

## ***Middlemarch* for Book Clubs: Discussion Questions**

### **Book V: The Dead Hand**

1. Chapters 43-45 offer yet another wonderful sequence worth analyzing for its twists of chronology. I think that, in addition to helping us see situations from different points of view, in constructing the novel this way Eliot is also working on a problem identified by her contemporary, philosopher-historian Thomas Carlyle: “Narrative is linear; action is solid.” Try to *draw* a diagram representing the movement of our attention through one of these sections (any kind of graphic that you think that will work) — messy, right? But if you think in three dimensions (if you think of yourself as building a solid) it neatens up.
2. Chapter 43 brings different plot lines together again — a bit to Dorothea’s surprise, as she doesn’t expect to see Will Ladislaw at the Lydgates’. What’s the effect for us of running into people outside of their usual context? Do we notice different things, or judge them differently?
3. This section focuses a lot on Lydgate’s career. How are things going for him? Why? How has his marriage affected his pursuit of his vocation? How have things changed for him — or have they? — since the earlier episode in which he voted for Tyke? In the struggle between ardour and pettiness, which force seems to be winning?
4. Lydgate, of course, is not the only person in his marriage. What has marriage meant for Rosamond? Has it changed her at all?
5. In Chapter 48 Mr. Casaubon asks Dorothea for a promise that is very hard for her to make. What are the stakes here— not just for her personally, but morally, in a more general way? Are there limits on the obligations imposed on us by sympathy? Does Dorothea make the right choice? *Is there a right choice?*
6. Brooke’s speech in Chapter 51 is another of the novel’s comic highlights. What picture of electoral politics does Eliot paint for us? What attitude towards reform does the novel encourage: what kind of change is desirable and how can or should it be brought about?

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