Middlemarch for Book Clubs: Discussion Questions

Finale

1. Would “home epic” be a good label for Middlemarch? What does that term suggest about scale and significance, in both life and literature?

2. Why is “a solid mutual happiness” within reach for Fred and Mary? What makes them (or their story) different from Lydgate and Rosamond? Do they somehow deserve better — did they do something right? Or are they just luckier?

3. Do you agree with those who are dissatisfied that Dorothea ends up “absorbed into the life of another,” “known only as a wife and mother”? Or do you find the conclusion of her story fitting, if perhaps not ideal? Can you think of other endings for her that you would prefer but that would also be realistic? What might be the political value of any lingering dissatisfaction?

4. Now that you’ve finished the entire novel, it’s worth rereading and reconsidering the Prelude. What does the story of Saint Theresa mean to you when you return to it here in the Finale? How does it help you understand the novel you’ve just read?

5. The final paragraphs of the novel are very beautiful (I recommend reading them aloud), but some have also found them painfully melancholy. Do you find them sad or inspiring? Why?

6. At the very end, the narrator once again draws us into the novel, speaking directly about why “things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been.” What message, ultimately, do you think the novel has for us about how to live our lives?

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