

Title: Victorian Research Seminar Week 14 Outline

Author: Arthur Davis, Rebecca Regan

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## Outline Week 15

### Middlemarch: first half

What are people's reactions to the book now that it's been finished? Where do we see Eliot's realism / research in the novel?

Potential discussion topics:

- Comparison to *Adam Bede*
- Eliot's narratological interruptions
- Themes of gender / romance
- Plot construction

### The end of *Middlemarch* - and returning to the beginning

#### Quarry for *Middlemarch* (continued)

- What patterns/systematic practices do we observe in Eliot's notes?
- Did anyone find anything in the notebook that surprised them?
- How do the notebooks reflect (or, potentially, not reflect) Eliot's theories of literature?

### Ana's close reading

Ana does an analysis via search of instances in which Casaubon refers to Dorothea as "my love", finding that these moments often also explicitly are tied to feelings of annoyance, thus foreshadowing an unhappy end to the marriage.

"[...] Eliot tells us that Mr. Casaubon's extremely strict sense of propriety leads him to call his wife "my love" when he is the coldest to her [...]. It turns out that, though there are surprisingly few instances of his use of the word, Eliot's observation holds up." (Curtis 1)

- What other foreshadowing ( if any ) do we see?

"As we read the second half of the novel, it will be interesting to observe whether there is anything of note in the instances of the phrase that relate to Will." (Curtis 2)

- See Chapters 47 (Will's song) and 83 (near the end)

### **Emma's close reading**

Eliot continues to enforce / manage readers' expectations with a passage hinting that Will is the better, younger match for Dorothea, while also dismissing her own suggestion in a kind of apophasis.

“Eliot effaces the “prophecy” about Will Ladislav that she has just created (ie, that he is more fertile, will develop as a man and eventually become a better match for Dorothea). In fact, she claims to not have created this impression at all, seeming to cast doubt on the reader's expectations. When the inevitable does happen, then, it likely seems to surprise as well as fulfill expectations, perhaps even seeming inevitable or natural.” (Pernudi-Moon 1)

## ***Middlemarch*: Second Half**

### **Katie's close reading**

Katie discusses a passage dealing with Lydgate's professional debts, noting that it, in particular, exemplifies Eliot's style ( see: Allison ). The passage links Lydgate's troubles to other characters in literature rather than to real life, seeming to lead the reader into a brief moment of literary criticism.

“While Eliot begins with a call for greater literary attention to ordinary lives and their larger struggles, she ends by suggesting that these struggles are avoidable through a specific state of mind.” (Paulson 1)

- How do we expect literary philosophy to relate to life philosophy in the novel? How does it actually relate in Eliot's work?
- Are we convinced by Eliot's efforts to depict the “sordidness” of life “for the majority” of people?

### **Willa's close reading**

Willa discusses the artistic status of *Middlemarch* in light of Dorothea's challenge to the value of classical visual art. Many cultural distinctions go into this question: classical vs. modern; “fine” art vs. popular art; masculinity vs. femininity ( vs. ungendered ). Dorothea takes issue with the sort of art that does not depict the difficulties faced by people every day, introducing an aesthetic issue into the argument.

“Dorothea’s description of the poor is “an aesthetic judgement rather than a realistic (or sympathetic) account of the conditions of poverty,” indicating “an aesthetic sensibility she has that cannot be repressed” despite her claimed preference for the real.” (Glickman 2).

- What might Eliot’s depiction of “fine art” in *Middlemarch* tell us about the (omitted) novel?
- How successful is *Middlemarch* at “address[ing] the specific, the suffering of our neighbors” (Glickman 1)? What do we think of this artistic objective (in the context of the Victorian novel)?

### Rebecca’s close reading

Rebecca argues that neither character psychology nor social circumstance is deterministic in Eliot’s narrative, but that the two rely on one another for their meaning, raising the question of to what extent Eliot is interested in depicting individuals versus depicting society as a whole.

“The complexity of character which this passage explores is predicated on the importance of social circumstance in shaping an individual’s behavior” (Regan 1).

## Break

### Childers

#### Emma’s summary

Discussions of Sir Walter Scott’s relationship to 18th century ideals of “idealism” or “realism” in fiction. Childers raises questions of how “realist” fiction is supposed to be perceived – that is, “as if it were fact, including provoking ‘real’ emotional reactions” (Pernudi-Moon, 1).

- Is realism ( according to the Victorians ) what we are actually discussing when we talk about realist novels? Has the definition shifted over time?
- Is a “seamless performance” necessary to provoke emotional reactions? Does Eliot – and did other Victorian authors – produce this seamlessness?

Childers argues that Victorian critics “did not form a coherent view of the novel, or often succeed in evaluating the form of the novel and its social impact simultaneously” (Pernudi-Moon 2)

- How have we done in this respect? Do modern methods address the aesthetic-social relationship?

### Amy's seminar paper

Amy examines Victorian theories of the novel in relation to *Middlemarch*: genre and “great literature”, authorial presence, and language as a medium. What is the relationship between Eliot's writing style and the realist novel as a genre?

“Eliot uses Ladislaw to express her idea that “language gives a ‘fuller,’ more holistic representation of an image” within the novel” (Ding 2-3).

- Ladislaw's comments on art: what do we make of this use of characters to reference the text's context, in a realist novel?

### Tenen

#### Leila's summary

Tenen proposes the “archeologization” of “diegetic” space – spaces that are described within and form part of a story. This should lead to a different method of approaching analyses of these locations, one which prioritizes poetic understanding alongside context over analytical practices.

He uses a variety of terms:

*Narratological primes* are the atomic, building block level relationships needed for a fictional world (119). *Diegetic density* is a measurement of diegetic space by density of perceptual objects (131). *Clutter distance* seems simple but contains a lot of information. Basically, it is how many things exist in the space. It can be a score showing how often a thing is described in a given space, and to measure if that thing is unique or one of many of the same type (a roomful of pencils, for example) (134).” (Selchaif, 1)

### Jaffe

#### Tristan's summary

Jaffe describes the Victorian novel's reception in several literary and scholarly movements. In the early 1900s, it was understood that these novels were primarily occupied with materialism rather than characters. From there, New Critics thought about ahistorical form, and from there, further viewpoints developed, including: reader-response theory, feminist literary criticism, deconstructionism, Foucauldian criticism + discussions of powers, psychoanalytical criticism, gender/queer theory, etc..

With regard to Foucault and New Historicism: > “It is in this pair of related critical moves where she begins to describe literary study moving perhaps away from the strictly literary and towards a broader cultural analysis” (Beiter 2).

- Do we see any consensus about the Victorian novel among the many methods in use in the late 20th century?
- What are cultural studies? This class is “Victorian Literature and *Culture*”, after all. How does/should cultural studies relate to literary studies?

## **The End of the Semester!**

Closing thoughts? Questions? Ideas?