

**GEORGE ELIOT'S MIDDLEMARCH – A LABYRINTHINE DECONSTRUCTION OF
CANONICALLY INVERSED ARCHITECTURE**

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Abstract : The starting point of this paper is the idea of anti-bildungsroman approached from the Derridean perspective of deconstruction and interpreted in terms of weakening the canons of masculinity while affirming the existence and identity of a feminine self evermore valuable and noble as weaknesses and failures heighten its humanity. George Eliot imagines a different patterned structure for the concept of becoming, other than the arrow – which describes the development of the protagonist in the male Bildungsroman, who reaches self-assertion after a spiritual, initiatic and psychological journey in the outer world – and the circle, characteristic for the female protagonist, whose life thread takes the shape of the ball of yarn that almost turns into the shadow of any Penelope, who remains at home to weave and unweave, only to become the doppelganger of her mother, grandmother etc. She imagines a maze, a maze that would not only echo the story of the Minoan princess but would also describe the challenge a woman's self, any self for that matter, has to stand up to in times of turmoil and change.

Keywords: womanhood, feminist criticism, psychoanalysis, gender studies, women's writing.

George Eliot's desire to portray characters on their route towards self-assertion is canvassed within a far broader perspective, as if we read the story of a story within a story, where background and character portray the two dimensions. The same is true about *Middlemarch*, about which the novelist herself asserted that she 'wanted to give a panoramic view of provincial life', whose Pantocrator she proves to be, for Eliot is both God and Lucifer at the same time: 'She divides the world into saints and sinners [...]. But her sinners are not made of a different clay from her saints. They are for the most part amiable, well-intentioned people who mean to be good, just as much as the saints do.'¹ Only it seems that they have a broken wing that shatters their flight, pinning them down to the ground. Her sinners are like colourless butterflies, whose virtue of the flight has faded into a total dimness of hues and colours. Despite the fact that Eliot empowers her heroes with a well-structured and articulated profile, all deriving from her own personal extremely sharp intellect, she fails to echo them into the heart of the reader, modern or not, for the virtues that she cultivates are colourless in themselves, very much focussed on self-restraint and conscientiousness, highly puritan in contents and value. It was as if she had to persuade herself that a life of self-denial was sufficiently rewarded by the consciousness of virtue. Once again the image she fosters is that of the redeemed self, for in the name of virtue, characters of her own come to sacrifice themselves on the altar of noble and altruistic ideals. Dorothea Brooke is the image of self-renunciation, of dedicating her entire life to anything but her own soul, an outstanding character who, although permeates the novel with an unmistakable touch of 'sense and sensitivity', fails to breathe that special air that only the most alive literary characters manage to convey. It is as if Eliot's heroes seem to be not so much real identities as studies of character, for they seem to be lacking that genuineness that would be expected of a writer of

¹ Lord David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation*, California University: Constable & co., ltd., 1935, p. 316.

such talent as George Eliot. Confined to a secluded and small vision of life, she assigns to her characters the part of objects of study, severely scrutinised from the moral perspective that spun the DNA spiral of canonicity. They never seem, as the greatest figures in fiction always do, to free themselves from their creator, and to be acting and speaking of their own volition. Behind the puppets we always see the shadow of the puppet master pulling the strings. Although in the shadow, the voice behind the veil is the only articulated *identity*, the consciousness behind the string-pulled (*id*)entities, conjugating in pages of fiction their destiny of mere entities whose wholeness is only rounded up by the consciousness that mirrors itself in actions and life stories. Nevertheless, we witness a far more complex projection that should be approached from the double perspective of the creator who works not only on his very self, fighting to complete the architecture of his own inner structure, but who also embroiders outer projections of his self that imbue the selves of fictional characters. It is an inward reflection that not only summons the energies of the ‘id’- called to drive personality – but also articulates the substance of the ‘ego’, in a game whose rules and extended metaphor are not fully mastered either by creator or by his creations. Thus, creator/creations articulate the perspective of becoming, where the ‘ego’ meets the ‘id’, just like a volcano meets its lava. ‘*Where id is, there shall ego be*’² argued Sigmund Freud who also said that ‘*the ego is not master in its own house*.’³ From a psychoanalytical perspective, we may look at George Eliot’s characters as if they were dormant volcanoes, whose lava lies somewhere hidden in the entrails of their abyss, not yet explored, still never thrown out. Thus, deprived of this magmatic outburst of latent energies, characters remain but sketches, no matter how powerful the strokes of brush that outline them, and fail to assume the part of genuinely portrayed identities.

If self is to be interpreted in George Eliot’s terms, it would be through its relationship with the net that support the fabric of social conventionalism, in an outer-projected type of perspective. The reflection is not as much within the depths of the heroes’ consciousness or soul, as it is in terms of their social effects. Dorothea Brooke is presented as such, as if she were cut off from a Dutch painting, gaining identity through her web of relationships with the rest, with the others, with the community, and not as much through her relationships with her *self*, whom, in fact, she sacrifices for a more universally-oriented ideal, that of seconding her husband in his scientific journey. George Eliot subjects her heroine to a double displacement of her genuine self, once subjected to her husband, and, at the same time, dedicated towards achieving his goals that conjugate an exclusively male-centred approach and ambition. Thus, she falls for a totally unsuitable man, in large part because of his scholarly attributes, and of her wish to master Latin and Greek, since ‘*those provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to her a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly*.’⁴ The first chapter of the novel clearly portrays Dorothea not in terms of fixed personal attributes, but in terms of their social effects. Her *self* is of little importance if not related to the collective dimension, for it is the latter one that bestows identity and profile onto the former. Thus, Dorothea ‘*was usually*

² Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933), New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995.

³ Sigmund Freud, *A Difficulty in the Path of Psychoanalysis*, 1917.

⁴ Jill L. Matus, *Unstable bodies: Victorian representations of sexuality and maternity*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, p. 220.

spoken of as being remarkably clever.' Public opinion defines each character, and the reader's understanding of each character is architected through the medium of the neighbours' eyes. Character cannot be defined apart from social opinion, for each individual is caught in an Arachne-like web of relationships and comes to be identified only through the sum of his/her relationships. If Novalis believed that each person is a small family and Freud argued that each person embodies a small society, George Eliot would say that without the voice and profile of the surrounding community, large or small, a character, major or minor, would fail to individualize himself / herself. It is as if mirrors surround the character, and the reflection is not as much his/her own, but the reflection of everyone else's opinion. Thus, the self undergoes a double distortion process, for not only is it to be mirrored, but it is to be mirrored through a scratched one that reflects the image indirectly, not through direct glance of, but through the eyes of the others. It is this game of mirrors the one that intensifies the intellectual approaches George Eliot is so fond of, and opens a wide, if not almost exclusive perspective upon the realm of the self. Furthermore, it seems that even the *locus mundi* Eliot thought of as setting for Dorothea's story, *Middlemarch*, echoes the same reflected *in-betweenness*. It is almost as if Miss Brooke is suspended somewhere in between her dreams and aspirations, on the one hand, and the harsh, prosaic social and emotional scenery, on the other. Of all Eliot's heroines, she is the only one that approaches the Christic, humble model of piety and devotion as she stoops to tie the shoelaces of her husband, *the Master*, the supreme Patriarch. It is the unbound admiration of this man's alleged nous that made her wed him, against the warnings of her family and friends and pushed her at his feet – evermore emblematic a gesture as it is benevolently embraced like an almost predefined philosophy of life. It is the cultivation of intellect that accounts for Dorothea's decision to tie her life to Casaubon's as it is her mind that she intends to cultivate, and for this grandiose project she deliberately sacrifices the attributes of her youth and femininity; no other goal could be greater and no other path would she consider following. Despite the fact that she seems to fail in almost everything she attempts, despite her harsh self-judgement – as she would often characterise herself as being 'ignorant', 'dull', 'short-sighted' – Dorothea is more like George Eliot than any of her fictional characters precisely due to her almost against her own social self, tenacious ambition to mould and forge her wits: '*Dorothea knew many passages of Pascal's Pensees and of Jeremy Taylor by heart; and to her the destinies of mankind, seen by the light of Christianity, made the solitudes of feminine fashion appear occupation for Bedlam.*'⁵ This is why we have suggested that *refined wit* captured the real dimension of this character, evermore so human and powerful as her trail is scattered with shortcomings and failures, for what makes an ancient hero ever more powerful and admired if not his hesitations and efforts, and not seldom his failures? George Eliot makes sure the reader ponders his /her expectations from the very beginning of the novel, opening and closing it with the idea that the sum total of her heroine's accomplishments is rather finite for someone who strives to '*deck herself in knowledge*'⁶. Nevertheless, there is another thing that she does the moment she introduces her character in this rather *silenced* note – it seems that all Eliot does is, in fact, to highlight Dorothea's exceptionality, her out of the ordinariness and typical womanhood pattern. None

⁵ George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1964, p. 30.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 86.

of the feminine characters of *Middlemarch* seeks for intellectual accomplishment, and none is able to even articulate such an aim; if one attains it or not, that is another issue, since the stage has never ceased to belong to *him*, the Patriarch, and the play scripts are entirely his. Sympathetic in her attitude towards Dorothea, George Eliot wants us to perceive her heroine as an exceptional human being with a great heart, pure soul, ‘thirsty’ mind and genuine demeanour and humbleness, one that epitomises and sums up all the divine sparkles of her ‘predecessors’, Dinah Morris of *Adam Bede* (1858), Maggie Tulliver of *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and Romola from the homonymous novel published in 1864. Dorothea’s thirst for knowledge was mildly anticipated by both Maggie and Romola – who dream of surpassing their extrinsically confining, socially imposed condition, as was her sense of humility and humbleness by Dinah Morris. The novel seems to be heavily imbued with the concept of vocation that does not architecture its dimensionality in a simple, rather pristine and ‘gothic’ structure, for it captures it in what we might refer to as a ‘baroque’ complexity that adds passion and devotion. The geometry of the lines and shapes is far from circumscribing itself on a linear trajectory, twisting and spinning its spire in a most intricate relationship. Alan Mintz argues that the ideal of vocation ‘*suffuses the whole range of work-related themes in Middlemarch with a kind of desperate spirituality*’⁷, whereas Karen Chase suggests that ‘[...] *if in Eliot vocation is also a form of idealism that is because of the ardour (another name Middlemarch gives to passion) with which it is pursued.*’⁸ This ‘desperate’ note is also to be felt in Eliot’s somewhat maternal, sympathetic tone with which she refers to Dorothea’s strive to reach the realm of Patriarchal wisdom, as ‘*she wished, poor child, to be wise herself.*’⁹ Eliot’s heroine does not seek fame, she ‘burns’ this passionate fervour, ‘the moment of vocation’¹⁰ of hers inside, and she does it in such a unique manner that with its piousness and modesty extinguishes not the fire that consumes her. Dorothea’s understanding of ‘*all who had slipped below their own intention*’¹¹ echoes her sense of loss in front of the implacable work of time on individuals and their most ardent plans, as she herself comes to admit that ‘*There is no sorrow I have thought more about than that – to love what is great, and try to reach it, and yet to fail.*’¹² Ardent is the journey she embarks upon with so much enthusiasm and dedication, whose final destination is only a mark time prints on the story of one’s self. No wonder then, at the end of Dorothea’s epic quest the narrator of *Middlemarch* argues: ‘*Many who knew 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. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done.*’¹³

The story of a destiny – any Victorian woman’s destiny – boiled down to one question, deliberately left unanswered. Could the ‘Angel of the House’ ideal of the nineteenth century be the only part her time would ascribe to such a gifted, exceptional woman? That is the moment when we could also bring into discussion the other dimension of Dorothea’s

⁷ Alan Mintz, *George Eliot and the Novel of Vocation*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978, pp. 6-7.

⁸ Karen Chase (ed.), *Middlemarch in the Twenty-First Century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 5-6.

⁹ George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, p. 64.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 135.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 465.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 719.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 809.

fervour that takes us closer to the very etymology of her name which in Greek means ‘utterly pure’¹⁴. George Eliot spares no associations when she pictures her *extraordinariness*. Both the Prelude and the Finale chapters introduce us to a Dorothea compared to Saint Theresa who makes ‘*life beautiful – I mean everybody’s life*’.¹⁵ George Eliot has brilliantly played with the game of mirrors, once she placed Dorothea at the very heart of it and imaged her onto an almost as variedly reflected and reflecting interplay as the community of Middlemarch itself. Thus, Dorothea wears the nimbus of sainthood wherever she goes, many of the characters of the novel identifying her with angels, saints or even the Virgin Mary. Will Ladislaw feels ‘inclined to fall at the Saint’s feet’ and even the narrator describes the effect of her white bonnet as resembling ‘a sort of halo’. The opening and closing chapters to which we have already alluded compare her to a Spanish medieval saint, and this is one of those magic moments when Eliot proves her mastership in handling mirrors, juxtaposing the recollections of venerable mirrors with the distorting image of contemporary ones that mutilate and almost annihilate any personal feminine profile; the rhetoric of Eliot’s wondering would have faded away in times of St. Theresa whose heroic fulfilment is totally inaccessible to the Victorian woman, thus further deepening the disjunction between the ideal and the real in the novel. While St. Theresa, a woman who yearned to do great work in the world is known as a founder and reformer of religious communities, Dorothea fails to fulfil one dream of hers, that of establishing a model village and school of industry, as she equally fails to improve the cottages of the tenantry and accomplish her own education. *Ardent* is one of the attributes that constantly defines Dorothea throughout the entire novel, since Dorothea’s capacity for love resembles St. Theresa’s, in its ardour and infinitude, while she herself embodies a most passionate and sensuous nature. The spirit of Bernini’s St. Theresa, the one that has infused Eliot’s Dorothea Brooke surfaces in some of her descriptions, like the one pencilled at the Vatican: ‘[...] a breathing, blooming girl, whose form, not shamed by the Ariadne, was clad in a Quakerish grey drapery; her long cloak, fastened at the neck, was thrown backward from her arms, and one beautiful ungloved hand pillowed her cheek, pushing somewhat backward the white beaver bonnet which made a sort of halo to her face around the simply braided dark-brown hair.’¹⁶ Thus, Eliot sketches an overwhelmingly simple, saintly beauty only gently dimmed by the austere line of her clothing, resembling the fluttering marble drapery of Bernini’s sculpture. Eliot calls us to witness a mirrored image of the myth of Ariadne, starting from the legendary story of a woman who guides Theseus out of the Cretan labyrinth by offering him a ball of thread, to the image of an Ariadne trapped herself inside the maze and who, for having erroneously thrown the thread of salvation to someone (Mr Casaubon) closer to the image of Creon, not only finds herself buried alive and turning into a ‘*Christian Antigone*’¹⁷, but also realizes that, if she wants to escape, she has no one except herself to rely on. In her study ‘*Middlemarch*’: *The Genesis of Myth in the English Novel: The Relationship between Literary form and the Modern Predicament*, Felicia Bonaparte argues that although the feminine profiles of Ariadne and Antigone have little in common, they come to share one

¹⁴ Karl Kerényi, in his book *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, part I. “The Cretan core of the Dionysos myth”. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, argues that the name Ariadne derives from *arihagne* which means ‘utterly pure’.

¹⁵ George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, p. 216.

¹⁶ George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, p. 131.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 187.

important function. Thus, Eliot suggests that the conflict between Creon and Antigone refers to: '[...] a confrontation between a man who speaks for the moral vision society has achieved in his day and a woman whose prophetic imagination conceives possibilities that will be realised only in the future. Like Ariadne, then, who threads a moral path in the dark and purposeless labyrinth, Antigone is a guide to a higher order of civilisation.'¹⁸

A constant presence in the mind and novels of George Eliot, the idea of progress, refined intellectual endowment accounts for the 'fervour' that infuses not only the extrinsic, diachronic profile of a great age that conquered time and mapped new geographies, but also the *chosen* spirits that dim with their inner *divine sparkle* the lights of the world. Dorothea has proven to be such a character, ever more exceptional as there is something 'angelic' about her, almost becoming her second skin and nimbusing her profile. Dorothea is a woman whose voice echoes either the strains of Handel's Messiah in the mind and heart of Caleb Garth or an Aeolian harp in Ladislaw's ears, the man who also perceives in her '*a fountain of friendship towards men which I never saw in any woman before*'¹⁹. Dorothea is the music of a stream that meanders through Middlemarch and if music were colourful, then it would have aquatic hues, blue-greenish ones, since this is the chromatic tone Eliot frequently associates her heroine with. A complex symbolism derives from this juxtaposition of imagery – labyrinth, thread, stream, guidance, progress – placing Dorothea at the very core of it. We witness an extremely well-disguised, reverse of gender-oriented symbols, displacing the masculine, spear-shaped, phallic iconography to the apparently infinitely weaker, paler feminine part, whose conventional, traditional circularity is subtly transferred to the helpless, somewhat petrified Patriarch. Though her constant association with running water, further stressed by her name, *Brooke*, Dorothea embodies the very concepts Eliot thought so highly of, *progress*, *transformation*, and *evolution*. U. C. Knoepflemacher, referring to her last name, points out its '*countless allusions to currents and streams – of water as well as of feeling and thought which recur throughout the novel*'²⁰, interweaving it into a much larger spiritual geography. Ariadne is thus, not only the mistress of the labyrinth, but also the goddess of time. A time that builds, a time that flows, '*a current into which all thought and feeling were apt sooner or later to flow – the reaching forward of the whole consciousness towards the fullest truth*'²¹, and a most astonishing woman who is defined '*through the channels of her ardent character*' that '*flow like a river*'. She epitomizes the rectilinear dimension of the stream, its passionate meandering, whereas her husband stands for the still, totally unheroic imagery of the 'lake', another possible interpretation of the symbol of the labyrinth Casaubon himself is unable to break from. The water and the mirror are the two metaphors that encapsulate the relationship of the two spouses which Dorothea herself brings together '*[...] he thinks a whole world of which my thought is but a two-penny mirror. And his feelings, too, his whole experience – what a lake compared to my little pool.*' Dorothea could not be more wrong by diminishing her *self* in front of Casaubon's, whom she considers to reflect in his infinite complexity and

¹⁸ Felicia Bonaparte, "*Middlemarch*": *The Genesis of Myth in the English Novel: The Relationship between Literary form and the Modern Predicament*. Notre Dame English Journal Vol. 13, No. 3 (Summer, 1981), pp. 110.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 629.

²⁰ U. C. Knoepflemacher, "Fusing Facts and Myth: The New Reality of Middlemarch" in *This Particular Web*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Ian Adam (ed.), 1975, p. 66.

²¹ George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, p. 166.

magnitude the image of the outer world, while she is nothing but the unworthy reflector of his greatness. What a huge contrast between Dorothea's consideration for her husband's lake-deep profoundness and the narrator's caustic juxtaposition of two water metaphors, namely the water that is expected to overflow its banks but fails to meet its destiny as flowing stream, lamentably proving to be nothing else but some 'shallow rill' – Mr Casaubon – and the abundant and pure water Dorothea, magnificently, stands for. And it is not by chance that Eliot uses water as *the* metaphor for contrasting the two characters, taking into account the fact that world's mythologies are populated with both gods and goddesses of water, rivers, stream, sea and floods - *Chalchiuhtlicue*, goddess of water, lakes, rivers, and seas in the Aztec mythology, *Acionna*, *Boan*, *Sinann* and *Sequana*, water goddesses in the Celtic tradition, *Mazu* and *Nephtys* in the Chinese and Egyptian folklore, *Vedenemo* and *Vellamo*, goddesses of sea, lakes and storms for the ancient Finns, the mighty Poseidon who ruled over the kingdom of waters of Greek epopees, and his feminine counterparts - *Amphitrite*, sea goddess and consort of Poseidon, *Cymopoleia*, a daughter of *Poseidon* and goddess of giant storm waves, *Galene*, goddess of calm seas, *Leucothea*, a sea goddess, *Juturna*, the Roman goddess of fountains, wells, and springs, *Neptune*, king of the seas and the list could continue with an almost endless cohort of water-related deities. The primeval energies and explosive clashes that moulded the myths of the world wove a fabric whose netting and yarn matted both the song of the mermaid and the trident of Neptune, and the silvery glittering of a rill's jocund meandering met the telluric depths of the oceanfloor. In this generic architecture, Dorothea continues to stand for the lively stream, compared by Balzac in *Le Lys dans la vallee* with a path that helps us fly, whereas her husband seems nothing else but the '*sandy absorption of such nectar*'²². The river bed, therefore, seems not only 'to imprison' the watery blue ribbon, since it also 'feeds' itself with its energy and matter. What plastic a comparison and vivid an image Eliot manages to create in her attempt to relate herself to the gender issue of her time. The feeling of entrapment is further heightened by the water-related metaphors and references that describe the feminine universe, where Heraclitus's concept of *panta rhei* voices a twofold dramatism of one's journey through life – the first one is journeying and mapping one's personal geography, the second is merely rambling, if movement were to mean more than simply witnessing one's almost sense of non-existence and acknowledging the *Other's* tracking of new trails and exploring new territories. Limits, confinements, painful boundedness that circumscribe themselves to the image of a fallen sky. Nevertheless, the sky manages still to light the stars and dawn the first lights of Venus. Ariadne weds Dionysus and continues to metamorphose the same metaphors of water and mirror, for Will Ladislaw is also one of those many profiles mirrored by Dorothea's stream of feeling and passions. The geography of souls opens no longer the perspective of running water and its sandy, absorbing bed, which, although greedy, continues to breathe life and motion, but petrifies in Will's '*transparent skin*'²³ Dorothea's '*crystal you want to see the light through*'²⁴. Immobility, one of the time's epitome regarding women's fate, surfaces once more through Dorothea's acceptance to marry Will, pointing at what Jacques Derrida used to call '*l'ouverture à l'avenir*

²² George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, p. 179.

²³ George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, p. 378.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 302.

*ou à la venue de l'autre*²⁵. It seems almost ironic that motionlessness should be one of the attributes that would sculpt Dorothea's new profile, had it not been for Rosemond's confession about Will's powerful feelings, would have remained 'as a bit of finest Venetian crystal.'²⁶ Will, Dorothea's other reflection, is himself a reflecting-surface or mirror, illuminated from within by his good nature and merry spirit as well as from the exterior, by his 'sunshine', but seems incapable of perceiving the true incandescence of his beloved feelings, as if he was afraid of not being consumed by it. The crystal melts once again into a beautiful, mirroring self which will flood the plains of her love with a 'young passion that bears down all the obstructions that had kept her silent'²⁷. The same ardour of Dorothea is transferred onto Will, for after their wedding we find him all an 'ardent public man'²⁸, roundly completed by his wife's powerful character. Finally, the myth of the androgen is complete and meets its circularity in the fact that Will, as the representative of the *Patriarch*, grows to appreciate and reverence Dorothea's wits and devotion, whereas she, the *Angel of the House*, can no longer unweave the fabric she wove for years, but tailor it into a proud toga for *He* who speaks in the Forum of the citadel. Appropriate then, for the narrator, to capture her true and final essence in lines that not only echo mythological grandeur and accomplishment – through the reference to Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, under whose rule, the empire embraced all the civilized states of the ancient Near East, expanding vastly towards Central Asia and the Caucasus – but which also speak of the same dominant metaphor of water.

A sense of identification with her main heroine's story melts George Eliot's self with that of one of her dearest feminine portrayals. The novel ends with the narrator's rhetorical remarks on the true sense and meaning of Dorothea's life, approaching not the narrow perspective of one's life trail, as many would have expected since the very name of the chapter points in that direction *The Finale*, for the authorial voice seems to involve the audience within the very essence of literary fabric, weaving its invisible threads of life together with that of the Middlemarch community. Thus, *The Finale* does not put an end to a story, for it offers it eternal life, pulsing in every page, gaining life with every *self* that travels through it. *The Finale* does not round up the circle, it accomplishes its magnificence through an eternal reference to life and its pervasive mystery. A possible 'you' and 'I' together with Dorothea Brooke, Will Ladislaw, Tertius Lydgate are summoned to confront oneselves with the eternal challenge of all times – the quest of one's trail in life, the issue of becoming, the chance of shaping one's own destiny; there could be no *finale* for that, for long after the story of one's self approaches its end, the pneuma fuses its pulsing into the everlasting concert of the world. The choir of angels sings the same musical score, but the voices are different. Eliot's genius, for which she was said to be 'the spirit and mind of the nineteenth century'²⁹,

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, "Foi et Savoir. Les deux sources de la «religion» aux limites de la simple raison", 1996, in Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida and the Limits of Phenomenology*, Fordham University Press, 2001, p. 235.

²⁶ George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, p. 648.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 663.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 680.

²⁹ Karl R. Frederick, *George Eliot, Voice of a Century: A Biography*. New York: Norton, 1995, p. xi. in *George Eliot, Middlemarch*, Gregory Maertz (ed.), Toronto: Broadview Press, 2004.

offers a new *mirroring* onto the idea of seeking self-realization as pioneered by Goethe's hero Wilhelm Meister, since although *Middlemarch* approaches the characteristic dilemma raised by the concept of *Bildungsroman*, namely the 'development of a complex personality in the midst of a typically modern crisis as old values are becoming problematical in an increasingly industrial, democratic age.'³⁰ it may also be interpreted in terms of rejecting it.³¹

George Eliot places the concept of *deconstruction* in front of a game of mirrors that put the characters into symbolically reversed positions, thus articulating, subtle as always, an inversed architecture of the self. The patriarchal society of the Protestant, nineteenth-century England denied women the right to aspire to, let alone build a vocation, since even the association of the weaker sex with consuming emotions, passion, and arduousness would describe a geometry of forbiddance. While Casaubon seemed to be consumed by his self-absorbing project, Dorothea was totally immersed in her angelic grace. Casaubon failed to be Dorothea's guide both in the world of myths as in the world of men, while she will assume the status of the patriarch in her second marriage to Will, whose guiding star bears her name. Dorothea seems to shift the angle of reflection quite often as her character is at odds with the internalized codes of her times that correspond to the rigid patterns that should accommodate the story of any woman's life. To be a woman of her time meant to have scant options and many dreams, especially if one 'flows' one's stream against the high tide of the time. In *Le Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs*, André Gide argues that '*On ne découvre pas de terre nouvelle sans consentir à perdre de vue, d'abord et longtemps, tout rivage.*'³² and in her abandoning the 'shores' of a most canonical age, in leading a life that may be interpreted as a statement of social and intellectual unboundedness, George Eliot could not refuse her dearest heroine the same freedom; thus, in the end we see Dorothea and Will sailing towards much wider and luminous horizons. Ariadne has *deconstructed* the maze, unstringing the thread that would not only guide Theseus out, but it would also allow the weaver to spin the thread of her own life – if not totally outside the confinement of the gender-based norm, at least as further from its chains and as close to one's self as possible. The image of the mirror comes to reflect this biased projection of the authoress's soul as revealed by the following lines taken from the fifteenth chapter of the novel, which melt in their fabric a twofold perspective whose angle of refraction is that narrow that image and reflection are almost one and the same story: '*I at least have so much to do in the unraveling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and inter-woven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe.*'³³

The story of the human lot is nothing but a most intricate pattern of tensions and fallings, of errors and trials, of ponds and rivulets, destined to be recorded by a few but lived by all those many other. Beneath the web itself, there to support the complexity and craftsmanship of its design, lies another knitting of threads that needs to have much light concentrated upon. This is the world from the *other side* only to be reached by running, underground waters, waters that cross, waters that flow, water that summon the endurance of every drop and carve a way through. If the *Prelude* of the novel captures the still presence of

³⁰ George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, p. 17.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

³² André Gide, *Le Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs*, Paris: Gallimard, 1995.

³³ George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, p. 148.

ponds and pools of a stifling, overwhelming paternalistic community, the *Finale* slips in the dancing aquatic windings of rivulets that ‘dare’ to abandon the ‘*labyrinth of petty courses*’ and surface the most delicate yet stringent issue of the *other* gender. Middlemarch is not at all about a single stream of water or still pond, it is about their will to get to know, and not only that, but also be the ocean – describing thus a sublime architecture of intermingling between springs and pools, between existing dimensions and future identities. ‘*It seems to me – Eliot writes – the soul of Christianity lies not at all in the facts of an individual life, but in the ideas of which that life was the meeting point and the new starting point.*’³⁴

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³⁴ *George Eliot’s Life as Related in her Letters and Journals*, Volume II, p. 359.