



## "MIDDLEMARCH" IS CONSIDERED BEST NOVEL EVER WRITTEN

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**Abstract:** *This article explores the ideas behind the endless praise for George Eliot's "Middlemarch" as one of the best British novels ever written. It examines Eliot's masterful use of realism to depict the social, political, and intellectual landscape of Victorian England, particularly focusing on the lives and experiences of ordinary people in a provincial town in 19th century England, and its continuing relevance to readers today.*

**Keywords:** *The Imperfection of Marriage, the status of women, idealism, self-interest, political reform, hypocrisy, education, religion, naturalism.*

Critical realism is a philosophical approach to understanding science, and in particular social science, initially developed by Roy Bhaskar (1944–2014). It specifically opposes forms of empiricism and positivism by viewing science as concerned with identifying causal mechanisms. In the last decades of the twentieth century it also stood against various forms of postmodernism and post structuralism by insisting on the reality of objective existence. In contrast to positivism's methodological foundation, and post structuralism's epistemological foundation, critical realism insists that (social) science should be built from an explicit ontology. Critical realism is one of a range of types of philosophical realism, as well as forms of realism advocated within social science such as analytic realism and subtle realism.

George Eliot, a pen name for Mary Ann Evans, is an English novelist who wrote the book *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life*. Eight parts, or volumes, were published in 1871 and 1872. It is set in the fictional English Midlands town of Middlemarch between 1829 and 1832 and tells several interconnected episodes with a large cast of individuals. The status of women, marriage, idealism, self-interest, religion, hypocrisy, political reform, and education are among the issues at hand. *Middlemarch* emphasizes realism to cover historical events, such as the 1832 Reform Act, the invention of railroads, and the coronation of King William IV, despite its humorous features. It examines the medical practices of the day and the reactionary beliefs of a settled population dealing with unwanted change. Eliot began writing the two pieces that formed the novel in " 1869–1870 and completed it in 1871. Initial reviews were mixed, but it is now seen widely as her best work and one of the great English novels"

Though opinions on what makes for the "best novel" are always based on



personal experience, \*Middlemarch\* has been a popular choice for more than a century, gaining over customers and reviewers. Numerous elements work together to confirm its status as a literary classic and contribute to its enduring appeal:

- A Microcosm of Humanity "Middlemarch" presents a panoramic view of Victorian society, encompassing a diverse cast of characters from various social classes and walks of life. Each individual is meticulously crafted with their own unique personalities, motivations, and flaws, creating a rich tapestry of human experience that transcends time and place.
- A Mirror to Victorian England - "Middlemarch" offers a nuanced and insightful critique of Victorian society, exposing its rigid class structures, gender inequalities, and political tensions. Eliot explores themes of social mobility, marriage, religion, and intellectual currents, providing a comprehensive portrait of a society on the cusp of change.
- Multiple Perspectives - Eliot employs a shifting narrative perspective, allowing readers to experience the story through the eyes of various characters. This multifaceted approach provides a nuanced understanding of events and challenges readers to consider different viewpoints and interpretations.
- Exploration of Morality - "Middlemarch" delves into complex moral questions, prompting readers to contemplate themes of duty, responsibility, ambition, and the pursuit of happiness. Eliot explores the tensions between individual desires and societal expectations, encouraging reflection on ethical choices and their consequences.

Middlemarch originates in two unfinished pieces that Eliot worked on during 1869 and 1870: the novel "Middlemarch" which focused on the character of Lydgate and the long story "Miss Brooke" which focused on the character of Dorothea. Dorothea Brooke is intelligent, wealthy woman with great aspirations. She always avoids displaying her wealth and embarks upon projects such as redesigning cottages for her uncle's tenants. She marries the elderly Reverend Edward Casaubon, with the idealistic idea of helping him in his research, The Key to All Mythologies. However, the marriage was a mistake, as Casaubon fails to take her seriously and resents her youth, enthusiasm, and energy. Her requests to assist him make it harder for him to conceal that his research is years out of date. Faced with Casaubon's coldness on their honeymoon, Dorothea becomes friends with his relative, Will Ladislaw. Some years after Casaubon's death she falls in love with Will and marries him.

The action of Middlemarch takes place "between September 1829 and May 1832", or 40 years before its publication in 1871–1872, a gap not so pronounced for it to be regularly labelled as a historical novel. By comparison, Walter Scott's Waverley (1814) – often seen as the first major historical novel – takes place some 60 years before it appears. Eliot had previously written a more obviously historical novel, Romola (1862–1863), set in 15th-century Florence. The critics



Kathleen Blake and Michael York Mason argue that there has been insufficient attention given to *Middlemarch* "as a historical novel that evokes the past in relation to the present".<sup>1</sup>

The subtitle "A Study of Provincial Life" has been seen as significant. One critic views the unity of *Middlemarch* as achieved through "the fusion of the two senses of 'provincial'": on the one hand it means geographically "all parts of the country except the capital"; and on the other, a person who is "unsophisticated" or "narrow-minded". Carolyn Steedman links Eliot's emphasis on provincialism in *Middlemarch* to Matthew Arnold's discussion of social class in England in *Culture and Anarchy* essays, published in 1869, about the time Eliot began working on the stories that became *Middlemarch*. There Arnold classes British society in terms of Barbarians (aristocrats and landed gentry), Philistines (urban middle class) and Populace (working class). Steedman suggests *Middlemarch* "is a portrait of Philistine Provincialism".<sup>2</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

Though penned in the 19th century, George Eliot's "*Middlemarch*" remains strikingly relevant to contemporary readers. Its exploration of universal themes, complex characters, and insightful social commentary offers valuable lessons and resonates with the challenges we face in the modern world. "*Middlemarch*" delves into complex moral questions, prompting readers to contemplate themes of duty, responsibility, ambition, and the pursuit of happiness. Eliot explores the tensions between individual desires and societal expectations, encouraging reflection on ethical choices and their consequences. Additionally, Eliot employs a shifting narrative perspective, allowing readers to experience the story through the eyes of various characters. This multifaceted approach provides a nuanced understanding of events and challenges readers to consider different viewpoints and interpretations.

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