

A “Toy-Box History” or “Rivers of Knowledge”

A Study of Female Intellectuality
in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*
and Dorothy L. Sayers’ *Gaudy Night*

Mette Sjölin
ENG K01 Literary Seminar
Spring 2008
Department of English
Centre for languages and literature
Lund University
Supervisor: Annika Hill

Contents

Introduction	1
A Word on Genre	2
Women and Education	4
The Depiction of Intellectual Women	8
<i>Middlemarch</i>	8
<i>Gaudy Night</i>	13
The Head and the Heart	17
Conclusion	21
Bibliography	25

Introduction

Comparing George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1870-71) and Dorothy L. Sayers' *Gaudy Night* (1935), a certain connection is discernable. Admittedly, these two novels were written in different genres and different centuries, and are rarely mentioned together. But the claim of a connection is not as far-fetched as it might at first glance seem: George Eliot (whose real name was Marian Evans) and Dorothy L. Sayers were both highly-educated women who had academic careers alongside their literary ones, but are both famous above all for their works of fiction, which are relatively light if compared to the rest of their production. Eliot and Sayers both wrote within genres that were very popular in their day: the Victorian novel (though of course it was not called "Victorian" at the time) and the detective novel respectively. In these popular novels the authors discuss social and moral issues of considerable significance, the issue in the case of *Middlemarch* and *Gaudy Night* being female intellectuality.

The aim of this essay is to examine in what ways fiction is used as a forum for discussing female intellectuality in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and Dorothy L. Sayers' *Gaudy Night*. Initially, there will be a genre discussion relating to the two works, after which I will move on to the main part of the essay and focus on three aspects of female intellectuality. Firstly, I will deal with the authors' treatment of a number of issues related to women and education: the difficulties for women in achieving education, formal education versus studying on one's own, and intellectual education versus education intended to prepare young girls for marriage. Secondly, I will compare the depiction of intellectual women in *Gaudy Night* with the depiction of intellectual women in *Middlemarch*, also with reference to the differences between intellectual and unintellectual characters. Finally, I will study the novels' reasoning concerning the ancient, much discussed theme which is often referred to as "the opposition of the head and the heart", in this case more specifically the discussion of education, intellectual career and independence of the mind versus love and marriage.

From the outset I should make it quite clear that this is not a study of influence; it is not a question of establishing an intertextual relationship between *Middlemarch* and *Gaudy Night*, nor is it my thesis that Sayers was influenced by Eliot. On the contrary, in Sayers' collected letters, written between 1899 and 1957, that is between the age of six and her death, there are only two instances where Eliot's name is mentioned, one in 1921 (*Letters*, vol 1, 176) and one in 1956 (*Letters*, vol 4, 308), and in both cases it is only in passing. In her works Sayers refers to and quotes numerous authors, but Eliot is not among them.

Needless to say, studies of *Middlemarch* and *Gaudy Night* already exist in abundance. Among my sources are studies of *Gaudy Night* focusing chiefly on female intellectuality by Ann McClellan (“Alma Mater: Women, the Academy and Mothering in Dorothy L. Sayers’ *Gaudy Night*.”), Chris Willis (“‘Suspicion in the SCR’: *Gaudy Night*, Feminism and Higher Education for Women”) and Veronika Sjöholm (“Dorothy L. Sayers’ *Gaudy Night* from a Class and Gender Perspective”). Female intellectuality in *Middlemarch* is treated by among others Gillian Beer (*George Eliot*), Bernard J. Paris (*Rereading George Eliot: Changing Responses to Her Experiments in Life*) and Sara Håkansson (*Narratorial Commentary in the Novels of George Eliot*). Since the problem of female intellectuality is only one of many themes in *Middlemarch*, however, none of these works are devoted solely to the study of that particular subject. Though much has been written on the intellectuality discussion in *Middlemarch* and *Gaudy Night* separately, to the best of my knowledge they have never before been combined in one and the same study. I hope therefore that the one work will shed some light upon the other, and in this way to be able to contribute something to the studies of each.

A Word on Genre

Before embarking on the actual analysis, I will provide a description of the two genres in question – the Victorian novel and the detective novel – and thereby attempt to determine how well each work fits into its genre, and how well the discussion on female intellectuality fits into each genre.

As far as *Middlemarch* is concerned, determining its genre is not very complicated, as what is generally called a Victorian novel is simply an English novel written in the Victorian period (1837-1901), which is unquestionably the case. The Victorian novel is further defined by M. H. Abrams, who states that it often “[deals] with or [reflects] the pressing social, economic, religious, and intellectual issues and problems of that era” (225). A discussion of the difficulties for intellectual women in nineteenth-century England would therefore fit very well into the genre. In her introduction to *Middlemarch*, Felicia Bonaparte even suggests that *Middlemarch* might be called “the quintessential Victorian novel” (xi), but she also points out that there are aspects of *Middlemarch* and George Eliot’s other novels which are not typical of the Victorian novel, as her works are more philosophical than most English literature (x).

As for *Gaudy Night*, it is generally supposed to be a detective novel, but the classification is not quite as straightforward as that, which will be shown by reading *Gaudy Night* against

Herbert Resnicow's "Rules' for the Classic Whodunit." It is of course important to make a distinction between the genre "detective novel" and its subgenre "whodunit" – a novel could very well be a detective novel without being a whodunit – but as the whodunit is the most conventional type of detective novel, and therefore characteristic of the genre, Resnicow's rules will serve the purpose. Some of these rules are followed to perfection in *Gaudy Night*. Firstly, the writer of a conventional detective story should present all the clues clearly, and not give any clues to the detective which are not also given to the reader (2). Secondly, the detective novel should involve a subplot about the detective, who should be represented as a human, with feelings and problems (ibid.). Both these criteria are true of *Gaudy Night*.

But Sayers does not conform to all of the rules with equal conscientiousness. The crime of the story must, according to Resnicow, be murder (1). The crime of *Gaudy Night* is not murder, but anonymous letters and vandalism. The novel, in fact, is notorious for its lack of murders. Resnicow further states that a "classic whodunit" should not be too long (ibid.), and that the crime should occur early in the story (3-4). In the Hodder and Stoughton paperback edition *Gaudy Night* is 440 pages long, and the crime is not introduced until page 72. This means that the reader has to wait for quite some time before there is any indication that *Gaudy Night* is about a crime at all. Considering how long the novel is in its entirety, page 72 could be construed as relatively "early", but already the length of the novel is a breach of a rule. Another rule is never to depend on clues that require specialised knowledge to understand (2). An example of this rule not being followed in *Gaudy Night* is the occurrence of a Latin quotation from Virgil's *Aeneid*. Its content is an important clue to the mystery, but no translation is offered – only the extremely abbreviated paraphrase "Harpies" (*GN*, 146). Furthermore, the detective novel should, according to Resnicow, preferably be set in an environment likely to be familiar to the reader (2). This is not the case in *Gaudy Night*: not only does the novel employ a setting which is unfamiliar to a great number of detective-story readers, but it presupposes intimate previous knowledge, as it offers no explanation either of the geography of Oxford or of university-related matters. This is pointed out by Janet Hitchman, who states that "[o]ne fault in the book is [Sayers'] assumption that *everyone* knows how a college in a university works. [...] The vast number of people who read detective novels in the thirties would not be aware of what was a Warden, what a Dean and so on" (109).

As can be seen from the above, *Gaudy Night* deviates from the conventional detective story in a number of ways, and cannot be called a typical or conventional detective novel. Sayers herself went as far as saying that "*Gaudy Night* is *not really a detective story at all*, but

a novel with a mild detective interest” [my italics] (*Letters*, vol 1, 354). However, *Gaudy Night* does appear on the surface to be a detective novel, and any first-time reader would certainly expect it to be one, especially as it is one of the last volumes in the popular “Lord Peter Wimsey” series. As can be deduced from Resnicow’s rules, the detective novel is not a conventional forum for discussing intellectuality, but nevertheless, that is how the genre is used in *Gaudy Night*. One of the most prominent aspects of intellectuality in the novel is intellectual integrity, and on her use of the detective-story genre for discussing this subject, Sayers says that “[i]t is the only book I’ve ever written which embodies any kind of a ‘moral’ and I do feel rather passionately about this business of the integrity of the mind – but I realise that to make a ‘detective story’ the vehicle for that kind of thing is (as Miss de Vine says of the Peter-Harriet marriage) ‘reckless to the point of insanity’” (*Letters*, vol 1, 357). Hitchman even questions the moral of this use of the genre: “was she exercising that integrity [‘of the mind’] to use the format of a detective novel to preach a sermon? Here was a captive, and captivated, audience; already in love with her characters, and wham! they are hit over the head with a treatise on ultimate truth. There is not even a corpse!” (108). Yet there were positive effects of Sayers’ using such a popular genre as the detective story for her discussion, which is pointed out by Willis: “By placing her views in the context of a detective story, she brought the debate on female scholarship to the attention of a wide range of readers” (1).

Women and education

Education for women is a recurrent theme in *Middlemarch* and *Gaudy Night*. It is a subject that both authors felt strongly about, and the narrators in the novels seem to sympathise more with well-educated women than with uneducated ones. This is obvious in *Middlemarch* from the narratorial commentary, where the narrator tells the reader outright what he or she thinks of the various characters; in *Gaudy Night*, the focaliser, through whose eyes the story is seen (Herman et al, 173-177; cf. Genette, 48-49), Harriet Vane, belongs among the well-educated characters. In *Middlemarch*, the reader is invited to side with the intellectually striving Dorothea Brooke against the superficial Rosamond Vincy; in *Gaudy Night*, the villain is a woman of low education who through personal conviction opposes higher education for women.

In *Middlemarch*, the most important aspect of education is the difficulties for women in obtaining an education, which was a very real problem in nineteenth-century England. Valerie A. Dodd claims that “education for girls in the nineteenth century was usually of a poor

standard. [---] The course of studies was unintellectual, for demanding subjects were seen to be incompatible with feminine frailty” (70). Claire Tomalin provides the following description of a boarding school for girls in the 1780s, which shows the lack of intellectual stimulation of such institutions:

[The pupils were] kept confined in the same unaired room, sewing on a wooden bench for hours at a time [...], [the teacher] occasionally enlivening things by reading aloud from *The Pilgrim's Progress*. [---] As for their studies, they learnt by rote from the Dictionary, the Grammar and a book of Geography; there were never any questions. They read from the Bible in the morning and the history of England or Rome in the afternoon; a master came to teach writing and arithmetic each morning from eleven to twelve, and the Dancing Master came twice a week. [...] They could not complain in their letters home, because these were “corrected” and sealed by their schoolmistresses. (35)

As *Middlemarch* takes place in the early 1830s, Dorothea, who at the beginning of the book is a little under twenty, would have grown up and been educated in a world not entirely different from that of Tomalin's description. It is no wonder, therefore, that Dorothea, unsatisfied with “the shallows of ladies'-school literature” (*Mm*, 23), should think that “[t]he really delightful marriage must be that where your husband [...] could teach you even Hebrew if you wished it” (*Mm*, 10). An odd virtue to wish for in a husband, it might seem, but a learned husband is the best chance for Dorothea to obtain an intellectual education. Her idea of marriage as a sort of education is obvious when, under the pretext of wanting to spare her husband's eyes by reading aloud to him, she asks if he might not teach her to read Latin and Greek “as Milton's daughters did to their father, without understanding what they read” (*Mm*, 58), but secretly plans to study on her own so as to understand what she reads. Throughout the book, the problem of women's education in the nineteenth century is illustrated by Dorothea's lack of intellectually stimulating education and her efforts to attain it. Dorothea is “[s]truggling in the bonds of narrow teaching” (*Mm*, 26), since a “toy-box history of the world adapted to young ladies” has formed “the chief part of her education” (*Mm*, 79).

Gaudy Night takes place a hundred years later than *Middlemarch*, but even though women in the interim had been admitted to universities, higher education for women was not a matter of course when *Gaudy Night* was written. “Whether a woman could truly be a scholar” was, according to Willis, “still a matter for debate” in the 1930s. Willis further states that women students at Oxford in 1936 were one to five (2). According to McClellan, 0.5% of the women in the relevant age group in 1938 entered university, and in 1930-31 9.9% of the total staff at universities and 28.6% of the students were women (324-325). The first women ever were

awarded their degrees from Oxford University in 1920. Dorothy Sayers, though by that time 27 years old and having gone down some years previously, was among them.

In *Gaudy Night* as in *Middlemarch*, then, female characters are presented with difficulties in pursuing an education. Willis points out that “[t]here is not a single woman professor in *Gaudy Night*” and that “Dr Baring is the only one of the female academics to have a doctorate” (3). One of the dons at Shrewsbury College, Miss Hillyard, claims that “[a]ll the men have been amazingly kind and sympathetic about the Women’s Colleges. [...] But you won’t find them appointing women to big University posts” (*GN*, 54). The Dean, Miss Martin, on the other hand, thinks that “it’s perfectly noble of [the men] to let us come trampling over their University at all, bless their hearts. They’ve been used to being lords and masters for hundreds of years and they want a bit of time to get used to the change. Why, it takes a man months and *months* to reconcile himself to a new hat” (*GN*, 55).

While there is in *Gaudy Night* a clear division between the educated and the uneducated female characters, none of the female characters in *Middlemarch* have any education to speak of, that is no formal intellectual education. All that the reader is told about what has actually constituted their education is that Dorothea and her sister Celia have been educated “first in an English family and afterwards in a Swiss family at Lausanne” (*Mm*, 8), and that Mary Garth and Rosamond both attended the “provincial school” (*Mm*, 101), after which Rosamond went to a finishing school. The significant difference between the various *Middlemarch* characters’ levels of education lies in the fact that Dorothea and, though probably not to the same extent, Mary read on their own.

The most important factor in the difference between education in *Middlemarch* and education in *Gaudy Night* is formal education: set in a ladies’ college, most of the women in *Gaudy Night* have, or are pursuing, a university education, while that possibility does not exist for the women in *Middlemarch*. The prevalent attitude towards universities in *Gaudy Night* is set by its epigraph from John Donne: “The University is a Paradise, Rivers of Knowledge are there, Arts and Sciences flow from thence [...]” Formal (and classical) education is very important to Harriet, which is obvious in the following quotation where she even thinks to herself in Latin:

They can’t take this away, at any rate. Whatever I may have done since, this remains. Scholar; Master of Arts; Domina; Senior Member of this University (*statuum est quod Juniores Senioribus debitam et congruam reverentiam tum in privato tum in publico exhibeant* [“It is laid down by the Statute that Junior Members shall both in private and public show due and suitable respect for Seniors” (trans. Reynolds, 255)]); a place

achieved, inalienable, worthy of reverence. (*GN*, 14)

Not only is Harriet proud of her education and her degree, but she feels they are the only things in her life that she can rely on – the only things that prop her self-confidence. She has rather a romantic and idealised view of the university, and feels a strong fellowship with “every man and woman to whom integrity of mind [means] more than material gain” (*GN*, 31). She sees the University world, and the ladies’ college in particular, as a safe place where she can hide from the frightening outside world. The college scout Annie Wilson, on the other hand, has a very different view of ladies’ colleges: she sees them as a threat to men and as against women’s natural calling, which is obvious when she says, “[a] woman’s proper job is to look after a husband and children. [---] I wish I could burn down this place and all the places like it – where you teach women to take men’s jobs” (*GN*, 426-427).

In *Middlemarch*, as in *Gaudy Night*, the only kind of education that really counts for something in the eyes of the implied author is intellectual education. It is intellectual education that Dorothea strives for and feels the lack of. But it is a very different kind of education that the society of *Middlemarch* finds suitable for young women. A “well-educated” young lady should according to the prevalent ideal be like Rosamond, who “was admitted to be the flower of Mrs Lemon’s school, the chief school in the county, where the teaching included all that was demanded in the accomplished female – even to extras, such as getting in and out of a carriage” (*Mm*, 89). Celia is also depicted as accomplished and well-adjusted, whereas Dorothea is a failure within the field of “feminine” education. The narrator adopts a highly condescending and sardonic tone towards girls’ education and “feminine accomplishments”, a feeling which is shared by Dorothea. The purpose of this kind of education is of course to increase the girls’ marriage eligibility, but does not really prepare them for marriage itself. As Håkansson observes, “[Rosamond] finds that after marriage her ‘female’ education does her no good” (242). Dorothea’s self-acquired intellectual education is presented as a hindrance for her chances of marrying: “Such a wife might awaken you some fine morning with a new scheme for the application of her income which would interfere with political economy and the keeping of saddle-horses: a man would naturally think twice before he risked himself in such fellowship. Women were expected to have weak opinions [...]” (*Mm*, 9). But for marriage to Mr Casaubon her comparatively intellectual education actually turns out to be a qualification: Mr Casaubon thinks that “she might really be such a helpmate to him as would enable him to dispense with a hired secretary” (*Mm*, 262).

Even though the main concern of *Gaudy Night* is intellectual education for women, the idea of the proper education for women being that which prepares them for marriage is by no means absent from that work either. This idea is embodied by Annie, who says, “I can’t see what girls want with books. Books won’t teach them to be good wives” (*GN*, 116). She also says that she hopes her daughters will be “good wives and mothers – that’s what I’ll bring them up to be” (*GN*, 216), and scolds one of them for saying she wants to ride a motorcycle and run a garage when she grows up: ‘You’ll never get a husband [...] if you mess about in a garage, getting ugly and dirty’ (*GN*, 217). Harriet calls these opinions “dreadful” (*GN*, 116), but remarks that, in the eyes of society, “a woman may achieve greatness, or at any rate great renown, by merely being a wonderful wife and mother” (*GN*, 53). The difference here is that most of the characters in *Gaudy Night*, unlike most characters in *Middlemarch*, endorse intellectual education for women. Even though both authors had similar opinions on the subject, opposing higher education for women is, as it were, a greater sin in the 1930s university-town world of *Gaudy Night* than in the 1830s countryside world of *Middlemarch*.

The Depiction of Intellectual Women

There are three main ways in which information on characters is conveyed to the reader: what the narrator says about them, what other characters say and think about them, and what they themselves say, think and do. I will therefore go through these three types of characterisation, with reference first to the characterisation of Dorothea in *Middlemarch* and then to the characterisation of intellectual women in *Gaudy Night*. The various characters whose views on the intellectual women will be presented are divided into three categories: unintellectual women, unintellectual men and intellectual men.

Middlemarch

It is appropriate at this point to say something about the role of the narrator in *Middlemarch*, which subject is exhaustively treated by Sara Håkansson in *Narratorial Commentary in the Novels of George Eliot*. The narrator of *Middlemarch* is, according to Håkansson, omniscient, not in the sense of being “positioned at a higher level as a supreme onlooker who sees, knows and judges characters from a distance”, but “in the sense that the narrative is in his control” (23-24). Håkansson further states that the narratorial voice of *Middlemarch* is particularly “richly varied” and “continuously [moves] between sympathy and sarcasm” (176). What makes the *Middlemarch* narrator (who will for practical reasons be referred to as “he”) so

prominent is that he draws attention to himself by stating his own opinions on the characters and events of the narrative. The function of this narratorial commentary is, according to Håkansson, to “[modify] the reader’s distance to the text”, to “communicate with the reader” and to “[shape] his or her interpretation of the text” (178).

The narrator’s attitude towards Dorothea is set by the Prelude, where she is compared to Saint Theresa (*Mm*, 3-4). This is, according to Bernard J. Paris, a rhetorical way of glorifying Dorothea and preparing the readers to react positively to behaviour of which they might otherwise have disapproved (26-27). It also shifts the responsibility from Dorothea onto society: in a different social context Dorothea could have been a Saint Theresa, but her spiritual and intellectual ambitions are thwarted by social conventions and her endeavours are misconstrued by the narrow-minded society. The narrator describes Dorothea as intellectual, if naïve, and that intellectuality as great and important. Throughout the novel, the narrator tries to defend and justify Dorothea. His tone is mostly approving and fond, but at times slightly ironic. Paris states that though “[m]ild satire is directed at Dorothea”, the reader is “not to forget that her quirks are the product of her frustrated lofty soul” (33). Still, the narrator wavers between partial and clear-sighted. In his more clear-sighted moments, he pities Dorothea, who is metaphorically short-sighted (Bonaparte, xiv), for her inability to see things clearly. But the narrator seems to be aware in his capacity of omniscient narrator of being at an advantage over Dorothea, and so does not blame her for her misconstructions. According to Paris, “George Eliot [offers] us two ways of looking at Dorothea: from the perspective of ‘common eyes,’ which she satirizes, or from that of the narrator, who is Dorothea’s ‘sacred poet’” (31).

The unintellectual woman who serves as Dorothea’s antithesis is Rosamond, but the one who has most opinions on Dorothea is Celia. Her attitude towards Dorothea has always been “a mixture of criticism and awe” (*Mm*, 14). “[C]leverness” seems “pitiable” to Celia (*Mm*, 76), who does not understand her sister’s motives or regard her as an intellectual, but accuses her of being “contradictory” (*Mm*, 694), “impatient [...] when people don’t do and say just what [she likes]” (*Mm*, 76) and “fond of melancholy things and ugly people” (*Mm*, 306). As for Rosamond, she thinks of Dorothea merely as a potential rival in the beginning, and is only interested in knowing whether Dr Lydgate “[thinks] her very handsome” (*Mm*, 275), but later on Dorothea makes her feel “something like bashful timidity before a superior” (*Mm*, 764). This shows that Rosamond, like Dorothea, grows to greater insight and maturity towards the end of the novel.

The two most prominent unintellectual men in *Middlemarch* are Dorothea's unsuccessful suitor and later brother-in-law, Sir James Chettam, and her uncle, Mr Brooke. Sir James obviously admires Dorothea and regards her intellectual abilities as superior: he "[delights]" in "her cleverness" (*Mm*, 20), calls her "a noble creature" (*Mm*, 267), and supposes her to do everything she does "from some high, generous motive" (*Mm*, 18). He also claims that she possesses "the power of discrimination" (*Mm*, 29) and has "a good opinion" about "everything" (28). His own intellectual abilities are depicted as so weak, however, that it is doubtful whether he has any sort of idea of what intellectuality really is. He says "exactly" to everything Dorothea says, "even when she [expresses] uncertainty" (*Mm*, 10), so he is obviously under the impression that he admires and trusts her opinions, though he is not interested enough to make the effort to find out what they are. He has "a very indefinite notion" of what "the excessive religiousness alleged against Miss Brooke" consists in, and "[thinks] that it [will] die out with marriage" (*Mm*, 20), which sounds rather condescending. On the other hand, he is the only one who takes Dorothea's plan to build better cottages for poor tenants seriously enough to help her with it, even after he has found out that she is going to marry Mr Casaubon.

As far as Mr Brooke is concerned, he does not acknowledge the possibility of a woman's being intellectual, but presumes that every woman is like his stereotype image of one. He is very generous in sharing his views on women with the other characters, and says among other things, "Your sex are not thinkers, you know" (*Mm*, 50), "I cannot let [Dorothea] meddle with my documents. Young ladies are too flighty" (*Mm*, 18), and "such deep studies [...] are too taxing for a woman [---] [T]here is a lightness about the feminine mind – a touch and go" (*Mm*, 60). Mr Brooke applies all of these standard opinions to Dorothea, disregarding how obviously they have nothing to do with her personality. But sometimes he does seem to recognise the fact that she is not just any "young lady." "I thought you had more of your own opinion than most girls", he tells her (*Mm*, 38); he also informs Dr Lydgate that "[s]he is clever enough for anything, is my niece" (*Mm*, 269). It is important here, though, to note that Mr Brooke chooses the word "clever", rather than the word "intellectual." The reader is told that Dorothea is generally considered *clever*, but, as the narrator points out, "that epithet would not have described her to circles in whose more precise vocabulary cleverness implies mere aptitude for knowing and doing, apart from character" (*Mm*, 80).

Another unintellectual male character who offers his opinion on Dorothea is Mr Chicely, who says that she is "not my style of woman: I like a woman who lays herself out a little more to please us. There should be a little filigree about a woman – something of the coquette"

(*Mm*, 82). Mr Chicely does not like the kind of woman Dorothea is, but, like many of the characters, he does not identify her as intellectual.

The intellectual male characters of *Middlemarch* who will be discussed are Dr Lydgate, Mr Casaubon and Will Ladislaw. Initially, Dr Lydgate is much like Mr Chicely in that he prefers Rosamond to Dorothea, as the latter does “not look at things from the proper feminine angle. The society of such women was about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form, instead of reclining in a paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes, and blue eyes for a heaven” (*Mm*, 88). Later on, however, like Rosamond, he changes his opinion on Dorothea: “[Dorothea’s] childlike grave-eyed earnestness [...] was irresistible – blent into an adorable whole with her ready understanding of high experience. (Of lower experience such as plays a great part in the world, poor Mrs Casaubon had a very blurred shortsighted knowledge [...])” (*Mm*, 720). It is clear from this quotation that Dr Lydgate is one of the characters whose ideas best correspond to those of the narrator, as they describe Dorothea in similar ways: both see her as special and “above” ordinary things and people, but at the same time “shortsighted” and “childlike.”

Mr Casaubon marries Dorothea for her “ardent self-sacrificing affection” (*Mm*, 46), and, as has already been mentioned, for her secretarial skills. At first he is “not without his pride in his young wife, who spoke better than most women, as indeed he had perceived in choosing her” (*Mm*, 199), but then he starts to feel annoyed and threatened by her efforts to understand his work and help him, and is reluctant to teach her anything. Perhaps he realises that she is not as “self-sacrificing” as either of them thought, but sees marriage to him as a means of learning and a chance of doing something important with her life. Mr Casaubon does not want Dorothea to be intellectual or to take an active part in his research, but silently to admire him, to perform the secretarial tasks assigned to her, and always to regard him as her superior.

Will Ladislaw, on the other hand, sees Dorothea as “divine” (*Mm*, 203), “an angel beguiled” (*Mm*, 195), “a creature worthy to be perfectly loved” (*Mm*, 341). He even has a fantasy about rescuing her from the “dragon” Mr Casaubon (*Mm*, 195-196). According to Paris, Ladislaw discovers his “calling” to be “the worship of the divine Dorothea” (46). Like many of the major characters’, Will’s view of Dorothea is dynamic – it is formed and changed during the course of the story. When he first meets her, he concludes that she “must be an unpleasant girl” on the grounds that she is engaged to Mr Casaubon and claims to be ignorant about art (*Mm*, 73), but he later changes his mind and realises that she is “not coldly clever and indirectly satirical”, as he first thought, “but adorably simple and full of feeling” (*Mm*, 195). More importantly, however, he takes an interest in her thoughts and ideas. He engages

in serious conversations with her and takes what she has to say seriously. He “[sees] more in what she [says] than she herself [sees]” (*Mm*, 339). Even though Ladislav is not himself as much of an intellectual as Mr Casaubon, he is more ready to recognise Dorothea’s intellectual qualities.

Many of Dorothea’s actions and utterances contribute to the image of her as an intellectual. The reader is for example told that she was “early troubling her elders with questions about the facts around her” (*Mm*, 349), that she often “[sits] up at night to read old theological books” (*Mm*, 9), and that she takes in the contents of a pamphlet on the Early Church “as eagerly as she might have taken in the scent of a fresh bouquet after a dry, hot, dreary walk” (*Mm*, 35). After Casaubon’s death, she tells Ladislav that Mr Brooke and Sir James “want [her] to be a great deal on horseback, and have the garden altered [...] to fill up [her] days”, and adds, “I thought you could understand that one’s mind has other wants” (*Mm*, 342). The intellectual and spiritual yearning discernible in the passages quoted above seems to accord with the narrator’s description of Dorothea, but this is not the only way of interpreting her actions. Paris claims that he, when examining Dorothea as a “mimetic character” – that is “an imagined human being”, separated from the narrator’s “rhetoric” – sees her as a completely different person from the Dorothea which the narrator describes:

[Dorothea’s] desire for intensity and greatness and need for an epic life are not manifestations of spiritual grandeur but of a compulsive search for glory. Her craving for “illimitable satisfaction” is an expression of insatiable compensatory needs, and her “self-despair” results from hopelessness about actualizing her idealized image of herself as a person of world-historical importance. (31)

Dorothea has no very clear image of what it is that she strives for, but expresses rather vague ambitions, such as wanting “to make life beautiful” (*Mm*, 205), and says that she has always thought she would like to devote her life to “[helping] someone who did great works, so that his burthen might be lighter” (*Mm*, 342). She also channels much of her mental energy into religion and charity. Paris observes that it is far from certain that Dorothea could have succeeded in doing something important, even in a different society. She shows no signs of any “special calling or ability” (54), and even though she is “of above-average intelligence”, more than that is required “to make a memorable contribution to the world” (55).

Dorothea’s attitude towards other women is, according to Paris, “enormously condescending”, especially towards Celia: he speaks of “contempt” as well as of a “sense of spiritual superiority” (33). If this is the case, Dorothea herself is not aware of the fact:

according to her image of herself, she is humble, charitable and very fond of her sister, and “her imagination [adorns] her sister Celia with attractions altogether superior to her own” (*Mm*, 10). But her behaviour towards Celia can certainly be seen as condescending when she, shudderingly refusing to wear a cross “as a trinket” herself, tells Celia that it would not be wrong of *her* to wear it, since “[s]ouls have complexions too” (*Mm*, 12). Opinions on whether Dorothea is an altruistic or a self-centred character diverge drastically. This is probably for two reasons: firstly, there is a discrepancy between the narrator’s presentation of Dorothea and the most natural interpretations of the motives for her actions; secondly, Dorothea changes during the course of the novel, and, as she grows more mature and less self-centred, her need to feel selfless and noble decreases.

Gaudy Night

The narrator of *Gaudy Night* is not nearly as prominent as that of *Middlemarch*. Rather than through narratorial commentary, much of the characterisation is conveyed in Harriet’s free indirect discourse, where the thoughts and wording are hers, but which is part of the narrator’s discourse in the sense that the tense and pronouns are those used by the narrator (Herman et al, 188-189). Sometimes block characterisations of characters are given the first time they enter the story – this is the case with two of the most intellectual female characters, Miss Lydgate and Miss de Vine. The former, who is an English teacher and Harriet’s former tutor, is described in the following way:

To the innocent and candid eyes of that great scholar, no moral problem seemed ever to present itself. Of a scrupulous personal integrity, she embraced the irregularities of other people in a wide, unquestioning charity. As any student of literature must, she knew all the sins of the world by name, but it was doubtful whether she recognised them when she met them in real life. [...]. So many young people had passed through her hands, and she had found so much good in all of them; it was impossible to think that they could be deliberately wicked, like Richard III or Iago. (*GN*, 19-20)

As a contrast, this is how Miss de Vine, Shrewsbury’s new Research Fellow of History, is described:

Here was a fighter, indeed; [...] a soldier knowing no personal loyalties, whose sole allegiance was to the fact. [...] Behind [the] sensitiveness [of her face] was a mind as hard and immovable as granite. [...] [S]he looked as though the word “compromise” had been omitted from her vocabulary [...] If anything came between her and the service of truth, she would walk over it without rancour and without pity – even if it were her own reputation. (*GN*, 22)

These two examples clearly show that every intellectual woman in *Gaudy Night* is described as an individual with her own character traits, rather than all intellectual women being described as a group. In some respects, however, all the academic women in *Gaudy Night* are alike. Perhaps most importantly, they are all unmarried. The significance of this is, according to Willis, that “Sayers links the disturbances at Shrewsbury with the allegations of mental disturbance levelled by men at communities of celibate women. Female scholarship is seen as being irretrievably intermingled with gender and sexuality in a way that male scholarship is not” (2). This can be seen for example in the “epithets” that Harriet is afraid will be used of the Shrewsbury academics if the outbreak becomes generally known – “‘Soured virginity’ – ‘unnatural life’ – ‘semi-demented spinsters’ – ‘starved appetites and suppressed impulses’ – ‘unwholesome atmosphere’” (*GN*, 74) – and in the epigraph to chapter five from Robert Burton:

And methinks sometime or other, amongst so many rich Bachelors, a benefactor should be found to build a monastical College for old, decayed, deformed, or discontented maids to live together in, that have lost their first loves, or otherwise miscarried, or else are willing howsoever to lead a single life. The rest, I say, are toys in respect, and sufficiently recompensed by those innumerable contents and incomparable privileges of Virginity. (*GN*, 78)

The only unintellectual woman who gets to say anything about the intellectual women is Annie, who thinks that “some of these clever ladies are a bit queer [---] No heart in them. [---] I always think of what it says in the Bible, about ‘much learning hath made thee mad.’ It isn’t a right thing” (*GN*, 116). Annie’s opinions are even clearer in what she says when it has been discovered that she was the anonymous-letter writer: “You’d destroy your own husbands if you had any, for an old book or bit of writing [---] There’s nothing in your books about life [...] – or love – or hate or anything human. You’re ignorant and stupid and helpless. [...] You can’t do anything for yourselves” (*GN*, 427-428). Since Annie is so obviously biased, insane, and, according to Willis, “an embodiment of the Nazi ideal of womanhood” (5), her speech about intellectual women does not perhaps afford much insight into their characters, but what she says is actually not so entirely different from what the narrator says about Miss de Vine. Annie’s statement “You’d destroy your own husbands [...] for an old book”, for instance, seems to echo a passage from the block characterisation quoted above: “knowing no personal loyalties, whose sole allegiance was to the fact.”

Unintellectual men are, like unintellectual women, scarce in *Gaudy Night*. There is however a decorator who calls Shrewsbury College “a ’en ’ouse”, to which remark the porter, Padgett, answers that he used to work at the zoo, but quit after being bitten by a *female* camel (*GN*, 114). These derisive comments show that the two men do not think highly of intellectual women, nor perhaps of women in general.

The main intellectual male character in *Gaudy Night* is Lord Peter Wimsey. His views on most matters seem to agree with the views of the implied author, so naturally he thinks well of intellectual women. He claims that he loves Harriet for her “devastating talent for keeping to the point and telling the truth” (*GN*, 319) – a decidedly academic quality – and takes her work seriously enough to tell her it would not matter if it hurt her “like hell” to write about her personal experiences and feelings as long as “it made a good book” (*GN*, 291). Moreover, his judgement is, unlike Harriet’s, unclouded by personal problems and prejudice. When she is outraged by a journalist’s referring to the students of Shrewsbury as “undergraduettes” and the Warden as the “Lady Head”, he says that “bad manners always [make] him sick, but [is] it any worse than headlining foreign monarchs by their Christian names, untitled?” (*GN*, 71). Furthermore, when Peter and Harriet first discuss the crimes that have been committed at Shrewsbury, and Harriet thinks “the motive only too painfully obvious” (hinting at the risk of lunacy attached to celibate life), Peter disagrees: he goes through the facts and comes to the conclusion that these facts do not suggest “blind malignity” caused by “sex repression”, thus showing that he does not share the standard prejudices about academic women (*GN*, 282-283).

The characters’ own behaviour gives the reader some information about them, both as a group and as individuals. Their intellectuality is perhaps most obvious in the arguments in the Senior Common Room, of which the following is an example:

“If you ask me,” observed the Bursar, “we discuss things a great deal to much in this university.

We argue about this and that and why and wherefore, instead of getting the thing done.”

“But oughtn’t we to ask what things we want done,” objected the Dean.

Before ten minutes had passed, somebody had introduced the word “values.” An hour later they were still at it. Finally the Bursar was heard to quote:

“God made the integers; all else is the work of man.”

“Oh, bother!” cried the Dean. “Do let’s keep mathematics out of it. And physics. I cannot cope with them.”

“Who mentioned Planck’s constant a little time ago?” (*GN*, 37)

This dialogue, which is part of an everyday conversation about among other things drains and men, features references to various academical subjects, in addition to which the SCR members are continuously analysing themselves and their motives and questioning the ethics of the most commonplace actions. At other times, the Senior Common Room is more than anything else reminiscent of a girls' school, for example when all the dons eagerly flock round a window to look at an "incredibly beautiful young man" (*GN*, 339). An example of the academics' "intellectual" curiosity is Miss Pyke's keen interest in and determination to find out exactly why some men's shirt-fronts make a "popping" sound (*GN*, 316).

One of the more exhaustively described characters is Miss Lydgate, about whom the reader gets a very clear idea from what she says and does. Her room is "festooned with proofs of her forthcoming work on the prosodic elements in English verse from Beowulf to Bridges" (*GN*, 40), and she has "perfected [...] an entirely new prosodic theory, demanding a novel and complicated system of notation which [involves] the use of twelve different varieties of type" (*ibid.*). This seems like a very impressive and innovative work of scholarship, but nevertheless Miss Lydgate tells Harriet that "I sometimes wonder whether I am a scholar at all [...]. It's all quite clear in my head [...], but I get muddled when I put it down on paper" (*GN*, 41). This is perhaps the female version of the stereotype male scholar – brilliant, but untidy and confused. Miss Lydgate is also presented as a very caring person. When all her proofs are destroyed, for example, she feels sorry for the printers and blames herself "for not keeping a proper record of everything" (*GN*, 98).

As both Harriet and the members of the Senior Common Room have professions, their intellectual aspirations are much more clearly defined than Dorothea's. The academics have their respective subjects, and Harriet strives for "the release that all writers [...] seek for as men seek for love": to get "her mood on to paper" (*GN*, 215) – to "get the thing dead right and know it's dead right" (*GN*, 170). However, she also considers an academic career and wishes she "could come back to this quiet place [Oxford], where only intellectual achievement [counts]" and "work here steadily and obscurely at some close-knit piece of reasoning" (*GN*, 21).

The intellectual women in *Gaudy Night* have many opinions on unintellectual women. For example, they discuss at some length whether any women other than academics care about intellectual integrity (*GN*, 330-331 *passim*), and whether they should employ secretaries who have children, as motherhood interferes with the secretaries' work (*GN*, 219 *passim*). Rather surprisingly, however, the Dean makes the reflection that the scouts "probably [...] spell far better than we do" (*GN*, 91).

The Head and the Heart

The opposition of intellectual and emotional interests is a prominent feature in both *Middlemarch* and *Gaudy Night*. In *Gaudy Night*, it plays an important part in the detective plot and is at the centre of the subplot, where Harriet is in conflict between intellectual ambition and love and in doubt as to whether it is possible to have personal relationships and retain one's intellectual integrity. As well as being an intrinsic part of the plot, the head-and-heart theme is discussed in several dialogues between Harriet and Peter (*GN*, 65-66 passim), in dialogues between Harriet and Miss de Vine (*GN*, 169-172 passim), and in Harriet's represented thoughts, most frequently in the form of free indirect discourse, of which the following is an example:

[---] Could there ever be any alliance between the intellect and the flesh? It was this business of asking questions and analysing everything that sterilised and stultified all one's passions. Experience, perhaps, had a formula to get over this difficulty; one kept the bitter, tormenting brain on one side of the wall and the languorous sweet body on the other, and never let them meet. [...] Easy for a man, and possible even for a woman [...]. But to seek to force incompatibles into a compromise was madness; one should neither do it nor be a party to it. [---] (*GN*, 401)

In *Middlemarch*, intellectual and emotional interests are not at first seen as being in conflict by Dorothea, but she ends up having great difficulty trying to combine them. Beer argues that "Dorothea finds it hard to distinguish between love and learning [---] To [her], passion and knowledge are identified" (172-173).

One aspect of the head-and-heart theme which can be found in both *Gaudy Night* and *Middlemarch* is the main characters' search for a vocation. Dorothea asks herself, "[w]hat could she do, what ought she to do?" (*Mm*, 26), and Harriet wants to know "which things" in life "are of overmastering importance" (*GN*, 38). The expression used for "vocation" in *Gaudy Night* is "proper job" (*GN*, 33 passim), and Harriet's problem is to find out which of the things she does or wants to do is her proper job. One of the Shrewsbury fellows, Miss de Vine, has a theory on the subject, which is that one's proper job is the one thing which one does not make fundamental mistakes about and is not on any account prepared to be insincere about or unfaithful to (*GN*, 169-171). Harriet comes to the conclusion that that "thing" is her work as a writer. Her problem then is that if one can only have one proper job, then marrying Peter Wimsey is not her proper job. Miss de Vine offers a solution to that problem, too:

though marriage to some people might be “a full-time job”, “there are a few rare people [...] who don’t look on themselves as jobs but as fellow-creatures” (*GN*, 171). Obviously, Peter Wimsey is one of those rare people. (Incidentally, his social position makes it easier for him to be that kind of person, since his wife will not have any actual household work to do.) In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea’s search for a vocation does not result in any solution of that kind. She marries, which is one of the very few things she can do as a woman in nineteenth-century Protestant England. There is no “proper job” in store for her and no intellectual fulfilment to be had.

A second significant concern in both novels is the moral dilemma of whether it is most important to be true to one’s own mind or to those one loves – to be professional and high-principled or to be charitable – to put “professional honour” or “personal loyalties” first (*GN*, 420). *Gaudy Night* is based almost entirely on this theme. At the centre of the detective plot are the moral questions of whether it was justifiable in a historian to falsify a claim in his thesis in order to secure a post that would enable him to support his wife and children, and of whether it was right of Miss de Vine, who found him out, to make his deception known and have him dismissed. In the subplot, the theme is recurrent in Wimsey’s choosing to solve the mystery knowing that it will decrease his chances of persuading Harriet to marry him if she finds out the solution, since it will give her support for the idea that “it [is] dangerous to care for anybody” (*GN*, 429) and show that there is no reason to believe that a celibate life devoted to intellectuality might lead to insanity. The corresponding incident in *Middlemarch* is Dorothea’s being faced with the choice after Mr Casaubon’s death of whether to finish his work on the “Key to all Mythologies” even though she has become convinced that it is not a good work of scholarship. As is the case in *Gaudy Night*, the loyalty to her own mind wins in the end; as Dorothea puts it, “Do you not see now that I could not submit my soul to yours, by working hopelessly at what I have no belief in?” [italics original] (*Mm*, 506-507).

As is obvious from what has been said above, the problem for both Dorothea and Harriet is that they are “cursed with both hearts and brains” (*GN*, 66). This means that they can do one of two things: either try to combine intellectual and emotional interests, or choose one or the other. The problems of a compromise are chiefly that one cannot devote one’s life to one object, which the object might require, and that a husband might not want an intellectual wife. The problem of making a choice is that whichever one chose, one would miss the other. Both Dorothea and Harriet identify with the intellectual side; the difference is that while an intellectual life is for Dorothea something exciting and out of the ordinary, for Harriet it represents safety. They both have bad emotional experiences – Dorothea’s unhappy marriage

to Casaubon and Harriet's disastrous relationship with Philip Boyes – and are inclined towards an intellectual life, but in the end they seem to choose the “heart” anyway, as both novels end with a love match.

In Dorothea's case, the ending is not entirely satisfactory: she has to content herself with giving her husband “wifely help” in his political career (*Mm*, 783), and feels that “there was always something better which she might have done, if she had only been better and known better” (*Mm*, 782), and “[m]any 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” (*Mm*, 783). Paris explains Dorothea's choice as a consequence of her disappointing marriage to Casaubon. She has “two selves”, he says, one that “aspires for greatness” and one that “longs for love” – in other words, a head and a heart. She first tries to find greatness, by marrying Casaubon, but when he “has no interest in her experience and makes no response to her affection”, her “love need becomes stronger”, and so she marries Ladislaw, whom she loves, and gives her search for greatness amiss (Paris, 44). According to Zelda Austen,

Feminist critics are angry with George Eliot because she did not permit Dorothea Brooke [...] to do what George Eliot did in real life: translate, publish articles, edit a periodical, refuse to marry until she was middle-aged, live an independent existence as a spinster, and finally live openly with a man whom she could not marry. (“Why Feminist Critics Are Angry with George Eliot”, *College English*, 1976, qtd Neale, 147)

Dorothea never does find her vocation, and she settles for less than she once wished for. This does not mean, however, that in her marriage to Ladislaw she is less intellectual than she was in her marriage to Casaubon, or as a widow, or before she was married. Catherine Neale points out that Dorothea finds “in Ladislaw some of the powers that she thought she saw in Casaubon: the dedication to a worthy cause, the appreciation of a helpmate” (155). It is important to remember that it is not intellectuality which Dorothea renounces in accepting Ladislaw, but “position and fortune” (*Mm*, 782). Rather than renouncing intellectuality, her perception of intellectuality changes. She starts off looking on Mr Casaubon as a father and teacher and hopes that he will have all the answers ready and teach her everything, but finds that there is more intellectual intercourse to be had with her fellow pupil Ladislaw. Beer states that Dorothea “learns to do without the masculine as father. She grows out of her belief that men father knowledge” (173) and that “[h]er attraction to Will grows through the play of spirit and learning between them [---] He and Dorothea educate each other, abandoning the

model of mentor and pupil” (174). In other words, she discovers collaborative learning. In parallel, she gains a more mature conception of love, which can be seen in her use of the word “fond.” At the beginning of the novel, she calls “fond of” an “odious expression” (*Mm*, 33) and tells Celia that “it is not the right word for the feeling [she] must have towards the man [she] would accept as a husband” (*Mm*, 34). At the end of the novel, on the other hand, when she is engaged to Ladislav, Celia asks her if he is “very fond of [her]”, and she answers, “I hope so. I am very fond of him” (*Mm*, 771).

In Harriet’s case, the ending is certainly meant to be a happy one. After a long struggle, Harriet can marry Peter and still preserve her intellectual integrity and her self-respect. The head and the heart are united, and a balance is reached. Sayers explains her intentions in the following way:

[T]he opposition of heart and mind, and the opposition of private and public loyalty are an extension and external reflection of the conflict in Harriet’s consciousness of her intellectual and passionate (bad word, but let it pass) relationship with [Peter]. His answer to that is: see that the mind is honest, first; the rest may follow or not as God wills. (*Letters*, vol 1, 353-354)

The idea is that in an equal relationship where the intellectual integrity of both parties is preserved there need be no opposition between head and heart. But everybody is not satisfied with this conclusion. McClellan argues that Sayers does not succeed in depicting Peter and Harriet as equals, but still sees Peter as Harriet’s superior (338-339). Sjöholm agrees, and claims that their equality is “false” and that “[i]t is impossible to see how the integrity of the mind can be preserved if Harriet gives Lord Peter the privilege of being the more intelligent of the two” (14). I would argue that the integrity of the mind can very well be preserved, whichever is the more intelligent – equality and integrity of the mind are not about having the exact same level of intelligence. Sjöholm further claims that Peter is Harriet’s superior because he has saved her life twice (*ibid.*). This does not agree with Sayers’ view of the events, nor with Peter’s or Harriet’s. Peter has saved Harriet’s life *once*, before the beginning of the story of *Gaudy Night*, after which she was struck with an overwhelming sense of obligation. Through most of *Gaudy Night*, she still feels she cannot marry him, as she cannot see herself as his equal as long as she feels she has to be grateful to him. In *Gaudy Night*, Peter does not ask her to give up the pursuit of the criminal, knowing full-well that an attempt on her life is likely to be made. He does buy her a dog-collar to wear for late-night patrolling and give her a lesson in self-defence, but this hardly amounts to saving her life. At the end of

the novel, she says to him, “I owe you my life”, and when he answers, “I have given you that back by letting you risk it”, she says that she appreciates that (*GN*, 436): she is free from her obligation and can be his equal, feeling love rather than gratitude. As for Peter and Harriet’s equality, Campbell remarks that their gowns are symbolically the same size – this shows that they have the same ideas about the importance of intellectual integrity, and are intellectual equals (16). Campbell also speaks of the “careful equilibrium” of their relationship. She concedes, however, that though *Gaudy Night* “to a large degree [...] succeeds in solving the imbalance between Harriet and Peter”, there is still an “undercurrent of imbalance in [their] personal relationship”, as Peter is something of an “authority figure” (17).

In *Gaudy Night*, the marriage between Harriet and Peter is presented as the perfect solution to the head-and-heart problem, while Dorothea’s outcome in *Middlemarch* is neither perfect nor tragic, but simply a description of what happened to be the fate of one particular person; however, in *Gaudy Night*, there are more intellectual women, more people with heads and hearts, and more solutions to the problem. Some characters try to combine emotional and intellectual interests, notably Miss Chilperic, a Shrewsbury don who is engaged to be married, and Phœbe Tucker, an old History student who is married to an archæologist, has three children and assists her husband in his work. There is also a very successful student who has a boyfriend and says that if she takes a first she will have to “make him believe [she] only did it by looking fragile and pathetic at the viva” (*GN*, 128). Other characters have made a definite choice. One of them is Miss de Vine, who was once engaged but who, when she “realised that [she] [...] wasn’t taking as much trouble with [her fiancé] as [she would] have over a disputed reading”, “decided he wasn’t [her] job” (*GN*, 171). Another is Catherine Freemantle, an old student who was “the outstanding scholar of her year” (*GN*, 46), but who has since married a farmer and “spent [her] time washing and cooking for a family and digging potatoes and feeding cattle” (*GN*, 48); she gives Harriet a “feeling that she [has] seen a Derby winner making shift with a coal-cart” (*GN*, 49). Catherine Freemantle represents the intellectual woman who is deprived of her intellectuality, and after Harriet has met her, she remembers her “melancholy lament for eternal loss: ‘Once, I was a scholar’” (*GN*, 58).

Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to examine in what ways fiction is used as a forum for discussing female intellectuality in *Middlemarch* and *Gaudy Night*. In both cases, the prerequisite of the discussion is that the main character is a woman with intellectual ambitions, and in both cases

the main character is put in opposition to an unintellectual woman (Rosamond Vincy and Annie Wilson respectively). In this way, characters are used as representatives of female intellectuality versus lack of intellectuality, so that the plot itself forms part of the discussion. However, female intellectuality is also discussed more explicitly in both novels. In *Middlemarch*, the subject is discussed in passages of narratorial commentary, where fiction serves the purpose of providing concrete examples which are more easy to identify with than general observations. In *Gaudy Night*, female intellectuality is extensively discussed in dialogues and in Harriet's free indirect discourse.

As has been indicated in this essay, the discussion of female intellectuality is a usual type of feature in Victorian novels, while it is very unusual in detective novels. In *Gaudy Night*, Sayers makes use of her readers' expectation to find a detective novel, in order to get her discussion about female intellectuality across to a wide audience.

In both *Middlemarch* and *Gaudy Night*, an important aspect of female intellectuality is education for women. The novels show the difficulties which society presents women with in trying to pursue an education, at the same time as they show how earnestly the female characters wish for an education or value the education they have, and how capable they are of achieving an education. The significance of this is that the novels take part in the debate on education for women. An important difference here is that the women in *Gaudy Night*, even though it is not as easy for them to attain an education as for the men, have the possibility of, and most of them *have*, a formal intellectual education. There is no possibility of achieving this for the women in *Middlemarch*. A similarity between the novels, however, is that the female characters who have or would like an intellectual education are represented as more sympathetic than the female characters who are contented with, or even prefer, the kind of education whose only function is to prepare them for marriage.

The next point which has been discussed is the depiction of intellectual women. Unlike *Gaudy Night*, where most of the characters are intellectual women, *Middlemarch* comprises only one female character who qualifies as an intellectual: Dorothea Brooke. Not only does this fact entail a sense of alienation, but means, as there are no other intellectual women for Dorothea to identify with and no such concept as "intellectual women", that she does not call herself or her ambitions intellectual. Dorothea can be seen in two different ways: in the way of most of the characters in *Middlemarch*, or in the way the narrator (and some of the characters, notably Ladislaw and Lydgate). The narrator regards her with sympathy and claims that she is a victim of society, and convinces the reader, sometimes in defiance of her actions, that she is nobler than most people and could have achieved true greatness in a

different social context. Dorothea herself is rather confused and does not know exactly what it is she wants to do. *Gaudy Night*, on the other hand, is set in a community of intellectual women whose self-images are very much dependent on their being intellectual. If being an intellectual woman in *Middlemarch* means being alienated, in *Gaudy Night* it means being part of a group. Intellectual but no longer part of the group, Harriet longs once again to belong to the community, but does not know whether to identify with the academic women or with the outside world. At first she sees the female academic community as an ideal world, but then she begins to suspect that one of the intellectual women is insane, and that this is what the inevitable frustration of such women must lead to. It turns out, however, that the enemy comes from outside the community of intellectual women, and there is no longer any reason to suspect intellectuality of being harmful. In this way, an intellectual life is through fiction presented as a good option for women.

In both novels, there are two questions present relating to the opposition of the head and the heart. The first question is how to find one's true vocation. Dorothea wants to do something great and noble and important, but does not know what and never achieves either a vocation or an intellectual education. Harriet, on the other hand, has already achieved an intellectual education, and now has a definite choice to make, where both options are open to her: she can either stay in Oxford and pursue an academic career, or she can marry Peter Wimsey. As it turns out, a combination is also possible, where she can marry and still be intellectual (even if it is not by pursuing an academic career), but through most of the novel she is convinced that no alliance between head and heart is possible. While Harriet sees more of an opposition between the head and the heart than there turns out to be, Dorothea's problem is the reverse: she cannot separate them. It seems that Dorothea thinks of intellectuality, love and religion as all vaguely the same thing and puts them in opposition to all that is material and mundane. She thinks that she marries Casaubon for love, but she really marries him for his intellectuality. Casaubon and Ladislaw can be construed as structural opposites where the former represents the head and the latter the heart. Though Dorothea does not actually at any point make a choice between the two men, she can be seen as faced with a choice of which kind of life she wants to lead, in the same way as Harriet chooses between an academic career and marriage. Despite this, however, marriage to Casaubon does not turn out to be a particularly intellectual experience, and in the end, rather than renouncing intellectuality in marrying Ladislaw, Dorothea's conception of intellectuality changes.

The second question is whether intellectual integrity or personal loyalty ought to be put first. In both novels, intellectual integrity wins, as neither Dorothea nor Harriet, nor any of the

members of the Shrewsbury Senior Common Room, are prepared to sacrifice their intellectual integrity for personal loyalties. By presenting this dilemma from a female perspective, the novels seem to want to show that women are capable of putting intellectual integrity first.

When it comes to the more general opposition of intellectuality and love, however, intellectuality only wins in combination with love and marriage. For both Harriet and Dorothea, marriage is only right if it is an *equal* marriage which preserves their self-esteem and integrity – but neither actually renounces anything else in order to have an intellectual life. Even though intellectual women are presented as more sympathetic than other women, and the intellectual life is presented as a good choice for women, neither ending dictates that women should see intellectuality as more important than love.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Eliot, George. *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (1871-1872). Oxford World's Classics, ed. David Carroll. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Sayers, Dorothy L. *Gaudy Night* (1935). London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970.

Secondary sources

Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (8th ed.). Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005.

Beer, Gillian. *George Eliot*. Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1986.

Bonaparte, Felicia. "Introduction." *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*. Oxford World's Classics, ed. David Carroll. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. vii-xxxviii.

Campbell, SueEllen. "The Detective Heroine and the Death of Her Hero: Dorothy Sayers to P. D. James." *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction*. Ed. Glenwood Irons. Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press, 1995. 12-28.

Dodd, Valerie A. *George Eliot: An Intellectual Life*. Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1990.

Genette, Gérard. *Nouveau discours du récit*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983.

Herman, David; Manfred Jahn; Marie-Laure Ryan, ed. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. London & New York: Routledge, 2005.

Hitchman, Janet. *Such a Strange Lady: An introduction to Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957)*. London: New English Library, 1975.

Håkansson, Sara. *Narratorial Commentary in the Novels of George Eliot* (Doctoral Dissertation). Lund University, 2006.

McClellan, Ann. "Alma Mater: Women, the Academy and Mothering in Dorothy L. Sayers' *Gaudy Night*." *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 15. Taylor and Francis, 2004. 321-346.

Neale, Catherine. *George Eliot: Middlemarch*. London: Penguin Books, 1989.

Paris, Bernard, J. *Rereading George Eliot: Changing Responses to Her Experiments in Life*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2003.

Resnicow, Herbert. "'Rules' for the Classic Whodunit." *Writer*, 107:8.
Kalmbach, 1994. 18-22.

(http://elin.lub.lu.se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/cgi-bin/linker/ebSCO_local?9407131141 18 Feb 2008)

Reynolds, Barbara. *Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993.

Reynolds, Barbara, ed. *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers 1899-1936: The Making of a Detective Novelist*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995.

Reynolds, Barbara, ed. *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, Volume Two, 1937-1943: From novelist to playwright*. Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society, 1997.

Reynolds, Barbara, ed. *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, Volume Three, 1944-1950: A Noble Daring*. Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society, 1998.

Reynolds, Barbara, ed. *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, Volume Four, 1950-1957: In the Midst of Life*. Cambridge: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society, 2000.

Sjöholm, Veronika. "Dorothy L. Sayers' *Gaudy Night* from a Class and Gender Perspective" (Bachelor Dissertation). Lund University, 2006. "Xerxes" database:
(http://theses.lub.lu.se/undergrad/search.tkl?field_query1=pubid&query1=1170703234-23561-711&recordformat=display 18 Feb 2008)

Tomalin, Claire. *Jane Austen: A Life*. London: Penguin Books, 1997.

Willis, Chris. "'Suspicion in the SCR': *Gaudy Night*, Feminism and Higher Education for Women", 2003.
(http://www.chriswillis.freeserve.co.uk/gaudy_night.htm 18 Feb 2008)