dorothea as a possible mate.

In time, she will realize that he cannot explain his scholarship because he, himself, does not truly understand what he does.

Casaubon also feels the damaging effects that his work has on his marriage. He had thought that Dorothea would be a barrier against those severe judgments of his critics. However, she becomes “a personification of that shallow world which surrounds the ill-appreciated or desponding author” (*MM* 233). He realizes that “instead of getting a soft fence against the cold, shadowy, unapplaudive audience of his life, [he had] given it a more substantial presence” (*MM* 234). Despite this awareness, he tries to control indirectly Dorothea’s actions. Banning Will from Lowick isolates her from his harshest critic. On the eve of his death, he asks her to carry out his wishes, but expects an answer before specifying what they are. Dorothea assumes he wants her to continue his work, but he dies conveniently before she can answer him.

His final action is the codicil to his will. Although a last effort to rule over both Dorothea’s present and future, it has more to do with Will than it does Dorothea, as evident in his thoughts before he drafts it:

This man has gained Dorothea’s ear: he has fascinated her attention; he has evidently tried to impress her mind with the notion that he has claims beyond anything I have done for him. If I die—and he is waiting here on the watch for that—he will persuade her to marry him. . . . He thinks of an easy conquest and of entering my nest. That I will hinder. (*MM* 458)

The intent is to prevent Will from gaining his money and estate. Yet, it also reveals the fragile sense of his masculinity. Will has presented a model of masculinity, although imperfect in itself, which has surpassed his own. His second cousin has been a thorn to

both his private and public life, sowing seeds of discontent in his wife and scrutinizing his work. While he is unable to leave his *Key* or copies of himself, he asserts himself in his codicil. It is one of the few instances where he is moved to a decisive action in which deed follows thoughts, and he is capable of producing something.

Their marriage is disastrous because their lives remain separate. The two never come together spiritually, and we might consider that they never do physically either. Nothing in the text speaks specifically to Casaubon's sexual abilities, but his failed scholarly endeavors can be read as analogous to sexual ones. He is unable to produce both his book and any copies of himself. Diane Sadoff argues that

The figurative father's sexual drive has withered through excessive mythological research. Moreover, the narrator hints that this fictional marriage must never have been consummated. When Casaubon joins Dorothea after speaking to Lydgate about his impending death, his rigid arm refuses his wife's sympathy, and the narrator speaks metaphorically of the 'wasted seed' of happiness. (75)

The text contains a number of instances that imply that Casaubon is impotent in both his scholarship and his ability to produce children. Ironically, his estate is called Lowick. Possessing a *low wick*, he cannot fuel the flame of his studies or attain the energy to leave a copy of himself. In one scene, he attempts to continue his work, but as he "dipped his pen and made as if he would return to his writing . . . , his hand trembled so much that the words seemed to be written in an unknown character" (*MM* 317). His unsteady hand and the failure to use his pen may be read also as a frustrated effort to use his penis.

Dorothea and Casaubon only “come together” through their various disagreements. Most end without resolution, or climax. After diagnosing Casaubon’s illness, Lydgate warns Dorothea that Casaubon must be “careful against mental agitation of all kinds and against excessive application” (*MM* 323). For a person of his disposition, sexual intercourse would surely constitute “excessive application.” In time, Dorothea believes that “her husband’s will which had been made at the time of their marriage, leaving the bulk of his property to her, with proviso in case of her having children . . . ought to be altered” (*MM* 407) to leave something for Will. Does this imply that she feels that children are no longer possible for them—is it due to Casaubon’s illness or a failure of the marriage having ever been consummated? Regardless of whether the marriage is consummated or not (and there is no irrefutable proof either way), it deteriorates because there is never a meeting of the minds.

Lydgate believes that if he is superior to others in his vocation, he must also be in his private life. He shares Rosamond’s opinion that ordering the best is necessary. Not only does he think of himself as being “better born than other country surgeons” (*MM* 179), he reasons that “there would be an incompatibility in his furniture not being of the best” (*MM* 180). His views here can also be attributed to his sense of manhood: “In most societies that we know of, setting up a new household is the essential qualification for manhood” (Tosh, *Manliness* 36). Lydgate feels that “the requisite things must be bought, and it would be bad economy to buy them of poor quality” (*MM* 389). As a man who will bring reform and discover the “primitive tissue,” it is imperative that all parts of his life are superior.

His professional approach and private one differ when it comes to the feminine mind. He has a very limited view of it, as is evident from his past history with the actress Madame Laure. Possessing “an impetuous folly when it came to women” (*MM* 180), he is unable to deduce that Madame Laure intentionally murders her husband. Assigning women a set of docile feminine characteristics, he cannot fathom that they are more complex than what he can observe. Alan Mintz notes that “George Eliot repeatedly cites Lydgate’s failure to apply to the non-vocational sectors of his life the same rigor of observation he applies to his scientific work” (93). His problem “is that he does not consistently view women from a clinical point of view” (Rothfield 109). He incorrectly presumes that Rosamond is a woman who will not bother him with questions and, more importantly, will quietly accept his judgment. Coincidentally, he expects this same type of obedience from his patients and the citizens of Middlemarch when it comes to his medical reform.

Their marriage becomes a contest of wills, Lydgate expecting his to always prevail over Rosamond’s. He desires to be the principle actor in their marriage. The pattern of their married lives involves Rosamond offering advice, and he disagreeing and asserting that his word is final. His constant refusal to consider seriously any of her suggestions leaves her with little choice but to act secretly. After learning that she has done something against his will, he attempts repeatedly to force her to accept his commands: “You must learn to take my judgment on questions you don’t understand” (*MM* 642). In his mind, she doesn’t understand any questions from why she shouldn’t ride an unfamiliar horse to why she shouldn’t have written to his uncle for money. Placing limited value on her mind, he often neglects to reveal his actions to her.

He realizes his “sense of powerlessness over Rosamond” (*MM* 631), and this awareness affects negatively his sense of self. However, what most wounds his masculinity is when his uncle writes a stinging response to Rosamond’s appeal for money. His uncle criticizes his profession and chastises him for permitting his wife to write to him. It is a personal affront to both Lydgate’s public and private aims, which causes him to admonish Rosamond scornfully:

Will this be enough to convince you of the harm you may do by secret meddling? Have you sense enough to recognize now your incompetence to judge and act for me—to interfere with your ignorance in affairs which it belongs to me to decide on? (*MM* 716).

Lydgate’s and Rosamond’s inability to agree on matters leads to the ultimate inaction of their marriage. They essentially stop communicating with each other. And for Lydgate, it distracts him from the aims of his vocation and leads to stagnation in both his public and private life.

The Lydgate marriage appears to be doomed and only through Dorothea’s actions is it saved. She becomes Lydgate’s confessor, and he is able to say to her what he cannot to Rosamond. Dorothea’s own marital trials have made her more susceptible to those of others, and she reminds Rosamond that Lydgate “depends on you for comfort. He loves you best. The worst loss would be to lose that—and you have not lost it” (*MM* 857). Her statement reminds us of both Casaubon’s and Lydgate’s views on marriages and wives. It also expresses Dorothea’s regrets about her own marriage, for she was not able to offer ease to Casaubon, and they were never able to be a comfort to each other. The Lydgate marriage is bandaged through Dorothea being able to communicate to Lydgate and

Rosamond what they cannot to each other. However just as a bandage only covers, Dorothea's intervention does not successfully heal the deeper wounds of the marriage.

Casaubon's and Lydgate's marital lives are shaped by what they desire in their professional ones. So obsessed with finding the key to other issues, they fail to find the one to a successful marriage. Each believes that there is one method for understanding all—Casaubon's *Key* and Lydgate's "primitive tissue." They apply mistakenly a similar conjecture to their wives and marriages, expecting that there exist one pattern for both. They refuse to acknowledge the complexities of marriage and wives and the interconnectedness between one's public and private life. Furthermore, they fail to consider other voices, most significantly their wives. Silencing them as they do their critics, they go about laboring under misguided principles. This ultimately strains both their marriages and how their masculinities are viewed by self and others.

### **Part Three Nicholas Bulstrode**

#### **Spheres Colliding and Collapsing**

Nicholas Bulstrode is an interesting character because his life experiences are an amalgamation of those of the previous male characters discussed. As a young man, he, like Will and Fred, has searched for a vocation. And while we do not have many details of his marriages, both have a harmony that is missing from the Casaubon and Lydgate marriages. By all outward appearances, he appears a success in both his marriages and his vocation. Yet, his achievements are accomplished through lies and deceit, which contribute to the collision and near collapse of both his public and private lives.

One of the true orphans of the novel, he has no knowledge or connection to his biological family. However, his "story is the only element of the narrative that entails

extensive exploration of the past” (Mintz 148). Each of the male characters examined previously have had ambiguous emotions concerning their pasts, whether it was a desire to sever or replace them. Bulstrode has this as well, but he must first create a beginning. His early life happens to him as a series of events that pushes him in a direction that he would not have gone into normally. He had thought to enter the ministry, which is described as “the happiest time of his life” (*MM* 663). Yet, he abandons this calling and consents to becoming the confidential accountant for Mr. Dunkirk, eventually marrying his widow and hiding the existence of a missing daughter from her. He knew that his actions were unrighteous, but he felt unable to retract them and allowed the current of his life, similar to what Arthur of *Adam Bede* and Stephen of *The Mill on the Floss* have done, to propel him onwards. Relocating to Middlemarch represents a rebirth, an opportunity to make himself anew. His marriage to Harriet Vincy is akin to that of Tito’s to Romola because it solidifies his power and influence, which would have been difficult for an outsider without such connection.

Bulstrode’s private and public masculinities are both fashioned on a life of separations. In both of his marriages, he has revealed little to his wives about his public life. He conceals the source of the Dunkirk wealth from his first wife and rarely discusses banking business with Harriet. In this respect, he shares the views of Casaubon and Lydgate concerning the role of the wife. Harriet seems to be a mate who completes the furnishing of his life without interfering with his public affairs. Also, he is fearful that if Harriet knew the full details of his public life that she might hold him in contempt. He is terrified that his past “would render him an object of scorn and opprobrium of the religion with which he had diligently associated himself” (*MM* 663).

Despite his efforts, his past is made public. Charges of being ungentlemanly and dishonest are brought against him at a Town Hall Meeting, which affects him both emotionally and physically:

The quick vision that his life was after all a failure, that he was a dishonoured man, and must quail before the glance of those towards whom he had habitually assumed the attitude of a reprovor, . . . [A]ll of this rushed through him like that agony of terror which fails to kill, and leaves the ears still open to the returning wave of execration. The sudden sense of exposure after the re-established sense of safety came . . . to the susceptible nerve of a man whose intensest being lay in such mastery and predominance as the conditions of his life had shaped for him. (*MM* 781)

His public masculinity is in ruins, and that sense of inferiority he had felt when Will had declined his financial offer is felt more intensively. Will's "open expression of scorn" (*MM* 673) had been the first that he had received from someone whom he had considered an inferior. That time, however, it had been in the privacy of his home, and he could check the "violent reaction, [which has caused him to weep] . . . like a woman" (*MM* 673). This public airing cannot be hidden.

However, he attempts to maintain the façade of his private one. After being escorted home, he conceals the true cause of his changed state from Harriet. She, however, is aware that he is suffering from more than a physical complaint: "She cried in private from the conviction that her husband was not suffering from bodily illness merely, but from something that afflicted his mind" (*MM* 802). Anxiety causes him to shut "himself up in his private room" (*MM* 803), an action that is geared towards

preserving his domestic masculinity. For a while, her husband's misfortunes are successfully hidden from her. However, Harriet has been misread often by her husband, many Middlemarchers, and even readers (at least until the end of the novel). She, like her niece Rosamond, has been described as a rather insipid woman more concerned about trivial matters than serious ones. Her intuition tells her something is gravely wrong, and she takes action.

For the most part, the Bulstrode marriage had merely existed in the text, with no description about their courtship and marriage. It appears that Bulstrode married her solely for her connections. Yet, his troubles uncover the hidden love that each has for the other. It is revealed that she has always "believed in him as an excellent man whose piety carried a peculiar eminence in belonging to a layman" (*MM* 661). Although extremely shaken by what she has learned, she returns home and locks herself in her room to prepare herself to meet their changed state. She displays a sense of the higher duty of marriage when she reasons that "now that punishment had befallen him it was not possible to her in any sense to forsake him" (*MM* 807). The act of removing her ornaments and putting on a plain black dress before going down to meet him is a visible sign that she is prepared to accept whatever life may now hold for them.

Waiting in anguish, Bulstrode realizes how much she means to him: "He felt himself perishing slowly in unpitied misery [, thinking that] [p]erhaps he should never see his wife's face with affection in it again" (*MM* 807). He has altered greatly as is evident in Harriet's impression of him when she goes to him: "He sate with his eyes bent down, and as she went towards him she thought he looked smaller—he seemed so withered and shrunken" (*MM* 807). Solemnly and kindly, she simply states, "Look up,

Nicholas” (*MM* 807). It is a call for him to see her physically but also to look towards their future together. The awareness that she is the great comfort of his life is such a strong emotion that he “looked at her half amazed for a moment . . . [and] he burst out crying and they cried together, she sitting at his side” (*MM* 808). No other words are spoken between the two, but volumes are in the silence: “His confession was silent, and her promise of faithfulness was silent” (*MM* 808). This moment of reconciliation and unconditional love is the fulfillment of that search for origins that he has so long desired. He is laid bare and given an opportunity for a third life, one built on honesty and truth. Eventually, the Bulstrodes leave Middlemarch, and what happens afterwards remains unknown for they are not mentioned in the “Finale.” Yet, if the last scene between husband and wife is any indication, we assume that they lived their remaining years in “that complete union which makes the advancing years a climax, and age the harvest of sweet memories in common” (*MM* 890).

#### **Part Four**

#### **Masculinity and Marriage in the After-History<sup>17</sup>**

One of the prevalent ideas in *Middlemarch* is that people are the product of their particular historical moment and location. Both forces dictate people’s actions and/or inactions and perceptions of self. The “Finale” provides us with the after histories of the Lydgates, the Ladislaws, and the Vincys.<sup>18</sup> For the male characters, these summations

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<sup>17</sup> After-history is the term that Marianna Torgovnick uses to describe the “Finale” of the novel. It is translation of *nachgeschichte*, a term coined by Boris M. Èjxenbaum in his essay “O Henry and the Theory of the Short Story” (1925) to label epilogues that provide readers with the histories of characters after the main plot of the novel has been resolved. See Boris M. Èjxenbaum.

<sup>18</sup> The Bulstrodes, as noted in the last section, are not included because their lives are effectively summarized within the novel. Furthermore, their absences add validity to my earlier comment that Bulstrode is at the last stage of his quests when the novel begins. Furthermore, the “Finale” is concerned with the young characters for we are asked, “Who can quit young lives after being long in company with them?” (*MM* 890).

comment specifically on the outcome of the masculine and marriage plots. We are presented with the view of the ideal marriage, and it is the model for which we are to judge the success or failure of marriages in the novel. Lastly, it prepares us for *Daniel Deronda*. George Eliot's last novel is a radical departure from her previous ones; yet, it deals with some of the same themes that have always concerned her. There is the search for origins and the quest to define one's place in society.

Marriage in *Middlemarch* is derived from the idea of a complete union, which should be read in a Biblical context as the "Finale" begins with an allusion to Adam and Eve, "who kept their honeymoon in Eden, but had their first little one among the thorns and thistles of the wilderness" (*MM* 890). The true test was the hardships that this original couple faced once paradise was lost. Despite the loss of Eden, their complete union was neither compromised nor broken despite the loss of Eden. This is the model and the ideal outcome, the key to a successful marriage, which is timeless since it is not limited to a particular historical moment.

However, there may be obstacles, and it is the reaction to these that determine whether the marriage is successful or not. Marriage is, as Dorothea tells Rosamond, "so unlike anything else. There is something even awful in the nearness it brings" (*MM* 855). While we may instantly think of "bad" or "unpleasant" when encountering "awful" in this statement, it can also mean to inspire awe or admiration. This "awfulness" (whether negative or positive) depends upon how each partner handles this closeness and the barriers that they face. For the male characters, one of the impediments is their sense of masculinity. Marriage challenges and sometimes alters how they perceive their masculine identities. Will and Fred are young men at the beginning of their careers and

thus are more capable of change than the older men. Their marriages allow them to develop. Casaubon and Lydgate expect to continue as they had before they were married, giving little thought to what their wives desire. Bulstrode, on the other hand, underestimates the significance of his wife until he is at his most vulnerable.

We have a much different view of marriage and masculinity in *Middlemarch* than we do in George Eliot's previous novels. From *Adam Bede* to *Felix Holt*, it appears to always be at odds with a man's sense of masculinity. In these novels, marriage is not the primary concern of the male character. His quest has focused predominately on his masculinity, and marriage appears to be a necessary requirement. And while, professional success is important in *Middlemarch* as each major male character attempts to find a vocation or improve upon his chosen one, there is equal significance attached to marriage that we have not seen in those earlier novels. Previous male characters have typically associated marriage with a life of inaction. However, as Stefanie Markovits argues, "marriage is also rife with the language of philosophy of actions: intentions, proposals, "I will's" or "I do's" (5). While not all the male characters immediately realize this connection, their experiences bear out this truth.

The "Finale" sums up the conclusion of the two plots for Lydgate, Will, and Fred. Despite outward signs of success, Lydgate "always regarded himself as a failure: he had not done what he once meant to do" (*MM* 893). He had not revolutionized medicine, and he fell in line with those doctors that he had despised in his youth. The Lydgates make the best of a bad situation, but each was never completely happy. He had "once called [Rosamond] his basil plant. . . [because it] was a plant which had flourished wonderfully on a murdered man's brains" (*MM* 893). To these speeches of Lydgate's, Rosamond

would comment that “it was a pity that he had not Mrs. Ladislaw, whom he was always praising and placing above [Rosamond]” (*MM* 893), thus always attaining the advantage and forcing Lydgate to see the foolishness of his youth; yet, he is unable to alter those earlier actions. These same types of thoughts are shared by Rosamond. After Lydgate’s death at fifty, she “married an elderly and wealthy physician . . . and often spoke of her happiness as ‘a reward’” (*MM* 893). While the Lydgate marriage has a somewhat happier ending than the Casaubon one, it does not achieve that “complete union” that is spoken of so highly at the end of the novel. It is merely a compromise, and Lydgate does not emerge as a new man in the sense of George Eliot’s alternative masculine plot.

Will’s marriage to Dorothea enables him to accomplish those lofty dreams that he had held during his period of uncertainty: “[He] became an ardent public man, working well in those times when reforms were begun with a young hopefulness of immediate good, . . . and getting at last returned to Parliament” (*MM* 894). The marriage for Dorothea, however, remains problematic in the sense that it conforms to that long tradition of female characters having to be sacrificed for the salvation of their fathers, brothers, or husbands. It is an impression held both by Middlemarchers and readers: “Many who know her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother” (*MM* 894). She, like all those characters in the text who aim to do more, faces the barrier of her historical moment. We are told that even those who expected her to do more, did not know “exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done” (*MM* 894). Yet, if she is Will’s salvation, he is also hers. Casaubon had been a vampire who had sucked the soul from her life, depriving her both of passion and

pleasure. Will breathes new life into her. However, he belongs firmly to his historical moment as much as she does hers. Those abilities that he had demonstrated at the *Pioneer* are put to great use during the age of reform.

The one male who emerges as a true new man in terms of George Eliot's alternative masculine plot is Fred Vincy. He proves to himself and others that he is better than most had ever expected him to be: "Fred surprised his neighbors in various ways. He became rather distinguished in his side of the country as a theoretic and practical farmer" (*MM* 890). Mary and her unwavering belief in him are largely responsible for his success. However, she is not subordinated or sacrificed. Bonnie Zimmerman asserts that "the idealized marriages that conclude *Adam Bede*, *Felix Holt*, and *Middlemarch* are intended to symbolize the unification of ardour and will, sympathy and action, heart and head—in short, female and male—that potentially liberates creativity" (154). The Vincy marriage achieves this unification more so than any of those previous ones because the potential is realized. Fred's book on agriculture is thought to be authored by Mary while her book for little boys is thought to be by him. Authorship doesn't really matter, but it is the complete union of these two, which allows the publication of both books. Neither partner loses themselves and finds the greatest part of self through marriage.

Significantly, the Vincys are the only couple who remain in Middlemarch. They, more than any other characters, accept both their historical moment and location. In doing so, there is a certainty about them. It appears that the great lesson of *Middlemarch* is that one must be aware of both of his/her time and place. Those characters that set out to achieve great reform (Dorothea, Casaubon, and Lydgate) never do. Ironically, it is Will

who has always been involved in reform that is able to “rise” to Parliament and succeed in the political arena.

It is this changing world that leads us to *Daniel Deronda*, the only novel that George Eliot sets after the First Reform Bill. And while the world is different, some of the same issues are present. The twin plots of masculinity and marriage are most vividly depicted in the character of Daniel Deronda, who, like those men of *Middlemarch*, is searching for his origins and calling.

Chapter Four: Masculinity, Marriage, and Power Dynamics in *Daniel Deronda*

*Daniel Deronda* (1876), George Eliot's last and only novel set in the High Victorian Period of the 1860s, brings together the many issues that have been raised in this examination of the masculinity/marriage dilemma in her novels. Unlike her previous English novels, this one is set well after the First Reform Act and just prior to the Second Reform Act of 1867.<sup>1</sup> While *Daniel Deronda* does not discuss this bill directly, the novel is concerned with new ideas about gender, race, and class that were raised by its passing.<sup>2</sup> The years following were marked by increased debates over identity and nationhood and further calls for the renegotiation of power, issues that the novel explores through a myriad of characters.

Mid-nineteenth-century Victorian men have been described as experiencing a crisis of masculinity.<sup>3</sup> John Tosh, however, argues that "masculinity is always in crisis . . . because it is equated with power, especially power over women, to an extent which can never be fully realized" (*Manliness*, 19-20). However, there are historical moments in which this struggle for dominance is challenged more strongly, such as the various voices against unequal laws—the divorce laws, the child custody laws, and later, the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882—that emerged in England during the second half of the nineteenth century. During this period, men were more apt to sense that their

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<sup>1</sup> Referencing historical events in the novel and entries by George Eliot in her Notebook, Graham Handley in an Appendix entitled, "The Chronology of *Daniel Deronda*," in the 1988 Oxford University Press edition of the novel, states that "the action of *Daniel Deronda* occupies two years, from October 1864 until October 1866, beginning *in medias res* in September 1865" (725).

<sup>2</sup> See Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendell's *Defining the Victorian Nation* (2000). The introduction offers an extensive overview of the Second Reform Act and its aftermath. Each author contributes one essay: McClelland writes on working class men and how the Act influenced conceptions of masculinity; Rendell relates the Reform Act to early demands for women's suffrage; and Hall considers the effects on Britain's colonial "others," particularly in Jamaica and Ireland.

<sup>3</sup> John Tosh finds the idea of a 'crisis in masculinity' to be misleading because it "assumes a pre-existing stability, when change was minimal and behavior predictable" (*Manliness*, 20).

masculinity was being threatened, a fear that many of the men in *Daniel Deronda* share but experience differently based on their social positions.

The social world of the novel is vast, ranging from quintessential outsiders to the more affluent of English society. This scope is evident in George Eliot's array of male characters, all of whom attempt to secure their place in the world. For instance, Sir Hugo Mallinger marries in order to continue his family's name yet fails to produce any male heirs; Hans Meyrick represents that typical young male given to impetuous actions, although he is redeemed by his good nature and intentions, and Lush and Mordecai are new character types not previously encountered in her novels, and which we will discuss later in relation to Grandcourt and Deronda, respectively.

The three male characters who are the principle focus in this chapter are Elijah Klesmer, Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt, and Daniel Deronda because the changing notions of masculinity, marriage, and power are most evident in their lives. In Klesmer, we see those same elements of effeminacy that characterized Seth Bede (*Adam Bede*) and Philip Wakem (*The Mill on the Floss*) as outsiders. To others, he is so alien that they attempt to exclude him from both a public and private life. Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt represents aristocratic masculinity, a type that George Eliot has yet to explore. As a member of that class who has long been dominant over others, he strives to maintain this control: "He becomes a metaphor for his times, the most pronounced example of the impact of a debauched aristocracy on the national psyche" (McCaw 150). Daniel Deronda is similar to most of George Eliot's major male characters, and yet also utterly unlike them in that much of his life is a blank slate erased through the machinations of his mother. He is "an outsider [who] even before discovering his Jewish

identity . . . is excluded from the birthright of an English gentleman by his apparent illegitimacy” (Zimmerman, “George Eliot and Feminism” 233).

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, the focus is on the precarious masculinity of all three men and how they are viewed by other characters. In “Masculinity and Power Dynamics,” I discuss Klesmer’s assertion of his own dominance, despite what others perceive, Grandcourt’s struggle to maintain control, and Deronda’s gradual realization of the power that has been dormant within him. The final section is an examination of how marriage for each man becomes the ultimate achievement or loss of power.

### **Precarious Masculinities**

Masculinity is always constructed and reconstructed through the eyes of others and is therefore precarious. While men are often characterized as being the active ocular agent, particularly with respect to the male gaze, Klaus Theweleit claims that the eyes, regardless of the gender of the possessor, are hermaphroditic by nature:

What is crucial is the eye’s capacity for transformation; it is simultaneously able to perform both functions. The same eye may sometimes actively radiate (and thus be “masculine”) and at other times passively drink in light from elsewhere (and thus be “feminine”). In conjunction with the gaze of another, it does both—it penetrates the other eye and receives its gaze. (134)

Throughout *Daniel Deronda*, Klesmer, Grandcourt, and Deronda are, more often than not, the subjects of the gaze of others. At the archery meeting, Klesmer is objectified by those in attendance. Grandcourt, on the other hand, both transmits and receives the gaze.

And while being the subject of everyone's attention, he is clearly in control of how others regard him.

Klesmer is immediately classified as an outsider and foreigner. For them, he is a source of amusement: "Some were inclined to laugh, others felt a little disgust at the want of judgment shown by the Arrowpoints in this use of an introductory card" (*DD* 103). These reactions are a result of xenophobia; he is mocked because he is so unlike an English gentleman:

The strong point of the English gentleman pure is the easy style of his figure and clothing; he objects to marked in and outs in his costume, and he also objects to looking inspired. Fancy an assemblage where the men had all the ordinary stamp of the well-bred Englishman, watching the entrance of Herr Klesmer . . . his tall thin figure clad in a way which, not being strictly English, was all the worst for its apparent emphasis on intention. (*DD* 102)

This "English gentleman pure" is contrasted to Klesmer's mixed heritage "of German, the Slave,<sup>4</sup> and the Semite" (*DD* 47). This distinction implies his impurity, further highlighting how others perceive him. Moreover, the English gentleman's style of dress exemplifies elements of control, discipline, and reserve—traits most commonly associated with ideas of Victorian manliness. Brent Shannon argues that "near the turn of the century, English society grew increasingly sensitive to the necessary distance between proper masculinity and the deviant fopperies of devout fashion worship" (31). Klesmer's

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<sup>4</sup> *Slave* is Middle English for Slav. George Eliot's use of the Middle-English spelling implies a further example of how far society removes Klesmer from the present day.

style of dress sharply distances him from English society and emphasizes his position as other.

Being a male musician,<sup>5</sup> he is also regarded as an outsider. This idea of the male musician as other is expressed by Deronda's reaction to being asked by Sir Hugo if he would like to become a professional singer. Despite deriving immense pleasure from singing, Deronda is visibly upset "by the idea that his uncle—perhaps his father—thought of a career for him which was totally unlike his own, and which he knew very well was not thought of among possible destinations for the sons of an English gentleman" (*DD* 169-70). He does not want a life where he would be "dressed up to sing before all those fine people who would not care about him except as a wonderful toy" (*DD* 170). Klesmer appears to be this "wonderful toy" who, as his "costume" at the archery meeting confirms, is dressed up for the fine people. And while his musical talents are respected, as a man, he is not. We are told that he "had not yet that supreme, world-wide celebrity which makes an artist great to the most ordinary people by their knowledge of his great expensiveness" (*DD* 103).

Klesmer, however, does not accept the perceptions of English society and directly challenges them when he confronts one of Catherine's suitors, a Mr. Bult, "a political man of good family who confidently expected a peerage" (*DD* 237). Filled with his own self-importance and position, Bult is quite dismissive of others, particularly Klesmer whom "he hardly regarded in the light of a serious human being who ought to have the vote" (*DD* 241). Klesmer, however, surprises Bult when he speaks eloquently about the "the lack of idealism in English politics" (*DD* 241). Astonished by this lucid rebuttal,

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<sup>5</sup> As a Jewish musician, Klesmer is more closely associated with Leonora Alcharisi and Mirah Cohen than he is with any of the men in the novel.

Bult, in a failed attempt to be gracious, remarks that Klesmer has “too much talent to be a *mere* [italics mine] musician” (*DD* 242). Klesmer disputes Bult’s degrading comment with an impassioned speech about the importance that musicians have and will continue to play in world affairs: “We help to rule the nations and make the age as any other public men. We count ourselves on level benches with legislators. And a man who speaks effectively through music is compelled to something more difficult than parliamentary eloquence” (*DD* 242). He elevates the musician above the mere public man. While Klesmer’s masculinity is constantly viewed as being inferior to that of the English gentleman, he regards himself above their perceptions and constantly defies them.

Grandcourt is the living embodiment of the “English gentleman pure.” His birth has positioned him above the everyday man. Not only is he in line to gain a baronetcy through his father’s blood, he may also gain a peerage through that of his mother. Despite these advantages of birth, his sense of his masculinity is shaped by others. His actions and inactions are devised both to draw and control the attention that he receives. He knows that he is the true aim of the archery meeting, the prize to be won by one of the young misses, as evident in Gwendolen’s assurance to her mother that she will be able to capture him: “My arrow will pierce him before he has time for thought” (*DD* 95). His late appearance is calculated to achieve the maximum affect. It builds up anticipation in both the characters present and the reader and is further reinforced by the narrative when Book One ends before we receive an actual description of Grandcourt.

He is described through the eyes of Gwendolen. She is pleasantly surprised to observe a man much different from the one that she had imagined. There is a rather long

account in which she takes in the fullness of both his body and manners. However, more significant is Grandcourt's sense of himself and his relationship to others at the archery meeting:

There was the not faintest smile on his face as he looked at her, not a trace of self-consciousness or anxiety in his bearing, . . . he also showed a perfect hand; the line of feature from brow to chin undisguised by beard was decidedly handsome, with only moderate departures from perpendicular, and the slight whisker too was perpendicular. It was not possible for a human aspect to be freer from grimace or solicitous wriggling; also it was perhaps not possible for a breathing man wide awake to look less animated. (*DD* 111)

Contrast this response portrait of Grandcourt to the earlier one of Klesmer, and Grandcourt seems superior. Nothing in his style of dress and manner is geared to draw attention. Both his dress and manner speak to the self-confidence that comes with his high status, and Gwendolen is effectively disarmed by it: “[She] decided that he was the most aristocratic-looking man she had ever seen” (*DD* 112).

However, the narrator does not share society's views about Klesmer's “inferiority” nor Grandcourt's “superiority.” These perceptions are consistently ridiculed, and it is society that is actually mocked at the archery meeting. The narrator comments on Grandcourt's lack of animation, which is not a compliment. In fact, he might as well be dead—foreshadowing the closure of the novel. Also, Grandcourt engages in many activities that the middle classes found problematic: “Masculine nature, in gentry terms, was based on sport and codes of honour derived from military prowess, finding

expression in hunting, riding, drinking, and ‘wenching’” (Davidoff and Hall 110).

Grandcourt’s masculine identity is shaped by metaphors of sport and military prowess.

He is a man accustomed to mastering others whether they are women or other men whom he views as being inferior (for Grandcourt, it appears as if all men fit into this category).

He is certain of his superiority over everyone in Diplo. He believes and attempts to live up to the impression that others have of him. Yet, he will soon find that the security of his masculinity is challenged both by a woman (Gwendolen) and a male “other” (Deronda).

In the end, his masculinity will prove to be just as precarious as that of Klesmer and Deronda.

Daniel Deronda is often described as possessing both masculine and feminine characteristics: “Deronda . . . was moved by an affectionateness such as we are apt to call feminine, disposing him to yield in ordinary details, while he had a certain inflexibility of judgment, and independence of opinion, held to be rightly masculine” (*DD* 322). John Rignall posits that George Eliot was doing something experimental with Deronda, “essaying a new kind of hero, one endowed with all the privileges of a man of wealth and standing yet who, at the same time, challenges conventional distinctions of gender by displaying a feminine quality of sensitivity and understanding” (84-5). This combination of feminine and masculine attributes creates a conflict for him, one that begins to surface in his boyhood and continues through his adult life. He is constantly measuring his masculinity against other English boys and men. It is what causes him to be so agitated when Sir Hugo playfully suggests that he might want to be a professional singer. Often considering himself different, he initially strives to attain those qualities that he perceives necessary for an English gentleman.

As a boy, Deronda regards proper education as one of those prerequisites. He is relieved when Sir Hugo reveals that he is “to have the education of an English gentleman” (*DD* 172) by first attending Eton and then Cambridge, Sir Hugo’s own university. He has no set ideas of what he will do with his education. When asked about his specific career plans, he replies, “I should like to be a gentleman . . . and go to school, if that is what a gentleman’s son must do” (*DD* 172). However, he will have a difficult time at both Eton and Cambridge because contact with the males there will only serve to reinforce his sense of difference. At Eton, he typically meets a boy with whom he is inclined to form a friendship but when this boy begins to talk “to him a great deal about his home and parents, and seemed to expect a like expansiveness in return, Deronda immediately shrank into reserve, and this experience remained a check on his naturally strong bent towards the formation of intimate friendships” (*DD* 173).

A critical question that remains unanswered is whether Deronda is circumcised or not, which might explain his shrinking into reserve. A *brit milah*<sup>6</sup> is usually performed eight days after birth, and Deronda has passed the age of two when he is given to Sir Hugo. However, this fact alone is not enough to state with certainty that he has been circumcised. His parents had married three weeks before his grandfather’s death, and his mother had only agreed to marry her cousin Ephraim because she could rule over him. It is doubtful whether Ephraim’s submission extended as far as breaking a *mitzvah aseh* (a ‘positive commandment’ to perform an act) even though she tells Deronda, “I said you should not know you were a Jew” (*DD* 634). Although it is impossible for readers to know whether Deronda has been circumcised, there are instances in the text that point to a figurative circumcision, which further reinforces his sense of masculine difference. He

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<sup>6</sup> In Hebrew, *brit milah* literally means ‘covenant of circumcision’.

has already been described as a type of “deformed foot doubtfully hidden by the shoe” (*DD* 175). Jacob Press reads the issue of Deronda’s circumcised penis as George Eliot’s method of thematizing “Deronda’s shame about his penis/parentage as a metaphor for what she reads as the nonphallic faux masculinity of the man whose consciousness and loyalties are European but who is nonetheless marked in his gender as Jewish other” (303). The result is that Deronda “refuses insertion/assertion in the world” (Press 306). At Eton, he frequently perceives that he is unlike other English boys. It is a thought that will follow him to Cambridge.

At Cambridge, Deronda meets Hans Meyrick who depicts “Deronda as an Olympian who needed nothing” (*DD* 181). Living up to this portrayal, Deronda assists Hans at his studies to the detriment of his own. His failure convinces him that Cambridge is not the place for him, and it marks a change in how he contemplates his masculinity. Sir Hugo, upon learning of his wishes to leave Cambridge, remarks, “So you don’t want to be an Englishman to the backbone after all?” (*DD* 183). He responds that he still desires this, but he “want[s] to understand other points of view. And I want to get rid of a merely English attitude in studies” (*DD* 183). While acknowledging that there are other ways of being, he still suffers from a sense of being unconventional: “Other men, he inwardly said, had a more definite place and duties” (*DD* 180). He realizes that a Cambridge education will not guarantee him masculinity, and he must follow a different path. Yet when this opportunity is presented to him, he retreats into the security of English manhood, as evident by his reaction in a Jewish synagogue in Frankfort when he is asked about his parentage by a Joseph Kalonymos:<sup>7</sup> “Deronda had a strongly resistant

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<sup>7</sup> Kalonymos had been a friend of his grandfather. At the time of this meeting in Frankfort, Deronda is unaware of that man’s connection to his family.

feeling: he was inclined to shake off hastily the touch of his arm; but he managed to slip it away and said coldly, 'I am an Englishman'" (*DD* 368). Englishness is still important to him, and any suggestion that he might not be one offends him greatly. He may not be attempting to achieve English masculinity by the prescribed script, but he, at least during this time, is still determined to be an Englishman.

### **Masculinity and Power Dynamics**

A man's sense of masculinity is tied to power, whether it is over himself or others. He struggles to achieve it and often faces a power dynamic—a process in which his pursuit of it is met by either competing or conflicting forces. The purpose of this section is to place each of the men within this power dynamic and to highlight the most serious threats to each man's success. The term "power" is used to refer specifically to social power and the power of influence. While Klesmer has influence with the Arrowpoints, his weight in English society is fragile. Grandcourt, on the other hand, uses his social dominance as a coercive force to bend others to his will. Although uncertain of his origins, Deronda's class status does give him social power. However, what he most desires is to have a positive effect on the lives of those he encounters. He does this in small ways with Hans and Mirah, but he longs to do more. Power, no matter in what form it may exist, always changes and shifts.

As stated earlier, the English society of the novel perceives Klesmer as an object to be sold and traded among them for his musical talents, locating the power in the hands of his patrons: "The large cheque that Mr. Arrowpoint was to draw in Klesmer's name seemed to make him as safe as an inmate as a footman" (*DD* 238-9). However, he is aware that he has more influence than they perceive, and his relationship with the

Arrowpoints clearly articulates his higher sense of self. So certain are the Arrowpoints of their control over him that it never occurs to them that a romantic bond might exist between him and Catherine. Aware of what her parents think of him, Klesmer believes that he would not be a suitable match for an English gentlewoman and an heiress. Even after she corrects this opinion, he understands that the impediments to marriage are great. It is not merely her parents who will object, but he envisions that all of English society will as well, a sentiment that Mr. and Mrs. Arrowpoint echo in their reactions. Catherine, however, does not share his view and does not care what the world thinks.<sup>8</sup> She immediately goes to her parents to announce their intentions, a meeting that reveals both the Arrowpoint's limited thinking and Klesmer's strong view of his masculinity and his position in society.

The Arrowpoints place great importance on being an English gentleman, and Klesmer not being one makes him unsuitable for Catherine. Mr. Arrowpoint tells her, "I am a gentleman, Cath. We expect you to marry a gentleman" (*DD* 246). He equates this status with competence: "He won't do at the head of estates. He has a deuced foreign look—is an unpractical man" (*DD* 247). He envisions the marriage between the two as an attack against England and its people: "We must do as other people do. We must think of the nation and the public good" (*DD* 247). Mrs. Arrowpoint is also quick to point out Klesmer's mongrel origins: "Everyone will say that you must have made the offer to a man who has been paid to come to the house—who is nobody knows what—a gypsy, a Jew, a mere bubble of the earth" (*DD* 246). She threatens that Mr. Arrowpoint "shall horsewhip him off the premises" (*DD* 246). Having Klesmer "fetched," Mrs.

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<sup>8</sup> Catherine Arrowpoint is one of George Eliot's strongest female characters, but her story is muted by other characters who take over the novel.

Arrowpoint expects him to submit to their will. However, he affirms that they have no “real” authority over him: “I consider it out of the power either of you or of your fortune to confer on me anything that I value” (*DD* 249). Although Mr. and Mrs. Arrowpoint are a specific example of the competing force that Klesmer faces, they represent an entire class of people who feel they have mastery over him, the outsider and “other.” They also fail to see that it is he that has power over them for his actions motivate theirs and reveal the fragility of their imagined dominance when challenged.

Grandcourt supposes that he is in complete control of himself and others. He views most males as inferior as seen in his relationship with both Lush and Deronda. Lush’s connection to Grandcourt is best explained in the thoughts of Sir Hugo:

The baronet always treated him [Lush] well, as one of those easy-handled personages who, frequenting the society of a gentleman, without being exactly gentlemen themselves, can be the more serviceable, like the second-best articles of our wardrobe, which we use with a comfortable freedom of anxiety. (*DD* 280)

Unable to attain power himself, Lush does the next best thing: attaches himself to a man with it. The tradeoff, of course, is that Lush is nothing more than a lackey whom Grandcourt uses as he fancies. Grandcourt is keenly aware of his command over Lush, realizing “that he might kick Lush if he chose” (*DD* 129). His treatment of Lush and Lush’s willingness to accept it gives Grandcourt a false sense that he has the same mastery over most, if not, all men.

This perception of male superiority is seen in Grandcourt’s relations with Deronda, whom he believes to be Sir Hugo’s illegitimate son and thus his cousin. In

becoming the presumptive heir to the baronetcy, he imagines that he has usurped Deronda's position. Aware that Deronda finds Gwendolen intriguing, he sees this as a sign of his power:

It was not a disagreeable idea to him that this fine fellow . . . would witness, perhaps with some jealousy, Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt play the commanding part of betrothed lover to a splendid girl whom the cousin had already looked at with admiration. (*DD* 325)

Deronda, however, will become a competing force in Grandcourt's dominance. Once he and Gwendolen are married, Grandcourt still feels no jealousy towards Deronda: "I don't care two straws about Deronda, or any other conceited hanger-on. You may talk to him as much as you like. He is not going to take my place" (*DD* 447). In this context, he is speaking specifically of his position as Gwendolen's husband, revealing also his anxiety about Deronda attaining his social role. His imagined sense of superiority over Deronda prevents him from acknowledging that he is jealous of him: "He would have denied that he was jealous; because jealousy would have implied some doubt of his own power to hinder what he had determined against" (*DD* 584). Jealousy, for Grandcourt, is a characteristic that belongs only to inferior men.

Grandcourt's greatest sense of control concerns women. His manipulation of his dogs, Fluff and Fetch, foreshadows the game he plays with Gwendolen and Lydia. As he holds Fluff in his lap, he is aware that Fetch is vying for his attention in a word or look. Fetch receives negative attention as he gives Fluff "caressing pats, all the while gravely watching Fetch" (*DD* 126) and perversely enjoying the pain she suffers. In observing her, but not giving her the positive touch she desires, Grandcourt manipulates

Fetch's gaze as he does with most people. Fetch's wailing causes her to eventually be put out of the house. Respectively, Gwendolen becomes his human version of Fluff, the pampered pet who will receive the honor of becoming Mrs. Grandcourt, and Lydia, the mother of his children, who will wail and be abandoned, becomes a human Fetch.

The power game between Gwendolen and Grandcourt begins immediately as he attains the upper hand during their first tête-à-tête at the archery meeting. He masterfully leaves short or long pauses before he responds to her statements or questions. These breaks disarm Gwendolen, who is forced to fill them with reflections upon Grandcourt and what his impressions of her might be. They work because Gwendolen is not able to "get rid of the unwonted flush in her cheeks and the sense of surprise which made her feel less mistress of herself than usual" (*DD* 114). What she finds most attractive about Grandcourt as a future husband is the command that she will gain: "The power of doing a great deal of what she liked to do" (*DD* 137). Despite this possibility, she fears a "subjection to a possible self, a self not to be absolutely predicted about" (*DD* 136). She is on the verge of accepting Grandcourt when she learns of Lydia and his children. She flees to Dover with the Langens to escape the control that she feels Grandcourt possesses over her.

Grandcourt views Gwendolen's running as part of the sport. He also sees it as demonstrating her spirit, which makes her worthy of his mastering. Her family misfortunes render her powerless, and she has no option but to accept. As Felicia Bonaparte has argued, "there is little difference between Grandcourt's attitude toward his animals and his attitude toward his wife" (102). Their marriage is best conveyed in terms of horses. In coming to Offendene to give Gwendolen the opportunity of accepting his

proposal, Grandcourt has his groom ride Criterion, a horse of which Gwendolen is fond. In their marriage, he will replace the stable attendant, and he expects to manage her as the groom has the horse. His one criterion for allowing Gwendolen the honor of being his wife is that she must submit to his will, a compliance that will be rewarded. On receiving an affirmative answer, he lets her know that the horse is outside and that she should come to the window to see it—it is Gwendolen’s first reward for her obedience. This “gift” is carefully orchestrated by Grandcourt. It is the exchange of one animal for another. In accepting the horse, Gwendolen tacitly agrees to his complete rule over her. He also views her as a wild filly that he will break in through the reins of marriage: “She had been brought to accept him in spite of everything—brought to kneel down like a horse under training for the arena” (*DD* 320). Within weeks of the marriage, Grandcourt has achieved command over the spirited Gwendolen: “Her husband had gained a mastery which she could no more resist than she could have resisted the benumbing effect from the touch of a torpedo”<sup>9</sup> (423). Helpless, Gwendolen quickly recognizes that he has the same control over her as he does his animals: “He delights in making the dogs and horses quail: this is half his pleasure in calling them his . . . It will come to be so with me; and I shall quail” (*DD* 427).

Deronda’s sense of being different draws him to those who are in need: “Persons attracted him, as Hans Meyrick had done, in proportion to the possibility of his defending them, rescuing them, telling upon their lives with some sort of redeeming influence” (*DD* 324). He is motivated to use his social position to assist those who are not as fortunate as he. Hence, of all the boys and men he encounters during his education, it is Hans whom

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<sup>9</sup> *Torpedo* is most likely a reference to a genus of fish, which can produce an electric discharge used to stun or kill a prey.

he aids. Significantly, he views women as those in the most need of his redeeming influence for he has the “deepest interest in the fates of women” (*DD* 191). Of course, this concern will complicate his relations with his mother.

Deronda’s mother has exercised dominance over him, particularly in her absence. Her goal had been to create the typical English gentleman. However, her motivation was based on desiring for him what she had for herself: “I chose for you what I would have chosen for myself” (*DD* 628). However, she is wrong here, for Deronda has never felt comfortable in English society. In explaining her opposition to the Judaism of her father, she tells Deronda, “You are not a woman. You may try—but you can never imagine what it is to have a man’s force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl” (*DD* 631).

His meetings with his mother are punctuated with Deronda’s feminine sensibilities. In this first instance, “he felt himself changing colour like a girl” (*DD* 624), and after he leaves her for the last time, “he allow[s] himself in his solitude to sob, with perhaps more than a woman’s acuteness of compassion, over the woman’s life so near to his, and yet so remote” (*DD* 683). Yet, his mother’s command over him existed before this meeting in Genoa. He had told her that he “used to think that you might be suffering . . . I used to wish that I could be a comfort to you” (*DD* 625). He longs to rescue her as well, but it is complicated by his feelings of her abandonment of him, the denial of his Jewish identity, and consequently, his masculinity. In her actions, she has deprived him of easing her pains.

He is motivated to save women whom he perceives to be in either moral or physical danger. He is the knight-errant towards women that Hans often teased him of

being. His fascination with Gwendolen and that question of whether she was beautiful or not is a result of the moral danger he fears for her. For Deronda, gambling is an action of soulless individuals: “Every single player . . . [possessed] a certain uniform negativeness of expression which had the effect of a mask—as if they had all eaten some root that for the time compelled the brains to the same narrow monotony of action” (*DD* 9). He longs to save Gwendolen from this meager existence. He retrieves her necklace because he sees it as the selling of her soul and the loss of her identity. In the note that he sends with its return, he attempts to keep her from further moral peril: “A stranger who has found Miss Harleth’s necklace returns it to her with the hope that she will not again risk the loss of it” (*DD* 20). While he actually saves Mirah from physical danger rather than a moral one, the underlying attraction to both women is identical. After preventing Mirah’s suicide, Deronda thinks, “perhaps my mother was like this one” (*DD* 191). Therefore, denied the ability to save his mother, he attempts to save those women like her.

### **Marriage and the Test of Masculinity**

In *Daniel Deronda*, marriage is where the masculinity of the male characters is either achieved or lost. Klesmer, Grandcourt, and Deronda each fear that their masculinity, and the power that is associated with it is in jeopardy. Their marriages either allow them to gain the influence that they did not fully have or lose that which they had only imagined possessing. Each marriage is different in its construction and how the power dynamics are resolved. Klesmer achieves social acceptance through his marriage to Catherine Arrowpoint. Grandcourt realizes too late that his dominance is not guaranteed. Deronda achieves the beginning of an epic power—one that endows him with the abilities to be a positive influence in the lives many. However, Deronda’s

“marriage” is refers to his relationship with Mordecai, than to his marriage to Mirah, and it is often read through Eve Sedgwick’s model of triangulated desire.<sup>10</sup>

Klesmer’s marriage to Catherine marks a reversal in how his masculinity is recognized by others. It is a public affirmation of what he has always known of his own masculine identity. He is fully cognizant of the social recognition he has achieved when he informs Gwendolen that “my marriage with Miss Arrowpoint . . . will more than double such right as I have to be trusted by you as a friend” (*DD* 261). In fact, the Arrowpoints are made to regard him in a new light when they finally accept the marriage. Coincidentally, we learn very little of the Klesmer marriage. Catherine virtually disappears from the novel though Klesmer is still present as he becomes instrumental in shaping Mirah’s career. Furthermore, his gain in public circles adds credibility to a comment of Gideon, one of the men at Mordecai’s club:

There’s no reason now why we shouldn’t melt gradually into the populations we live among. That’s the order of the day in point of progress. I would as soon my children married Christian as Jews. And I’m for the old maxim, “A man’s country is where he’s well off.” (*DD* 527)

The progress that Gideon speaks of can be interpreted as Klesmer fusing into English society and the world of the novel. At a certain point, he is rarely mentioned,

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<sup>10</sup> See Gayle Rubin, and Eve Sedgwick. Rubin introduced the idea in her essay, “The Traffic in Women”(1975), where she argues that the woman is “a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it” and “it is men who are the exchange partners” (174). Sedgwick reads the transfer of the woman between men as a way of accomplishing intimate male relationships. For instance, Arthur Hallam was engaged to Tennyson’s sister. In literature, one example is found in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* where George and Robert’s alliance is cemented through Clara, George’s sister who Roberts marries. However, the triangulated desire model does not work in the *Deronda*/Gwendolen/Grandcourt triangle since the men are not friends and Gwendolen is not the means by which they become “homosocially” bonded.

confirmation of Gideon's view of merging gradually into the population. Having achieved public acknowledgment and English masculinity through his marriage, Klesmer is no longer defined as "other", which allows him to take his rightful place in English society.

Grandcourt's marriage to Gwendolen is based on antiquated ideas where the aristocratic male exercised total authority over his wife, a sentiment alluded to by the miller's wife on the day of their wedding:

The miller's daughter of fourteen could not believe that high gentry behaved badly to their wives, but her mother instructed her—'Oh, child, men's men: gentle or simple, they're much of a muchness. I've heard my mother say Squire Pelton used to take his dogs and a long whip into his wife's room, and flog 'em there to frighten her.' (*DD* 353)

Although Squire Pelton's treatment of his wife occurs in the past, Grandcourt will use similar tactics to exercise power over Gwendolen in the present: "He had a surprising acuteness in detecting that situation of feeling in Gwendolen which made her proud and rebellious spirit dumb and helpless before him" (*DD* 424). His control over her is made all the sweeter because "he meant to be master of a woman who would have liked to master him, and who perhaps would have been capable of mastering another man" (*DD* 320). He finds that his marriage is proceeding exactly as planned: "[Marriage] had really brought more of aim into his life, new objects to exert his will upon; and he had not repented his choice" (*DD* 528). At this point, his marriage has validated all his beliefs concerning his masculine superiority over others.

Such confirmation, however, begins to crumble as Deronda poses a threat to his command over Gwendolen. Despite claiming that he is not jealous, Grandcourt maintains a close watch upon his wife's relationship with Deronda. He is wary of Deronda and this feeling, as Elizabeth Foyster argues, "stems from a man's insecurity about himself and from his innermost fears and anxieties" (132). Grandcourt has two apprehensions concerning his wife's association with Deronda, and both are related to the issue of his control over her. First, he is concerned about his reputation, on which his sense of masculinity depends: "The man who was not master in his own house courted the scorn of his male associates, as well as economic ruin and uncertain paternity" (Tosh, *A Man's Place* 3). He is aware that if his wife and Deronda are seen too often speaking together in hushed tones in quiet corners, people will talk: "Having taken on himself the part of husband, he was not going in any way to be fooled, or allow himself to be seen in a light that could be regarded as pitiable" (*DD* 585). Eve Sedgwick explains that "to cuckold is by definition a sexual act, performed on a man, by another man" (49). He cannot bear the thought of being placed in a subordinate position by and to Deronda, whom he clearly views as an inferior. More importantly, he fears that Deronda will gain authority over Gwendolen and will usurp his own: "Grandcourt himself was not jealous of anything unless it threatened his mastery—which he did not think himself likely to lose" (*DD* 325). There is a hint of uncertainty in his thoughts, which will only increase as Deronda becomes more of a fixture in his married life.

Grandcourt, however, misreads the influence that Deronda has over Gwendolen. The relationship between the two changes from one of possible romantic involvement to that of a very intimate, platonic friendship. Deronda's intimacy with Gwendolen allows

him to surmise that there is something amiss in the marriage: “He thought their exchange of looks as cold and official as if it had been a ceremony to keep up a charter” (*DD* 414). Returning to his need to save, he will become her confessor. His advice, however, to “try to care for what is best in thought and action” (*DD* 446) proves difficult for her. Ironically, one of the reasons she does not leave Grandcourt is that she feels a separation from her husband will also involve a one from Deronda: “The idea of herself separated from her husband, gave Deronda a changed, perturbing, painful place in her consciousness: instinctively she felt that the separation would be from him too” (*DD* 603). In fact, to walk away from her marriage would ostracize her from the social world in which she lives. Furthermore, she feels that Deronda would judge her harshly and sever his connection with her. As odd as it seems, her marital problems are cause for her to seek continually Deronda’s guidance and for him to come to her aid.

Having failed to remove the imagined threat of Deronda, Grandcourt takes the inferior position in removing himself and his wife from Deronda’s presence by running away on a yachting expedition to the Mediterranean. He feels that in doing so, he has successfully dealt with Deronda and re-established his mastery over Gwendolen—a satisfaction that proves to be only temporary when they encounter Deronda in Genoa. The unexpected appearance of his masculine nemesis unnerves him: “Grandcourt felt towards Gwendolen and Deronda as if he knew them to be in conspiracy against him” (*DD* 677). Grandcourt assumes that both of these “others” are attempting to usurp his power. He fears Deronda’s presence more than ever and decides that he will not allow Gwendolen out of his sight for one moment. Nevertheless, he does not realize that it is

not Deronda who is the threat; the real danger is Gwendolen, whom he has underestimated.

He misreads those hidden abilities that lie dormant within her: “Grandcourt was not likely to be infallible in his judgments concerning his wife who was governed by many shadowy powers, to him non-existent” (*DD* 555). Gwendolen attempts to warn him during an argument they have shortly after encountering Deronda: “It is all false . . . you don’t in the least imagine what is in my mind . . . and you had better leave me at liberty to speak with any one I like. It would be better for you” (*DD* 680). Despite this uncharacteristic outbreak from his wife, he fails to perceive the risk: “He had the courage and confidence that belong to domination, and he was at that moment feeling perfectly satisfied that he held his wife with bit and bridle” (*DD* 680). He displays this arrogance as they set out on what is to be their last boating trip, the locals finding the English couple to be “as good as a theatrical representation” and “a thing to paint” (*DD* 681). Such outward appearance though is a violent contrast to the “shadowy powers” within Gwendolen that were hidden from onlookers and even Grandcourt: “She was afraid of her own wishes, which were taking shapes possible and impossible, like a cloud of demon-faces. She was afraid of her own hatred, which under the cold iron touch that had compelled her to-day had gathered a fierce intensity” (*DD* 681). Her aims are figured in her dreams and wishes. Dorothea Barrett notes that “the knife that Gwendolen dreams of putting under her pillow is another instance of her aspirations to the male role, wishing to penetrate before she is penetrated” (*DD* 172). For Gwendolen, it was the force of her convictions that killed Grandcourt: “I knew no way of killing him there, but I did, I did kill him in my thoughts” (*DD* 695).

The relationship between Grandcourt and Gwendolen is a metaphor of battle. It begins at an archery meeting and continues throughout their marriage where Grandcourt attempts to assert his masculinity. However, in the end, it is Gwendolen who emerges as victorious, even though she is wracked with guilt and does not feel like a victor. She literally holds in her hands the ability to save him with the rope that he had so desperately called out for in his last moments: “And I held my hand, and my heart said, ‘Die!’” (*DD* 696). Furthermore, his death is not told by a genderless narrator but by Gwendolen herself. Her narration brings to mind the Wife of Bath’s famous lament: “Who peynted the leoun, tell me who?” The unstated answer is that it is always the victor who writes history. In recounting the final seconds of her husband’s life, she is the champion returning from battle. Whereas Grandcourt may have attained control over a small portion of her life, she has secured it over his life *and* death. In a final insult to Grandcourt, the details of his death are first narrated to Deronda, a male whom he had considered his inferior.

Deronda achieves masculinity and power through his relationship with Mordecai. Apart, neither Deronda nor Mordecai feel secure about their masculinities. It is only through their union that each comes to this confidence. With his physically weak body and lack of social power, Mordecai is the quintessential “other” in *Daniel Deronda*. He pursues a young man who can become the vessel for his beliefs to take seed and grow:

For many winters, while he had been conscious of an ebbing physical life, and a widening spiritual loneliness, all his passionate desire had concentrated itself in the yearning for some young ear into which he could pour his mind as a testament, some soul kindred enough to accept the

spiritual product of his own brief, painful life, as a mission to be executed.

(*DD* 472)

Mordecai's longing carries the sexual blurring that Sedgwick writes of when it comes to homosocial relationships. There are homoerotic overtones to much of the interchange between the two. Their relationship "forces eroticized alliances . . . and unseats heterosexuality as an original, primary, and autonomous form of desire" (Marcus 74). Mordecai will become like an older active male lover to a younger passive one. He has a set of desired masculine characteristics that this male must meet: "His face and frame must be beautiful and strong . . . his voice must flow with a full and easy current" (*DD* 472). The narrator describes him as perusing pictures and searching for men who fit his idealized image: "He had, both abroad and in England, looked at pictures as well as men, and in a vacant hour he had sometimes lingered in the National Gallery in search of paintings which might feed his hopefulness" (*DD* 472). He reads Deronda's body as possessing everything that he had long sought in terms of masculinity: "He saw a face and frame which seemed to him to realize the long-conceived type" (*DD* 479).

Mordecai is not deterred when Deronda informs him that he is not Jewish and does not know Hebrew. He is still convinced that Deronda is the long-awaited fulfillment of his desires. His yearnings influence Deronda who gradually begins to think that there must be "some strong relation . . . between me and this man, since he feels it so strongly" (*DD* 495). Deronda seeks out Mordecai to find out more. When he rows over, he finds Mordecai waiting for him on the banks of the river. The two return to the book shop where their meeting is described as a clandestine meeting of two lovers:

In ten minutes the two men, with as intense a consciousness as if they had been two undeclared lovers, felt themselves alone in the small gas-lit book-shop and turned face to face, each baring his head from an instinctive feeling that they wished to see each other fully. (*DD* 495)

Deronda submits to Mordecai: "I am not impatient. . . . I am ready to listen to whatever you may wish to disclose" (*DD* 496). In much of the conversation that follows, Deronda is the listener, surrendering himself to Mordecai's life, history, and ideas. Mordecai pours forth his passionate desires into the willing Deronda. However, he seeks much more from Deronda: "That is not enough. . . . You must be not only a hand to me, but a soul . . . . You will be my life: it will be planted afresh; it will grow. You shall take the inheritance" (*DD* 499-501). Mordecai's speech is sexual as it refers to him planting his seed into Deronda where it will grow and produce offspring.

The metaphorical act of sex between the men occurs at the Philosopher's Club, the group of "poor [Jewish] men given to thought" (*DD* 521) that Mordecai attends. It is significant that the "sexual act" occurs at this meeting because it is Deronda's initiation "into a homosocial brotherhood that reconciles the identity categories of 'Jew' and 'man'" (Press 306). During the meeting, the discourse turns to the discussion of a Jewish homeland where Mordecai emerges as the only supporter. As the other men raise objections, Deronda comes to Mordecai's defense, which feeds his passion and enables him to continue. We are told that it was not the first time that he had spoken of a Jewish homeland at the meetings, but this time was different because Deronda is there: "The dawn of fulfillment brought to his hope by Deronda's presence had wrought Mordecai's conception into a state of impassioned conviction, and he had found strength in this

excitement to pour forth the unlocked floods of emotive argument” (*DD* 538). The scene is sexualized as seen in the many terms used to describe Mordecai as having spent himself: “For he remained rapt and motionless” (*DD* 539) with Deronda waiting for him to recover. Press describes Mordecai’s Zionism as “the ejaculatory climax of a homosocial orgy staged for the initiation of Deronda into human brotherhood” (311). In the post-orgasmic scene that follows, Mordecai “look[s] up at Deronda . . . with a gaze full of reposing satisfaction” (*DD* 540). He has planted his seed into Deronda’s listening ear. He tells Deronda, “I shall live in you” (*DD* 543). Deronda receives it not as a passive lover, but as one willing to bear the child with whom he has been impregnated for he tells Mordecai, “everything I can in conscience do to make your life effective I will do” (*DD* 540). This metaphorical sexual act between the two men endows them with a sense of power that neither has experienced previously.

The joining of the two men is made possible through the female in the persons of Mirah and Leonora. In learning that Mirah is Mordecai’s sister, Deronda experiences a strong connection to Mordecai, and one that is overtly sexual: “The certainty that this was Mirah’s brother suffuse[d] his own strange relation to Mordecai with a new solemnity and tenderness [and he] felt his strong heart beating faster and his lips paling” (*DD* 543). For Mordecai, the homosocial relationship that exists between him and Deronda is far more important than any that exists between himself and Mirah or even between Deronda and Mirah. He warns Deronda to “not dwell on my sister more than is needful” (*DD* 573). Once Deronda has learned that he is a Jew, his primary thoughts turn to Mordecai while thoughts of Mirah are secondary:

He wanted now to be again with Mordecai, to pour forth instead of restraining his feeling, to admit agreement and maintain dissent, and all the while to find Mirah's presence without the embarrassment of obviously seeking it, to see her in the light of a new possibility. (*DD* 745)

When Deronda informs Mordecai and Mirah of his Jewishness, it is once again his association with Mordecai that is primary: "The two men clasped hands with a movement that seemed part of the flash from Mordecai's eyes, and passed through Mirah like an electric shock" (*DD* 748). Mirah here is the conduit by which the relationship between Mordecai and Deronda can be legitimized. Any possibility of something more with Mirah is instantly short-circuited when Mordecai claims Deronda as his own: "It has begun already—the marriage of our souls" (*DD* 751).

Furthermore Leonora is also a vessel by which the "marriage" between Mordecai and Deronda is made stronger.<sup>11</sup> Both Mordecai's and Leonora's bodies are physically weak and powerless. Deronda's is the body that they both use to exercise influence. In severing Deronda from his Jewish origins, she has attempted to subdue the legacy of her father, whose authority exists in the chest which haunts her and functions as more than just a container for her father's papers. It is, to borrow from Eve Sedgwick, a "structure for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power" (25). Bonnie Zimmerman has compared the chest to "the phallic instruments of certain cultures that only men may handle and play" ("Sacred Chest" 156). Leonore is rendered impotent by it. First, she realizes that she cannot destroy it as she had desired, telling Deronda, "it was difficult to burn; and burning a chest and papers looks like a shameful act" (*DD* 637). Secondly and

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<sup>11</sup>Bonnie Zimmerman argues that in addition to Mordecai being a better mate to Deronda, Mordecai is also a better mother than Alcharisi. See Zimmerman's "George Eliot's Sacred Chest of Language" (1993).

more importantly, she cannot hand it over directly to Deronda: “So loaded with male significance is this chest that the princess lacks the power to turn it over directly to her son” (Zimmerman, “Sacred Chest” 155-6). She must entrust it to her father’s friend, Joseph Kalonymos. Despite the removal, the chest still has dominance over her as images of her father torment her, echoing and enhancing her physical pain. The primary reason for summoning her son is to give him access to the chest is so that the images of her father may be replaced with those of Deronda. Although it is Kalonymos who actually transfers the chest to him, it is Mordecai to whom Deronda turns for unlocking its secrets: “I mean to leave it [the chest] with you, Mordecai, that you may help me to study the manuscripts . . . .We will study them together” (*DD* 748).

Consequently, Deronda’s true marriage is to Mordecai. It is a relationship that has been described more passionately and sexually than anything that has existed between him and Mirah. This marriage has given Deronda access to the masculinity that he has been searching for since childhood. He explains the significance of this relationship to Gwendolen: “I have been prepared for it by becoming intimate with a very remarkable Jew, whose ideas have attracted me so much that I think of devoting the best part of my life to some effort at giving them effect” (*DD* 802). Whereas it is normally through marriage to a woman that a man finds his higher aims, Deronda finds them through Mordecai. In marrying Mirah physically, Deronda is able to marry Mordecai psychologically.

George Eliot reconfigures ideas of masculinity and power in the homosocial relationship between Deronda and Mordecai. Both men have masculine and feminine traits. While Mordecai’s weak body is associated with the feminine in that it restricts his

actions in the social world, he possesses a phallic (masculine) ability that allows him to impregnate Deronda. This fertilization “feminizes” him, temporarily resulting in a transfer between the two. In receiving Mordecai’s ideas, he also becomes endowed with the phallic agent. He will do what Mordecai is unable to do—travel to Palestine to plant the seed. In addition, Mordecai attains Deronda’s physical and social advantage.

The death scene reiterates this exchange, expressed by Mordecai’s dying words: “Where thou goest, Daniel, I shall go. Is it not begun? Have I not breathed my soul into you? We shall live together” (*DD* 811). In fact, Mordecai must die in order for this transfer to be successful. As Bruce Robbins argues:

A prince, once wedded, would remain superior. A patron or mentor, however intent he may be on preserving his putative superiority, is structurally obliged to allow the possibility of final freedom and equality. If for no other reason, this is true because, having helped raised the protagonist up, he will then disengage from the protagonist’s life and very likely disappear from the plot. (2-3)

Mordecai’s strengths are wedded to those of Deronda. Both achieve power and masculinity that they had lacked previously. This “marriage” between the two men accomplishes what is denied to many of male-female couples in George Eliot’s novels: a true meeting of the minds. It is the one real companionate marriage in all of her novels.<sup>12</sup> Their relationship symbolizes the fulfillment of the Casaubon-Dorothea marriage, where Deronda is able to promise to continue Mordecai’s work—something that Dorothea cannot do.

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<sup>12</sup>The exceptions are Adam and Dinah (*Adam Bede*) and Fred and Mary and Will and Dorothea (*Middlemarch*).

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As stated earlier, the male characters in *Daniel Deronda* each encounter a crisis of masculinity. Neil McCaw argues that these individual characters collectively form a metaphor for “a nation in crisis,” explaining that “this anxiety is . . . embodied in a symbolic face-off between contrasting masculinities” (149). Klesmer, Grandcourt, and Deronda’s experiences add weight to this argument. Klesmer, regarded the least by society, is the one who remains in it.

Unlike his literary antecedents whose masculinities are questioned in the world of the novel (e.g., Seth Bede from *Adam Bede* and Philip Wakem from *The Mill on the Floss*), Klesmer is granted a full life. He does not find himself subordinated to the role of uncle, sent abroad, or exist only to haunt the margins of the text. He achieves masculinity and power without compromising his sense of self. He has always been a new man in terms of George Eliot’s alternative masculine plot because he did not possess those trappings of the old; it is society that has to recognize his significance. His character’s rise in the novel suggests that we need look beyond England for models of masculinity and adds validity to Deronda’s desire to “understand other points of view . . . and get rid of a merely English attitude” (*DD* 183).

Grandcourt’s aristocratic status is insufficient to save him. He fails miserably, similar to Tito Melema of *Romola* and Casaubon of *Middlemarch*. Yet, while we are sympathetic to Tito and Casaubon in that we understand their struggles and in them find glimpses of the human, no such compassion exists for Grandcourt. We find ourselves voicing Gwendolen’s thoughts for him to die. His death marks the irrevocable demise of

the aristocratic masculinity, one that George Eliot saw as problematic and beyond redemption.

Grandcourt's death, symbolizing the failure of the old, allows for the emergence of the new, embodied in Deronda, whose quest "ends" differently from those of George Eliot's previous major male characters. *Daniel Deronda* is her only novel that does not end with an epilogue or conclusion in which all the loose ends of the plot are tied up. Marianna Torgovnick refers to this type of ending as *tangential*, "one motivated by the author's wish to end his [her] novel with the sense that it could be continued" (13-14). Instead, the ending of *Daniel Deronda* is a new beginning. Deronda has yet to embark on his new life in Palestine. All that we know is that a new type of manhood has been defined and is poised to move into an unknown and unforeseeable future. Overall, the novel reveals doubts about English manhood. It is only the "foreign" men who thrive—Klemser in England and Deronda in Palestine.

Conclusion: George Eliot and the Ways of Being a Man: Alternative Manhood in *Silas Marner*

Felicia Bonaparte has asserted that “the question, which entails all others, to which Eliot addressed herself, is the perennial riddle of the Sphinx: What is man?” (*Will*, xii). From *Adam Bede* (1859) to *Daniel Deronda* (1876), George Eliot portrays the divided lives of her male characters—men who experience a “conflict between the competing demands of masculinity in the public sphere and private domestic affections” (Danahay 17). Their sense of masculinity is unstable and changes with the social and political landscapes of their times. George Eliot’s characters’ identities are never fixed and variables exist; rigid definitions will collapse when a person is placed in a different setting and under new circumstances. In all, George Eliot never answers the question, “what is man?” nor does she ever intend to. Instead, she presents us with situations that reveal the complexities of her characters and their identities within their respective societies.

Struggle is central to all of George Eliot’s novels and is experienced by all her characters. As this study has shown, her male characters express it through their attempts to fashion their masculinities. They imagine that masculinity is defined by a life of action in the public sphere, and this belief causes many of them to either neglect or devalue their private lives. Domestic life, and particularly marriage, imposes a different set of demands upon them, a reality that George Eliot’s novels repeatedly reveal and one that Dorothea comments upon: “There is something even awful in the nearness it brings” (*MM* 855). George Eliot’s novels address this closeness of male-female relationships and the effects that they have on a person’s sense of self. Her male characters strive to

balance their assumptions of masculinities with those of the establishment of marriage. However, as we determine in this dissertation, no single male character's experience of this masculinity/marriage dilemma is the same.

Moreover, each novel sets the stage for the next, simultaneously tearing down and reestablishing different ideas about masculinity and marriage in English society. A reader who expects that George Eliot would provide us with the one definitive answer—much in the vein of Casaubon's *Key* or Lydgate's primitive tissue—to what it means to be an English man will be sorely disappointed, for she presents *ways* of being a man. These are not universal or static; they are constantly being challenged and amended. Consequently, she exposes the complexity of masculinity long before scholars began to work in this field.

George Eliot's view is brilliantly summed up in *Silas Marne* (1861). Chronologically, it was published between *The Mill on the Floss* and *Romola*. However, unlike her other novels, it does not belong to a specific place or time, but is, as F.R. Leavis has famously described, "a moral fable." Furthermore, it belongs fittingly to a world beyond that of *Daniel Deronda*, for it not only addresses some of those same identity issues raised in her last novel, but also looks towards a new world—one that complicates further our ideas about masculinity.

Before Raveloe, Silas is torn between two competing demands: the masculine sphere represented by William Dane, "with whom he had long lived in such close friendship that it was the custom of their Lantern Yard brethren to call them David and Jonathan" (*SM* 10), and the domestic one, represented by Sarah, his intended bride. The masculine plot is frustrated when William betrays Silas, and the domestic one is thwarted

when Sarah breaks her engagement to Silas in order to marry William. This double betrayal symbolizes a failure of the triangulated desire, suggesting that the model that worked for Adam, Seth, and Dinah in *Adam Bede* and Deronda, Mordecai, and Mirah in *Daniel Deronda* either does not work or is no longer possible in the world of *Silas Marner*. Furthermore and most importantly, it allows for the development of a new way of being, one that Silas must create because no pattern of it exists.

Having been denied the traditional paths, Silas' presence in Raveloe is unsettling because he cannot be easily defined: "No one knew where wandering men had their homes or their origins; and how was a man to be explained unless you knew his father and mother?" (*SM* 5). Accounting for Silas is further complicated by his self-alienation from both men and women: "He sought no man or woman. . . and it was soon clear to the Raveloe lasses that he would never urge one of them to accept him" (*SM* 8). Refusing to accept either the public or private sphere, Silas must find an alternative route to manhood.

Silas first replaces it with gold. Money not only becomes his link to manhood, it also becomes him: "He began to think it was conscious of him, as his loom was, and he would on no account have exchanged those coins, which had become his familiars, for other coins with unknown faces" (*SM* 19). More than a companion, they are also his progeny: "[He] thought fondly of the guineas . . . as if they had been unborn children—thought of the guineas that were coming slowly through the coming years, through all his life" (*SM* 21).

*Silas Marner* also introduces a new requirement for masculinity that we have not seen in George Eliot's other novels. Due to its isolation from other places, service to

community is important in Raveloe. Citizens do not travel, and except for Silas's originating from Lantern Yard, there is no mention of any places beyond the town's borders. It is a world where the web metaphor of *Middlemarch* is made real. In distancing himself from this public life, Silas sets himself as "other." Donald Hall associates Silas's obsession with his gold to a masturbatory instinct<sup>1</sup> where we often see Silas "alone in his hovel at night, caressing his coins, fingering them repeatedly, loving them intensively" (*SM* 182-183). It leads to what Hall identifies as the "primary ill" of the novel that must be cured: "That of pleasing oneself by oneself" (184). Since Silas's gold (i.e., masturbatory instincts) does not serve the public good,<sup>2</sup> this alternative manhood also fails. Ironically, his gold is stolen.<sup>3</sup>

Silas goes to the Rainbow in the hopes that the men there will help him find his missing gold. For him, the pub represents masculine wisdom: "The Rainbow, in Marner's view. . . was the place where he was likely to find the powers and dignities of Raveloe, and where he could most speedily make his loss public" (*SM* 45). When the landlord asks Silas "in a conciliatory tone, what's lacking to you? What's your business here?" (*SM* 55), it is an invitation for him to join the world of Raveloe. However, the "lacking to you" is also a reference to something other than gold that Silas is missing; it is at once both manhood and community. In narrating his story to the men in the pub, Silas not only welcomes this invitation but the men also accept him. He is no longer an outsider,

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<sup>1</sup> Masturbation was a social concern for the English in the nineteenth century. Advice and medical literature of the day warned against "spermatorrhea," a disease that was caused supposedly by masturbation. Furthermore, epilepsy, of which Silas suffers, was linked to masturbation. See Tim Hitchcock and Lawrence Stone for further discussion of the hysteria surrounding masturbation in England. See also Jeff Nunokawa for an analysis of masturbation in *Silas Marner*.

<sup>2</sup> Also, in hoarding his money, Silas is not spending it; therefore, he does not contribute to the financial success of the town.

<sup>3</sup> Dunstan's act of stealing Silas's gold also goes against community. His death appears to be his punishment.

but becomes one of them as the men offer to help him locate his manhood and provide him with a community.

The sharing of his story provides Silas a pleasure that replaces the self-absorbed one of his coins. Yet, his grief threatens his sanity:

He every now and then moaned low, like one in pain: it was the sign that his thoughts had come round again to the sudden chasm, . . . And all the evening, as he sat in his loneliness by his dull fire, he . . . moaned very low—not as one who seeks to be heard. (*SM* 77)

Despite not wanting to be heard, his sorrows are, and the self-alienation that had marked his fifteen years in Raveloe is no longer possible as his neighbors begin to show kind feelings towards him in various ways—from bringing him Christmas dishes to listening to his personal tragedy—all in an effort to console him. No one is able to find Silas' missing gold, which is symbolic in that the attachment he had towards it was unhealthy.

Ultimate consolation, however, comes when he finds a child asleep on his hearth. Silas had expected that the gold would mysteriously be returned to him just as it had inexplicably been removed. In this state of mind, it is understandable that he would mistake the girl "with soft yellow rings all over its head" (*SM* 110) for the gold. The child coming to Silas so close after Christmas also affects him powerfully. He moves from thinking that the child is his dead sister to the belief "that this child was somehow a message come to him" (*SM* 111). When the girl awakens and the mother is not there, Silas is first forced and then assumes willingly the role of mother:

The child had awaked, and Marner stooped to lift it on his knee. It clung round his neck, and burst louder and louder into that mingling of

inarticulate cries with 'mammy' by which little children express the bewilderment of waking. (*SM* 111)

As Silas had gone to the Rainbow to make his loss known, so he goes to the Red House, Squire Cass's home, to announce his gain. While the Rainbow represents the masculine sphere, the Red House represents a possible domestic one. When it is suggested that he leave the child there, he refuses and impulsively decides to keep her: "His speech, uttered under a strong sudden impulse, was almost like a revelation to himself: a minute before, he had no distinct intention about the child" (*SM* 115). Furthermore, when Godfrey Cass assumes that Silas will take the child to the parish, Silas responds by stating that since the child's mother is dead and there is no father present, the child, like him, is alone and he will keep her. For the girl, Silas has become associated with mother: "The child . . . began to cry and call for 'mammy,' though always clinging to Marner" (*SM* 116).

Whereas it was mostly men who had given him sympathy when it came to his missing gold (a false manhood), it is the women who give him courage and support in his role as mother. They provide him with maternal wisdom: "Notable mothers . . . [and] lazy mothers were equally ready with their suggestions: the notable chiefly telling him what he had better do, and the lazy ones being emphatic in telling him what he would never be able to do" (*SM* 120). Dolly Winthrop, a "notable mother," accepts his role as mother as if it were the most natural relationship between man and child. When she brings him some of her son's old clothes<sup>4</sup> for the girl, Dolly notices the fondness the child has for him and insists that Silas dress her: "She wants to go o' your lap, I'll be bound.

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Stearns notes, "the dress of a young male was distinctively feminine, and would remain so in many social classes well into the twentieth century" (34).

Go, then: take her, Master Marner; you can put the things on, and then you can say as you've done for her from the first of her coming to you" (*SM* 122).

Furthermore, while he is dressing Eppie in the clothes of a young male, he also is donning figuratively the female clothing of mother. Silas' new set of clothing is a return to boyhood, where he is once again associated with the feminine. However, this blurring of gender does not present a major issue for the citizens of Raveloe. When he appeared at the Rainbow for that first time, Mr. Macey was telling a story of the old Rector, Mr. Drumlow, who when performing a wedding ceremony mixed up the vows: "But when he come to put the questions, he put 'em by the rule o' contrary, like, and he says, "Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded wife?" . . .and then he says, "Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded husband" (*SM* 50). For Mr. Macey, it is not so much that Mr. Drumlow confused the vows, but that "nobody took any notice on it" (*SM* 50). The landlord also has a story that emphasizes the lack of gender distinctions. In talking of seeing ghosts, he uses the analogy of his wife who has a weak sense of smell and thus argues that some people might have a sense for seeing ghosts while others do not. What his story emphasizes is that people have different sensibilities and what might be natural for one is not necessarily natural for another.

The citizens of Raveloe understand that a person can easily perform a role that has been traditionally associated with one gender without losing the other as evident in one of the comments that Silas receives concerning his motherhood:

Why there isn't many lone men 'ud ha' been wishing to take up with a little un like that: but I reckon the weaving makes you handier than men as do

out-door work—you're partly as handy as a woman, for weaving comes next to spinning. (*SM* 130)

Silas is both mother and father to Eppie, and he provides a complete domestic presence for her. In *Family Fortunes* (1987), Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall write that "mothers were to be relied upon for personal care and emotional rather than economic support" (335). While Silas provides Eppie with all three, it is the personal and emotional ones that are strongest. He takes on "that presence of the wife and mother which is the fountain of wholesome love and fear" (*SM* 24), something that is absent in the Red House, "where the hearth had no smiles, and where the daily habits were not chastised by the presence of household order" (*SM* 31). We can equate this lack of a domestic presence with the unstable lives of Godfrey and Dunstan.

Although Godfrey's marriage to Nancy provides him with the domestic comfort and space lacking in his youth, it is not complete because it is a home without children. Consequently, the discovery of Dunstan's remains and Silas's gold prompts Godfrey to disclose that he is Eppie's biological father. However, given the opportunity and choice to become daughter to Godfrey and Nancy, Eppie chooses to remain with Silas because of the bond between them: "He's took care of me and loved me from the first, and I'll cleave to him as long as he lives, and nobody shall ever come between him and me" (*SM* 172). Her statement alludes to a maternal bond, one that makes the two of them inseparable because she is as much a part of Silas as he is a part of her. Although Nancy feels that she should accept their offer, her choice of words is revealing: "It's natural you should cling to those who've brought you up, . . . but there's a duty you owe to your lawful father" (*SM* 172). Using "lawful" to describe Godfrey and "natural" to describe Silas, Nancy,

unconsciously, gives more weight to the bond between Silas and Eppie than that of Godfrey and Eppie. Godfrey's "choosing" to be involved in Eppie's life while Silas being "naturally" in her life is an illustration of Davidoff and Hall's argument concerning the difference between fathers and mothers: "While for fathers involvement with their children's lives was a matter of choice, it was regarded as natural for women to take up the whole duty of motherhood" (335). It is also this relationship that the citizens of Raveloe view as Silas's gift: "He had brought a blessing on himself by acting like a father to a lone motherless child" (*SM* 182). He has not only acted like a father, but he has also provided Eppie with a maternal presence which is echoed in Eppie's remarks to him as they go home to the Stone-pits after her wedding: "Oh father . . . what a pretty home ours is! I think nobody could be happier than we are" (*SM* 183). He has created a home for Eppie, a maternal and paternal sphere filled with acceptance and love. Dianne Sadoff posits that nearly all of George Eliot's fictional fathers fail because "they misinterpret the signs and symbols around themselves" (81); Silas, however, reads accurately those of motherhood.

While Silas's experiences some of the same struggle as many of George Eliot's other male characters, unlike them, he avoids both the masculine and marriage plot. Instead, he chooses a third, unnamed path that defies easy definition. It appears to be a maternal one, but being a "mother" does not make him a man. He, like Deronda and Mordecai, embodies both the male and the female. However, the difference is that this third gender is accepted and embraced by the citizens of Raveloe, the text, and its narrator. Unlike Deronda, he does not have to leave to create a new world.

Silas is the culmination of the struggle that Marianne Hirsch identified in *Daniel Deronda*: “Gwendolyn and Daniel, both occupying (and competing for) the position of the novel’s protagonist, enact the battle between Eliot’s own self-representation as Marian and as George” (70). Implicit in Hirsch’s statement is the conflict between the female (Marian) and the male (George). George Eliot’s “gender dysfunction,” as U.C. Knoepfmacher describes it, “began at an early stage of her emotional development as she turned from a precarious mother love and an identification with sisters and female teachers to a strong attachment to father, brother, and other father-surrogates” (131). Marian is the private/feminine side of that woman who had a loving and long relationship with George Henry Lewes and became “mother” to his three sons; while George is that public/masculine side, the author who through her novels is able to act in the public sphere. This conflict is played out in the lives of George Eliot’s male characters, and *Silas Marner* is its resolution. Biologically male, Silas’s third gender allows for a seamless integration where a life of action and inaction, public and private, father and mother, and man and woman all exist in the one body.

*Silas Marner*, like George Eliot’s novels from *Adam Bede* to *Daniel Deronda*, is about that question of “what is man.” In his biography of George Eliot, Frederick Karl writes that her “men must re-examine and in some instances transcend themselves” (xxi). It is not only the male characters who must go through this re-examination but also her readers. The novels challenge us to reconsider our definitions of English masculinities and to realize that there can be more than one way of being a man. George Eliot did not write of what a man should be, but what men are in all their diverse masculine identities.

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