

2011 – Question 2 (Passage) Anchor Essays – Eliot—*Middlemarch*

9

Arguments are rarely about their subject of quarrel. Many a spat over curtain color, dinner plans, and children's names have been proxy battles for the real issue—control. In George Eliot's Middlemarch, the newly wedded Rosamond and Tertius Lydgate encounter a real issue—a lack of money. Yet in their argument, as in so many marriage decisions, money is not the danger confronting their happy marriage. Rather, by telling detail and omniscient perspective, George Eliot reveals that the true stumbling block in the Lydgates' relationship is their pride—Tertius's desire to maintain his pride as “provider” for his family, and Rosamond's want of a more elegant, self-pleasing existence.

With very little obvious exposition, Eliot sets the scene in the passage expertly via her concise use of detail. The scene enters in medias res, with the lovers holding hands, and Rosamond blushing. While these details may initially seem trite, they offer excellent insight into the nature of the relationship. By the hands, the reader can deduce that these newly weds are, as should be expected, in love. Yet the blushing response and following questions show that there is not a lot of transparency in the relationship. Rather, it is a chess game of discreet, manipulative moves to disarm the other of control in the relationship.

Even in the next action, after Lydgate says “no,” this manipulation is emphasized. Not only does Rosamond blatantly disobey her husband by exclaiming “then I must tell him!” but she also undermines his authority covertly, moving “two yards' distance from him.” By including the detail of distance, Eliot emphasizes that this was not an emotional outburst, but rather a calculated maneuver to thwart her husband. If her intention was to subvert, she succeeded.

Later in the passage, the narrator exposes that her moving away “made everything harder to say.” These little details expose the deliberation of the couple in one of their first arguments.

Details also serve to highlight the “financial difficulties” the couple confronts, and show them to be less severe than expected. Perhaps the most telling portion of the passage is the description of what Dover, the appraiser, will do to earn the Lydgates some more money. He will “take a good deal of the plate back again, and any of the jewelry we like.” This choice detail shows that this couple is not broke, but rather has a “good deal” of plate silver and enough jewelry to choose which ones to sell! By showing the couple to be only slightly financially distressed, Eliot allows the reader to focus on the true issue of the passage—who will get his way.

Another tactic Eliot employs to expose the pettiness of this argument is perspective. The narrator is 3rd-person omniscient allowing for an unbiased peek into the thoughts and desires of each character. This serves the reader well by allowing him to see the motives behind each character’s actions. This narrator shows the double fault at Lydgate’s offending Rosamond—both the man’s insensitivity and the difficult situation Rosamond placed him in with her disobedience. It also exposes the selfishness of Rosamond, only wanting to find in her marriage “more indulgence, more exactly to her taste.” It also shows how she aims to take advantage of Lydgate’s momentary humility to “attend to her own opinion.” By showing the flaws behind the reserved argument, Eliot’s narrator allows the reader to see both sides of this conflict.

As all unbiased narrators must, Eliot does not solely implicate Rosamond in this passage, she also criticizes Lydgate for his pride. She first directly addresses it, saying that Lydgate’s “proud resistance to humiliating circumstances” hindered him from being sympathetic to his wife’s plight. Later, when Lydgate momentarily bows under his wife’s yoke, his pride quickly

rebounds when offended, with his “peremptoriness rising again.” This same pride that refused to ask his wife’s father for money will not ask his friends or family for help. He claims that she “doesn’t understand” his predicament and dismisses her as inferior. Yet he still wishes to be “gentle” and “imploring.”

Ultimately, in this passage Eliot offers a warning to the early arguments in marriage. She exposes, by keen detail and omniscient point of view, that both husband and wife have their own motives in the marriage. Yet she does not condemn them. There is still love in their marriage, and one difficult time will not ruin a lifelong relationship. Yet she warns that unless this couple stop playing games and start being honest, squabbles will quickly escalate into fights.

8

The use of foils in works of literature is an incredibly effective tool for characterization. In being presented with two antithetical personalities, the reader can learn and infer facets of one character’s personality through the words and actions of another. Rosamond and Tertius Lydgate are such characters, and unfortunately for themselves, they are married. Many details of both these characters and their relationship from one another can be gleaned from the method in which the story was written. The narration not only offers deep insights into the words and actions of the two people but also a precise examination of their motives and emotions.

The Lydgate’s are rapidly discovering that they make an awful married couple, but both attempt to ignore this and maintain the charade of marital bliss. However, by virtue of the omniscient third person narrator, the reader is allowed to see the underlying feelings of the couple, and thus see right past the failed charade. For instance, while it seems to Tertius that his wife is being quiet and attentive to his demands, in reality she is practicing “quiet, steady disobedience” as a means of challenging him. This sort of misunderstanding deeply complicates

their relationship, as Tertius then believes he is making headway and pushes for more, which only causes Rosamond to be even more stalwart in resisting him. Eventually, this unabated pushing by Tertius prompts Rosamond to make a secret confession to only herself and the reader: had she had the chance to choose again, she would not have married Lydgate. However, there is dramatic irony in this in that the reader knows that Rosamond has entirely given up on marriage, while Lydgate thinks he has won after seeing this his wife is “determined to make no further resistance or suggestions” against him.

Though this revelation would surely come as a tremendous shock to Lydgate should he ever learn of it, the reader had been steadily forewarned of it as a result of very specific details throughout the selection. The first such detail comes very early on with Rosamond physically distancing herself from her husband. To counter this, Lydgate calls her “Rosy”, trying to make her feel childish and weak in a way that would make Thorvald Helmer (*A Doll’s House*, Henrik Ibsen) proud. When Rosy cries, this too prompts an emotional response from Lydgate, who feels it paining his heart. These two instances clearly demonstrate a major difference between them; Rosamond is quieter, preferring to speak through action, and much more conscious of the subtle meanings behind her husband’s words, whereas Lydgate doesn’t seem to listen to his wife, and responds only to her most obvious physical signals. These two divergent means of communication are the basis of the rift growing between the couple. Lydgate doesn’t realize the effect that his demeaning and angry tone has on his wife, and Rosamond hides this pain inside herself instead of telling Lydgate what he is doing to her.

This passage is able to demonstrate the true nature of the two characters and the status of their marriage in greater detail than the words themselves provide. Through the use of foils, every word or action of one character reflects back on the other and thus speaks twice. Through

the detailed language, the reader is able to see with great specificity the inner workings of each character's personality, and by virtue of the omniscient, third person perspective, is able to extrapolate these details into a clear view of what a shamble their marriage is.

7

In a passage from George Eliot's "Middlemarch", written between 1819 and 1880, Eliot comments on matters very close to home for many future readers. The old adage "Relationships are more important than the task at hand" is brought to new light in marriage during times of financial crisis. Eliot portrays a young couple faced with financial burden and the emotional toll it takes on their relationship with the use of dialogue, word choice, and tone. Eliot shows the strain at which the financial crisis has ripped open a gaping new hole in the relationship of the newlyweds, putting their love to the test as each thinks he or she has found a solution to a complex problem. He also comments on the stubbornness of men and the ignorance of women.

Eliot skillfully uses dialogue to convey the differences facing this couple. The quickness of Lydgate to anger at his new bride is notable as he says "forgive me" (line 47) and angers again soon after Rosamond mentions leaving Middlemarch. The reader is exposed to the strong resolve of Lydgate who insists they "do what is necessary" to climb out of the hole of financial ruin that surrounds them. The husband seems to blatantly put blame on himself, saying "I could not afford to live this way" (lines 38-39), almost placing unnecessary blame on his wife. He asks her to "school [him] in carefulness" (line 45) which shows his supplication. He admits he is in the wrong, and this gives his wife hope her opinion will be heard. However, when she suggests something, her opinion is immediately disregarded and Lydgate is quick to anger again. Rosamond comments that "if she had known how Lydgate would behave, she would not have married him" (lines 78-79). This, again, shows the strain in their relationship as Rosamond is

having doubts about being married. The financial crisis, which caused a hole in the circle of marriage brings along with it discontent and heartache as couples argue about how best to deal with the situation. Disregarding the relationship and focusing on the task of getting out of financial ruin, proves detrimental in any situation. The dialogue of this passage shows the back and forth argument of a couple as well as the toll of anger from Lydgate on Rosemond. She sits supplicantly as her husband continues to assert his opinion and disregard her own. On more than one occasion, she “sit[s] perfectly still” (line 77) as Lydgate moves from yelling to “trying to be gentle again” (line 18). We see Rosamond further succumb to her husband's wishes as she agrees to sell “jewelry” and “spoons and forks”. Eliot makes a comment on Rosamond's lips saying they “seemed to get thinner with the thinness of her utterances” (lines 87 to 88).

Eliot uses word choice to bring about a feeling of contentment to the reader. Using words like “indulgence”, Eliot comments heavily on the way in which Lydgate and Rosamond were living before, creating an image of luxury. The relationship is thickened when the couple cannot live as they were before. Even the “unpardonable” yelling of Lydgate seems to drive a wedge deeper between the two making the marriage even more complicated. Words like “self-blame” and “implored” add a complexity to the relationship as one blames themselves for mistakes while the other begs to be heard.

Eliot portrays two characters almost prophetically to a modern reader of a struggling couple faced with financial difficulty due to previous choices. It's almost frightening the way the passage alludes and prophesies of the future. Eliot utilizes dialogue and word choice to emphasize the complex relationship between husband and wife and how financial crisis can become a wedge for discontentment and marital and relationship ruin, by only focusing on the task, not the relationship.

6

In the novel Middlemarch by Mary Ann Evans under the pen name George Eliot the complex relationship between husband Tertius Lydgate and wife Rosamond Lydgate is explored. It is explored through the perspective of the characters, the specific details that went into the passage, and the different emotions of the characters.

The different perspectives between Rosamond and Tertius show their complex relationship in the novel Middlemarch by Mary Ann Evans. When Tertius is confronted with imminent financial catastrophe he reacts in an immediate and resolute manner. In his perspective the only way to save himself and his wife is to become financially austere. His perspective is captured in line seven “no, Rosy,” said Lydgate decisively. “It is too late to do that.” In other words he must act now as the situation is desperate and it is the only way to save their relationship and position in the community. For Rosamond or ‘Rosie’ who has been sheltered from the business world and the household finances, this comes like a shot out of the blue. She feels that Tertius is overreacting, instead of selling everything to pay their debts she suggests “Have you not asked Papa for money?” (Lines 1-2) however Tertius cannot bring himself to ask another for help. The two characters perspectives in Middlemarch by Mary Ann Evans play an important role in their complex relationship.

In Evans’ novel Middlemarch the selection of detail plays a role in showing the complex relationship between husband and wife. Rosamond’s movement away from Tertius in this time of trials “That she ... to say” (lines 33-35) shows how this financial burden is causing a strain in their marriage. Instead of trying to help her husband she pulls away from him. Tertius’ decision to pawn the silverware and Rosamond’s reaction to it on line 86, “Are we to go without spoons and forks then?” again shows the disconnect between the two. Tertius may be being unrealistic

but Rosamond also fails to realize the dire straits they are in. Finally Tertius' admission of the failure of his practice. "But many ... low point." (Lines 38-40) show that he as the man of the household feels that he can no longer support it. The selection of detail in Middlemarch by Mary Ann Evans shows the couples marital problems.

Finally the emotions of Rosamond and Tertius show the strain on their relationship in Evans' Middlemarch. Tertius is trying to be kind but it comes across too firm and seems unfair. "This is ... not ask them for anything". (Lines 71-76) in these lines Tertius tries to explain to Rosamond but instead ends up yelling at her. Rosamond is sad that her life as she perceived it may be over and angry and Tertius for how he is presenting it to her. "Rosamond sat ... married him." (Lines 77-79) In this passage it is shown that Rosamond is so angry and hurt by Tertius that she is now willing to reject him. In Middlemarch emotion is important in describing the characters unique relationship.

In Mary Ann Evans' novel Middlemarch the complex relationship of Rosamond and Tertius is explored. This is done through useage of perspective, selection of detail, and the emotions of the characters.

5

George Eliot in his novel "Middlemarch", makes effective use of literary devices such as the narrative perspective in which the novel is written and also attention to detail to characterize the relationship as husband and wife of Lydgate and Rosamond.

Eliot portrays Rosamond as pampered and a bit selfish even. This can be seen in lines 23-35 where the narrator informs the reader, through Lydgate's thought process that Rosamond had never known hardship only indulgence. In addition, the selection begins with Rosamond being too angry to speak because Lydgate had not requested money from her father. This sort-of

attitude continues throughout the passage until the end when Rosamond realizes Lydgate is right, that she was throwing a tantrum, and that she still loves him.

In contrast to Rosamond, Lydgate is portrayed as practical, pragmatic, proud, and wiser. The reader first sees his pride in the beginning when he is too proud to ask for money from Rosamond's father, which he admits when trying to see the situation from her perspective, and later when he refuses to ask his friends for favors. The reader also sees the practical side of Lydgate when, in lines 80-85, he wants to sell plateware and jewellery for money to help through their hardship. Throughout the selection the reader may observe Lydgate's circuit of continually consoling Rosamond because he cares for her, and lapsing back to his upsetting her again. This shows the compassionate side of Lydgate, proving that though they may disagree and become impatient with one another they still love each other. Another way in which Eliot shows their relationship is through his careful attention to detail especially in regard to space. For instance, in lines 33-36 Rosamond's moving away from Lydgate hurts him as did her tears which "cut him to the heart". Lydgate also asks forgiveness of Rosamond in lines 45-47 when she becomes upset with him.

Through these devices George Eliot develops and portrays the relationship between Lydgate and Rosamond as one of hardship but ultimately love.

4

The chosen passage from the novel "Middlemarch" by George Eliot demonstrates a feuding couple discussing financial matters. The author chooses to write in a narrative perspective, and uses imagery to show their struggle. From the beginning of the passage, we can gather that Rosamond wants to find the easy way out of this problem by asking their parents for money, and

until the end of the passage, both characters have different solutions. And using the narrative perspective and imagery gives the reader insight into their situation.

Throughout the passage, the author uses certain details to show their concern and sadness. It is mentioned in lines 24-26 that Rosamond knows nothing more than indulgence, and their financial difficulties are not allowing it. Rosamond argues for her solution of borrowing money, and the details used in her actions show her frustration. Lydgate on the other hand, wants to stick it out and solve this on their own. Using the narrative perspective allows us to understand each sides of the argument, and gives us their reasons for their actions. Without use of this chosen perspective, the reader would be limited in understanding, and the relationship would not be as easy to comprehend.

Furthermore, it is important for an author to use certain details, but a perspective used is even more so. Knowing the point of view can help the reader to understand why the author chose the selection of detail and how they were used. The details played a large part in understanding the attitude and actions that set the tone of the passage. Without either of these methods, understanding their situation and the different solutions would not have been as easy, or possible.