Conscious Construction: The Concept of Plot in Five Novels by Women

Nancy McKeon Taylor
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/1709

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.

Copyright © 1977 Nancy McKeon Taylor
CONSCIOUS CONSTRUCTION:
THE CONCEPT OF PLOT IN FIVE NOVELS BY WOMEN

by
Nancy McKeon Taylor

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June
1977
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout the preparation of this dissertation, I have benefited greatly from Professor Eileen M. Baldeshwiler's knowledge and understanding of fiction, from her probing questions, and from her high intellectual standards. For her time, careful attention, and constant interest, I am most grateful. Also, I must thank Professors Joseph J. Wolff and Gene D. Phillips, S.J., for their useful comments and interested responses to the completed work.

A final word of thanks to Mary Anne Connelly for her preparation of the final typescript.
The author, Nancy McKeon Taylor, is the daughter of Richard William McKeon and Irene Turbush McKeon. She was born April 1, 1947, in South Orange, New Jersey.

Her elementary education was obtained at Sacred Heart School in West Reading, Pennsylvania, and her secondary education at Ursuline Academy in Dallas, Texas, where she was graduated in 1965.

In September, 1965, she entered Loyola University of the South in New Orleans, Louisiana, where she completed her first two undergraduate years. In 1966, she was elected an honorary member of Alpha Sigma Nu, the National Jesuit Honor Society. After a year of studies at the Loyola University Rome Center in Rome, Italy, she completed her undergraduate major in English at Loyola University of Chicago and received the degree of Bachelor of Arts, *cum laude*, in June of 1969.

In 1969, she was granted an assistantship in English at Loyola University of Chicago. In June, 1971, she was awarded the Master of Arts in English. She is a member of The Modern Language Association. She and her husband, John R. Taylor, M.D., are currently living in St. Louis, Missouri.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIFE</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. EMMA</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. MIDDLEMARCH</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. PILGRIMAGE</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE WAVES</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Without question, women have made their major contribution to English literature through the novel, and the novel is the only genre in which they have been a significant shaping force. Although many aspects of this unique contribution to fiction are well-documented, there has been very little systematic analysis of formal development in the novels of women. Therefore, in an attempt to establish one way in which women have been conscious, formal technicians, this dissertation examines the plots of five novels—Emma (1816), Middlemarch (1871-1872), Pilgrimage (1915-1938; 1967), The Waves (1931), and The Golden Notebook (1962)—and reveals that most fundamental aspect of fiction as a major tool through which women have expressed artistic maturity and innovation.

A change in plot was the earliest manifestation of a new genre which would come to be known as the novel. In The Rise of the Novel, Ian Watt distinguishes the new genre from previous literary forms by its use of "non-traditional plots," plots taken from individual experience: "Defoe and Richardson are the first great writers in our literature who did not take their plots from mythology, history, legend, or previous literatures."¹ The change in plot necessitated further changes

in the characters who acted and in the meaning of their actions and thus established in the novel a new literary perspective. The new plot was also a basis upon which the novel could develop, for, after Defoe, "Richardson and Fielding in their very different ways continued what was to become the novel's usual practice, the use of non-traditional plots, either wholly invented or based in part on a contemporary incident." As a contrived series of interrelated actions in time, plot would suffer mockery at the pen of Sterne early in the genre's history and would become, at times, a second-rate tool and an unnecessary encumbrance in the minds of critics and writers alike. But it has persisted, for tradition requires of the novel that it be a coherent action.

For Henry James, fiction's first great theorist, the movement of plot toward final symmetry was one of creativity's mysteries. In the preface to The Awkward Age, he writes of his own experience with plots, of the

... long stories that had thoroughly meant to be short, the short subjects that had underhandedly plotted to be long, the hypocrisy of modest beginnings, the audacity of misplaced middles, the triumph of intentions never entertained— with these patches, as I look about, I see my experience paved: an experience to which nothing is wanting save, I confess, some grasp of its final lesson.

At mid-twentieth century, Elizabeth Bowen believed that plot was the essential element and that all other aspects of a novel, such as character, scene and dialogue, were "subsidiary

2Watt, p. 15.

to the relevance of the plot—i.e., the relevance to itself that plot demands.4 In The Appropriate Form, Barbara Hardy establishes the basis for her essays on the fact that all novelists are story-tellers and that "if the novel does not possess the form of the story then it is not a novel." She defends the necessity of a coherent story by asserting that even "defiant story-tellers like Sterne or Joyce or Robbe-Grillet have either had to retain its rudimentary features or have had to exploit the very form they were flouting."5 In 1950, in a tradition clearly derived from Aristotelian criticism, R. S. Crane gave plot its most elegant and meaningful description as the first artistic principle in the criticism of fiction.6 Objecting to the isolation of plot as "simply one of several sources of interest and pleasure afforded by a novel," he defines it as "the particular temporal synthesis effected by the writer of the elements of action, character, and thought that constitute the matter of his invention." From this definition it follows that the form of the plot, in relation to the work as a whole, is not merely a means—

a 'framework' or 'mere mechanism'—but rather the final end which everything in the work, if that is to be felt


as a whole, must be made, directly or indirectly, to serve. For the critic, therefore, the form of the plot is a first principle, which he must grasp as clearly as possible for any work he proposes to examine before he can deal adequately with the questions raised by its parts.

It is in the spirit of Crane's theory of plot that I will examine these five novels and it is because of a belief in the form of the plot as a necessary artistic principle that I am subjecting the novels of women to this type of examination.

Contribution to the form of the novel through plot has never been a significant consideration in the study of women's works. In fact, the participation of women in the novel has been viewed, on occasion, as a detriment to the formal development of the genre. Returning to those same authors who recognize the importance of plot to form, one finds Ian Watt suggesting that, in the novel, the combination of women writers and women readers is "connected with the characteristic kind of weakness and unreality to which the form is liable." The characteristic weakness comes apparently from a restriction of experience and attitude peculiar to women, even though, originally, the feminine sensibility was "in some ways better equipped to reveal the intricacies of personal relationships and was therefore at a real advantage in the realm of the novel." In a 1902 essay on Flaubert, Henry James celebrates the beauty of composition in the novels of the Frenchman and

7The Rise of The Novel, pp. 298-299.
laments, at one point, the failure of the English novel to produce similar triumphs of form. This failure, he suggests, arises because the novel is

... preponderantly cultivated among us by women, in other words, by a sex ever gracefully, comfortably, enviably unconscious ... of the requirements of form. The case is at any rate sharply enough made for us, or against us, by the circumstance that women are held to have achieved on all our ground, in spite of this weakness and others, as great results as any. The judgment is undoubtedly founded: Jane Austen was instinctive and charming, and the other recognitions ... are obvious; without, however in the least touching my contention. For signal examples of what composition, distribution, arrangement can do, of how they intensify the life of a work of art, we have to go elsewhere.8

He pursued this feeling in his criticism of individual novels as well. In a review of Middlemarch, James wrote that he began his reading of the novel wondering, through the early chapters, "what turn in the way of form the story would take—that of an organized, moulded, balanced composition, gratifying the reader with a sense of design and construction, or a mere chain of episodes, broken into accidental lengths and unconscious of the influence of a plan." Had the first possibility been the result, we should have had "the first of English novels"; however, Middlemarch is "a treasure-house of details, but ... an indifferent whole."9

Such an attitude may well explain the widespread critical habit of treating the novels of women primarily as vehicles


of "feminine sensibility," of morals, of manners, of characters—of everything but plot. The twentieth-century emphasis on close textual analysis has done much to repair the damage, however, and there now exist many studies of the novels of Jane Austen, for example, which establish their author as a conscious artist and most of her plots as "precisely planned." A work by Barbara Hardy pioneered the formal study of George Eliot's novels in 1959. But even though criticism has extended beyond the most basic description of Austen's and Eliot's plots as "simple" and "complex," respectively, it has not adequately considered the two authors' use of plot in the manner suggested by R. S. Crane. Most critics who treat the plots of Emma and Middlemarch examine them as isolated aspects of the works. The plot of Emma is seen as working on a basis of "three's," present in three suitors or in triangular relationships. The plot of Middlemarch is usually handled only by dividing it into four separate stories. In both cases (but especially in Middlemarch), this method neglects much of the work and fails to see it as a form alive with one coherent action. In fact, a recent critic still maintains that Eliot's work is not unified on the level of action.

The concept of plot in the works of Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf must be approached from a slightly different perspective. These two women have been viewed as authors who consciously abandoned plot to the extent, it sometimes seems, that "nothing happens" in their novels. This reaction has had an especially curious effect on the critical treatment of Pilgrimage. Melvin Friedman, who ultimately assigns the work only historical importance, states that Richardson almost completely eliminates plot and he then offers a somewhat inaccurate summary of what plot there is. Leon Edel, while recognizing the artistic difficulty of the task Richardson set for herself, decides that it is probably easier for women than it is for men to make the pilgrimage through the dense, slow work. In the introduction to Caesar R. Blake's full-length study of Pilgrimage, Leslie Fiedler writes that Richardson's "is the least acceptable of dulness, the sort of avant-garde dulness inevitable once one has abandoned the expected delights attendant on the fully articulated plot."

13 Stream of Consciousness: A Study in Literary Method (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1955), p. 180. He claims that Miriam becomes "a governess in a fashionable hotel," and summarizes her ten-year employment by stating that she "helps out a group of dentists." He also implies that her journey to Switzerland is immediately followed by her stay with the Quaker family at Dimple Hill. Such a careless rendering of the plot precludes any understanding of meaningful relationships between its separate actions.


It may not be surprising, therefore, that Blake's fine and in many ways enlightening study of the work as a movement toward a final mystical vision does not base itself on plot. Another critic begins his study of Pilgrimage by suggesting that, as a work of art, it is "closer to the art of autobiography than to fiction."16 While this idea allows for one method of investigation, it certainly denies outright the possibility that Richardson accomplishes in Pilgrimage anything like what she hoped to.

Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, is recognized as an artist with paramount concerns about form and the techniques of fictional presentation. Her conscious rejection of certain conventions of character and plot is celebrated as one of the means by which she was able to make her special contribution. The Waves was her most challenging struggle with a form of fiction, but, despite its unique beauty, some critics have seen the work as pushing fiction to the breaking-point, as too stylized to be finally convincing. In The Novel and The Modern World, David Daiches writes that in The Waves,

the level of stylization results in a certain lack of vitality; if the work is a novel, we demand more of what James called 'the sense of felt life' than this technique can achieve. . . . Not that one wishes to impose on Virginia Woolf any external criterion of 'the novel,' but one does demand that a work of literary art should achieve its own form by the most appropriate devices.17


Several more recent Woolf scholars undoubtedly would disagree with Daiches and one in particular makes a strong claim for the value of *The Waves* as fiction.\(^\text{18}\) But there is, I believe, a need, in the case of both Richardson and Woolf, to establish to what extent they use coherent action as a basis for their fiction and how, rejecting more conventional means, they still managed to write works which are as convincing as novels as are works in the major tradition.

Most of the novels of Doris Lessing mark a contemporary return to the use of realistic narrative and the conventional treatment of character and plot. In her determination to "evoke twentieth-century reality directly," Lessing has been compared to George Eliot.\(^\text{19}\) Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that most of the criticism of her works ignores plot altogether or considers it only as a vehicle of character.

The content of the five works under consideration qualifies them as novels if one agrees that the genre's subject matter is the "passage from a state of innocence to a state of experience, from that ignorance which is bliss to a mature recognition of the actual way of the world."\(^\text{20}\) As such, they

\(^{18}\) Avrom Fleishman, *Virginia Woolf: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975), p. 157. "Rarely in the history of fiction have form and content—indeed, all the diverse elements of a fictional work—been so closely bound together to form one substance."


should be submitted to as rigorous a system of critical assessment as the novels of men have been, for their authors have been using the same tools and have been shaping the same tradition as men have. The place of these authors in that tradition can be fully appreciated only if the total creative impact and direction of their individual works are understood. This study, by examining five works as coherent actions, with the form of the plot as a first artistic principle, hopes to reveal and clarify a neglected or ignored aspect of women's contribution.

To understand the creative manner in which women have used such a technique as plot, it is necessary, I believe, to remember that when women began to write novels, the major foundations of English fiction had been established. Women novelists before the latter part of the eighteenth century were extremely rare, and by that time Defoe, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett had directed the novel onto the path it would continue to follow, with some modifications, into the twentieth century. This fact leads to the assumption that the novel originated and developed as a "male" tradition and to the understanding that, in a period when the tradition of the novel was largely masculine, "women writers who tried their prentice hands at writing fiction had either to write as men wrote (if they could) or to write as women with a woman's different awareness of life: by doing the latter they gradually worked out their own tradition." 21

21 Hazel Mews, *Frail Vessels: Woman's Role in Women's
Such an understanding, the basis of much contemporary criticism of women's novels, is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Since artistic vision is molded to a large extent by personal experience, it is important to an understanding of women's literature to have some knowledge of the special kind of experience which women brought to their works. The limited range of worldly experience available to literate, middle-class females in England during the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth centuries probably led to their emphasis, when they wrote novels, on the domestic scene and on the dynamics of personal relationships. Looking back, many critics believe that this predisposition was actually an advantage for the female as novelist and that it led the novel (albeit at the initiative of Richardson) into its exploration of "inner" or psychological reality and the realm of consciousness. As the social role of women expanded, so did the characters and situations in their novels. Today, for example, a novelist like Doris Lessing can apply "a woman's different awareness of life" to a broad range of social problems formerly considered topics more competently handled by men.

But viewing women's relationship to the novel as one exclusively determined by experience and the presence or absence of worldly knowledge leads, I believe, to a critical


problem. For the assumption that women are at an advantage in the abstract areas of emotion, morality, and sensibility may lead to the opposite assumption that they are at a disadvantage in the concrete areas of composition and form. Such a possibility certainly seems to lurk behind the attitude that women were unconscious of the requirements of form. With regard to plot, two things might be thought to work to their particular disadvantage. As the novel was originated, and as it has continued in its main tradition, the framework of a plot was the external action of the story, and worldly external adventure was more exclusively the realm of the male than the female. Furthermore, the construction of a plot was a logical and technical aspect of the novelist's craft. Assuming that women were oriented to the less rational aspects of life, they would therefore not emphasize or pay as much attention to the requirements of plot as they would to other requirements of the novel. Such ideas, then, may have colored the reception of novels by women and dictated the perspective from which they were—or were not—to be viewed. At any rate, I am suggesting not only that women were, from the outset, conscious of the requirements of plot but also that they were using plot as a basic tool in their adjustment to and exploration of a genre they had not created.

One influential impression of the artistic relationship of the female author to a male-created genre appears in Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own:
Moreover, a book is not made of sentences laid end to end, but of sentences built, if an image helps, into arcades or domes. And this shape too has been made by men out of their own needs for their own uses. There is no reason to think that the form of the epic or of the poetic play suits a woman any more than the sentence suits her. But all the older forms of literature were hardened and set by the time she became a writer. The novel alone was young enough to be soft in her hands—another reason, perhaps, why she wrote novels. Yet who shall say that even . . . this most pliable of all forms is rightly shaped for her? No doubt we shall find her knocking that into shape for herself when she has the free use of her limbs.23

Woolf obviously regards the female as a conscious artist and a careful technician who, as she achieved artistic maturity and confidence in the strength of her own vision, was re-shaping the genre accordingly. To provide a long view of how this re-shaping may have taken place, the novels chosen for this study span about a century and a half. For, as she developed her artistic vision and literary experience, the female artist would become more able than formerly to use or re-interpret to her own advantage the techniques, such as plot, which she had inherited.

As I noted, women came to the novel after the four great mid-eighteenth century authors had laid its foundations. By the end of the century, women had written significant numbers of Gothic and epistolary novels.24 This prolific initial


24Between 1780-1790, for example, of 190 English epistolary novels, 48 were written by known women authors, others were written "by a lady," and still others, judging by the titles, were probably written by women. See Hazel Mews, Frail Vessels, p. 24.
period helped to prepare the way for the emergence, early in the nineteenth century, of Jane Austen as the first female artist of the novel. Before her, Fanny Burney did try to counteract some of the excesses of the Gothic romance and the novel of sensibility by emphasizing natural and probable action and, in so doing, helped future novelists. But she was not formally innovative (Evelina, 1778, is in epistolary form) and her work is marred by a conscious moralizing attitude. It is with Austen that the novel by women enters its artistic maturity, and although she made few direct statements about her writing, she was surely a conscious artist. Austen was well aware of the novels which had preceded her, parodying their excesses in such works as Northanger Abbey (published posthumously in 1818, but written in 1797-98) and her first published novel, Sense and Sensibility (1811). In response to a suggestion that she write an historical novel, she replied: "I could no more write a romance than an epic poem. . . . No, I must keep to my own style and go on in my own way."25 Literary history has named her the artistic successor to Richardson and Fielding, combining character from the former and plot from the latter into a form which could be passed to the Victorians.

Among the Victorians, the great female author is George Eliot, who did write about her art and who was conscious of herself as developing artist. Her theory of form moved toward

the organic; as she wrote in 1868, the "highest Form . . . is . . . the most varied group of relations bound together in a wholeness." In the same essay, she wrote that an author's structure is "a set of relations selected & combined in accordance with . . . the preconception of a whole which he has inwardly evolved." This formal theory of a number of varied relationships bound together in a wholeness is certainly evident in Middlemarch, a work in which she hoped no part would be irrelevant to the final design. Seeing Eliot historically as the successor to Dickens and Thackeray and the predecessor of Henry James tends to blur the question of her solitary artistic struggle with the bulky, complicated Victorian form. At least one critic suggests that, in trying to create whole organic forms in her novels, she was frustrated by the requirements of the form she had inherited:

It is George Eliot's sense that there can be no satisfactory ending to a novel which exhibits this kind of form [an organic one] that seems to have frustrated her at the end of her career. For her conception of form is in the end self-defeating. To the extent that she is able in her last novels to achieve a high degree of form by showing very intricate inner relations within a novel, the beginning and ending become increasingly false in that they artificially cut off relations which the novel itself sends outward, as it were, from its complexity to the rest of the universe.28


This sense of her struggle working within an inherited form will be important to my chapter on Middlemarch.

In the twentieth century women authors entered a new stage of artistic self-definition. Both Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf (and Doris Lessing, but in a later time and a different way) saw themselves as artists who were female and their works as attempts to overcome or depart from the requirements of a novel peculiarly "male." In her foreword to Pilgrimage, Richardson wrote of her self-appointed task to discover an alternative to the realism offered by her contemporaries, the immediate successors of Balzac and Bennett:

Since all these novelists happen to be men, the present writer, proposing at this moment to write a novel and looking round for a contemporary pattern, was faced with the choice... of... attempting to produce a feminine equivalent of the current masculine realism. 29

With no contemporary female example to follow (the first volume of Pilgrimage appeared in 1915, the same year as The Voyage Out), Richardson considered herself to be, and was, a pioneer. In Pilgrimage, through the voice of Miriam Henderson, Richardson commented on the problem, as she saw it, with the novel written by men. Her primary objection is to an authorial tone which lectures reality rather than contemplates it and, in so doing, overlooks or leaves out a great deal of life. Referring to authors like James and Conrad, Miriam

condemns the "self-satisfied, complacent, knowall condescendingness of their handling of their material." Wells, she thinks, seems to have more awareness, but "all his books are witty exploitation of ideas," and the "torment of all novels is what is left out" (IV, 239). Part of the "witty exploitation" seems to be the conventional plot, neatly contrived to serve the author's "knowall" tone: "Bang, bang, bang, on they go, these men's books, like an L.C.C. tram, yet unable to make you forget them, the authors, for a moment" (IV, 239).

Woolf also denounced the realist's use of the traditional plot, the "appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner," for she believed it was "false, unreal, merely conventional."30 In "Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown" (1924),31 she explained why the Georgian novelists could not learn from the Edwardians how to write a novel. The problem, basically, was one of character, for "on or about December, 1910, human character changed." What Woolf meant was that the Edwardians had told the reader all about the character's environment and nothing about the character himself. The Georgians, she believed, were searching for new ways to portray the unique atmosphere of human character, the highest reality—in Woolf's view—that the novelist can pursue. Both Richardson and Woolf agreed that the female


vision or understanding of life was closer than that of the male to inner realities. Thus it was out of a concern for fiction itself, out of an awareness that the traditional novel, as she inherited it, was actually incapable of expressing many areas of human experience, that the articulate female author of the twentieth century would attempt to lead the novel into different channels, not as a departure from reality but in pursuit of it.

In the middle of the twentieth century, Doris Lessing returned to the realistic narrative as her fictional method. Prompted perhaps by the fact that Lessing's works reflect a desire to present in the manner of the nineteenth-century novelist a broad spectrum of social concerns, one critic observed that she is "basically unconcerned about the fate of the novel as form."32 But her choice of her method was deliberate; in "The Small Personal Voice," Lessing writes that, for her, "the highest point of literature was the novel of the nineteenth century."33 She defines realism as "art which springs so vigorously and naturally from a strongly-held, though not necessarily intellectually-defined, view of life that it absorbs symbolism." In The Golden Notebook, she

32 Dagmar Barnouw, "Disorderly Company: From The Golden Notebook to The Four-Gated City," Contemporary Literature 14 (Autumn 1973): 510. He also writes that The Golden Notebook is "too exclusively a woman's world." This echoes many statements about Pilgrimage and suggests that there is a persistent feeling that an exclusively female point of view is too restricted and, by implication, somehow invalid.

explores the problem of trying to write a nineteenth-century novel, so to speak, with twentieth-century life. In 1966, she talked with Florence Howe about the relationship, in that work, between the separate notebooks and the short novel, "Free Women":

I was really trying to express my sense of despair about writing a conventional novel in that ["Free Women"]. You see, actually that is an absolutely whole conventional novel and the rest of the book is the material that went into making it. . . . And the bloody complexity that went into it and it's always a lie. And the terrible despair. So you've written a good novel or a moderate novel, but what does it actually say about what you've actually experienced. The truth is, absolutely nothing.34

Although Lessing herself may be learning only now what Richardson and Woolf knew a long time ago, it is interesting to finish the study with a contemporary re-examination, in fiction, of the traditional form within which women began to write novels.

I have combined, then, in this study an awareness that these authors were confronting an inherited tradition and were striving to express their own female visions with the examination, in the manner and for the reasons already indicated, of their novels as forms of plot. Such a combination reveals plot, or the concept of a coherent action, as a major artistic tool used by women and leads to some new interpretations of their works, for in "telling his story, or in between telling his story, the novelist is also organizing his

criticism of life."

The unifying idea by which Emma is held together is the education of its heroine, and the final end toward which the work moves is the adjustment of her consciousness to certain factors of external reality, an adjustment which prepares her for and makes her worthy of Knightley's love. To achieve this end, Austen wrote a work which, in terms of plot, contains two novels. What I shall call the "minor" or hidden novel has a traditional or eighteenth-century external plot and "works out" behind the scenes and in spite of the major or overt novel. The "major" novel has an internal plot presenting possible alternatives to the plot of the "minor" novel. United toward the growth of Emma's consciousness, both plots examine the problem of the individual's perception of and adjustment to an external reality and order. Austen's use of plot in this work is also an exercise in artistic adjustment to an external order. For the minor novel contains the final form and, as it moves toward it, acts as a check to the possibilities in the major novel. At the end, the plot arrives at a traditional structuring, and the major novel is sacrificed to the minor one. Through this innovative use of plot, Austen confronts and challenges the traditional plot as she inherited it.

In Middlemarch, George Eliot introduces into a conventional plot subject matter which could lead to a new kind of

35Barbara Hardy, The Appropriate Form, p. 2.
plot. The unifying idea by which this work is held together is the relationship between the male and the female; the final end toward which it moves is the mutual understanding which its hero and heroine come to share. Accordingly, the action of the novel is structured between the two poles of the male and the female and the form of the plot becomes the relationship, on all levels, between these two poles. Within the requirements of conventional plot, Eliot dramatizes the isolation of the male and the female and depicts the social dangers inherent in that isolation. The Dorothea-Lydgate relationship emerges from this plot and dramatizes a possibility for change in the relationship of the sexes—a change which could lead to a new concept of the roles and actions of the male and the female in fiction and thus to a new kind of plot. But the possibility of the Dorothea-Lydgate relationship is not fulfilled; Middlemarch arrives at a conventional ending. However, unlike Emma, Middlemarch is open-ended, reaching beyond itself with possibility.

I believe that, despite prevailing opinion, Pilgrimage is a novel based on coherent action. The unifying idea which holds the volumes together is the development of Miriam's consciousness and the final end toward which the work moves is her artistic commitment, a goal accomplished by the end of the final volume, March Moonlight. Although the work is presented exclusively through the filter of Miriam's consciousness, there is a well-defined plot which moves her consciousness toward artistic commitment. As such, it divides the work
into four successive stages which trace the quest of an artist-to-be in search of her own point of view and literary method. The plot of Pilgrimage guides and interprets the internal progression and makes of the work a coherent action. Reflecting, perhaps, Richardson's pioneering concerns about the self-expression of the female artist, the four stages of the plot also serve as an archetypal explanation of the female's discovery of her own point of view against or in spite of the existing tradition. Rather than abandoning plot as a fictional tool, Pilgrimage incorporates it into a new narrative whole.

Virginia Woolf's abstract and highly stylized work, The Waves, also depends for its artistic integrity on the basic fictional tool of an extended coherent action. Its unifying idea is the individual's perception of consciousness through time and its final end is a momentary illumination of the relationship between individual, transitory consciousness and the all-consuming, inevitable forces of the cosmos. The work is informed, accordingly, by two separate sources of action. The soliloquies of the six speakers appear as isolated actions in time and tell, on one level, six separate "stories" of the development of human consciousness as it progresses through the various stages of life from childhood to middle-age. Separated from the soliloquies is the larger or background action of the novel, the independent, external passage of time itself, an "anonymous" story plotted in the interchapters tracing the cycle of nature through one day and four seasons.
The two separate sources of action are united; finally, in Bernard's last soliloquy, a soliloquy which fulfills the work's narrative vision. This formal action controls the complex linguistic patterns and individual movements which connect and enrich the separate parts of the work as it progresses toward the final end.

The plot of *The Golden Notebook* is the action that creates the work itself. To better examine the ability of language to evoke the reality of experience, a fictitious author named Anna Wulf keeps four notebooks, in each of which she records one area of her life. After recognizing the failure of her arbitrary action, she attempts a synthesis of her whole experience in one notebook (the internal "golden notebook"). From what she realizes through this synthesis (after the fragmentation of the four notebooks), she writes a conventional novel entitled "Free Women," the subject matter of which overlaps with that of the notebooks and sections of which are printed in between sections of the notebooks. The keeping of the notebooks becomes the major action of Anna's life (and the whole action of the novel), an action which moves the novel toward the synthesis and the final construct, "Free Women." Through this coherent action, an innovative exercise in the form of the plot, Lessing shows the relationship between twentieth-century consciousness, twentieth-century reality, and the conventional novel.

Originally, then, the novel distinguished itself from other literary forms through a well-articulated plot based on
"real" action. From this foundation, it has gone on to be many things, but the novel has always retained, even in its most radical innovations, some concept of coherent action to give sense and shape to artistic vision. The guiding principles of the genre already existed by the time women started to write fiction. By successfully adapting the concept of plot as it had been established, women became qualified storytellers. Then, as their artistic consciousness matured, they began to seek new ways to express their unique understanding of experience. They created innovative methods and forms which re-examined or re-interpreted the basic principle of coherent action without sacrificing fictional integrity. To understand how it is that women have been a "shaping force" in fiction one must understand how they have used the shaping tools of this art. The five chapters which follow will detail, then, one way in which women have served the craft of fiction.
CHAPTER I

EMMA

By the time Jane Austen wrote *Emma*, she had perfected her use of plot and had proven herself, especially in *Pride and Prejudice*, a masterful story-teller. In *Emma* (1816), she was to create her critical masterpiece. Working, still, within the limits of a conventional plot, she introduces another plot which, through its synthesis of action, character, and thought, challenges the foundations of its conventional counterpart. The novel's subject matter is the education of Emma Woodhouse, the novel's end is the adjustment of her consciousness to certain realities, an adjustment which prepares her for a marriage dictated by the proprieties of the existing social order (and the practice of the conventional ending). On the way to this end, Austen uses an innovative plot to examine the "terms" of the final adjustment.

Two separate novels exist, in fact, in *Emma*. The minor novel has a conventional or "eighteenth-century" plot and exists within and behind the plot of the major novel. In fact, this novel "works out" behind the scenes and in spite of the apparent or major novel, and is the one which culminates in the marriages of Harriet Smith and Mr. Martin, Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill, and Emma Woodhouse and Mr. Knightley. Presented to the reader obliquely, it progresses
in terms of events which occur in external time and space. The major novel exists on the surface and is a plot of alternatives to the minor novel. These alternatives are the many imagined alliances: Harriet Smith and Elton, Elton and Emma, Emma and Frank Churchill, Frank Churchill and Harriet Smith, Harriet Smith and Knightley, Knightley and Jane Fairfax, and Jane Fairfax and Mr. Dixon. They are all variations of the novel's central problem—the individual's private perception of and adjustment to an external reality and order. This major novel progresses in terms of internal perceptions and events and occurs in a state of "suspended" time and space. The two novels are connected by Emma's imagination and Austen's innovative construction and control of the two plots.

These two plots exist within Emma out of formal necessity. In the conventional novel of the eighteenth century, action was stimulated externally (even in Clarissa, Richardson only apparently surrenders the novel to the pen-and-ink of his characters). In Emma, however, the consciousness of the heroine emerges or surfaces as a dramatic force, stimulating its own activity and creating its own situations. Once the energy of a character's consciousness is freed into the novel, the role of the controlling narrator and the force of external events must be re-shaped. This, I believe, is essentially the formal problem Austen had to deal with in Emma. In confronting the novel as she inherited it, Austen faced a plot of causal external events and effective character reaction leading through time and space to a conclusion or completion;
in confronting her audience, she, like her predecessors, shared with it belief in a fixed, seemingly autonomous social order which functioned as a given structure of reality. To reconcile these two external "givens" with a new internal one, Austen constructed a novel which contained two formal plots.

Paradoxically, the "concealed" or minor plot in *Emma* is the conventionally-shaped one, a novel of the young woman moving toward marriage. By tightly controlling its events in time and space, Austen is able to remove it from the direct encounter of the reader at the same time as she is able to give it dramatic weight and formal resolution. Indeed, it is in the resolution of this plot that the entire work rests at its end, despite the fact that the concealed novel develops to the point of resolution outside of and almost against the plot of the direct novel. Only by examining the complex details of this minor plot can Austen's masterful control be appreciated.

The minor plot moves from one wedding to three weddings through the cycle of one year. Volume I opens on the evening of the day of the Weston marriage in late September or early October. Harriet Smith will soon return to Mrs.

---

1The edition is *Emma* in *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman, 3rd ed., IV (1933; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960). All quotations have been checked against this edition (based on the original one of 1816), but, in my text, I refer to the chapters sequentially, according to the practice of the later editions. There are thus fifty-five chapters which were originally divided into three volumes in this way: Volume I, Chapters 1-18; Volume II, Chapters 1-18 (19-36); Volume III, Chapters 1-19 (37-55). All references will appear in the text.
Goddard's from her two-month stay at Abbey-Mill Farm, and Jane Fairfax is getting to know Frank Churchill at Weymouth. A year later in September, Harriet will marry Mr. Martin of Abbey-Mill; a year later in November, Jane will marry Frank. This same evening, Mr. Knightley returns from London and visits Hartfield, the home which has that day lost its former governess, Miss Taylor, to Mr. Weston. A year later in October, Emma Woodhouse of Hartfield will marry Mr. Knightley and they will live at Hartfield. These three marriages are inevitable from the beginning of the novel, but they must be revealed and worked out (with their obstacles and crises) throughout the coming year. Each of the three relationships shapes itself into a marriage at various distances from the major or apparent plot.

The Harriet Smith-Mr. Martin relationship is discussed in, interrupted by, and developed in spite of the major plot. When Harriet is introduced at Hartfield, she has just returned from a visit with her school friends, the Martin sisters, and she speaks with much pleasure of their brother for "his great good nature" (Ch. 4). From what she tells Emma, the latter is immediately aware of the young man as a danger to her own schemes for Harriet. However, the seeds of affection leading to their marriage have already been planted; Martin will decide that he wishes to marry Harriet, if he hasn't already, after only one more brief encounter (on the Donwell

---

road later in the same chapter). Sometime during the evening which separates Harriet's two sittings for her portrait (Ch. 6), Martin tells Knightley of his desire to marry Harriet. (we learn this in Chapter 8). During the morning of Chapter 7, while Harriet is at Hartfield having her head filled with thoughts of Mr. Elton and the portrait-framing, Martin calls on her at Mrs. Goddard's and leaves a parcel containing a letter of proposal. Harriet is extremely flattered and pleased, but as usual, she is confused; thus she immediately brings the letter and the fate of her proposal to Emma, who manipulates her into a written refusal. While Emma practically dictates the answer, Harriet is so upset that Emma realizes "if the young man had come in her way at that moment, he would have been accepted after all."

Despite the interruption by the machinations of Emma's consciousness in the major plot, events of the Harriet-Martin relationship continue on their own, although, in Volume II, the weight of the events of the major plot hampers the effect of these events and continues to retard the progress of the relationship. In Chapter 21, when Harriet is very upset about having met Elizabeth Martin and her brother at Ford's shop, Emma, "in order to put the Martins out of her head," tells her rather abruptly of Elton's impending marriage. Whereupon Harriet reassumes her role in the major plot and begins to suffer anew the pangs of disappointed love. Emma's reflection at the end of the chapter is a representation, as she would see it, between the minor and the major plots:
Emma learned to be rather glad that there had been such a meeting [with the Martins]. It had been serviceable in deadening the first shock [of Elton's marital plans], without retaining any influence to alarm. As Harriet now lived [major plot], the Martins [minor plot] could not get at her, without seeking her where hitherto they had wanted either the courage or the condescension to seek her.

But Harriet is never firmly positioned within the major plot. In fact, in Chapter 22, Emma herself notes that, in her friend, sometimes "Mr. Elton predominated, sometimes the Martins; and each was occasionally useful as a check to the other." A few days after the meeting at Ford's, Elizabeth Martin leaves a note for Harriet at Mrs. Goddard's, "and till Mr. Elton himself appeared, she [Harriet] had been much occupied by it, continually pondering over what could be done in return, and wishing to do more than she dared to confess" (Ch. 22). When Elton leaves for Bath and his marriage, Emma, "to dissipate some of the distress it occasioned," decides that Harriet should return Miss Martin's visit. Although she expects the visit to reinforce the distance between Harriet and the Martins (and thus between the two plots), it is clear when we see Harriet emerge from her chat with the Martin ladies that she is "feeling too much" (Ch. 23). In Chapter 27, she expresses shy concern that Mr. Martin might possibly marry another, whereupon Emma, realizing that in Harriet's present state another accidental "meeting with the Martins . . . would be dangerous," accompanies her to Ford's shop.

From Chapter 27 until the end of Volume III (roughly from February through August), the Harriet-Martin relationship is suspended; there are no more chance meetings and the
two remain separated in both plots. During this period Harriet ironically moves as far (internally) from Martin as is possible within the context of *Emma*. By imagining Knightley as her future husband, she chooses not only Martin's landlord but also the primary figure in the novel's social order. After her folly is revealed, she is removed to London (Ch. 52), and sometime during Chapter 52 or 53, Knightley (without Emma's knowledge) sends Martin to London on business which will entail his going to the John Knightley home where Harriet is staying. To allow the Harriet-Martin relationship to be revitalized so that it can move forward in time to its natural conclusion, Austen removes the two characters in space from the major plot and reunites them in time. This removal frees the major plot to continue uninterrupted and protects the Harriet-Martin relationship from any further intrusion. Early in the morning of Chapter 54, Mr. Martin, returned from London, can inform Knightley that he has been awarded the promise which was earlier denied him. And so this relationship, started even before the novel opened, is allowed to come to its inevitable conclusion in the marriage which takes place in Highbury in September. It is fitting that Harriet's role in the major plot was coming to an end after the revelation of Knightley and Emma's engagement, so that she is freed, as it were, to take her rightful position within the minor novel (Harriet operates largely "in the wrong novel" throughout much of *Emma*). Martin, in his formal role in the minor plot, is a reminder of Harriet's rightful position and allows her to
move into that position at the novel's end.

The famous Jane Fairfax-Frank Churchill relationship also works out behind the scenes of the major plot, but is formed and presented at a greater distance from the major plot than the Harriet Smith-Mr. Martin relationship. This greater distance affords it greater anonymity and, interestingly enough, this anonymity allows the relationship to use the characters, events, and even the language of the major plot to its own advantage and disadvantage. When *Emma* opens, Jane and Frank are meeting at Weymouth, and in October (early in Volume I), the two become secretly engaged. Thus their relationship has a formal aspect long before either character appears in Highbury or in the novel. Because their relationship is a secret one, its existence cannot be known to Emma (and thus must remain outside of the major plot) or to the reader. Austen can present its progress only in indirect glimpses. To control the Jane-Frank relationship and to avoid its being a secret or mystery for its own sake, Austen uses it to stimulate the major plot (and it is eventually interrupted by the major plot), and provides many hints and clues of the truth of its existence. Finally, the secrecy of the engagement and the behavior of both Jane and Frank are justified to a certain extent by the external facts of their economic and social situations which are presented directly, although of course the relation of these factors to the engagement is not.³

³Neither Jane nor Frank was brought up in Highbury. In upbringing and education, Jane is genteel, but a lack of fortune is forcing her to become a governess. She comes to
Jane arrives from London about the middle of January; we learn in Chapter 20 that, although she had become "a little acquainted" with him at Weymouth, she refuses to say very much about Frank Churchill. Within about two weeks, Frank himself arrives and is introduced at Hartfield (Ch. 23) where, after a "reasonable visit" with the Woodhouses, he declares that there is another visit he is obliged to make in Highbury (on the very day of his arrival): "I have the honour of being acquainted with a neighbor of yours . . . a family of the name of Fairfax . . . though Fairfax, I believe, is not the proper name—I should rather say Barnes or Bates. Do you know any family of that name?" Two days later on a Saturday (Ch. 25), Frank goes off to London, ostensibly to have his hair cut; on Monday Jane receives a pianoforte from an anonymous benefactor; on Tuesday evening at the Cole's dinner party (Ch. 26), the pianoforte is the subject of much discussion and conjecture. At the same dinner party, on the pretext of teasing Jane about her strange coiffure, Frank apparently manages a few words alone with her; by singing when Emma plays the piano, he is able to sing with Jane when she takes over. During the course of Chapter 27, Jane and Frank are left alone at the Bates's with the slumbering, deaf grandmother; thus, he has adequate opportunity to tell her of Emma's ideas about her visit her grandmother and aunt, the Bates ladies, when the people who reared her, the Campbells, visit Ireland. Frank lives with his late mother's brother and sister-in-law, the Churchills, whose heir everyone expects he will be, but whose heir he is apparently not yet in fact. He comes to Highbury when his natural father, Mr. Weston, remarries.
romantic life. In the next chapter, Frank manages to speak to Jane, in public and from within the context of the major plot, about the generosity of her "anonymous benefactor." (Most people have come to the logical conclusion that Jane's benefactor must be Mr. Campbell, thus erroneously placing the gift within the major plot.) When, in Chapter 30, Mrs. Churchill's claims of ill health require Frank to leave Highbury, we learn that he went first to the Bates's home to say good-bye and that Miss Bates's absence probably afforded him another brief private visit with Jane.

In Chapter 33, we learn that the Campbells have urgently invited Jane to join them on their now extended stay in Ireland, but that she has chosen to remain in Highbury. At the dinner party for the Eltons (Ch. 34), Jane's ardent refusals of Mrs. Elton's alternate plan to her daily jaunts to the post-office mean, of course, that she and Frank correspond through the mail. Also, it is revealed that, despite the fact that April has come, Jane is doing nothing about looking for a position as governess (she had vaguely decided upon the summer as the time she should begin her new life). When Mr. Weston announces that Frank is returning to Highbury, Jane avoids having to make any comment on the news, for she obviously already knows that he is coming.

The Churchills remove to London and Frank comes to Highbury for a brief visit (Ch. 37), stopping only fifteen minutes at Hartfield before rushing off to visit "a group of old acquaintances." When the fretful Mrs. Churchill moves to
Richmond, Frank is brought within only nine miles of Highbury. The dance cancelled in February is now, in May, rescheduled, and when Jane and her aunt arrive (Ch. 38), Frank rushes off to greet them with an umbrella. (In Chapter 1, we learned that his father's having done the same for Miss Taylor on a distant occasion had convinced Emma that Mr. Weston and Miss Taylor should marry.) Frank encounters Mrs. Elton for the first time at this dance and is obviously upset by her easy familiarity toward Jane. The next day (Ch. 39), he can arrive at just the right moment to rescue Harriet from the gypsies only because he had been delayed on his way back to Richmond by stopping at the Bates's home. By June (Ch. 41), Mr. Knightley is entertaining suspicions about Frank's attentions to Jane, attentions which he first noticed at a dinner party at Randalls which Emma did not attend. Austen's exposure of Knightley's consciousness at this point moves the Jane-Frank relationship, or at least its possibility, closer to the major plot and to the reader. It is through Knightley's memory that we learn, also in Chapter 41, of Frank's blunder about Mr. Perry's carriage, a bit of information he could have learned only in a letter from Jane. After a lame excuse about having dreamed it, Frank initiates a word game so that he can (from a social situation within the major plot) comment to Jane on his error.

Jane is embarrassed by Frank's blunder and angered by his game-playing; their relationship has been badly strained by the necessity of concealment and by Frank's role in and use
of the major plot. It now moves into a crisis period within the minor plot at the same time as the force of external events begins to move it into the path of its eventual revelation in the major plot. At the party at Donwell Abbey (Ch. 42), Jane is obviously distressed by Mrs. Elton's announcement that she has found a situation for her, and Emma encounters Jane as the latter is leaving the party by herself. About fifteen minutes later, Frank arrives in an irritable mood and complains excessively about the heat, mentioning in passing that he met Jane on the road. (Later, in Frank's letter in Chapter 50, we learn that on this occasion, "every little dissatisfaction that had occurred before came to a crisis," and Jane absolutely refused to allow him to walk her home. She does not tell him about the position Mrs. Elton has found for her.) The next day at the Box Hill party (Ch. 43), a break occurs within their relationship through a scene in and in the language of the major plot. Under the guise of publicly discussing relationships in general, Frank and Jane privately communicate their anger and she makes it clear to him that it is not too late for them to change their plans. The next day (Ch. 44), we learn that Frank has left Highbury (in his letter in Chapter 50, he claims that he just wanted to show how angry he was) and that Jane has directed Mrs. Elton to accept the situation for her. That the two events are connected is revealed by Miss Bates's unwitting explanation to Emma (who doesn't understand the implication either): "... then it came out about the chaise having been
sent to Randalls to take Mr. Frank Churchill to Richmond. That was what happened before tea. It was after tea that Jane spoke to Mrs. Elton." The Jane-Frank relationship is apparently ending just when fate gives it its chance, for the following day Mrs. Churchill is dead at Richmond. This external event joins with the fact that Jane has agreed to take the position as governess to "force the moment to its crisis." Within about ten days, Emma is hurried to Randalls to learn from Mrs. Weston of the longstanding "solemn engagement" between Frank and Jane (Ch. 46). The events which combined to force the revelation of their engagement are explained by Frank in the letter which Emma reads in Chapter 50 and occur during the time, in the novel, which elapses between Chapters 45 and 46.

Once the Frank-Jane relationship is revealed to Emma and thus is positioned within the major plot, it is carefully incorporated and given its proper place. Mr. and Mrs. Weston pay a visit to Jane in Chapter 48 and Mrs. Weston goes immediately to Hartfield to tell Emma of it. Frank's letter passes from Mrs. Weston to Emma and is printed in Chapter 50; in Chapter 51, Knightley reads the letter and delivers a running commentary on it. In Chapter 52, Emma pays a visit to Jane and the two talk with a new sincerity. When Mr. Woodhouse and Emma arrive at Randalls for their daily visit (Ch. 54), Frank and Jane come into the house from the garden. Frank and Emma, with the memory of their game-playing and concealment, meet face to face. With the end of Frank's
concealed role in the minor novel, his disguised role in the major novel is no longer necessary and he is free to relax into a combined role of Jane's fiance and Emma's brotherly cohort. This clarification of position frees the Emma-Knightley relationship to move toward its ultimate conclusion and the novel toward its final structuring. Jane and Frank remove to London, where they await a November marriage as the novel ends. Jane, like Mr. Martin in the first relationship, is present throughout the novel as a possibility for Frank's final position, and her presence allows him to move into that position at the novel's end.

Unlike the events of the other two relationships, those of the Emma Woodhouse-Mr. Knightley one occur within the major plot; the two move toward marriage "under the noses," as it were, of their fellow characters and the reader. Austen can allow this to take place for two reasons. First of all, Emma and Knightley have known each other for years when the novel opens; many factors—they are socially-prominent neighbors, his brother is married to her sister, he is sixteen years older than she and has played a somewhat active role in her upbringing—combine to give them an old and well-established external relationship within which they can act. Secondly, because their mentor-pupil relationship is so well-established, Emma is blind to the truth of her emotional attachment to Knightley. Thus her consciousness gives the same shape to her relationship with him as her behavior does in the external social order. (Although Knightley realizes his feelings
much sooner than Emma realizes hers, the fact that we do not learn this directly does not violate the major plot because Knightley's consciousness is not an active, shaping force in the novel.) While the Harriet-Martin and Jane-Frank relationships "work out" in spite of or behind the major plot, the Emma-Knightley relationship works out in spite of Emma's consciousness of it and thus outside of the reader's awareness, and behind their accepted position in the social order and thus outside of their fellow acquaintances' awareness. So that while Austen has them function as one thing in the major plot, they evolve into something other in spite of themselves, though inevitably. While Harriet and Martin and Jane and Frank are moving toward the major plot, Emma and Knightley are moving toward the minor plot (in the sense that it is marriage); in the mingling of these three marriages at the end, the two plots are blended and the novel is resolved.

To provide a plot for a "slow and entirely convincing bringing-together of Emma and Mr. Knightley" without violating the role of Emma's consciousness, Austen uses their separate and mutual involvement in the lives of the other two couples to lead them into a series of verbal confrontations through which the formal structure of their relationship can be indirectly and unconsciously dissolved and re-shaped. The characters and events of the minor plot provide the reason

---

for and the subject matter of the talks, confuse the motivations of both Emma and Knightley, interfere with the old relationship, and finally cause the new relationship to define itself. In fact, the minor plot is responsible for bringing Emma and Knightley to their marriage and thus into itself.

The conversation between Emma and Knightley in Chapter 1 is the only opportunity we have to see the "old" Emma-Knightley relationship before its re-defining begins. Within their roles of casual mentor and saucy pupil they are comfortable and frank with each other, making their points while remaining calm and friendly. But ominously, the subject matter includes matchmaking and Mr. Elton.

By Chapter 8, Emma's schemes in the major plot for Harriet Smith and Elton have interfered in the minor plot with the Harriet-Martin relationship. Emma wishes to conceal her role in the major plot but is adamant about her disapproval of the Harriet-Martin marriage. Knightly suspects what is going on in the major plot and is upset because he has given his approbation to the affairs of the minor plot. Their long discussion centers on Harriet (who is the pivotal character, at this point, between the two plots). Knightley, enraged at learning that Martin's plans have been foiled, demeans Harriet. Emma, torn between respect for his judgment and her own consciousness, inflates her. They are both very vexed and Knightley leaves abruptly. Emma's scheme, which she flatly denied, has distanced them.
Their next long discussion (Ch. 18) is characterized by blatant subterfuge on Emma's part and clouded motivation on Knightley's part. It is just after Christmas and Mr. Frank Churchill, eagerly awaited, does not come for his visit to Highbury. Emma, recovering privately from the Elton debacle and wishing to appear her normal public self, feigns personal disappointment about Frank's not coming. Knightley, annoyed by the social fuss over Frank, is particularly irked by Emma's enthusiasm and apparent disappointment. She assumes Mrs. Weston's position as her own and is too easy on Frank, while he, unaware of his incipient jealousy, is too hard on Frank. Emma accuses Knightley of an unusual personal prejudice and finally, puzzled by his vexation, changes the subject. Her private consciousness and his private feelings are blurring their old roles.

During Volume II no solitary conversations of any length occur between Emma and Knightley. The two are virtually removed from each other by the arrival of Frank Churchill, who then begins to play the chief role in Emma's public life and in her consciousness. Although Austen separates them, she keeps them each (though not together) before the reader as a romantic possibility. The Frank-Jane relationship in the minor plot indirectly allows for a possible and parallel permanent separation of Emma and Knightley—while Emma herself and others (including Knightley) are diverted by thinking Emma and Frank in love, some characters (including Emma) entertain thoughts of a possible marriage between Knightley and Jane.
Early in Volume III (Ch. 38), Emma and Knightley are reunited in a bond of close feeling, though not of perfect understanding. After Knightley dances with Harriet to save her from an embarrassing social situation, he and Emma are able to admit to each other the errors of their former discussion about her and they converse, for the moment, as two adult equals. That this reunion of feeling takes place at a dance—a setting of constant motion and changing structures of couples—is appropriate.

In Chapter 41, because he thinks Emma is in love with Frank, Knightley begins to re-define his own role toward her. His new hesitation to speak directly to Emma is certainly motivated in part by his awareness of some jealousy toward Frank and by his realization of his own love, which he must conceal, for Emma. But he reasons that, "as a friend—an anxious friend—," he must reveal to her his suspicions about Frank and Jane. Emma is in much the same position as she was in their first long discussion about Harriet (Ch. 8)—she must conceal the truth of her role in the major plot (about the meaning of the word game) while at the same time she is adamant about her disbelief in the Jane-Frank relationship (the minor plot). He is kind but retreats when he realizes that his interference is useless; she is confident and gay and oblivious to his concern and discomfort.

The outing at Box Hill (Ch. 43) causes a final temporary resurgence of their old mentor-pupil relationship and a break which threatens, at the same time as it clears the way for,
the formation of a new relationship. Emma, caught in the web of her own consciousness, entertains herself by flirting with Frank. Knightley, enraged by her flirtation, resolves to escape her and his own feelings by going to London. \(^5\) Isolated from each other on two islands of feeling by the various intrigues involving Frank, their personal frustrations explode around the neutral character Miss Bates. Emma is inexcusably and publicly rude to Miss Bates and Knightley seizes the opportunity, which he sees as his last, to discipline her. The situation allows real feelings to surface—Knightley is genuinely concerned with her behavior and with what he knows is right and Emma cannot deny the truth of what he says. After this break, Knightley will remove himself (externally) to London and Emma will begin to change herself internally. The next time they talk they will be lovers.

The Emma-Knightley relationship is freed to evolve into the minor plot as a love relationship by an occurrence within each of the other two marital relationships. When Harriet reveals that Knightley is her real object of interest, Emma realizes that she herself loves Knightley. When the truth of the Frank-Jane relationship is revealed into the major plot,  

\(^5\) An effective measure of the control of his feelings over him at this point is the fact that Knightley so readily accepts a strong attachment between Emma and Frank despite his strong suspicions about Frank and Jane, suspicions which should be amply reinforced by the lightly disguised conversation between the two which takes place in his company. It should also be noted here that Emma, who has been informed in Chapter 41 of Knightley’s suspicions, also listens to their talk without any twinge of awareness as to its real meaning.
Knightley is prompted home from London, "to see how this sweetest and best of all creatures, faultless in spite of all her faults, bore the discovery." Their long conversation in Chapter 49 assigns a new relationship to Emma and Knightley, one that was prepared for outside of the consciousness of the major plot. ⁶

The new Emma-Knightley relationship requires a more delicate process of assimilation into the major plot than did either of the other two marital relationships. Once the clarification of other positions in the minor plot allows for the formation of a new Emma-Knightley relationship, it, in turn, in clarifying its own new form, clarifies and blends the two plots within Emma into one. Although Knightley's transformation from mentor to lover is an interesting portrait of the adjustments entailed by a change of role in Austen's world, it is Emma's adjustment to her new role which is absolutely necessary to the plot's formal resolution.

Emma's realization that she loves Knightley brings upheaval to the constructs of her consciousness. As she painfully, but honestly, readjusts her internal perspectives she also adjusts her external behavior accordingly. The impetus which moves her toward an open, honest relationship with Knightley gives Emma a new role in reconciling the two plots of the novel. In her movement toward the position of Knightley's

⁶Throughout the novel there are several scenes which foreshadow or prepare for Emma and Knightley's ultimate relationship, and these form a substructure of support for the acceptance of it.
wife she must free herself of the entanglements and intrigues of her consciousness, which have also been the stuff of the major plot. Therefore, at the point at which the other two marital relationships are being revealed into the major plot, Emma reaches the point at which she can welcome and support them (in that the constructs of her consciousness which would serve to interfere with or reject them are no longer desirable to her or to the novel). Accordingly, in Chapter 52, she can visit Jane with friendship and sincerity, all her old jealousy gone; in Chapter 53, she can respond with a new self-knowledge to John Knightley's letter; in Chapter 54, she can accept with joy the news that Harriet will marry Martin and can meet Frank with rational, well-controlled friendship. Emma's new awareness of her fellow characters' proper roles and positions allows the reader to accept the formal ending of the novel.

With the three marriages, the minor plot emerges and encapsulates the major plot. Although it is submerged and even disguised in the novel, the minor plot is one of intricate detail. By interweaving its characters and events and by carefully controlling them in time and space, Austen is able to present the minor plot obliquely, but successfully; moreover, through masterful control she is able to use these characters and events to furnish the stuff of which the major plot is made. Finally, the minor plot—in a brilliant technical coup—functions unobtrusively to keep the major plot
in control throughout and to provide it a resolution at its end. With such a formal device working for her, Austen is able to experiment in the major plot, to examine less tangible subject matter and to incorporate into her fiction problems and possibilities not usually sustained by the novel as her audience knew it.

The major novel in *Emma*, a plot of alternatives to the actual events and situations of the minor novel, is presented to the surface of the work through Emma's consciousness. With the conventional plot removed into a minor position and with the functioning external order from her society permeating the work, Austen allows a third order to emerge in a major plot. This third order is the world of the individual consciousness as a dramatic, shaping force in the fictional medium; with its appearance, we encounter Austen the innovator, for what we are seeing here are the first tentative steps of the internal mind into the making of plot. Although these steps do not falter, they are not allowed to proceed out of control. Emma's freely imagined alliances encounter the harsh truth of former commitments and inevitable marriages, and Austen's use of the individual consciousness encounters and is finally submerged in the form of the conventional novel and the inexorable social order. With the minor plot in possession of the ultimate control over the novel, the way in which an individual consciousness gives shape to the world around it is examined at some length by the major plot. This experiment requires technical innovation, and Austen begins by
shaping the major plot out of the substance of the minor plot.

Marriage is the subject matter of the minor plot, so matchmaking in the major plot obviously links the two subject matters and allows for a sharing of characters and events. Furthermore, while marriage is an event based on knowledge, straightforwardness, and decision, matchmaking is the game of marriage based on supposition, scheme, and hope. While marriage is a world of probability if not of certainty, matchmaking is a world of possibility. The role of marriage in the social order gives matchmaking an added appropriateness. In Austen's social spectrum, marriage is a state of superior importance, dictated by and resolving one's economic and class positions. It is a matter of the greatest seriousness and, according to the narrator of *Emma*, is "the origin of change" (Ch. 1). Thus the decisive movement of the individual toward marriage contains within it the threat of too much change and, in a very important way, the stable existence of the social order depends upon the marriages formed within it. The central characters in *Emma* are in motion toward the resting point of marriage and fixed social position, and in this state of suspension and flux the major plot, (with the central point of Emma's consciousness), examines various final marital forms which are "bad" marriages in terms of the social order. Thus the major plot is a constant threat to the minor plot at the same time as the latter
is a constant control for it. The workings and effects of Emma's consciousness throw the social order into a state of temporary chaos which is restored to order only by the marriages at the end. It is in this way that Emma's consciousness is a subversive factor, as perhaps all active consciousnesses are.

The control of time and space in the minor plot, through the use of the one-year cycle and of Highbury as the setting, allows these two dimensions to function in a different way in the major plot. Time seems suspended, temporarily "frozen," to allow for the examination of several variations of the weddings to which its inevitable flow will lead. The limitation of depicted events to the external space of Highbury and its environs allows in the major plot a suitable compression of space so that a chess game of sorts can be played. Emma's consciousness expands over a small amount of space, moving her fellow characters around within a small pattern to better examine variations to their positions. This compression of space is emphasized by several factors in the novel. One is the pressure felt from the world outside Highbury: from the Churchills at Enscombe, from the Campbells and Dixons in Ireland, and from the Sucklings at Maple Grove. The force of these places is felt at various times and with various strengths but they and the people who inhabit them are never allowed active space in the novel. Some of the necessary events of the novel—the meeting of Frank and Jane at Weymouth,
the meeting of Mr. and Mrs. Elton at Bath, the final alliance of Harriet and Mr. Martin in London—take place outside the space of the novel and then are brought into its space to be dealt with. Compressed space is also reinforced by factors within the world of Highbury. There are a number of characters—Mr. Perry, the Coles, the Martins, Mrs. Goddard—who influence the action of the novel without every occupying a considerable space in it. Also, there is constant emphasis on the space between the homes of Highbury and the distance between Highbury and other places, all comically supported by Mr. Woodhouse's trepidations about travel of any kind (even the half-mile between Hartfield and Randalls). The enforced isolation and the inevitable intimacy within such restricted space are made clear in Emma's thoughts after the Emma-Harriet Smith-Mr. Elton debacle:

Their being fixed, so absolutely fixed, in the same place, was bad for each, for all three. Not one of them had the power of removal, or of effecting any material change of society. They must encounter each other, and make the best of it (Ch. 17).

All of these external manifestations of restricted time and space allow for a more workable portrayal of the processes of the individual consciousness.

Another factor which contributes both to the restriction of space (in terms of the number of characters in it) and to the social flexibility of the characters who are moving toward marriage is the rather conspicuous absence of parents in the novel. Harriet Smith is illegitimate with no known
parentage; Knightley's parents do not exist and are never mentioned; Jane's parents are dead and she was brought up outside Highbury; Frank has no mother and was surrendered by his father to be brought up by relatives away from Highbury; Mrs. Elton's parents are dead and she has only an uncle and a sister, neither of whom appears; Mr. Elton's parents are, like Knightley's, never mentioned; finally, Emma's mother is long dead and she lives with a rather ineffectual father. Certainly the social anonymity of Harriet and of Jane contributes to their problems in the minor plot and to the schemes surrounding them in the major plot.

Each plot deals on a different level with the limitation of knowledge. The minor plot is formed largely of events which are concealed in time and removed from the direct apprehension of the reader. One of its main aspects is the Jane Fairfax—Frank Churchill relationship which is also concealed in time, but more importantly, is a secret relationship and thus concealed from the reader and from the other characters. In the major plot we are dealing with an individual consciousness and thus necessarily with the limitation of knowledge—what Emma does not know the narrator cannot tell the reader and what Emma does not know cannot be depicted in the novel. Also, the drama of consciousness results partially at least from the fact that it must shape reality with only a limited knowledge of the meaning of the events which it uses for its material.
Finally, Austen uses aspects of the minor plot to control the problem of the freedom of Emma's consciousness in the major plot. In releasing Emma's consciousness to "play" dangerously with the ultimate form of the novel, Austen had, at the same time, to retain her as the traditional romantic heroine. She had to give Emma the freedom a consciousness requires without losing her as a heroine, either for the novel or for the reader. Matchmaking is a game, and, essentially, Emma is playing games with reality. So Austen introduces a second game-player, namely Frank Churchill, who really is playing games and who actually endangers the fate of others and of himself. In so doing, he incorporates Emma into his game on the pretext of playing hers, and thus Emma is as much played against as playing. As a formal construct, then, Frank is present at the end to receive Knightley's verdict—"Playing a most dangerous game" (Ch. 51)—and to suffer more severe criticism from both his fellow characters and the reader. Emma, despite what she herself may think, is never really playing games "for keeps"; her pieces are protected from her by the events of and their ultimate position in the minor plot, and Emma is protected from doing any real damage to herself in much the same way. Knightley, in his role as mentor, is present as a consciousness-control for Emma and is present at the end as a position to which she can move. Thus Knightley is like Martin to Harriet and Jane to Frank, functioning in part as a reminder of Emma's fate.
With some idea, then, of how the major plot was created in *Emma*, we can examine how it actually works as a plot. Various tri-level or triangular patterns in the action of *Emma* have been noted by its critics, but a new one emerges when two separate plots are distinguished. This pattern emanates from what I call the major plot, but operates through levels of reverberation which expand to incorporate all aspects of the work. Patterns or levels of reverberation function as both the method and the effect of the workings of Emma's consciousness and give to the major plot its progressive stages. Austen joins structural and epistemological (formal and thematic) concerns into a working union through three levels or systems within and against which Emma's consciousness expands, acts, and re-acts and the major plot takes place.

These three systems are the social order, personal consciousness, and private design. The social order is an external, given reality pattern imposed on the novel, an artificial system wherein a person has a name, a rank, and a position, and from this name, rank, and position, receives an accepted and expected code of behavior. By virtue of its given nature, the social order is an external reference point within which a person is defined and against which a person can be judged. Because the system is only conventional (despite the fact that it seems to exist independently of the individuals who move through it), it can only be sustained through the unspoken compliance of its members. Thus it is constantly
subject to threat and is, despite appearances, a fairly fragile construct. In order to operate efficiently and to survive, the social order requires the strictest adherence, for the people operating within it must be able to trust the behavior of the others and be able to make judgments in terms and with reference to it. The community must be one in which all the persons adjust themselves comfortably to their external roles and be what they are taken to be. In other words, the social order is its own kind of game. The meaning of Emma's angry words on learning of Frank's engagement extends beyond her personal outrage and humiliation:

What has it been but a system of hypocrisy and deceit, espionage and treachery? To come among us with professions of openness and simplicity; . . . Here have we been the whole winter and spring, completely duped, fancying ourselves all on an equal footing of truth and honour (Ch. 46, my italics).

Of course, Emma has been guilty of her own personal "treachery" against the social order too.

But Emma's guilt lies within the second level, the personal consciousness. Whereas the social order is the given in the minor plot, the consciousness of Emma is the given in the major plot. It is an internal source imposed on the novel, but although it is also a given, it is unlike the social order precisely because it is unordered. Consciousness gives internal shape and perspective to one's experience and awareness of external reality, operating without the limitations of external existence and to a certain extent unaccountable to it. However, one's behavior mediates between one's
consciousness and the external world and thus most people shape their consciousnesses (or allow them to be shaped) into a pattern which is in accord with the external world of their social milieu. In the eighteenth-century world of the Austen novel, such an accord makes for the ease of social interaction and progress. If, however, an active imagination is given free reign in the individual the result is likely to be a chaotic imbalance between the consciousness and the external order, an imbalance which, if allowed to influence one's behavior, can have a disruptive and even a subversive effect.

The third level is a factor in both plots, but has a greater importance in the major one. This is the area of private design, that is, of the personal plans or hopes of characters other than Emma which are not shared by the reader. The design may or may not be in accord with the social order, but what is important about it is that it results in the use of accepted behavior patterns to obtain or disguise personal goals or situations. The problem which results lies in the disparity between the person's design and his behavior. The behavior is taken at face value, according to the dictates of the person's social position and, as such, has an effect and is reacted to within a set or code of predetermined relationship patterns. These patterns are potentially harmful when they are based on false cues and plans which are at variance with the behavior of their initiators.
In each of the patterns of the major plot, the characters operate as formal constructs of knowledge, and their behavior reverberates within this tri-level structure of the social order, personal consciousness, and private design. In this way, Emma's consciousness, the central shaping force of the major plot, dramatically encounters other systems of knowledge; the tension which results moves the novel toward its final form. Actually, each encounter is a clash between Emma's personal consciousness and an area of private design over a factor in the social order. The first of these is the Emma-Harriet-Elton intrigue, which operates throughout Volume I.

Emma's lively imagination, left in relative isolation after the Weston marriage and resolved upon making a match ("It is the greatest amusement in the world!" Ch. 1) for Elton, encounters Harriet Smith. As a device, Harriet is perfect for Emma because her position within the social order is relatively ambiguous. She is a parlour boarder in a common school and is by nature pretty, sweet-tempered, impressionable, and compliant, with no pretensions or preconceptions about her social position. Through a gradual loss of perspective, Emma incorporates Harriet into her consciousness. Ignoring the fact that Harriet obviously possesses neither intelligence nor wit, Emma decides that she "wanted only a little more knowledge and elegance to be quite perfect" (Ch. 3). Despite evidence to the contrary, Emma decides that
Harriet's friends the Martins "must be coarse and unpolished" (Ch. 3). Emphasizing Harriet's unknown parentage over the fact of her illegitimacy, Emma convinces herself, and can state to Knightley, that "she is a gentleman's daughter" (Ch. 8). Finally, ignoring altogether Harriet's birth and current situation and choosing her physical appearance over her mental capability, Emma tells Knightley that "till it appears that men are much more philosophic on the subject of beauty than they are generally supposed, till they do fall in love with well-informed minds instead of handsome faces, a girl, with such loveliness as Harriet, has a certainty of being admired and sought after" (Ch. 8). As Emma's consciousness-control, Knightley speaks directly out of the social order and pinpoints Emma's loss of perspective when he angrily asks her, "What are Harriet Smith's claims, either of birth, nature, or education, to any connection higher than Robert Martin?" (Ch. 8). So completely does Emma's incorporation of Harriet into her personal consciousness overcome her perspective of the external reality that, when she first mentions Elton to Harriet, she is convinced that "it would be an excellent match . . . . She feared it was what everybody else must think of and predict" (Ch. 4). For the novel, Harriet

7In the space between Emma's consciousness and the social reality, in the gap, as it were, which opens up as a result of her loss of perspective, she makes statements, like the one above, which contain more than a kernel of truth and which form, on their own, a body of social criticism. For those critics concerned with Austen's irony or her cynicism, the way in which these statements exist in the novel should be of some interest.
is now removed from her position in the external order and
given form and position in the world of Emma's conscious-
ness (this is the movement which takes her out of the minor
plot and "misplaces" her in the major plot). With Harriet
in this new position, Emma encounters Elton, the newly ar-
rived young minister.

Emma and Elton clash over Harriet in a series of misun-
derstood cues and misinterpreted behavior. As the Emma-
Harriet-Elton pattern works its way toward self-destruction,
what we have is a confrontation between personal conscious-
ness (Emma) and private design (Elton) over the social order
(Harriet). Convinced of her own transformation of Harriet,
Emma deludes herself into thinking that everyone else, but
especially Elton, must see Harriet the same way as she does.
Such extension or externalization of the internal view of
reality is the danger inherent in personal consciousness.
Emma interprets all of Elton's posturings and actions as indi-
cations of his growing attachment to Harriet (toward whom she
also re-directs his effusively complimentary behavior toward
herself), and she calmly ignores Knightley's outright warning,
in Chapter 8, that Elton plans to marry someone with at least
a moderate fortune. Her problem is that, although she is
acting indirectly toward Elton and has herself raised Harri-
et's social position, she assumes that Elton is acting direct-
ly and that he would not presume to raise his own social posi-
tion (to hers, that is). Although she has violated the social
order, she continues to expect that others live in strict accord with it.

Elton, however, acts out of his private design. When he begins to receive all kinds of undue attention from Miss Woodhouse, his flattered vanity—encourages him to hope for a marital alliance with Emma and her thirty thousand pounds. Responding to the social situation as he sees it, he indirectly pays attention to Emma by paying attention to Harriet. Ironically, of course, Harriet is only an extension of Emma in this pattern, so Elton’s flattery of her is really flattery of Emma. It is thus quite fitting that Elton is the only character in the novel who finds the portrait, Emma’s literal creation of Harriet, "a most perfect resemblance" (Ch. 6). They both use Harriet for their own private purposes and are blinded to the real situation by their external belief in the social order; for, just as Emma never expects that Elton could be pursuing her, he never expects that Emma could intend him for the lowly Harriet.

While Elton and Emma act at cross-purposes, they gradually convince themselves that their private beliefs are assuming some reality. With much self-satisfaction, Emma says to Harriet that when "Miss Smiths and Mr. Eltons get acquainted they do indeed—and really it is strange; it is out of the common course that what is so evidently, so palpably desirable—what courts the pre-arrangement of other people—should so immediately shape itself into the proper form"
(Ch. 9). There is no finer comment in the novel than this one to suggest the workings and dangers of the personal consciousness when it overwhelms social reality. Elton's confidence eventually betrays itself in his social behavior, and when he urges Mrs. Weston to remonstrate with Emma about the danger of catching a sore throat, Mrs. Weston is much surprised at his "assuming to himself the right of first interest in her" (Ch. 15).

Warmed by wine and alone for once with Emma, Elton finally proposes to her. After some confusion, the truth of each of their positions is revealed. Outraged and humiliated, they accuse each other on the grounds of behavior and defend themselves on the basis of social position. Emma tells Elton, "my astonishment is much beyond anything I can express. After such behavior as I have witnessed during the last month, to Miss Smith--such attentions as I have been in the daily habit of observing-- . . ." (Ch. 15). Elton protests, "Everything that I have said or done, for many weeks past, has been with the sole view of marking my adoration of yourself. You cannot really seriously doubt it. No . . . I am sure you have seen and understood me." (Frank will use the same judgment of Emma's understanding in his own defense.) Amazed at the slur on his position, Elton declares that he could never be expected to think of Miss Smith seriously and accuses Emma of having encouraged his attentions toward herself. To which she, likewise outraged, haughtily replies: "Sir, you have been
entirely mistaken. . . . I have seen you only as the admirer of my friend. In no other light could you have been more to me than a common acquaintance."

Both Elton and Emma have used and abused the social order, but Emma is the more culpable. For one thing, other characters are able to see their situation for what it is. Miss Nash obviously suspects that Emma is Elton's object of interest (Ch. 8), and Knightley's brother, John, warns Emma outright of Elton's possible attachment to her (Ch. 13). After the whole affair is over, Miss Bates lets slip in her imitable way that other members of the community had suspicions about Elton and Emma. Her comment is worth examining:

Well I had always rather fancied it would be some young lady hereabouts; not that I ever--Mrs. Cole once whis­pered to me--but I immediately said, 'No, Mr. Elton is a most worthy yojng man--but---' In short, I do not think I am particularly quick at those sort of discov­er­ies. I do not pretend to it. What is before me, I see. At the same time, nobody could wonder if Mr. Elton should have aspired--Miss Woodhouse lets me chatter on. . . . She knows I would not offend for the world (Ch. 21).

This points out for the whole novel the disparity between the social order and behavior. Miss Bates may see everything that is before her, but she can interpret nothing and she is incapable of even suspecting variations to the social order as she knows it (and she knows that Elton is Emma's inferior). But to people like the Coles (rising middle-class tradespeo­ple), behavior is subject to more loose interpretation because it is not so clearly associated with pre-existing social po­sition. Therefore they have their suspicions about Elton
and Emma. Miss Bates's comment that "nobody could wonder if Mr. Elton should have aspired," points to a legitimacy in Elton's behavior for, within the confines of the social system, he is playing an accepted "game"—trying to better oneself through marriage. Emma's "game" with Harriet is, in one sense, a variation of an unspoken game which goes on all the time. The three characters involved survive this debacle and suffer no ultimate damage from it, but a residue of urges, hostilities, and resolutions will re-emerge to become entangled in and complicate the major plot as it continues.

This next scheme, which dominates the rest of the novel, is the Emma-Jane Fairfax-Frank Churchill pattern. Although it is also incorporated within the personal consciousness-social order-private design triangle, it is far more complex and far-reaching than the Emma-Harriet-Elton pattern. The former scheme was stimulated, plotted, and directed from within Emma's consciousness and, appropriately, most of it took place within her home. She was dealing with a simple social situation contained within Highbury and the two characters with whom she dealt each had one, relatively uncomplicated, role to play. In the new pattern, however, Emma's personal consciousness is stimulated externally—by both the area of private design and the area of the social order. Secondly, this scheme involves more complicated social roles and lives which extend farther in space. These two facts serve to remove parts of the scheme from Emma's area of control and thus,
as it were, beyond the limits of her consciousness. Third-
ly, the Emma-Jane-Frank scheme itself reaches out into space
and includes within its web factors from the previous scheme
and eventually gives birth to a minor scheme of its own (i.
e., the Emma-Knightley/Frank-Harriet one). Finally, the most
significant change of all is that of the role of Emma's con-
sciousness. In the Emma-Harriet-Elton pattern, Emma was the
"player," but in this new scheme, although she begins as the
player (and continues to believe that she is), she becomes a
pawn in the game being played by Frank Churchill.

That this new stage of the major plot will involve an
extension in space is signaled at the opening of Volume II
(Ch. 19) by Emma's visit to the Bates home and by the conver-
sation about Jane and Ireland. From Miss Bates's chatter
about Jane's situation, Emma begins to form her scheme about
a possible romantic alliance between Jane and Mr. Dixon, the
husband of Jane's close friend who is the daughter of the
people who educated her. While this scheme may seem far-
fetched and rather silly of Emma, its formal and thematic
role in the novel is complicated and significant. As the
plot continues, Emma is able to pursue and elaborate on her
ideas about Jane and Mr. Dixon from what she considers in-
direct "evidence" of such an alliance--Jane's refusal to go
to Ireland and her reserve in talking about that area of her
life, the gift of the pianoforte, and her private trips to
the post office. Thus her consciousness is fed by real
occurrences in the external order, occurrences Emma correctly believes are masking a deeper significance. The alliance she settles on—one between a single woman and a married man—is a direct subversion of the social order. While that is not the truth, the truth is nonetheless a subversion of the social order (secret engagements were a serious matter then). Thus in this scheme we have another confrontation between personal consciousness (Emma) and private design (Jane) over the external reality (Jane's secret alliance). Formally, this scheme is an important part of the larger pattern of Emma-Jane-Frank.

The Emma-Jane-Frank intrigue is a complex one in which factors in the social order reverberate between the areas of personal consciousness and private design. The pattern works in this case because of the subtle positioning of the various characters involved in such a way that the availability of knowledge between them is well-controlled. Various alliances imagined through hints or expectations from the social order are used to provide pairs of characters access to each other or to keep them apart. Emma forms her scheme about Jane and Dixon before either Jane or Frank appears in the novel. This scheme works as a cover to blind Emma and keep her from any possible suspicion about an alliance between Jane and Frank. This blindness is necessary to the major plot and is also necessary to the minor plot where their engagement is hidden. But although the Emma-Dixon-Jane scheme functions in one sense
to keep Emma from Frank's area of private design, it also, joined with another scheme stimulated from the external order, functions to provide her with direct access to Frank. The social order of Highbury and the wishes of such people as the Westons dictate a possible alliance between Emma and Frank. Encouraged thus to assume that Frank will fall in love with her, Emma allows their relationship to proceed at a rapid pace and feels free to share with Frank her ideas about Jane and Dixon. Under cover of the social order (at the Cole's dinner party, she "divined what everybody must be thinking. She was his object, and everybody must perceive it." Ch. 26), a whole relationship between the two of them takes place in Emma's imagination. When Frank takes his leave of her in Chapter 30, she assumes that she has stopped him from declaring his love (which she has, but not for herself). When he returns in two months, she decides that time and her indifference to him have reduced his love for her. Thus the idea of an alliance between Harriet and Frank is free to grow in her mind. Emma's fancying that Harriet should succeed her in Frank's affections keeps the plot involved with Frank as a romantic possibility, brings Harriet back into the major plot, and keeps, in Emma's consciousness, both Frank and Harriet away from their real alliances. That Harriet is a survivor of Emma's original scheme works in two ways. Emma continues to feel guilty about Harriet and concerned about the younger girl's marital possibilities, but because
of the disastrous results of the scheme with Elton, Emma keeps the idea of Harriet and Frank to herself and resolves to do nothing actively. But the idea allows her consciousness to interpret external events accordingly and, after Frank "rescues" Harriet in Chapter 39, Emma decides that the event is surely "recommending each to the other." Her own interpretation of events plus her determination not to interfere lead ironically to the misunderstanding with Harriet in Chapter 40 and cause Emma to give inadvertent encouragement to Harriet's thoughts of Knightley as a possible suitor. It is important that Emma not know of Harriet's hopes, for she has already reacted badly to the thought of Knightley's marrying at all (Ch. 26). Furthermore, Harriet's eventual "evidence" that Knightley cares for her will spark Emma's realization that she herself loves Knightley. Thus Harriet's private design must be formed but must be kept from Emma's knowledge until such time as the plot is ready for Emma to realize that she loves Knightley. Finally, by allowing Harriet to "grow" alone in the pattern of exalted social position and expectation which Emma initiated, Austen demonstrates an important part of the novel's theme. When Emma forms her schemes for Harriet, she is subverting the social order but in a way which she feels she can control. But the control of the personal consciousness is limited and Emma creates her own kind of "monster," as it were, who grows out of her control and who eventually turns on her and threatens
to subvert her own social position. For the Emma-Knightley-Harriet pattern is another variation of reverberation of the personal consciousness (Emma)-social order (Knightley/Frank)-private design (Harriet) construct. In this pattern Harriet is no longer just a pawn in Emma's game, she is herself (albeit with what she thinks is Emma's approbation) a player.

As Harriet moves from pawn to game-player of sorts, Emma is moved from player to pawn. After delaying his visit several times, Frank arrives in Highbury a day before he is expected, thus prophesying his fondness for surprises and games. He is a young man with "a secret which was to be kept at all hazards" (Ch. 50). From the outset he uses facts of the social order to cover and blind others to the fact of his private design. Social custom demands that he visit Jane because of their acquaintance at Weymouth and social expectation demands that he become acquainted with Emma. He is prepared to do both and thus to play a game of sorts with the society of Highbury. In the early stages of their relationship, Emma unwittingly provides him with an additional cover for his relationship with Jane, a cover under which he can have even more access to Jane. Frank actually makes the first allusion to the Dixons, but once he senses the drift of Emma's eager reaction, he checks his surprise and encourages her to continue. His ready acquiescence to her ideas makes Emma feel "herself so well acquainted with him that she could hardly believe it to be only their second meeting"
(Ch. 24). Actually, Emma has dangerously exposed her personal consciousness to a conniver more masterly than she. By flattering her about her strong powers of intuitive knowledge and by allowing her to appear the master game-player, Frank incorporates her into his own game. At the Cole's dinner party, he allows her to bring him step-by-step to her own decision that Mr. Dixon sent the pianoforte. He tells her:

Your reasonings carry my judgment along with them entirely. At first, while I supposed you satisfied that Colonel Campbell was the giver I saw it only as paternal kindness, and thought it the most natural thing in the world. But when you mentioned Mrs. Dixon, I felt how much more probable that it should be the tribute of warm female friendship. And now I can see it in no other light than as an offering of love (Ch. 26).

Ironically, of course, an "offering of love" is exactly what it is. Immediately after this, he begins to use Emma as a piece in his game, announcing to her that he will go ask Jane if her hair is arranged in "an Irish fashion" and that Emma "shall see how she takes it." Emma goes along with Frank's schemes from now on and, indeed, plays her part so well that Frank finally assumes that she knows the real truth. It is appropriate that Frank is the initiator and Emma the follower in the dance at Crown Inn, the word game at Hartfield, and the games on Box Hill. For she is certainly not the one in control of this personal consciousness (Emma)-social order (Jane)-private design (Frank) triangle, a situation saved from utter disaster by events, already related,
Once all the schemes have been revealed and Emma has learned the error of her ways, the major characters position themselves according to their rightful places and the novel comes to an end structured according to the suggestion of its beginning. It has taken the opportunity to examine the role of position—in terms of the individual's awareness of and adjustment to it and in terms of society's ordering of it—in the time and space which exist between the initial attraction and ultimate marriage of six characters. Although Emma's consciousness is the main disruptive factor, she has a large supporting cast ranging from Mrs. Elton and her overestimation of her own position, Miss Bates and her obsequiousness about her own lowered position, and the Coles and their eagerness to raise their social position, to Mr. Woodhouse and his horror and dismay over marriage and yet his care to pay all proper attention to a new bride. The concerns of the major plot reverberate throughout the entire work and all the characters and situations find their counterparts in some other area—for example, Mrs. Elton and her relationship with Jane parodies Emma and her relationship with Harriet.

It is clear that the social order (and, by implication, the conventional plot) as Austen and her audience knew it is affirmed at the end. The major plot is constructed to guide the reader to this end. The first genuine grief Emma displays is over her mistreatment of Miss Bates at Box Hill,
mistreatment based on irresponsible disregard of duties dictated by the class system. In her bitter examinations of conscience, she realizes that her refusal to be Jane's friend was a direct violation of the class system and led to her unhealthy relationship with Harriet:

Had she followed Mr. Knightley's known wishes, in paying that attention to Miss Fairfax which was every way her due; had she tried to know her better; had she done her part towards intimacy; had she endeavoured to find a friend there instead of in Harriet Smith, she must, in all probability, have been spared from every pain which pressed on her now. Birth, abilities, and education had been equally marking one as an associate for her, to be received with gratitude; and the other—what was she? (Ch. 48).

Also important are Emma's repeated affirmations, toward the end, of Mr. Knightley over Frank Churchill, for throughout the novel these two gentelmen represent, respectively, a social viewpoint based on rationality and justice versus an individual viewpoint based on whim and selfishness. Emma's flirtation with Frank before moving toward marriage with Knightley is an important expression of the relationship between the two plots.

In 1951, Arnold Kettle stated emphatically that there was no longer "any excuse for thinking of Jane Austen as an untutored genius. . . . She was a serious and conscious writer, absorbed in her art, wrestling with its problems. . . . she had the great artist's concern with form and presentation."8 In Emma we see Austen wrestling with an existing form.

---

in order to bring forth her own creative innovations. Emma's shaping of imaginative alternatives out of the materials of Highbury is like Austen's shaping of a fictional alternative out of the materials of the romantic novel—both are subversive, both make their aesthetic point, but both submit to convention in the end. Emma submits to the existing social order by marrying Knightley and abandoning her schemes and Austen submits to the existing form of the novel by "abandoning" her major plot as I have defined it.

The major plot has to be sacrificed to the minor plot, for its presence in the novel threatens the whole work with destruction. The impact of personal, internally-stimulated action on a world regulated by a strict external social code is potentially devastating. But, in terms of the development of the novel, its potential effect on plot is far more important. For, if consciousness were to become the source of action, a whole new area of experience would enter the novel, an area of experience not necessarily regulated by the author's or the reader's social and literary preconceptions and expectations. The function of external action would then be re-directed, and the final form of the novel would be dictated, perhaps, by some internal principle rather than, as in Emma, by the external social order. The question of preconceived, imposed requirements for the ending of a

---

9Alistair M. Duckworth, The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1971), p. 174 ("... what has been threatened is an entire way of life... ").
novel will become a creative problem for George Eliot in Middlemarch. Austen's work is only a partial confrontation with the novel form through plot for she allows the conventional plot to triumph. Working within and with the tools of a male-created form, she only suggests these other possibilities. But in her suggestion lies the origin of the female as a shaping force in the novel.
CHAPTER II

MIDDLEMARCH

Gordon S. Haight places Middlemarch (1871-1872) in the novel's major tradition by stating that its plot is "as carefully planned as that of Tom Jones or Bleak House" and that it is George Eliot's "inheritance from the old tradition of the novel."¹ But while Middlemarch apparently operates according to a conventional plot, it actually suggests a re-structuring of it. Eliot introduces into the work an area of subject matter which, if it were allowed to be fully realized, would significantly change the concept of action in fiction and thus ultimately the form of the genre. The recognition of this innovative content invites a new reading of the total plot of Middlemarch and reveals George Eliot as another artist in confrontation with conventional form.

Eliot was concerned about the role of women especially as it affected the whole of society. She thought that the isolation of male and female areas of interest was a detriment and desired that the two areas be brought into closer contact for the general welfare. In an 1854 essay on Mme. de Sablé, she wrote of the effect on women of the French social system:

Women become superior in France by being admitted to a common fund of ideas, to common objects of interest with men; and this must ever be the essential condition at once of true womanly culture and of true social well-being. . . . Let the whole field of reality be laid open to woman as well as to man, and then that which is peculiar in her mental modification, instead of being, as it is now, a source of discord and repulsion between the sexes, will be found to be a necessary complement to the truth and beauty of life. Then we shall have that marriage of minds which alone can blend all the hues of thought and feeling in one lovely rainbow of promise for the harvest of human happiness.2

Responding to a request for support of a new women's college, Eliot wrote (in a letter of October 4, 1869) of her belief that

women ought to have the same fund of truth placed within their reach as men have; that their lives (i.e. the lives of men and women) ought to be passed together under the hallowing influence of a common faith as to their duty and its basis. And this unity in their faith can only be produced by their having each the same store of fundamental knowledge.3

I believe that these thoughts actively influenced George Eliot's decision to unite the beginnings of two separate stories, "Miss Brooke" and "Middlemarch," a decision which brought Dorothea Brooke and Lydgate into the same work and which led to the plot of Middlemarch as we know it. Into a conventionally-constructed plot, Eliot introduces the two spheres of the male and the female and dramatizes their isolation and the social dangers inherent in that isolation. Into its conventional subject matter of marriage, she


introduces the Dorothea-Lydgate relationship and dramatizes the possibility of a closer union and understanding between the sexes. The plot moves toward its culmination in the final possibility of the Dorothea-Lydgate relationship (which has a minor internal plot of its own throughout the novel), a relationship which is ultimately unfulfilled and which, therefore, does not interfere with a conventional ending. But the effect of the Dorothea-Lydgate relationship causes an imbalance in the final form with the result that, unlike *Emma*, *Middlemarch* is open-ended, reaching beyond itself with possibility.

The novel is shaped against a complex, multi-level version of society. Recent critics have found many narrative and thematic links between the seemingly unrelated actions of its complex plot, but by examining the plot as a version of society shaped between and energized by the two poles of the male and the female spheres, a new reading of the novel emerges. Throughout *Middlemarch* the two spheres lie side by side in a precarious co-existence. To the male is assigned the world of action and intellect, to the female the world of

---

4 See quotation from "George Eliot's Conception of 'Form'" on p. 15 above.

5 The fact that this version of society is based on the pre-Reform provincial England of around 1830, some forty years prior to the composition of the work, is appropriate to my thesis. Pre-Reform England was a society in turmoil, a society on the verge of profound changes in class structure and political and economic values and as such is a perfect setting in which to suggest out-dated values and the need for change.
non-action, or passivity, and emotion. In the external action of the plot these two worlds become vocation and marriage, respectively, and their juxtaposition is constantly before us. As the plot crosses and recrosses between vocation and marriage, all its aspects are linked and the novel is given artistic shape. Fed from the two sources of energy—the poles of the male and the female on which the plot is hung—other areas of life which intertwine with vocation and marriage, such as education, money and behavior, are examined. The network of action moving between the male and the female spheres reveals that in the interaction of the two spheres there is danger but that in their isolation there is defeat.

From this main plot the Dorothea-Lydgate relationship emerges. Receiving its initial energy from the conventional external plot, this relationship is actually sealed off from the rest of the novel and is shaped with its own internal plot and its own poles of energy in the consciousnesses of two characters who reflect the failures but also the possibilities of the rest of the novel. Dorothea and Lydgate are the two centers of this minor plot, their two consciousnesses the two central points of energy infusing it. This minor plot, then, shows the journey of these two centers of consciousness toward each other until they meet on the same level of vision and truth. Through failure and "tragedy," the male and the female consciousnesses unite in a bond of understanding,
but Dorothea and Lydgate ultimately withdraw from each other. As Eliot moves them toward the same fund of truth, she dramatizes the possibility that men and women can share the same store of fundamental knowledge.

To allow for the Dorothea-Lydgate relationship, Eliot shapes the main plot of the novel between the two poles of the male and the female spheres and dramatizes, externally, various aspects of the coexistence of the male and the female worlds. The "matter" of this main plot provides the external background for the internal process of the Dorothea-Lydgate relationship, a relationship in which their two consciousnesses, male and female, reflect the male and the female spheres from which they come. Once Dorothea and Lydgate begin to interact, their "private" plot is constructed and contained within their two consciousnesses. This plot is isolated in space, as it were, from the main external plot; thus it need not be incorporated into that plot's resolution, in which Dorothea and Lydgate have other roles to fulfill. But through it, Eliot unleashes energy (new thought as a source of character and action) into the conventional novel which could reshape the very plot from which it emerges. For, since the novel as Eliot and her peers inherited it depended for the form of its plot upon certain preconceptions about male and female roles and activities, the radical suggestion of the Dorothea-Lydgate relationship is subversive and challenging to that plot. But, as Eliot introduces it in Middlemarch,
the minor plot exists in isolation from the rest of the novel and thus does not re-shape it.

Thus, if we read the complex plot of *Middlemarch* as a series of actions moving between the male and the female spheres as I have defined them, what emerges is a cleverly and carefully constructed representation of the relationship, on all levels, of these two spheres. From such a reading, the Dorothea-Lydgate relationship emerges as a radical suggestion about change in the relationship of the male and the female. Finally, the novel itself can be seen to be a form which, contrary to much of the critical opinion, is unified on the level of action.

The most important characteristic of the plot of *Middlemarch* is its recurrent association between vocation and marriage (the male and the female spheres). As Eliot has the characters pursue their independent paths, she repeatedly emphasizes the interdependence of the two spheres. For Fred Vincy, marriage to Mary Garth is totally dependent on his choice of vocation, not on the love between them (which goes back to their childhood). Will Ladislaw comes to Middlemarch to be near Dorothea, and in so doing, finds his way into politics, a career which is cemented after his marriage to her. Casaubon faces the real truth of his own vocation only after marriage to Dorothea. Farebrother, a man in the wrong vocation, is also a man who fails in his attempt to enter marriage. Joshua Rigg, once has has inherited Stone Court, looks forward
to marrying a "genteel young person" and to fulfilling his lifelong desire to be a money-changer. After the truth of Bulstrode's past career is revealed, the character of his marriage changes. Lydgate originally views his profession as something which must, at least temporarily, remain isolated from marriage. When he does marry, his marriage becomes a chief factor in the destruction of his vocation.

Like two poles on either side of these examples are the cases of Mr. Brooke and Caleb Garth: the former, who "went into" everything at one time or another, but who has done nothing and never married; the latter, who has a passion for "doing" his job and has a marriage well-integrated with his vocation.

As Eliot demonstrates the interdependence of vocation and marriage, she also uses other external factors to reveal the problems of that interdependence. Money, a factor which, in Middlemarch, links vocation and marriage, often throws the two spheres into a state of tension. Mary Garth's inadvertent role in the loss of Fred's inheritance causes him to move toward a vocation and, ultimately, to marriage with her. Bulstrode originally obtained his money by marrying an older woman and cheating her heir. Because Will's mother rejected her family's illegal business, ran off and married, he does not have his rightful inheritance; but, when Bulstrode attempts to assuage his own guilt by offering him some of what is rightfully his, Will rejects the money because of the illegal careers which earned it and because of what Dorothea
might think if he accepted it. Lydgate, on the other hand, is forced to accept Bulstrode's money because of the financial condition of his own marriage. Farebrother became a clergyman for need of some sort of financial security, but supporting his mother, aunt, and sister has prevented his marrying. Featherstone wills his property to a son born outside of marriage, and that son rejects the old man's wishes for the ultimate disposition of the land. When Will stops accepting money from Casaubon, the latter's feeling of superiority over his cousin begins to dissolve and is replaced by stronger feelings of jealousy and suspicion which reach out to involve Dorothea. In Casaubon's will, the areas of love, money, and vocation most closely come together. By stipulating that Dorothea would have to surrender her right to his property and income were she ever to marry Will Ladislaw, he attempts to hinder her from a marriage and Will from any association with his money. The economic foundations of both marriage and vocation can keep the sexes at odds, trapping each one within different interests and needs.

Eliot believed in education as a means to provide the male and the female with the "same store of fundamental knowledge," yet she found the educational systems of her own time inadequate for any sort of higher goals. In *Middlemarch*, education is another link between vocation and marriage, but a link which causes a severe imbalance between them and which serves to dramatically isolate them. It is not surprising that the education of the female is shown to be inadequate,
but more importantly, in the relationship of the female to
the male sphere, it is shown to be dangerous. The two major
types examined are the education of Dorothea and the educa-
tion of Rosamund, each with its own inherent danger. Doro-
thea, as a well-born English female, was educated in England
and then abroad, but her lessons provided her with only "the
shallows of ladies'-school literature," "meagre Protestant
histories," and "art chiefly of the hand-screen sort." The
narrator sums up Dorothea's education as a "girlish instruc-
tion comparable to the nibblings and judgments of a discurs-
sive mouse" (Ch. 3). Herein lies its danger. After "nib-
bling" on such a version of male areas of knowledge, a girl
like Dorothea is left desiring more, with no clear means to
obtain it, or, for that matter, to identify it:

But something she yearned for by which her life might
be filled with action at once rational and ardent;
and since the time was gone by for guiding visions and
spiritual directors, since prayer heightened yearning
but not instruction, what lamp was there but knowledge?
Surely learned men kept the only oil; and who more
learned than Mr. Casaubon? (Ch. 10).

Thus she is led to her marriage and her disillusionment.
Since the spheres of marriage and intellect have been con-
fused in her mind, her disillusionment with the former be-
comes disillusionment with the latter.

On the other hand, Rosamund, daughter of the prosperous
middle-class, goes to Mrs. Lemon's school, "the chief school
in the county, where the teaching included all that was de-
manded in the accomplished female—even to extras, such as
the getting in and out of a carriage" (Ch. 11). She is trained to be someone's ideal wife, a thing of adornment. She is perfect in all the externals—her voice is well-modulated, but she has nothing serious to talk about; she is a fine musician, but her playing is more execution than understanding. Isolated within the female sphere of talents and interests, she has no knowledge of, interest in, or sympathy for the "male" areas of intellect and action. (Lydgate's "preoccupation with scientific subjects . . . seemed to her almost like a morbid vampire's taste," and she resented "his peculiar view of things which had never entered into the dialogue of courtship" (Ch. 64). Herein lies the danger of Rosamund's education. Marriage is everything, but, isolated within it, she cannot be reached from within the male spheres. Challenged in her own sphere, she instinctually fights to preserve it, at the expense of the male sphere.

Education is revealed as inadequate in the structure of the male characters as well. The narrator tells us that the young Lydgate was

a vigorous animal with a ready understanding, but no spark had yet kindled in him an intellectual passion; knowledge seemed to him a very superficial affair, easily mastered: judging from the conversation of his elders, he had apparently got already more than was necessary for mature life. Probably this was not an exceptional result of expensive teaching at that period (Ch. 15).

He discovers his vocation during private exploration of the family library and rejects the English university training in medicine. Since Lydgate has the greatest potential of
the male characters, this rejection seems significant. However, as Casaubon explains, Will Ladislaw also "declined to go to an English university, . . . and chose what I must consider the anomalous course of studying at Heidelberg" (Ch. 9). At the outset of his role in the novel, Will goes off to the Continent in pursuit of art and culture, proclaiming his disinterest in a profession. His energies will finally be channeled, but not as a direct result of his education. On the other hand, Fred Vincy, son of the prosperous middle-class, is sent "entirely from worldly vanity" to the university. His father wants him to go into the Church, but as Fred's uncle Bulstrode puts it, his expensive education "has succeeded in nothing but in giving him extravagant idle habits" (Ch. 13). After passing his examinations on the second try, Fred rejects the Church, but "what secular avocation on earth was there for a young man . . . which was at once gentlemanly, lucrative, and to be followed without special knowledge?" (Ch. 56).

From within the home environment of the Garth family comes a portrait of the early education of children. Mrs. Garth, surrounded by the tools of her duties in her kitchen, gives lessons to her youngest son and daughter, Ben and Letty. Ben, who resists the lessons, is treated with patience and given explanations, while Letty, who is quicker, is chided for interrupting her brother's faltering account of the story of Cincinnatus: "How rude you look, pushing and
frowning, as if you wanted to conquer with your elbows! Cincinnatus, I am sure, would have been sorry to see his daughter behave so" (Ch. 24). Although the tone is humorous, the scene signals the probably unconscious separation of the boy and the girl into the male and the female sphere. Eliot shows, then, that the whole educational process leads to the isolation of the sexes in adulthood, an isolation which, ironically, threatens the very social fabric from which it came.

Throughout the novel, various aspects of the external verbal links between the male and female spheres affect the action. Communication between men and women in Middlemarch is stilted, causing imbalance; fragile, causing tension; and sometimes non-existent, causing dangerous isolation. In the marriages of both Dorothea and Lydgate, the channels of communication dry up, leaving the two characters in total verbal estrangement from their spouses. As Eliot depicts their marriages, this inevitable deterioration is the result of their ignorance of the minds and feelings of the persons they marry. In this ignorance lies the basis for the ultimate alienation of the male and the female spheres. A "drama of uncommunicability" takes place in the novel, underscored in the plot by the use of characters acting as intermediaries between the male and the female. Thus Lydgate must tell

Dorothea what he has told Casaubon and Dorothea must tell Rosamund about Lydgate's innocence; Farebrother acts through-out as the go-between for Fred and Mary, and Mrs. Garth tells Fred that Farebrother himself is interested in Mary. Celia must interpret Sir James's behavior to Dorothea and Mrs. Cadwallader must suggest to Sir James that he marry Celia. Later, Sir James uses Mrs. Cadwallader to pass on information he wishes Dorothea to hear. Mr. Vincy must tell both his sister, Mrs. Bulstrode, and his daughter, Rosmund, of the scandal involving their husbands. Even though Dorothea and Will talk a great deal, their relationship also requires intermediaries. Rosamund tells Will about Casaubon's will and eventually must reassure Dorothea of Will's love for her, and Will himself, before their final meeting, sends little Miss Noble to Dorothea to plead for his admittance. Interestingly enough, the relationship between Dorothea and Lydgate requires no intermediaries: at no time must one of them be explained to the other.

The spheres of the male and the female are brought into verbal juxtaposition by a linguistic pattern emphasizing the verb "to do." It is to the men characters that the sphere of action, of "doing," is assigned, but in the intricacies of narrative and dialogue the women are shown as a strong force in the action of the men. Sir James, aware of his own mediocrity, "liked the prospect of a wife to whom he could say, 'What shall we do?' about this or that" (Ch. 2). One of the
major downward steps of the Casaubon-Dorothea marriage occurs when Dorothea challenges her husband to action: "All those rows of volumes--will you not now do what you used to speak of?... and begin to write the book which will make your vast knowledge useful to the world?" (Ch. 20).

Fred Vincy, who hopes to inherit the Featherstone property so that he can "know that he needed to do nothing" with his life, faces a severe challenge from Mary Garth: "How can you bear to be so contemptible, when others are working and striving, and there are so many things to be done--how can you bear to be fit for nothing in the world that is useful?" (Ch. 25). When he decides that he must go into the clergy, he appeals to Farebrother: "what else am I to do?" (Ch. 52).

Will's energies are channeled because of Dorothea. The narrator tells us that "but for the desire to be where Dorothea was, and perhaps the want of knowing what else to do, Will would not at this time have been meditating on the needs of the English people or criticising English statesmanship" (Ch. 46). Later, when circumstances have worked to separate him from Dorothea, he tells her "I have not given up doing as I like, but I can very seldom do it" (Ch. 54). Mrs. Garth reveals her insight into her husband and into the male sphere when she describes him as "one of those men who always do more than any one would have thought of asking them to do" (Ch. 57).

From their positions within the female sphere of non-action, the women characters push with collective pressure
on the male sphere of action. Eliot assigns to her female characters words (there is here a continuing emphasis on the verb "to do") and actions which, when taken together, form a challenge to male dominance over action. This challenge is woven between two women's voices which vibrate within the depths of the novel's plot. The one is Dorothea's voice, urgently pleading with Lydgate about her husband, "Tell me what I can do" (Ch. 30). The other is Rosamund's voice, neutral, chill, and aloof, replying to Lydgate, "What can I do, Tertius?" (Ch. 58). The one is self-involving and supportive; the other, self-preserving and destructive. Dorothea enters marriage to support the action of a great man, and, in so doing, to find a path of higher action for herself. In her own particular manner, Dorothea attempts to salvage old illusions in the face of ever increasing disillusionment. She tells Will about her marriage to Casaubon:

... it always seemed to me that the use I would like to make of my life would be to help some one who did great works, so that his burthen might be lighter.
... I should have no happiness if I did not help him in his work. What could I do? There is no good to be done in Lowick (Ch. 37).

Later, when her widowhood is still bound in the confines of her marriage and she is unable to act at all or even be supportive, she speaks again to Will: "I used to despise women a little for not shaping their lives more, and doing better things. I was very fond of doing as I liked, but I have almost given it up" (Ch. 54). Entering marriage to find her own place in the sphere of action only isolates her in the
female sphere of non-action.

Rosamund, to whom marriage is an end in itself, sees the female sphere as having no relation to the world in general. When her father urges her not to marry Lydgate (whose professional plans are not financially promising) because of family money problems and industrial and political problems, her immediate response is: "Dear Papa! what can that have to do with my marriage?" (Ch. 36). However, within her own sphere her will is as strong as any man's. When Lydgate wonders if she will listen to her father, she tells him, "I never give up anything that I choose to do" (Ch. 36). When the outside world of debt collection and political and personal scandal threatens the world of her marriage, she removes herself from her husband's sphere in any sort of supportive sense ("Whatever was to be said on the subject she expected to come from Tertius. What did she know? And if he were innocent of any wrong, why did he not do something to clear himself?" Ch. 75), but moves into it in a destructive sense. Against Lydgate's wishes she appeals to her father and to his uncle for money, and when she goes to Mr. Trumball's office to frustrate Lydgate's efforts to sell their house, "It was the first time in her life that Rosamund had thought of doing anything in the form of business" (Ch. 64). Her will is finally the stronger and their marriage is ultimately patterned to her liking and to the destruction of Lydgate.
Because of family poverty, Mary Garth faces the possibility of her own vocation: "And, you see, I must teach: there is nothing else to be done" (Ch. 40). But she readily admits that she has no desire to teach, and when her father receives new sources of income, she gladly rejects the offer of a position. Having removed herself from the sphere of action, she awaits Fred and places the burden of action on him. Mary's mother, moreover, was "apt to be a little severe towards her own sex, which in her opinion was framed to be entirely subordinate" (Ch. 24). Yet within her own marriage, she must battle the opposing forces of action and repression: "On ninety-nine points Mrs. Garth decided, but on the hundredth she was often aware that she would have to perform the singularly difficult task of carrying out her own principle, and to make herself subordinate" (Ch. 56).

Even Celia, who divides her time between marveling over her baby and worrying about what Dorothea may do next, demonstrates her own reserve of energy when she tells Dorothea that "of course men know best about everything, except what women know better. . . . Well, I mean about babies and those things. . . . I should not give up to James when I knew he was wrong, as you used to do to Mr. Casaubon" (Ch. 72). Later when Dorothea has a child, Celia (albeit with totally feminine means) forces Sir James to end the silence between the two families. He is "much wrought upon" and surrenders: "What do you wish? I will do anything you like" (Finale).
Mrs. Cadwallader, a woman who feels her own particular urges toward action, laments her placid husband: "I never can get him to abuse Casaubon . . . what can one do with a husband who attends so little to the decencies? I hide it as well as I can by abusing everybody myself" (Ch. 6). When her attempts to persuade her husband to intervene in the Casaubon-Dorothea marriage plans fail, she tells Sir James: "I have done what I could: I wash my hands of the marriage" (Ch. 8). When Mr. Bulstrode has been defeated, his quiet, non-assertive wife is moved into the sphere of business and action. Bulstrode appeals to her: "Tell me anything that you would like to have me do, Harriet, . . . I mean with regard to arrangements of property" (Ch. 85).

In turn, comments from the conversations of the male characters echo throughout the novel as a verbal rebuff against the female pressure on their sphere. What is important in this verbal pattern is not necessarily the individual motivation of the speakers, but rather the words they use. These words, as part of the plot, form another thread of tension which vibrates between the male and the female spheres. Mr. Brooke, who is always glad to point out the areas into which "young ladies" should not go, talks to Dorothea about her choice of a scholar for a husband:

Well, it lies a little in our family. I had it myself—that sort of thing doesn't often run in the female line; or it runs underground like the rivers in Greece, you know—it comes out in the sons. Clever sons, clever mothers (Ch. 5).
Sir James, Dorothea's over-zealous protector, who always tries to keep her from knowledge and action he feels unbecoming, sums up his whole feeling when he says that surely "a woman is bound to be cautious and listen to those who know the world better than she does" (Ch. 72). Casaubon attempts to stop Dorothea's inquisitive approach toward his work with these words:

... you may rely upon me for knowing the times and the seasons, adapted to the different stages of a work which is not to be measured by the facile conjectures of ignorant onlookers. ... And it were well if all such could be admonished to discriminate judgments of which the true subject-matter lies entirely beyond their reach (Ch. 20).

When she makes a suggestion about his financial affairs, he offers this verbal barrier: "Dorothea, my love, this is not the first occasion, but it were well that it should be the last, on which you have assumed a judgment on subjects beyond your scope" (Ch. 37). When Rosamund questions Lydgate's decision that she not go horseback riding during her pregnancy, his answer is: "My darling, don't talk nonsense ... surely I am the person to judge for you. I think it is enough that I say you are not to go again" (Ch. 58). In his anger over Rosamund's interference in their financial affairs, his words are: "Have you sense enough to recognize now your incompetence to judge and act for me—to interfere with your ignorance in affairs which it belongs to me to decide on?" (Ch. 65). Caleb Garth cautions his daughter that "a woman, let her be as good as she may, has got to put up with the
life her husband makes for her" (Ch. 25). Farebrother offers this generalization to Mary Garth: "Young women ... don't feel the stress of action as men do" (Ch. 52). He comments to Dorothea on the kind of action women might be allowed: "It is true that a woman may venture on some efforts of sympathy which would hardly succeed if we men undertook them" (Ch. 72). These "male" words are the external manifestation of a cultural disposition which hinders the action of the female and seriously limits the role she can play in society, and by implication, in the novel.

However, Eliot also uses the plot to subtly suggest the possibility for change in the social consciousness. A certain pattern of acceptance and rejection arises from the central opposition of the two major intellectual endeavors in Middlemarch—Casaubon's lifelong attempt to establish a "Key To All Mythologies," and Lydgate's early hope to establish the nature of the primitive anatomical tissue. Both projects deal with questions of homogeneous origin and structure. But where Casaubon's work is backward-looking and dependent on speculation, Lydgate's is forward-looking and dependent on experimentation. While Casaubon works isolated from the world amidst a dead past, Lydgate works in the world among living patients and living organisms. Furthermore, Casaubon spends his life working on a project which has already been accomplished by German scholars, while Lydgate plans to devote his life to a field new in medical research.
Neither work is accomplished, but there is a significant difference between the two failures. Casaubon's endeavor does not fail because he dies; rather, it has been a failure all along—an elaborate sham, not worthwhile in the first place, to cover his mental inadequacies. Lydgate's endeavor is never realized because of his personal failure, not because his project is worthless or his own intellectual capability inadequate. Casaubon's defeat is linked to a failure of subject matter, but Lydgate's is not.

From this central opposition and rejection emerge others. Will the artist is rejected for Will the political reformer, and Fred the clergyman is rejected for Fred the "theoretic and practical" gentleman farmer. When Mr. Brooke, the intellectual dilettante and bad landlord, attempts to enter politics as a liberal, the move is rejected. While Bulstrode, with Lydgate's help, chooses Tyke over Farebrother, Dorothea, also with Lydgate's help, rejects the dissenting clergyman for the plain-speaking Low Churchman, Farebrother. Bulstrode, whose prominent position is built on sham and deceit and nurtured by stringent Evangelical piety, is finally deposed and rejected by the community. Mrs. Garth's rigid textbook method of teaching her children is rejected by her daughter, whose sons receive "little formal teaching" at home but who are found to be "quite forward enough" when they go to school. Thus there seems to be a conscious movement in the plot toward certain vocations and
attitudes of mind and behavior which are forward-looking and motivated by genuine social concern. They tend to be less rigid and less dependent on intellectual and religious theory which is divorced from the conditions of contemporary life. Certainly the boundaries between the male and the female spheres could begin to dissolve in a society directed toward the general welfare, a society which could provide all individuals access to the same store of fundamental knowledge.

As we turn our attention to the Dorothea-Lydgate relationship, we see the development of the personal awareness which is also necessary for social change. Moving through the external spheres of the male and the female to the internal spheres of a male and a female consciousness, George Eliot reaches the two poles of energy between which the minor plot will be structured. This internal plot is the journey of the two consciousnesses of Dorothea and Lydgate toward each other until they attain a mutual understanding and a shared truth. By establishing certain connecting links between Dorothea and Lydgate, Eliot carefully prepares for the relationship in which they participate.

Though the literary creations of one mind, Dorothea and Lydgate actually originated in two different works. At the end of 1870, Eliot reviewed the state of her unfinished works and decided to join the manuscripts of "Miss Brooke" and an earlier work entitled "Middlemarch." Looking at the
"Middlemarch" text, she suddenly saw that it and the new novel she had begun "were similar in setting and theme, similar enough, indeed, to make up parts of the same large novel." In this way Dorothea, the female consciousness-center of "Miss Brooke," and Lydgate, the male consciousness-center of "Middlemarch," were carefully brought together in a new work.

As characters, both Dorothea and Lydgate stand apart from the other young male and female characters. Lydgate is the only young male in the novel who has well-defined vocational goals, and he is also the only male whose vocation carefully combines the realms of intellect and action. Dorothea is the only female who attempts to enter the male sphere, first through marriage and then through money. Furthermore, there are similarities in their initial situations in the novel. They are both orphans who were educated abroad, they are both relatively new to Middlemarch and naive about its social processes, they are both proud and aloof and have a great need to lead a worthy, productive life. Lydgate separates himself from his titled relations by becoming an apprenticed country practitioner (not university-educated), and from his medical colleagues by taking up the new practice of prescribing drugs but not dispensing

---

them. Dorothea is separated from other young women of her class by her simple manner of dress and her unusual enthusiasm for the design and building of tenant cottages. From this initial situation, their stories unfold with continuing, even striking, similarity.  

Another important—even essential—connecting link between Dorothea and Lydgate is the role and prominence of consciousness. From the beginning we sense that these characters are capable of and destined for internal growth and change. Each possesses a carefully presented blend of ideals, illusions, impulses, and ignorances, pulsating with energy but as yet untried and untested in the "reality" of adult life. Together with their initial situation, this energy links Dorothea and Lydgate over the wide expanse of the novel and creates the framework within which their relationship can begin. It also separates them from other characters. The consciousnesses of Casaubon, Rosamund, and Bulstrode, each of which is presented to the reader in some detail, do not expand, and in the face of suffering or disillusionment these characters fight to preserve their self-esteem rather than to develop any new awareness. To Dorothea and Lydgate exclusively does Eliot give the potential for growth.

A final important link between Dorothea and Lydgate is

---

8 Brian Swann notes the similarities between the stories of Dorothea and Lydgate and suggests that the double pattern must be "symbolic of some ideal George Eliot had in mind." See "Middlemarch: Realism and Symbolic Form," English Literary History 39 (1972): 306.
that they are not romantically associated at any time in the novel. This is an especially interesting factor because many critics, desiring a marriage, have found its absence a weakness both in the author and in the novel. (In one sense, this relationship does contribute to what might be called a "weakness" in the conventional ending, a point referred to at the beginning of the chapter and one which will be taken up later.) That Eliot did not want the two romantically linked is signaled by the fact that they are kept apart from the emotional centers of each others' lives. Dorothea does not even think of Lydgate as a married man until their climactic visit in Chapter 76. When Lydgate recommends Farebrother to Dorothea, he does not hesitate to mention Will Ladislaw's relationship to the vicar's family, for, as was "usual with him in matters of personal gossip, Lydgate had quite forgotten Rosamund's remark that she thought Will adored Mrs. Casaubon" (Ch. 50). Will is carefully present as Dorothea's romantic interest, deflecting her emotions (in the reader's mind, as well as in the novel) from any possible entanglement with Lydgate. The absence of romantic overtones may be seen as a conscious attempt to keep the relationship "pure" for some other purpose.

Once the connecting links between Dorothea and Lydgate are established and once their thoughts and feelings are presented to us, Eliot begins to construct the minor plot. The external roles of the two characters in the main plot
are made to work for and on their internal roles in the minor plot. In the main plot Dorothea and Lydgate begin in a certain separation, they move to incorporate the opposite sphere (Dorothea marries Casaubon to enter the male sphere of learning; Lydgate marries Rosamund in an attempt to blend marriage with his vocation), until through the varied effects of their marriages they are left in a state of isolation where they remain until they make certain adjustments prior to re-entry into society. In the minor plot, meanwhile, Dorothea and Lydgate also begin in a certain separation, they move through gradual realization (corresponding to the incorporation of the opposite sphere), they reach a point of integration (during the external isolation), and they withdraw into a final isolation (corresponding to external readjustment to society). Also, this journey is shaped like an external plot, progressing toward a transition, a climax and a denouement. One last factor which argues for Eliot's conscious manipulation of the novel to allow for the minor plot is the use of the narrator. During the initial steps of the internal plot, the narrator alerts the reader to the possibilities which exist between the two characters, but as the plot gains momentum from its own internal action, the narrator no longer verbally intervenes to direct our attention.

The preparation for the minor plot begins with the exposition of Dorothea's separation (externally and internally)
from a certain norm and her incorporation of the opposite sphere (marriage to Casaubon). Her urges toward thought and action (the dual aspects of the male sphere) contradict her role as a female, for "such elements in the character of a marriageable girl tended to interfere with her lot" (Ch. 1). But it is a social truth that Dorothea will encounter marriage, and herein lies a danger in her isolation from the female sphere, which, in Middlemarch, is marriage. Placing marriage in perspective with her own impulses, Dorothea had decided that a "really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it" (Ch. 1). She has already started a school in the village, she looks forward to having money of her own, and meanwhile responds with enthusiasm to Sir James's interest in her plans for tenant cottages.

The brief relationship between Dorothea and Sir James in the opening chapters foreshadows the fate of her efforts to enter the male spheres. Dorothea's instinctual revulsion from Sir James occurs as she and Celia drive back from the building-site for the cottages and is a reaction to the idea that his building the cottages is associated with his desire to marry her. "I can have no more to do with the cottages" is her immediate declaration (Ch. 4). Dorothea objects to the mixture of the realms of emotion and action, despite the fact that she has no desire to marry Sir James. What she wants, since she cannot build the cottages by herself, is an
equal partnership on the level of action (the male sphere), but what she has is a man who helps her mostly because he wants to marry her (the female sphere) and a truth-saying sister who reduces her activity to a female fad, thus suggesting the inability of the female to enter the male sphere. Her expectation belongs to the ideal of the minor plot, but the result belongs to the social reality of the main plot.

Turning immediately from Sir James and the male sphere of action, Dorothea embraces Casaubon and the male sphere of thought. Through submission to the, in her mind, imposing figure of Casaubon, she will secure her own intellectual freedom, for the "provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to her a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly . . . she wishes, poor child, to be wise herself" (Ch. 7). She fancies that she and Casaubon will be true intellectual companions, that their marriage will be a communion of minds. The idea of marriage as a communion of minds will become a factor in her and Lydgate's journey toward each other. Once Dorothea discovers the personal and professional impotence of Casaubon, she will begin to develop realistic understanding of the limits of human potential and the complexity of human relationships.

Just before her marriage and removal on her wedding trip, Dorothea meets Lydgate at a dinner-party at Tipton Grange (Ch. 10). Significantly, they have a "very animated conversation" about "cottages and hospitals." But, that
their situations and feelings are practically untouched by this meeting underscores the fact that they are not yet ready to begin to interact. In fact, Lydgate reflects that Dorothea "did not look at things from the proper feminine angle," and feels that the "society of such women was about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form" (Ch. 11). So the narrator points the reader toward the future by cautioning that "any one watching keenly the stealthy convergence of human lots, sees a slow preparation of effects from one life on another, which tells like a calculated irony on the indifference or the frozen stare with which we look at our unintroduced neighbour" (Ch. 11). Dorothea has just reached the point of incorporation of the opposite sphere, and she is leaving for Rome where the internal process of gradual realization will begin for her.

Within the male sphere, Lydgate exists in a certain separateness, externally and internally, from the other males in the novel, for he has definite goals and the means to attain them. His profession is medicine, which he considers a discipline "presenting the most perfect interchange between science and art; offering the most direct alliance between intellectual conquest and the social good" (Ch. 15). In other words, medicine is the perfect blend of the dual aspects of the male sphere. Lydgate's plan is to combine his practice with his intellectual passion, and thereby "to do good small work for Middlemarch, and great work for the
world" (Ch. 15). That he thinks his life should have such
a high purpose is a central factor in the minor plot. How­
ever, we also learn that Lydgate was "much fortified by
contempt for petty obstacles or seductions of which he had
had no experience" (Ch. 13), and that he considered Fare­
brother's playing at whist for money a hateful meanness.
Furthermore, despite his intellectual theories and social
liberalism, he is a snob, thinking of the "desirability of
its being known (without his telling) that he was better born
than other country surgeons" (Ch. 15). His contempt for
human weakness and his smug self-confidence will work against
his self-fulfillment in the main plot, and the failure will
lead him to a greater understanding and awareness.

Lydgate feels little necessity to apply much of his
thought to the female spheres of love and marriage, "these
being subjects on which he felt himself amply informed by
literature, and that traditional wisdom which is handed down
in the genial conversation of men" (Ch. 16). To him, "adorn­
ment" has "the first place among wifely functions" (Ch. 11).
Marriage is a sweet retreat, filled with music and beauty,
to which a man comes to rest his mind and escape the male
spheres of action and thought. It is in no sense a communion
of minds--indeed, "he held it one of the prettiest attitudes
of the feminine mind to adore a man's pre-eminence without
too precise a knowledge of what it consisted in" (Ch. 27).
Lydgate's feelings about marriage will change. Because of his
experience with marriage in the main plot, he will come to a new understanding, which is demonstrated in the minor plot, of the relationship between the male and the female. Lydgate plans to avoid the female sphere of marriage for some time because he won't be able to afford it.

Lydgate's brief encounter with Mme. Laure when he was a student in Paris has much the same function as Dorothea's relationship with Sir James—it foreshadows the fate of his encounter with the female sphere. Schoolboyishly enamoured of an actress whose play he attends over and over, Lydgate blindly rushes to her defense when she is rumored to have purposely stabbed her actor-husband during a performance. When she disappears from Paris, he abandons his studies (which have been everything to him) and follows her to ask her to marry him. He learns to his horror that Mme. Laure did indeed mean to kill her husband: "No! he wearied me; he was too fond; he would live in Paris and not in my country; that was not agreeable to me" (Ch. 15). Disillusioned, he returns to his studies resigned to "take a strictly scientific view of women." Of course he does not heed the hidden warning in this episode and his illusions about the female sphere remain intact. Equally by impulse he will become engaged to Rosamund Vincy. Thus he will attempt to incorporate the sphere of marriage with the high ideals of his vocation and will undergo permanent disillusionment by marrying a woman who, in her own way, is as deadly as Mme. Laure.  

---

9With a few substitutions, Mme. Laure's words would do
When Dorothea and Lydgate meet again (Ch. 30), she is deeply troubled by her new awareness about the male sphere of intellect and by her realization of the impossibility of her own entrance into it. Arriving at Lowick Manor as Casaubon's doctor, Lydgate encounters another patient. Dorothea, suffering from her own frustration and guilt and from sympathy toward her proud but impotent scholar of a husband, begs Lydgate to be frank with her as she cries, "Help me, pray . . . Tell me what I can do!" Lydgate is touched and curious, for women "just like Dorothea had not entered into his traditions." As he is leaving, Dorothea's plea registers her new understanding: "Oh, you are a wise man, are you not? You know all about life and death. Advise me. Think what I can do. He has been labouring all his life and looking forward." That Lydgate cannot respond--"... what could he say now except that he should see Mr. Casaubon again tomorrow?"--indicates that he does not yet understand what Dorothea understands. Once again, the narrator prepares us for the future of their plot: "For years after Lydgate remembered the impression produced in him by this involuntary appeal--this cry from soul to soul, without other consciousness than their moving with kindred natures in the same embroiled medium, the same troublous fitfully-illuminated life" (my italics). Soon, Lydgate visits Rosamund and stoops to "pick up the for Rosamund after she has "killed" Lydgate's spirit: "He would live in his vocation and not in my marriage; that was not agreeable to me."
chain" of marriage. The meeting between Dorothea and Lydgate is followed by his marriage, as their first meeting was followed by hers.

Lydgate is married to Rosamund (external incorporation of the opposite sphere) sometime after Chapter 36, and goes on his wedding-trip, returning by Chapter 42. Meanwhile, Dorothea's marriage begins to fail. Finally, when Casaubon refuses even to discuss with her the terms of his illness, Dorothea sees her future as one of permanent isolation from her husband, also linked to isolation from the intellectual sphere. Because of Casaubon's silence, she seeks out Lydgate to learn what he has told her husband.

Consequently, in Chapter 44, we find Dorothea and Lydgate at the new hospital. He appeals to her for money for the project, and their short interchange is important on many levels. The subject of the hospital becomes a reason for external plot interaction between them (Casaubon will soon die). In a variation of their doctor-patient roles, Lydgate "educates" Dorothea about some of the complexities of the political aspects of the new hospital and of the medical community. She has had to surrender her illusions about the purity of the intellectual sphere, and now begins to gain some insight into the social intricacies of the sphere of action. Money becomes a means for Dorothea to attempt once again to enter the male sphere of action. Lydgate offers her a new outlet and she responds with rekindled
enthusiasm for the male sphere: "I have some money, and don't know what to do with it--that is often an uncomfortable thought to me. . . . How happy you must be, to know things that you feel sure will do great good! I wish I could a­wake with that knowledge every morning." In terms of the minor plot, this conversation initiates in them a common ground of interest based on a common faith in the meaning of life.

The relationship between Dorothea and Lydgate reaches a transition point, in both the external and internal plots, in the events surrounding Casaubon's death, which occurs in Chapter 48. When Casaubon realizes he is dying, he asks Dorothea to solemnly promise to do only as he wishes in the future. In despair, she asks him for time to think and, before she can actually answer him, Casaubon dies. Later the same day, Lydgate sits by her bed as she once again appeals to him from the deep recesses of her jarred consciousness, where old illusions struggle with new adarenesses. Dorothea recognizes Lydgate, but seems "to think it right that she should explain everything to him; and again, and again, begged him to explain everything to her husband." Dorothea is still suffering from guilt and sorrow about her marriage and now about her failure to do as Casaubon wished. At this point Dorothea and Lydgate are actually positioned as patient and doctor in preparation for symbolic exchange of roles which will occur.
Unlike his reaction to her first appeal (Ch. 30), Lydgate's behavior now begins to register the development, in his consciousness, of a new awareness of and sensitivity to the nature of Dorothea. Even after she learns of Casaubon's will, her family attempts to hinder her return to Lowick. Striving to assert herself, Dorothea struggles against them and Celia appeals to Lydgate. Looking at Dorothea, he replies: "In my opinion Mrs. Casaubon should do what would give her the most repose of mind. That repose will not always come from being forbidden to act" (Ch. 50). In his final gesture as "doctor," he acknowledges her freedom and provides her with the first means to be active by suggesting Farebrother for the living at Lowick. At this transition point, it is appropriate that Dorothea will help Lydgate to undo the injustice of his earlier vote for Tyke over Farebrother. Discussing Farebrother introduces a new subject between them, the mutual understanding of which will be part of their final vision. A person who has slipped below his own expectations bears special significance in Dorothea's consciousness, and will come to bear the same in Lydgate's. In fact, his fuller sympathy toward the subject of Farebrother suggests some new traces of awareness, for when Dorothea asks why Farebrother has not done more, Lydgate responds: "That's a hard question, . . . I find myself that it's un-commonly difficult to make the right thing work: there are so many strings pulling at once" (Ch. 50).
Dorothea and Lydgate are now separated in the external plot and they will not meet again until Chapter 76. She retreats into what appears to be a hopeless state of isolation at Lowick. Casaubon's will keeps her away from Will Ladislaw and marriage. Because any effort to organize her husband's papers would be futile, she has no productive mental outlet. With her money she attempts to find a productive outlet in the sphere of action, but her schemes prove fruitless. While Dorothea is in this suspended state of isolation, the deterioration of Lydgate's marriage moves him into the path of gradual realization.

Lydgate's enlightenment about his marriage seeps through his consciousness at the same time that the financial and emotional burdens of the marriage encroach upon his position in the community. The external steps toward isolation are clearly outlined in the main plot and, by Chapter 69, Lydgate sees his and Rosamund's future as a "bare isolation in which they would be forced to recognise how little of a comfort they could be to each other." After he has taken the money from Bulstrode and the scandal has broken, he does not speak of it to Rosamund. Once she has learned of it from her father, they still come to no mutual understanding and live their days in separation and isolation. As word of the scandal spreads through Middlemarch, Lydgate is also isolated from the medical and social community.

Importantly, the focal point of Lydgate's change is his
marriage, for he must come to a realization about the relationship of the male and the female spheres. As he is heading for isolation in the main plot, he is being prepared for integration in the minor plot. Pondering his new awareness of "feminine impassibility" and insensitivity in Rosamund, Lydgate's immediate reaction is to observe that is "is the way with all women" (Ch. 58). But just as he does so, "wondering impressions from the behavior of another woman" emerge from his memory. Dorothea, with her "voice of deep-souled womanhood," takes her place in Lydgate's consciousness. At the end of the destructive path of his marriage, Lydgate comes to a new vision of what marriage could be, for "he was beginning now to imagine how two creatures who loved each other, and had a stock of thoughts in common, might laugh over their shabby furniture, and their calculations how far they could afford butter and eggs" (Ch. 69; my italics). With such realizations, his consciousness moves closer toward Dorothea's. But with new awareness and implied possibility in the minor plot will come defeat and impossibility in the main plot, for the narrator warns us that, even as Lydgate has his vision, it "seemed as far off from him as the carelessness of the golden age" (Ch. 69).

During Lydgate's downward path to his entrapment in the Bulstrode scandal (male sphere), Dorothea has maintained an active interest in the hospital and has considered taking over Bulstrode's position as a director and major patron.
Such a move would bring her and Lydgate into a working relationship, thus it is in this sense that the hospital and money become components of the minor plot. When she learns of the accusations against Lydgate, she is the only person who is unafraid and is willing to talk to him and learn the truth, although she is temporarily dissuaded from acting by her masculine advisers. When Dorothea says, "I cannot be indifferent to the troubles of a man who advised me in my trouble, and attended me in my illness," their role reversal has taken place. Eliot has carefully prepared Dorothea for her new role, a result of her own "intensest experience in the last two years" (Ch. 72). Her consciousness is filled with the "hardship of Lydgate's position" (male sphere) and her own desire to do some good, to enter the sphere of action.

The visit which takes place between Lydgate and Dorothea in Chapter 76 is the climactic one of their relationship and completes the movement of the male and female consciousnesses toward each other. In the main plot they are both in a state of isolation, but the separate processes which have led to isolation have also led, internally, to greater awareness and understanding. They meet as two human beings who are ready to unite in a mutual understanding and belief and thus to complete the minor plot of the novel. Dorothea has become the doctor, and, for Lydgate, it is, at first, "something very new and strange . . . that these few words of
trust from a woman should be so much to him." But the strangeness vanishes and Lydgate finds that he is "recovering his old self in the consciousness that he was with one who believed in it." Dorothea responds to his story about Bulstrode's money and the death of Raffles by telling him that she can

... understand the difficulty there is in your vindicating yourself. And that all this should have come to you who had meant to lead a higher life than the common, and to find out better ways... 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.

For this moment the boundaries of the male and female spheres have been dissolved and Dorothea and Lydgate meet in the "ready understanding" of high purpose in life, but it is a "private" understanding, isolated from and unknown to the main action of the novel. When Lydgate speaks of his marriage, Dorothea is quick to understand and to offer to explain the situation to Rosamund, just as she had earlier asked Lydgate to explain a situation to Casaubon.

But integrated action between Dorothea and Lydgate is short-lived and the denouement follows quickly. For one thing, Eliot must move each of them toward a final position in the conventional plot. There, they cannot remain in their separate states of isolation. An emotional relationship between them is impossible and a working one would not be satisfactory in the main plot, where, despite everything, Dorothea is still a nineteenth-century heroine. Also,
however, the new awareness comes too late and at too high a price. The trappings of Lydgate's life—the yoke of his marriage, the smashed intellectual goals, the professional scandal—all dictate that he must leave Middlemarch. When, in the main plot, he abandons the hospital, the action resounds symbolically in the minor plot for, with that gesture Lydgate severs himself from any fulfillment of his new consciousness. Left in her isolation from the male spheres, Dorothea soon after re-enters the female sphere and also leaves Middlemarch. To marry, Dorothea must abandon her money in the main plot, and this is the symbolic gesture which severs her—in her role in the minor plot—from any possibility of individual freedom or incorporation of the male sphere. Lydgate becomes a wealthy doctor, Dorothea, a loving wife and mother—each safe within his and her own sphere. In terms of the main plot they have readjusted and re-entered society; in terms of the minor plot they have withdrawn from new awareness into isolation. In this new isolation, however, there is a permanent effect. Lydgate "always regarded himself as a failure; he had not done what he once meant to do" (Finale). Dorothea would face the years with the feeling that "there was always something better which she might have done, if she had only been better and known better" (Finale).

*Middlemarch* is, then, another partial confrontation of a female author with conventional form. Although Eliot fails
to fully incorporate her own innovative ideas; she does construct a work which, along with a complex nineteenth-century plot, contains a revolutionary minor plot—revolutionary because of its suggestions about the roles and activities of the male and the female. Eliot directs these suggestions—that the male and the female should share the same knowledge and the same sense of purpose in life—toward social change. However, I think the same suggestions also imply a change in the form of the novel as well. Throughout its history, the novel has critiqued social weaknesses and reflected social developments. In *Middlemarch*, Eliot is suggesting the need for change and providing an example of the possibility for change. That such a change would effect some development in the form of the novel is suggested by her struggle with the plot of *Middlemarch*. The Dorothea-Lydgate relationship exists in a certain isolation from the main plot and is not incorporated into its conclusion. The implications of the new awareness which Dorothea and Lydgate come to share are not realized in the two characters’ final positions in the main plot. As I wrote above, the requirements of the conventional plot preclude Dorothea’s and Lydgate’s acting on their new awareness. In this way, *Middlemarch* itself points to the fact that, were new roles assigned to the male and the female, the form of the novel would change.

In the sense that *Middlemarch* is Eliot's version of
traditional society, both Dorothea and Lydgate become exiles, displaced persons, carrying with them their failed visions. But that she leaves them with their battered consciousnesses intact is very important. At the end of *Emma*, Jane Austen reverts to the conventional plot (which has been submerged through much of the novel) and, in so doing, brings the internal lives of her characters into exact accord with their final external situations. At the end of *Middlemarch*, although the external situations are brought into accord with the conventional plot, the internal ones are not. This is the "imbalance" which causes distress over the ending and complaints that Dorothea and Lydgate should have married. And it is indeed a problem—one which is the result of a struggle between innovation and convention. But this "looseness" in the ending of *Middlemarch* is also an open-endedness which is the novel's contribution to the genre's formal development. By demonstrating her vision through plot, Eliot furthers the use of plot as a shaping tool and offers a new source of fictional energy to the plot of the future.
CHAPTER III

PILGRIMAGE

In their novels, both Jane Austen and George Eliot attempted to incorporate innovations into the conventional novel form of their time. During the early twentieth century, authors, both male and female, sought new alternatives to existing forms in an attempt to express different areas of reality. At that time, Dorothy Richardson strove to make her particular contribution to the development of the novel by portraying, in her fiction, a new kind of reality which she saw as decidedly feminine.\(^1\) By presenting reality as shaped through the vision of one consciousness, she hoped to provide for fiction an alternative to the arbitrarily arranged, dogmatic vision of reality which she felt the male form of the novel necessitated. But, in "abandoning" the world of external reality, the mainstay of masculine fiction, she did not abandon the basic creative tools which the tradition of fiction offered her. The unifying idea behind Pilgrimage (1915-1938; 1967)\(^2\) is the development of Miriam Henderson's consciousness as it gradually unfolds

\(^1\)See her own statement of purpose, as quoted above on p. 16.

over the course of some twenty-five years, from adolescence to mature adulthood. The life of consciousness, or the way in which consciousness "knows" is highly personal, abstract, unordered, and even tentative—in short, characterized by attributes for the most part alien to the novel as Richardson inherited it. She had, then, to provide the illusion of "pure" consciousness without sacrificing the basis of fictional integrity, the communication of a coherent story. This problem is resolved, I believe, through the form of the plot, the final end of which is Miriam's artistic commitment.

Pilgrimage is the story of a woman in the process of becoming an artist, a Kunstlerroman with a contemporary male counterpart in Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. At the end of the final "chapter," March Moonlight, Miriam is writing the work we have just read. She is Dorothy Richardson's alter-ego and Pilgrimage is arranged as the story of the development of the point of view which led to its own creation. As a portrait of an evolving female artist, the work is based on a well-defined plot and is unified through this extended coherent action.

That Dorothy Richardson was conscious of creating Pilgrimage as one coherent action, even though individual "chapters" could be read independently, seems evident. After the 1938 edition, which collected the first twelve chapters into four volumes, many critics found the work "inconclusive if
In his biography of Richardson, John Rosenberg reports that she herself was surprised to see the 1938 edition presented as complete and states that in fact the publisher had made a mistake. Richardson then completed a final chapter which she left to take its "posthumous chance." This last chapter, March Moonlight, was finally added to the 1967 edition of Pilgrimage and subsequent critics accept it as the completion of the work. It is in March Moonlight that Miriam finally defines and accepts an artistic commitment, and thus the work is brought to its fulfillment.

Besides explaining the unity and organization of a work which long has been considered to have little coherence, examining Pilgrimage as the story of a young woman in the process of becoming an artist helps to clarify the most significant aspects of Miriam's development and, thus, of the novel itself. For, although Miriam is a thoroughly believable character, she is not always an engaging one. As an adolescent, she is understandably naive about many aspects of life and, just as understandably, boldly opinionated. But as she grows older, she develops a smug superiority about the kind of life she is leading, a superiority which is sometimes


rather tedious. As a single, poor working woman living alone in London at the turn of the century, Miriam is part of a small new minority of women and is certainly a long way from the comfortable middle-class life of her childhood. A defiant pride about her freedom mingles with a fear of its consequences, both socially and economically, and causes Miriam to be intensely self-conscious and, at times, irrationally defensive about her own position and unnecessarily hostile toward society. As Richardson shapes her consciousness, Miriam's basic hostility is toward men, about whom she maintains a neurotic ambivalence. She is unable to handle her very natural attraction to the opposite sex, and ultimately rejects all of the relationships which she forms with men. She extends this basic hostility, at times quite rashly, into a universal view, in which the world is male and the female a misplaced alien. Because of Miriam's (and perhaps Richardson's) inability to distinguish between simply personal feeling and rational theory, Pilgrimage is sometimes unconvincing. But this flaw does not interfere with the portrayal of the formation of an artistic consciousness.

As Miriam moves toward a goal which she only dimly perceives, Richardson shapes the events of her life in such a way that they lead through four progressive stages which prepare her for her ultimate role as a literary artist. As the plot unfolds, it defines from the author's point of view certain prerequisites to a peculiarly female artistic
commitment. Thus Pilgrimage lays the groundwork for a female point of view. As Miriam is made to encounter external reality, her consciousness is being educated in such a way that it defines itself against certain things. Then, as Miriam gradually develops a literary point of view, she makes certain discoveries about writing. These discoveries center around the individual consciousness. Life as it is internally contemplated is the only reality, and writing itself is a process of contemplation and a creation which is a re-creation. Miriam's discoveries, she feels, celebrate a female reality.

Pilgrimage, then, incorporates a well-defined external plot into an internal narrative. In the first of the plot's four stages, Miriam, as the artist-to-be, moves away from a type of life conventionally portrayed for women, rejecting it for its shallow and unconvincing vision in Pointed Roofs, Backwater, and Honeycomb. Then, in The Tunnel, Interim, Deadlock, Revolving Lights, and The Trap, she moves toward and embraces the challenge of a wider social and intellectual life, only to find herself lost in its atmosphere, her vision trapped in its existing structures. As the first stage is presented as an encounter with a female way of life, so the second stage is presented as an encounter with a male-dominated way of life and point of view. In both stages, the female and the male points of view signify for Miriam confinement and a kind of death. In the next stage, by recovering
the sense of her own vision, she finds the strength to con-
front and move beyond the male point of view in Oberland,
Dawn's Left Hand, and Clear Horizon. The final stage--
Dimple Hill and March Moonlight--is the movement toward
self-expression and the gradual definition of and acceptance
of her own personal artistic commitment. Woven throughout
the work, but especially at the end of each of these stages,
is a kind of "song of the self," prefiguring the artist's fin-
al solitude.

The first stage of the plot, then, emphasizes tradition-
al ways of life for the female. At the threshold of her own
adult life, Miriam encounters women in various social and
professional situations and simultaneously reads novels
which present visions of the supposedly perfect female exis-
tence. What she discovers is a reality which belies the
vision expressed in many novels written by women. Throughout
this early stage there is an emphasis on the need for self-
expression and the impossibility of any real self-expres-
sion within the traditional ways of life available to the
female.

The central action of the first stage is Miriam's strug-
gle to structure her life within the female-dominated world
of teaching. She makes three separate attempts—as a pupil
teacher in Germany, as a resident teacher in London, and as
a governess for the children of a wealthy British family--
to shape herself as a teacher. But she repeatedly discovers
that her own desires and the desires of both her employers and many of her students are divergent. She begins to feel restrained, as teaching becomes a trap from which she must save herself:

The sunlight in this little schoolroom was telling her of other sunlights, vast and unbroken, somewhere—coming, her own sunlights, when she should have wrenched herself away. . . . The girls did not know where she belonged. They were holding her. But she would go away, to some huge open space (I, 287-288).

The "huge open space" is the larger, male-dominated world.

As Miriam becomes increasingly dissatisfied with teaching, she begins to criticize what she sees as the collective fate of all women in traditional roles. She decides that most of the modes of life and expression available to women lead only to a death-in-life state, an ultimate lack of expression. Thus, for example, Mrs. Corrie, the wealthy girlwoman, seems trapped in a deadly doll's house, "dead and drowned." She is dead because of "something she had never known," dead "in ignorance and living bravely on—her sweet thin voice rising above the gloom where she lay hid—a gloom where there were no thoughts" (I, 404). Marriage itself Miriam believes to be a death-like state. Alone with her own sick mother, Miriam realizes that even she had been "almost killed by things she could not control, having done her duty all her life . . . doing thing after thing had not satisfied her . . . being happy and brave had not satisfied her," for

6 The ellipses here are mine, but in all the other quotations the punctuation is Richardson's.
"there was something she had always wanted, for herself 
. . . even mother . . ." (I, 472). At the end of Honeycomb, 
the end of the first stage of the plot, Mrs. Henderson com-
mits suicide.

To relieve the tedium at the Banbury Park school, Mir-
iam devotes her nights to romances written by "authoresses." 
What had once thrilled her in their vision of women's life--
the world of "good girls and happy marriages and heaven" (I, 
284)--now dismays her because it no longer represents what 
she has come to perceive as the truth. When she has finished 
the novels of one woman, she realizes that "there'll be whole 
heaps of books, millions of books I can't read--perhaps 
nearly all the books" (I, 284). After reading the works of 
another woman, Miriam is "exasperated, tired of the mocking 
park, the mocking happy books" (I, 285).

Despite Miriam's dismay at the novels written by women, 
it is in "the refuge of silence and books" that she recovers 
her self, "the nearest most intimate self she had known" (I, 
282). Importantly, this self is "not dead" (I, 282). Also, 
she is already aware of a core, a feeling deep within of 
the independent life of the self. After a fleeting experi-
ence of this feeling, Miriam thinks: "There's something in 
me that can't be touched or altered. Me. If it comes again. 
If it's stronger every time. . . . Perhaps it goes on getting 
stronger till you die" (I, 246). This core, the conscious 
center of the self, will be the basis of her ultimate artis-
tic commitment.
The first stage of the plot ends with Miriam's rejection of the traditional role of teacher. At this point she is alone, and her solitude prefigures her ultimate solitude. She has no clear prospects for the future. Two of her sisters are married and her mother is dead. At the end of each stage of the plot, there is mention of the continuing dissolution of her family, as if to emphasize, as Miriam is about to enter a new stage of her development, the original action—Miriam's departure from her family to become a teacher—which prompted her journey toward an artistic commitment. In the first stage the artist-to-be has tried and rejected a traditional female mode of life and is about to examine the larger, more complex world.

The second stage of the plot, Miriam's exploration of the male-dominated world, has a twofold effect on the artist-to-be. As this stage is presented, the male world is challenging and stimulating, but ultimately confusing and confining for the female point of view. What Miriam discovers is that by attempting to adjust her own point of view to her new experience, she is sacrificing and compromising an essential part of herself. This stage begins with Miriam's move to London and, more specifically, with the introduction of her relationship with Hypo Wilson.7

In London, Miriam takes a room in a Tansley Street boarding house, finds a position working for a group of Wimpole Street dentists, and spends her free time exploring the intellectual milieu of the city. London is, for a time, an appropriate setting for the artist-to-be. Miriam reads philosophy at the British Museum, attends lectures on everything from photography to Dante, and discusses "ideas" endlessly--women and working with Mag and Jan, civilization and literature with Michael Shatov. By thus expanding her horizons, London prepares Miriam for the final confrontation which will grow out of her relationship with Hypo Wilson.

In his role in Pilgrimage, Hypo Wilson represents an existing literary point of view specifically male. Miriam's struggle with his mind, then, is the struggle of an emerging female point of view with an existing male point of view. As it is presented through Miriam's consciousness, Hypo's view of mankind and of history is based on atheism, science and sexism. He considers the "business of the writer" to be "imagination, not romantic imagination, but realism, fine realism, the truth about 'the savage,' about all the past and present" (II, 122). Miriam finds his vision disquieting but stimulating.

From the beginning, Hypo suggests that Miriam should write. She is flattered, but wary of his casual, mechanical attitude toward the English language and the writing of "good stuff." In her response to his initial suggestion, Miriam
begins to address herself to an artistic problem: "Anyhow it was wonderful about English—but if books were written like that, sitting down and doing it cleverly and knowing just what you were doing, and just how somebody else had done it, there was something wrong, some mannish cleverness that was only half right." She assumes, therefore, that to write books, "knowing all about style, would be to become like a man." However, "women who wrote books and learned these things would be absurd and would make men absurd" (II, 131). It should be noted in passing that although this polar- ization of the male and the female points of view may help Miriam to define her own method, it remains an unconvincing argument throughout Pilgrimage and condemns, by implication, such previous female accomplishments as Emma and Middlemarch.

Miriam tells Hypo stories about her life in London. At first she presents her tales in the manner in which she assumes he would want to hear them—wittily, rapidly, factually—but realizes that this style is sacrificing "the real moments of these people's lives" (III, 255). She then tries to bring her own inarticulate ideas to the surface and finds that the "joy of making statements not drawn from things heard or read but plumbed directly from the uncon- scious accumulations of her own experience was fermented by the surprise of his interested attention, and the pride of getting him occasionally to accept an idea or to modify a point of view" (III, 255). As the artist-to-be, Miriam is
learning to express her own point of view in contrast to a male point of view.

During this second stage, Miriam is exposed to the social and intellectual milieus of London and, through her visits to Hypo's country home, that of contemporary writers. Even though the artist-to-be has begun to address herself to the creation of literature, at the end of this stage she feels confused and somehow off-the-track. During The Trap she becomes increasingly aware that London, because it is a male-dominated world, does not ultimately hold a place for her. By now Miriam's sister Eve is dead and her sister Harriet has moved to Canada, and Miriam feels that she is left with the "people without traditions" and that her life is "short and wavering and shapeless" (III, 495, 497). The artist-to-be is adrift in an essentially foreign atmosphere, struggling with a formless vision. Miriam knows that she must leave London: "There was in the depths of her nothing but this single knowledge that she was going away from this corner where she had been dying by inches" (III, 507-508). The time has come for her to assume responsibility for her self: "I must create my life," for "life is creation," and "self and circumstances the raw material" (III, 508). The artist-to-be decides to flee the male-dominated atmosphere in an attempt to recover the sense of her own independent vision.

The third stage marks the strengthening of the potential
artist's own point of view and a final confrontation with the male point of view. Miriam's visit to Switzerland helps her to recover a sense of her vision. As she approaches the mountainous region of the Oberland, it seems to be "summoning her up amongst its peaks" (IV, 24). In its majestic heights and its cold clear air, Miriam recovers her sense of solitude without loneliness and her sense of the strong center of self, emotions that had become obscured amidst the busyness of her recent life. There begins in Oberland an emphasis on radiance and light which continues throughout these final volumes. Light is associated with the creative vision, and in Dawn's Left Hand, is opposed to Hypo's world of "fact-facing and circumstance-facing" (IV, 168).

When Miriam returns to England, there is a new emphasis on the female and the female vision. She now has the strength for a last confrontation with Hypo after which she, as the artist-to-be, moves beyond the male point of view. This stage is accompanied by a growing realization of a destiny awaiting her. Miriam meets Amabel, with whose introduction comes a new emphasis on women as the artist's creative inspiration. Amabel is leading an even more "rebellious" life than Miriam is, having surrendered wealth and security to pursue her own life. From her, Miriam acquires a new assurance about herself as a woman, for Amabel represents a new, bold, female spirit and one which is at ease with itself. Most importantly, through her intimate
conversations with Amabel, Miriam begins to express herself with a new honesty and openness. This mode of expression is different from the one Miriam used with Hypo and is the result of a shared female understanding. The artist-to-be is discovering her own voice, for, as Miriam explains it, "I've been silent nearly all my life" (IV, 244).

From the strength of her developing female vision, Miriam begins to realize that her own and Hypo's points of view cannot be reconciled. Probably because of her own literary preoccupations, Richardson emphasizes through her plot that the male and the female visions are mutually exclusive or that, at least, the female vision—less dogmatic, more internal and contemplative than the male—must be expressed separately and individually.

Alone at dinner with Hypo, Miriam has a "flash of insight" which helps to free her: "she saw how very slight, how restricted and perpetually baffled must always be the communication between him and anything that bore the name of woman" (IV, 223). Miriam has apparently forgotten that she and Hypo have communicated a great deal. Actually, the fact that she cannot accept a coexistence of the two points of view is a weakness in the novel's argument. Later, in the company of both Amabel and Hypo, she sees "the flagrant opposition, to him and his world, of themselves and their world" (IV, 317). This, in Pilgrimage, is the female artist-to-be's final illumination. That same evening, Miriam says good-bye to Hypo
and walks off through the streets of her own neighborhood. "to become once more aware of her own path" (IV, 336-337). She is free to move ahead.

Throughout her relationship with Hypo, Miriam has resented both his theory of the novel's function and his theory of creativity. As she develops her own point of view, she becomes more articulate about her objections to the novels written by men and condemns the realistic method for leaving out or avoiding too much of human experience ("The torment of all novels is what is left out" IV, 239). Then, she and Hypo discuss the creation of literature by women. He begins:

Women ought to be good novelists. But they write best about their own experiences. Love-affairs and so forth. They lack creative imagination.

Ah, imagination. Lies.


Writes just like a man.

Just so. Lewes. Be a feminine George Eliot. Try your hand (IV, 240).

First of all, Hypo divides female authors into two groups: the ones who write novels about their own experience and the ones who write novels of ideas. From Hypo's male point of view, most female authors are incapable of going beyond their own experience because they are not imaginative or inventive. That Miriam rejects his implication that imagination lies beyond experience suggests, I think, that she
believes in the self and the experiences of life as the materials of creativity. For, in the theory of creativity suggested by Pilgrimage, Wordsworthian recollection of experience is the artist's primary source of imagination. But Hypo challenges the artist to write from a decidedly intellectual, as opposed to emotional, point of view. The indictment of Eliot, that she "writes like a man," is probably a condemnation of what to Miriam is over-intellectualization or of the realistic method, which both Miriam and her creator saw as "male." To be a "feminine George Eliot," then, would be to write fiction from an intellectual point of view in a method suited to a vision of "female" reality.

The possibility that George Eliot was able to pursue her female point of view in a "male" style is something Miriam could not accept. While Hypo's agreement with the indictment of Eliot is based on the rather glib assumption that she was unduly influenced by the man who encouraged her to write novels, reducing the problem of female authorship to a Lewes-Eliot basis points once again to the inherent danger that has been, for Miriam, part of the Wilson-Henderson relationship from the beginning. For Richardson believes if women are unduly influenced by men—or the male tradition—they surrender, partially or completely, their special point of view.

Miriam begins to take seriously Hypo's suggestion that she escape to a "green solitude," where she can be free to
develop her own vision. The decision to leave London suggests two things about the development of the artist-to-be: first, Miriam now feels that London, originally a center for the self, is no longer a supportive atmosphere. For one thing, its intellectual milieu is male-dominated. But, more importantly, its bright, busy, superficial life is not conducive to the recovery of a sense of personal vision. Therefore, Miriam prepares to leave her city life behind her. She rejects a Dr. Densley's longstanding offer of marriage and thus puts aside forever an opportunity to return to her original milieu, a comfortable middle-class life. In her introduction of Amabel to her former suitor Michael Shatov and in the development of their relationship, which will lead to marriage, Miriam is uniting and leaving behind in London the two people closest to her. Finally, she ends her employment as a dental secretary at Wimpole Street, a position she has held for the entire ten years of her life in the city. Before leaving, she visits her only remaining sister, Sarah, in a hospital.

At the beginning of the final stage of Pilgrimage, the movement toward artistic commitment, Miriam goes to the country and stays in the Quaker home of the Roscorla family. The peaceful and serene Quaker atmosphere, with its curious blending of inner and outer reality in a timeless vision, stirs Miriam's inner depths and invites her to return to the center of self. Within the Quaker vision and solitude Miriam
rejoices in her own participation in the Quakers' lifelong endeavor to "remain always centred, operating one's life, operating even its wildest enthusiasms from where everything fell into proportion and clear focus" (IV, 497). The Quaker atmosphere also stimulates and directs the exploration of consciousness:

Be still and know. Still in mind as well as in body. Not meditating, for meditation implies thought. Tranquil, intense concentration that reveals first its own difficulty, the many obstacles, and one's own weakness, and leads presently to contemplation, recognition (IV, 498).

The Quaker emphasis on quiet contemplation and a strong, peaceful center of the self reinforces Miriam's approach toward reality, as the Quaker life allows for the return of all that had been hidden underneath an elaborate surface during her years in London. Within this contemplative atmosphere, the artist-to-be is beginning to create or re-create the self, the exercise she will ultimately bring to her writing. Through internal concentration, the self comes closest to "reality." For Miriam believes, and Pilgrimage itself suggests, that literature results from the confrontation of and the interaction between the artist's consciousness and its created alter-ego. This exercise in re-creation as a method of approach to and expression of private reality is accomplished from within the consciousness of the alter-ego and unfolds, in one sense, as a contemplation of external reality.

But ultimately, the Quaker point of view will fail the
artist-to-be and she will have to leave it behind. On this one point I must disagree with Caesar Blake's study of Pilgrimage. Although Blake acknowledges that Miriam never totally identifies with the Quaker creed or church, he does argue that the various currents of Miriam's life are finally channelized in an achieved mystical vision and that this vision is the culmination of Pilgrimage. I think, however, that the importance of the mystical vision is its influence on the creative imagination and its role is that of a temporary resting place for the artist-to-be, helping her to strengthen and clarify what will ultimately be a solely artistic vision. In the journey of the artist-to-be, the Quaker episode marks, I believe, a last attempt to adopt an existing point of view for Miriam's ideas. While the Quaker view of life proves more appealing than any of the other views Miriam has examined, the final realization of Pilgrimage is that the female artist must create alone and apart from all existing points of view, as far as that is possible. That Dimple Hill will not be the final creative atmosphere is signaled by Miriam's first attempt, during this stay, to write her novel. The Quaker vision can stimulate the creative imagination, but it is not essentially a literary

8Dorothy M. Richardson (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1960). Although Blake did not have the benefit of knowing March Moonlight when he made his study, I think it is clear even in Dimple Hill that Miriam could never have accepted the role of the Quaker female. She does, indeed, leave to go to Switzerland at the end of Dimple Hill.
atmosphere. Miriam then leaves Dimple Hill to return to Switzerland.

The second visit to Switzerland proves as redeeming to the artist as the first. Miriam meets Jean, the woman with whom, for her, "friendship reaches its centre" (IV, 613). As a creative source, this friendship is appropriate to the atmosphere in which Miriam now lives and incorporates many of the serene qualities of the Quaker values. Jean's friendship comes at an appropriate time, as had Amabel's, and will be a source of strength Miriam can draw upon as her involvement with the Quaker life disintegrates.

When Miriam returns to England, there is a new concentration on writing and she begins to incorporate some of the Quaker values into an artistic viewpoint. Miriam now believes that to write is "to forsake life" (IV, 609), and that writing involves the "clear focus" of the Quaker atmosphere:

> Imagination means holding an image in your mind. When it comes up of itself, or is summoned by something, then it is not outside, but within you. And if you hold it, steadily, for long enough, you could write about it for ever (IV, 613).

This is the key discovery and the closest Miriam comes to explaining her artistic method. It is formed as a possible alternative to what she sees as the novel's concentration on external reality and owes its aesthetic to a Romantic or mystical vision. Reality is internal and art is the business of concentrating on the inner, felt reality rather than the observed reality.
Pilgrimage ends with a portrait of the female artist and the terms of her artistic commitment. Two years have passed since Miriam left Dimple Hill. She is living alone in a room in St. John's Wood, the solitude that now offers itself as her creative atmosphere. She still feels a loneliness that she knows now "may encircle" the rest of her life (IV, 657). But the solitude is absolutely necessary for creativity and has allowed her to finally fulfill her own artistic creed. For, at last, Miriam is writing her novel.

Because the final end of the work is Miriam's artistic commitment, the plot of Pilgrimage is Richardson's interpretation of the artistic journey of a female consciousness toward the freedom of literary self-expression. In its basic outline the plot is archetypal in its depiction of that journey. The artist-to-be, searching for a form for her point of view, encounters and rejects the romantic novel as it has been written by women. She then explores the male tradition and finds that, in attempting to adapt its points of view, she is losing or compromising her own. After recovering her own vision, she can move in a direction different from the male point of view. A mystical vision helps the artist to define her own method and purpose, but she ultimately moves on in solitude to begin her writing. Thus Pilgrimage possesses an action which is coherent and enables Richardson to express her understanding of reality in fiction.
In many ways, Dorothy Richardson's achievement in Pilgrimage is not unique. From the eighteenth-century Richardson, the effects of external reality on a developing consciousness had been explored by several authors, and certainly such a concern is manifest in both Emma and Middle-march. Also, Richardson's pre-occupation with inner reality was shared by her contemporaries and internal narrative would be used with more artistry by writers like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. However, I think Pilgrimage remains an important work. First of all, it is unique as a Kunstler-roman about a woman. Furthermore, in the history of novels written by women, it marks the first conscious attempt to present an alternative to the realistic method originated by males.

Richardson's narrative method, the way by which she hoped to overcome certain restrictions necessitated by the form of the novel as she inherited it, has been discussed and appreciated by many critics. Therefore it was my concern in this chapter to approach Pilgrimage from a different perspective. Although the internal narrative method has been recognized as important to the development of the novel, most critics assume that, because of her use of it, Richardson was unconcerned with selectivity, organization, and arrangement. Rather, I have sought to show that Pilgrimage shapes an internal narrative into a coherent plot, one which reveals that Richardson was conscious of organization and unity. Thus
when women begin to define themselves against an existing tradition, there is a new emphasis on the form of the plot as a major artistic tool. But Virginia Woolf will re-interpret the very meaning and function of plot.
CHAPTER IV

THE WAVES

Perhaps because *The Waves* (1931) seems most remarkable for the ways in which it transcends certain characteristics of fiction, many critics feel that to approach the work in terms of character or plot is neither helpful nor to the point. However, I believe that the work is unified and moves toward its final form through an extended coherent action which is not plot in a conventional sense, but rather a transformation or re-interpretation of that basic fictional element. Virginia Woolf is attempting to express in fictional form a vision or perception of the quality of life through the relationship of the individual consciousness and the forces external to it. To allow this perception to reveal itself dramatically, she shapes the action of the work in the form of a quest or search through the "story" of life for some ultimate meaning.

The kind of reality Woolf is presenting in *The Waves* is essentially different from the kinds of reality which usually lend themselves to the novel form. It is unspoken, thus outside of the realm of social realism, and unconscious, thus outside of the realm of stream-of-consciousness.¹ It

is best described as the experience of self-consciousness, the awareness of an existence separate from individual consciousness, awareness which "lies too deep for the tears of personality and style." Detached and impersonal, it does not involve character in any traditional sense. But Woolf is concerned not only with awareness itself, but also with the process or development of awareness and thus necessarily with extended movement or action through time. And through this process, a concept of action or plot, I believe that she incorporates her abstract matter and lyrical language into a work which fulfills the expectations of a novel.

The unifying idea behind the action of The Waves is the individual's perception of consciousness through time, and the final end is a momentary illumination of the relationship between individual, transitory consciousness and the eternal, permanent forces of the cosmos. From a momentary harmony of shared perception, the speakers and the interchapters are separated to dramatize the formation of the individual consciousness, an act which opposes the individual life to the external forces of nature. But the speakers share an awareness, which they do not understand, of existence outside the self and this awareness provides the tension between the soliloquies and the interchapters and between the individual speakers as well. This tension propels the quest, which is

for the meaning which lurks among the separate events of life and among the separate soliloquies themselves. The action fulfills itself in Bernard's final soliloquy which bridges the seemingly impassable gaps between the various selves and between the self and the cosmic action or reality and makes them into a whole. Through the final creation of this whole, Woolf suggests the stream of life she referred to in her diary as "the stream I am trying to convey; life itself going on." Finally, through her transformation of elements of the conventional plot into an area of consciousness where they are reflected upon, Woolf demonstrates, in one sense, that reality does not lie in the conventional treatment of its events but rather in all that the treatment covers and denies.

In one sense, The Waves is the story of the world—or a world—from the beginning of time. This world is "created" and set in motion by some obscure intelligence or consciousness which contains, from the beginning, all the diverse elements of the novel. The felt presence of the force of this intelligence—in the narration of the interchapters and the shared voice of the six speakers—is, as J. W. Graham explains it, the vestige of Woolf's original concept of a narrator for her work. After rejecting the presence of an


4 "Point of View in The Waves: Some Services of the Style," Univ. of Toronto Quarterly 39 (April 1970), rpt. in
omniscient consciousness as too intrusive and "pompous," Woolf sought to establish a narrative continuum which "might be termed omnipercipience: a perception (not an understanding) of the characters' inner experience fused with a perception (not an understanding) of what they do not perceive—the background of time and sea against which they are set.

While this omnipercipient consciousness may compel the action of The Waves, I believe that the action develops—and can be examined—indeedependently of it. In Woolf's original conception of the work, the narrator was a woman through whose meditating mind the stories of the speakers were to be told in an attempt to sift through the events of the past for some "whole" meaning. Graham quotes from the first draft of The Waves in which the narrator meditates on her purpose:

I am telling myself the story of the world from the beginning. I am not concerned with the single life, but with lives together. I am trying to find, in the folds of the past, such fragments as time, having broken the perfect vessel, still keeps safe.

This quest or search remained the purpose and action of the work, despite the apparent disappearance of this narrator, whose role had been explicitly defined in an earlier stage of the manuscript: "I am the seer. I am the force that arranges. I am the thing in which all this exists. Certainly without me it would perish. I can give it order. I perceive what is bound to happen." While this rather god-like

role is still felt in the final version of *The Waves* and explains the "obscure compulsion," as Graham puts it, under which the voices speak, it does not, I believe, "make" the action happen. It may "perceive what is bound to happen," but its perception is detached, even passive, and what actually does happen is essentially independent of it. In rejecting her original narrator, Woolf actually freed the action of the novel to suggest its own meaning and to progress "independently" toward some final illumination.

While the containing consciousness—which is really a new variation of the role of author—may govern the method of the work and even dictates its purpose, the work exists as fiction because of a coherent action which "happens" internally on its own, fulfilled in Bernard's last soliloquy, in which he tells (or re-tells) a story which delivers to the reader the final vision of the work.

In the interchapters, then, a detached, impersonal, receptive consciousness narrates the story of the world through manifestation in time and nature. As the process of one day (which contains four seasons and various "scenes"), the interchapters progress from the creation of the day/world from the darkness just before the light of sunrise to its destruction or end in the darkness after sunset. This cyclical background of time and the sea is the pure "action" of the forces of life itself, relentless and all-consuming. In *The Waves*, this story exists outside of or separated from
the episodes of the soliloquies and represents the external order in a spontaneous defiance of which human consciousness charts its own course.

As this story of the world is being told in the background, the six speakers are recounting or meditating on the stories or plots of their lives in the foreground. Compelled by the containing consciousness or perhaps just by the fact of their own self-consciousness, the speakers meditate on the stories of their lives as those stories progress (along with but apparently outside of the interchapters) from a beginning in childhood to an approaching end in middle-age. The one voice of the soliloquies is the voice of consciousness which is aware of itself. It issues from an essentially non-verbal realm in which consciousness of life has been distilled or abstracted, its events sifted and re-sifted until only pure essence remains for expression. The elements of consciousness (and of plot in one sense) have settled in some deep, inner realm of the individual, allowing him to speak of himself as individual consciousness and as pure consciousness. Thus the individual statements are at once personal and universal, at once the story of a single consciousness and the story of consciousness itself.

Although Woolf differentiates the six speakers by their actions and to a certain extent by the images they use, she makes their sameness immediately apparent. The six all speak in the same highly stylized way and their speeches are
shaped in the same soliloquy-like form. This sameness, and the speakers' unawareness of it, is, from the beginning, an integral part of the action of *The Waves*. Though the speakers emphasize individual perception and identity, they are part of the same linguistic medium. Borrowing from the novel's major metaphor, their individuality is like the individuality of separate waves—waves which rise defiantly from the sea but are filled with similar content and destined to return to the flux of the sea. What we perceive (perhaps without understanding its meaning ourselves) from the beginning is that their consciousnesses and their awareness and communication of those consciousnesses are, to their creator, essentially collective, part of some process larger than the individual ego. This essential communality is one way in which the narrative suggests the final end of the quest. For the quest, the "plot" of *The Waves*, describes the striving for or the desire for a communal harmony and sense of wholeness which the six speakers shared momentarily as children in the garden but which was quickly destroyed under the onslaught of the moment and the developing apprehension of the individual "I." The speakers constantly search among the successive flow of fragmentary "present moments" which are shaping their lives for something whole which time has not destroyed.

The action originates in the first episode in which the
speakers appear as children in a garden.\(^5\) In the background, light has just come to the day, suggestive of the beginning of the world. As the voices "awaken" into consciousness, there is a brief harmony of shared perception through which the voices are simultaneously linked to the universe ("I see a ring. . . . I see a globe . . . .") and to nature.\(^6\) The voices are receptive to the natural setting and respond directly and simply to nature's stimuli ("Stones are cold to my feet. . . . The back of my hand burns . . . "). But they also share the setting, perception, and language of the first interchapter. Both the interchapter and the episode are set in the garden and both mention the house with the drawn, white blinds. Bernard actually uses the words of the interchapter ("there are blue, finger-shaped shadows of leaves beneath the windows").

But this pristine sense of universal, natural harmony is quickly shattered by the intrusion of the external, present moment, under the pressure of which the six will become differentiated and will begin the separate stories of their lives. A perception of the "plots" of their individual lives begins when Louis is shaken from his "natural" identity by an

\(^5\) The text used is The Waves (New York: Harcourt, 1959). All references to it will appear in my text.

\(^6\) Jean Alexander finds in the six characters an awareness of "a master design, a completeness that is spontaneously and intuitively known at the dawn of being, before identity has separated the parts from the whole." See The Venture of Form, p. 163.
encounter with Jinny which instigates his self-consciousness:

I am green as a yew tree in the shade of the hedge. My hair is made of leaves. I am rooted to the middle of the earth. My body is a stalk. I press the stalk. A drop oozes from the hole at the mouth and slowly, thickly, grows larger and larger. Now something pink passes the eyehole. Now an eyebeam is slid through the chink. Its beam strikes me. I am a boy in a grey flannel suit. She has found me. I am struck on the nape of the neck. She has kissed me. All is shattered (pp. 12-13).

This act, a willful one, enforces self-awareness. It not only causes the six to react in a new way but initiates their awareness of their differences: Jinny creates the moment and willfully kisses Louis; Louis is distraught at the external interruption of his sense of order and place in the universe; Susan sees the kiss and rages with hurt and pain; Bernard, only partially understanding, feels sorry for Susan and attempts to distract her with a story; Neville is aware, but remains indifferent, only worried about the whereabouts of his knife; and, Rhoda remains oblivious to the whole occurrence. They are already assuming the responses or separate identities with which they will participate in living. At the end of this day, when Mrs. Constable squeezes the sponge, Bernard is caught in the awareness of his body, his feelings, and his day. This is the beginning of the individual awareness of self, the origin of the "I" with and in which each of the speakers will struggle from now on. The beginning of willful action in the present moment shattered the original harmony and initiated lifelong quests
for a recovery of wholeness. At the end, Bernard will say: "Sometimes indeed, when I pass a cottage with a light in the window where a child has been born, I could implore them not to squeeze the sponge over that new body" (p. 239).

As the soliloquies now continue (the very speaking of them is, in one sense, the plot and the need to speak them propels the action itself), they are the voices of the six as they grow through the various stages of life. Preoccupied with the development of the individual self, each speaker meditates on the external activities in which he or she finds identity. After the initial experience in the garden, the children go off to different schools, where the process of individualization is intensified. As the children mature, they seek a wholeness or total meaning in the separate paths of activity which they pursue.

After leaving school, Susan rejects the city society from which she feels alienated and returns to the country, to the natural life of the farm. There, in her youth, she identifies with the natural cycle, with the fields, the seasons, and the rotation of crops. To fuse herself with this process she later embraces maternity, bearing children as links to a natural universal cycle. She lives apart from society, rhythmically crooning the word "sleep" to the in-and-out stitches of her sewing. Jinny, on the other hand, embraces the social life of the city. She asserts her identity in the present moment and seeks wholeness and fusion in
the thrill of romantic conquest. She cannot go from the present into the past and she does not dream. Jinny is a creature of the senses, her imagination is the imagination of the body. As Bernard says, she "saw nothing that was not there" (p. 252). Rhoda is cut off from external reality and estranged from the present moment. She lives almost totally within her own consciousness, a self-proclaimed dreamer. She has no real external reality, mimics the social gestures of others, and sees through the social moment to the dark, hidden side of the universe. She suffers in her solitude, fearing the moment because it forces a recognition of the self. Significantly, her life is without any real "plot," and she ultimately commits suicide. The presence of Rhoda's voice in *The Waves* suggests the necessity of order and action to the creation and survival of the self. Louis is closest to Rhoda in his absorption in his own consciousness. He is the foreigner ("My father is a banker in Brisbane and I speak with an Australian accent" p. 19), neurotically aware of being socially different from the others. He is preoccupied with the sense of his roots in history and keeps a place there for his private self, because he never feels comfortable in the present moment. However, unlike Rhoda (who is his lover for a time), he endeavors to establish an identity in the present moment by becoming an active business man. As he charts routes on maps and signs his name over and over again, he struggles to concentrate on the
present moment and his place in it. He longs for meaning of the kind that can be imposed, and would like to create a ring of poetry which would fuse into a whole both seagulls and women with bad teeth. Neville, like Jinny, establishes his identity in the present moment through love as he seeks one male, one room, one moment to secure the illusion of wholeness and meaning. But his homosexuality is tormented and, by becoming a scholar, Neville escapes into the meaning and order of the past through the Latin poets. Bernard is the most complex and versatile of the six. At college, he explores his sense of being many different selves. While he establishes an identity to function in the present moment—he becomes engaged, marries, fathers children, inherits money, accepts a post in the government—he willingly embraces a wider participation in society. From his youth, he collects in a notebook phrases about the various events of his life, phrases which he one day hopes to collect into a novel so that he can tell a story about life.

These, then, are the separate activities which form the stories of the lives of the six speakers. They are the activities among which the quest for meaning takes place. For, even as the speakers assert an individual sense of self, they are aware of and puzzled by something outside consciousness because the attempt to establish a well-defined sense of self through orderly action is in opposition to the stream and flux of both consciousness and external, cosmic
reality. Each speaker perceives his developing consciousness as moving toward the establishment of one single identity, but the main action of *The Waves* suggests that one single, simple self is an artificial concept maintained to protect the self from and assert the self against a larger reality. In his final soliloquy, Bernard defines the urge for individual action: "I then first became aware of the presence of those enemies who change, but are always there; the forces we fight against. To let oneself be carried on passively is unthinkable. 'That's your course, world,' one says, 'mine is this'" (p. 240). But, as each of the six speakers charts his own course, the separate actions are saturated with the course of the world, the inevitable flow which carries them onward to eventual reincorporation in nature through death. This opposition provides the tension which compels the quest, of which they are all not equally aware but in which they all participate, and moves the action toward fulfillment.

As the flux of time and nature continues in the background, it is reflected in the soliloquies through the persistent, ongoing, impersonal flow of common humanity and everyday life. This collective action appears intermittently but consistently throughout the soliloquies in the groups of school boys going off to games, in the swirl of London parties, in the steady stream of the midday crowd as it passes a London restaurant, and in the chance group of train
passengers being hurled together toward some destination. Also, there is a steady narrative flow of imagery, individual and shared, and the very persistence of the soliloquy form is its own kind of stream, suggesting some common end even as it is displaying individual identity. Moreover, as Bernard explains it, consciousness itself is a stream of disparate things that "happen" simultaneously, a stream over which the individual throws a thin cover of habit and order:

But it is a mistake, this extreme precision, this orderly and military progress; a convenience, a lie. There is always deep below it, even when we arrive punctually at the appointed time with our white waistcoats and polite formalities, a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights—elm trees, willow trees, gardeners sweeping, women writing—that rise and sink even as we hand a lady down to dinner. While one straightens the fork so precisely on the tablecloth, a thousand faces mop and mow (p. 255).

As the action unfolds, the interchapters and the episodes of the soliloquies work together to suggest the final end of the work and to move it toward that end. The speakers make the choices which they feel will insure a separate identity, but the act of making those choices and sustaining them serves to isolate them from each other. Meanwhile, the interchapters ominously record the passage of time, a passage which will eventually reunite the six, if only through death. It is toward a reconciliation of these two forces that the action of the work is striving.

In the speakers' youth, choices are made with an
optimistic hope in the power of salvation for the self.

Louis, sitting in a London restaurant, staunchly opposes himself to the world around him:

I will read in the book that is propped against the bottle of Worcester sauce. It contains some forged rings, some perfect statements, a few words, but poetry... I will not submit to this aimless passing of billycock hats and Homburg hats and all the plumed and variegated head-dresses of women.

... I will reduce you to order (pp. 94-95).

Bernard takes comfort in a strong sense of self which always comes to reassure him: "But you understand, you, my self, who always comes at a call... you understand that I am only superficially represented by what I was saying tonight. Underneath, and, at the moment when I am most disparate, I am also integrated" (p. 77). Susan meditates calmly on her future identity:

For soon in the hot midday when the bees hum round in the hollycocks my lover will come. He will stand under the cedar tree. To his one word I shall answer my one word. What has formed in me I shall give him. I shall have children; ... I shall be like my mother, silent in a blue apron locking up the cupboards (pp. 98-99).

Jimmy embraces the social world with assurance and a strong sense of self-fulfillment:

I am ready now to join men and women on the stairs, my peers. I pass them, exposed to their gaze, as they are to mine. Like lightening we look but do not soften or show signs of recognition. Our bodies communicate. This is my calling. This is my world. All is decided and ready; servants, standing here, and again here, take my name, my fresh, my unknown name, and toss it before me. I enter (p. 101).

But, parallel to their pre-occupation with their individual choices, the six speakers share an awareness, from
their awakening in the garden, of a common consciousness. In *The Waves*, this awareness is dramatically rendered through the speakers' love for Percival, a friend of their youth. At the center of their collective life, Percival represents the spontaneous force of life. He is a man of action, lives in the present moment of time, and does not struggle with an "I." At a farewell dinner for him, the six communicate as one consciousness. Together they re-speak the events of the garden. Bernard later tells of their present union: "We have come together, at a particular time, to this particular spot. We are drawn into this communion by some deep, some common emotion. . . . We have come together . . . to make one thing" (pp. 126-127).

Then, in India, Percival dies. His death signals the end of youthful illusion and forces the six to recognize the power of forces which act outside the individual consciousness. As life now continues, there is both an increasing awareness of the fragility and tenuousness of the surface of individual identity and an increasing urgency to maintain it as a defense against passing time. Louis, for example, now feels that he must cling to the external routine of his life or suffer extinction:

> Life passes. The clouds change perpetually over our houses. I do this, do that, and again do this and then that. Meeting and parting, we assemble different forms, make different patterns. But if I do not nail these impressions to the board and out of the many men in me make one; exist here and now and not in streaks and patches . . . I shall fall like snow and be wasted (p. 170).
But, as the flow of external events continues, each speaker must also struggle with an uneasy sense that individual consciousness does not provide total meaning.

Finally, the six come together for dinner at Hampton Court. They are now in middle-age ("The sun was sinking") and their life choices have been made, so that they come bearing the "credentials" with which they rigidly and defensively seal themselves off as individuals. With a great deal of effort each has painstakingly established a sense of his or her self as opposed to the other five and as opposed to an awareness of life in general. Time has narrowed significantly the possibility of change.

They are defensive about the sense of self because they intuitively feel that the individual effort has somehow not been complete or at least has not granted them an understanding of life as a whole. They perceive, but do not understand, the impressions which swirl in consciousness and suggest a dark meaning. As Susan says, "Still I gape . . . like a young bird, unsatisfied, for something that has escaped me" (p. 233). After their meal, the six share the novel's most important moment, a moment of "disembodied" communication and, walking together down the avenue, their six lives blaze together as one creation:

Marriage, death, travel, friendship . . . town, and country; children and all that; a many-sided substance cut out of this dark; a many-faceted flower. Let us stop for a moment; let us behold what we have made. Let it blaze against the yew trees. One life. There. It is over. Gone out (p. 229).
They have momentarily felt the common pattern which they do not understand. The coming together brings a strong sense of peace and relaxation of effort, but the sense of individual self is too strong and they quickly return to what they know, away from what they fear. For the enemies who are always there are now time and death. The Hampton Court dinner is an ending, for it marks the last appearance of all but Bernard.

After an initial momentary harmony of perception, the soliloquies have rendered six separate awarenesses of the sense of self. They suggest the process by which an awareness of self is formed and the need of all six speakers to seek some explanation or meaning in their lives. Both the process and the quest have been portrayed through the effect on consciousness of external events and time, or in another sense, by the story of life itself, common to all humanity.

Throughout The Waves, we have sensed that we were being told a story and that it was somehow "one" story. But, at the end of the Hampton Court dinner, we are left with an unresolved, unfinished story. Five of the speakers retreat into silence, leaving us with individual gestures, separate meditations. The oneness, which has been suggested throughout, has not been successfully fulfilled in the action of the novel. The soliloquies remain separated from the inter-chapters and from each other and, at this point, we have only the "splintered mosaic" (p. 247) or the broken vessel
among the pieces of which lies some vision, some ultimate perception about life. It will be Bernard's function, in the final soliloquy or monologue which is definitely spoken to some anonymous listener/reader, to complete the quest, to sift the elements of the past for some ultimate "story."

To prepare him to tell her story, Woolf grants Bernard the vision which moved her to write *The Waves* and to which she referred throughout the composition of the work, commenting finally that she had "netted" it. Bernard is the only speaker who consistently fluctuates between the sense of self and of the larger social flux. He refuses to accept any definition of order as final and he revels in the process of life itself. He can, as after Percival's death, make the effort to hold himself outside the surge of life, but finds that he can do so for only a brief time. On the other hand, his sense of self is strong, and, at the Hampton Court dinner, it is he who bangs on the table to arouse the others and to restore the sense of the present moment and of individuality. He consistently articulates the problem of the relationship between self and all that lies outside self. As a writer Bernard from his youth prepared to write an ultimate story, collecting in a notebook phrases which he one day hoped to string together to make a statement about the

---

7Woolf first mentions the vision ("One sees a fin passing far out.") on September 30, 1926. After finishing *The Waves*, she writes on February 7, 1931, that she had "netted that fin in the waste of water." See *A Writer's Diary*, pp. 103 and 162.
meaning of life. But the phrases never fuse (at the end of
the monologue he throws away the notebook) and he is aware,
as he grows older, that some vision or understanding has
escaped him.

When Bernard begins to feel his advancing middle-age,
he flees alone to Rome where he contemplates his new awareness
that the cycle of time threatens the sense of individual iden-
tity: "Time tapers to a point. As a drop falls from a glass
heavy with some sediment, time falls. These are the true
cycles, these are the true events" (p. 184). This awareness
makes Bernard question his own perception of life, and by
implication his literary habit:

I have made up thousands of stories; I have filled in-
numerable notebooks with phrases to be used when I have
found the true story, the one story to which all these
phrases refer. But I have never yet found that story.
And I begin to ask, Are there stories? ... But why
impose my arbitrary design? Why stress this and shape
that and twist up little figures like the toys men
sell in trays in the street? Why select this, out of
all that,—one detail? (pp. 187-188).

It is at this point that Bernard has Woolf's own vision:

Leaning over this parapet I see far out a waste of
water. A fin turns. This bare visual impression is
unattached to any line of reason, it springs up as one
might see the fin of a porpoise on the horizon. Visu-
al impressions often communicate thus briefly state-
ments that we shall in time to come uncover and coax
into words. I note under F., therefore, 'Fin in a
waste of waters.' I, who am perpetually making notes
in the margin of my mind for some final statement,
make this mark, waiting for some winter's evening
(p. 189).

The association of the vision and the desire to tell a story
suggests strongly that Bernard will tell his own author's
story. In this way, Woolf makes the action of *The Waves* self-contained.

Sometime after the Hampton Court dinner, Bernard looses his sense of self, as "No fin breaks the waste of this immeasurable sea" (p. 284). He is a man "without a self" but is now able to see the world with detached, impersonal consciousness—as the other, divorced from and independent of the I of the individual. Without his old sense of self, he can clearly perceive the groups the six had made, "how they came together, how they ate together, how they met in this room or that" (p. 284). Opposed to that oneness, he sees his own "indefatigable busyness," the frenetic path of the self which he had cut this way and that across the passage of time. Through this vision of the single identity and the common identity, Woolf prepares Bernard to tell his story (to create his novel as she would have it) which, in its complexity, is one story of all six speakers.

Woolf's careful preparation of Bernard for his final role is certainly indicative of some conscious purpose, and I suggest that that purpose may have been to resolve the work through the use of a dramatic, developing action, in the manner of the conventional novel. As Bernard sums up or retells the stories which have been told individually in the narrative, he fulfills the role of the novel's original narrator. That is, he searches among the events of the past.

---

for some whole and fulfills the quest which prompted
the process of which he has been a part. The last solilo-
quy is significantly different from the ones which have
come before: Bernard is more eager and willing to speak than
compelled to speak. He chooses an audience and presents his
tale more as a personal story than as an impersonal medita-
tion (this is especially obvious in the shift from the pure
present of the soliloquies to the normal past tense of story-
telling, a shift which brings the story to the surface of
communication). Presumably, the summing-up could have been
done by a containing consciousness or an omnipercipient nar-
rator. All six speakers could have ceased to speak as indi-
viduals after the Hampton Court scene, and the voice of the
interchapters could have narrated a final summary. Essen-
tially the same vision could, I think, have been communicated,
but it would have been detached and impersonal, closer, per-
haps, in voice to lyric poetry than to fiction. By giving
the final task to Bernard, Woolf provides us the sense of
something's having been discovered within the novel itself
and brings us much closer to that "sense of felt life" which
fiction requires. Through the use of her speaker/author,
Woolf is, I believe, communicating her vision within the
realm or in the manner of a novel.

Bernard intends to tell the stranger he meets in a res-
taurant the story of his own life. But as he speaks he dis-
covers that his story is the story of all six. That The
Waves has been one story all along is, at the end, dramatically revealed. This sense of his community with the other speakers—"For this is not one life; nor do I always know if I am man or woman, Bernard or Neville, Louis, Susan, Jinny or Rhoda—so strange is the contact of one with another" (p. 281)—is the major pre-occupation of his story. But there is also a new perception of the process which has been contained in the interchapters:

How then does light return to the world after the eclipse of the sun? Miraculously. Frailly. In thin stripes. It hangs like a glass cage. It is a hoop to be fractured by a tiny jar. There is a spark there. Next moment a flush of dun. Then a vapour as if earth were breathing in and out, once, twice, for the first time (p. 286).

For the real purpose of Bernard's story and the fulfillment of the action of the narrative is the suggestion of a stream of life. By re-speaking the separate stories of the soliloquies and the words from the interchapters, Bernard blurs the edges of the individuality and separation of both speakers and interchapters and places them together in a "stream" of words which tells one story. As he tells his story, he is outside the present moment, but, once finished, his sense of self and the struggle of daily life return and he prepares to carry on his individual course, for effort is the main triumph of the individual. Illuminated by the perception of the wholeness of the forces which propel life, he hurls himself, "unvanquished and unyielding," against death. There is constant renewal and the process of life goes on.
"The waves broke on the shore."

As fiction, then, The Waves is the story of the development of an awareness of self which leads to a final illumination of the relationship between that awareness and the cosmos. By allowing the soliloquies and the interchapters to work together to the final end, Woolf based her work on one extended coherent action. Through her use of elements of conventional plot, she developed plot as a fictional tool instrumental in expressing areas of experience and awareness normally assumed beyond its scope. And through the incorporation of lyrical elements into a narrative work, Woolf helped to reveal new possibilities for the novel. In The Golden Notebook, Doris Lessing will use plot not to reveal but to seek new possibilities for the novel.
CHAPTER V

THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK

Women made their early contributions to the form of the novel within a tradition of realism, and after a departure in the works of Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf, realism returns in the work of Doris Lessing. In her novels before 1962, Lessing used conventional realism, a method she believes marked the novel's highest achievement during the nineteenth century. The Golden Notebook, however, is the result of a growing despair about the realistic method when applied by the creative imagination to the chaos and destruction of twentieth-century society. The work shows both effort and result as Lessing confronts and explores the problem of creating a contemporary novel, and it is an interesting example of the use of the novel form to examine the process of its own creation.

In a 1971 introduction to The Golden Notebook, Lessing writes that she had hoped to create a work which would "talk through the way it was shaped."1 Her statement provides the key to the work's particular contribution, for through a unique formal innovation, Lessing has shaped a work which

explores through its plot and reveals through its structure the relationship between twentieth-century society, twentieth-century consciousness, and the conventional novel. Finally, what the work strives for is a contemporary justification for continuing to create literary forms to express a formless reality.

To effect an examination of society and writing about society, Lessing creates an author/protagonist, Anna Wulf, and makes the central problem of *The Golden Notebook* Anna's writer's block. After publishing a commercially successful novel which she does not respect, Anna finds herself writing only in four notebooks, in each of which she records one area of her experience. She continues the notebooks for seven years, from 1950 to 1957, before attempting a synthesis of her whole experience in another journal, the "internal" golden notebook, after which she is able to produce a short conventional novel entitled "Free Women." The keeping of the notebooks is the major action of Anna's life and of *The Golden Notebook*. What we read, then, are Anna's five private journals, interspersed with five parts of a different narrative, "Free Women," also, we finally learn, written by Anna. The four notebooks are arranged in four sections, each of which contains a part of each notebook, and thus we encounter the notebooks simultaneously, as it were, in the manner of their creation. The experience of reading *The Golden Notebook* is an uneven, jarring one and the work
progresses through a shuttle-like movement between the various notebooks and between the notebooks and "Free Women." In this manner we become part of the world of one consciousness as it reflects and struggles with its own particular exposure to the external realities of life in the mid-twentieth century.

The central consciousness is Anna's, "the modern detached critical consciousness, suffering from a debilitating overexposure to contemporary world history and riven by nostalgia for a faded dream of wholeness," but what gives Anna's situation special significance is that she is a writer who believes in the supremacy of novels which are "powered with an intellectual or moral passion strong enough to create order, to create a new way of looking at life" (p. 61). Precisely because she is incapable of creating an ordered vision (she is at no loss for subject matter), Anna is experiencing a writer's block; her attempts to work through this block provide the plot of The Golden Notebook. Anna's block is caused, on the one hand, by her realization that her first novel was a betrayal of the reality of the experience on which it was based and, on the other hand, by her fear that without such a form, a second novel would be only an irresponsible record of disillusionment and chaos. It is a fear of this novel confronting or even embracing formlessness.

---

that drives Anna to compose her four separate notebooks as an alternate attempt to contain chaos.

As the exercise of a literary consciousness struggling in isolation to control its own subject matter, each notebook is an examination of the relationship between experience and art, between life and language. In a black notebook, Anna tries to get back through her first novel to the experience from which it came. *Frontiers of War* was an attempt to expose the inhumanity of the racial barriers in Africa (the specific country is probably Rhodesia) through the story of an affair between an idealistic British pilot and a black woman, the wife of a hotel cook. Anna now despises the book for its tone of "lying nostalgia." Wondering why she wrote about her experience by fictionalizing it in the first place, she attempts to record the truth of what had actually taken place. During World War II, Anna had lived as a member of a small group of so-called "communists" isolated together by chance in Africa. The core of the group consisted of Anna herself, who was staying on in the city after a failed marriage to a tobacco farmer, three British pilots stationed in Africa, Maryrose, the only member actually born in Africa, and Willi, a self-exiled German liberal. Brought together by war, the group becomes a "family" and there is constant interplay between the various relationships within it. The war has produced a fashionable flirtation with communism in the white community, a social
phenomenon which is doing nothing to affect the rigid white/black barrier. As the center of Anna's group, Willi maintains a ruthless and abstract view of the world proletarian revolt which precludes any active concern for the plight of the individual. Between him and the other members, who are in varying degrees emotionally caught up by the idea of communism, there is a constant dialectic. Anna's memory of the group's life is focused on the several weekends they spend away from the city at the Mashopi Hotel, an establishment run by a transplanted John-Bull-type landlord, Mr. Boothby, and his wife and young daughter. In the relationship between the Boothbys and their black servants and between the members of the group and the Boothbys, the particular problems of the society and of the gap between beliefs and behavior are exposed. A fringe member of their group, a man named George, has been having an affair with the wife of the Boothby cook and discovers that she has born him a son. The social and political impossibility of his acknowledging or doing anything about the child is an important example, in the black notebook, of the inhumanity which the racial system necessitates. From this affair Anna created Frontiers of War. After a long account of these experiences, Anna judges her attempt to recover the "truth" a failure. She realizes that what she had thought was objectivity turns out to be, again, simply nostalgia and what she thought was truth is simply a prearranged set of memories.
She writes a short parody of *Frontiers of War* for her literary agent but it too is taken seriously. What distresses Anna in the black notebook is that the three versions of her African experience are simply that, versions, and not one of them captures the "truth." And while the original fiction is a distortion of the reality, the various movie and television people who try to buy the rights to *Frontiers of War* want to create yet other versions which are distortions of the fiction. One falls through descending levels of fiction farther and farther from life.

In a red notebook Anna records her later experience with the British Communist Party during the 1950s and with the fate of the international dream of communism in post-World War II society. Anna joins the party partially out of a "need for wholeness, for an end to the split, divided, unsatisfactory way we all live" (p. 161). But what she encounters is a split and factionalized party which cannot function as a whole mainly because it will not face the truth of the world political situation. As the ideals and hopes of the party disintegrate under the central horror of Stalin's regime, the leaders of the small British party continue to use the language which supports the original ideal and to encourage the production of idealistic literature by the party's members. After the death of Stalin, there is much talk of a new party, but a flurry of political activity produces no tangible results. The red notebook convincingly
exposes, from a political focus, the ability of language to distort or deny truth. It also reveals the problem, which seems particularly contemporary, of "the thinning of language against the density of experience" (p. 302). Faced with increasing complexity and chaos, language itself seems to falter and to be incapable of expressing "reality." During a Communist Writers' Group Meeting, at which a mediocre pamphlet by Stalin is treated as a serious linguistic theory, Anna finds herself "listening to a sentence, a phrase, a group of words, as if they are in a foreign language--the gap between what they are supposed to mean, and what in fact they say seems unbridgeable" (p. 300). The red notebook most accurately depicts the contemporary problem of the ability of language to mask reality.

In a yellow notebook, Anna transforms another area of her experience, a five-year love affair, into fiction. As we learn in the blue notebook, Anna had a serious affair with Michael, a married East European physician whose family was killed during World War II. During the time of the affair, Anna is living with her daughter in the home of her close friend, Molly. When Michael finally leaves her, Anna suffers and is unable to break the hold which this relationship has come to have over her consciousness. Then, in the yellow notebook, she begins to write a novel, entitled "The Shadow of the Third," about a relationship between Ella and Paul, personae for Anna and Michael. Ella is a divorced
mother of a young son, Michael, and lives in the home of her friend Julia. She writes an advice column in Women at Home, a magazine geared toward the British working-class housewife. Meanwhile, she is writing a novel about a young man who commits suicide. She meets Paul, a dedicated, overworked psychiatrist whose working-class background gives him a different social and political point of view from Ella's own. Paul has a wife and children, but spends his nights with Ella, leaving his own wife at home, a member of the anonymous female audience who reads Women at Home. During most of their affair, Ella ignores certain aspects of their situation and drifts along on a cloud of her own happiness. When Paul leaves her she cannot get over him and holds a place in her life ready for his return.

"The Shadow of the Third," as an experiment in the relationship between language and life, becomes important to Anna for two major reasons. By creating Ella, a character who is both Anna and not Anna, she is able to admit and examine certain aspects of herself which she had not been able to look at directly. The projection into "fiction" helps Anna get closer to certain aspects of reality and, instead of being simply an evasion of truth, this "distortion" is actually a means to an understanding of personal experience. Of even more significance is the method in which Anna writes the novel. ³ Throughout the yellow notebook, Anna comments

³John L. Carey discusses the making of "The Shadow of
on the process and effect of writing "The Shadow of the Third." She realizes that in writing about an affair which ended, she emphasizes those aspects of it which led to its dissolution. Just as nostalgia had shaped the written experience in the black notebook, pain shapes the written experience in the yellow notebook. However, the writing of the yellow notebook is also a process of discovery for its creator. Anna writes that the themes of the book actually emerge as it is being written and that despite their close proximity to her own life, the characters have a freedom of their own.

A major part of the experiment of writing the notebooks is the attempt to separate fiction and reality, to record reality without "fictionalizing" it. Here, from the satisfactory interworking of the two, arises the implication that the separation of fiction and life may be yet another faulty exercise in compartmentalization (like the notebooks themselves). In a world in which it is impossible to know the truth, the boundary between fiction and reality is often indistinguishable and the closest approximation of "truth" may well lie in some mixture of experience and art.

The blue notebook is a diary-like record of daily experience. In 1950, Anna goes into psychoanalysis because she cannot feel, cannot respond directly to the experiences that

---

should touch her (p. 232). During her years with her analyst, Mrs. Marks, she comes to realize that psychoanalysis, rather than allowing one to face one's experience, actually invites one to block it off by incorporating it into mythic and historic categories. Through her discussions with Mrs. Marks, we learn of the contemporary dream which haunts Anna, the dream of the anarchic principle of joy-in-spite which she believes is the spirit of the times (pp. 477-478). Also in the blue notebook, Anna writes of her affair with Michael, the basis for "The Shadow of the Third" in the yellow notebook, and her friendship with Molly, the basis for "Free Women." For a few years Anna stops writing in the blue notebook and simply pastes onto its pages newspaper clippings which present, as she puts it, "a record of war, murder, chaos, misery" (p. 250), a record which she feels represents the truth of contemporary experience. But the major effort of the notebook is Anna's attempt to truthfully recount one entire day of her life, September 15, 1954, in direct response to her lover Michael's charge that she makes stories out of their life together. In an effort to write about life without any of the trappings of fiction, Anna records in minute detail the most intimate intellectual, emotional and physical happenings of one day. It proves to be the day on which she decides to leave the Communist party (although she does wonder if she makes the decision, one she has often thought of, on this particular day simply because she has chosen to
write about it) and the day on which she is forced to admit that Michael is leaving her. She judges the very long account a failure, scores it through, and substitutes a terse paragraph which lists only the day's external events. She continues these factual summaries of her life for almost two years before she admits that they, too, are a failure:

The blue notebook, which I had expected to be the most truthful of the notebooks, is worse than any of them. I expected a terse record of facts to present some sort of a pattern when I read it over, but this sort of record is as false as the account of what happened on 15th September, 1954, which I read now embarrassed because of its emotionalism (p. 468).

Although any expression of life in language is an alteration of life, the blue notebook does attempt to examine the effect of emotion on experience and the distortion that results from having to express experience in patterns of language at all.

As we are reading the four notebooks, which overlap and even occasionally contradict one another, we are also reading "Free Women," in which Molly's son Tommy has blinded himself after reading the notebooks. What we are being exposed to is the matter which could be made into a conventional novel about twentieth-century life, but the matter has, on one level, no form. At the outset of "Free Women," Anna states her social vision: "the point is . . . everything's cracking up" (p. 3). In the notebooks, the reality of the present day is perceived as chaos, a permanent state of formlessness. The omnipresent threat of mass atomic
destruction has produced a state of more or less constant hysteria in which the "truth" of the world situation is blocked off or disguised by devices which deny the real situation: political rhetoric, sham governments, empty marriages, the mythic framework of psychoanalysis, uninvolved sex, social programs, journalism, and even art forms which insist on depicting wholeness. Society has betrayed itself by clinging to traditional ways of living which no longer have any relevance. The social and the literary situations reflect each other in the mirror of the artist's consciousness which, out of a fear of literary formlessness, itself clings to outmoded forms of expression.

An important element of both the social and artistic visions of The Golden Notebook is the fact that Anna is a female. She tells her psychoanalyst that "there are whole areas of me made by the kind of experience women haven't had before" and that she is living "the kind of life women never lived before" (pp. 471-472). The social, political, and intellectual emancipation of twentieth-century women has resulted in a particular advantage for the female consciousness presented in The Golden Notebook. Having abandoned the traditional patterns of female experience (especially marriage, which lends financial and social security), a woman like Anna has been forced to encounter areas of experience for which her upbringing had not prepared her. Because her consciousness is shaped by unexpected experience for which
she has no established patterns of response, Anna and women like her are in a position to be more acutely aware than their male counterparts of a world in which "everything's cracking up." Threatened by the formlessness of a world she did not create but which created her, Anna personally and professionally recognizes the need for new methods to organize reality. Her female vision is of the isolated human person surviving in a fragile, contrived life underneath which rage chaos, pain, and meaninglessness. On all levels, the novel dramatizes not only the sterility and inadequacy of existing patterns but also the pain of breaking through them to shape new ones.

Anna's writer's block is a result of her exposure to the mass nightmare of death and destruction which is the reality of the twentieth century. Faced with a society splintered by chaos and meaninglessness, the creative consciousness falters and becomes doubtful of its own ability. Anna's particular response is to attempt to gain some control over her understanding of contemporary society by dividing her own experience into four categories, represented by the four notebooks. But what *The Golden Notebook* finally reveals is that Anna's self-imposed response is in itself faulty. The "cure" for her writer's block is symptomatic of the disease. The notebooks are the therapy through which Anna hopes to break her block by warding off chaos with the creation of individual units of order. Designed to overcome the fragmentation which
is her contemporary consciousness, the notebooks are simply further fragmentation. They compartmentalize the self and avoid confrontation with the total consciousness. Rather than admitting the chaos, the arbitrary structure of the notebooks denies it and imposes a factitious order which cannot come to terms with the present reality. Taken together, the notebooks are what they contain—large blocks of splintered fragments held together by a superficial form. They are comprised of pieces of autobiography, fiction, parody, letters, reviews, synopses, newspaper clippings. Some entries are dated, others are not; entries are crossed out, contradicted, overlapped, and redone. The result is a record of social confusion and personal inability. For, as Anna fails over and over again, the notebooks demonstrate that she cannot shape the raw material into a whole.

That Anna seems to have worked herself into an aesthetic dead-end is, I think, one of Lessing's themes in The Golden Notebook. Throughout the notebooks Anna seems to have the rather naive belief that language should be capable of expressing experience without distortion. But, as the structure reveals, the real failure of the notebooks is that they keep Anna from the chaos, for compartmentalization precludes confrontation. Thus the notebooks come to represent the form of consciousness through which Anna must break if she is to encounter the chaos and end her writer's block. In this way, the form of the plot leads directly to the
"internal" golden notebook and then to "Free Women."

With her consciousness trapped in the notebooks, Anna encounters Saul Green, an unemployed writer with no personal ties, exiled in a foreign land. Through her relationship with him, Lessing moves Anna "beyond words" and thus out of the notebooks. The consciousness of Saul Green is one totally exposed to and debilitated by the contemporary situation. An ex-American communist, he had been blacklisted by the communists for being anti-Stalinist and then by the American government for once having been a communist. A world-changer who is outliving his youth, Saul has seen his friends and colleagues deny their beliefs, turn on each other, and retreat into the kind of life which orders itself around marriage and parenthood. In Hollywood, where he had been a writer for a time, the integrity of his artistic consciousness was shattered. Through it all, he has refused to give in to any of the various pressures which society has used against him, or, in terms of The Golden Notebook, he has refused any of the superficial orders which society offers, ways of life which are denials of truth. Saul seems to have several different conflicting personalities, has no sense of time or memory, and is haunted by pain and anxiety. He often seems to be at the mercy of emotions which rage without controls. The effect of such a consciousness on Anna Wulf, Lessing shows, is the effect of a confrontation with present reality. When he moves into Anna's flat as a boarder, Anna's
daughter has just gone to boarding school, leaving her mother with "no outer shape" (p. 554) to her life (which may indicate that Anna's whole life is rather tenuous). That Janet leaves when Saul comes prepares the way for Anna's confrontation with chaos.

The process which will free Anna from the forms which restrict her consciousness, represented by the notebooks themselves, is presented as a process of descent into chaos. The descent is played out amidst the drama of the male and the female facing each other across a wasteland of contemporary experience. Anna and Saul become lovers and live for a time isolated from the world in Anna's flat, where they construct a "world" (p. 611) of their own through intense exposure to each other. Anna and Saul oppose each other as form and formlessness, their opposition most dramatically rendered through the use of language. Anna's attempt to "name" Saul as a means to categorize him and thus to hold off his increasing power over her, the power of disintegration and dissolution, is opposed by Saul's compulsive, disconnected, rapid speeches by which he asserts his own formlessness and wards off her attempt to categorize him. Saul is the more

4 The relationship between Anna and Saul, as a relationship between a woman and a man, is, I think, unnecessarily sadistic. Anna assumes the role of the passive female and suffers sexual degradation, crippling jealousy, and total dependence. The relationship is not intended as a totally pleasant one, and certainly not as a romantic one, but Anna's behavior as a woman is disturbing and I, for one, wish Lessing could have effected her confrontation without such personal degradation.
powerful of the two and the merging of their consciousnesses is really the absorption by Anna of his state of consciousness. Anna is the more vulnerable and she finds that she is absorbing his fear and even assuming the physical symptoms of his anxiety. The longing for dissolution which has been part of Anna since her days in Africa (p. 64) responds to Saul's consciousness and she longs to be free of her "ordering, commenting memory" (p. 585). After this she discovers that she had "gone right inside his craziness" (p. 587)—meaning that she has gone into that area of consciousness beyond or outside of time and memory and language, a movement presented as beneficial and salvific. During this time, the yellow and blue notebooks are kept up. In the blue notebook, Anna writes straightforwardly about the situation with Saul and in the yellow notebook transforms the situation into a series of fictional synopses. She realizes this is going on and even cross-references the two notebooks with a series of numbers and asterisks. Sometimes the "truth" appears in the yellow notebook before it does in the blue, and, driven to read Saul's diary, Anna is shocked to find there something she had already written in the yellow notebook (p. 572). As Anna moves inside Saul's craziness, all boundaries are dissolving—fiction and life, the four notebooks, Anna and Saul, knowledge and experience. In a state of half-dissolution/half-order, Anna finds herself announcing that she will now be using only one notebook, that she will not split herself
up any longer. With a solemn double black line, she ends each notebook and then purchases a golden notebook for the final confrontation.

In the "internal" golden notebook, Anna attains the illumination of consciousness which will free her to attempt to write again. Within the altered state of consciousness represented by her relationship with Saul, Anna enters a semi-dream state in which, with Saul as a projectionist, she is made to watch a "film" which is her life and the stories she has made of it. Within the context of a confrontation with the whole consciousness, the writer is confronted with the whole of her literary process. Through the mechanism of the film Anna is made to strip her experience of the literary forms she has given it. By confronting her life/fiction through a vehicle other than words, Anna sees that she has ordered her experience in such a way that it makes a series of "conventionally, well-made films, as if they had been done in a studio" (p. 619). Without the benefit of such forms, the individual fictions and realities of her past (the materials of the four notebooks) merge into a chaotic whole and Anna is "unable to distinguish" between what she "had invented" and what she "had known" (p. 619). She recognizes that the forms she has used to shape her life are false but, challenged by Saul the projectionist to "do June Boothby," a character from the black notebook, Anna resorts to an insipid fictional style foreign to her and is
"unable to stop the flow of words" (p. 620). What frightens Anna is that she recognizes the style as varying only slightly from her own and thus is forced to see the ease with which language can be distorted and can then distort meaning. When her attention returns a second time to the film, the forms of language have dissolved from the experiences and she slowly examines images from the past, images which reveal a new, apparently more "honest" version of experience and which send Anna on the road to re-creating order out of the chaos of her life.

Anna's experience in the golden notebook leads her to a new awareness of the relationship between language and life and of the relationship between form and chaos:

The people who have been there, in the place in themselves where words, patterns, order, dissolve, will know what I mean and the others won't. But once having been there, there's a terrible irony, a terrible shrug of the shoulders, and it's not a question of fighting it, or disowning it, or of right or wrong, but simply knowing it is there, always. It's a question of bowing to it, so to speak, with a kind of courtesy, as to an ancient enemy: All right, I know you are there, but we have to preserve the forms, don't we? And perhaps the condition of your existing at all is precisely that we preserve the forms, create the patterns—have you thought of that? (p. 634).

It is this ironic awareness of the possible interdependence of chaos and order which breaks her block. Saul, the instrument of her new consciousness, gives her the first line of "Free Women": "The two women were alone in the London flat." Anna then writes her short, purely conventional, "well-made" novel.
The final end of the plot of *The Golden Notebook* is Anna's novel, "Free Women," which she writes out of a new understanding of her role as an author. The understanding is that, even in the face of chaos and meaninglessness, the author still has the obligation to keep on trying, to pursue the struggle with language which is the creation of fiction. Trying to communicate her new knowledge, Anna writes, "I play with words, hoping that some combination, even a chance combination, will say what I want" (p. 633). Writers belong to the Sisyphuses of the world, those who have insight into "truth" and work very hard to communicate it to other people even in the face of inadequate means and probable defeat, bolstered by the knowledge that a few great people have penetrated beyond the present society and are forming the solutions to the future.

In "Free Women," Anna's friend's son, Tommy, reads the notebooks, charges Anna with "just making patterns, out of cowardice" (p. 275), and then shoots himself, not fatally but seriously enough to blind himself. The novel then proceeds to examine the results of Tommy's action on the lives of the four adults around him. Two of them, Tommy's father and his wife, have been living within an empty marriage and are now able to break that pattern and to both find other lives which they feel will make them happy. The other two adults, Tommy's mother and Anna herself, have been living unpatterned, "free" lives but now retreat into the
conventional structure of British society: Molly into marriage, Anna into welfare work. The reality—the chaos—exists but the "message" about it is ambiguous and the novel ends on a note of ironic, embarrassed despair, as Anna and Molly face their choices and prepare to part.

Ultimately, The Golden Notebook leaves us with, in one sense, a rather complicated message about the creation of literature in the present day. After all Anna goes through, she reverts to a realistic method and a conventional form for her novel, with the implication that the realistic method remains the most satisfactory means to portray a wide social spectrum. The final suggestion is, then, that the writer must try to present chaos in an unchaotic or ordered way. But the very patterning of The Golden Notebook shows us the raw material, the "reality," and the organization of that material, the "fiction," and invites us to measure, as it were, what got lost in the translation. Because of the structure, the work moves not through a linear progression but through a shifting, subtle-like movement between the notebooks and the novel. The structure does not allow the reader to "relax" into the comfortable form of "Free Women," but constantly interrupts with the notebooks, thus making the experience of reading The Golden Notebook, as I noted earlier, an uneven, jarring one. We are not allowed to assume anything for very long. Because we constantly have the raw material juxtaposed with the fiction, we
constantl y have before us the distortion which results when the former becomes the latter. Furthermore, we experience confusion about what is supposedly "real" and what is supposedly "fiction." Thus the experience of reading the work re-creates through its structure Anna's experience in writing the notebooks; internally and externally, the work reflects the artistic difficulty of distinguishing and expressing the truth of human experience and of "being" in the modern world.

*The Golden Notebook* is a compelling re-examination, through the eye of one mid-twentieth-century consciousness, of the relationship between life and literature. It is an extremely honest and original attempt to confront, within one work, both society and the creation of literature about that society. In effectively accomplishing her confrontation, Lessing has advanced the use of plot as a contemporary artistic tool. Furthermore, through her plot, Lessing is able to reveal the chaos at the same time as she is able to go beyond it. For, even though Anna despairs of and rejects her notebooks, they convincingly reveal a vision of chaos and meaninglessness. At the end of *The Golden Notebook* we understand not only the chaos but also the need to order it, the need to struggle with form in order to present a communicable vision of reality. And this is, after all, the struggle which each of the female authors in this study has been dealing with, each in her own time and each in her own way. Lessing's
work is thus a fitting contemporary conclusion to the study and brings us, in one sense, full circle, for it was within the conventional form that Jane Austen first suggested an alternate plot.
CONCLUSION

This dissertation was undertaken out of a concern for the critical investigation of novels written by women. In the past, criticism often ignored or dismissed the role of the female author as craftsman and stressed instead her sensibility. In the present day, amidst the genuine concern for female rights and self-expression, criticism often approaches the works of women as celebrations of the female self or as polemic treatises on the fate of the female in society. But such an approach is inadequate. The creation of a novel is a process requiring conscious skills and deliberate choices and women novelists deserve to be examined in light of how they perceive problems, prepare solutions, and shape forms which express their unique vision.

From the eighteenth century, novels have always included a narrative line, a coherent story expressed and shaped through plot as the term is used by R. S. Crane in "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones." Yet plot has been largely ignored in the criticism of women's fiction. Therefore, I chose to examine five established authors' use of plot in an effort to judge their contribution to the form of the novel. It is necessary to remember that, by the time women began to write novels, the major foundations of the genre had been established by men and that one of those
foundations was, of course, plot. Therefore, to examine the way in which women used plot as a tool it is helpful to understand that the female novelist was approaching a form which, while not essentially alien to her, was nevertheless a form she had to adapt for her own vision.

That the participation of women in the novel has been viewed, by some, as detrimental to the formal development of the genre makes a study of plot in women's novels appropriate and, I believe, necessary. For if, as Crane suggests, the form of the plot—the final end toward which everything in the work is moving—is the first artistic principle, then without a clear understanding of this principle in the novels of women, no real assessment of their formal contribution can be made. Furthermore, a study of women's formal contribution to the novel must be shown as a formal development in which the inherited tools of fiction were the means by which women confronted and gradually re-shaped the genre for their own visions. Such an understanding of the creative role of female authors links their separate innovations and suggests some new interpretations of their works.

The first great female novelist was Jane Austen who, by the time she created *Emma*, had mastered the art of storytelling. In *Emma*, then, she was able to address herself not only to the story at hand but also to a creative alternative to that story. The "eighteenth-century" or traditional plot, that of the young woman moving toward marriage, is submerged
or "hidden" and Austen focuses our attention on an overt plot which confronts through its action the social and literary expectations upon which the action of the minor plot is based. Through the overt or major plot in *Emma*, Austen explores the effect of internally-stimulated action on a world (and a novel) oriented toward an external system of roles and behavior. At the end, the major or innovative plot is surrendered to the minor or traditional plot and *Emma* emerges as one completed, self-contained action.

A little over fifty years later, George Eliot also struggled to express an innovative vision within an inherited form. In *Middlemarch*, she shapes a conventional Victorian plot between the two poles of the male and the female so that the action of the novel becomes a representation, on all levels, of the basic isolation of the male and the female and of the social dangers inherent in that isolation. Then, emerging from this plot, the Dorothea-Lydgate relationship suggests change in the relationship between the sexes, change which could lead to a new concept of the roles and actions of the male and the female in fiction and thus to a new kind of plot. But because of the requirements of the form Eliot is using, the Dorothea-Lydgate relationship is finally unfulfilled and *Middlemarch* arrives at a conventional ending. However, the innovative aspects of the novel cause an imbalance in that conventional ending, and *Middlemarch* is ultimately a novel which contains an unresolved formal dilemma.
After the partial confrontations with form represented by the plots of *Emma* and *Middlemarch*, *Pilgrimage* marks the first attempt by a female author to create an alternative to inherited form. Substituting internal "feminine" realism for external "masculine" realism, Dorothy Richardson nevertheless relied on a well-defined external plot to shape and control her internal narrative of consciousness as fiction. To move *Pilgrimage* toward its final end in Miriam Henderson's artistic commitment, the plot divides the work into four successive stages which trace the artistic development of the novelist-to-be. Because the presence and/or the importance of a coherent plot in *Pilgrimage* has not been appreciated, this work has often been misunderstood and even unfairly dismissed by critics and historians of the novel. Furthermore, in terms of the formal contribution of the female author to the novel, I think it is important to at least note that once she began to offer visions of reality based on principles other than the external social reality she did not abandon coherent action as a first artistic principle.

Virginia Woolf provided fictional integrity to her highly individualized work, *The Waves*, through her use of the basic tool of an extended coherent action. Working separately and together, the two sources of "action"—the episodes of the soliloquies and the interchapters—move toward an ultimate union in Bernard's last soliloquy, in which the work achieves its final end in a momentary illumination of the
relationship between individual, transitory consciousness and the all-consuming, eternal forces of the cosmos. Within the soliloquies themselves, which tell, on one level, six separate "stories" of the development of human consciousness, Woolf effects a transformation of elements of the conventional plot into an area of consciousness where they are meditated upon by the speakers. Through this transformation, she demonstrates in fiction that reality does not lie in the conventional treatment of its events but in all that that treatment obscures. By incorporating elements of drama and poetry into a work which was based on a strong fictional foundation, Woolf re-interpreted the meaning and function of plot and revealed new possibilities for the novel.

In The Golden Notebook, Doris Lessing effects a contemporary re-examination of the realistic method, bringing the examination of form through plot full circle. To explore in fictional form the relationship between twentieth-century consciousness, twentieth-century reality, and the conventional novel, she uses a well-organized plot which creates the work itself and which imposes an order on the presentation of the unordered material of present society. Anna Wulf's keeping of the notebooks, the major action of her life and the whole action of the novel, moves the work toward the synthesis in the golden notebook and into the final construct, "Free Women." Through the use of this coherent action, Lessing reveals the well-organized plot as a tool for the
exploration of unorganized material and contemporary external reality.

Some suggestions about the collective contribution of women can certainly be drawn from the individual contributions. The female novelist was, from Jane Austen on, a conscious artist sensitive to the most rigorous requirements of the genre. As she matured and developed into an accomplished story-teller, the female novelist was developing confidence in her own personal vision. Working within an inherited form, she gradually began to incorporate into that form aspects of her own creative understanding. Looking at these five novels together, a pattern seems to suggest itself. Women originally began to write within an established method. Then, once they became a shaping force in the novel, the began to work themselves free of the form they inherited. In *Emma*, innovation does not affect the final form, but in *Middlemarch*, innovation causes a disruption in the final form; the artistic consciousness is gradually becoming stronger and freer. After the development or preparation represented by *Emma* and *Middlemarch*, we move on to the independent accomplishments of *Pilgrimage* and *The Waves* and to the skilled craftsmanship of *The Golden Notebook*. As the female novelist continues to develop, plot remains an important tool through which to express artistic maturity and innovation.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

General


A defense of plot as the first principle for understanding cause in fiction.


Jane Austen

Primary


Secondary


George Eliot

Primary


Secondary


Dorothy Richardson

Primary


Secondary


Kaplan, Sydney. "'Featureless Freedom' or Ironic Submission: Dorothy Richardson and May Sinclair." College English 32 (1971): 914-917


Virginia Woolf

Primary


Secondary


Doris Lessing

Primary


Secondary


The dissertation submitted by Nancy McKeon Taylor has been read and approved by the following Committee:

Eileen M. Baldeshwiler, Ph.D., Chairwoman
Professor, Department of English, Loyola

Joseph J. Wolff, Ph.D.
Professor, Department of English, Loyola

Gene D. Phillips, S.J., Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Department of English, Loyola

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 8, 1977
Date

Eileen Baldeshwiler
Director's signature