Newton, K.M. "Prototypes and Symbolism in *Middlemarch*." *Modernizing George Eliot: The Writer as Artist, Intellectual, Proto-Modernist, Cultural Critic*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010. 69–78. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849665155.ch-005>>.

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Prototypes and Symbolism in *Middlemarch*

The question of prototypes for characters in George Eliot's fiction has always been a subject of interest. The publication of Richard Ellmann's essay 'Dorothea's Husbands' in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1973¹ provoked a long-running correspondence in its letters page. This correspondence reflected the assumption that one should look to real people personally known to her for prototypes of her characters.² But though *Middlemarch* is undoubtedly in certain respects a novel with some strongly personal aspects, it is also concerned with wider issues. To consider the question of prototypes only in relation to people she knew personally limits the novel's scope since it does not sufficiently acknowledge that Eliot is both artist and intellectual and that for her the two are not separable. I shall suggest that historical figures were a more significant influence on Eliot's characterization in artistic terms than people she knew and that this can offer insight into some of the cultural issues the novel is concerned with. Indeed, the narrator encourages the reader to look for historical parallels:

And here I am naturally led to reflect on the means of elevating a low subject. Historical parallels are remarkably efficient in this way ... whatever has been or is to be narrated by me about low people, may be ennobled by being considered a parable. (*M*, 337)

This passage relates to Featherstone and his circle. But Lydgate is associated with the great physician Vesalius – Felicia Bonaparte has suggested that his surname is also not accidentally related to that of the mediaeval poet John Lydgate³ – and Casaubon is compared with such men as Hooker and Aquinas.

Casaubon in particular raises interesting questions about the relationship between the personal and the historical. It has been suggested, notably by John Sparrow, that the prime reason for taking Casaubon to be based on Eliot's friend, the classical scholar Mark Pattison, is the name of the subject of Pattison's biography, Isaac Casaubon. The main objection to this is that it seems unlikely that Eliot would have ridiculed a friend with whom she was on good terms and remained so after the publication of *Middlemarch* in such an obvious way. Sparrow in his book on Pattison claims that the resemblance is so obvious that Pattison himself must have been aware of it but that he maintained relations with Eliot for the sake of appearances. He goes on to make the even more unlikely suggestion that Eliot intended that Pattison should see the resemblance and suffer in silence. Moreover, he admits that Pattison 'gave private "readings" [from *Middlemarch*] in his study to his

female disciples'.⁴ This would indicate a peculiar form of masochism if Pattison thought that he himself was the model of Casaubon.

It is still possible, of course, that Pattison, in particular his devotion to scholarship and his marriage to a woman much younger than himself, contributed to some aspects of Eliot's depiction of Dorothea Brooke and Casaubon, though the fact that Eliot almost certainly would have been aware both of numerous scholars severely lacking in sensibility who failed to complete some monumental project and of many young women who idealized and married men old enough to be their fathers suggest that these characters had a resonance and a general rootedness in reality beyond particular people known to her personally. But there is surely a much simpler explanation for the use of the name Casaubon than seeing Pattison as his prototype, namely – as I shall try to show – the connection between Eliot's character and the historical figure Isaac Casaubon. This allows her to extend Casaubon's significance beyond the level of realism through implying a parallel at a symbolic level with the Renaissance classical scholar.

Perhaps the fact that Pattison's biography of Isaac Casaubon was not published until 1875, some three years after the publication of *Middlemarch*, as well as the seeming absurdity of comparing Eliot's character to a great scholar, has made such a parallel appear unlikely. However, according to Gordon S. Haight in his biography of Eliot, she had had an interest in Isaac Casaubon since 1849: 'George Eliot had been interested in the great French scholar since her winter in Geneva, where Casaubon was born, and knew his fine edition of Theophrastus' *Characteres*.'⁵ Pattison had also published a long account of Casaubon's life in the *Quarterly Review* of 1853, substantially similar in approach to his biography. Eliot and G. H. Lewes had been friendly with the Pattisons since early 1869, and there is evidence that she was greatly interested in Pattison's work in progress. In late 1874 she wrote to Mrs Pattison: 'We are looking forward to the Rector's book – which is a great deal to say in these times' (*Letters*, VI, 97). Another letter written in January 1875 while Pattison was still proofreading indicates that she and Lewes were familiar with the contents of the book before its publication: 'Mr Lewes and I both cry out against the omission of the final chapter which must be needed as a spire to the edifice' (*Letters*, VI, 108).⁶ There are thus strong grounds for believing that Eliot was familiar with both the historical Casaubon and with Pattison's work in progress before she wrote *Middlemarch*.

If one reads Pattison's biography one can see numerous similarities between the historical figure and the fictional character. Isaac, for example, was not exactly a passionate suitor. According to Pattison, he married Florence Estienne as much to gain access to her father's manuscripts as out of personal interest in her, and as Pattison puts it in the *Quarterly Review*, 'Matrimony did not detain him long from his books.'⁷ His relationship with his wife is in some respects clearly suggestive of that between Dorothea and Casaubon:

He certainly complains bitterly on one occasion of her interrupting him. But over and above Casaubon's constitutional fretfulness, we must make allowance

for the irritability engendered by a life of hard reading against time. Casaubon thought every moment lost in which he was not acquiring knowledge. He resented intrusion as a cruel injury. To his wife struggling also, in her way, with the cares of a large household and narrow means, he may naturally have seemed at times apathetic to her difficulties, and selfishly 'burying himself in his books'.⁸

In personal appearance Isaac resembled Edward. Of his physique, Pattison writes that 'Nature had given him a puny and infirm frame' (*Isaac Casaubon*, 466). One recalls Celia's comment on Edward Casaubon's ugliness and Sir James Chettam's poor opinion of his legs. Neither Isaac nor Edward excelled in conversation: 'Even if Casaubon had found a Boswell, it may be doubted if his talk could have been effectively reported' (*Isaac Casaubon*, 479). This recalls Celia on Edward's conversation at the dinner table: 'He talks very little' (M, 20). The scene in which Lydgate visits Casaubon and finds him 'show[ing] more markedly than ever the signs of premature age' (M, 416) and diagnoses 'fatty degeneration of the heart' (M, 418) is similar to an incident Pattison describes in his *Quarterly Review* essay when Isaac's doctor came to attend him: 'He was no sooner called in than he discovered the lines of death in the dark ring round the eye, the prominent cheek bone, the hectic flush, the sunken chest, and the incessant cough.'⁹ Isaac Casaubon's death was accelerated by his efforts to complete what he saw as his major work: 'Casaubon killed himself over the "Exercitationes"... his life could not have been long, but excessive labour, joined with mental anxiety, hastened the end' (*Isaac Casaubon*, 475). Edward Casaubon suffers from similar 'anxiety as to how far [his illness] might be likely to cut short his labours or his life' (M, 411).

Isaac Casaubon's most ambitious undertaking, his *Exercitiones Contra Baronium*, was a work of vast proportions. Like the 'Key to All Mythologies' it was an attempt at religious reconstruction, but only a fragment was completed. Pattison writes, 'Of this monster criticism the volume which we have is only the first half of the first volume – a mere fragment!' (*Isaac Casaubon*, 373). He was also a man of very limited output, despite his great ambition: 'Of all these schemes, and of others not a few, hardly any traces remain among the papers, because hardly anything was ever put on paper' (*Isaac Casaubon*, 486). Not only that, what work he did do, claims Pattison, has been forgotten: 'Well done, or ill done, or half-done, however, Isaac Casaubon's books are now consigned to one common oblivion' (*Isaac Casaubon*, 487). Neither did he have any claims to genius or original thought; in fact, he was 'destitute of imagination' (*Isaac Casaubon*, 498). Of his response to the works he studied, Pattison asserts, 'It is almost a paradox that this most successful and most thorough interpreter of the classics, should have been a man who was totally destitute of sympathy for their human and naturalistic element' (*Isaac Casaubon*, 496). One recalls Edward Casaubon's response to the frescoes of Raphael in Chapter 20 of *Middlemarch* and his general lack of imagination.

The connections between the historical Casaubon, on Pattison's account, and Eliot's Casaubon are thus fairly palpable. But what could have been Eliot's purpose in creating the link between her character and the historical figure? There would appear to be no clear-cut ironic contrast as Isaac has many of the personal inadequacies of Edward, made little progress with his greatest undertaking and what he did produce is now forgotten. But the difference is that despite all of Isaac Casaubon's shortcomings, Pattison still regards him as a great man: 'But Casaubon's books, whatever their worth, were not the man. The scholar is greater than his books. The result of his labours is not so many pages of folio, but himself' (*Isaac Casaubon*, 488). He goes on to compare him with Milton – with whom Edward is also compared – another man who, says Pattison, is greater than his works. For Pattison there is something heroic in Casaubon's total commitment to knowledge: 'Day by day, night by night, from the age of twenty upwards, Casaubon is at his book ... Casaubon renounced action, pleasure, ease, society, health, life itself – killing himself at fifty-six' (*Isaac Casaubon*, 490–1). One recalls Browning's poem, 'A Grammarian's Funeral', which, though ambivalent in its view of the Grammarian, suggests that he can be seen in this heroic light. An additional interest is that it has been suggested that Casaubon may have been Browning's model.¹⁰

But the reasons why Pattison regards Casaubon as great help us to see how he differs from Eliot's character and perhaps lead to a greater understanding of Casaubon's role in the novel at a symbolic level. Isaac Casaubon had worked within a tradition which gave value to his labours much in excess of any intrinsic merit of his individual writings. He was a great scholar of the second period of the classical revival which followed the first phase of the Renaissance. Pattison asserts, 'The period of youthful enjoyment was at an end; the time of manhood, and of drudgery, was entered upon' (*Isaac Casaubon*, 509). Casaubon transcended this drudgery and his personal limitations by his part in reconstructing classical texts and thus establishing a classical tradition supported by scholarship: 'To put together this tradition, to revive the picture of the ancient world, patient industry, and industry adequate to a complete survey of the extant remains of the lost world, was the one quality required. This was Casaubon's aim, and inspiring ideal' (*Isaac Casaubon*, 511–12). His very lack of genius was of assistance to him, since it prevented subjective distortion: 'His want of genius saved him from falling, as Scaliger has sometimes done, into the temptation of pursuing the striking rather than the true' (*Isaac Casaubon*, 410).

Edward Casaubon's misfortune is that the work he is doing is no longer perceived as belonging to a tradition of scholarship comparable to that of his namesake. That tradition of humanist scholarship played a significant part in connecting the classical world with a culture and civilization based on Christianity, a split which Eliot had explored in *Romola*. Isaac Casaubon was both classical scholar and a Christian who though a Protestant was sympathetic to some aspects of Catholicism and was courted by both parties,

so again potentially helping to overcome cultural division. As W. J. Harvey pointed out, Edward Casaubon's field is syncretic mythography, a study which Eliot believed had been discredited by Otfried Müller's *Prolegomena to a Scientific Mythology*, with the result that Casaubon is 'lost in a labyrinth of an exploded pseudo-science'.¹¹ The figure he is often associated with is Thomas Aquinas, whose great mediaeval synthesis is the paradigm of the constitutive system which Casaubon desires to create from the study of mythology, but Casaubon's relation to Aquinas is merely ironic. The synthesis of Aquinas, the culmination of the scholastic tradition, had succeeded in creating a structure which in his time reconciled Christian belief with reason and knowledge. But in the nineteenth century, a period in which knowledge is now driven by a methodology based on scientific principles, anyone aspiring to create a synthesis comparable to that of Aquinas is likely to be reduced to the status of an Isaac Casaubon without the classical tradition of scholarship that gave his labours form and value. Edward Casaubon, in trying to create his system of reconstruction by means of a scientifically discredited method, must fail ludicrously.

Though the two Casaubons are similar in many respects, the real distinction between them is that their relationships to their cultural contexts are fundamentally different. Isaac lived at a time when a man without genius whose main attributes were the acquiring of and total devotion to knowledge in the form of classical scholarship, even if what he did mainly involved intellectual drudgery, could contribute significantly to his culture. In the Renaissance, it furthered the alignment of classical learning and scholarship with Christian belief and so helped to create a great era in the history of civilization. But Edward Casaubon, not a 'later born' Theresa, like Dorothea, but a later born Isaac Casaubon, similarly exists in a world that lacks the 'coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul' (M, 3). Edward Casaubon's cultural context is one in which religion and science, or faith and knowledge in its modern form, appear irretrievably split, which is partially responsible for the fragmented and 'inorganic' culture Carlyle describes in *Past and Present*. The assertion by the narrator in the 'Finale' that 'there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it' (M, 821) applies as much to Casaubon as to Dorothea. The various comparisons of Casaubon to the likes of Aquinas, Milton, Hooker, Locke are, in terms of the novel's realist aspect, ironic and comic, but in terms of the symbolism associated with Casaubon's name, they are not necessarily invalid for, even though he lacks genius or even imagination, had he lived in an earlier era his labours may not have been fruitless. Isaac Casaubon plays a significant symbolic role in the novel, for though his books may have been 'consigned to a common oblivion', he offers the hope that one does not necessarily need to be an Aquinas or a Milton to have a significant impact on the world, an implied anti-elitist

and thus democratic message, which is an important theme of the novel and explicitly articulated in the 'Finale'.

If Casaubon can be seen as representing someone who primarily relates to a pre-modern past, Dorothea Brooke and Will Ladislaw represent symbolically the break from that past and identification with a view of the world that is future oriented, namely Romanticism in its idealistic and utopian aspect. Having suggested that Eliot had good reason for choosing the name Casaubon because of its symbolic potential, I shall focus now on two less obvious historical prototypes that are also exploited symbolically, and again a name serves as a clue. Dorothea's 'ardour' is stressed throughout and this is a very Romantic quality, obviously associated with Shelley, the most idealistic of the Romantics. Her enthusiasm to play a great part in the world and her willingness to trust feeling rather than reason characterize her as a Romantic. Ladislaw is more directly associated with Romanticism but initially is drawn to its more individualistic aspect. He has been educated in Heidelberg, one of the centres of German Romanticism; he is twice compared to Shelley by Mr Brooke: 'He seems to me a kind of Shelley ... he has the same sort of enthusiasm for liberty, freedom, emancipation' (*M*, 355–6) and is also associated with Byron, being described by Mrs Cadwallader as '[a] sort of Byronic hero' (*M*, 375). His flamboyant appearance and his having taken drugs connect him with Romantic individualism. The following dialogue between them on what it means to be a poet illustrates their Romantic qualities but also differences between them:

'To be a poet is to have a soul so quick to discern that no shade of quality escapes it, and so quick to feel, that discernment is but a hand playing with finely-ordered variety on the chords of emotion – a soul in which knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge. One may have that condition by fits only.'

'But you leave out the poems,' said Dorothea. 'I think they are wanted to complete the poet. I understand what you mean about knowledge passing into feeling, for that seems to be just what I experience. But I am sure I could never produce a poem.' (*M*, 220–21)

In a novel in which names are important, the name 'Dorothea' is a clue to a historical prototype for the character. With her Romantic qualities but not being a poet, one may be reminded of another Dorothea, one of the great female figures of the German Romantic movement, Dorothea Schlegel – a novelist and translator – though not very well known currently in the English-speaking world. I shall suggest that connections between Eliot's Dorothea and Dorothea Schlegel point to – as with Edward and Isaac Casaubon – Dorothea's significance in the novel being enhanced through symbolism and furthermore that Dorothea's relationship with Ladislaw also has parallels with Dorothea Schlegel's relationship with Friedrich Schlegel, developing the symbolism even further.

Dorothea Schlegel was one of the most notable women of the nineteenth century. She was Jewish, being the daughter of the philosopher Moses

Mendelssohn. Eliot, with her wide knowledge of German and Jewish culture, would surely have been acquainted with her life.¹² Interestingly she had significant connections with the Nazarenes, who play a part in *Middlemarch*, since two of her sons from her first marriage became part of the movement and Friedrich Schlegel, her second husband, was one of the Nazarenes' main advocates. Dorothea Schlegel was, in her later years especially, the kind of woman Eliot would have respected strongly. Thus if she was looking for a historical figure to enlarge the implications of her fictional character, there could scarcely have been a better candidate.

Some aspects of Dorothea Schlegel's life and character seem similar to characteristics of Eliot's Dorothea. Before meeting Schlegel, she had married at nineteen a German banker, Simon Veit, an inappropriate husband for her. Robert M. Wernaer writes, 'Dorothea was a woman of rare intellectual gifts, in every respect the worthy offspring of her father ... whereas her husband was a plain business man, with a plain, everyday mind'.¹³ Thus there is a broad similarity with Eliot's Dorothea, also married at nineteen to a man who has little of her form of 'ardour'. Dorothea Schlegel later met Friedrich Schlegel, left her husband for him and scandalized Berlin society. Friedrich Schlegel at this time was a Romantic aesthete without adequate means of support. Wernaer describes this episode:

She left the house of a well-to-do banker, and joined herself, for love's sake only, to a penniless literary man ... She gave him the financial support by her own literary work, she comforted him in troubles, she entered to the fullest extent into his varied intellectual life, she guarded him against the selfishness of the world, she assisted him in practical advice, she loved him with an ever-increasing love as years went by, she gave him strength and courage and hope, without which he would not have been enabled to do the work he did.¹⁴

This is suggestive of Dorothea Brooke's relationship with Ladislav. Like Schlegel he was a penniless literary man, and Dorothea's determination to marry him scandalized many members of Middlemarch society. She also had to support Ladislav financially and gave up a great deal of wealth in order to marry him. In Dorothea Schlegel's earlier life she possessed a similar ardour to Eliot's Dorothea. The *Biographie Universelle* states that she was

expressive, passionnée, reine d'un petit cercle sur lequel elle exerçait une véritable fascination, elle était belle pour les privilégiés peu nombreux devant lesquels se déployait dans son exubérance l'âme éminemment impressionnable et chaleureuse dont l'avait doué la nature.¹⁵

(expressive, passionate, queen of a small circle over which she exerted a true fascination, she was beautiful for the small number of privileged people before whom the soul eminently impressionable and warm which nature had endowed her with was exuberantly displayed.)

If these similarities suggest that Eliot was using the historical figure as a model for Dorothea Brooke, is there any indication that Friedrich Schlegel

could have been a prototype for Ladislav? Schlegel in his early career was most strongly associated with the individualistic and aesthetic side of Romanticism. Though the name Ladislav does not appear to be significant in relation to Schlegel, the Christian name Will would have been very appropriate for him as he was strongly influenced by the philosophy of Fichte – who gave greater emphasis to the ego and will than any of the other philosophers associated with German Romanticism – and translated it into aesthetic terms. The young Schlegel was an extreme aesthete and claimed that ‘Willkür’ (caprice) was the ‘supreme, indeed only law governing the poet’.¹⁶ Ladislav is also, at first, an aesthete who believes that ‘[t]he best piety is to enjoy – when you can... It is of no use to try and take care of all the world; that is being taken care of when you feel delight – in art or in anything else’ (M, 217). It is also the capricious nature of Ladislav’s will that is emphasized. He has no desire to channel his energies in any one direction and, like Schlegel, can be seen as making a virtue out of caprice. Mr Casaubon stresses this aspect of his character in criticizing him: he thinks he is ‘a man with no other principle than transient caprice’ (M, 42). Schlegel was a man whose interests were almost unlimited. Lilian R. Furst writes that his ‘unpredictability is that of a weather-vane, blown hither and thither by the wind of his whims’.¹⁷ Ladislav has a similar range of interests. Naumann says of him, ‘His walk must be *belle-lettres*. That is wi-ide’ (M, 212). In an essay on Ladislav entitled ‘George Eliot’s “Eminent Failure”’, Gordon Haight wrote that the ‘objection most often made is that Ladislav is a dilettante’, a view that he points out goes back to Henry James and his remark that the ‘impression once given that [Ladislav] is a *dilettante* ... is never properly removed’.¹⁸ If Friedrich Schlegel is a prototype for Ladislav, then there is of course good reason why that impression should not be removed.

There are also similarities between the development of Schlegel and that of Ladislav. After moving beyond the extreme aestheticism which characterized his early thought, Schlegel devoted himself to journalism and politics. He was for many years a journalist, editing *Europa* while he lived in Paris, and from 1820 to 1823 he edited the Catholic review, *Concordia*. Before that, he had been involved in the anti-Napoleonic liberation movement in Germany and took part in the Congress of Vienna. He later took an active role in politics, being part of the ministry of Metternich, and was appointed adviser to the parliamentary delegation at Frankfurt. Ladislav also gives up his early aestheticism to take a more active role in the world. He had seen himself as ‘Pegasus’ and regarded ‘every form of prescribed work’ as ‘harness’ (M, 80). But soon his Romantic energy is redirected into social channels. He accepts the ‘harness’ he had formerly scorned, ‘having settled in Middlemarch and harnessed himself with Mr Brooke’ (M, 462). He takes up journalism to help promote Mr Brooke’s political ambitions. Energies which were once devoted to art are now directed to politics: ‘he studied the political situation with as ardent an interest as he had ever given to poetic metres or mediaevalism’ (M, 454).

At the end of the novel he has become 'an ardent public man' and eventually enters parliament. Ladislav, then, like Schlegel, is a Romantic who sets aside extreme aestheticism for greater social involvement, in journalism and politics.

The last and possibly most important of the similarities between Dorothea and Friedrich Schlegel and Eliot's characters concerns the nature of their relationship. The prime influence on Schlegel's change of views, which made him reject his belief in Romantic individualism and an exclusive devotion to art and literature to play his part in society, was Dorothea Schlegel. This is particularly suggestive of Dorothea's role in Ladislav's decision to serve society. Wernaer describes the influence of Dorothea Schlegel on her husband: 'Through this harmonious union she exerted a direct influence on him, a gentle influence, which she tried to hide even from herself.'¹⁹ It was she who was eager that he should take up a political career instead of devoting himself entirely to literature and aesthetics. According to Wernaer,

[She] had occasional visions that Friedrich would, at some time in the future, give up his literary career and take up another occupation. 'Should Providence give us a *country*,' she wrote to Schleiermacher, 'I am sure he [Friedrich] will then be a citizen.' Her visions turned out to be true.²⁰

And R. Haym states in *Die Romantische Schule* that '[s]he became really fond of him only when he began to prove his worth as a competent citizen in a genuine state'.²¹

Similarly, in *Middlemarch* it is the influence of Dorothea on Ladislav that makes him return to the town and act for the social good. The change that has taken place in him is made apparent by Dorothea in a conversation with him when he is on the point of leaving Middlemarch:

I have heard from my uncle how well you speak in public, so that every one is sorry when you leave off, and how clearly you can explain things. And you care that justice should be done to everyone. I am so glad. When we were in Rome, I thought you only cared for poetry and art, and the things that adorn life for us who are well off. But now I know you think about the rest of the world. (M, 534)

Dorothea's great quality is her ability to influence people by the strength of her idealism, and this has powerfully affected Ladislav:

But that simplicity of hers, holding up an ideal for others in her believing conception of them, was one of the great powers of her womanhood. And it had from the first acted strongly on Will Ladislav ... he felt that in her mind he had found his highest estimate. (M, 760)

Without the influence of Dorothea, we are made to feel, Ladislav would have remained a rootless aesthete.

If the case I have presented is persuasive and Eliot intended Dorothea and Ladislav to be symbolically related to the Schlegels – reinforcing the underlying themes that the Romantics should reject social alienation and direct their

energies towards trying to change the world for the better, and that women, even if they were greatly restricted at this time in making a direct contribution to the social good, should exploit their potential for ardent feeling and exert influence on men for this purpose – why do Eliot's later Romantics fail to match in any respect the achievements and cultural influence of the Schlegels? The ending of *Middlemarch* has often been perceived as pessimistic and even depressing. In contrast to Casaubon, there may appear to be no fundamental barrier to Dorothea and Ladislav being capable of emulating their symbolic counterparts, but instead they are associated with 'insignificant people' whose lives are 'spent ... in channels which had no great name on earth' (M, 822). However, as I will argue more fully later, the role of symbolism in Eliot, as in modernist texts, is not necessarily to allow the level of realism to be transcended or elevated; there is always a certain distance or tension between the two. With regard to Dorothea and Ladislav, it is implied that the 'medium' or cultural and historical circumstance that shaped and made possible the achievements of high Romanticism has changed in the period following it; at the time the novel is set the major figures of the second generation of English Romantics are all dead, and Friedrich Schlegel himself died in 1829. But the novel also suggests that very few people can be heroes of culture and play a significant role in shaping society, and luck – a preoccupation of Eliot's as I shall discuss in detail in the final chapter – plays a part in that. This should not, however, be seen as invoking pessimism. Pessimism would rather consist in believing that the lives of those who are 'later born' than those who made a great contribution to their culture and so are unable to emulate their achievements are inevitably failures. The idealism of the Romantics is not worthless or devalued by being manifested at a more ordinary cultural level for, as the narrator states, 'the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts' (M, 822). For readers and critics who want the uplift of the heroic, *Middlemarch* does not have a happy ending, which is not to deny that the heroic has value in inspiring people, but what the ending implies, I would argue, is that devaluing anything less is absurdly elitist and anti-democratic in spirit.