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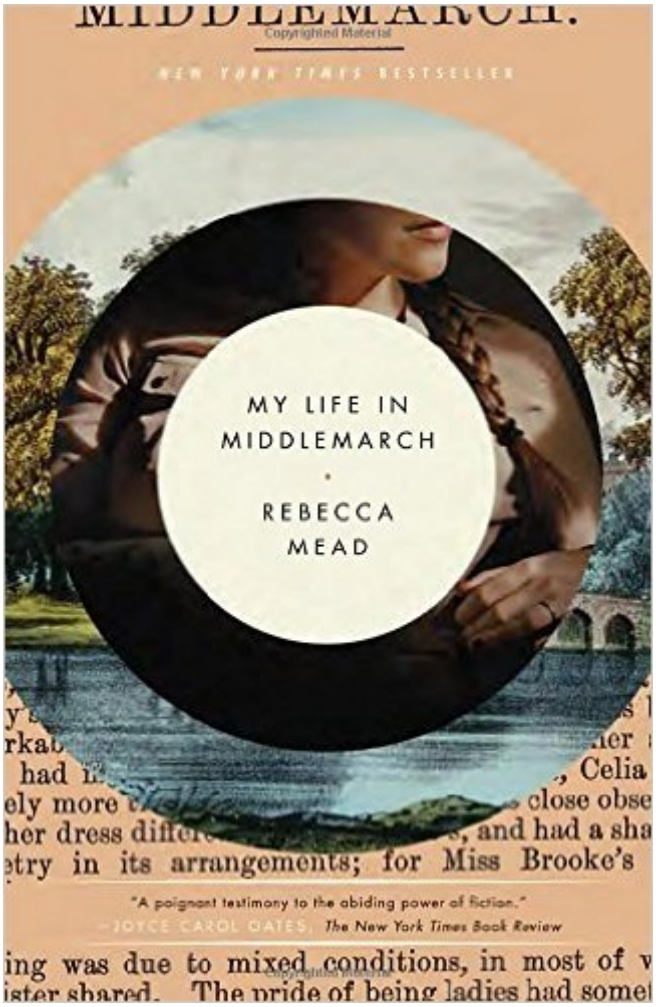
My Life In Middlemarch



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Synopsis

A New Yorker writer revisits the seminal book of her youth--Middlemarch--and fashions a singular, involving story of how a passionate attachment to a great work of literature can shape our lives and help us to read our own histories. Rebecca Mead was a young woman in an English coastal town when she first read George Eliot's Middlemarch, regarded by many as the greatest English novel. After gaining admission to Oxford, and moving to the United States to become a journalist, through several love affairs, then marriage and family, Mead read and reread Middlemarch. The novel, which Virginia Woolf famously described as "one of the few English novels written for grown-up people," offered Mead something that modern life and literature did not.In this wise and revealing work of biography, reporting, and memoir, Rebecca Mead leads us into the life that the book made for her, as well as the many lives the novel has led since it was written. Employing a structure that deftly mirrors that of the novel, My Life in Middlemarch takes the themes of Eliot's masterpiece--the complexity of love, the meaning of marriage, the foundations of morality, and the drama of aspiration and failure--and brings them into our world. Offering both a fascinating reading of Eliot's biography and an exploration of the way aspects of Mead's life uncannily echo that of Eliot herself, My Life in Middlemarch is for every ardent lover of literature who cares about why we read books, and how they read us.From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As the author Rebecca Mead puts it, "Middlemarch," is indeed a "brick of a book" at 900 leisurely

paced and philosophical pages. This is probably why my main memory of reading it in school was anxiety over finishing it before the exam. However, Mead, who grew up in rural England, and studied the book as a youth had a much different impression. "Aching to get away," from her small world and go to Oxford (though "anywhere would do"), she said, "I couldn't believe how relevant and urgent it felt." "Middlemarch" had insightful things to say about being a young woman desiring love with a kindred spirit, and also the hopes and dreams of later life. As Mead grew up, married and embarked on a career in journalism, she continued to turn to "Middlemarch" for inspiration. Here, she goes to Eliot's various homes to find out more about the writer's life, as well as seeking out Eliot's manuscripts and letters (and those of her partner, contemporaries, and on one occasion, a stalker-like correspondent of Eliot who published a collection of her sayings). The result is an extraordinarily perceptive look at a writer who has fallen out of fashion, but who is still very much worth reading.Some of the topics explored here include Eliot's decision to risk ostracism in order to live with George Henry Lewes, a man who helped her enormously with her work, but who was also technically married to someone else; her subsequent marriage to a man twenty years her junior after Lewes' death; her choice to break with her religious upbringing as a young woman; and the contrast between falling in love as a youth and developing a lifelong partnership/marriage.

I've read a number of books, and they all seem to have been written by women, about the impact of literature, and / or of a particular author on them. This would include Azar Nafisi's Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books, Emma Larkin's Finding George Orwell in Burma and Gloria Emerson's Loving Graham Greene: A Novel. If this be a sub-genre of books, then Rebecca Mead's "My Life in Middlemarch" has been the most satisfying and fulfilling for me. Part of the reason, for sure, is that Ms. Mead has helped me overcome some of the sins of my youth.Mead has read George Eliot's Middlemarch (Penguin Classics) four times. The first reading was at age 17. I STILL have not read any work of George Eliot. When I was 15 or 16, I barely escaped being forced to read Silas Marner and Two Short Stories (Barnes & Noble Classics), which the literary scholars in my high school class had universally proclaimed to be the most boring book ever. It was even set in the 19th century, and what could we learn from that?

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