

Tyler Armstrong

AP Lit

4/7/2020

In this excerpt from *Middlemarch*, George Eliot uses dialogue and imagery to weave together a story of a married couple with vastly different values, and how they confront adversity in light of these differences.

At the passage's outset, the reader is quickly made aware of Rosamond and Lydgate's financial troubles. Rosamund asks her husband, "have you not asked Papa for money?" which is quickly dismissed by Lydgate--this, however, is an important insight into Lydgate's personality. He speaks "decisively" against Rosamund's desire to obtain money from a third party, and although the reader is not immediately made aware of why this is the case, Eliot uses this specific detail, this specific adjective, to suggest an ego on Lydgate's part. Eliot, through this, establishes Lydgate's pride, and unwillingness to accept help for his situation. This character trait acts in stark contrast to his wife's worldview; not only does she suggest that they try to obtain money from friends by saying "your friends would not wish you to be without money," Rosamund was also the first to bring up asking her father--she simply does not have the same prideful reservations that her husband has. Lydgate wants to hide their problems, evidenced by the fact that he tells Rosamund, "I insist upon it that your father shall not know [about our financial issues] unless I choose to tell him." This contrast reflects both Rosamund's openness with those she trusts, and Lydgate's desire for privacy in his own affairs.

But beyond that, this difference between the two of them brews conflict. Even to Rosamund, who is "not given to weeping and [dislikes] it," "her chin and lips began to tremble and the tears welled up" as a result of their financial problems. Lydgate's own pride leaves him with mixed emotions, as he was "under the double stress of outward material difficulty and of his own proud resistance to humiliating consequences." Eliot could not state it more outright--while Rosamund's worries are marital and materialistic, Lydgate's are due to his inner emotions and desire for control, both of

himself and of how he appears. It is also important to note that when addressing these problems head-on with his wife, Lydgate repeatedly uses the pronoun "I." He tells her, "it is I who have been in fault; I ought to have seen that I could not afford to live in this way... I may recover it, but in the meantime we must pull up." Through his wording, we can see that Lydgate places responsibility entirely on himself, and sees this as a problem which is his to address. His consistent use of "I" mirrors his rejection of help from others, and in turn, that same aforementioned desire for control.

With varying approaches at handling their problem, Eliot illuminates the relationship these two individuals have. Both have a desire to be heard by the other--Rosamund when "[Lydgate's] self-blame gave her some hope that he would attend to her opinion," and Lydgate when he tells Rosamund, "you must learn to take my judgement on questions you don't understand." Rosamund is blindsided by her husband's attitude, and realizes that "if she had known how Lydgate would behave, she would never have married him." This revelation of the blindness with which she entered marriage leaves her utterly disappointed and distraught--both when "the tears welled up" and when her "lips seemed to get thinner with the thinness of her utterance." Rosamund realizes that, by entering into a relationship with a prideful man, her voice is drowned out; and as such, she becomes "determined to make no further resistance or suggestions." This death of communication suggests two things: on a plot level, this foreshadows a marital disaster, and on a grander level, Eliot is imploring readers to truly understand the people they involve themselves with.

Through the contrasting dynamic and specific details that Eliot invokes, she exhibits a broken relationship composed of vastly different individuals. The clashes between the two, although not as impassioned as other fights may be, suggests a deeper dysfunction; rather than this simply being the side effect of an incorrect pairing, it illustrates the faults of the era's broken way of approaching romance. While women are suppressed, that suppression creates a cycle--a cycle of blindness and impulse marriages, which ultimately breeds more clashing like that depicted in this passage.