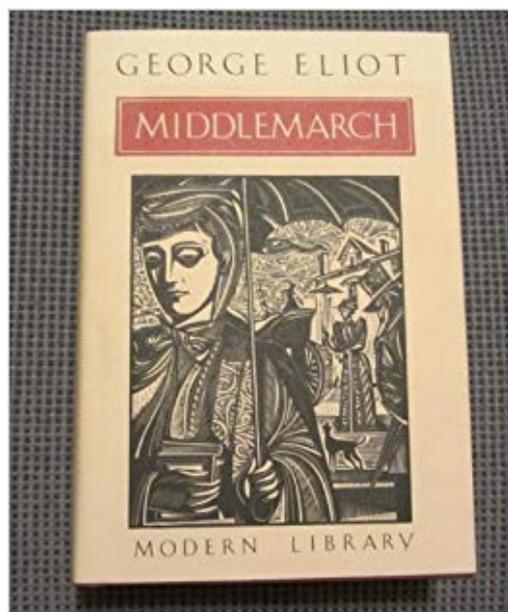


Middlemarch by George ELIOT



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Reviews of the **Middlemarch** by George ELIOT

Dori

I read *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot when I was about 17 years old. I remember the experience because I almost literally could not put the book down. I read for 14 hours straight until I finished the book. I even remember cooking pork chops with one hand while holding the book in the other hand so that I could read while I cooked. I cannot tell you now what the book was about (that was almost 40 years ago), just that I loved it and devoured it, along with the pork chops:-). After reading *Middlemarch*, I plan to reread *The Mill on the Floss* and read all her other novels as well.

I loved *Middlemarch*, but I didn't devour it. I chewed it slowly - the writing too beautiful to swallow whole. It grabbed me right from the start and I knew I was in for a sublime reading experience.

In many of the reviews I have read people have mentioned that Eliot's narrative voice was not to their liking, finding it too didactic or distracting. I found her narrative to be one of the things I liked

best. It was through this technique that most of the wisdom and life lessons were imparted. The narrative became another character for me, seamlessly blended with the rest of the characters.

"We mortals, men and women, devour many a disappointment between breakfast and dinner-time; keep back the tears and look a little pale about the lips, and in answer to inquiries say, "Oh, nothing!" Pride helps us; and pride is not a bad thing when it only urges us to hide our own hurts-- not to hurt others."

Her ability to sum up a character in one beautifully written paragraph is remarkable.

In describing Mr. Casaubon, one of the main characters, Eliot writes. "It is an uneasy lot at best, to be what we call highly taught and yet not to enjoy: to be present at this great spectacle of life and never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self-- never to be fully possessed by the glory we behold, never to have our consciousness rapturously transformed into the vividness of a thought, the ardor of a passion, the energy of an action, but always to be scholarly and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dim-sighted."

In talking about another character, Dr. Lydgate, she says. "Only those who know the supremacy of the intellectual life-- the life which has a seed of ennobling thought and purpose within it-- can understand the grief of one who falls from that serene activity into the absorbing soul- wasting struggle with worldly annoyances."

Her dry wit and humor are scattered throughout the book like sparkling gems.

"Miserliness is a capital quality to run in families; it's the safe side for madness to dip on".

"He has got no good red blood in his body," said Sir James. "No. Somebody put a drop under a magnifying-glass and it was all semicolons and parentheses," said Mrs. Cadwallader.

"Oh, tallish, dark, clever--talks well--rather a prig, I think." "I never can make out what you mean by a prig," said Rosamond. "A fellow who wants to show that he has opinions." "Why, my dear, doctors must have opinions," said Mrs. Vincy. "What are they there for else?" "Yes, mother, the opinions they are paid for. But a prig is a fellow who is always making you a present of his opinions."

"But Duty has a trick of behaving unexpectedly--something like a heavy friend whom we have amiably asked to visit us, and who breaks his leg within our gates."

Eliot is sympathetic to her characters, showing the good and bad in all, even the characters who would be despised if written by most authors. There is no black and white here, and yet the story is still compelling without the device of writing purely lovable or despicable characters. We are shown what motivates the most hateful figures as well as those we are drawn to, and as a result there is no one in this book with whom you cannot empathize in some way. Her writing is infused with penetrating insights into human nature without ever losing compassion and understanding for their frailties. This empathy for her characters, perhaps more than anything else, differentiates her writing from Dickens and Austen.

I now look forward to reading all her other novels, starting with her first one, Adam Bede. It should be interesting to see her progression from first novel to last. I had very few preconceived notions about Middlemarch before I read it and maybe that helped me to enjoy it all the more, but enjoy it I certainly did!

The_NiGGa

January 16, my birthday, I started *Middlemarch* by George Eliot (1871), a book I have wanted to read for fifty years. I finished it today, July 3.

Set in the fictitious Midlands town of Middlemarch during 1829–32, and widely considered the greatest of Victorian novels, this mighty work has often been compared to Tolstoy's *War and Peace* due to its immense cast, and its historical precision. Additionally, however, it reminds me of Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880) due to its depth of psychological analysis of human nature in all its rhythms and shades. Some have called *Middlemarch* a novel without a hero, but in the end it is the town of Middlemarch itself, with all its dizzying array of foibles and follies, loves and slanders, gossip and redemption, tragedy and laughter, wealth and poverty, that fills the role. The author never ridicules, never mocks, but simply loves her people, every one, and after spending six months with them I will miss every one, even the monsters, but especially the disappointed.

Halfway through I discovered that Edward VII (1841-1910), Queen Victoria's eldest son, read *Middlemarch* annually from its publication until his death, thirty-six years later. I can see why. Spanning eight books, and nearly a thousand ages, the author never falters.

A sample:

“Men outlive their love, but they don’t outlive the consequences of their recklessness.

"Every limit is a beginning as well as an ending. Who can quit young lives after being long in company with them, and not desire to know what befell them in their after-years? For the fragment of a life, however typical, is not the sample of an even web: promises may not be kept, and an ardent outset may be followed by declension; latent powers may find their long-awaited opportunity; a past error may urge a grand retrieval. Marriage, which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a great beginning, as it was to Adam and Eve, who kept their honeymoon in Eden, but had their first little one among the thorns and thistles of the wilderness. It is still the beginning of the home epic--the gradual conquest or irremediable loss of that complete union which makes the advancing years a climax, and age the harvest of sweet memories in common. Some set out, like Crusaders of old, with a glorious equipment of hope and enthusiasm and get broken by the way, wanting patience with each other and the world."

And, finally, the last and most famous line in the book, "...for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on un-historic acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in un-visited tombs."

Mettiarrb

To give a masterpiece of world literature, which is what *Middlemarch* is, only five stars is to fail to acknowledge its greatness. Yes, it's a bit slow in the beginning; yes, it's long and written in a leisurely pace; yes, it's written in the English style of the 19th century, which is a far cry from modern prose. But in depth and precision of characterization, in its ability to penetrate to the core of human experience, and in its creation of a picture of an entire world, there are few, if any books, that can match it. It is, indeed--as Virginia Woolf said--a novel for adults.

Many others have pointed out the particular beauties and wisdom of the novel better than I can, so let me point out a particular feature that Amazon offers that I have used. If you buy the Kindle version of this Oxford edition of *Middlemarch* you can, for an extra few dollars, also get the Audible version read by Juliet Stevenson. (The Audible version on its own is \$55.) Also, the two versions sync together, so you can read a few chapters, and then switch over on your iPad or iPhone to

Stevenson's reading, and then switch back whenever you wish. Stevenson's reading is legendary for a reason: she brings the book alive in a very powerful way, and is marvelous at communicating its meanings. I learned a lot from listening to her--especially in revealing the humor in the book, which I missed in my own reading. But I also wanted to read on my own as well. Amazon had made this now possible at a very reasonable price, and I heartily recommend it.

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