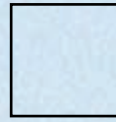


British Masterpiece

from *Middlemarch*

Novel by George Eliot



George Eliot



READING 5A Analyze how complex plot structures and devices function and advance the action in a work of fiction. **5B** Analyze the moral dilemmas and quandaries presented in works of fiction as revealed by the underlying motivations and behaviors of the characters.

BACKGROUND The works of Mary Ann Evans, who adopted the pen name George Eliot, mark the high point in English realism. George Eliot (1819–1880) was a moralist, yet she also introduced skepticism and a desire for progress into her works. For example, in many of her novels, Eliot wrote about women whose need for education and useful employment went sadly unmet in a patriarchal society. Her novel *Middlemarch* focuses on one such woman, Dorothea Brooke. Dorothea marries elderly scholar Edward Casaubon but is unhappy from the start. She gets much sympathy from Casaubon's young cousin, Will Ladislaw, but Casaubon is jealous of their friendship. His dying wish is that Dorothea not take Will as her second husband, and his will stipulates that Dorothea can inherit his wealth only if she does not marry Will. Wanting not to fuel local gossip or ruin Dorothea's prospects, Will decides to leave Middlemarch. In the following scene, he and Dorothea are saying goodbye.

LITERARY ANALYSIS An offshoot of **realism**, **psychological fiction** focuses on the inner workings of a character's mind in a realistic, or true-to-life, way. As people often do in real life, fictional characters face moral dilemmas that may not allow them to state directly to others what they feel. When this happens, readers often must rely on elements other than dialogue to identify what a character does not verbally express. Important details in the scene, such as body language, the setting, and comments by the narrator can all reveal a character's true state of mind. In *Middlemarch*, for example, the forbidden love between Dorothea and Will prevents them from expressing their true feelings. In the excerpt that follows, Will tells Dorothea, "What I care more for than I can ever care for anything else is absolutely forbidden to me," but he fails to tell her that he loves her, even though he may never see her again.

DISCUSS In a small group, choose two specific examples from the excerpt that illustrate the difference between what the characters say and what they really feel. How does each character's choice of words help conceal his or her true feelings? What clues about the characters' true feelings can you gather from the narrator's comments? What do these narrative techniques add to the realism of the scene? Do they make the scene more believable or true-to-life? Explain.

FROM MIDDLEMARCH

They were wasting these last moments together in wretched silence. What could he say, since what had gone obstinately uppermost in his mind was the passionate love for her which he forbade himself to utter? What could she say, since she might offer him no help, since she was forced to keep the money that ought to have been his, since today he seemed not to respond as he used to do to her thorough trust and liking?

But Will at last turned away from his portfolio and approached the window again.

10 “I must go,” he said with that peculiar look of the eyes which sometimes accompanies bitter feeling, as if they had been tired and burned with gazing too close at a light.

“What shall you do in life?” said Dorothea timidly. “Have your intentions remained just the same as when we said good-bye before?”

“Yes,” said Will in a tone that seemed to waive the subject as uninteresting. “I shall work away at the first thing that offers. I suppose one gets a habit of doing without happiness or hope.”

“Oh, what sad words!” said Dorothea with a dangerous tendency to sob. Then trying to smile, she added, “We used to argue that we were alike in speaking too
20 strongly.”

“I have not spoken too strongly now,” said Will, leaning back against the angle of the wall. “There are certain things which a man can only go through once in his life, and he must know some time or other that the best is over with him. This experience has happened to me while I am very young—that is all. What I care more for than I can ever care for anything else is absolutely forbidden to me; I don’t mean merely by being out of my reach, but forbidden me, even if it were within my reach, by my own pride and honour, by everything I respect myself for. Of course I shall go on living as a man might do who has seen heaven in a trance.”

Will paused, imagining that it would be impossible for Dorothea to
30 misunderstand this; indeed he felt that he was contradicting himself and offending against his self-approval in speaking to her so plainly; but still—it could not be fairly called wooing a woman to tell her that he would never woo her. It must be admitted to be a ghostly kind of wooing.

But Dorothea’s mind was rapidly going over the past with quite another vision than his. The thought that she herself might be what Will most cared for did throb through her an instant, but then came doubt.

