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# ”The varying experiments of Time”: adapting the past, transmitting the future in Middlemarch and Middlemarch, the series

Louise Dolo

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**UNIVERSITE RENNES 2**

**MEMOIRE DE RECHERCHE**

**Master 2 Recherche • Master LLCER Aires  
Anglophones**

**Etudes anglaises**

**“The varying experiments of Time”:  
adapting the past, transmitting the  
future in *Middlemarch* and  
*Middlemarch, the series***

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**Sous la direction de Maria TANG**

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## Table of contents

<b>Engagement au respect des principes d'honnêteté intellectuelle</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 1: The transmission of a heritage, from memory to deconstruction</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>I- A work of memory</b>	<b>18</b>
I A – Nostalgia	19
I B- An analogous format	23
I C- How to recognise the world of <i>Middlemarch</i>	26
<b>II- A critical view of the past</b>	<b>29</b>
II A- The novel's critical vision of the past	30
II B- Death	33
II C- Casaubon, a figure of the past	37
<b>III- Deconstructing the novel</b>	<b>41</b>
III A- A desire to deconstruct	42
III B- A challenging vision of expectations	45
III C- Erasure of Victorian conventions	48
<b>Chapter 2: Transmission from the past to the present, a re-actualisation of the novel</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>I- A daring adaptation, but is novelty modernity?</b>	<b>52</b>
I A- An inclusive adaptation	53
I B - A feminist rewriting?	57
I C - The transposition of space and time	61
<b>II- Modernity as re-actualization</b>	<b>64</b>
II A- <i>Middlemarch</i> as the novel of reform	65
II B- New technologies as the new science	69
<b>III- A postmodern adaptation</b>	<b>73</b>
III A- Subversion of the text	74
III B- Subversion of the relation between the creator and the audience	78
III C- The weight of time and history	82

<b>Chapter 3: Transmission from the past and the present to the future: youth takes centre stage</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>I- Transmission into the present</b>	<b>87</b>
I A- A timeless fiction?	88
I B- Persistence	91
I C- An open future	94
<b>II- A focus on youth</b>	<b>96</b>
II A - The depiction of a specific period of life	97
II B - <i>Middlemarch</i> as a <i>Bildungsroman</i> ?	101
II C- The community	106
<b>III- Blurring frontiers between the agents</b>	<b>109</b>
III A - The question of authority	110
III B - The narration process	114
III C - The multiplicity of agents	118
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Works Cited</b>	<b>126</b>

## Table of illustrations

<b>Figure 1: typographical design of Middlemarch, the series' title</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Figure 2: Buckley's characteristics of the Bildungsroman in Middlemarch</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Figure 3: Middlemarch, the series, brand image</b>	<b>118</b>

## Introduction

A few years ago, the BBC organised a poll to determine which books constituted “the 100 greatest British novels”. With 42% of the literary critics who participated in the poll voting in its favour, George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* was declared winner by a landslide (Ciabattari). Two reasons make this result meaningful for this study: the poll is recent – the list was published in December 2015 – and the voters were 82 book reviewers or literary scholars coming from all over the world. Thus, this “outsider’s perspective on the best in British literature” (Ciabattari) reveals that *Middlemarch* has an appeal for non-British people, as demonstrated in a recent rewriting of the novel, *Middlemarch, the series*. Like the poll, this web-series is the work of an “outsider”, namely an American producer called Rebecca Shoptaw, which was released in 2017. The series does not only meet a personal preference but also reflects a liking which is shared by many people knowing *Middlemarch* overseas in our time.

This current attraction for *Middlemarch* reveals a taste for the Victorian era, as the novel was published between 1871 and 1872, and relates a story which unfolds forty years before, between 1829 and 1832. However, *Middlemarch, the series* does not reproduce a Victorian setting as the series takes place in the 21st century. The gap between the two periods is not the only difference in the setting as the novel unfolds in Middlemarch, a provincial town in England, while the series is set in the USA, in Middlemarch, Connecticut, and more specifically at Lowick College, the local university. In both cases, Middlemarch is the name of the town, but the two works do not focus on the same community. On the one hand, George Eliot’s narrative intends on depicting the life of all the inhabitants of a provincial town, including elderly persons, such as Peter Featherstone who is repeatedly called “Old Featherstone” (Eliot 74), and children like Ben and Letty Garth who are less than 9 years old.

On the other hand, *Middlemarch, the series* stages only young people who are students at university, meaning that all other characters from the novel are either erased – like the main characters’ parents, including the Garths or the Vincys – or rejuvenated, like Casaubon who becomes a 25-year-old graduate student.

Thus, the characters of the series are not entirely identical with those of the novel. Some of them look similar, like Fred and Rosamond Vincy whose identities are retained in the series, or Dorothea Brooke who keeps her real name but is nicknamed Dot by the other protagonists. Some names slightly differ, like Tertius Lydgate who is turned into Thomas Lydgate, or Celia Brooke who becomes Celia Arroyo. But the main alterations relate to gender changes, like Will Ladislaw, a man in the novel, who is Billie Ladislaw, a woman, in the series. Conversely, the woman Mary Garth in *Middlemarch* changes for the man Max Garth in *Middlemarch, the series*. Finally, the character of James Chettam is adapted into Jaime Chettam, a non-binary protagonist. These modifications imply changes of the characters’ sexual orientations, as the couples formed by Fred and Mary, or Dorothea and Will become homosexual relationships in the series. In these circumstances, the aim of the series is to reproduce the plot of *Middlemarch* while taking into account all these alterations to the initial context.

For all that, the similarities in the plot, the characters, and the text of the two works make clear that the series’ rewriting retains a certain closeness to the original, which invites us to look at the relationship between the two works. Julie Sanders compares adaptation and appropriation in her eponymous book, and explains that adaptation often deals “with reinterpretations of established (canonical or perhaps just well-known) texts in new generic contexts or perhaps with relocations of an ‘original’ or source text’s cultural and/or temporal setting, which may or may not invoke a generic shift” (Sanders 24) while “appropriations tend

to have a more complicated, intricate” relationship with the canonical work, which “can therefore seem more sideways or deflected” (36). Despite an intricate relationship with the novel, *Middlemarch, the series* still presents an obvious reinterpretation of the Victorian work that is already visible in its title, which is a recurrent feature in adaptations (Sanders 35). Thus, the series can be defined as a “transpositional practice”, transposing George Eliot’s novel, in the aim of “exploring, even celebrating, ongoing interactions” (22).

The specificities of *Middlemarch, the series* may be justified, according to Sanders, by the notion of “proximation” which “brings the text closer to the audience’s personal frame of reference, allowing always for variation between local contexts and audiences” (26). But as proximation brings the adaptation closer to the audience, it also takes it away from the original by highlighting the time-gap between the two. While the legacy of *Middlemarch* is recognisable, the series’ relationship to the canon is, nonetheless, unclear: instead of representing the novel on screen, the series offers a discussion of *Middlemarch* and invites the audience to consider both works together, as a process of “ongoing interactions”, as mentioned by Sanders. Thus, these interactions give rise to two distinct issues, the first one being the relation between the novel and the series, which evolves as the interactions progress, and the other one being the notion of transmission, from the novel to the series but also starting from the series.

The definition of the relation between the two works will be examined – questioning transfiction or even fanfiction before arguing that this relation resorts to intertextuality – but first, the series’ connection with the Victorian period requires to be understood. In an article entitled “(Re)workings of Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Definitions, Terminology, Contexts”, Andrea Kirchknopf summed up and compared the different terms referring to adaptations of Victorian novels. From this study, the term “post-Victorian” appears to be the most relevant



for the series as it refers to “contemporary reworkings of Victorian texts” (Kirchknopf 66). Kirchknopf highlights the complete aspect of post-Victorian writings as “the existing debate between the nostalgic and innovative aspects of Victorian” is stressed while “awareness of its historicity” is raised (66). Despite its visual medium, the word “text” applies to the series since “cinematic readings of canonical novels” are frequent and since “adaptation studies also provide a good example for the emerging interdisciplinarity of research invited by the post-Victorian phenomenon” (71). Kirchknopf also adds that the Victorian and the postmodern are studied together in post-Victorian texts (14), which invites us to look at the postmodern aspects in the series.

The notion of transmission is harder to determine because the concept is vague, as shown in the definition of the verb transmit: “To cause (a thing) to pass, go, or be conveyed to another person, place, or thing; to send across an intervening space; to convey, transfer” or figuratively, “to convey or communicate (usually something immaterial) to another or others; to pass on, esp. by inheritance or heredity; to hand down” (‘OED). Thus, transmission may refer to a multiplicity of elements, such as communication, circulation, or inheritance, and this diversity is already visible in *Middlemarch*: communication is developed through gossip but is also noticeable in the exchanges of notes and bills; the issue of circulation is raised in the debates over the construction of the railway; inheritance is at stake for several characters, occurring after the death of Featherstone and Casaubon, or related to the hidden past of Bulstrode and Will; transmission is also viral as in the case of the Cholera epidemic. Likewise, the series questions the use of social networks as a communication tool and expounds on the transmission of knowledge by setting its plot at university, presenting characters doing research like Casaubon, or offering a post in the Featherstone institution.

However, transmission is not limited to the plots but is also taking place outside the fiction. The adaptation process implies the transmission of the plot from the novel to the series, which leads to observing not only the result of this transmission as depicted in the series, but also the remains of the original work which achieved posterity because they are still present in the recent adaptation. The understanding of the intertextual relation between *Middlemarch* and *Middlemarch, the series*, as evoked above, will help determine the nature of the transmission between the two works and show in what way the process takes place. Once this process is clarified, the series may be considered not only the simple outcome of the transmission process, but a stage in the line of transmission which started with George Eliot's novel, and which extends beyond the series. As the latter offers a new vision of *Middlemarch* by proposing an alternative fiction, transmission may be constructed on both the novel and this new vision.

Besides, the topics mentioned above relate to the object being transmitted, but the process also implies modalities for this transmission to happen. The question of the means of transmission arises in the adaptation of the narrative voice, in charge of expressing the story in the novel, as it disappears from the series. Indeed, the adaptation takes the form of a vlog, which involves the replacement of the narrator by the discourses of the characters taking place directly in front of the camera. Thus, the canal of transmission also shifts from verbal to oral and even to non-verbal thanks to the visual images of the series. The series being a visual medium, the modality of reception changes too, since the work has been broadcast on the web, more precisely on the YouTube platform. Therefore, the viewers of the series differ from the readers of the novel, but this audience needs to be defined to understand their inclination in the adaptation of a Victorian novel. Finally, transmission implies a distance between the

source object and its destination, but a continuity at the same time, as the process of transmission is uninterrupted.

As the elements mentioned and their consequences are too numerous for this study, the field of transmission will be narrowed to its temporal aspects, for which the latter point on the need for both distance and continuity is particularly significant. Indeed, continuity is achieved since time is by definition continuous, but distance is also present in the identification of three very distinct temporal periods which are the past, the present, and the future. Again, the definition of these three periods is not fixed as they are intermingled in both works and outside them. On the one hand, the past – either individual or collective as in history or myths – is often evoked in *Middlemarch*, but the action of the novel is also anchored in the past regarding the time of narration, which takes place forty years later. On the other hand, the novel itself is the past of the series, but contrary to George Eliot's work which associates the periods of narration and publication, the series' period of reception is situated in the future in comparison to the present time of the fiction. This intermingling of the past, the present, and the future highlights the necessary connection between the two works to understand the process of transmission.

The issue of time is described as a major concern in *Middlemarch* from the first sentence of the novel which lays emphasis on the "varying experiments of Time" (xiii). Even though its variations are acknowledged from the outset, the novel mostly points out a divide between the past and the present, highlighted by Dorothea who focuses on the "here—now—in England" to achieve her aim at a meaningful life (18). While the characters may use the past as a comparison, a potential impact on the future is not considered. Likewise, the protagonists of *Middlemarch, the series* also express concerns over the issue of time, like Dot trying to find the "meaning of life" (ep.35), but their impact on the future is a possibility assessed by the

characters. Thus, the comparison between the two works is required to enable the audience to have an overview of the different dynamics regarding time – either looking towards the past, as in the novel, or envisaging the future like the series. As such, the comparison makes the study of transmission relevant to understand both the role played by the narrative of *Middlemarch* to different periods, whether Victorian or contemporary, and the evolution of this process as time goes by.

The emphasis on youth, as mentioned above with the omnipresence of young characters in the series, leads to the future as well, as Moretti claims in *The Way of the World*: “Youth is, so to speak, modernity’s ‘essence’, the sign of a world that seeks its meaning in the future rather than in the past” (Moretti 5). However, Moretti adds that the characters emphasise modernity, which triggers several questions concerning the place of the latter in *Middlemarch, the series*, and how it is expressed in the adaptation. It may be asked whether the series’ modernity comes from novelty or is a transposition of the novel’s modern elements. Besides, modernity confronts postmodernism, which was suggested as part and characteristic of the post-Victorian texts, and thus, it leads to distinguishing the daring aspects caused by the transposition in the present from real modernity. The modern choices made by the series display several aspects that oppose the idea of a smooth transmission but reflect instead the complexity of the creation process of a contemporary adaptation which discusses the original work while keeping its significance for the present and the future times.

The first step in this study of transmission consists in understanding the connection with the past. The past can be considered a legacy, which is expressed in nostalgia especially, as shown in the series’ repetitions of the novel’s plot, characters, text, or veiled references like Celia’s baby who is only evoked in the title of episode 28. These nostalgic aspects make the series appear as a memory work on *Middlemarch*, which is visible in the analogous formats

of both works and their similar division in numerous chapters or episodes, and in the work achieved to enable the audience to recognise the world of *Middlemarch*, namely the common features in both works, based on what remains identical after the transmission to the series, such as the identities of Fred or Rosamond Vincy. However, this heritage from the novel is not completely accepted since both works present a critical vision of the past: the novel is critical of its own past, be it individual as in the case of Will's inheritance, or collective as in the resort to myth, while the series is critical of the novel as representative of the Victorian period. This analysis of the past is particularly visible in some characters, like Casaubon, which is why his behaviour needs to be detailed as he stands for a scholar stuck in the past without acknowledging the relevance of his work for the present. Likewise, the representation of deaths also helps discuss the relation to the past as this transition period, which cuts the links the deceased had with the present, is much challenged in the transmission between the novel and the series.

The series' critical vision leads to question if it debunks the past, based on its desire to differ from the Victorian period and the Britishness which are depicted in the novel. The series is also distinguishable from the novel in the way it deals with expectations, those of the characters, such as Lydgate's and Rosamond's false ideas regarding the reality of marriage, but also those of the knowing readers who are watching *Middlemarch, the series* while comparing it to the events that happen in the novel. This debunking of expectations is completed by the erasure of Victorian conventions on the part of the series, regarding family or orphanhood, which contributes to widening the gap between the Victorian original work and its adaptation. Thus, the vision of the past expressed in the series shows a clear refusal of the adaptation process as a simple representation of the novel on screen but tries to challenge the past as represented by and depicted in the novel.

Then, the question that arises is how this rejection of the past and its conventions impacts on the present, and understanding this point is the aim of chapter 2, as it focuses on the aspects that create a discrepancy with the novel. The modernity attributed to the novel stems from these daring aspects, such as the changes of race, gender, or sexual orientation as in the case of Mary Garth who is turned into Max Garth. The purpose in the depiction of the LGBTQ community, which brings a completely new light on *Middlemarch*, will be opposed to the feminist dimension of George Eliot's work – already demonstrated in relation to Dorothea or Mary – and to its echoes in the series, as it is affected by the changes like the disappearance of Mary. Among all these alterations, the most striking certainly is the transposition of place and time which attests to the novelty inherent to the series, but not especially its modernity. In fact, modernity is already at stake in *Middlemarch* through the topic of reform, with the debates on the 1st reform Bill, but also with the gradual changes of morality that Dorothea and her social concerns embody. Modernity is also expressed in the much-developed theme of science, depicted through Lydgate's search for the primitive tissues, but also in George Eliot's scientific method of writing, both of which find an echo in the series' use of the social networks which appear as a tool of communication emphasising gossip for the characters but enabling the audience to access the series at the same time.

These adaptations of the issues already at stake in the novel lead to see the series not as a modern but as a postmodern adaptation, as suggested by its post-Victorian aspect. Some of the postmodern subversions relate to *Middlemarch's* text directly, as a written medium using many visual metaphors which are undermined by the series, despite its visual aspect. The relation between the creator and the audience is also subverted by the vlog format of the series which entails that the characters are in charge of the narration. Nonetheless, it will be necessary to focus on the weight of time and history – already challenging for some characters

of the novel like Dorothea who looks for its meaning – to understand how the subject is treated in the postmodern series, since postmodernism does not only mean subversion but also an increased attention to time, its weight and its relations. The aim of this part will be to understand how this present adaptation manages to take the past into account, which is the purpose of the postmodernist adaptation.

Finally, transmission does not stop at the present, since the future is evoked in the series, hence a focus on its role. The third chapter will show that the narrative of *Middlemarch* is not atemporal, even though some aspects were depicted as meaningful in the present as they were in the past. Rather, an attention to Ricoeur's thesis on the link between time and narrative suggests to see time as persistent through the narrative in question, which makes the future as meaningful as the past and the present are. More than simply evoked, the future is at stake in the relation between the two works, since it is possible to see the common fiction in *Middlemarch* and *Middlemarch, the series* as a future narrative, which aims at making the audience compare distinct potential futures. Indeed, the audience is involved in the creation process, and the young people who compose this audience are concerned by the future since their own prospects are still open and undefined. While a young audience suggests that the series belongs to the young adult genre, the young characters inside the fiction lead to see *Middlemarch* as a *Bildungsroman*, not only for one character but for several of them. Besides, this omnipresence of youth in the audience and among the protagonists suggests that young people are forming a community, which reciprocally highlights the role played by youth.

Last, the frontiers between the past, the present, and the future are unclear, but the definition of the roles played by each agent is blurred as well. The traditional role of the author is undermined by the increasing place taken by the protagonists inside the fiction, and the authority of the series needs to be challenged with regard to the canon. Another figure whose

role is blurred is the narrator as he is absent from the series, which makes other voices emerge, like those of the characters who become new agents in the process of creation and not only fixed objects in the fiction. It brings about a multiplicity of opinions, including, in addition to the characters, the voices of the audience. The intermingling of voices – writer, producer, characters, and viewers – answering each other at different periods, addresses logically the future as it follows from the past and the present. In the end, the study of both works together allow the work of transmission to be always meaningful, bringing new questions as the process of transmission unfolds.



# Chapter 1

## The transmission of a heritage, from memory to deconstruction

### I - A work of memory

The adaptation process expresses a desire to revive a story already existing – namely *Middlemarch* – by reusing constituent elements of the original novel’s identity. The rewriting is a work of memory in that it brings out *Middlemarch*’s plot or characters and comes to question the distinctive aspects of the 19th century novel. What the novel has to offer can be discussed, as these elements constitute the very motivation for making an adaptation and, therefore, the basis of the work of memory; the adaptation process respects the transmission of the essence of George Eliot’s art. Similarities can be found between the original novel and its adaptation as a vlog series, concerning the characters or the plot: in both works, Dorothea Brooke is driven by the search for a meaningful way of life, showing a continuity in the values defended by the characters. It is thus relevant to question how the search for meaningfulness in the adaptation echoes and answers this same search in *Middlemarch*. Similarly, plot twists such as the discovery of Bulstrode’s corruption and Raffle’s blackmail help recognize the original story, despite the erasure of the character involved, as in the case of Bulstrode who does not appear in the series.

The concept leading this reshuffling of the novel's constituent elements seems to be nostalgia, being a particular look over the life represented in *Middlemarch*. But the similarities between the two works are not limited to the plot and characters but can also be observed in the structure of the works, thus showing that the work of memory is not limited to the nostalgia of a certain time and way of life described in *Middlemarch*. The work of memory is about the novel in itself, as a type of writing, a way to disclose the story, or to involve the reader. Therefore, all the similarities are to be questioned concerning the links between *Middlemarch* and its adaptation to understand the basis of the rewriting and make the memory of the original novel appear through the work of transmission.

## I A – Nostalgia

The first motive of rewriting is based on a feeling of nostalgia which invites a return to the original work to find similarities. This idea of nostalgia is expressed by Marjorie Garber in her understanding of sequels in *Quotation Marks*: “the desire for a sequel is part of the impulse to hear stories and to tell them, the desire that they never come to a definitive end” (Garber 73). *Middlemarch, the series* cannot be considered a sequel, which, according to Armelle Parey's definition, refers to “a narrative that goes beyond the ending of a preceding and complete work” (Parey 3). The series is not an extension but a re-writing of George Eliot's novel that keeps the same events to mark out the beginning and the end of the diegesis. However, Parey acknowledges that Garber's definition does not only apply to sequels but to all types of expansions “since they all return to the same diegetical world and pick up pre-existing characters” (Parey 14). Therefore, nostalgia can be found in *Middlemarch, the series*

as the characters and plot it shares with the novel indicate a common source of literary pleasure.

Indeed, nostalgia is about reaching a form of pleasure that was previously achieved through another work. Paradoxically, it can be observed in the repetition or re-enactment of the original novel only, by depicting a loss and putting forward missing elements from the original work. Terry Castle explains in her book *Masquerade and Civilisation* the reason why the “unconscious nostalgia for a past reading pleasure” (Castle 134) can never be fulfilled. The impossibility comes from the reader’s desire to find a new work that “reconstitute[s] its charismatic original” (134), and to find the qualities of the original in the difference with the second. Readers are expecting “a paradoxical kind of textual doubling – a repetition that does not look like one, the old story in a new and unexpected guise” (134). By watching *Middlemarch, the series*, viewers are expecting the pleasure they experienced while reading *Middlemarch*. The sense of repetition is qualified by the change of medium, though. Thanks to the form of the web series, the audience knows from the start that the reading pleasure is confined to the novel. For instance, Eliot’s numerous descriptive passages are lost, as well as certain characters, which entails the disappearance of entire sections of the novel, as in the case of Farebrother. Nostalgia is, therefore, present in the repetition of the plot, the treatment of the characters, and all the references made to George Eliot’s novel.

Besides, the series keeps on relating to the novel through veiled references, especially references to elements that seem to have disappeared. Celia’s baby, for instance, does not exist in the series, which is a logical modification given that the period has changed, and young people are less likely to have babies in the 21st century. However, the baby is still referred to in the title of the episode 28 “Baby steps”. No real baby appears in the episode; therefore, the title figuratively hints at the small progresses made by the characters in the episode. Indeed,

Celia and Jamie make clear they are engaged in a relationship by officially announcing it to Dorothea and by kissing before the camera. Even though there is no such gesture in the novel, the scene draws a parallel with the arrival of James Chettam and Celia's child, which also changes the status of the couple as they are starting a family. These hints enable the series to adapt its storyline to the time without suppressing significant features of the novel.

The series also refers to the themes of the novel, such as gossip which is underlined in the episode 19 "Whispers". Jamie and Celia are reproducing the whisper challenge, which consists in repeating someone's words without understanding them. Based on a "trend", they qualify their game as "completely pointless and super fun". This definition echoes the use of gossip in the novel, which looks like a "trend" in the sense that it is appreciated and shared by the community. It is, nonetheless, an effective tool in its goal to maintain the community's unity and "protect a fantasised self-image", as underlined by D.A Miller in "The Wisdom of Balancing Claims" (Miller 93). The whisper challenge empties gossip of its efficacy by reducing it to a game. Besides, in the vlog, Celia shows the complexity of conveying information during the challenge by mistranslating "Jamie Chettam has the best hair in the universe" by "Jamie Chettam has trouble getting their point across?" (ep.19). This misinterpretation reprises the moment in the novel when Sir James Chettam fails to seduce and propose to Dorothea. Instead, gossip outdistanced him, as Dorothea learns of his intentions by Celia to whom the servant Tantripp reported "that Sir James's man knew from Mrs. Cadwallader's maid that Sir James was to marry the eldest Miss Brooke." (22) The long chain of communication brings false information, and the series tries to depict this flaw through the whisper challenge, thus creating a reflection on the themes of *Middlemarch* without reproducing the scene with all the characters – Tantripp, Mrs Cadwallader and her maid, or Sir James's man – all absent in the series.

What's more, the adaptation makes hints at the novel by directly quoting some terms, sometimes even sentences, used by George Eliot in her work. The narrator is for instance commenting upon Dorothea's sadness during her honeymoon in Rome, at a moment when she is alone, crying. The narrator declares: "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heartbeat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence" (Eliot 135). In the series, Billie Ladislav reads a poem she wrote that is very similar to these famous lines. The poem, called "the other side of silence", appears in the eponymous episode:

"These days I wish I had a keen feeling  
For the rhythmic pulse of all ordinary life.  
It'd be like hearing the grass grow,  
The squirrel's heartbeat,  
Like trying to listen for the roar that lies on the other side of silence." (ep.38)

The poem is almost a word-for-word transcription of George Eliot's writing, even though the content is taken in charge by a character – Billie Ladislav – and not by the narrator anymore. Because in the novel the narrator was assessing Dorothea's situation, the viewer, who watches the series with this reference in mind, therefore understands that Billie's poem is referring to Dorothea, and the "you" mentioned next in the poem is not unknown anymore: "you are the sum of a million metaphors/ With a smile that lights up your transparent skin" (ep.38). The subtle references to the text create a system of links between the two works through which the series asserts its roots in the novel.

## I B- An analogous format

The transmission of a memory from the first work to the second is achieved by conveying a feeling of nostalgia, but also through the numerous similarities in their respective plots and formats. The characters are recognisable through their names which are either identical, like Fred Vincy in both the novel and the series, or similar, like James Chettam becoming Jamie Chettam. The characters in the series are driven by the same motives as their homonyms in the novel. Thus, Lydgate is originally a doctor in *Middlemarch* and becomes a student applying for medical school in the series. Another instance is the character of Dorothea who has kept her ambitions from the novel: her attempt is to “lead a grand life” (18), which can be seen through her values and her actions, turned towards the well-being of others. For instance, she plans on building cottages to improve the living conditions of poor tenants, and “to make the life of poverty beautiful” (20). In the series, Dorothea’s generous behaviour is noticeable in her film project. Her documentary is based on the lives of people surrounding her. She acknowledges that they are “not important causes or world events” but “it’s a story worth telling” (ep.1) to put emphasis on the “ordinary lives of a group of ordinary college students” (ep.1), thus giving importance to people who would not receive attention otherwise. In both cases, the protagonist is creating projects for the sake of others, which allows Dorothea’s character to keep a coherence in both narratives through the transmission of her values and behaviour.

Moreover, the plot is also adapted in the series to correspond to the way the novel unfolds, despite the changes of setting, time, and characters. Bulstrode is a secondary character in *Middlemarch* who disappears from the series. For all that, he is still mentioned by other characters and the plot developed around him in the novel is still adapted in the series. In the novel, Bulstrode is a wealthy banker with a dubious past, as he made his fortune by

selling stolen goods and through the inheritance of his first wife, by hiding the existence and location of her daughter and grandson. Raffles is the one character aware of Bulstrode's swindle and blackmails him in return. Even if Bulstrode is not present in the series, John Raffles appears in episode 53 and explains how he discovered that "Professor Bulstrode" was involved in a side-business. Like his homonym in the novel, the professor is making money in an illegal way by selling pre-written papers to his students. Raffles takes advantage of this fraud to blackmail Bulstrode as well. Thus, the series does not stage Bulstrode as a real protagonist but still develops his plot by taking over the topics of a dubious past and of blackmail, which enables the viewers of the series to recognise the original plot of *Middlemarch*.

Similarities in the plot are not unusual in the case of an adaptation, but it is worth noticing that the two works also display similar formats. Despite an obvious difference of medium – a book and a vlog series – both unfold over several months and are divided into parts of varying length. Indeed, *Middlemarch* was published as four volumes containing two books each, whose length is based on the coherence of the narration and not on commercial reasons. Each book contains between nine and fifteen chapters, and George Eliot was free in the number of pages she would give to her publisher, as Laurel Brake points out in "Star Turn? Magazine, Part-Issue, and Book Serialization": she "did not wish to be confined in production of numbers of uniform length, and in the event, part IV is 377 pages while V is only 191" (Brake 215). This discrepancy between different parts was unusual for the type of publication but offset by the length of each book which was consistent enough to form a small volume. Likewise, *Middlemarch the series* is long in that it comprises seventy episodes and two bonus episodes. The length of each episode is equally flexible, as they vary between 1:14 minute for the shortest one and 10:31 minutes for the longest. Thus, the treatment of the plot in the series follows the same freedom as George Eliot's publication of her novel into parts.

The serialisation of *Middlemarch* was also intrinsically linked to its multi-plot aspect as it emphasised the unity of the story through the intermingling of the plots. Indeed, George Eliot originally planned to write two distinct stories, one called *Miss Brooke* narrating Dorothea's story, and the other called *Middlemarch* evolving around the Vincys and the Garths. Martin Carol explains in *George Eliot's Serial Fiction* that readers can notice the process of two distinct stories progressively merging to form a whole. For instance, in Book 2 "Old and Young", the chapters 13 to 18 all evoke Lydgate while Dorothea only reappears in chapter 19. However, in Book 6 "The Widow and The Wife", all plots are interwoven. "What is striking is not only the intermingling, which Victorian readers expected by the later parts of a multi-plot novel, but the way in which, by book 6, Eliot has become skilled in framing her story as a whole." (Carol 206) The series follows the same pattern of progressive merging of the plots: the first four episodes unfold around Dot while the following two – quite rightly called "Meet the Vincys" – are exclusively devoted to the presentation of Fred and Rosamond. In both works, the multi-plot appears progressively and stages instalments in the end that unite the characters coming from different plots, even different stories in the case of Rosamond and Dorothea's meeting – the former originally coming from *Middlemarch* and the latter from *Miss Brooke*.

Besides, both works take advantage of their division into parts to allow intervals between the distribution of each instalment. *Middlemarch* was a bi-monthly serial, meaning the readers had to wait two months before the distribution of the next volume. Several advantages are drawn from this type of publishing. For Carol, it served Eliot's realist depictions of life as it laid emphasis on the time axis. "The serial story reinforced the illusion of time passing and events receding because of the actual passage of time in the weekly, monthly, or bimonthly pauses between instalments" (241). Similarly, the series released its episodes one



after another on Mondays and Wednesdays in 2017, between March 15th and December 1st, which also gave space to the viewers to imagine how the story would unfold. This type of distribution reinforces the link between the work and the audience; it enables the emergence of a “dialogue between reader and text or between reader and reader” (Carol 244), which could be seen both in the case of *Middlemarch*, with the numerous reviews including readers’ opinions, and in *Middlemarch, the series*, with the appearance of an online community<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the series takes over the format and the method that contributed to the success of George Eliot’s work.

### I C- How to recognise the world of *Middlemarch*

The work of memory aims at allowing the series’ viewers to recognise George Eliot’s work, which assumes a clear relationship between the two works. As *Middlemarch, the series* features the same plot and characters as the novel, the former could be considered a “transfiction” at first sight. Transfiction was defined by Richard St Gelais in *Fictions Transfuges* as a phenomenon by which two texts refer to the same fiction (7). This phenomenon appears by sharing characters, a fictional universe, or extending the plot, to enable the reader to establish links between the two texts. The question of transfiction arises in the case of *Middlemarch, the series* since some characters, like Fred and Rosamond Vincy, retain their identity in both works and could be considered transfictional characters directly extracted from *Middlemarch* to be part of the series. For all that, the plot of the series is a repetition of the first one instead of an extension, and the temporal gap implies that the characters of the

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://middlemarchseries.tumblr.com/>

The use of social networks, such as tumblr, to establish an online community will be developed in the 3rd chapter of this study.

series re-enact the novel's protagonists instead of being the same individuals. Consequently, the fictional universe is not shared and extended from one text to the other, but the series rather imitates the world of *Middlemarch* to the point of making it recognisable.

As it happens, St Gelais points out the difference between migration and imitation, the former being a feature of transfiction while the latter leads to the creation of a hypertext, as defined by Genette in *Palimpsestes*: "Any text derived from an anterior text by simple transformation [...] or indirect transformation: this will be called imitation"<sup>2</sup> (Genette 13). The derivation of the hypertext – *Middlemarch, the series* in this case – from its hypotext – *Middlemarch* – can be more or less extensive and entails changes that obfuscate the recognition of the hypotext. In the series, the changes are the transposition of the diegesis and the consequences that stem from it, but overall, the plot and the characters' personalities remain identical. Therefore, the series defines itself as an independent fiction whose light transposition from its hypotext enables the viewers to recognise the world of *Middlemarch* thanks to the similarities between the two works.

As critics like Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation*, defend, creating a coherent world is necessary to develop links between several works in the case of adaptation. What is adapted is not the story but rather the story world: world building replaced "thematic and narrative persistence" (Hutcheon 4), which leads to look for the elements constituting the world of *Middlemarch*. At first sight, the 19th century English town and the 21st century are so far apart that there is no obvious connection which would link them as identical places. The elements defining the world of *Middlemarch*, if not its space and time frame, are rather its components, namely its characters. They are indeed the ones who persist over the transposition and who

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<sup>2</sup> « Tout texte dérivé d'un texte antérieur par transformation simple [...] ou par transformation indirecte : nous dirons imitation. » (my translation)

demonstrate a direct connection between the two works. Both the novel and the series use a set of characters who constitute the story world of Middlemarch through their relationships and interactions. This consistency does not only create a common frame for both fictions, but it produces a basis for further adaptation, by considering “world building as an essential component of developing a brand identity that can be extended across platforms”, according to Siobhan O’Flynn (196). Thus, world building allows the recognition of the original novel and at the same time, the development of other texts, based on the same world, so that adaptations and transmedia storytelling can take place.

The series could not exist without displaying similarities to *Middlemarch*, as the concept of adaptation implies the recognition of the relationship between the two works. The choice to adapt the novel is a way to pay tribute to George Eliot’s work while proposing a new version, which is why the work of memory is not just about expressing nostalgia. It is also a reflection on the novel by demonstrating a critical ability as to the relationship to the past. In this way, the past can be considered the Victorian period of *Middlemarch* which brings about a feeling of nostalgia and the pleasure of adaptation on the one hand, and on the other hand, the past for the characters of the fiction which entails consequences on their behaviours in the present. This second possibility invites us not only to see the series as a nostalgic re-writing of an idealised period that was the Victorian time of *Middlemarch*, but also to study the past with a critical view to grasp its further implications.

## II- A critical view of the past

The notion of transmission requires choices over whether to keep or alter what is presented in the original work, a dilemma at stake in the series: by setting its plot in the 21st century and claiming its refusal of the past as in Celia's interjection "It's not the Victorian era!" (ep.31), it contrasts with the novel and deploys a reflection on its heritage. But before analysing how the series unties itself from the past, it is worth noticing that this critical view is already apparent in *Middlemarch*, which reflects the vision the Victorians brought to bear upon their own past in multiple ways. First, the relationship between young and old characters foregrounds the divide between generations, a gap that is not visible in the series because of the erasure of adults; however, it is developed by George Eliot in the exchanges between young characters such as Dorothea Brooke or Mary Garth and older figures like Edward Casaubon or Peter Featherstone. Moreover, the past is also at stake in the relation to bygone times, through the numerous allusions to mythology for instance, especially with regard to Dorothea's character who is incessantly compared to mythological figures.

Relations to the past are presented in the novel as alternatively dangerous, as in the case of Bulstrode, ironic, as illustrated by Featherstone's lack of future, or idealised when it comes to mythology. These relations are also challenged when a character dies, like Casaubon or Featherstone: indeed, insofar as death represents the moment of transition which makes a character's entire life belong to the past, it is also the boundary between the past and the present. Death is omnipresent in the novel but disappears from the series, which both explains and is explained by the changes of attitude towards the past. Finally, these multiple relations to the past are embodied in one single character, Casaubon, who is confronted at once with

mythology, old age, and death. This protagonist is relevant to study so as to understand the critical view towards the past which is presented by the novel and taken over in the series.

## II A- The novel's critical vision of the past

Accessing the past of characters is not an easy task in George Eliot's novel for the past is often hidden. If the story of Lydgate for instance is narrated, other characters seem to have always been present in Middlemarch, such as the Vincys or the Brookes, and others have an unknown past, like Bulstrode or Ladislaw. This ignorance of the past gives the novel a "static" aspect, "regarded simply as a story about a few individuals", as indicated by Mason in "*Middlemarch and History*" (Mason 419). He explains that history gives dynamism to the story because the "onward passage of human beings in time" is not shown (420). However, this fixity of the protagonists in the present might not depend on a general sense of history but rather to the hiding of individual stories by some characters, hence the chaos that arises when Will and Bulstrode's pasts are revealed. Indeed, Bulstrode hid his activity as a pawnbroker that enabled him to make his fortune illegally. Besides, he concealed from his first wife Mrs Dunkirk, the widow of his former employer, the location of her daughter and grandson Will, which prevented them from receiving their inheritance and thus increased Bulstrode's own wealth. The revelation brings confusion for the whole town and substantial changes for some secondary characters, like Harriet Bulstrode who endures "shame" or "bitter[ness]": "the twenty years in which she had believed in him and venerated him by virtue of his concealments came back with particulars that made them seem an odious deceit" (517). Hiding one's past entails a series of negative impacts which invites both Middlemarchers and readers to be wary of concealment.

This distrust of the past is contrasted with an interest for the future, which the narrator comments on ironically regarding the oldest characters. Featherstone for instance, accords particular attention to the future, while knowing he is about to die: “so far as he was preoccupied with a future life, it was with one of gratification inside his coffin” (222). The attention he pays to his will seems excessive, hence the ironic mention of the coffin, as he nearly belongs to the past, not to the future. The other old character, Casaubon, is mocked likewise, as, the day before his death, he asks for Dorothea’s help to start a new task: having “newly arranged” the library in order to implement “the first step in a sifting process which [he] ha[s] long had in view” (329), he decides, when they stop the task, that they “will resume [their] work to-morrow” (330). Casaubon does not consider his project to be restricted by time, and thus he is unable to foresee an end to his writing of the *Key to all Mythologies*. His death is an abrupt limit to both his life and his work for nothing is achieved when he passes away. As the narrator mentions in a brief aside, “(Not that Mr. Casaubon called the future volumes a tomb; he called them the *Key to all Mythologies*)” (342), which ironically suggests that his work also encountered a sudden end. Therefore, Casaubon’s unfulfilled book cannot be used in the future and becomes a useless remainder of his past life.

Casaubon and Featherstone’s belonging to the past is also emphasised in comparison to the young women with whom they interact just before they die. In both cases, they summon young people in the middle of the night before their respective deaths, to request impossible tasks: Mary Garth is asked by Featherstone to bring him his will so that he can modify it, and Casaubon expects Dorothea to promise she will “carry out [his] wishes” and “apply [her]self to do what [he] should desire” (331). But in both cases, their last requests are not respected. Barbara Hardy explains in *The Novels of George Eliot* that Casaubon and Featherstone are indeed linked by their attempt to control the young: “Both try to clutch the

living in a dead hand (Casaubon's dead grasp is called 'the cold grasp'), and both fail: Dorothea gives up her fortune and Rigg sells his father's house to Bulstrode" (Hardy 121). She also points out that they are associated by the dead hand, namely the name of the book in which Casaubon's death is narrated, which is a term first mentioned in "the rigid clutch of his dead hand" in relation to Featherstone (222). But the dead hands remain ineffective as the failure of their requests demonstrates, which make Featherstone and Casaubon belong to the past in which they cannot exert any influence on the present and the living.

Casaubon's attempt to influence the present was through the writing of a book, but the failure of the *Key to all Mythologies* is one of the many examples in the novel that show how myths, that is, the reference to an idealised past, cannot be translated into the present, however potent they may be in conjuring an imaginary past. These references are pervasive and associate several characters and their projects with myths. Despite his pursuit of rational knowledge, Lydgate's wish to achieve a form of immortality through scientific discoveries compares him with a form of ancient hero whose models, "the great originators", are "lifted up among the constellations", thus reaching a celestial position (100). Ground-breaking discoveries would even offer him a god-like status as he considers he is on a "course towards final companionship with the immortals" (100), that is an ambition which contrasts with the disinterested help he provides to Middlemarchers. However, this wish for immortality is ironically debunked by his early death "when he was only fifty", and his status as a hero is never reached since "he always regarded himself as a failure" (575) which shows the inadequacy of myths for the present.

The multiplicity of mythological references, often used to describe Dorothea, such as Cleopatra, Ariadne (131), or Antigone (132), invites the reader to question the benefit of these recurrent allusions to the past to understand the present narrative. The latter figure,

Antigone, is particularly significant because it relies on a conflictual understanding of myths. Dorothea's dilemma makes her waver between helping Ladislaw and respecting Casaubon's authority, which rewrites Antigone's decision to oppose her uncle's order to bury her brother according to religious traditions. As Maria Tang explains in "End(s) of Myth in *Middlemarch*", the relevance of the comparison between Dorothea and Antigone does not lie in the similar plots but in the state of conflict that emerges from the confrontation of two sources that appear as valid and respectable. "The myth of Antigone does not enact, perform or embody the resolution of a contradiction, but instead provokes in the receiver of the myth an awareness of the ongoing *construction* of a contradiction and its effects" (Tang 215). Therefore, the myth cannot solve Dorothea's dilemma as it only emphasises the several discourses that are opposed. George Eliot's use and reflection on past texts is based on a "recognition of claims (of readings, of interpretations) whose validity, but also whose *invalidity*, is constructed *in relation to other claims*" (Tang 216). This agonistic reading of myth puts into question the use of references to the past as it does not provide any understanding of the present but only highlights contradictions. Yet, the references to the past seem to be motivated by their very relation to the present, which leads to discuss this link between two less distant moments in time. The proximity between the past and the present is found in the transition from one to the other, that is the moment of death.

## II B- Death

A recurrent element of George Eliot's fiction, which stands in sharp contrast with the present, is death, as several characters pass away in the novel. Transmission is significant both in the relation of the characters towards dead protagonists, and their transition from living



beings to characters belonging to the past. In the series however, no one dies, which entails substantial changes in the narrative. Although death is not present, it is not totally erased but rather softened or replaced. The transposition of the narrative into a 21st century setting can be an explanation for this soft depiction of demise, as the same event would have much more dramatic consequences in our era. As depicting the death of some characters would be tragic, the series takes the opposite view and evokes death for comical purposes. Jamie is for instance summoned to Fred's "deathbed" (ep.26) even though the latter is only sick because he went outside while it rained. The depiction of the illness is based upon elements usually associated with death, such as the deathbed, the tragic, or the agony, as Fred mentions: "Alas, I have been bedridden by my tragic illness [...] convalescing in agony" (ep.26). This representation of illness becomes comical because of the exaggerated association with death proclaimed by Fred when he does not seem sick. Indeed, he does not hesitate to leave his bed to question his sister on her relationship with Lydgate. Death is not threatening enough for 21st century characters, which explains why it is not seriously depicted in the series as it is in the novel.

For all that, the series does not entirely rule out the novel's focus on death, but rather illustrates the change of attitude towards death, as shown in Casaubon's case. Even though Casaubon is only "towards fifty" (13) when he meets Dorothea, a few months before his death, he is old enough to die of natural causes. Men had indeed a life expectancy of 40.2 years in England in 1841, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Seventy years later, the life expectancy had almost doubled to reach 79 years (ONS). Conversely, the character of Casaubon took years off in the series as he is only 25. Therefore, his young age added to the increased life expectancy makes his death extremely unlikely. Had he died in the series, the consequences would have been totally different, as the event would have been deemed a tragedy and would have entailed sympathy towards the deceased, which is not the case in the

novel. If Dorothea is mourning her late husband, all other characters do not particularly mind his death: Mr Brooke and Sir James Chettam do not hesitate to judge his actions and criticise him the day following his death, on learning the conditions of his last will which stipulates that Dorothea will inherit his money on condition that she does not marry Will Ladislaw. They declare he was a “jealous” man whose will was “a positive insult to Dorothea” as “there never was a meaner, more ungentlemanly action than this” (335). The reactions are not sympathetic towards Casaubon, which would potentially have happened if he was to die in the series. Consequently, the choice of not making Casaubon die reflects a conformity to the attitudes of characters towards him in both the novel and the series.

Yet, Casaubon’s death is not totally erased. As Deborah Lutz explains in *Relics of Death*, the Victorian representation of death was often associated with artefacts, as if they bore a trace of the life of the deceased. This representation “also influenced – and was influenced by – the literary. The body and the book intersected. This sometimes happened with a palpable literariness [...]. A volume was bound in the skin of the individual. Yet, more commonly, this intersection happened figuratively” (Lutz 2). Following this intersection, Casaubon would logically be represented after his death by his work, the *Key to all Mythologies* in the novel, or *Transcendental Otherness and Identity* in the series. However, in both cases, the work is not finished, thus implicating a failure of the object supposed to represent him. Deborah Lutz defines the relics as the “things that prove embodiment, that have the texture of a life lived” (4). The absence of relics in the case of Casaubon's unfinished work implies the absence of “life lived”. Therefore, Casaubon’s failure in writing his thesis in the series is an inversion of the phenomenon described in *Relics of death*: the individual is still alive, but the relic cannot exist, thus reversing the intersection of death and the literary. Moreover, as Casaubon did not write his dissertation in the series, his home university puts an end to his enrolment, thus

marking a definite end to his attempt at writing. Therefore, his actual death is replaced by an academic death, not only through his unfinished work, but also by depriving him from the possibility to write it.

Death is also removed from Rosamond's storyline in the series and replaced elsewhere. In *Middlemarch*, Rosamond gets pregnant but has a miscarriage after going for a horse ride against her husband's advice. In the series, this episode is replaced by a hangover in episode 39, following a party. The removal of the miscarriage is first explained by the change in the Rosamond-Lydgate relationship: their marriage implies the duty to start a family, as expected in the Victorian time. Such expectations are not shared anymore in the 21st century. Not only are Rosamond and Lydgate not married, but they also never manifested the wish to start a family. Therefore, the removal of the miscarriage is logical in the modern context of the series, but its substitution by a hangover is more surprising. The similarities are again to be found in the reactions of the characters to the situation. In the novel, Rosamond's miscarriage is caused by her disobeying her husband and going for a horse ride. The novel does not emphasise the loss of her baby but the conflictual relationship with Lydgate that results – partly – from this loss. Their positions were already opposed before the accident, as Rosamond shows a "victorious obstinacy which never wastes its energy in impetuous resistance" whereas Lydgate declares: "surely I am the person to judge for you. I think it is enough that I say you are not to go again" (403). But Lydgate only gets the measure of this opposition after his wife loses the baby: "she believed in her own opinion more than she did in his. Lydgate was astounded to find [...] that affection did not make her compliant" (404-405). Therefore, Rosamond's miscarriage entails delusion and a loss of confidence in the couple, which is exactly what the series depicts with the hangover. When Lydgate asks Rosamond to quit drinking, she does not answer, thus revealing her disagreement. Lydgate highlights the gap which is created by

complaining to the camera: “she doesn’t actually respect my opinion over hers, especially on something like medicine which I obviously know more about” (ep.39). Therefore, the series lays the emphasis on the consequences of ignoring male advice more than the death of a baby in order to show how the couple falls apart.

If death is not represented as such in the series, it is still replaced by a form of disappearance which is less sudden than death itself. Casaubon is doomed from the beginning as his portrayal marks him with death. He is “buried in books”, as repeated twice in the novel (25; 335). As Lauren N. Hoffer mentions in “‘A Beginning as well as an Ending’: The Narrative Power of Death and Remarriage in *Middlemarch*”: “The narrator’s treatment of him suggests his very purpose in the narrative is, in fact, to die” (Hoffer 47). In comparison, the series does not hint at a potential future death, which suggests that Casaubon is not doomed as he is in the novel. Thus, his departure does not need to be sudden, and Casaubon is allowed to give notice of his departure from the narrative. Indeed, his last words are “Goodbye Dorothea. Goodbye camera” (ep.40). His goodbye to Dorothea reflects his metaphorical death as it implies an end to his relations with the other characters. On the other hand, his goodbye to the camera addresses the viewer and signifies his departure from the work. The character clearly warns the audience that he will not be seen in the series anymore. With this goodbye, Casaubon is offered a more subtle departure which has consequences not only for the other characters but also for the viewers who find themselves more involved than in the novel.

## II C- Casaubon, a figure of the past

Casaubon is particularly significant to depict the critical view of the past expressed in *Middlemarch*, as the character is anchored in the past instead of being a link to the present.

His *Key to all Mythologies* has already been shown to be a useless recollection of the past, and his old age sets him apart from the other characters. In the series as well, he is excluded, even though he is not old but only older, the difference of age and vision being sufficient to make him an alien to the other protagonists. Moreover, Casaubon is first presented as a historian, which leads Dorothea to suppose that his knowledge of the past will help her to make sense of the present and the future. Casaubon is thus expected to be a figure of transmission, but this soon proves wrong. The metaphors used to describe him and his book are only wandering figures that remain in the past, Casaubon himself defining his mind as “the ghost of an ancient” (9) and Dorothea mentioning the “shattered mummies” of his work (331). For Barbara Hardy in “*Middlemarch: Private and Public worlds*”, Dorothea’s delusion comes from the fact she did not read the signs making clear that Casaubon was stuck in the past, even though he explicitly said he was “capable only of 'wandering . . . and trying' rather than firmly guiding. He is a historian who ignores the evidence of history” (Hardy 7). The problem lies in Casaubon’s inability to use his historical knowledge to serve the present; he only goes around in circles with his *Key to all Mythologies* “as if progress could be ignored” (Hardy 19). The character presents a “negation of historical consciousness” (19) which contradicts his presentation as a historian.

Casaubon’s wandering in the past suggests a conflict between the duty of transmission due to his work, and the oppression that this duty brings out. The creation of the *Key to all Mythologies* could offer Casaubon a form of transmission that he cannot encounter otherwise: indeed, he fails to pass down a heritage as he dies childless. His intellectual production could then be considered another form of offspring, except that Casaubon does not manage to finish his work, nor does he accept to give rise to a project of current interest. The series highlights his rejection of novelty which prevents him from being part of the chain of transmission, as

underlined by his rejection of modern means, such as the camera when he asks: “Is it really necessary for the camera to be on right now?” (ep.14). The conference he attended, the Key to all Monadologies, resembles the original model, the *Key to all Mythologies*, in their phonic similarity. Moreover, it can be noted that Leibniz’s *Monadology*, which inspired Casaubon’s work in the series, seeks to prove the origin of the world by explaining it is a system of monads set up by God (Leibniz). The philosopher was not chosen randomly as Casaubon demonstrates a similar purpose – to understand religion by studying the basis of mythology. The choice of this philosopher is a return to the past, as his texts were already published at the time of *Middlemarch*. Writing on Leibniz shows a regression to a period when the state of knowledge was less advanced than that of *Middlemarch*, negating the progress made in-between. Despite a focus on modernity throughout the series, in the case of Casaubon, his work illustrates regression instead of progress, thus opposing the idea of transmission which is first expected from him as a scholar.

Besides, the metaphor of light shows how backward Casaubon is compared to other characters, especially to his wife Dorothea and Will Ladislaw, her second husband. Eliot uses the lexical field of darkness to describe Casaubon as a “dull” husband (337) who stands “rayless” in comparison to Will’s “sunny brightness” (145). This extended metaphor is even re-used by critics, like Henry James who finds that “The whole portrait of Mr. Casaubon has an admirably sustained greyness” which provides a “helplessly sinister expression” (James 358). An explanation for this metaphor could be the association of Casaubon’s lack of colour with knowledge, the truth waiting in the light while he is wandering in darkness. This play on the vocabulary of light is extended in the series, as the name of Casaubon’s dwelling in the novel, rightly called Lowick, becomes the name of the university where the characters study, Lowick college. While “low wick” associates Casaubon with a candle whose light is dim, this

picture is materialised in the typography of the series' title since the flame of a candle replaces the "i", as shown on Figure 1. Moreover, the motto of Lowick College is *mens lucis origo*, which means the mind is the source of light. Thus, the motto refers to Casaubon who seeks light, that is knowledge, through his intellectual work, but fails, as is suggested by his lack of colour.



Figure 1: typographical design of Middlemarch, the series' title

These associations contribute to providing a negative image of Casaubon who cannot move forward. The dim light shows how hard it is to reach knowledge and progress, which leaves him in a gloomy past. But it can also be understood as a metaphor for his old age and link to the past, as the comparison with young characters suggests. The contrast with Will Ladislaw is emphasised because the two men are bound by family links and by one woman, Dorothea, whom they married one after the other. The comparison makes the qualities and flaws of the other more extreme, as Ellman shows in "Dorothea's Husbands": "The one is all labyrinth and darkness, the other all candour and light" (Ellman 765). The use of "all" in his quote suggests that the totality of their characters is contained in this opposition, without nuances. The extreme depiction of Ladislaw leads to an idealisation of the character, "his only imperfection being what is also his chief perfection – youth" (Ellman 765). This idealised picture is balanced by the other extreme, Casaubon, who serves as a counterweight for Will and whose negative depiction elevates the young man by contrast. Casaubon's association

with the past seems critical so that the present – through the representation of young and progressive characters like Will – can be highlighted, which is a view proposed by George Eliot in her novel that persists in the series.

The past is questioned in *Middlemarch*, both as an individual threat like Bulstrode's story, and as a shared knowledge supposed to help understanding life, like mythology. Death is also challenged as the very moment of transition which suddenly makes a character belong to the past and cuts its links with the present, which appears as the reason why the past is criticised: it highlights the existing or missing connection with the present. This critical look at the past is also at stake in the series, but results in a distancing from the original narrative, as a refusal of a useless past, but a need for a meaningful past for the present. In this way, the series uses both the Victorian period and *Middlemarch's* critical vision of the past as a basis to deconstruct the novel and start something new.

### III- Deconstructing the novel

The discrepancy between the novel and the series can be explained by the time-difference between the Victorian era and the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as the series illustrates a refusal of the norms of the Victorian period. But it also steps aside from what *Middlemarch* represents in the collective imagination: for instance, the Britishness of the novel is put into question, as the series decides to extract the narrative from its context of creation, 19th century England, to reconstruct the plot in a North American context and thus inspect the alterations that stem from this uprooting.



This desire to rewrite the novel can only take place by becoming aware of the expectations at stake both inside and outside the fiction: older characters like Casaubon or Mrs Cadwallader display expectations towards the younger protagonists while the latter also have their own ideas on how they will live. If the novel refutes their expectations and depicts disillusion, such as Dorothea or Rosamond experience in their respective marriages, the series on the other hand offers a wider scope for the unexpected, which becomes challenging for the characters. The focus on the unexpected, instead of dealing with specific expectations, is a move in the series which is itself unexpected for the viewers. Hence, the issue of expectations is at play outside the fiction with the audience.

Another aspect creating expectations is the play with conventions. Victorian tropes constitute *Middlemarch's* identity, but as the series depicts a refusal of the Victorian, it also deconstructs the conventions, which re-establishes new relationships between characters and thus forms a new basis for *Middlemarch, the series*.

### III A- A desire to deconstruct

As a consequence of its critical view, the series deliberately steps outside the timeframe of *Middlemarch* to bring novelty to the original story. The gap between the two works lies in the shift from the Victorian era to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, according to characters of the series. Indeed, when Celia asks Dot what she thinks of Casaubon, she answers that “he’s smart and intellectual” (ep.31). This episode finds its equivalent in *Middlemarch* when Celia exclaims “How very ugly Mr. Casaubon is!” (11), to which Dorothea retorts “It is so painful in you, Celia, that you will look at human beings as if they were merely animals with a toilet, and never see the great soul in a man’s face” (11). In both cases, Dorothea refuses Celia’s point on

Casaubon's unattractiveness. But while Celia apologises in the novel, she insists in the series and justifies her remark with the argument "It's not the Victorian era!" (ep.31). Dorothea's reaction is not presented as depending on her character but rather on a prudishness that would supposedly be characteristic of the Victorian era. Thus, the series expresses its deliberate intention to be detached from the context of *Middlemarch's* creation and warns the reader that it will deconstruct the original narrative.

The series also deconstructs the Britishness of the novel by going against the tradition of adapting literary classics in period films. As Kamilla Elliott points out in *Rethinking the novel-film debate*, Victorian fictions have been the most frequently adapted, counting more than 1500 movies or TV adaptations (Elliott 3). *Middlemarch* is not an exception and has been adapted several times already in historical films, the most famous being the 1994 adaptation by the BBC. The novel lends itself to period films for it depicts the life of a rural town in the midlands, thus creating an easily recognisable setting that is anchored in the English landscape. Moving adaptations often follow the tradition of the depiction of an old and fantasised England: *Middlemarch* favours the production of such a heritage film, as defined by Voigts-Virchow in "Heritage and literature on screen", because they "emotionalize space and time by structuring a cultural memory" (Voigts-Virchow 128). That being said, *Middlemarch, the series* offers an adaptation of the novel that is antithetical to the concept of heritage. Indeed, the plot takes place in university dorms in the town of Middlemarch, Connecticut: not only is the cultural recognition of the landscape absent, but the Britishness itself is also suppressed to give rise to an Americanisation of the setting – dorms replacing the rural town. For Voigts-Virchow, the heritage space presents a twofold direction: "it is an 'authenticated' space and it displays high production values that stimulate the heritage imagination" (129). But none of these dimensions is visible in the series as the place is not recognisable so not

authenticated, which prevents the stimulation of the heritage imagination. The Britishness of *Middlemarch* is uprooted in the series, which is a deliberate step against the tradition of adaptation and the affirmation of a search for novelty. It presents the possibility of adapting a classic English novel without necessarily forging a cultural memory.

However, the rewriting of a classic novel has become a trend, and many contemporary fictions are in fact historical as they are based on canonical texts from the past. In “‘Writing back’: contemporary re-visionary fiction”, Peter Widdowson defines the concept of “re-visionary fiction” to explain the relation of these contemporary texts to the past: as rewritings, they “call to account formative narratives that have arguably been central to the construction of ‘our’ consciousness” (Widdowson 491). Therefore, they are creating a dialogue between past and present, establishing “dialectical connection between the period in question and other periods – pre-eminently, by inference, the present” (495), more than a bare representation of the past, as period films do. *Middlemarch, the series* belongs to this field of re-visionary fictions, as it reveals a strong link with the Victorian era by trying to detach itself from its characteristics. This emphasis on the past enables the series to highlight its contemporary features and to draw attention to past elements – such as values, behaviours, or manners of thinking – made invisible because they are inscribed in the original fiction. The series “denaturalise[s] that original by exposing the discourses in it which we no longer see because we have perhaps learnt to read it in restricted and conventional ways” (Widdowson 503). Thus, re-visionary fictions are narratively conscious of their links to the past. In this respect, *Middlemarch, the series* presents a conscious attempt to deconstruct George Eliot’s novel, as it is aware of both its heritage and the limits of such a work anchored in the Victorian era.

### III B- A challenging vision of expectations

*Middlemarch* presents a set of expectations held both inside the fiction by the characters, and outside, by the readers, which the series seeks to debunk in order to rewrite its own narrative. Almost all characters in the novel have expectations about other people that prove wrong, which makes expectations and disillusionment major themes of the work. For instance, Lydgate and Rosamond both have expectations on how the other should act, which leads to the failure of their marriage. First, Lydgate thinks “he had found perfect womanhood” (242) and Rosamond that “no other man could be the occasion of such delightful aerial building as she had been enjoying” (207). But after they are married, Lydgate “feel[s] bitter disappointment” and Rosamond starts “to associate her husband with feelings of disappointment” (457) to the point that “if she had known how Lydgate would behave, she would never have married him” (412). The two protagonists are unable to understand the other’s interests, as shown by Kathleen Blake in “*Middlemarch* and the Woman Question” on the role of a wife in Lydgate’s point of view: “Lydgate’s theory of women as beings providentially framed to live in and through their husbands in this way is met by the refuting irony that Rosamond does not identify with him at all” (Blake 303). She does not grant attention to primitive tissues, nor does he understand her concern for furniture. They illustrate the failure of a marriage due to idealised expectations, but as Blake mentions, Rosamond “may find marriage itself the condition of discontent, more than the particular husband” (303), which shows that expectations are not only constructed on other people but also on aspects of their adult lives that they discover in disillusion.

The series, on the other hand, gives more weight to the unexpected than to unmet expectations. Delusion is also noticeable but is expressed directly by the characters, as Dorothea demonstrates in confessing her feelings to Billie: “It hurt me to think that you maybe

weren't as good of a person as I thought you were" (ep.65). This admission could be due to the visual form of the medium which offers less room to explore inner feelings, but the vlog format allows the characters to speak individually and, therefore, grants access to their emotions. It does not mean that illusions are not present, Rosamond for instance still idealises Lydgate: "He's... god, he's just perfect" (ep.24). But the fall from expectations to disillusion seems less abrupt in the series because the characters are made aware of their misunderstandings. Rosamond even apologises to Lydgate for wanting him to be different: "I'm sorry too. [...] I wanted you to be the person I imagined you to be" (ep.63). Interestingly, the only person who cannot manage to get over his expectations is Casaubon: "I never would have expected this from you" (ep.40) is his last sentence concerning his relationship with Dorothea before leaving the series, which emphasises the discrepancy between him and the other younger characters.

The series depicts a shift from too high expectations that bring about disillusion, to a disinterest in expectations which creates a place for the unexpected to happen. In several cases, the unexpected takes the shape of surprises: Dot cleans Casaubon's room and organises his notes (ep.17) or Fred tries to cook a birthday cake for Max for instance, namely two activities, cleaning and cooking, which echo the tasks of women in the Victorian era (ep.18). Even if the surprise does not result in the anticipated effect – Fred creates a mess in the kitchen and Casaubon does not manifest any satisfaction – the effort shows a total reverse of the way in which characters comprehend their relationships to others. Fred and Dot, in their respective attempts to create a surprise to their partners, do not respond to gender-role expectations, as is depicted in the novel by Dorothea putting away her husband's belongings. Instead, they demonstrate interest to the other and attention to what could bring them pleasure, thus decentring the relationship, which is no longer focused on oneself, but pays

attention to the other person involved. This attention goes against the attitudes provoking disillusion which are represented in *Middlemarch*, such as the relationship between Rosamond and Lydgate previously evoked. While Eliot attached great importance to the depiction of egoism<sup>3</sup> or altruism in her characters, the series offers new perspectives to go beyond egoism by replacing disappointed expectations by unexpected gestures towards one another.

However, this replacement does not meet the expectations of viewers who are prepared to see the series deal with disillusion. Because the series claims its links with the novel, the viewer is expecting elements which may be missing in the adaptation, thus eliciting questions, surprise or lack of understanding. The success of these changes lies in their recognition by a viewer who is called “knowing” according to Linda Hutcheon, that is a person familiar with the original work being adapted. In *Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon explains that pleasure comes from “repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise” (4), which means adaptations can be pleasurable if they slightly differ from the expectations of their knowing audience. Expectations outside the fiction are, therefore, due to the series being an adaptation. Nonetheless, adapting a very popular work can be risky if the audience’s demands are not met, explains Hutcheon, which invites consideration of how challenging the changes in the series are, to the point of making recognition more complex, at the risk of losing the repetition factor which turns an adaptation into a pleasurable work. Thereby, the series demonstrates a challenging vision of expectations, toning down those of the characters, and side-stepping those of the knowing audience, which emphasises its independence from the novel.

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<sup>3</sup> This point will be detailed in Chapter 2 as the vlog format echoes and challenges George Eliot’s notion of egotism

### III C- Erasure of Victorian conventions

In addition to expectations, the transmission of *Middlemarch's* identity is also at stake in the attention paid to conventions, as several Victorian tropes are displayed in the novel, one of which is the family. The novel articulates several of its plots around this subject - such as the questions of inheritance from Featherstone, Casaubon, or Mrs Dunkirk – and some characters even assert that family is the basis of the community, like Mr Brooke's claim: "you've got to look at the thing in a family light [...] We're all one family, you know" (347). Even when it is not highlighted, the novel presents several large families, such as the Garths, composed of at least five children, or the Vincys – despite an emphasis on Fred and Rosamond – who are "a family of three sons and four daughters" (86). In *The Higher Inward Life*, Georges Letissier, explains the significance of the family which "fulfils a structural function as each and every character finds himself or herself involved in a network of relationships of kinship which both undergird and set the plotlines in motion" (Letissier 130). The notion of the network recalls George Eliot's purpose to depict how people's lives were interwoven in the town, but also in more intimate circles like the couple or in this case, the family.

However, families are barely mentioned in *Middlemarch, the series*: If Fred and Rosamond are still siblings, the kinship between Celia and Dot disappears to make them friends. The erasure of the family is a direct consequence of the disappearance of the adults in the series, which prevents any parent from appearing and having a part to play in the plot. They do exist and interact with the protagonists, like Caleb Garth, the owner of Stone Court Pizza, who gives Fred a job interview, but they do not appear. Consequently, the plot is focused on the young characters, which tones down the importance of the relationships inside

and between families. By concealing the adults, the series softens the family trope and thus, it suppresses the Victorian conventions in favour of a more youth-oriented approach.

Stemming from the family trope, the figure of the orphan is also a Victorian recurrent figure that loses momentum in the series because of the disappearance of the adults. Will Ladislaw, Lydgate, and Dorothea are all semi-orphans in the novel, which can explain why their behaviours are more distant from social conventions. Indeed, John Reed points out in *Victorian Conventions* that the three of them display profound emotions. Although these characters show empathy, their attitudes are not without consequences, since all three suffer reproaches concerning their manners. Dorothea for instance is frowned upon for not demonstrating ladylike manners, due to her lack of maternal figure: “These peculiarities of [her] character caused Mr. Brooke to be all the more blamed in neighbouring families for not securing some middle-aged lady as guide and companion to his nieces” (4). For Lydgate, his uncommon medical methods are questioned since “a certain showiness as to foreign ideas, and a disposition to unsettle what had been settled and forgotten by his elders—was positively unwelcome” (107). In each case, Reed mentions “a form of guidance that is lacking, though it is not just parental authority” (Reed 256). The counterexample for this is Fred Vincy whose parents do not manage to make him “satisfactorily disciplined” (Reed 256). Therefore, *Middlemarch* suggests a discrepancy between the orphans and the young who were guided by adults, not especially their parents. Orphans are more likely to act according to their own views instead of following social conventions because they lack the guide necessary to understand these conventions.

The series’ treatment of orphanhood challenges the Victorian trope, as the erasure of the adults turns all characters into orphans of sorts. The disappearance of the parental figure sets on an equal footing the Vincys and Lydgate or Dorothea, as all characters are now given



a greater freedom. However, it is worth wondering whether the adult figure is still represented in the series through surrogate protagonists. Thus, in episode 23, Lydgate is summoned to Fred's bed during his illness, called by Rosamond instead of Mrs Vincy who acts as a nurse for her son in the novel. Young characters are taking on adults' roles, since Lydgate is not even a doctor but only a future student at med school. The presence of these surrogates is favourable for the characters, as "true parents in Eliot [...] often merit less love than surrogates" (Reed 256). Once again, Fred Vincy is the one involved in such a relationship as he resorts to Caleb Garth's help instead of his father's. This episode happens in both the novel and the series, which suggests that young characters are not fully independent. Nonetheless, when Fred accepts Caleb Garth's job offer at Stone Court Pizza, he presents himself as "Responsible Adult Fred Vincy" (ep.50), which implies he becomes an adult thanks to the help of another one. Therefore, the condition of orphanhood as depicted in the series is not a complete lack of supervision, but a moderate guidance which allows the young protagonists to be free in their choices and actions while the presence of adults is ensured by invisible minor characters.

The transmission from *Middlemarch* to *Middlemarch, the series* is first of all a work of memory as highlighted by the nostalgia, the similarities in both the content and the format, and the story-world recognisable in the two fictions. However, the adaptation is not just a repetition of George Eliot's novel, hence the critical reflexion on the past, which develops ideas already at stake in the original work, but which is a *mise en abyme* of the relation between the novel and the series as well. This reflexion gives the series a basis to establish points of contention with the novel and enables the former to propose an alternative fiction which aims at deconstructing the conventional Victorian frame of the story. The new fiction, therefore, presents a more radical vision than the original narrative, due to its uprooted

diegesis, but the originality of this rewriting can be questioned. As *Middlemarch* was already considered a modern narrative, it is possible to wonder whether modernity stems from the series or is only a transposition in the present of already progressive points raised by George Eliot.

## Chapter 2

# Transmission from the past to the present, a re-actualisation of the novel

### I- A daring adaptation, but is novelty modernity?

Because it extricates itself from the ties of the past, the series displays original alterations which first appear as the features of a modern rewriting of the Victorian plot. The question that now arises is whether these daring changes really are an attempt at reversing both past and present codes of society to present a challenging adaptation to its viewers, or a mere consequence of the erasure of the Victorian setting. Modernity here, and, therefore, its adjective modern, are understood in their literal meaning, which is “a social perspective characterised by departure from or repudiation of traditional ideas, doctrines and cultural values” (OED), and do not refer to Modernism as the artistic and literary movement which took place in the 20th century. The difference is pointed out by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane in *Modernism*, saying that the latter transformed “artistic form just as the energies of modernity – scientific, technological, philosophical, political – transformed forever the nature, the speed, the sensation of human life” (Bradbury and McFarlane 11).

Even though art forms are at stake in this study, it will deal with the “scientific, technological, philosophical, political” changes of “human life” as demonstrated in *Middlemarch, the series*. The novelty in question concerns subjects of current interest, such as the inclusion of the characters, regardless of their race, gender, or sexual orientation. The place of women will also be analysed in the light of the feminist studies written about *Middlemarch*, and of the changes of gender that occurred between the novel and the series, granting special attention to Mary Garth becoming Max Garth, and Will Ladislav turning into Billie Ladislav. Finally, the transposition of space and time is daring as it sets the plot in a contemporary period, but its modernity as a demonstration of progress will be challenged.

#### I A- An inclusive adaptation

The series dispenses with the Victorian conventions and restricted representation to give scope to diversity, which implies many changes in the depiction of the characters, concerning their race, gender, or sexual orientation. With the exception of Will whose grandfather was a Pole in the novel, all characters’ nationalities shift from English to American. Max and Dot’s origins vary as well, as they are both black characters. In addition to race, inclusion is also visible in the attention paid to the depiction of the LGBTQ+ community. Not only do most characters belong to this community, but they also show it in various ways. Fred Vincy, who overtly asserts his homosexuality, cares about this community, as shown by his catchphrase with which he starts many of his interventions: “Ladies, gentlemen, and otherwise” (ep.14). By calling out to non-binary people, he turns the standard form of address into a new inclusive phrasing. This attention to the LGBTQ+ community manifests itself in speeches, but costumes, like Fred’s tee-shirt, are also vectors of meaning. In episode 21, “Fred

Vincy on a mission”, he goes to Stone Court Pizza to find Max while walking under the rain, in order to appear wet, as in romantic movies. He wears at that time a tee-shirt on which the only word is “gay”. The same tee-shirt is worn by Max in the last episode, “An ending of sorts”, when Max and Fred’s relationship is finally confirmed. The clothes follow the evolution of characters and their progressive inclusion in the community.

However, the depiction of sexual orientation is extreme in its diversity, which questions the aim of depicting such a variety. Indeed, at the end of the series, Lydgate is the only cisgender heterosexual protagonist out of 9 characters whose sexual identities are known. This is obviously different from the novel in which all characters are heterosexual, but also disproportionate in comparison to reality as heterosexual people are still in majority, despite a decrease in their number over the years. This extreme diversity depicts a choice of representation over reality, which is striking when compared to *Middlemarch*, but not surprising for Gutleben, since the series is an adaptation of a Victorian novel. In *Nostalgic Postmodernism*, he explains that “the foregrounding of the discarded of society was impossible for the Victorian novel, essentially written for the middle-class, but today, at the time of the politically correct, those voices correspond precisely to readerly expectations” (Gutleben 37). Indeed, many retro-Victorian fictions attempt “to retrieve the forgotten of history and lend them a voice” (124). The diversity of genders and sexualities does not modernise *Middlemarch* for its content, but rather adapts a novel which presents obvious Victorian characteristics for a 21st century audience expecting variety in the representation of characters.

Diversity, instead of being representative of a modern point of view, becomes a conventional feature of the fiction as well. “Repeated from one novel to another, these

politically correct perspectives, far from being subversive or innovative, become predictable, not to say redundant" (Gutleben 169). However, in *Middlemarch, the series*, the depiction is so extreme that it goes beyond a politically correct perspective, which invites us to look for the significance of such a variety in the representation. A first explanation could be the age of the characters in the series, as the number of young people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community is higher than for older people, but the ratio is not as high as in the series: according to a study carried out by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on the sexual identity of American students, 84.4% consider they are straight, and even if the number falls to 80.3% in Connecticut, where the series takes place, it is still higher than the ratio depicted in the series since Lydgate is the only heterosexual character (CDC). Another explanation was given by Rebecca Shoptaw, the producer of the series. She explained, in an interview she gave me, that she could change the genders of the characters without altering the plot, which implies that genders are of no consequence in both *Middlemarch* and *Middlemarch, the series* for the sake of the fiction, since they are interchangeable (Shoptaw 00:14:03 – 00:14:43). The extreme diversity then appears as a continuation of the novel's attempt at erasing strict Victorian gender-roles, which the series keeps on undermining.

Lydgate does not only stand apart from the other characters because of his heterosexuality, but he is also not present with the rest of the group at the end of the series. This disappearance is problematic as the community formed by all characters is shown as excluding those who do not identify as LGBTQ+. However, this seeming rejection does not stem from Lydgate's eviction, since it also happens in the novel. As Rosemary Bodenheimer explains in "George Eliot and the Power of Evil-Speaking", Lydgate is a victim of gossip: "Eliot devotes a long chapter (45) to rumour about Lydgate in which she concentrates fully on the misinterpretations of Lydgate that prepare his fall" (Bodenheimer 215). He is forced to leave

Middlemarch at the end of the novel because he never really managed to be included; he rather stood in opposition with the community, because of his alliance with Bulstrode and of the originality of his practice, on which the conventional doctors looked unfavourably. His exclusion is, therefore, logical in the novel as he was not swallowed by the town that did not “assimilat[e] him very comfortably” (105), which is similarly represented in *Middlemarch, the series*.

If his exclusion is so striking, it is rather due to the inclusion of other outcasts, which forms a startling contrast. Rosamond is indeed integrated into the community at the end of the series, whereas the Finale of the novel makes clear she managed to flee Middlemarch and live with Lydgate in London. Moreover, Will Ladislaw who is an outcast from the beginning, is replaced in the adaptation by Billie Ladislaw, who is only criticised by Casaubon. Billie appears in scenes with Fred Vincy or Max Garth (ep.66-70), characters with whom Will does not interact in the novel. Celia and Jaimie also welcome Dot and Billie’s relationship whereas they oppose Will and Dorothea’s marriage in the novel, after Casaubon’s blackmail. But this inclusion is again an extension of Will’s final success in the novel, explained by his talent “in anticipating what he looks like to others [...]. If Will escapes being what gossip calls him, it is because he outwits it at his own game” (Bodenheimer 219). Will prevents the community from deciding who he is, which finally leads him to success, and so does Billie in the series, thus getting along well with all the characters she encounters. The series’ inclusion of Billie or Rosamond does not aim to evict Lydgate but reflects the insertion of the novel’s protagonists in different communities, in Middlemarch or London.

## I B - A feminist rewriting?

The inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community is greatly developed in the series, but another cause – feminism – may be examined, as both *Middlemarch* and *Middlemarch, the series* are works realised by women: George Eliot for the novel, Rebecca Shoptaw for the series, and even Dot for the vlog project. At first sight, the involvement of women is not surprising as there is a discrepancy between genders concerning the participation in narrative-building, according to Brenda Laurel who conducted a study on the subject which she explained in her article “New Players, New Games”: “It turns out that girls tend to prefer narrative play and are attracted to narrative complexity [...]. It’s a good bet that this fascination with narrative construction continues into womanhood” (Laurel qtd. in Hutcheon 2013 115-116). This study could explain the involvement of women in the decision to extend the world of *Middlemarch* – by creating the series or implicating the viewers – to increase its narrative complexity.

However, the choice to adapt this very story and to give Dot empowerment sheds a light on the role of women in the process of creation. For the feminist critic Adrienne Rich in her article “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision”, the involvement of women finds an explanation in their need to know and express their identities through the act of re-vision, as “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (Rich 18). More than that, it is even an “act of survival” since it is part of a woman’s “refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society” (18). Following her argument, the choice to adapt *Middlemarch* is a reflection on the role of women in the narrative itself, but also on the evolution of women in search for self-knowledge, identity, and emancipation. Therefore, the place of women in the process of creation is significant because *Middlemarch, the series* is a re-vision of a past novel, an act which allows women to find empowerment.



A fourth woman is worth mentioning as active in the creation process: it is Mary Garth, as a *mise en abyme* of George Eliot herself. A parallel can be drawn between the two women based on both physical and intellectual features. Mary is depicted as a “dreadful plain girl” (69) who calls herself a “brown patch” (282). This lack of beauty echoes the physical appearance of George Eliot, described by Henry James in a famous letter as “magnificently ugly – deliciously hideous” (James 211). Moreover, Mary becomes an author at the end of *Middlemarch*, since she writes and publishes a book for children entitled “Stories of Great Men, taken from Plutarch” (573). Nicole M. Coonradt points out in “Writing Mary Garth: locating middle ground among female characters in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*” that Mary is the only female writer in all of George Eliot’s novels, which is a reason why Mary deserves attention (Coonradt 17). Contrary to Dorothea who dreams of having a grand life, she actually accomplishes something beside her marriage by publishing her book: “George Eliot quietly offers us Mary, who like herself, takes up the pen in a male-dominated world of letters” (24). George Eliot was well aware of the difficulties of publishing as a female writer, which led her to take a masculine penname. Mary is given even more power as she publishes her book not only under her own name, but also under George Eliot’s real one, as the novelist was called Mary Ann Evans. George Eliot’s choice to offer her name to her character was surely an invitation to reconsider women’s work without hiding behind male identities.

The parallel between the two women could be seen as reinforced in the series since Mary Garth becomes a man called Max Garth, which gives both Mary and Mary Ann Evans a male name as second identity. However, this understanding is challenged because the change does not only concern Mary’s name but also her gender. Writing a book in a male-dominated society was a way to get masculine prerogatives, which explains why the change of gender is not jarring, as a man gets back these prerogatives. But the form of female empowerment

which was at stake in the novel is erased alongside the deletion of Mary's female gender. Besides, both the name Mary and the link to authorship disappear from the series, as Max Garth does not write any book, which leaves no trace of likeness with George Eliot. While the series pays attention to the inclusion of all genders, the disappearance of Mary Garth seems to be a setback in the defence of the role and place of women, contrary to the modern behaviours depicted in the novel.

For all that, the gender changes also take place in the other way, like Will becoming Billie, a woman, which reverses the dynamics between characters. Talking about Dorothea's second marriage in "*The Power of Middlemarch*", Patricia Meyer Spacks points out that "she remains subordinate to a man, in the eyes of the world, although the man to whom she is helpmeet proves far more satisfying to her than his predecessor" (Meyer Spacks 73). The replacement of Will by Billie frees Dot from the subordination to a man, the consequence of which is to highlight the relation between the two women, more than the role of the man in the couple. Indeed, while Will becomes an "ardent public man", Dorothea achieves nothing but is never more satisfied than when she gives her husband "wifely help" (576), which stresses her devotion to a man instead of following her own aspirations. Dot and Billie, in contrast, do not know what to do and "that's kind of the point" (ep.70), as neither will become dependent on the other. The series attempt seems less to defend women than to deconstruct masculinity, as presented by James Chettam. As a sir living in a Hall and looking for a wife to be fully established, he embodies the perfect gentleman. His equivalent in the series is the non-binary character Jamie whose behaviour is devoid of masculine stereotypes: the Hall is for instance replaced by a "blanket fort" (ep.51), which again lays emphasis on the intimacy of the couple, whereas Freshitt Hall was a symbol of glory with its "white freestone, the

pillared portico, and the terrace full of flowers, Sir James smiling above them like a prince” (49).

Still, the counterpart of this deconstructed masculinity is a reassertion of feminine stereotypes, especially visible in Billie, as a female version of Will. The androgynous representation of Will in the novel, “a slim young fellow with his girl's complexion” (421), and his role as an outsider, without a home or an inheritance, give him feminine traits. For Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, “Will is Eliot’s radically anti-patriarchal attempt to create an image of masculinity attractive to women. [...] Will is thus mythically linked with female power and female inspiration” (Gilbert and Gubar 528-529). Gilbert and Gubar’s understanding of Will is significant in that it does not deny his masculinity, but suggests women are more sensitive to him if he integrates their features. The deliberate choice to turn Will into a woman in the series divests him of the ambiguity of his gender, which reinforces the feminine traits of the character as a stereotype of womanhood because they are displayed by Billie, a woman.

Feminine stereotypes can also be questioned in the transposition of Chettam’s rejected gift to Dorothea – a “tiny Maltese puppy” (18), onto a bunch of flowers for Dot (ep.4). In “Dorothea’s lost dog”, Nina Auerbach argues that Dorothea should not have declined the gift of the dog, which was doubly symbolical. On the one hand, the puppy symbolises James Chettam’s future proposal, the refusal of which would have justified refusing the dog, except that Dorothea is not aware of Chettam’s courtship. On the other hand, it only represents “an enchantingly sympathetic friend, one unavailable among Middlemarch humans” (Auerbach 88). The canine gift and its symbols are rather neutral, even though the proposal implies that the receiver is a woman, because the gift was not meant for any woman but for Dorothea.

The replacement of the puppy by a bunch of flowers in the series challenges the symbolism of the gift as flowers are usually associated with women – an association reinforced throughout the novel with Rosamond being called “the flower” of her school (65). Thus, offering flowers to Dot seems to be a conventional and masculine act that does not take into account her personality, since she does not like them. Whereas Dorothea turns down a friend in the novel, she rejects feminine stereotypes in the series, which Jamie recognises as a “traditional” gesture (ep.4). The lack of modernity in the flowers and the choice to offer them is pointed out, which suggests a willingness on the part of the series to demonstrate a progressive approach to gender stereotypes, if not to women’s cause.

## I C - The transposition of space and time

The series is not only daring in its treatment of the characters but also in the transposition of the diegesis, which might be, at first sight, the most striking element of the rewriting, since it brings about obvious changes: the story takes place in the 21st century instead of the 19th, and Middlemarch is now located in Connecticut instead of being an English provincial town. If the characters are broadly the same age between the two fictions, it entails a change of their status, from young people about to marry or starting to work, to students at university without professional lives. As Gérard Genette explains in *Palimpsestes*, the “transposition of the diegesis”<sup>4</sup> necessarily involves a “pragmatic transformation”<sup>5</sup>, that is an alteration of the action (Genette 442). The pragmatic transformation in this case would be the issue of marriage being dropped in favour of less restrictive relationships, due to the temporal

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<sup>4</sup> « Transposition diégétique » (my translation)

<sup>5</sup> « Transposition pragmatique » (my translation)

transposition of the plot into the 21st century, when young people are less likely to marry. The consequences of this change are numerous: Dot is not bound to Casaubon anymore but decides willingly to leave him; Lydgate and Rosamond do not depend on each other for their decision to quit Middlemarch or not. The question that arises from these transpositions is whether the changes and their consequences demonstrate real modernity or just are a repetition of the novel's action in a new diegesis.

“Character is not cut in marble—it is not something solid and unalterable. It is something living and changing” (507) said Mr Farebrother, a quote that applies to the series' transposition, not referring to the characters' behaviours anymore but to their very identities, while their behaviours allow the audience to recognise them. These changes in the characters' identities are an instance of pragmatic transformation resulting from the transposition of the diegesis, as explained by Genette. For instance, Celia Brooke, later Chettam, becomes Celia Arroyo in the series, Dot's best friend and roommate instead of her sister. Despite an erasure of their family bond, the dynamic of their relationship is still the same, as Celia plays the role of Dot's confidant in both works. These changes in the characters' identities are not supposed to be surprising since Farebrother already put forward this idea in the novel. Therefore, the series does not suggest any modern interpretation of their social interactions but relies on Farebrother's remark to modify characters whose relations are similar to those of the novel while they fit a 21<sup>st</sup> century setting.

Likewise, spaces are given a symbolic value by George Eliot, which is kept in the series despite the transposition. In “The Representation of Place in *Middlemarch*”, Adam Wright gives the example of Lowick Manor, Casaubon's home, which reflects the association between Casaubon and the past through its “colours subdued by time” (49) like “faded blue” (50), or

its “old maps”, “old vase” (49) and “old English style” (48) (Wright 52). Dorothea only realises the gloominess of the place after she returns from Rome, in the same way Dot enjoys Casaubon’s flat before asserting she “has not much to do” when she stays there (ep.28). The opposition between the present and the past is reinforced by the pictures in Dot’s room, among which photos of her with Celia or her portrait drawn by Billie can be found. In Casaubon’s flat, the only picture is the face of Leibniz, visible in episode 22 “Twenty Questions”, which brings back the past in the settings of the series when the scholar is concerned and reinforces the values of spaces as they were already depicted in *Middlemarch*.

Spaces are not only transposed but also reduced, since all characters live in dorms, except Casaubon who owns a flat. This single location shared by all students contrasts with the numerous places evoked in the novel: besides Middlemarch itself, Lowick, Freshitt, and Tipton are places respectively situated two and three miles from the town, according to the sketch drawn by George Eliot herself in her “Quarry for *Middlemarch*” (Eliot 625). The proximity of living places in the series suggests to reconsider distance as remoteness between people more than locations, as suggested in episode 50 “Acceptance”, when Lydgate discovers the release of admission results in Med school. Although the scene takes place in Rosamond’s room, he waits for her to go and fix her hair, before announcing to the viewer he got rejected from Columbia and Stanford and discovering that Harvard also declined his application. Rosamond is close, though off-camera, but not aware of the situation: when she asks what he is up to, Lydgate answers “I have to go” (ep.50). By leaving, he creates a physical distance between him and Rosamond, that already existed inside the room as they were mentally apart, to the point of hiding his results from Rosamond. However close the characters are, the distance is still represented by the divergence between their individual natures, thus referring to the “unloving proximity” evoked in the novel after Harriet Bulstrode’s discovery of her

husband's shady past (518). The series materialises the "unloving proximity" by reducing physical distance to nothing, which finds its originality in the non-place where the characters are located – university dorms, which are a temporary and impersonal living place.

Despite being a daring adaptation, the novelty of the series confronts the themes already at stake in the novel, such as the exclusion of some characters like Lydgate, or the empowerment of women. But while some points, such as the issue of marriage, are a clear update of the topics of *Middlemarch* modified by the transposition into the 21st century, others are erased in favour of new causes. On the one hand, gender stereotypes are given more weight and are challenged, but on the other hand, the disappearance of Mary Garth mitigates the advocacy for women's cause illustrated in the novel, which questions the modernity of the series concerning these topics, as the treatment of the subject seems more daring in George Eliot's work. In the light of these topics more developed in the novel, it is possible to look for the modernity already demonstrated by Eliot. Called the novel of reform, *Middlemarch* displayed modernity in several fields, which are relevant to study in order to understand that modernity does not only come from the novelties of the series but from the transmission between the two works, as it was a main feature of the Victorian work.

## II - Modernity as re-actualization

The designation "novel of reform" suggests there is a modernity inherent to *Middlemarch*, since reform is the "improvement or modernization of something no longer of sufficient accuracy or quality"(OED). It also shows how modernity is rooted in the Victorian period, as the term reform refers to the First Reform Act of 1832, which notably extended the voting conditions in the counties. However, modernity is not limited to political reform, since

several fields – from the psychological to the scientific – encounter gradual changes in the novel. The way the novel expounds on the theme of reform can be studied in the first place, which leads to question its implications, its links with time. Space and characters are subject to reform too, since novelty seems to be brought by young protagonists, as illustrated by Will Ladislaw, who is often deemed young by other characters. Thus, several consequences will be demonstrated as a result of the reform in every shape and form.

As the story is set during the industrial revolution, technical reform also takes place in the background of the story and is emphasised by Caleb Garth, even though it is not given a lot of weight in the plot. Technical and technological reforms are worth studying though, because they deal directly with the issue of transmission and communication, and because the new technologies that are used in the series directly echo the debates over scientific and technical reforms that are developed and presented as novelty in the novel. Both works present the advantages and the downward slides that can result from this progress, which suggests that a parallel can be drawn between the reactions towards novelty in both the series and the novel. The parallel does not only appear in the plot but also in the ways the respective formats of both media – the novel and the series – deal with science, which enlarges the scope to study the impact of these new technologies.

## II A- *Middlemarch* as the novel of reform

Modernity was already at stake in *Middlemarch*, rightly called the novel of reform since the plot takes place between 1829 and 1832, that is to say shortly before the first Reform bill was passed, on 7th June 1832. The novel contains many references to the event, which



triggers questions concerning innovation in the political field. As Jerome Beaty points out in “History by Indirection: the Era of Reform in *Middlemarch*”, these diffuse references pervade throughout the novel, but never take centre-stage, since they remain subordinate to the fiction. George Eliot refers to the political reform in two ways, the most recurrent being the introduction of the event “as part of the everyday affairs of the fictional characters, rarely overshadowing personal affairs, often overshadowed by them” (Beaty 179). When she mentions considerable political events, “she so surrounds them with momentous fictional events that the history is brushed aside” (179). The reform is then omnipresent in the novel but eclipsed by the more consistent attention offered to the fiction, which makes readers unaware of the weight of political history in the plot even though it stands as a major concern for several characters, the most preoccupied being Mr Brooke.

Reform is not limited to the political field, though. George Eliot had noticed that a shift of mentality was gradually taking place at that time, as she explained in a letter to Alexander Main: “Do you not take interest in the tremendous European change which is being prepared by the new attitude of Common Labour? The centre of gravity is slowly changing and will not pause because people of taste object to the disturbance of their habits” (Haight 326). *Middlemarch* depicts this “tremendous European change” in several fields, which is discussed by different characters according to their occupations. As Cherry Wilhelm developed in “Conservative Reform in *Middlemarch*”, it seems that this gradual process has “been telescoping the slow but real extension of political rights into the temporal curve of her novel by showing its broader principle in action in all spheres: science, transport, morality, medicine, and religion” (Wilhelm 47). Reformatory methods are always questioned as to the benefits of their modernity, which entails confrontations between opposed views: Lydgate’s modern practice of medicine is compared to the more traditional attitudes of other doctors such as Dr

Sprague, Dr Minchin, or Mr Wrench to whom Lydgate is preferred to take care of Fred when the latter catches the typhoid fever. Likewise, Caleb Garth opposes a group of Middlemarchers on the question of the railway, or Dorothea's sense of morality is tried when Casaubon asks her to give her word without judging the consequences of such a promise by herself, because her position, as his wife, is to obey him. All these confrontations show that reform is a major theme of the novel, not especially defended as a necessary change, but questioned as to the benefits of stepping away from traditional behaviours.

Since reform departs from tradition, it is linked to time and also to space, as argued by Heather Miner in "Reforming Spaces: The Architectural Imaginary of *Middlemarch*". She defends Dorothea's attempt to tackle the issue of poverty through her plans for redesigning cottages, an industrial town, or the hospital, the three of them being "sites implicitly in dialogue not with aesthetical representation and tradition but with modern day social problems" (Miner 200). Though Dorothea's plans show "spatial reform as a means of symbolic resolution to the social strife" (202), their modernity does not come from her generous endeavour but from the distinctive feature of the places: Miner bases her study on the notion of heterotopia, coined by Foucault in "Of Other Spaces" to refer to "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted" (Foucault 24). To consider that the cottages or the hospital are heterotopias is a way to reform these spaces, argues Miner, since she understands heterotopias as "the fundamental symbols of modernity" (Miner 194). However, although Foucault's fourth principle on the heterotopias asserts that they are "linked to slices in time", he does not consider them modern but rather out of time, "when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" (Foucault 26). More than in its relation with the spaces, the notion of heterotopia highlights the links between reform and

time: the cottages symbolise a place out of time so that Dorothea's attempt – even though the reader never knows whether the cottages are realised – is reformatory since it shows her purpose to improve the living conditions of her time.

Finally, reform is most of the time brought about by young characters, to the point that youth is associated with modernity in opposition to the traditional behaviours of older characters. This link between youth and modernity is embodied by Will Ladislaw whose juvenile aspect is always put forward, to the point that it defines him. The expression "young Ladislaw" is recurrent throughout the novel, even though the adjective does not bear the same connotations according to the speaker. Indeed, Will is associated with "a startling apparition of youthfulness" (51) by Dorothea the first time they meet at Lowick. This aspect is positive as Dorothea finds Will's "young equality" pleasant (145). On the other hand, Mrs Cadwallader's exclamation "Not to *young* Ladislaw" is contemptuous, and the italicised word emphasises all the faults she finds in youth (562). The fact that the remark is made by Mrs Cadwallader highlights the inability of older characters to understand the modernity brought by young protagonists such as Will.

According to Eugene Hollahan in "The Concept of 'Crisis' in *Middlemarch*", characters like Mrs Cadwallader oppose the reform brought by young protagonists because they are the cause of crises. Hollahan found significant occurrences of crises related to Will and his age in particular. He points out that the narrator "offers the reader two characteristic views of crisis, those of youth and age" (Hollahan 451) in chapter LV: "Each crisis seems final, simply because it is new" (377). If the narrator refers to Dorothea's state of mind at this moment, this crisis is, nonetheless, caused by Will, which makes age a criterion for both being subject to and the cause of such disruption. Thus, the multiple emphases on Will's youth allude to the modernity

he brings, which gives rise to reform. By presenting only young protagonists, the series displays characters with a potential to reform, and reinforces the association between youth and modernity already embodied by Will Ladislaw in *Middlemarch*.

## II B- New technologies as the new science

Reform can also be found in *Middlemarch's* relation to science, both in the subject of the novel with characters such as Lydgate or to a lesser extent Farebrother, and in the design of the text as a scientific work. Lydgate's studies are indeed accurately developed in the novel, to the point of explaining how the new doctor bases his research on the latest discoveries, such as Bichat's work, in order to find "what was the primitive tissue" (102). Consequently, Lydgate demonstrates innovation in its practice, which opposes him to the other doctors of the town who stand against the arrival of modernity: "Regarding themselves as Middlemarch institutions, they were ready to combine against all innovators" (126). This search for modernity is the element that can be compared to George Eliot's method, as underlined by Letissier in "The Higher Inward Life": "Like Eliot, Lydgate does not consider science as based merely on observation and classification, but more as being creatively dependent upon the pursuit of ideas and hypotheses" (Letissier 53). They are both driven by the possibilities that invention could find to "investigate the import even of that which cannot be registered by the instruments or the unaided senses" (52). Thus, the parallel drawn between George Eliot and Lydgate brings to light her scientific writing as it illustrates the modernity which lies in her ideal to go beyond the possibilities of knowledge offered by the present.

Scientific aspects can find a parallel in the series with Lydgate, who is still drawn to medicine, but also in the creation of Dot's project that she defines as a "documentary" (ep.1).

Striking similarities with a scientific experiment are noticeable when she explains the purpose of her initiative: “if we can watch and understand where we are now, then it’ll help us figure out what we want to do later” (ep.1). The project is based on a hypothesis, highlighted by “if”, and follows some steps, as supposed by “then”. The verbs used also suggest that the process is based on observation – “we can watch” – in order to “figure out”, that is to lead to a conclusion. Again, the series reuses George Eliot’s interest in science to shape both the plot and the work itself. Thus, if the concept of a filmed documentary can first appear jarring in an adaptation of *Middlemarch*, it is in fact an adaptation of the working process of the author herself. The documentary uses the modern means of technology to re-enact George Eliot’s modernity in her own use of science to compose her novel.

Even though the new forms of media are only a remake of Eliot’s scientific approach to writing, they can however expand the field of transmission by opening new possibilities. Indeed, the new technologies are an embodiment of *Middlemarch*’s most used metaphor of the web. This metaphor stands for all the connections between the characters and their actions, thus building the story around the idea of relations. For Gillian Beer, this notion comes from George Eliot’s familiarity with Darwin’s theories upon relations and origins. If origins are repudiated in the novel, relations are given a significant part: “Relationships become the organising principle of all life” in *Middlemarch*, “a single work preoccupied with the ‘web of affinities’, setting out relations in a particular space and time. This allows a sense that everything is knowable and even that it may finally become known” (Beer 154). Thanks to the use of digital technologies, the series is enabled to go further than Eliot’s use of Darwin’s theories concerning relations. Indeed, the series is posted on the web, which is the place where “everything is knowable”, thus creating new links that go beyond the relationships between *Middlemarchers*. Whereas *Middlemarch* was limited by “a particular space and

time”, the series can transcend this barrier thanks to the use of the digital environment. These technologies serve to develop George Eliot’s metaphor by widening the web of relations, and the modernity of the digital tools aims at offering the audience a contemporary presentation of the issue of science at stake in the original novel.

Indeed, the series rather puts the emphasis on ideas already developed by George Eliot instead of stressing the improvement of science that has taken place in the intervening 200 years. Paradoxically, medicine is even undermined as it does not serve the same purpose anymore. In *Middlemarch*, Lydgate’s talents are first demonstrated when he is called to Fred Vincy’s bed. Fred’s illness is due to the typhoid fever that he caught in unsanitary Houndsley streets, and the case is serious enough to worry the whole family and make them dismiss Wrench, their family doctor: “Lydgate should go on now, whether Wrench liked it or not. It was no joke to have fever in the house” (180). In contrast, Fred’s illness in the series is a joke, as the reasons are ridiculous in the first place: he caught “a sort of flu or something” (ep.23) while walking under the rain without taking an umbrella or a raincoat. Whereas medicine in the novel helps cure a real disease, in the series it serves to fix the consequences of irresponsible behaviour. Besides, Lydgate, who is summoned to Fred’s side in both cases, is “practically a doctor already” (ep.23) in the series, thus emphasising the fact he is not. Since the importance of medicine is reduced in the series, it enables the emphasis to be placed on the modern aspects of science that the series has adapted, rather than on medicine itself whose modernity is no longer striking in a contemporary era.

In addition to medicine, the emphasis on various techniques also shows an interest in modernity in different scientific fields. The debate over the railway illustrates the distrust of the population towards innovative tools. Even though Caleb Garth tries to explain the benefits

people will obtain with the construction of the railway, it is objected that “Traffic is what they put forward; but it’s to do harm to the land and the poor man in the long-run” (383). Despite Caleb Garth’s association with traditional practices in the novel, he becomes the spokesperson of modernity while the other farmers cannot see the benefits of a technique that does not concern them yet. While the train is supposed to make communication easier, it is rather seen as a luxury widening the social gaps, as illustrated by Timothy Cooper’s remark: “They’ll on’y leave the poor mon funder behind. [...] This is the big folks’s world, this is” (386). The series takes over this theme in one of the few episodes shot outside the dorms, as Rosamond takes the bus and meets Billie at the railway to prevent her from leaving. This excerpt can be seen as an answer to the farmers’ doubts by showing how common the means of transport has become, which is highlighted by the scenes filmed in the bus and the railway station, thus contrasting with the previous well-known settings of the dorms (ep.62). Besides, the appropriation of this issue illustrates the progress and thus the legacy of the Victorian period. The debate over the railway emphasises the transmission through its definition as a means of communication and by reappearing in the series as an answer to the mistrust emitted in the novel, thus showing the effects and efficiency of modern techniques.

The series and the novel create a conversation over the issue of modernity as they both present modern features in their contents and formats. It gives rise to a depiction of reform, in any form, since political but also social, technical, or scientific fields constitute the steps which lead to the gradual and “tremendous” change George Eliot perceived in Europe. The transmission of this issue is represented in the way the series re-enacts the discovery of modernity, even though the Victorian technical reform is replaced by new technologies. The reform is then reproduced, which shows not only *Middlemarch* as an already modern work, but also the series as a re-actualisation of these modern features. However, it cannot be

denied that many elements go beyond a mere re-enactment of the modern. The series expatiates on the issues of the novel, but instead of creating only a parallel to *Middlemarch* in the conditions of the 21st century, it subverts these issues. Therefore, the modernity of the series can be studied in light of postmodernism, as a way to question the links the series has with the past and the modernity it displays.

### III- A postmodern adaptation

The series does not just bring modernity but questions its place inside the novel: what is modern in the present is confronted to what was modern in the past. This is the characteristic of postmodernist writing, as defined by Linda Hutcheon. In her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, she defines postmodernism as “a problematizing force in our culture today: it raises questions about (or renders problematic) the common-sensical and the ‘natural’. But it never offers answers that are anything but provisional and contextually determined (and limited).” (Hutcheon x) The relation between the past and the present is expressed in postmodernism, as she explains: “In a direct reaction against the tendency of our times to value only the new and novel, it returns us to a re-thought past to see what, if anything, is of value in that past experience. But the critique of its irony is double-edged: the past and the present are judged in each other’s light” (39). This relation between the past and the present is not challenged in itself, but with regard to the work which is rewritten. The series can only subvert the novel because it reflects upon the past Victorian setting of *Middlemarch*. “Postmodernism signals its dependence by its use of the canon, but reveals its rebellion by its abuse of it” (130). Therefore, the series can be studied in the light of postmodernism since this concept questions the issue of transmission.



The postmodern aspects of the series can be studied in the subversion of both the text and the protagonists. The sensory modes of apprehension – visual and auditory – are already in play in the novel as it presents a short-sighted heroine, Dorothea, and lays emphasis on the musical skills of Rosamond. But the senses are also at stake in the shift from a written text to a visual medium, the series, which puts forward their importance. Not only does the new medium entail different ways to apprehend the text, but it also implicates new people in the creation of the narrative. The fixed positions of the author, the characters, and the audience are challenged, considering the new technologies used to create the vlog, which has a direct impact on the realism at stake in the series. Finally, the issue of the weight of time and history arises from these numerous subversions, which is precisely the point of postmodernism. However, it is worth noticing that the weight of time was already at stake in *Middlemarch*, through the characters of Dorothea and Will, and that the series only gives a new dimension to these already existing concerns. Thus, the series offers insight to question the weight of time, as depicted in George Eliot’s novel, which makes it a postmodern adaptation.

### III A- Subversion of the text

*Middlemarch* and *Middlemarch, the series* are opposed in that their modes of communication depend on different means: narration for the former, performance for the latter. In his article “What Novels Can Do That Films Can’t”, Seymour Chatman claims that novels have the power to “assert”, to make statements including on visual elements, while films are limited to “present” them and cannot assert without resorting to a narrative voice such as the system of voice-over. The series is restricted to the same extent as films are, since the reason for this limit is their “essential visual form” (Chatman 128), which prevents them

from describing. Chatman's distinction seems restrictive in that he suggests a divide between the action of the novel, which consists in telling, and that of a film or a series, which involves showing, without possible crossing as suggested by the assertion in his title: "Films Can't" do. However, the concept of showing is at stake in many novels, as illustrated in a quote from Joseph Conrad in the Preface of the *Nigger of the Narcissus*: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see" (Conrad). This quote has been used several times to reassert novels' ability at showing, which is heavily emphasised in *Middlemarch* as the novel unfolds many extended metaphors. The choice to make a visual adaptation of a visual novel, then, seems an appropriate one to communicate the novel's mode of expression.

However, the series does not simply pay tribute to George Eliot's visual narrative: some of her most developed metaphors – like woven threads or flowing water – are not even referred to. On the contrary, the series seems to reverse the binary divide pointed out by Chatman between showing and telling. Instead of "presenting" the action to the eyes of the viewer, the actions are narrated by the characters in front of the camera after they took place, unless the action in question is a conversation between the characters which happens at the same time as filming. The novel and the series, when studied alongside each other, propose an inversion of their supposed ways of communication: the novel resorts to visual imagery instead of asserting, while the series narrates instead of showing. The subversion of the series resides in its decision not to allow the visual elements of the novel to be seen, but instead, to allow the narration expected from a novel to be heard through the concept of vlogging.

The vlog, as the format chosen by the series, highlights this inversion of the telling and showing processes, as it echoes one of George Eliot's metaphors – the pier glass. The narrator

explains that the scratches of a pier glass, when lighted by a candle, “seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun” (27), which refers to egotism, especially Rosamond’s. J. Hillis Miller, in “Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*”, studied this metaphor and pointed out that it shines a light on the act of seeing as “the spontaneous affirmation of a will to power over what is seen” (Miller 75), which reveals the self-centeredness and subjectivity of the act of seeing. Besides, the pier-glass, as a kind of mirror, is supposed to reflect the world, but the intervention of an ego entails the distortion of the world “so that it takes the configurations of our private vision of things” (78). Miller deduces that the pier-view does not reflect egoism but is an instrument of distortion which shows reality according to the subjectivity of the ego. This interpretation suggests the impossibility to reach an objective vision without taking a “panoramic distant view” to avoid the “illusionary interpretation” made by the ego (79).

The series, in light of Miller’s understanding of the metaphor of the pier-glass, presents paradoxes: Seeing being a subjective act determined by an “egotistic centre” (Miller 75), it would suggest an explanation for the series’ refusal of showing, as a search for objectivity, which could be reached through an impartial distant discourse, according to *Middlemarch*’s narrator. But the vlog format, by making characters intervene one by one in front of the camera, presents an addition of subjectivities instead of a distant view: the successive monologues and their sometimes opposite discourses reinforce the different egoistic interpretations of the world. During the process of recording, the characters are only talking to themselves, while the camera in front of which they stand acts like the mirror, which is the instrument of distortion, to highlight the multiplicity of egos. Hence, the series offers a subversive rewriting of the metaphor of the pier-glass, since it emphasises the subjectivity of

the act of seeing through the form of the vlog, while refusing the showing process implied by the visual medium.

Moreover, the act of seeing, and the other individual senses, in the case of Dorothea or Rosamond, are ironically emphasised in the series. Joseph Wiesenfarth suggests in "*Middlemarch: The Language of Art*" that "one sees how poorly developed [Dorothea's] aesthetic perceptions are and how uneducated the range of her sensibility is" because of her short-sightedness (Wiesenfarth 364). It prevents her from enjoying visual works of art, as she herself acknowledges in chapter IX: "I never see the beauty of those pictures which you say are so much praised. They are a language I do not understand" (53). In the series, even though she is deprived of this sensibility, Dot still manages to implement a visual project, the vlog. Likewise, Rosamond is a musician in both the novel and the series. In the former, she is a skilful pianist but plays mechanically like her teacher, as she, "with the executant's instinct, had seized his manner of playing, and gave forth his large rendering of noble music with the precision of an echo" (110). Her musical skills are also reassessed in the series since she presents herself as a singer but is reproached for not listening. While she asks Max a question before turning the conversation back on herself, he answers her: "I kind of find it hard to like people who talk to me without actually hearing me" (ep.7). In both cases, the heroines require a deficient sense to achieve their tasks – view for Dot's vlog, hearing for Rosamond's singing – which is highlighted by the visual and musical dimensions of the series. This ironic emphasis subverts the binary divide between the verbal and the visual texts as it sheds a light on the intermingling of senses.

### III B- Subversion of the relation between the creator and the audience

*Middlemarch*, according to George Levine in the introduction of the *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, is “the novel that might be taken as the fullest achievement of English realism” (Levine 16). As a study of provincial life, realism appears in the various perspectives offered by the multiplot novel, or in the disenchantment experienced by characters, and thus reveals “the energizing principle of George Eliot’s art” (7). In the series, realism is still present but is challenged as it is extended beyond the limits of the plot to reach the field of creation. The vlog project is set up by the characters inside the fiction, which means that the format of the series is taken in charge by amateur people. Realism then takes place in the aspects showing that the shooting is made by the characters instead of a film crew, which is illustrated by Fred Vincy at several times. In episodes 5, 13, and 57, the camera is not centred and Fred appears out of range. In episode 64, his image is blurred because he starts too close to the camera. All these episodes show flaws due to Fred’s lack of skills in filmmaking, which is acknowledged by Max: when Fred asks him “Do you take me for an amateur?”, he answers “By definition, yeah” (ep.13). The characters themselves assert that their work is not professional, and the vlog shows it through the repeated flaws in the technique, which makes the project realistic as the creation of the vlog by the characters is credible. Paradoxically, realism is reinforced by the metatextual references to the creation process.

Besides, these flaws in the technique shed the light on the two sides of the protagonists, both characters in the fiction and producers of the vlog. The difficulties that Fred encounters in centring the camera show him as a creator, but a creator who can fail in the realisation of his project. It echoes the distinction made by Maria Su Wang in “Realism’s Operative Paradox: Character Autonomy vs Authorial Construction in *Middlemarch*”, in which

she discusses the distinction between narrative and authorial audiences, as defined by Rabinowitz, to produce a realist text. If the narrative audience's limited knowledge seems to depend on their willing suspension of disbelief, the authorial audience is supposed to have a wider knowledge, but Su Wang argues that Eliot "inscribes some ambiguity" in her treatment of perspective, which limits the authorial audience's knowledge as well (Su Wang 296). Thus, the narrative and authorial audiences are both confused as to the autonomy of characters, which reinforces the realism of the text. On the other hand, the series takes the opposing view of Eliot's attempt to reinforce the illusion of the characters' autonomy, as it does not "hide authorial control" anymore but reinforces it (295). The creator has no need to erase their presence to assure realism through the illusion of the characters' autonomy since characters and creators are the same people. Moreover, Fred's clumsiness suggests that realism is achieved by showing both the presence of the creator behind the fiction, and his flaws. The image of the author as a demiurge in control of his characters' construction is undermined by the lack of competence illustrated by Fred.

The relationship between the author and the audience owes much of its subversion to the vlog, which questions *Middlemarch* through the prism of digital humanities. Digital humanities refers to "the interweaving of intellectual, exploratory and technological modalities", and aims to "engage with, build on, and connect with pretty much any and all humanities disciplines, while looking at once to push the traditional and conventional to new insights and newly productive ways of making knowledge", according to Patrick Svensson and David Theo Goldberg in *Between the Humanities and the Digital* (Svensson and Goldberg 5). This field is relevant in the study of transmission between *Middlemarch* and *Middlemarch, the series*, as "it looks to provide productive resources to address traditional research questions but equally to pose old questions anew and new questions for long established or more recent

fields” (5). Digital humanities merges the past conventional understanding of humanities with the contemporary tools to make new reflections arise and lead to “innovation, reconfiguration, and exploration” (5), but also to challenge what was previously established by the traditional study of humanities. The series is concerned by digital humanities because it challenges the plot of *Middlemarch* by confronting it to the digital, either in its format as a web-series, or in the characters’ use of social networks.

The vlog – short for video blog – is an especially apt medium since it is chosen by the producer as the form of the web-series and is created and shared on the social networks by the characters, thus relating to digital humanities in two different ways, both inside and outside the fiction. In  *Blogging: digital media and society series*, Jill Walker Rettberg points out the particularities of blogs as they are “part of the history of communication and literacy, and emblematic of a shift from unidirectional mass media to participating media, where viewers and readers become creators of media” (Rettberg i). Rettberg’s definition joins Fred’s demonstration of his failures in the idea that the author is not irreplaceable in the process of creation since the vlog enables new actors to participate in making the series. The form of the vlog challenges the reception of *Middlemarch* through the shift from a passive to an active audience. Thus, digital humanities erase the one-way relationship between an author who is alone and an audience who is a group, to give rise to interplay between various communities, including the readers or viewers.

Indeed, viewers are invited to pass a judgement on the series, and thus to be an active audience<sup>6</sup>. In episode 39 “Second Thoughts”, Celia creates a debate over the sunk cost fallacy,

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<sup>6</sup> The way viewers engage with the series, especially through the use of transmedia, will be developed in the third chapter. This part only focuses on the subversion of the role of the creator since the series itself implicates the audience in the process.

which is “a reluctance to abandon a strategy or course of action in which one has already invested heavily even when it is clear that abandonment is rationally the correct response” (OED). The fallacy is evoked to challenge Dot’s relation to Casaubon, which she is advised to stop to avoid wasting time, but Celia does not directly refer to Casaubon and takes the example of a bad movie to explain the theory. As they are similar mediums, the example of the film suggests drawing a parallel with the series so that the viewer can interpret Celia’s remark as a question on the interest of watching the series until its end. The *mise en abyme* is thought-provoking for the viewer who reflects upon the qualities of the series which will help him decide whether the series is worth watching or should be stopped. Not only does the fallacy involve the viewers by asking them to react to the series, but it also considers they are trustful enough to assess its quality.

This participation of the viewers in the series ironically refers to the context of publication of the novel. George Eliot was known to be self-deprecating about herself and her works, out of fear of publishing a mediocre book of poor quality, and this fear of failure is even the reason which pushed her to take a penname, as explained by Rosemarie Bodenheimer in “A woman of many names”. She did not ask for readers’ opinions or for critical reviews, to the point that her husband “Lewes increased his efforts to protect Marian from any town talk about her books, and showed her only an occasional favorable review” (Bodenheimer 30). Eliot’s self-deprecation echoes the sunk cost fallacy in that she invested time in the writing of books whose success she doubted. But above all, Eliot’s attitude and the fallacy stand in sharp contrast for presenting opposite dynamics in their relation to the audience: George Eliot avoided the contact with her readers by remaining unaware of their opinions and reviews, while the series asks its viewers to pass a judgement and assess the quality of the work. The role of the viewers as a passive audience which cannot reach the author of the text, is



undermined by the series which opposes the reaction of George Eliot at her time, and values the role of the audience by engaging with their comments.

### III C- The weight of time and history

These postmodern subversions adumbrate a concern for time and history, as indicated by Linda Hutcheon. These concerns are visible in both the novel and the series, especially through the character of Dorothea whose search for a meaningful life enters a timespan that exceeds her own life. Dorothea expresses existential questions so as to find a way to make her life meaningful. She considers a meaningful life is achieved by the people who realise “the greatest things” (18) and hopes to be equal to it by marrying Casaubon, as she tells herself: “There would be nothing trivial about our lives. Everyday things with us would mean the greatest things. It would be like marrying Pascal. I should learn to see the truth by the same light as great men have seen it by. And then I should know what to do, when I got older: I should see how it was possible to lead a grand life here—now—in England.” (18) By expressing her wish to accomplish significant acts, Dorothea situates herself in the flux of time. Her wish is based on her admiration for actions and people of the past – Pascal for instance – but is inscribed in the present as she needs to act “here – now – in England” (18). Dorothea’s perception of her identity is bound to her historical consciousness, all the more so as she is engaged to an historian. She is aware of being part of a web bigger than her.

Barbara Hardy, in “*Middlemarch: Public and Private Worlds*”, shows Dorothea’s search for an alternative to the “toy-box history of the world adapted to young ladies” (58): “her search is for culture, history, and economic information which she can use and relate to herself, her immediate environment, and her present. Dorothea asks for knowledge to be

relevant” (Hardy 24). If Dorothea searches the past to know how to live, she does not know what she is looking for: “it is vague, admiring glorious things in a blind sort of way” (Hardy 19). This vagueness suggests that the sense of history is too complex to be grasped by one single person, especially as it implies not only links between the past and the present, but also with the future. As Barbara Hardy points out, Dorothea is aware of the “continuity in which yesterday continues history into today, and in which tomorrow needs to be aware of last week, last year, and last century” (9). The notion of tomorrow inscribes Dorothea’s quest in a longer time span, and invites us to question a contemporary sense of history, which is allowed through the adaptation of Dorothea in the series.

In episode 35, Dot Brooke is explicitly asking Billie “what is the meaning of life?”, thus making a connection with Dorothea’s search in *Middlemarch*. Both women are unable to find an answer. If Dorothea shows she is lost by expressing vague ideals, Dot on the contrary does not have a sense at all of what she is looking for: “Maybe you’re supposed to figure it out. Like the meaning of life is to continuously try to find the meaning of life” (ep.35). The discrepancy between the two quests lies in their understanding of life: Dorothea looks for a meaningful life in the novel, thus trying to find her own place within the wider concept of history, whereas Dot questions the meaning of life in general, thus seeking an answer which could apply to anybody. In the meantime, Dot suggests there may be no meaning at all, as people should “continuously try to find” it. This hypothesis creates a *mise-en-abyme*, as time goes by but the search to find meaning and a place in history stays and repeats itself throughout history. Dorothea’s awareness of belonging into a wider timespan is surrounded by her knowledge of the past in the novel, and the echoes of the future brought by the series, but no answer is given on how to apprehend the weight of history.

Contrary to the novel, the series does not let characters suffer from the weight of their own past but offers alternatives to this burden. Will Ladislav's family is linked with both Casaubon and Bulstrode, but these connections harm Will rather than help him. First, the release of Casaubon's codicil depicts Will as an opportunist who would profit from the death of his cousin by marrying Dorothea. Then, the disclosure of Bulstrode's dark past sheds light on Will's own origins. Indeed, his origins are a reason for Middlemarchers to consider that Will is an outsider to be wary of. He is the grandson of a Polish Jew, which earns him a comparison with an "Italian carrying white mice" (341) from Mrs Cadwallader. According to Juliet McMaster in "Will Ladislav and other Italians with white mice", the nickname "constructs him as other, as foreign, as less than respectable" (McMaster 6), and thus, it excludes Will from society because of his origins. Will's inheritance appears as a weight in the novel, since his past prevents him from being accepted in the present by other characters.

In the series however, the reverse of Will, Billie Ladislav, is accepted by all the other characters, except Casaubon. As the latter does not die, there is no codicil in the series, but a threat on Dot to publish a video gathering all the mean talk that took place in front of the camera, in case she dates Billie. Even though the threat is not the video itself, this document is the reverse of the codicil as a medium on which Casaubon has a direct power beyond Dot's control. However, the characters, among whom Dot and Billie, decide to release the video themselves. This action counters Casaubon's intention and makes his plan unrealisable. By cancelling the threat, Dot and Billie are freed from the constraint of respecting Casaubon's wish. It is as if the codicil was erased, a possibility not given to the characters in the novel. Billie is not dependent on his family anymore, the link between her and Casaubon is weakened as she countered his threat. Thus, the series allows her to be relieved from the burden of her inheritance and offers a possible resolution on how to deal with the weight of the past.

The particular attention given by the series to the weight of time and history seems both in line with and at odds with its subversion of the novel, which has been evoked above. Indeed, the relation to the past is often disrupted in postmodernism, as highlighted by Billie being relieved from the burden of inheritance. But Dot's reflection on the meaning of life imitates the concerns of George Eliot's heroine. Instead of subverting the way the subject is developed in the novel, the series shows the persistence of the issue in the 21st century, which is closer to nostalgia, as mentioned in the first chapter, than subversion. But postmodernism, as defined by Linda Hutcheon, opposes nostalgia which aims at reproducing the past without questioning it. She clearly explains that postmodernism "is not a nostalgic return; it is a critical revisiting, an ironic dialogue with the past of both art and society" (Hutcheon 4). Paradoxically, the series appears as a hybrid format, both respecting and subverting the past, both nostalgic and postmodern at the same time.

Nonetheless, the association of the two is not impossible for Christian Gutleben, who coined the term *Nostalgic Postmodernism* in his eponymous book to define the ambivalence at stake in the series. Retro-Victorian fictions present a form of postmodernism that "has strayed from its original orientation" (Gutleben 219) as it is less subversive than early postmodernism. The main reasons for this toning down of the concept are the public getting used to subversion which does not appear radical anymore, and an adaptation of the writers to the spirit of the time, "one of assimilation and reconciliation, and not one of sedition and agitation" (220), explains Gutleben. Nostalgic postmodernism is part of the line of history; it reconciles the paradoxical aspects of nostalgia and subversion by considering the present not in contradiction but in continuity with the past:

So what the phenomenon of retro-Victorian fiction illustrates is the development of a new cultural and aesthetic landscape where the artistic projects are not defined in opposition to the previous tradition anymore but by a process of incorporation and where the new aesthetic practices are achieved by recombining the aesthetic practices of the past (223).

What Gutleben presents is a new form of postmodernism which fits contemporary fiction, and which enables the series to be a coherent contemporary adaptation of the Victorian novel, as its subversion is both respectful of the past and in compliance with the present.

It cannot be denied that the series displays daring features, like the resorting to digital humanities or the inclusion of characters belonging to the LGBTQ+ community for instance, which are obvious contemporary issues. But the reform present in *Middlemarch* itself shows that post-modernism is not a choice of the series but rather a result of the transmission between the two works, as it re-enacts George Eliot's attempt at describing the issues of her time. Even when the adaptation seems the most radical, the series takes its roots in the novel: the subversion of the relation between the creator and the audience reveals a new way to express realism; the format of the web series is the equivalent in a 21st century setting of Eliot's scientific approach both in the plot and in her writing process. All these echoes of the novel are united around the concept of time, as a major feature of postmodern rewritings, and especially of nostalgic postmodernism, as defined by Gutleben. Thus, these concerns over time, both respectful of the past and deeply anchored in the present, question the possibility of transcending the present and perhaps, of entering into a meaningful relation with the future.

## Chapter 3

# Transmission from the past and the present to the future: youth takes centre stage

### I- Transmission into the present

Part of the fiction is repeated in the adaptation, despite the time gap, showing that events already meaningful in George Eliot's Victorian era, such as the depiction of ordinary lives, are still at stake today. These repetitions suppose a timeless dimension to the narrative of *Middlemarch*, as argued by some critics or Rebecca Shoptaw. However, a timeless dimension would inscribe *Middlemarch* out of time, whereas the postmodern features studied before highlighted the significance of time, and especially of the past with regard to the present, which leads one to question the persistence – rather than the repetition – of these elements in a contemporary era.

Ricœur especially expatiated on the persistence in relation to narratives in *Time and Narrative*, and defended the notion of a transhistorical process, which does not envisage a break between past and present times but places each period in the continuity of the previous one. As a result of this continuity, the future is taken into account by the characters who express their prospects, but the transhistorical process also makes it meaningful for the audience since the future experience of the viewers is considered by the protagonists themselves. When both works are watched together, the future is even more relevant as it is constructed on several vantage points which are the narrated time of the novel, its period of publication, and the present time of the series. Thus, *Middlemarch* could be seen as a future narrative which builds on the relation between the novel and the series.

#### I A- A timeless fiction?

The narrative of *Middlemarch* may be considered timeless since several events, repeated from the novel to the series, have the same outcome, despite the transposition through time. Not only is the impact on the characters similar in each case, but the setting is also in line with the events. For instance, the scene when Dorothea and Will, or Dot and Billie, realise they cannot live without each other presents in both cases the same setting as a storm gradually increases. In the novel, Dorothea points out “how dark the clouds have become”, then the narrator mentions that “the light was more and more sombre, but there came a flash of lightning” (558), and finally the storm breaks “while the thunder gave a tremendous crack and roll above them, and the rain began to pour down” (559). Similarly in the series, the rain is suggested both through the sound effect in the background and Dot’s remark that “the rain is picking up” (ep.65). The storm becomes evident as the flash of lightning is visible on screen.

The similarity in the weather has a double purpose: first, it brings the same consequences regarding the characters' reactions. The flash of lightning "made them start and look at each other" in the novel (558), which is reproduced in the series as they start to hold hands and look each other in the eyes after the flash, while they avoided the other's look before (ep.65). Secondly, the storm mimics the confusion of feelings experienced by the protagonists at that moment. This association between emotions and nature is not specific to *Middlemarch* though, but known as the pathetic fallacy.

The pathetic fallacy was first demonstrated by Ruskin as the projection of human features onto nature because of "violent feelings", which results in "a falseness in all our impressions of external things", as mentioned in *Modern Painters III* (Ruskin 268). The use of the pathetic fallacy was frequent, as many poets and authors resorted to it to convey their feelings, which led Josephine Miles to express the following statement in her article "The Pathetic Fallacy and the Thing in Itself": "It becomes apparent that poets living in the same milieu of thought and feeling, however various their individual styles, are in a way limited by their very sense of the possibilities, and so phrase alike, as they share alike, the attitudes contemporary to them" (Miles 211-212). The similarities in the two scenes of the novel and the series suggest that the feelings are shared alike at both moments of creation, so that the attitudes are not "contemporary" to one period only, but what was contemporary to Eliot's Victorian era was still contemporary to Shoptaw's 21st century. Instead of showing the uniformity of thought of a group of artists who lived at the same time, the use of the pathetic fallacy in the series rather shows how atemporal are the emotions. The fallacy's function is not limited to expressing the authors' feelings through the characters but reveals how these feelings remain through time.



Besides, the series does not only aim at reproducing the emotions that are felt in the novel, but more generally, at describing the main characters' concerns. Both works have in common to represent what is ordinary instead of exceptional events, and this attention paid to the commonplace, already at stake in *Middlemarch*, is precisely the element that appealed to Rebecca Shoptaw for her series, as she confided to the magazine i-D in an article entitled "*Middlemarch* is now a queer coming-of-age web series":

I think something that really struck me when I read *Middlemarch* for the first time was the way that the novel's narrator make[s] broader points about human nature. One of those points that was especially powerful for me personally was the novel's appreciation of the ordinary, the beautiful way with which it insists on telling unimportant stories. I feel like this especially resonates in college, where the pressure to change the world, or to be important, or just to be in some way extraordinary is so strong (Shoptaw).

This focus on the commonplace contributes to make *Middlemarch* a timeless narrative as ordinary lives and concerns are not bound to a specific era but valid anytime, which enables *Middlemarch, the series* to be a relevant adaptation. As Rebecca Shoptaw specifies, this "completely timeless" aspect of the fiction is a reason why "one could keep adapting it to different time periods" (Shoptaw 00:08:11 – 00:09:02), and it would still work because ordinary lives have always existed.

These timeless aspects were already noticed in *Middlemarch*, before the series emphasised their relevance for a contemporary narrative, as argued by Brian Swann in "*Middlemarch* and Myth". Swann shares this idea that the "sameness of the human lot" is at the basis of *Middlemarch's* atemporality and explains that "Dorothea's experience is given a timeless dimension common to all ardent 'later-born Theresas' of all ages" (Swann 211).

Dorothea's experience is understood as an instance of life which would then be repeated through time. But Swann does not only limit the timeless understanding of *Middlemarch* as a mere repetition of events that take place in the novel. He takes the example of Will who is a complex character who embodies several symbolic values such as the duality between light and darkness: "George Eliot was trying to give Will a whole burden of cultural values which transcend time and space" (212). Paradoxically, Swann suggests that the transcendence of time is achieved through the depiction of ordinary lives, which makes the characters' lives meaningful beyond the scope of *Middlemarch*. Therefore, this atemporality of the novel invites one to question how events, instead of being only repeated in the series, can persist through time.

## I B- Persistence

George Eliot herself displayed the idea of duration in her novel as she evoked "our persistent self" which "awaits us", after Lydgate acted like "a madman" and asked the actress Laure to marry him (104). Eliot understands persistence as the fact identity remains despite some behaviours departing from one's usual personality. Though she does not focus on the temporal aspects implied by persistence, these aspects are suggested through the verbs "pauses" and "awaits" (104). Indeed, duration is part of persistence, as defined by the OED: "Continued or prolonged existence or occurrence; duration; continuance" (OED). The question that arises, then, is how the phenomenon of persistence is meaningful in the study of transmission between *Middlemarch*, and *Middlemarch, the series*. Eliot evokes the persistence of identity during a lifespan, and in this case, throughout the novel, but the issue is whether these identities can remain identical in the series, and if this persistence can apply

to other phenomena than identity. These observations lead to challenge the role played by time inside fiction, and question how time and fiction have the capacity to affect each other.

The link between time and fiction is part of the subject of the thorough study carried out by Paul Ricœur in his work *Time and Narrative*, in which he defends the argument that the narrative configuration leads to a refiguration of temporal experience. In the third volume of his work, Ricœur discusses Kant's definition of persistence and what this notion entails. Kant considers that the meaning of the verb "to persist" refers to time itself, because the relations of succession and simultaneity require a basis that is stable and permanent, which leads Ricœur to deduce that permanence is presumed by these relations (Ricoeur 93-94). Thus, the changes or the simultaneity of two phenomena are only manners for permanence to exist. These relations are at stake in the transmission between *Middlemarch* and *Middlemarch, the series*, for the latter follows on from the former, and thus creates a relation of succession between the two works. But simultaneity may also be perceived in that the same fiction, even though developed in two distinct ways, is offered at the same time for a contemporary audience. This analysis suggests that permanence is at stake between the two works and becomes meaningful for today's readers and viewers, as witnesses of the relations of succession and simultaneity.

Indeed, what fiction allows through its treatment of time is a virtual representation which questions the experience of being in the real world. As Ricœur explains, "here is a fictive experience that has an imaginary world for its horizon, one that remains the world of the text. Only the confrontation between the world of the text and the life-world of the reader will make the problematic of narrative configuration tip over into that of the refiguration of time by narrative" (Ricoeur 100). The confrontation between the two worlds implies that the significance of time inside a fiction is not reduced to its characters' concerns, but reaches, and

most importantly, addresses the audience to reconsider our understanding of time in the “life-world”. By extension, the refiguration of time may apply to the future since the world of the text is not limited by chronological consistency but may expand beyond the historical timespan. Then, the confrontation enables the audience to see the future as potential, as suggested by the narrative.

However, this refiguration of time by narratives opposes the vision of a timeless fiction, as the confrontation between *Middlemarch* and *Middlemarch, the series* is not set out of time but uses narrative to challenge the life-world of the audience. Ricœur explains that timelessness is not suitable to deal with the intertwining of periods of time, because of the notion of traditionality inside which changes occur: “One aspect of the very idea of traditionality [...] is that identity and difference are inextricably mixed together in it” (25). He explains that the identity of style evolves through time to the extent of being associated with traditionality, as it “characterizes the schematism of the narrative understanding, such as it becomes constituted through a cumulative and sedimented history. This is why this identity is transhistorical rather than atemporal” (25). As a result, changes are inherent to the persistence through time, given that difference defines traditionality, which means there is no atemporal traditionality, but a transhistorical evolution instead. Therefore, a transhistorical vision of time inside the narrative is more significant to study transmission, as it takes into account the changes that already occurred and will occur again in the future, whereas a timeless understanding of the fiction fails to deal with the specificities of time. This is why it is relevant to see *Middlemarch, the series* as a transhistorical process, for it makes it differ from a mere adaptation of a past work. Contrary to the vision of a timeless fiction, the future can be considered a part of the transhistorical process as it is anchored in time, and through the

refiguration, this process becomes meaningful for the audience. Thus, the series can be seen as a transhistorical narrative which highlights the significance of the future for its viewers.

### I C- An open future

*Middlemarch*, the series lays emphasis on the future as it displays a change of dynamics in the relation between the work and its audience. Even though, in both cases, the work was published after the events of the narrative took place, the series and the novel do not take the same reference point. Indeed, in *Middlemarch*, the moments of narration and reception are both in the present. The narrator looks back on past events with a hindsight of forty years, and thus evokes elements which do not exist anymore at the time of *Middlemarch's* publication. For instance, the narrator comments on Dorothea's clothes and mentions "her straw bonnet (which our contemporaries might look at with conjectural curiosity as at an obsolete form of basket)" (16). The narrator takes his own present as a reference and, therefore, considers the audience is made of "contemporaries", while the novel is set in a past period in relation to them since the characters' habits are "obsolete". On the other hand, the reference point in the series is the narrated time of the characters, which sets the audience in the future. Several characters make clear that the moment of reception has not happened yet, like Dot who highlights her lack of knowledge regarding the reception when she wonders "if you're watching this" (ep.70). Through this change of dynamics, the series acknowledges its influence over its audience's future reception.

For all that, the references to a future audience are only meaningful when considering the series follows on from the novel. As Gillian Beer explains in *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary narratives in Darwin, George Eliot, and 19th century Fiction*,

The foreclosed future is held in the gap between the character's time-experience and our surveying backward interpretation from the vantage point of forty years (or now, a hundred and fifty years). [...] The setting alongside of our time and their time provides another control by means of which we recognise 'experimentally' common factors and divergences (Beer 155).

While George Eliot only had the perspective of telling a past story, Rebecca Shoptaw has herself a second vantage point which allows her to inscribe the series in a longer time span. Thus, she knows that the reception of *Middlemarch's* narrative did not stop after the reception of Eliot's work and may persist as well after the series is released. By addressing an audience which does not exist yet, the series invites future actors to challenge the narrative of *Middlemarch* and make it persist.

As the series and the novel need to be studied together to have an impact on the future, the story can be seen as a future narrative, as defined by Christoph Bode and Rainer Dietrich in *Future Narratives*. These narratives "preserve and contain what can be regarded as defining features of future time, namely that it is yet undecided, open, and multiple, and that it has not yet crystallized into actuality" (Bode and Dietrich 1). They are identifiable in the presence of "nodal situations", namely a "situation that allows for more than one continuation (1). It is possible to see nodal situations in the novel already, for instance during the good-bye scene between Will and Dorothea which takes place several times in chapters LIV, LXII and LXXXIII, and which leads to different consequences that are the departure of Will or the revelation of their love. But when the novel is compared to the series, new possibilities are added as resulting from one single situation, which enlarges the "nodal power", that is "the degree to which a situation is open" (Bode and Dietrich 47). For example, the good-bye scene is offered a new outcome when Rosamond goes to the train station to prevent Billie from

leaving (ep.62). As the series “add[s] to the openness or potentiality of a node” (47), it can be seen as the continuity of the novel, and the narrative common in both works appears as one single future narrative. Therefore, the study of a Victorian novel to contemplate new perspectives is not irrelevant but rather a way for the readers and viewers to be brought back to the future as a multiplicity of potentials that stem from one single knot anchored in the past.

Through the transhistorical process, evoking the future becomes meaningful as it stems from numerous vantage points, starting with the 1830’s period of *Middlemarch*’s plot. But the significance of the future for both the characters and the audience does not only come from the adaptation process of a past novel, but from the composition of these two groups, as they both consist of young people. The protagonists of the novel, and more strikingly of the series, wonder about their futures which are still open and undefined. The multiple possibilities that the characters evoke in the series find an echo in the viewers since they are at the same stage of their lives and are consequently preoccupied by the same concerns. Therefore, the significance of the future is led by a focus on youth, as being a feature of the main actors of the narration and reception of the series.

## II - A focus on youth

The relevance of the future stems partly from the role played by young protagonists, first depicted in the novel and then emphasised in the series. This period of life is characterised by its specific place, in-between childhood – whose remains are visible through the attitude of Fred for instance – and adulthood which is still a perspective for the protagonists, as shown

by the openness of their prospects in the series. This transition period makes education a major issue, either studied in university where the characters of the series live or developed through moral dilemmas such as experienced by Dorothea. The moral concerns may lead to perceive *Middlemarch* as a *Bildungsroman*, but the relevance of this designation for the novel has been discussed by several critics – among whom Hardin, Arnold, or Buckley – who disagree on the specific definition of *Bildungsroman* and whether it applies to Dorothea's situation or not.

Yet, morality is not only Dorothea's dilemma but a concern for all the young protagonists playing a role in the fiction. By considering a form of comprehensive *Bildungsroman* concerning all young characters, it is not one single individual who is put centre-stage, but a whole period of life with the concerns which accompany it. Besides, young protagonists are not only studied together because they are at the same stage of their lives, but because they constitute a community, especially visible in the series. The community plays a role which is distinct from that of solitary characters, but also of gossip and the new form it takes in the series, namely social networks. This focus on the community's strength sheds light on young people's abilities to deal with the concerns displayed in both *Middlemarch* and *Middlemarch, the series*.

## II A - The depiction of a specific period of life

The main protagonists in *Middlemarch* are young people, but in the series, youth is a period of life which is even more foregrounded as all the characters are young. This period of one's life is particularly relevant when considered as a period of growth, which is emphasised by the references to childhood as, for example, during Fred's illness which highlights how close



to childhood the protagonists are. Already in the novel, Fred, whose “illness had made him childish” (183), is taken care of by his mother when he is sick. In the series, this link to childhood is materialised by a soft toy with the appearance of a green monkey (ep.23). But the green monkey reappears later, in episodes 26 or 33, always in the background of Fred and Rosamond’s bedroom, but changing attitudes and positions according to the episodes. These moments, when the soft toy is noticeable, include a scene in which Fred leaves the room to give Lydgate and Rosamond some privacy (ep.33). At that moment, the green monkey’s head is buried in a cushion, in the background, as if refusing to witness the proximity of the couple. Thus, its presence acknowledges the transition from childhood to a new period of life and emphasises the growth of the characters by showing that childhood is a bygone but not remote period.

The focus on youth also comes from the openness of the series, since there is no sense of closure: no character dies, and the Finale is not represented on screen, which lets the reader imagine the future of the protagonists. In “A Conclusion in Which Almost Nothing Is Concluded: *Middlemarch’s* ‘Finale’”, J. Hillis Miller argues that this openness is already present in the novel, which is supported by George Eliot’s statement that “every limit is a beginning as well as an ending” (573) and also evoked in the absence of grounds to justify that Dorothea’s second marriage is better than the first, for her and for others (Miller 142). However, Mark Llewellyn opposes Miller in his article “Neo-Victorianism: On the Ethics and Aesthetics of Appropriation”, saying that “for George Eliot every limit might well have been both a beginning and an ending, but for her readers the final chapter of a novel was, as far as we seem to be concerned here, just that: final” (Llewellyn 31). Indeed, Eliot may suggest that the lives of her characters go on after the end of the novel, but the reader only sees the last chapter as the end of the novel, which is reinforced by the time lapse between the events of

the story and the Finale. On the other hand, the series' last episode does not show what the characters become, which is not final as in the novel, but suggests that the characters' future is not fixed, and, therefore, it leaves many possibilities open concerning the evolution of the young protagonists.

This focus on youth is linked to education, which appears as a major topic of George Eliot's novels that the series reinforces by setting its plot on a campus. However, a startling contrast appears in that the series does not depict education at university, the everyday life that takes place in classrooms, or the professor-student relationship, in the way represented in texts which belong to the campus novel genre. "The problem, therefore, of defining a university novel is in part quantitative, in that it must be concerned with the extent to which the author's ingenuity and tenacity have succeeded in making the university theme predominate", notes Mortimer R. Proctor in *The English University Novel* (Proctor 3). Even when applied to visual forms, the definition of campus novels as understood by Proctor does not apply to the series since the university theme does not "predominate". Thus, the series makes clear that it focuses on a period of life, and not on the space that university is for campus novels. Rather, it tries to demonstrate the changes that young people face, and university happens to be the place where this age group gathers, but it is not depicted for its specific relation to education.

This lack of focus on university life does not mean that the series avoids the topic of education. On the contrary, it follows the way George Eliot herself deals with this topic by focusing on the education that takes place outside the classroom. As Linda K. Robertson mentions in *The Power of Knowledge*, Eliot presents only one "enthusiastic, successful student who shows potential for continuing his efforts in the academic community" (Robertson 58-59), namely Christy Garth. On the other hand, several characters illustrate the misuse of their

learning, such as Fred Vincy who completes his degree because he feels compelled to do it, but his studies do not lead him to any profession. Robertson insists on the difference between being educated and being knowledgeable, as illustrated by Raffles who “thinks that his experience of having been educated at an academy qualifies him as the social and intellectual equal, if not the superior, of anyone” but “the effects of [his] pretension to being [a] gentlem[a]n (and sometimes deceiving the naive) extend far beyond what might be forgivable as simply the indulgence of vanity” (48-49). For all that, both Fred and Raffles are far from being ignorant, but their cleverness does not come from their studies. The series echoes this idea that education is not necessarily learnt at school through its refusal to depict the academic aspect of campus life.

The form that education takes in *Middlemarch* is moral, as the characters look for what George Eliot calls “vocation” (55), “which may be political, religious, social, scientific, artistic, but which embodies in every case the synthesis of individual expression and collective benefit”, explains Franco Moretti in *The Way of the World* (Moretti 214). He argues that youth is a period during which the concerns over the future are epitomised, since youth does not last long, which leads to the paradox of feeling “restlessness and the ‘sense of an ending’” at the same time (6). If the protagonists of *Middlemarch* and *Middlemarch, the series* are young people, it is “to *accentuate* modernity’s dynamism and instability” (5) as they are in the best period to face the future and to learn how to adapt to modernity, even though this learning process does not take place in a school. Moretti explains that the education of the protagonists comes from the hardships they encounter and the difficulty to deal with the double aspects – dynamism and instability – of modernity. This form of education of young people, directly linked to their concerns over the future, leads to consider *Middlemarch* as a *Bildungsroman*, as suggested by Moretti.

## II B - *Middlemarch* as a *Bildungsroman*?

Whether *Middlemarch* is a *Bildungsroman* or not has entailed numerous answers which vary according to the definition of *Bildungsroman* which was understood. Dilthey defines *Bildungsroman* as the story of a protagonist “who enters into life in a blissful state of ignorance, seeks related souls, experiences friendship and love, struggles with the hard realities of the world and thus armed with a variety of experiences, matures, finds himself and his mission in the world” (Dilthey, qtd in Hardin xiv), but above all, this protagonist must be a young man. Following this definition, *Middlemarch* cannot be a *Bildungsroman* for several reasons. First, George Eliot presents numerous characters who mature throughout the novel, due to the multi-plot aspect of her work, but not one single protagonist. When a main character is evoked, it often refers to Dorothea, but this assumption is undermined by the author herself: “but why always Dorothea”? (192). Besides, the issue of gender arises since Dorothea, as a woman, cannot be the hero whom Dilthey evokes, despite having a central place in the novel.

Yet, this idea of *Bildungsroman* around the life of Dorothea is not incoherent as George Eliot was familiar with the genre, which finds its origin in Germany with the novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, by Goethe. Indeed, the novelist spoke and translated German, and she read *Wilhelm Meister* several times. As underlined by John Rignall in the *Oxford Reader's Companion to George Eliot*, “she knew Goethe's work intimately, praising his wisdom and large tolerance in her 1855 essay on ‘The Morality of *Wilhelm Meister*’, and it was of central importance in her own creative life” (Rignall 134). Goethe's works inspired Eliot so that the theme of *Bildung* can be found in *Middlemarch*, and German literature is even advocated by Will, suggesting that “If Mr. Casaubon read German he would save himself a great deal of trouble” (144). However, the novel is not a *Bildungsroman* strictly speaking, as argued by Jean

Arnold in “Cameo Appearances: The Discourse of Jewelry in *Middlemarch*”, in which she explains that *Middlemarch* is not a female *Bildungsroman* “for it promotes the impossible task of free female self-formulation as a dream that cannot be realized in a culture that only allows males to engage in such practices” (Arnold 273). Nonetheless, “it was Eliot’s particular object to use an ideal of *Bildung* to question Victorian female gender conventions” (273). Thus, the novel depicts the ideal of *Bildung* and the failures that result from it, but even though it is an “unsuccessful attempt at *Bildung*” (274), this ideal can be searched for by a female protagonist.

Another significant critic who considered *Middlemarch* as a *Bildungsroman* is Jerome Buckley, even though his understanding of *Bildungsroman* is contentious. Buckley explains in his book *Season of Youth* that he uses the label English *Bildungsroman* “in its broadest sense as a convenient synonym for the novel of youth or apprenticeship” (Buckley 13). His analysis was criticised for not taking enough into account the German origins of the genre – which is not especially a problem since he tackles the English *Bildungsroman* only, so that the differences with the German novels are emphasised. But above all, he is reproached for his lack of definition, since he does not explain the term but provides a series of criteria usually found in the English *Bildungsroman*. James Hardin, in *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, points out that the imprecise use of the word, as mentioned by Buckley, leads to “categorize virtually any work that describes, even in the most far-fetched way, a protagonist’s formative years” (Hardin x). Buckley’s understanding of the genre is indeed vague; nonetheless, his list of characteristics appears as a useful tool to identify the elements in *Middlemarch* that could relate to the *Bildungsroman* genre.

Buckley categorises the main feature of a typical plot of *Bildungsroman* as the following: “childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-

education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation, and a working philosophy” (Buckley 18). The protagonist is a child whose experience is first narrowed because of the provincial town where he lives, and because of absent or unsympathetic parents. Going to a city is the occasion for the hero to experience the reality of life, work, or social interactions, and to discover himself and his values. Buckley also adds that love is linked to sexual encounters and that the search for a vocation makes him learn to manage his money. Several of these themes are present in *Middlemarch*, even when they seem at odds with the usual depiction made of them in the typical *Bildungsroman*. For instance, the city is usually described to emphasise the discrepancy with the provincial town from which the hero originates, while George Eliot only aims at depicting the provincial town itself, which gives her characters – such as Rosamond for example – the longing to leave for the city.

Except for childhood, which is replaced by the depiction of young people, all Buckley’s criteria appear in *Middlemarch* and offer a range of variations, as each aspect is experienced by at least three characters in the novel. Figure 2 below, “Buckley’s characteristics of the *Bildungsroman* in *Middlemarch*”, presents a list of situations when five of the main characters – Dorothea, Will, Rosamond, Lydgate, and Fred – are confronted to these aspects of the *Bildungsroman*. The multiplicity and variety of experiences lived by the young protagonists refutes the idea of *Middlemarch* being a *Bildungsroman* for Dorothea. Instead, numerous characters face the grow-and-change effect of the *Bildung*, which suggests that the novel displays the collective awakening of a group of young people rather than the evolution of a single individual. This effect is not only caused by the multi-plot novel, but also by the focus on a young community, which implies that most of the main characters are at the dawn of their adult lives.

The comprehensive depiction of the *Bildung* is achieved in *Middlemarch* through the sum of individual experiences, which, once accumulated, present to the reader a variety of situations that contribute to the representation of the grow-and-change effect. The series depicts how the *Bildung* applies to most characters too, but it amplifies the collective awakening that they live by stressing the importance of their support to each other. The protagonists are aware of the strength that comes from the group, and they even acknowledge it, as Jamie mentions after they watch the trailer released by Casaubon: “Most of us just move on. Grow. Change” (ep.67). The use of the pronoun “us” highlights the collective advantages resulting from their shared experience – filming for the vlog project – beyond individual struggles. Thus, the *Bildung* of *Middlemarch* is at stake in the series as long as the characters can count on each other to evolve individually and as a group, which emphasises the role of the community.

**Figure 2: Buckley's characteristics of the Bildungsroman in Middlemarch**

	Dorothea	Will	Rosamond	Lydgate	Fred
Provinciality	Contrast between Roma and Lowick	Newcomer in Middlemarch	Wish to settle in London	Newcomer in Middlemarch	
Conflict of generations	Opposes Casaubon	Opposes Casaubon		Opposes the doctors in Middlemarch	Opposes his father
Larger society	Meets Will and Casaubon	Meets Dorothea and Mr Brooke	Meets Lydgate	Meets Bulstrode, Rosamond and Dorothea	New relationship with Caleb Garth
Ordeal by love	Casaubon	Inaccessibility to Dorothea because of Casaubon	Lydgate	Rosamond	Mary's refusal if he becomes a clergyman
Choices to reappraise values	Renounces Casaubon's inheritance	Hesitates to leave Middlemarch as expected of him		Must vote according to his duty or his reputation	Must choose an occupation instead of clergyman
Self-education	Orphan	Orphan		Orphan	
Alienation	"these peculiarities of Dorothea's character" (4)	"some oddities of Will's, more or less poetical" (319)	"tottering in the midst as a lonely bewildered consciousness" (538)	"narrowed into the miserable isolation of egoistic fears, and vulgar anxieties" (447)	
Search for a vocation	Devoted to help people, especially her husband	Artist, Journalist, Politician		"the conviction that the medical profession as it might be was the finest in the world" (99)	Apprentice at Caleb Garth's side
Money	Does not know how to deal with her money	Refuses Bulstrode's money	Learns to live with less money than what she was used to	Indebted	Gets indebted and counts on money he does not have to repay



## II C- The community

In *Middlemarch*, the strength of the community comes from gossip, which reinforces the cohesion and unity of the group. D.A. Miller analyses gossip in “The Wisdom of Balancing Claims” and argues that the community shares a narrative of its own through gossip, as a “blinded form of th[e] busy quiescence” created by the production, dynamics, and maintenance of social exchanges (Miller 89). The community is sustained through its narrative as “gossip is always about someone else, oriented towards a story that both precedes its discourse and stands outside its frame” (89), thus reinforcing links between people. This leads Mr Brooke to compare one single character – Mrs Cadwallader, prone to share gossip – to the entire world, asserting that he was “brave enough to defy the world – that is to say, Mrs Cadwallader the Rector’s wife” (4). She embodies the width of the community by representing “the world”, but also the strength of social conventions, in this case the sharing of gossip, that requires to be defied. Indeed, gossip contributes to keep the image of the community intact: “the community’s narrative-formation is reduced to its source in the need to protect a fantasised self-image” (Miller 93). This narrative appears as the very element that allows the community to oppose the unusual behaviours of characters like Dorothea concerning her marriage, or Fred regarding his search for a proper occupation, since the social norms and the image of the community are protected by their transmission through gossip.

The transmission of gossip is still at stake in the series but takes another form due to the omnipresence of social networks. Thus, many secondary characters missing in the series are referred to in episode 64 “Q&Gay”, in which Max and Fred answer questions asked by supposed internet users. The names of Cadwallader and Ned Plymdale appear, but also the pseudonyms ty-ke, referring to Mr. Tyke who won the election for the chaplaincy at the New Hospital, @borthrop who is the forename of the auctioneer Trumbull whom Lydgate called on

to change his house, and even Brother-fair, a reference to the vicar Camden Farebrother. All these characters are members of the community in the novel and compose together the chain of gossip. This sudden apparition of forgotten characters in the series draws attention to the scope of the community, which is wider than what the series depicts and aware of the events that happened to the main protagonists. On the other hand, these human characters from the novel are turned into network accounts; it makes gossip more insidious since the community, whose narrative is already invisible in the novel, is dematerialized and virtually created.

The main characters' gathering at the end of the series demonstrates an opposition to this virtual community and its harmful effects. They constitute a group of young people whose strength enables them to resist gossip, as shown in episode 68 "The Release: Part One", when they voluntarily release on social media a trailer with which Casaubon threatened Dot because she and her friends were likely to be criticised by internet users if the trailer's content was watched. This episode highlights two sides of the community, one being virtual, invulnerable, and constituted by anonymous participants, the other being real and paying more attention to each of its members. As in the novel, Dot is showing empathy for others when she reacts to the threat of the trailer being released: "I really don't care if people hate me for what I said, but I can't stand the thought of it hurting everyone" (ep.56). But the strength of the community is visible in Billie's answer to Dot's worry, while all main characters agree: "whatever happens, Dot won't have to go through this alone" (ep.68). The opposition of the young characters to the virtual community values honest exchanges while preventing gossip from harming them.

The strength of the group is also opposed to intellectual loneliness, as shown by Casaubon's attempt to find a place in the virtual community when he is rejected by Dot. In both the novel and the series, Casaubon represents the figure of the failed scholar, and prefers

his work to his partner. His disappointment after they broke up leads to his participation in sharing gossip in the series, and his base intention emphasises the harmful effects of the online community. Another character who is characterised by his intellectual loneliness is Lydgate, as he is often mentioned for his skills as a pre-med student, but not for his relations with other characters: he does not get along with Fred, he separated from Rosamond, and he does not have any exchange with Dot, contrary to the novel in which Dorothea is his ally and helps him get rid of his debts. Suzanne Graver, in *George Eliot and Community*, suggests that Lydgate has always manifested distance between himself and the others, especially Rosamond: “his hand movements represent the distance he would place between her and his masculine world of thought and action” (Graver 209). They do not manage to have a true relationship, as “‘Social consideration’ does indeed rule in their marriage, but in such a way as to mean not sharing in a wide common life” (209). Having this interpretation in mind, distance can be seen in Lydgate’s sentences such as “you dated THE Thomas Lydgate. Isn’t that something?” (ep.42), which lays emphasis on the respectability of his future profession, at the expense of his couple, the latter appearing doomed with the use of the past tense on “dated”. Thus, Lydgate’s distance from the others, and especially Rosamond, participates in his exclusion from the community.

This depiction of a young community inside the series reflects the target audience of the medium, as it appears to belong to the Young Adult genre which is for and about youth. Judith A. Hayn and Jeffrey S. Kaplan explain in *Teaching Young Adult Literature Today* that the terms Young Adult “are driven by the audience” since the works are created with the aim of attracting young people, which is why they “generally have a young protagonist who deals with issues that other young people face or might have to face, no matter the setting” (Hayn and Kaplan 1). By focusing on a community of young people, the series makes clear it

addresses this age group. The combination of young people both inside the fiction and as a target audience highlights the specificity of the series as part of the Young Adult genre, which paradoxically contradicts the depiction of *Middlemarch* as “one of the few English novels written for grown-up people”, expressed by Virginia Woolf in *The Times Literary Supplement* (Woolf). Thus, the series manifests a shift from the depiction of “certain human lots” (96) to a genre which aims at addressing universal issues lived by young people.

The basis for the series appears to be the specific age-group depicted in *Middlemarch*, namely youth. But this topic is developed in the series through the significance of the *Bildung* value for all protagonists and the focus on the community, so that the study of youth becomes relevant both inside and outside the fiction. This presence of youth in relation to multiple aspects of the work creates an interplay between the various agents, to the point that some people belong to the narrated field and the creation process at the same time. Thus, the frontiers between the agents are blurred, which makes easier the audience’s identification with the characters and intensifies the relevance of protagonists’ concerns over the future as these concerns step out of the fiction.

### III- Blurring frontiers between the agents

Imprecise frontiers between the agents involve the blurring of clear traditional figures like authority which can be discussed in the opposition between George Eliot – having the authority over her novel – and Rebecca Shoptaw, over *Middlemarch, the series*. The question of authority also appears in the relation between the two works, as *Middlemarch* is defined as part of the canon, but the role of the series in relation to this canon is undefined, which

leads to a discussion of the series as a fanfiction, and what this role implies in terms of authority. Finally, authority is at stake inside the fiction and especially visible in Eliot's narrative voice. However, many changes stem from the disappearance of the narrator in the series, as the characters become responsible for the analysis of their own behaviours. Challenging the authority of the novel, this disappearance erases the single voice of the narrator to make a multiplicity of opinions and discourses emerge.

This multiplicity of voices takes the audience into account as it allows the viewers to shape their opinions without being influenced by an overwhelming narrator, to the point that the audience is integrated into the fiction through the resort to transmedia. Once again, the original plot works against the liberties taken by the series as it gives voice to more people, including characters who have their say since they are not reduced to protagonists of the fiction but live outside the story. Thus, the multiplicity of agents, through the conflict with the canon's authority, questions the possibilities of expansion of the fiction.

### III A - The question of authority

The authority of the canon is to be understood in the relation it develops with its adaptation, and several concepts, such as intertextuality, explore this relation between a hypotext and its hypertext. In *Refracting the Canon in British Literature and Film*, Gutleben explains that "when Julia Kristeva first coined and defined the term intertextuality in the late 1960s it was part of an attempt at deflecting the focus of literary criticism away from the traditional subject, i.e. the author as a demiurgic originator of a fixed meaning in his/her autonomous creation" (Gutleben 8). Even though intertextuality challenges the model of the canon and the role of its creator, Gutleben considers it a "reductive typology" as it only

“reorganise[s] previous cultural discourse” and establishes links without questioning the canon in the light of the novelty brought by the rewriting (9). Thus, intertextuality fails to take into account the dialectic relationship at stake in the case of a postmodernist rewriting.

To overcome these one-sided analyses of rewritings according to canons, Gutleben forged the term “refraction” to “designate a double process involving the ways in which a text exploits and integrates both the reflections of a previous text *and* the new light shed on the original work by its rewriting” (7). The specificity of refraction lies in this dialectic “affecting the result as well as the source, the new text as well as the old one, the modern product as well as the original prototype” (7). With this process, new layers of meaning come to the surface, which results in the elimination of “any hierarchical or evaluative distinction between two related texts - however canonical one of the two might be” (9). Gutleben’s concept of refraction suggests that *Middlemarch, the series*, as a postmodernist rewriting, may not only be studied in the light of *Middlemarch*, but may also bring new perspectives on Eliot’s novel without being reduced to a hypertext which depends on the canon from which its inspiration was drawn. Most importantly, this double process is more meaningful than the simple study of intertextual connection and suggests to forget the assumption of superiority inherent to the canonical form.

However, the dialectic relation does not only stem from the postmodern interaction between “conservatism and subversion” nor “present and past”, but also between “fidelity and betrayal”, as highlighted by Celestino Deleyto Alcala in “Return to Austen: Film Heroines of the Nineties” (Deleyto Alcala 97). The issue of fidelity is recurrent when dealing with rewritings of a canon, but challenging in that it has often been deemed irrelevant to study the quality of an adaptation. As Brian Mc Farlane argues in *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, “any given film version is able only to aim at reproducing the film-

maker's reading of the original and to hope that it will coincide with that of many other readers/viewers. Since such coincidence is unlikely, the fidelity approach seems a doomed enterprise and fidelity criticism unilluminating" (McFarlane 9). For all that, the creator of the adaptation is not given as much credit as the author of the original work, and the issue of fidelity remains at the heart of the debate. Sarah Cardwell pointed out in "Literature on the small screen" that "the issue of fidelity persists in the case of classic-novel adaptations, primarily because of the special status of these highly-regarded and much loved sources" (Cardwell 192), which suggests that the fame of the adapted work results in making the producer of the adaptation subordinate to the author of the original.

Indeed, this idea is reinforced by etymology as the words "author" and authority share a same Latin root – auctor – which justifies the authority of the writer but also considers the producer's authority as secondary since the adaptation is not an original writing but a re-writing. Hence, the authority of Rebecca Shoptaw, the producer of *Middlemarch, the series*, can be questioned in relation to George Eliot's one. Knowing that Rebecca Shoptaw expressed her fondness for the novel, asserting it was her favourite one, *Middlemarch, the series* could be considered a fanfiction, thus making clear the relation of subordination to the canon. The producer would stand in between an artist's status whose role is similar to George Eliot's and a mere admirer realising a fanfiction. The question of the fanfiction arises in that this type of writing "challenges notions of originality as being the condition of creativity", and refutes the authorship of one single person, as explained by Judith May Fathallah in *Fanfiction and the Author* (Fathallah 24). Seeing *Middlemarch, the series* as a fanfiction could appear as a form of contestation of George Eliot's authority over *Middlemarch*.

However, this vision of the adaptation as a fanfiction is not satisfying for several reasons that Deleyto Alcala highlights:

Although postmodern theorists have repeatedly pinpointed the conflation of high art and popular culture as one of the most salient features of postmodernism, what they usually mean by this is the sophisticated appropriation of popular culture by *serious* authors in their work, but hardly ever the reverse phenomenon: the *trivialisation* of high art by popular texts (97).

The postmodernist “sophisticated appropriation” seems to be opposed to the more popular form of fanfiction, as it takes into consideration the seriousness of the work and gives credit to the producer as an independent artist. The adaptation is not a contestation of authority, which is also asserted by Rebecca Shoptaw herself as she refutes the interpretation of her work as a fanfiction. She shows the seriousness of the series in that it is “methodical” and that she had “to realise things fully in a different way” because of the change of medium (Shoptaw 00:02:38 – 00:04:02). Besides, she pointed out the fact that many fan-fictions try to alter or fix the original while her series “stays very close to it, it’s not an attempt to make it better or make it more like what I want it to be” (Shoptaw 00:04:43 – 00:05:01). Thus, she emphasises the “desire to show *respect* to that text, rather than to be *faithful* to it”, as explained by Cardwell (193). *Middlemarch*, the series is not challenging George Eliot’s authority but taking possession of the narrative to question it.

Another argument given by Rebecca Shoptaw against fanfiction is that it leads to “lazy readings” (Shoptaw 00:02:20 – 00:02:27), which is an idea relying on the cliché of the fan-consumer. However, it has already been suggested that the series invites the audience to reflect and give its opinion, so as to avoid pointless consumption by a passive audience. By passing judgements, the audience becomes “active”, as defined by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and explained by Stuart Hall in *Culture, Media, Language*, which means they get involved and take action in the reception of the media, and they



propose alternative modes of reading (Hall 118). By inviting the audience to be active, the series once again refuses to claim authority over the narrative since the interpretation of this narrative is open. Therefore, *Middlemarch*, the series imposes itself as a serious work, rather than a fanfiction, through the complexity of its adaptation and by getting its audience involved. The audience's part leads to question how the viewers can become agents as well, but before focusing on their role, a third agent, standing in-between the creation process and the period of reception, needs to be taken into account: the narrative voice.

### III B - The narration process

The transition from a written to a visual medium results in the toning down of a major voice since the narrator is missing. The previous adaptations of *Middlemarch* already dealt with the difficulty of adapting the narration process on screen, as underlined by Jakob Lothe who sees Eliot's third-person narrator as "a challenge to any director attempting to adapt this particular novel to the screen", in "Narrative Vision in *Middlemarch*: The Novel Compared with the BBC Television Adaptation" (Lothe 176-177). The adaptation does not imply the disappearance of the narrator, but rather its substitution by what Lothe calls the "film narrator", which "is the sum of a large number of variable elements, and the narrative functions and effects of these typically depend on the manner in which they are combined" (183). The adaptation may "activate and combine constituent facets of the film narrator in a manner that presents a number of the literary narrator's functions" (197), to obtain a film narrator which resembles *Middlemarch*'s narrator, but it is only a combination of functions, and not an independent voice as it is in the novel.

However, the concept of film narrator is tried in the series for several reasons. Lothe first explains that the narrator can be detected since the viewer “who sees the film as an adaptation (because he or she has read the novel) is likely to construct an “internal speech” that approximates to that of the narrator in the literary text” (183). This argument suggests that the narrator is only perceived by the knowing audience, but the series’ target audience is made of young people, not expected to be familiar with the novel. Besides, Lothe presents the movements of the camera as an example of the “visual and auditory signals” (182) that form the film narrator. The camera has the possibility to focus on details to make the reader understand what is suggested by the narrating voice in the novel. But the vlog format of the series prevents this type of clue since the camera is fixed. Instead, Rebecca Shoptaw explains that editing was used to mimic the narrator’s omnipresence thanks to the juxtaposition of significant events: “Dot looking back could effectively play the role of the narrator in how she organised and titled the episodes. I rearranged the events of the novel in order so that the moments that the narrator parallels could be put together in the same episode” (Shoptaw 00:36:10 – 00:36:57). Contrary to Lothe’s film narrator which lays the emphasis on specific details, the role of the narrator in the series is reduced to linking the different plots.

This toning down of the narrator is consistent with the series’ turn towards the future. Indeed, the narrator in *Middlemarch*, as a “belated historian” (96), is passing judgements on the past, but does not dare evoke the future, as mentioned in chapter X: “Among all forms of mistake, prophecy is the most gratuitous” (56). To avoid the contradiction of a narrator expressing false prophecies, the series displays the erasure of the distinctive voice of a narrator making assertions. This choice fits the format of the vlog in which the characters speak directly in front of the camera, without depending on another voice to relay their stories. Moreover, it enables the series to address the future as the notion of prophecy is no

longer relevant, due to the absence of a prophet. Contrary to the prophet-like omniscience of the novel's narrator, the characters in the series evoke their own futures, thus making assumptions which only affect them. The characters are given more space to express themselves because of the format of the vlog, which softens the presence of the narrator in the story.

More than an overwhelming presence, it is in fact control that the narrator of *Middlemarch* holds over the characters, as Isabelle Hervouet points out in "The Narrative Voice of *Middlemarch*", describing the narrator as "a very traditional omniscient, god-in-the-novel, instance. [...] the omniscient narrator is endowed with unrestricted knowledge of characters and events" (Hervouet 37-38). The suppression of the narrator's control in the series results in an emancipation of the characters who are free to talk to the camera without interpretation occurring after their intervention. Consequently, the reader is also allowed to make his own interpretations based on the characters' discourses. As Hervouet argues: "the reader's response to the characters' actions is significantly conditioned by the narrator's constant observations" (39), which shows how the narrator's intrusiveness has an impact both inside and outside the story, on the characters and the readers. Thus, the series limits the bias of the audience who is affected by the narrator's opinions. It offers a more balanced story in which there is not one single voice in control of the narrative, but a multiplicity of discourses, both emitted by the characters and interpreted by the viewers.

The two models of narration presented by the novel, that is a single narrative source, and by the series, namely a multiplicity of discourses, question where the objectivity and truth lie in the narration process. Hervouet argues that "the narrator's systole-diastole approach – a constant movement from individual truth to general law – abound[s] in the novel" (43), but this notion of truth is contested by Michael Ginsburg in "Pseudonym, Epigraphs, and Narrative

Voice: *Middlemarch* and the Problem of Authorship". He explains that the narrator exposes different opinions, but does not value one over the other, so that the truth is not achieved in the end. This is due to the free indirect discourse which sometimes renders impossible to detect who is speaking, the narrator or a character, since their voices dissolve into the other (Ginsburg 550). Instead of giving credit to one source of utterance, the text depicts "a 'polyphony', that is to say, a multiplicity of truths, an endless oscillation between incompatible positions" (555). This notion of polyphony suggests that the series' multiplicity of voices is not opposed to the novel's narrator, as it echoes the "multiplicity of truths" evoked by Ginsburg. What the series refutes, then, is the control over the characters and the readers by an external voice, but not the content of the narrator's comments.

The multiplicity of discourses, as a source of subjectivity, is also emphasised by the metaphor of the candle, both in the novel and the series. Already evoked in the second chapter of this study, many interpretations were drawn from the parable of the pier-glass, which reveals concentric circles when lighted by a candle:

It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection. These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent—of Miss Vincy, for example (182).

Michael Rectenwald argues in "The Construction and Deconstruction of Science in *Middlemarch*" that the narrator of the novel is associated with light: "all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web" (96), so that the narrator "would appear to be creating the same kinds of patterns as the candle on the lamp" (Rectenwald). His interpretation suggests that the narrator reveals the egoism in each character, in the same

way the candle does. The disappearance of a single source of narration in the series could weaken this attempt to reveal egoism. However, the series kept the imagery: in the same way the candle is a metaphor in the novel, it is extended in the series to the point of being its brand image, on which all the characters can be seen holding a candle, as shown on Figure 3. This imagery shows that the series does not need an authorial voice, that would be the narrator, to expose the subjectivity of discourses. Instead, it supports the emancipation of the characters and lets them express their own idiosyncrasies.



Figure 3: Middlemarch, the series, brand image

### III C - The multiplicity of agents

The novelty of the multiplicity of voices could be refuted as already present in the novel, since numerous characters express their opinions, pass judgements on others, or give advice. But in *Middlemarch*, these discourses are often brought together in the single and collective voice of the doxa, called the “intermental thought” by Alan Palmer in “Intermental thought in the novel: the Middlemarch Mind”. Intermental functioning is “opposed to intramental, individual, or private thought” (Palmer 427), and even though it is shaped by the inhabitants of the town, it results in the construction of one single mind. Individualities struggle to oppose this instrumental mind, because it draws its strength from the numerous people who sustain it. When Dorothea tries to marry Ladislaw at the end of the novel, the

opinion of the Middlemarch mind appears in her sister's answer: "You have disappointed us all so. And I can't think that it ever *will* be — how *can* you marry Mr. Ladislaw, that we none of us ever thought you *could* marry?" (565-566) The repetition of "us" and the emphasis of "all" suggest that the surprise is shared, while the italicised "could" shows that this marriage has never been perceived by the Middlemarch mind because it is not considered acceptable. If some characters manage to counter the doxa, like Dorothea who will finally marry Will, its power is still sufficient to force most people to act according to it, as illustrated by the Lydgates and the Bulstrodes who are forced to leave the town because they upset the Middlemarch mind.

The multiplicity of voices in the series differs through its treatment of the doxa. The Middlemarch mind may still be at play in the use of social networks, but as shown above, the online community is depicted as a source of harm, like blackmail. However, this potentially harmful community is not given a lot of space, contrary to the doxa in *Middlemarch*, because it is not considered a character but an invisible presence. Rather, the series puts distinct voices to the fore and highlights their idiosyncrasies through the use of the vlog which allows individualities to be heard. Moreover, the series opposes the derogatory connotation of the doxa by increasing the role of the social networks instead of reducing them to gossip. New voices, like those of the audience, are given the opportunity to express themselves on the social networks, which erases the totalising aspect of the doxa, since social networks are not the realm of the Middlemarch mind anymore. It also allows new agents to mix their voices to those of the fiction, thus it participates in blurring the frontiers between the different speakers by increasing the number of distinct and singular voices. This aspect of the audience leads to question how the voices of viewers are integrated in the fiction.

The series resorts to transmedia storytelling to increase the multiplicity of agents. In *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins explains what a transmedia story is and how it expands the field of transmission in comparison to usual mass media:

A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. [...] Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa. Any given product is a point of entry into the franchise as a whole. Reading across the media sustains a depth of experience that motivates more consumption. (Jenkins 97-98)

*Middlemarch*, the series is above all a vlog series which invites the audience to watch the seventy episodes available on YouTube. But the transmedia story is developed on different social networks, like Tumblr or Twitter, on which the characters feed their own network accounts, such as [FRED VINCY \(@invinciblefred\) / Twitter](#) or [dot brooke \(@thoughtsbydot\) / Twitter](#).

The content of the network accounts is distinct from the series, as new moments of the characters' lives are imagined and supported by pictures. This novelty not only extends the fictional world of the story, but also totally departs from the plot of *Middlemarch* which was rewritten and recognisable in the series. For instance, on 7th October 2017, Fred released pictures of him and Max on his Twitter account (@invinciblefred, 'the time has finally come for me to share my BRILLIANT ARTISTIC TALENT with the world YOU'RE WELCOME (as requested by the People Of Tumblr)'). At this date, the last episode was the revelation of Raffles's blackmail after he discovered Bulstrode's side-business, which is not linked in any way to Fred's skills at drawing or to his relationship with Max. It does not find any echo with the novel either, since it is never mentioned that Fred likes art; in contrast he needs to learn to draw plans to work for Caleb Garth. The use of social networks by the characters meets

Jenkins's definition of transmedia as they do bring a distinctive contribution to the whole story and a depth of experience.

Nevertheless, the agents participating in this transmedia storytelling may be questioned as to their actual role in the creation of a new text. Jenkins specifies that artists who put transmedia storytelling in place "are building a more collaborative relationship with their consumers: working together, audience members can process more story information than previously imagined" (Jenkins 98). Yet, the network accounts of the characters are not fed by members of the audience but by the staff of the series. Even though it still fits the definition of transmedia as the story is deployed across several media, the binary relationship between the producer and the audience is not challenged at first sight. The already evoked "Q&Gay" episode highlights the references to a fake audience as the internet users who are mentioned all allude to a character from the novel, like ty-ke, referring to Mr. Tyke, or @borthrop who reminds viewers of Trumbull. The Q&Gay is not made up though, as Fred Vincy asked his followers to ask him questions on his twitter account, which blurs the frontier between real internet users reacting to Fred's post, and characters created for the sake of the fiction who supposedly reacted to his post (@invinciblefred).

Yet, some internet users did send questions for the "Q&Gay" organised by Fred Vincy. The relevance of these questions – such as "If you were dinosaurs, which dinosaurs would you be?" (@White\_Rose\_Cafe) – seems sometimes remote from the plot of *Middlemarch*, which justifies their absence from the series. However, these questions were taken into account and answered by Fred, with pictures of dinosaurs, on his twitter account. Thus, the use of transmedia does not modify the rewriting of *Middlemarch* in the series but gives the characters a more fulfilled life than the plot allowed. The two treatments, in the series and on the social networks, of one single starting point – Fred's decision to host a Q&Gay – explore



the different possible futures of the characters, one remaining faithful to George Eliot's novel, and one engaging in a dialogue with the audience so that the fiction of *Middlemarch*, the series becomes emancipated from the Victorian story. The creativity of the audience, through the resort to transmedia, allows the characters to be independent from the constraints of *Middlemarch's* plot.

These exchanges with the audience are not confined to the realm of production but acknowledged by the characters themselves inside the fiction. In episode 18 "Fred spectacular cooking", Fred exclaims while addressing the camera: "Do you hear that? Of course you don't, you're not real yet!" (ep.18). This recognition of the audience is paradoxical as it questions the actual existence of the agents. By asserting the audience is "not real yet", Fred suggests his own existence is real in the present, as opposed to the viewers who are not viewers until they watch the series. This assumption highlights the temporal gap between the moments of the production and the reception, as it considers the audience belongs to the future whereas the use of transmedia plays on the possibility for the audience to step in while the action unfolds. This relation to the audience as belonging to both the present and the future is already paradoxical and participates in blurring the frontiers between the agents. On the other hand, Fred, as a character of fiction, is the one who is not real, while viewers, even though they are not members of the audience at Fred's time of utterance, still exist in real life. This double paradox undermines the clear distinction between fiction and reality through the involvement of agents who are both existing and fictitious. Thus, the narrative has an actual impact on the viewers as it makes them be a part of the fiction, which reveals itself to be meaningful not only for their present but also for their future, as proposed by the characters.

## Conclusion

“Postmodern styles, I conclude, combine homage and critique” declared J. Hillis Miller, in “Parody as Revisionary Critique” (Miller 130). Indeed, *Middlemarch, the series*, as a post-Victorian adaptation, has demonstrated this double process of respect and subversion of George Eliot’s novel, following the works of scholars who “open up the Victorian past by making it the locus of an intertextual, dialogic, historicised self-understanding going far beyond mere nostalgia, voyeurism, or epistemological popularisation”, as noticed by George Letissier in “Dickens and Post-Victorian fiction” (Letissier 112). The postmodernist adaptation is aware of the past and its weight, and demonstrates it by challenging the text, its format as a visual or a written medium, the place of the author, the characters, and even the audience, while always acknowledging its roots from *Middlemarch*. If postmodernism already opposed the binary divide between the past and the present, the series goes even further by adding the future to its reflection on time.

As the continuity of the past and the present, it was only logical to consider the future as a possibility for the development of the fiction, but this possibility requires to see *Middlemarch* as a future narrative, which implies that this single narrative is formed by the common nodes coming from the various adaptations of the fiction. The future is at stake in the depiction of youth and the community created by these young people, since their prospects are indefinite. Young people rely on the openness of the future, which is visible inside the fiction with characters like Max in the series or Dorothea in the novel, trying to find meaningful occupations, as highlighted by the pattern of a *Bildungsroman*, which may be seen in the actions of most protagonists. Outside the fiction, this openness is established through the creation of a young community drawn to the series which belongs to the Young Adult

genre. By resorting to transmedia, the series asserts the relevance of the fiction for future viewers and invites them to be involved by challenging the narrative after the series' release. The members of the audience of existing works – the novel and the series – become the necessary actors to take charge of the transmission process in the future.

Thus, the appeal to the future reveals itself convincing when both works are considered together. The adaptation, with regard to *Middlemarch*, is necessary to study transmission between the two, to perceive the continuity, and to understand that George Eliot's fiction is not anchored in time. Instead, it offers a look at one specific period – the Victorian era – on topics which are still at stake today: the exchanges and gossip switched from rumours told by the inhabitants to messages posted on social networks, but they still represent the manner for a community to express its opinion. Likewise, the substitution of Eliot's scientific writing by a filmed documentary highlights the scientific dimension of these two projects more than the technological evolution that happened in-between. Therefore, *Middlemarch* provides a possibility to challenge these topics through time, so that the work of transmission is an answer not depending on the Victorian period.

These topics are the common points between the novel and the series, and they create a basis which enables the transmission to take place, since the series takes charge of these issues after *Middlemarch* developed them. The depiction of ordinary lives and the difficulties to face the weight of time are still convincing issues because they do not depend on the Victorian way of life but are persistent. By challenging these issues, the transmission process suggests some answers, as hindsight gives the audience a more elaborate view of potential developments. Above all, it invites this audience to keep on challenging these issues which are meaningful whatever the period and keep on questioning *Middlemarch's* concerns in the future. George Eliot might have depicted "ordinary human li[ves]" (135) and "unhistoric acts"

(578), in the end, Dorothea does not rest in an “unvisited tomb” (578); her story achieved posterity thanks to the work of transmission which started with *Middlemarch*, is developed with *Middlemarch, the series*, and will persist in the future.

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