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## Fear of diminishing fortunes in Middlemarch

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**Fear of Diminishing Fortunes  
In *Middlemarch***

By

Mirella Scarvaci

A Thesis submitted as Partial Fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Award of

Bachelor of Arts (Honours),  
English

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Date of Submission: 30<sup>th</sup> October 1998

## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

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## Abstract

This thesis offers an interpretation of George Eliot's novel, Middlemarch, which focuses on the historical qualities of Eliot's writing. The thesis invites the need to challenge earlier interpretations of the novel and to develop new theories about the text. The main focus of this research is to show Eliot's presentation of the fear of diminishing fortunes within Middlemarch society. Historical materials are used to verify Eliot's portrayal of the past in Middlemarch. To supplement this, secondary historical sources with a traditional approach will be challenged by recent historical material to ascertain whether Eliot's Middlemarch is a true portrayal of the fear of diminishing fortunes in mid Victorian England.

The thesis then argues that the traditional conservative element in society contributed to the stability and eliminated the fear of diminishing fortunes. Traditionalism is shown to govern Middlemarch society. Furthermore, the relationship between industrialization and the fear of diminishing fortunes is assessed. In addition, the thesis contends that there existed a relationship between classes. Conclusions are drawn on the manner in which the author establishes the existence of a fear of diminishing fortunes in the society of Middlemarch.

## Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or contain any defamatory material.

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## Introduction

Ashton (1996: 319) asserts that Middlemarch is a "successful historical novel". Bellringer (1993: 104) states that Middlemarch "encompasses national social trends". Middlemarch is a representation of the past for it deals with the reform Bill of 1832, industrialization, the arrival of the railway, scientific and medical revolution, inheritance laws, class and the fear of diminishing fortunes. The 'fear of diminishing fortunes' concerns upward and downward social mobility, especially the fear of moving downward in class.

One literary study by Daiches (1996: 1068) demonstrates that Eliot portrayed the relationship between town and country, between landed families living in declining provincial towns where farmer, tradesman, banker and politician collided with each other in a world of dividing interests. In Middlemarch Eliot explores the progressive conservative society to an expanding industrial society. It was the beginning of an era of change. Similarly, Stoneman (1979: 114) asserts that the characters have an economic interest.

Critical interpretation of George Eliot's novel has centred on a historical path. Early interpretations centre on the historical comment made by the novel, which acts as a representation of the past. In summarising



recent criticism of the novel, the body of interpretation is divided between two mutually exclusive conclusions of Thompson's (1969: 299), theory of easy upward social mobility or Stone (1995) and Beckett's (1988) opposing viewpoints on a closed elite.

A member of the first group, Thompson (1969), studies the history of industrialization and the impact on the landed establishment and the business classes. Thompson (1969) demonstrates that there was easy upward social mobility in mid Victorian Britain and a merging of the classes. This study of the past implies there was a fear of diminishing fortunes among the landed establishment for, in the face of change, the bourgeois class found easy upward social mobility into the aristocracy. Yet, in Lovesey's (1991) interpretation of the novel, Lovesey declares that the novel epitomises conservatism and tradition.

Other critics suggest that there was an absence of an open elite. Both Stone (1995) and Beckett (1988) suggest that upward social mobility into the ranks of the landed elite was not as easy as was believed. In fact, even though upward social mobility did exist, it was limited to only a few. Downward social mobility was far more frequent. This thesis will apply these views to Eliot's construction of the fear of diminishing fortunes in Middlemarch society.

Other researchers into the novel's historical dimension use theories of Realism as an interpretative device. Jenkins (1979: 5) reports that realism "is an artistic mode" in which the novelist offers an illusion of reality and an appearance of objectivity. Blake (1989: 78) noted that, by the 1850s, 'Realism' referred to the establishing of the ordinary, and not a reflection. Thus Chase (1991: 24) asserts that in Middlemarch anything but a total representation would distort the realist project, for Eliot records all the diverse conditions of the historical moment. As this thesis will demonstrate, Eliot uses Realism to identify the contrast between static and progressive society.

More recently, literary perspectives of the novel have attempted to interpret the relationship between the novel as a literary artifact of the past and history itself. This thesis will demonstrate the strong relationship between literature and history. Mason (1971: 417) states that "not only is it about the past, but it has that further characteristic we expect of a historical novel of being decidedly and explicitly about the past". As well as being decidedly about the past from the twentieth-century view point, the novel's relation to the period is historical for Eliot set the novel in an earlier period from which she was writing.

Unfortunately, many literary analyses of the novel neglect the historical basis on which the novel is founded, and therefore ignore the elements of social mobility in the novel, as Stone (1995) and Beckett (1988)

describe them in their original theory of an 'open elite'. In order to refute Thompson's (1969) claim of easy upward social mobility, this thesis will employ Stone (1995) and Beckett's (1988) theory, which is historically based, to argue that the meaning of the novel is derived from the manner in which Eliot realistically portrays the temporal, social and political conditions in which the novel takes place.

The originality of this research is due, in part, to the complete absence of critical attention by theories to the historical dimension of a 'fear of diminishing fortunes' towards Middlemarch. This thesis will demonstrate how the novel invites this interpretation, by emphasizing its openness to the many forms of historical research methodologies. The questioning of traditional theories will be attempted, specifically the theory that upward social mobility was easily attainable.

In order to form interpretations of the fear of diminishing fortunes in Middlemarch, this thesis will argue that Eliot moves beyond the realist vision of a mere portrayal of the past and as George Eliot states that "I hope there is nothing that will be seen to be irrelevant to my design, which is to show the gradual action of ordinary causes rather than exceptional" (in Swann 1972: 280). The thesis will illustrate that it is Eliot's portrayal of the ordinary that is the truest portrayal of the past.

In order to verify this new perspective, this thesis will utilise historical and literary research methodologies to propose that the fear of diminishing fortunes was minimal, for upward social mobility was minimal. In Section One, historical research will explore the conservatism of Victorian society and the similarities in Middlemarch provincial society. This thesis will illustrate that, through Eliot's realist portrayal of a conservative society, there was a preservation of tradition which established limited upward social mobility and minimal fear of diminishing fortunes. The thesis will demonstrate that the traditional elements of society were used to maintain and preserve the conservatism of society.

The second section will conclude with a study of the intrusions in society due to industrialization. This section will show that industrialization did not create an open elite. There was no increase in upward social mobility to warrant any fear. This section will also demonstrate that there was an increase of imitation by the bourgeois classes that created the image of an open elite and, unforeseeably, the fear that interpenetrated the landed establishment.

Karl (1995) and Best (1971) agree that upward social mobility existed because of industrialization. The analysis of Middlemarch, as a reflection of the past, will show that upward social mobility was not as easily obtainable as society believed it to be. This theory will be

supported by the historians, Stone (1995), Beckett (1988) and Rubinstein (1983), who argue that the caste system was closed and that imitation of the landed elite by the new wealthy created the myth of an 'open elite'. The basis of the thesis is to challenge traditional theories about upward social mobility and to support the new theories emerging.

Section Three will outline concepts of intermarriage based on love or wealth, and demonstrate how Middlemarch invites such a reading. In particular, this portion will emphasize how the novel corresponds to the concepts of intermarriage as an influencing factor in the fear of diminishing fortunes.

The thesis will centre on a textual analysis of the novel to challenge traditional theories about upward social mobility. What has been neglected in previous research in upward and downward social mobility is a literary context as a reflection of the past to authenticate the theories of upward and downward social mobility. This thesis will provide the literary context, for the novel itself is history. It tells of how people lived, their manners, their conflicts, their errors and their heroism. Some novels look like "real" history, a factual social record, but as Dorothy Van Ghent (1953: 13) stresses, there is a need to carefully define the characterizing differences between novels and history.

## Section 1: Conservatism of Provincial Society

During the Victorian period provincial society, which is exemplified in Eliot's novel by the small country town of Middlemarch, exhibited intense conservatism. It was in fact the provincialism of Middlemarch society which led to its intense conservatism, and was illustrated by the traditional and unprogressive principles of the older generation of Middlemarch society. Sir James Chettam and Mr Brooke represent the traditional, conservative element in provincial Middlemarch society, and it is through these characters that George Eliot depicts the deep conservatism of a provincial society.

The conservative nature of a Provincial society applies to the way in which society functions according to the principles of tradition and conventionalism. George Eliot portrayed, by highlighting Middlemarch provincial society, the traditional social ideals by which conservative provincial society lived. The traditional social ideals in Victorian society, illustrated in Middlemarch society, include primogeniture, patrilineal descent, inheritance, entail, strict settlement, patronage and deference. These traditional social ideals contributed to the stability and tradition of society by preserving the position of the landed elite. In Middlemarch, these ideals aid in the preservation of the positions of Mr Brooke, Dorothea, Celia and Sir James Chettam. However, another

view was that at the same time, the traditional social ideals caused instability in society by causing the middle classes to envy the upper classes, so that they might find a means of rising up the social ladder. As people moved upwards, others were moved downwards. It was the new threat of the rising middle class which created a fear among the conservative upper class that their positions, status and wealth would diminish and the balance of power would shift into the hands of the middle class. A fear of diminishing fortunes in Victorian society, which is exemplified in Middlemarch society, means a fear of diminishing status and position in society. It is these two conflicting historical views between the function of the social ideals that will be applied to Middlemarch to ascertain whether Eliot's depiction of Victorian society in Middlemarch is a realist projection.

George Eliot was considered in her own time to be an unconventional woman who, as a novelist, upheld convention in her works (Rogers 1987: 376). Eliot was often tabooed as a member of society due to the nature of her relationship with George Henry Lewes (Blake 1989: 55). She lived with him out of wedlock against society's standards of matrimony. There was an absence of any qualities of convention, order and conservatism in her life. Despite Eliot's personal unconventionality, her fiction reveals a conservative attitude towards female roles. Rather than demanding new patterns of female behaviour in her fiction, she asserts traditional values. Her own

experience no doubt heightened her awareness of the conflict between conventionalism and revolt. Eliot was also aware of the penalties, as well as the rewards, of actively pursuing an unorthodox lifestyle (Foster 1985: 186). She was shunned from 'polite' society by her family and friends. In asserting traditional values, the novel supports the argument that Eliot's work is a realistic portrayal of Victorian society.

Eliot was the product of a conservative environment which emphasized the traditional ideals of kinship and respectability. She was torn between the opposing ideas that she could not be a dutiful daughter and independent woman. This originated in her alienation from her father and brother over her apostasy, the renunciation of her faith, and over her union with George Henry Lewes. Only after her marriage to John Cross in May 1880, was she able to restore her relationship with her brother and return to society's convention of normality (Foster 1985: 186) and conservatism. It was not until she was sixty that society accepted her for marrying Cross. As a result of her own experience, in Middlemarch Eliot projects a realist dimension of Victorian society and her female characters accept society's conventions about marriage.

It was Eliot's relationship with Lewes that strengthened her conservatism towards women's social and sexual roles (Foster 1985: 187). Eliot was viewed as a naturalistic novelist, for she presented an



observant picture of ordinary life (Rogers 1987: 377). She depicted conventional society. Eliot's careful emphasis on the depictions of character, social setting and physical background was based on her personal observation. Her portrayal emphasized realism, which was a dominant trend in post romantic literature (Mosse 1974: 76). The study of provincial life in the town of Middlemarch is based on Coventry (Roberts 1993: 231). George Eliot is a novelist describing middle England. By 'middle England', as Ashton (1996: 6) notes, Eliot not only refers to the geography but also to the society in terms of being socially and politically middling, engaging qualities of quietness, conservatism, decency but at the same time being narrow. This applies particularly to the landed class represented by Mr Brooke and Sir James Chettam's conservatism, but it also applies to the middle classes which is indicative of the Vincy family for their imitation of the conservative, narrow aspects of society. This led to a desire of the middle classes to move up the social ladder into the conservative and traditional sphere of society and created a fear among the landed elite of a possible and accessible easy upward social mobility, and escalated into a fear of diminishing fortunes.

Born and raised in England, George Eliot was brought up in a society that was directed by tradition. Forms of behaviour and attitudes towards state, government and church were governed by traditional values which were based on lineage, birth, education and family status.

Adherence to the conventional values of past history, rather than individual responses, governed society. Within traditional society, Karl (1995: 6) observes, was embedded a rigid class system which disallowed mobility, but the advent of industrialization loosened class lines. It was this adherence to the conventional values of past history which dominated the way society was governed and preserved the positions of the landed elite. In Middlemarch, the maintenance of the conventional values of the past dominated Middlemarch society. Mr Brooke and Sir James Chettam are totally moulded by the standards of the gentry and aristocratic lifestyles. They both own property, country seats, rent out land, believe in the conventions of primogeniture and inheritance and advocate the preservation of the landed elite, especially through the union of marriage. Above all, they both advocate a closed caste system. However, Middlemarch highlights the arrival of industrialization through the coming of the railway and the emerging bourgeois classes, and the creation of an 'open elite'.

In Victorian society, the landed elite were identified through their size of wealth, their style of life, their inherited right to compete for access to offices and their possession of a sizeable establishment. The offices included administrative duties and public service which enabled access to the exercise of authority. The landed elite, according to Stone (1995: 41), were an elite of wealth, status and power. Greene (1970: 34) states that "the power of the peerage stemmed from the rank itself,

which was only a symbol, but, as with untitled men, from political success and the ability to accumulate money and property". As the best of landlords, Semmel (1994: 92) says Sir James Chettam epitomizes the patriarchal ideal of traditional society, for Chettam is a baronet who possesses all the qualities of the landed elite. Mr Brooke is a country gentleman who also possesses wealth, status, a country house and holds the position of magistrate in Middlemarch. It is these qualities of the landed elite which helped maintain the position and status required of Mr Brooke and Sir James Chettam. Thus, Middlemarch seems to conform to Stone's assertion that the ideals of society contributed to the tradition of society by preserving the position of the landed elite, Mr Brooke and Sir James Chettam.

Inheritance, Beckett (1988: 58) ventures, was given a particular significance as a result of the evolution of primogeniture, strict settlement, and the system of entails. During the Victorian period, the wealthy landed elite were preoccupied with attempting to devise methods for the preservation and tenure of country seats. The seats would be passed on to the next generation, in accordance with the principle of primogeniture in tail male. The tenure and preservation of a country seat represented an observable symbol of family continuity. Stone (1995: 45) explains that there were two types of inheritance: the direct male inheritance from father to son or grandson; and indirect inheritance within the family, whereby inheritance was passed through

the male or female lines to close or distant kin. The word 'seat' represented the country house, for it was a place where one was seated. Stone (1995: 46) notes that the word 'house' tended to mean lineage and kin, the ancestors, the living kinsmen and the future generations of descendants. The Quarterly Review (1867: 243) states that the history of English tenures has shown that the law of primogeniture and entail, "to bequeath or settle a landed estate in favour of one son," has succeeded in the past. Any fear of diminishing fortunes expressed by the landed elite was quelled by the unprogressive and conventional ideals of society. The fear of diminishing fortunes was also a fear of the new progressive society emerging among the middle classes, which desired to rise up the social ladder. The landed elite tried to block attempts by the middle classes to rise up the social ladder by turning back to their conservative and orthodox principles of inheritance, entail and primogeniture. Evidence of this is suggested in Middlemarch, when Mr Brooke excludes Rosamond from the dinner party with all his friends, for she was not from the privileged classes. For example:

For Mr Brooke...would not have chosen that his nieces should meet the daughter of a Middlemarch manufacturer (60).

In excluding Rosamond from the social gathering, Mr Brooke is blocking her attempt to move up the social ladder. The aristocratic and gentry circle was a tight, exclusive one where, as Gerard (1994: 16) says, membership relied on rank, pedigree, connections and

patronage. Mr Brooke endeavours to dissociate the Vincys from polite society. Mr Brooke feared diminishing fortunes, for it would mean a loss of privilege, status and wealth. His manoeuvre to quell the fear was to dissociate himself from the problem.

The Quarterly Review (1826: 552) specifies that there are different ways of acquiring real property including "by descent; by the rights of marriage; by disposition, by deed or will". In Middlemarch, Mr Brooke does not have a son, a direct male heir to whom to pass on his fortune and estate. Mr Brooke has to rely on indirect patrilineal descent. For example:

If Dorothea married and had a son, that son would inherit Mr Brooke's estate, presumably worth about three thousand a-year-a-rental which seemed wealth to provincial families (3).

Mr Brooke's inheritance is passed through an indirect line so that Dorothea's future son is Mr Brooke's heir. This system of inheritance was used to secure the family seat, protect the family name and preserve the family lineage for future generations.

Primogeniture was the fundamental principle of inheritance and the medium to enforce it was the entail. Entail was a law which settled the succession of an estate upon the descendants of an individual owner. The legal mechanism, Stone (1995: 48) records, turned the present owner into a tenant for life, who was a trustee for the transferral of the patrimony to ensuing generations. For Mr Brooke, the entail settled his

estate upon Dorothea's son, his descendant and heir. Sir James Chettam's estates are settled upon his son and heir. Eliot depicts the entry into the landed elite as closed and preserved by the traditional social ideals of society. This runs contrary to the theory of a fear of diminishing fortunes.

The 'strict settlement' was a device developed from 1650 which enabled landowners to secure the heir and turn him into a tenant for life. The strict settlement engaged three generations, including unborn children. The terms of the strict settlement protected the patrimony of the eldest son of the marriage and upon the failure to produce a son, the preserved patrimony would be passed on to the next or closest male relative. The strict settlement secured the bride's jointure or pension if she became a widow and provided financial arrangements for any daughters or younger sons. The terms of the strict settlement, continues Stone (1995: 48), were arranged by will on the death of the father, or when the heir reached twenty-one, or upon the heir's marriage as a result of transactions between the fathers or guardians of the bride and groom. This, Beckett (1988: 59) explains, was to avoid an estate falling into the hands of a life tenant with full powers of disposal. Strict Settlement was believed to have enabled families to hold owned property together and to encourage accumulation. Strict settlement, Beckett (1988: 60) continues, was believed to be a "deliberate invention of the aristocracy to preserve the land in the

hands of the few, at the expense...of the community at large". The Quarterly Review (1848: 183) states that the terms of the strict settlement are "repeated from generation to generation". According to Stone (1995: 50), the terms of the settlement determined beyond dispute who was, and who was not, the heir. If the settlement was arranged properly it reduced family altercations over inheritance. In Middlemarch, Lady Chettam is a dowager who as Tulloch (1997: 440) explains, is 'a widow with a title or property derived from her late husband' and is provided with a pension under the terms of the strict settlement. Under the strict settlement, Sir James Chettam is a tenant for life and the patrimony of his unborn son is protected. Eliot's presentation of Middlemarch society as a microcosm of Victorian provincial society corresponds to the historical evidence. Thus, Eliot has accomplished a realist presentation of Victorian society in Middlemarch.

The most common way for a man to gain entry and membership into the landed elite was by inheritance from an aristocratic relative. In some cases, patrilineal male descent was not available, so inheritance had to pass through a woman, priority being given to a daughter and her husband, sister, aunt or matrilineal cousin. In this case, Stone (1995: 66) notes, the family name would disappear and family continuity would inevitably discontinue. In Middlemarch, Dorothea and Celia inherited "seven hundred a-year each from their parents" (2).

Dorothea "was regarded as an heiress" (2), for her son would inherit Mr Brook's estate as well as his name so that the family name would be preserved.

Stone argues that the tradition of marriage and inheritance, established by older families, was used to preserve their positions. Like Stone, Beckett (1988: 17) argues that "entrance into the aristocracy was far from easy, and penetrating the uppermost reaches took careful planning, considerable good fortune and, above all, patience". When Sir Chettam chooses a partner in marriage he does so with caution to secure and preserve his wealth, status and lineage, for future generations. He finally chooses Celia Brooke who occupies a position in his social sphere as the niece of a country gentleman who possesses both wealth and status. There is no evidence in Middlemarch to suggest that there were successful attempts to move into the ranks of the landed elite. Indeed Middlemarch does suggest that there were successful attempts to move into the ranks of the middle class, but overall social mobility was not easily achievable. Therefore, Middlemarch complies with Stone and Beckett's views on social mobility.

Beckett (1988: 16) asserts that, in English society there was an obsession with rank and a belief that upward social mobility was attainable for anyone, but the most distinctive feature of the aristocracy



was the ease of exit for younger sons, for they automatically descended into the gentry and were only given a courtesy title of 'lord' for themselves and not for their children. For the rest, the only status available was that of a gentleman. Younger sons did not have automatic claim to offices, including the armed forces, law and church and, with the development of the strict family settlement, younger sons received a cash payment to set themselves up in society. Opportunities in the professions, Beckett (1988: 23) explains, were increasing so that the church, law and armed forces served as an advantageous escape. If James Chettam were to have future children they would move down into the gentry.

Thus, perhaps Middlemarch is not an acceptance of the view that the rising middling class gained entry into the ranks of the landed elite, but instead suggests that the entry into the ranks was far from easy. Mr Brooke, Sir James Chettam, and Casaubon abide by the conventions and traditions of the landed elite, thus preventing any attempts made by the bourgeois classes to rise up the social ladder.

Land, argues Beckett (1988: 44), represented wealth, status, stability and continuity. In Middlemarch Mr Brooke's land offers him a high position in society and wealth through rentals, as well as securing the social status of his heir, Dorothea's son, thus securing the continuity of the family name. The middle class believed that if they could obtain

land, they could obtain wealth, status and rank and automatically rise up the social ladder. The myth of easy upward social mobility is more complex and has been shown by the historians, Stone and Beckett, to be hampered by the traditional and conservative pieties of provincial society. Even the historian, Rubinstein (1986: 203), argues that "the notion that Britain's landed elite is hereditary and virtually closed is certainly true, as of course one might expect, given the nature of British landownership, its titled aristocracy and primogeniture". Middlemarch suggests that there is downward mobility from the aristocracy, for Mrs Cadwallader moves downwards, but there is no evident move upwards into the ranks of the gentry and aristocracy from the middle classes.

Deference and patronage were also qualities of conservative provincial society. According to Thompson (1969: 184), the nature of a deferential society was the respect that the landed classes were accustomed to receive from the community. The social basis of deference to the landed classes was the acceptance of aristocratic authority and the economic dependence of farmers, servants, and the labouring poor on the patronage of individual owners. Casaubon and Mr Brooke provided patronage to Will. The Garths give deference to James Chettam, for he is their landlord. Therefore, this assures Chettam that his position in society is secured, for the working and lower classes abide by the conventions and conservatism of society. For Chettam, there was no need to fear diminishing fortunes.

Patronage and deference were a means of preserving the conservative aspects of a provincial society.

The problem escalating in the nineteenth century, was the imitation of the landed elite by the new wealthy and which created the idea of an 'open elite', and easy upward social mobility. The new wealthy classes imitated the landed elite by attaining sizeable establishments which created a fear among the landed elite of diminishing fortunes. In order to ward off the challenge of the new wealthy classes, Thompson (1969: 188) ventures, the landed elite were obliged to increase the size of their own retinues. Eliot demonstrates that there were attempts to move upwards through imitation but there was no mass movement upwards into the landed elite. Rosamond and Lydgate are only imitators of the privileged classes, for they imitate the landed elite by buying everything on loan. There was a conflict between the old world endurance of a conservative provincial society and the new world complication. The instability of the new society emerging as a result of industrialization was considered to be an intrusion into the conservative provincial society, and this created the fear of diminishing fortunes among the landed elite.

## Section 2: Intrusions into society due to Industrialization

The rising intrusion of the bourgeois class emerged in the conservative provincial society of Middlemarch to create turmoil and the fear of diminishing fortunes among the landed elite. Eagleton (1983: 19) describes the historical epoch in question during the nineteenth century as one of revolution, when England had become the world's first industrial nation. It was an era recognized for its sanctification of faith and its growing doubt. Ashton (1996: 8) also refers to it as a period for imperial expansion, expanding democracy, and political and social reform, restricting bureaucracy, scientific progress and society's refusal to accept scientific conclusions. There was also, notes Landes (1969: 1), a breakthrough from an agrarian economy to an industry and machine manufacture economy. It was through the economy, Karl (1995: 7) says, that the unprogressive, conventional traditionalism of society was threatened.

The full significance of the novel, set in the years leading up to the 1832 Reform Bill, was, according to Thomson (1950: 73), the central change from an agricultural nation, dominated by squires, parsons and wealthy landowners into an industrial nation controlled by the classes that were produced by the industrial expansion and commercial enterprise. The 'middle-class', argues Rubinstein (1983: 80), rose to

pre-eminence in the wake of 1832. The 1832 Reform Act has been regarded by Blake (1989: 42) as a phase in a non-violent 'bourgeois revolution' in which the political device of the state was transferred to the control of the middle class, so that a 'bourgeois normality' would become the norm. It was an era in turmoil, as the traditional conservative members of society attempted to defend and retain their power, while the new emerging bourgeois classes were endeavouring to shift the balance of power from the landed elite into their own sphere. The established classes feared the destruction of their hegemonic leadership in society. They feared the power of the rising bourgeois classes, for they would strive to destroy the status quo of the established classes. The bourgeois class made intrusions into society, for they ventured to imitate the traditional landed elite in order to raise their social position. The increase in imitation of the landed elite and the rise in social position of the bourgeoisie destroyed the landed elite's basis for conservatism in society, for traditionally the elite's caste system had remained closed. It was an era of fear of diminishing fortunes for, if the bourgeoisie were successful in raising their social position, there was a fear that there would be a possibility that the landed establishment could be pushed out of the social ladder. Yet Lovesey (1991: 84) states that the novel stresses that there was a need to maintain a cultural tradition in the face of social change.

Middlemarch society exemplifies the modernizing progress which changed England. The major characters of Middlemarch participate in the change as doctors, manufacturers, bankers, scientists, and political reformers. The task of the historian or narrator of the tale Middlemarch is, Seeber (1997: 17) believes, to record the change. In Middlemarch, Eliot states that "municipal town and rural parish gradually made fresh threads of connection-gradually, as the old stocking gave way to the savings bank" (65). The advancement of industrialization in Middlemarch society heightened the awareness of the landed elite that change was imminent. This escalated the fear of diminishing fortunes, for change equalled progress, which meant that the conservative element of Middlemarch society would diminish, as would the position of the landed elite. The middle class welcomed progress and the rewards that it could bring them.

According to Stone (1995: 3), many historians viewed English society during the nineteenth century for its illustriousness in its easy access of self-made men to relinquish power and status. There was a harmonious intermingling of the landed order with the industrial entrepreneurs. The new rich members of society were eager to enter into the ranks of the landed squirearchy. When the new rich were successful in entering into the landed squirearchy they were readily accepted. England has long since been considered 'an open elite'. This view had been traditionally accepted by many historians and was

one view that Stone began to challenge. Beckett (1988: 17) also opposes the traditional view by asserting that the "entrance into the aristocracy was far from easy". Evidence of this is suggested in Middlemarch, for neither Fred or Rosamond succeeds in moving into the ranks of the landed elite.

Although a century before Eliot, Daniel Defoe, notes Stone (1995: 17), concluded that "the rising tradesman swells into the gentry, and the declining gentry sinks into trade". This view had become the traditional view that many historians accepted about the Victorian period. Thompson (1969: 299) concludes that there was a transformation from an aristocracy of landowners to an aristocracy of business and professional talents. In 1835 A de Tocqueville suggested that, for the landed aristocracy,

what distinguishes it above all others is the ease with which it has opened its ranks...with great riches, anybody could hope to enter the ranks of the aristocracy (in Stone 1995: 24).

Sir James Chettam and Mr Brooke considered the Vincy family as manufacturers to be an intrusion in society, for they epitomized the new wealthy classes that arose in Victorian England as a result of industrialization. In Middlemarch the Vincy family, argues Lovesey (1991: 85), aspire to elevate their position in society through marriage, education, positions of power, association with the landed elite and the accumulation of wealth, for they perceived the ranks of the landed elite to be open. This heightened the fear among the established classes,

for their stable conservative environment was dominated by change. The Vincys were terrified that Fred would lose his social status. Fred acquired, as Mason (1971: 422) terms it, a "gentleman's university education," a position above his parents' station in society. His education was based on imitation, for he imitates the characteristics of a gentleman. He acquires debt for he lives lavishly:

Fred had naturally required more amusements than he had money for... The total debt was a hundred and sixty pounds (158).

Fred's parents feared he would go down if he continued to gamble, marry Mary Garth, and if he did not inherit Mr Featherstone's, his uncle's wealth. The accumulation of wealth was a means of moving upwards in society. According to Bradley (1975: 47), for Fred, the "problem of work and vocation can be solved by the legacy old Featherstone is bound to leave him".

The Vincys did not connect themselves with anyone inferior to their rank for fear of going down the social ladder:

Even when Caleb Garth was prosperous the Vincys were on the condescending terms with him and his wife, for there were nice distinctions of rank in Middlemarch: and though old manufacturers could not any more than dukes be connected with none but equals, they were conscious of an inherent social superiority (160).

According to Mr Vincy, "it's a good British feeling to try and raise your family a little" (87). He tried to achieve this goal through his manufacturing, by emulating the landed classes so that his family was a reflection of the landed classes.



Rosamond's ambition was to rise up the social ladder through imitation of the etiquette of Dorothea, Celia and Dowager Chettam. Through her association and marriage to Lydgate she felt that she was fulfilling her ambition. Rosamond was, as Mason (1971: 422) says, "the finished product of a ladies' academy". Rosamond 'had been at school with girls of higher position' (66) so that she was educated to imitate the manner of a wealthy young lady. When she decides to marry Lydgate her father states "what have you such an education for, if you are to go and marry a poor man?" Mr Vincy feared that Rosamond would move down in rank.

As mentioned earlier, Eliot set her novel Middlemarch in an earlier period from which she was writing, for, as Karl (1995: 5) notes, she had a penchant to return to her younger years before the arrival of the railway had begun to alter the way England lived. Thomson (1950: 41) calls the period from 1830 to 1850 an era of railways and steamships. There was an emphasis on movement away from the traditional and permanent ways and a move towards progress and technology. Middlemarch is set in the period that marks the rise of the burgeoning middle class. Industrialization changed the way members of society were able to move upwards and downwards in the social ladder. No longer were people forced to abide by the traditions of society, but were seeking new opportunities through change. This change affected

the movement in the social ladder. In Middlemarch, the society was on the verge of change. Lydgate's profession in society is medicine. His vocation opposes the traditional conformities of society. Born into a privileged society, his profession bears no qualities of upholding the convention of tradition, orthodox and stability. Mr Lydgate is referred to as a "gentleman" by Mrs Cadwallader for she "heard him talking to Humphrey. He talks well" (62). The Dowager Chettam notes that:

Mr Brooke says he is one of the Lydgates of Northumberland, really well connected. One does not expect it in a practitioner of that kind...I like a medical man more on a footing with the servants (62).

Lydgate's profession represents change and progress. Such a position is usually attributed to the business class, so that they can aspire for a higher social position. It was not a profession that a gentleman connected to the landed elite would uphold. Traditional vocations for gentlemen were public offices or the army, but Lydgate "was one of the rarer lads who early get a decided bent and make up their minds that there is something particular in life which they would like to do for its own sake, and not because their fathers did it" (97). In taking on the position of a medical doctor, he denied himself his social privileges and bearing. Society, therefore, no longer recognizes him as landed elite. He has moved down in status, for his profession is suited to the business class. Scott (1972: 70) asserts that the reader gains insight into Lydgate's position through the reactions that the other characters take towards him. Sir Godwin Lydgate renounces Lydgate for he has disregarded caste, refused the church and army, and compromised the

family name by taking up a trade as a physician. Yet, at the same time, Scott (1972: 72) argues that Lydgate's vices which led to his death were characteristic of the aristocracy responsible for his rearing. He spends money lavishly, he collects and indulges in an ornamental, status-conscious wife, and reacts with reserved baronial arrogance to the lower orders of Middlemarch society. At the end, Lydgate has been reassimilated into upper-class culture, supplying an 'excellent practice' among wealthy patients and, 'alternating, according to the season, between London and a Continental bathing place' (575). Lydgate chose the medical profession to earn a living for he was fearful of going down. The medical profession would pay for his expensive tastes. Towards the end of his life he works and lives in wealthy polite society.

In Middlemarch, George Eliot presents to the reader the arrival of the commercial society. The landed elite learn to participate in civic life and descend from their position of stature. Class mobility was visible as some members of society moved upwards and others moved downwards. Semmel (1994: 99) argues that entrepreneurs like Garth had to persuade the traditional workingmen that progress and improvement were advantages and not threats to the community and stability of society. Progress meant a different life for many of the middle and lower classes, for it gave them a chance to aspire to something higher. Industrialization was a means of accumulating wealth and generating profit. In Middlemarch, Solomon Featherstone

understood the potential of the railway system. He desired to make his fortune through the railway, for he understood the potential of progress as a means to change. He feared diminishing fortunes so he manipulated the situation for his own potential gain. By making society feel antagonistic towards the arrival of the railway he made his property increase in value. For example, Mr Solomon asserts:

the more spokes we put in their wheel the more they'll pay up to let 'em go on, if they must come whether or not (382).

According to Scott (1972: 64), "the railways advertize the mechanization of society". Solomon Featherstone realized the potential of making money by selling his own land to the railway. In order to raise the value of his property, Chase (1991: 52) explains, Featherstone developed a plan to stimulate public opposition to the railways so that he could make more money from the scheme. After all, wealth was thought to be the only means of being accepted by the landed elite and moving up the social ladder.

The arrival of industrialization and the new industrial towns meant that there were problems of human adjustment. Thomson (1950: 43) argues that the country bred men of the provincial towns lived by custom and tradition, yet in the new environment the concepts of custom and tradition were destroyed and convention weakened. The Quarterly Review (1873: 399) states that

The growth of enormous cities, the ease of travelling and the taste for travelling, the largeness and organisation of commercial and industrial energy, the disappearance of those local attachments and

local peculiarities, which used to hold us so strongly because they had bound our fathers and grandfathers before us-these imply... a more rapid transition.

If outside members were successful in rising into the ranks of the aristocracy and gentry the problem was that, once they had fulfilled their desire to move up the social ladder, they did not have the stamina to preserve the tradition, custom and wealth of the privileged landed elite. According to Rubinstein (1986: 205), the meritocratic elite members that were drawn from outside the privileged classes had no vested interest in the preservation of capitalism, for they were not personally wealthy and had lacked capital for most of their adult life. The landed elite began to fear diminishing fortunes and were terrified of a decrease in tradition, for they believed that the bourgeois classes would not know how to preserve and retain capital. In Middlemarch Mr Standish, the old lawyer, "had been so long concerned with the landed gentry that he had become landed himself" (60). Mr Standish can achieve this by imitating the landed gentry. Thus, the clear division of rank between Mr Standish and Mr Brooke diminished. Although Mr Standish had not moved into the ranks of the landed elite, for his rise was only based on imitation, it was apparent that he did not have the motivation to preserve the traditions of the landed elite if he were to successfully move into their ranks. Yet this supports the argument that there was an acceptance from the old order of the new wealthy classes. Even though the old nobility remained dominant in numbers, explains Thompson (1969: 299), social standing and even in wealth,

there was a transformation of the titled upper class for they merged together with the new bourgeois class. The narrator in Middlemarch states that "before Reform had done its notable part in developing the political consciousness, there was a clearer distinction of ranks" (60). Hobsbawm (1962: 62) believes that there was an unclear distinction of rank in society due to the middle classes imitating the privileged classes. This intensified the fear of diminishing fortunes among the landed elite for, once the division of rank disappeared due to imitation, so too would the division in status and wealth, the basis of defining members of the landed elite. Furthermore, the middle classes would also imitate the status and wealth of the landed establishment.

Will Ladislav was considered an intrusion in society for, although he belonged to no class, he was making a position for himself as an advocate of political reform. He also made a name for himself in the business class as a journalist and newspaper editor. Casaubon feared being dragged down by Ladislav. Jealousy is not his only failing. Celia also feared the repercussions of Dorothea's involvement with Ladislav, for she feared that it would result in Dorothea's move down the social ladder. Ladislav was considered by Casaubon and Celia to be an intrusion. During the nineteenth century, Rubinstein (1977: 102) explains, the wealthy earned fortunes from commerce, finance, transport, merchants, bankers, shipowners, merchant bankers and stock insurance broker, rather than as industrialists and manufacturers.

The middle classes, continues Rubinstein (1977: 99), contested with the landed elite for the benefits of wealth, status and power. However, Rubinstein (1977: 103) notes, it was the landowners that were still the largest group of wealth-holders and not the industrialists and bankers. This is evident in Middlemarch, for Sir James Chettam and Mr Brooke remain the largest group of wealth-holders in Middlemarch.

George Eliot did not write about static and unchanging societies. McDonagh (1997: 7) insists that Eliot wrote about societies that were in the midst of change. Middlemarch society was in the midst of progress and enlightenment. The unprogressive nature of traditional society was pushed aside for progress and change. This situation created a fear among the privileged classes. They feared diminishing fortunes for, in the society of progress and change, they would not be able to retain their status and wealth. The advent of progress meant that the burgeoning bourgeois class could produce their own wealth and compete for a high position into the ranks of the landed elite. As society was changing, so too were the way classes interacted.

### Section 3: Interactions Between Classes

The advent of change in society progresses in Middlemarch to alter the way in which different classes begin to interact through the union of marriage. Marriage, as Graver (1992: 98) illustrates, is at the centre of the novel and many social issues and institutions become involved, including class, church, property and progeny. Victorian society was permeated with people marrying into different classes, for it was a means of moving upwards in the social ladder. However, an unwise match in marriage could result in downward social mobility. In Middlemarch, Mrs Cadwallader moves down the social ladder, for she marries a man beneath her position, while Mrs Vincy rises through marriage. Many members of society married for wealth and status in order to rise up the social ladder. This was part of the old order which emphasized the tradition and conservatism of provincial society. In Middlemarch, Mr Brooke represents and advocates the traditional, cautious and unprogressive conservatism of provincial society. Mr Brooke states:

People should have their own way in marriage, and all that sort of thing - up to a certain point, you know (25).

This is evidence that Mr Brooke, who represents the traditional and orthodox conservatism of provincial society, believes that status and wealth must always take priority in marriage. Even if the choice of



partner is left to the individual to choose, Mr Brooke considers that status and wealth are the influencing factors in the match. In fact, Mrs Vincy states that "a man marries his wife's relations" (69) which was the belief that Victorian society, exemplified by Middlemarch society, advocated.

In Mr Featherstone's first marriage he married beneath his position. In this marriage he feared diminishing fortunes, for the union was not prosperous and he feared diminishing status. Mrs Waule states:

"His first wife was a poor match for him, though," said Mrs Waule, "she brought him nothing" (216).

In his second marriage he fared better and made a prosperous match, for his wife brought wealth into the marriage. Mrs Waule states that "some men must marry to elevate themselves a little" (217) for marriage was considered the means of social elevation.

The new trend in Victorian society was to marry for love and not for status and wealth. in some cases, marriages of love could result in downward social mobility. Fred's union to Mary Garth is in opposition to the tradition of marriage as a means of social elevation. For Fred

had grown in love with his old playmate, notwithstanding that share in the higher education of the country which had exalted his views of rank and income (94).

Fred's marriage was based on love, for "he was thoroughly in love, and with a plain girl, who had no money" (95).

According to Best (1971: 264), "social ascendancy was dominant among the middle classes in the sixties and seventies". Best (1971: 262) states that "society's edge was permanently blurred by the jostling of the thousands who were trying to get in with the hundreds who were trying not to be pushed out". In Middlemarch, this was achieved particularly through marriage. Mrs Cadwallader asserts:

Young people should think of their families in marrying. I set a bad example - married a poor clergyman, and made myself a pitiable object among the De Bracys (37).

As a result of her own experience, Mrs Cadwallader maintains that marriage is the union of wealth and status, and not a union of love. Society reacted negatively to Mrs Cadwallader's union to Mr Cadwallader, for "her friends had a very poor opinion of the match she made when she married me" (45).

For women, marrying for money was a real alternative, especially when the alternative was to live in the women's land of governessing and genteel poverty. A marriage based on wealth could earn a woman some form of independence, a household to manage, funds to administer and a kind of career. Beer (1992: 158) points out that although 'independence' implies money, money does not assure independence. In Middlemarch Celia's union to James Chettam is an example of matrimony based on wealth. Through her marriage, Celia moves upward into the aristocracy for, prior to her marriage, she had belonged to the gentry. This matrimonial partnership assures Celia a

household, funds to supervise and a career as a wife, and later as a mother. For Celia, wealth provides her with a form of independence as a wife of a provincial landowner and independence from occupying a career as a governess, seamstress, or any other type of women's work. Celia gains independence, for she marries within her class, finds happiness and love in marriage and her marriage does not imprison her. Celia's marriage fulfils the expectations of the old world stability, and the new world trend for love, wealth and status co-exist in the marriage.

Hardy (1997: 65) considers Eliot's presentation of marriage in the novel as part of the analysis of a woman's archetypal life in the nineteenth century. Upon matrimony, a woman takes on her husband's rank. The peerage, observes Haight (1975: 37), is filled with examples of noblemen whose mothers had speculative origins. Mingay (1976: 6), too, notes that the landed gentry intermarried with the wealthier merchants, professional families, the superior parsons and the prosperous gentleman farmers. Ashton (1983: 10) counters this by stating that Eliot regarded marriage as one based on the 'natural law' of the affections, rather than one based on a legal bond, as was Eliot's partnership to Lewes. Yet, even though her own union to Lewes was neither legal nor adhered to conventional standards, Eliot did highlight the need for convention and tradition in marriage in Middlemarch.

From the time of the first Reform Bill in 1832, Eliot, comments Karl (1995: 452), viewed the availability of career options for women in society to be limited to marriages. Eliot places marriage at the centre of her vision of social harmony and emotional fulfilment. Eliot, however, also maintains a critical awareness of the shortcomings and perils of marriage. She highlights through Middlemarch how women can be trapped by the false promises that it offers. Rosamond Vincy believes that matrimony is a means to social success. Rosamond's belief is that, through a tactically negotiated marital union, she can control her own destiny. She is disabused of her belief too late in her life. Eliot's socially conditioned female characters are also responsible for their own tragedies, for she suggests that society is not wholly to blame for an individual's beliefs and suffering. Foster (1985: 195) argues that Eliot lays bare the alluring ideologies and economic conditions which influence and force women into matrimonial imprisonment. Rosamond's family background provides her with the belief that marriage can be used as an agency to move up the social ladder. Rosamond marries under the pretensions of wealth. Eliot states in the Vincy family that

there had naturally been much intermarrying with neighbours more or less decidedly genteel (65).

Rosamond favours Dr. Lydgate as a suitor because of his class superiority. Gilbert (1980: 528) argues that Rosamond is a true representative of the socially ambitious Victorian middle class, for she

is attracted to Lydgate simply for his noble family connections and his aristocratic good taste. Rosamond thought that the alliance to Lydgate would assure her easy upward social mobility. Rosamond's belief in marriage was that she could control her own destiny and her own independence. She was not made aware of the false promises of independence that marriage offers until it was too late. Her destiny and independence are controlled by society's conventions and conservatism. Matrimony for Rosamond does not guarantee independence, but imprisons her, for her marriage to Lydgate is based on false promises and a false idea of independence. Miller (1992: 447) states that Middlemarch shows "the terrible dangers of ignorance" and Williams (1984: 30) argues that Middlemarch shows the danger of marrying "with false expectations". Eliot implies that access into the ranks of the landed elite was far from easy, and for Rosamond there was no transformation from the bourgeois classes to the privileged classes.

The female virtues of devotion and service in Rosamond are transferred to an uncompromising dedication to her own interests. She marries the hero of a 'preconceived romance' who, she believes, will bring her the fulfilment she desires. She is the victim, according to Foster (1985: 209), of a false ideology and of masculine exploitation.

Eliot comments:

Here was Mr Lydgate suddenly corresponding to her ideal, being altogether foreign to Middlemarch, carrying a certain air of

distinction congruous with good family, and possessing connections which offered vistas of that middle-class heaven, rank (81).

In 1872 the editor of the Spectator, R.H. Hutton (in Carroll 1971: 296), claims that Eliot identifies Rosamond Vincy with that of "specimens of the 'nice', superficial, conventional young ladies whom she detests". Foster (1985: 209) comments that Eliot subjects her to irony. The irony lies in the fact that, even though Rosamond tried to marry for social elevation, she did not succeed in fulfilling her own expectations.

Lydgate considered marriage to Rosamond a disappointment, for he had moved down the social ladder. In marrying Rosamond "Lydgate had to confess to himself that he was descending a little in relation to Rosamond's family" (240). Lydgate feared diminishing fortunes, for he nor Rosamond had an abundance of wealth to satisfy their lavish tastes. Lydgate, according to Karl (1995: 497), also married under false impressions about marriage and his expectations of his wife. Graver (1984: 206) points out that Lydgate belongs to good society but aspires to something higher, while Rosamond aspires to good society but does not belong to it. For both characters, marriage falls short of their expectations.

Dorothea, the protagonist of Middlemarch, marries a man who is much older, who has never been married, and who is not considered by society's standards to be of marriageable material for a young noble-

woman. For Dorothea, Karl (1995: 67) reveals, marriage is a means of connecting herself to someone whom, she believes, will achieve greatness. Dorothea does not fear diminishing fortunes in marriage. Dorothea has married within her class for, as the niece of a country gentleman, she has married a gentleman, so her marriage is considered to be a good match. In Middlemarch, Mr Brooke states that Mr Casaubon

is over five-and-forty...And his income is good-he has a handsome property independent of the church (26).

Mr Brooke prefers that Dorothea marry Chettam, for his income is higher and he is younger. Mr Brooke fears diminishing fortunes for Dorothea. In her marriage to Casaubon, Karl (1995: 67) suggests that there is a suppression of feeling which runs parallel to her desire for the release and liberation that would arise in a union with Will.

Middlemarch acts, according to Tush (1993: 10), as a condemnation of society's restrictive gender conventions. Throughout the Victorian period, the traditional hero equalled his heroine in wealth or was wealthier than she. If the heroine were able to choose the "right" man to marry, the marriage represented for the heroine a financial reward. In both marriages, Dorothea's men have less wealth than she. This emphasizes, Tush (1993: 156) says, Dorothea's independence in choosing her own partner in marriage. In Dorothea's marriage to Will, she does not marry within her class. He is inferior to her in both status

and wealth, but in her first marriage, Casaubon is inferior to her in wealth but equal to her in status. Even though in both marriages Dorothea did not fear diminishing fortunes, her sister Celia feared for her, for in Dorothea's marriage to Will, she states that "to think of marrying Mr Ladislaw, who has got no estate" (566).

Dorothea's second marriage is a marriage of love. Yet this second marriage results in downward social mobility in terms of status, for he is not socially acceptable. This does not, however, apply to Ladislaw's lack of wealth for Dorothea has independent wealth. In marrying Ladislaw, Tush (1993: 159) asserts that Dorothea is planning on trading in her entire way of life for one with fewer material advantages. Yet, this view can be opposed for Dorothea has her own independent wealth. Eliot subjects Dorothea's second marriage to irony, for it does not really affect her in the way that Tush argues. In fact she is not trading in her life for fewer material advantages. With her own independent wealth, Dorothea can afford the same material comforts enjoyed when she was married to Casaubon. Dorothea's marriage to Ladislaw is based not on wealth but on love.

Even though Will Ladislaw is better educated than Dorothea, his situation is considered worse than his predecessors, for he lacks wealth and social position. The situation is made worse by his foreignness. In creating the character of Will Ladislaw, Eliot breaks



with the tradition of the heroine rising in social status by marrying the hero. In marrying Will, Dorothea jeopardises her own social position. Dorothea gives up her own status to take on the status of her husband. She will merely be recognized as being Will's wife, argues Tush (1993: 158), for the people whom she will meet through Ladislav will not know or appreciate her family's position and status in society. Yet Shuttleworth (1992: 125) suggests in marrying Ladislav, Dorothea restores him to his rightful role of property owner. However, this view by Shuttleworth can be opposed, for evidence suggests that the wife takes on the status of the husband; the husband does not take on the status of the wife. Therefore, it is impossible that, through the matrimonial union, Dorothea can restore Will to the position of rightful landowner, unless Dorothea decides to fund him with her own wealth. Blake (1992: 145) stresses that Dorothea and Will adore each other and Dorothea attains some kind of achievement in the marriage, but, parallel to this, their union represents a sacrifice too. For Dorothea, it is a sacrifice in status in society. Scott (1972: 74) asseverates that Dorothea's marriage to Ladislav is not the anti-climax that many critics argue but in fact completes the social vision of Middlemarch which is the "substantial force for change, promising to break down eventually the restrictive class barriers of the Middlemarch gentry".

Through marriage, Will Ladislav, the eternal outsider, is brought into connection with the heart of Middlemarch. He is the grandson on his

father's side of Mr Casaubon's aunt and grandson on his mother's side of a Mrs Dunkirk, the first wife of Mr. Bulstrode, before he arrived in Middlemarch. As Ashton (1996: 317) explains, Bulstrode is connected through his second marriage to Harriet, sister of the mayor Mr Vincy, and Aunt to Rosamond and Fred. Consequently, Will is connected to the Vincy family through marriage. Will can lay claim that he is connected to Casaubon and the Vincy family through marriage.

Ladislaw's paternal grandmother, Semmel (1994: 97) reminds us, was disinherited after her marriage to an impecunious Polish musician, and Will Ladislaw, Wilhelm (1979: 51) emphasises, is considered to be a 'love-child', for "his mother deserted money for love". Casaubon states that "my aunt made an unfortunate marriage. I never saw her" (50) and accepts the situation without question. Will Ladislaw states that

It was an abominable thing that my grandmother should have been disinherited because she made what they called mesalliance (252).

An unwise union resulted in rejection from polite society. This occurred to Will's mother. Will is also subjected to the same exclusion from 'polite' society due to his grandmother's and mother's actions. Hardy (1982: 29) states that Ladislaw is a "social misfit, a man seeking his vocation, and the poor man who wins the lady". Yet, Ladislaw believes that he "never had any caste" (319) and Lydgate had said that "he was sort of gypsy rather enjoying the sense of belonging to no class" (319).

During the Victorian period, Graver (1992: 95) observes, a wife was to be "legally considered as absorbed and consolidated in that of her husband, from which it is judicially indistinguishable, and under whose wing, protection, and cover she acts". Graver (1992: 96) cites Barbara Bodichon, a friend of George Eliot, who states that a wife's 'existence is entirely absorbed in that of her husband'. In Middlemarch, Mrs Cadwallader absorbs Mr Cadwallader's status. She has moved down the social ladder to become absorbed into his lifestyle. Likewise, Mrs Vincy's marriage to Mr Vincy resulted in her being absorbed into Mr Vincy's lifestyle for she rose upwards in the social ladder. Even though Mrs Vincy was able to move upwards in the social ladder due to good fortune in marriage, she still did not reach the ranks of the privileged classes. Her rise upwards only extended into the ranks of the middle class.

According to Strachey (1928: 72), "one and all, married or single, women were financial nonentities". As Strachey (1928: 72) says, it was not until Barbara Leigh Smith, later known as Barbara Bodichon, decided as a result of her own financial freedom provided by her father, to set out and amend the laws of property for women in England with the help of her friend Mr Davenport Hill and the law amendment society, so that women could have control of their own property. Both support of, and opposition to, the question of women owning property were strong. The opposing forces were against change. People

believed that it would disrupt the home and society and that women would become self-assertive creatures. However, its supporters continued undismayed and the Bill was introduced into the House of Commons in May 1857 by Sir Erskine Perry and, as Strachey (1928: 73) records, passed its Second Reading without much trouble.

The agitation for winning the reform of property rights for married women had been simmering since 1855. In 1870 a Bill was brought forward and went as far as the House of Lords. When it returned to the House of Commons it had undergone a transformation so that, instead of allowing women a free footing and granting them their own possession of wealth, the transformed Bill allowed women to keep possession of what they earned for themselves. Everything else belonged to their husbands, regardless of whether it was acquired before or after marriage (Strachey 1928: 273). The supporters of the married women accepted the Lord's amendments and the Bill was passed into law in 1870. The Act allowed women to retain and acquire assets independently of their husbands and for the first time eradicated the notion that a wife was the property of her husband. Eliot gives Dorothea her own wealth so that, when she opposes Casaubon's wishes and marries Ladislav, she is still quite wealthy, for she has an independent wealth inherited from her parents.

The Married Women's Property Act went through parliament in 1870, just before Middlemarch was published in 1871 to 1872. This meant that the Act would have influenced Eliot's life as well as having an influence in Eliot's portrayal of characters in Middlemarch. Even though the passing of the Act in parliament does not directly influence the time period set in Middlemarch, it does influence the lifetime of the author. In 1884 Mary Ann Evans went to live with George Henry Lewes as his wife in every way, except legally, for he was already indissolubly married. Their union, Ashton (1983: 1) comments, was one of attraction and shared beliefs. Eliot's liaison with Lewes showed how she believed that women were not the property of their husbands, but it also showed that she favoured the idea of love and attraction in a union of humanity and not a union based on status and wealth. Like Eliot, Dorothea's union to Will was based on love, but unlike Eliot, Dorothea's union was legal, whereas Eliot's was not. The distinction of Dorothea's wealth from that of Eliot's was that her wealth was inherited and not earned, while Eliot's was earned.

Marian Evans, Ashton (1983: 12) argues, acted on Feuerbach's ideology that "the perfection of the bonds of fellowship between human beings is marriage" and that love brings with it duties that do not need to be enforced by dogma or creed by calling herself Mrs Lewes. Even though her union with Lewes was unconventional by Victorian standards and excluded her from much of proper society, it did not stop

her from writing about the conventions of Victorian society dealing with marriage in her novels.

## Conclusion

This thesis, which uses several historical and literary approaches to demonstrate the nature of the fear of diminishing fortunes in Eliot's novel, draws several conclusions. As quoted earlier, this novel appears to be an historical novel, for it is set in an earlier period from which it was written, as well as dealing with historical issues of the nineteenth century.

The textual analysis reveals a link between Eliot's portrayal of the past in her novel and recent developments in historical theories. This link challenges earlier traditional historical viewpoints on upward and downward social mobility in Victorian society, for Eliot provides a literary context for the analysis of upward and downward social mobility in light of the historical references used in the research.

The study demonstrates that the conservative nature of society actually provided stability in the emerging industrial society. It has also shown that, although upward social mobility did exist, it was not easily attainable. In fact, as has been illustrated, downward social mobility was far more common. Eliot highlights that there was no increase in upward social mobility due to industrialization. Industrialization created an increase in the imitation by the bourgeois classes of the

establishment. The thesis has emphasized that it was the increase in imitation, and not an increase in social mobility which created the fear of diminishing fortunes.

The examination of Middlemarch provides evidence that intermarriage between classes existed but that it did not overly effect upward social mobility. Generally, Eliot presents a society that is class conscious. The classes aspire to elevate their position, while the landed establishment seek to ward off the challenge.

The thesis has concentrated on an analysis of the fear of diminishing fortunes in Middlemarch society, but there is now scope for further research focusing on other variables which contributed to the fear of diminishing fortunes. The study has uncovered areas open for further research which may be able to trace the rise in the scientific and medical revolution. An examination of the role of the church in preserving the landed establishment and the role of women and their limitations in society would be valuable. Another fruitful area if research would be to trace the decline of the British peerage in the late nineteenth century, due to the imitation of the establishment by the bourgeois classes.

These areas of further research emphasize even more strongly what my thesis has demonstrated. In writing Middlemarch, George Eliot has



provided a microcosm of Provincial life, connecting literature with history. In fact, Middlemarch correlates well with the following lines from the Quarterly Review (1873: 338):

What a close connection there is between history and literature!  
How often has our literature returned upon our history gathered from  
the traditions of the past new strength and hope!

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