

Araştırma-İnceleme

GEORGE ELIOT'S *MIDDLEMARCH*: THE URGE OF REFORM AND PROGRESS IN VICTORIAN NOVEL

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Abstract: *Middlemarch* is not only one of the greatest novels by George Eliot but also one of the most popular and bulkiest novels in English literature, with its richly-peopled story, multi-plot structure, and outnumbering themes and arguments. The grandeur of *Middlemarch* has been perhaps due to its intellectual powers to include major ideas of the Victorian England, which also attracts contemporary readers as well, such as the idea of reform and progress at the aftermath of Industrial Revolution, the rise of science and scientific thought with its influence on theology, the changing face of the new world despite the old, and the overall prosperity of Victorian England greatly developing and reaching to the one tenth of the world's soil. George Eliot situates her novel within such a complex scene of early 19th century and reflects the intermingled developments of the time in the fictitious world of Middlemarch community. Yet she not only reflects these discussions but also participates in them intellectually in *Middlemarch*. Interested in Victorian urge and relish on the ideas of reform and progress, this paper analyzes George Eliot's *Middlemarch* with a New Historicist look to be able to grasp the idea of reform in the novel and evaluate it on political, scientific, and social grounds.

Keywords: Middlemarch, Victorian novel, reform, New Historicism.

GEORGE ELIOT'UN MIDDLEMARCH'I: VİKTORYEN DÖNEMİ ROMANINDA REFORM VE KALKINMA TUTKUSU

Öz: *Middlemarch*, çok çeşitli insan portreleri sunan hikâyesi, çok-konulu yapısı ve içinde barındırdığı sayısız temaları ve tartışmaları ile yalnızca George Eliot' un en büyük romanlarından biri olmakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda İngiliz edebiyatının da en popüler ve en hacimli romanlarından biridir. *Middlemarch*' ın ihtişamı belki de, Victoria Devrimi'nin sonrasında reform ve ilerleme düşüncesi, bilim ve bilimsel düşüncenin önem kazanması ve bunun teolojiye olan etkisi, değişen dünya algısı ve emperyalizm ile dünya üzerindeki toprakların onda birini kontrolü altına almış olan Viktorya dönemi İngiltere'sinin genel refah seviyesinin

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yükselmesi gibi günümüzde çağdaş okuyucuların da ilgisini çeken Victoria İngiltere'sinin temel fikirlerini içermesinden kaynaklanmaktadır. George Eliot, romanını 19. yüzyılın başlarındaki böylesi karmaşık bir dünya sahnesinde konumlandırmıştır ve zamanın karmaşık gelişmelerini *Middlemarch* toplumunun hayali dünyasında yansıtır. Yine de Eliot sadece bu tartışmaları yansıtmakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda *Middlemarch* romanıyla entelektüel olarak da bu tartışmalara katılmış olur. Dolayısıyla Viktorya dönemindeki reform ve ilerleme düşüncelerini temel alan bu araştırmada, romandaki reform fikrini kavramak ve bunları siyasi, bilimsel ve sosyal gerekçeler çerçevesinde değerlendirmek için George Eliot'un *Middlemarch* isimli eseri Yeni Tarihçelcilik bakış açısıyla incelenmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Middlemarch, Viktoryen Roman, Reform, Yeni Tarihçelcilik Kuramı.

Introduction

George Eliot was born in 1819 as Mary Anne Evans, educated at girls' boarding schools in the Midland where she could get a conventional education. As Catherine Neale notes, she developed a strong commitment to Evangelicalism, "an earnest and self-denying form of religion, which tended to be the norm among Protestants at that time" (4). After the death of her mother she returned from school, to live with his father, but she perpetuated "an extensive reading programme, mainly on religious topics" but she also "studied Italian, Latin and German" (Neale, 4), which led way to her reformative ideals represented in *Middlemarch* as well. As she reached maturity, she denounced her attachment to Christianity and leaned on major theological discussions of Victorian England. She translated in 1842 *The Life of Jesus* by D. F. Strauss, which was a critical and secular inquiry into the life of the prophet. Later in 1854, she would also translate *The Essence of Christianity* by Ludwig Feuerbach, who argued that "humanity not divinity must become the object of worship" as Karen Chase notes, since "religion is a human construction which has prevented social progress by diverting reverence from humanity itself to the theological images it has made" (4). These translations which were a formidable task since Eliot learned German on her own, gave her a different perspective on the philosophy of religion and theology, and gave her more confidence to support science in its discussion with religion. She was forty when her first novel, *Adam Bede* was published in 1859 which became immensely popular. Her major works came one after the other, like *The Mill on the Floss*, *Silas Marner*, *Romola*, *Felix Halt*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*.

As Abrams defines concisely, New Historicism opposes the earlier formalist arguments in dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, and evaluates or considers "the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meanings, its effects, and also of its later critical interpretations and evaluations" (218). In a famous phrase, Louis Montrose remarks on New Historicism as "a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the

textuality of history” (qtd in Abrams, and Castle). Going back to the Foucauldian arguments of discourse in its roots, New Historicism observes historicity of the texts as a part of the discourse of the time, reflecting and representing it in the text itself.” In the New Historicist perspective, the “mapping” of various connections between the text and “discursive negotiations” outside of it, as Gregory Castle calls it, constructs a specific reading that reveals the “interrelations” that mediate between them (123). Therefore a New Historicist reading of *Middlemarch* will help situate the text within its culture of a specific time and place, with its “institutions, social practices, and discourses” to reflect the grounds “with which the literary text interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes” (Abrams 219).

1. Discussion

Middlemarch is considered as the masterpiece of Eliot. She published it serially between December 1871 and December 1872- a few years after the Second Reform Bill- but she was planning the novel in 1869. As Neale writes, she started working on the manuscript around July 1869 but it was the story of Lydgate, the Vincys, Featherstone and the Garths. After a short intervention, she started writing again but on a different fiction, that she called “Miss Brooke”. In March 1871, she decided to combine two works because of the similarity of the time span. When she talked to Mr. Lockwood upon the suggestion of Lewes, and decided to publish the novel in a form of serialization to be helpful for the ongoing composition, the publisher was more than happy in the excellence of the novel, and as the publication started Eliot had very good reviews, including from Harriett Beecher Stowe from overseas. Eliot was so happy that she wrote in her journal on January 1, 1873 that “at the beginning of December, the eighth and last book of *Middlemarch* was published, the three final numbers having been published monthly. No former book of mine has been received with more enthusiasm —not even Adam Bede, and I have received many deeply affecting assurances of its influence for good on individual minds” (qtd in Norton edition, 535). The reviews included in the Norton Critical Edition of *Middlemarch* proves her more than right. Saturday Review writes in December 7, 1872 that they observed “never before have so keen and varied an observation, so deep an insight into character and motives, so strong a grasp of conceptions, such power of picturesque description, worked together to represent through the agency of fiction an author's moral and social views.” Likewise, Sidney Colvin from Fortnightly Review in January 19, 1873 calls *Middlemarch* as “the ripest” of her novels and observes that “what she writes is so full of her time. It is observation, imagination, pathos, wit and humour, all of a high class in themselves; but what is more, all saturated with modern ideas, and poured into a language of which every word bites home with peculiar sharpness to the contemporary consciousness.” Henry James criticizes his fellow novelist but still praises its “vast, swarming, deep-colored, crowded

with episodes, with vivid images, with lurking master-strokes, with brilliant passages of expression” in the *Galaxy*, in March 1873. Modern criticism also favored her, and she was never forgotten in literary circles. One of the modern critics, Mark Schorer praised her, though she was notorious in early 20th century, in *The Kenyon Review* in 1949, for her “explicit symbols of psychological or moral conditions” and most famously Virginia Woolf called *Middlemarch* as “the magnificent book, which with all its imperfections, is one of the few English books written for grown-up people.”

The novel is situated nearly 40 years before the time of composition, takes the readers back to a few years before The First Reform Bill. As well as making political references such as to the death of George IV, outbreaks of cholera, political figures of the time, and the eventual passing of the Reform Bill via their influence on the characters, the novel also demonstrates the social and cultural reform through the coming of the railways to the provincial towns and the impact of industrialization on people. Thus, Eliot represent English society in all its complexity and remembers the early Victorian period from her position in Mid-Victorian background.

The story starts with Miss Dorothea Brook, a modern day “St Theresa”. She is an idealist young woman, whose religious piety and honesty retrieved her from pleasures like jewelry and also horse riding. Once their parents are dead, Dorothea and her sister Celia is educated “first in an English family, and afterwards in a Swiss family at Lausanne” and now for a year they are living in Tipton Grange, England, under the guardianship of their uncle Mr. Brooke, “a man nearly sixty, acquiescent temper, miscellaneous opinions, and uncertain vote” (Eliot, 8). Upon her acquaintance of Mr. Casaubon, an elderly scholar and churchman who is obsessed with his prospective work “A Key to All Mythologies” she is impressed by his Milton-like posture, agrees to marry him to lead the “ideal” life, despite the advice of her family. Mr. Casaubon on the other hand, sees an obeying sprit in Dorothea and decides “that it was now time for him to adorn his life with the graces of female companionship ... to secure in this, his culminating age, the solace of female tendance for his declining years” (58). Then arrives a new, idealist doctor to the town, Dr. Tertius Lydgate, who wants to be a part of medical reform but then unconsciously withdraws after his acquaintance and marriage of Rosamund Vincy. The Vincy family is among the most notable people of *Middlemarch* community, which also encourages Mr. Bullstrode, the banker and religious patron of the town, to marry the sister of Mr. Vincy. The young Fred Vincy is another major character that develops in the course of the story with the love of Mary Garth and turns into a self-reliant young man. The story of *Middlemarch* is a very complex one, with not one or two but many major characters on the stage. In the course of their story, the reader learns about the ideas of reform and development, what society felt about political reform, what science meant them and how the society is transformed after the Industrial revolution. Thus, to analyze these reforms in

Middlemarch, it will be useful to discuss the novel with the context of New Historicist criticism.

With its fast-changing patterns of life, Victorian society provided a powerful discourse to speak from. With the advent of Industrial Revolution, it was the beginning of modernity and a kind of national remaking. The major change of the time was the shift from a way of life based on the land-ownership to a more modern urban life based on trade and manufacturing. Though early Victorian period was mostly called as “a time of troubles” due to economic and social problems of the time, the conditions of the working class, and the inevitable Chartist uprising, it was also a time of great change. After the rise of factories and manufacturing industry, society experienced an inevitable rise of urbanization, an increase in population, settlement of new industrial cities, and a much faster lifestyle than they were used to. With the steam engine, the railways and telegraph, the notions of time and place changed greatly.

Middlemarch starts at this time, on the eve of the First Reform Bill. Despite the rise of population in lately-founded industrial cities, they were not presented in the English Parliament. Therefore, the first great Reform Bill was introduced in the House of Commons in 1831 by Earl Grey's Whig government, which would redistribute the seats in the House of Commons, and give representation to forty-two cities and towns previously without representation, such as Manchester. It also included the elimination of hardly populated “rotten boroughs”. This bill was rejected by the House of Lords on October 8, 1831; then, in 1832, under pressure of near-rebellion, the Lords accepted the bill, giving the royal assent by King William IV on June 7, 1832. With the Reform, the right to vote was extended to “all males owning property worth £10 or more annual rent” (Norton Anthology 982), which referred to the manufacturing middle class. The working class was excluded until the Second Reform Bill in 1867, four years before the publication of the novel.

As Bert Hornback argues in “Moral Imagination of George Eliot” Dorothea's anxious determination to do good and to be worthy for others in this world is part of a larger web of reform that is presented in *Middlemarch*. The novel begins with her ambitions and accomplishments: she is “enamoured of intensity and greatness,” but also “likely to seek martyrdom” (6). She was the most eager one in Grange, more than would-be reformer Mr. Brook, to contribute to this spirit of reform and from the beginning as readers we are presented with her idea and plans for new cottages to replace the hovels in which the tenant farmers and their families live. Her ambitious character to do “good”, to be useful for other people is highlighted and made manifest from the beginning of the novel. In later parts of the novel, she supports Lydgate both economically and spiritually.

But the main representative of political reform in *Middlemarch* is Mr. Brooke, whose involvement in politics fails eventually. Through his personage, George Eliot “presents history dramatically, within the story”, as part of the lives of the

characters (Beaty, 593). Names of political characters such as Peel, are revealed in the discussions of reform from various angles. For example in chapter 37, Mr. Hawley says:

“I myself should never favour immoderate views—in fact I take my stand with Huskisson—but I cannot blind myself to the consideration that

the non-representation of large towns — ”

"Large towns be damned!" said Mr. Hawley . . . "Let 'em quash every pocket-borough to-morrow, and bring in every mushroom town in the kingdom —they'll only increase

Mr. Brooke aspires to be elected from the side of reformers though very early in the novel Eliot describes him as unsure of his vote. He bought a newspaper, *the Pioneer*, and has hired Will Ladislav to edit and write for him. But Mr. Brooke is certainly too weak to be a Reformer in the novel:

"Quite right, Ladislav; we shall make a new thing of opinion here," said Mr Brooke. "Only I want to keep myself independent about Reform, you know: I don't want to go too far. I want to take up Wilberforce's and Romilly's line, you know, and work at Negro Emancipation, Criminal Law—that kind of thing. But of course I should support Grey."

"If you go in for the principle of Reform, you must be prepared to take what the situation offers," said Will. "If everybody pulled for his own bit against everybody else, the whole question would go to tatters." "Yes, yes, I agree with you—I quite take that point" (432).

In another instant of the novel, other characters talk of the disposition of Lord Russell's Reform Bill twice. Lydgate and Bulstrode, riding back to Middlemarch after the death of Raffles, talk “of many things—chiefly cholera and the chances of the Reform Bill in the House of Lords, and the firm resolve of the Political Unions” in chapter 70.

As for the scientific reform, Lydgate becomes the prominent example and leader in the novel, whose ambitious start in the community declines with his involvement in Rosamund Vincy. John Kucich writes in his essay “Scientific Ascendancy” that “an enormous increase in the prestige and authority of science was, perhaps, the central intellectual event of the Victorian period” (119). He continues his argument on the importance of science in Victorian culture that it was of until the nineteenth century that the word science was applied to the study of natural and physical world, followers of which were called “natural philosophers” since any pursuit of knowledge could be called as science in earlier ages. But at this century, science became a focus of interest and flourished in the modern sense with its subdisciplines like biology. Scientific vacation and thought in Victorian society gained “a confidence and a cultural authority which it had not had before” as Robin Gilmour argues (111).

Growth of science not only enlarged the horizons of Victorian people, but also questioned the biblical authority, a matter that made it more eluding for scientists of Oxford and Cambridge, and more interesting for the public. Robin Gilmour remarks that “as bastions of the Anglican hegemony, Oxford and Cambridge were very resistant to the introduction of the ‘progressive sciences’” which continued until the mid-19th century when scientific reform in education system was encouraged widely by some organizations such as the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS). Another important factor for the emerging influence and authority of science on the lives of Victorians was due to the accessibility of scientific writing. Books and essays on science were published in journals, side by side with literary serials, and read eagerly by the public, non-specialist audience. The popularization of the scientific matters which helped to educate the public, was a result of the “Anglican resistance [and] their enfranchisement in the universities” that led scientists to write in magazines to make a living (Kucich, 120-21). Therefore, Robin Gilmour says that “science was the pursuit of the enthusiastic amateurs,” “something of a national hobby” which “fertilized the imagination” of Victorian writers like George Eliot (7, 111).

In *Middlemarch* Lydgate confronts the reader as the enthusiastic idealist, who does not conceive his medical profession as a way of making money, like other doctors of the town did, but as a free-help to the poor, provided through a new hospital, that he will be in charge of. His real pursuit is the medical “reform” (15, 136). He wishes to continue “glorious career of Bichat” the French scientist of 18th century, and his enthusiasm is further triggered with “the possibility that he might work out the proof of an anatomical conception and make a link in the chain of discovery” (15, 137). But institutional medical science opposes the radical science and research. Eliot writes in chapter 15:

There was fascination in the hope that the two purposes would illuminate each other: the careful observation and inference which was his daily work, the use of the lens to further his judgment in special cases, would further his thought as an instrument of larger inquiry. Was not this the typical pre-eminence of his profession? He would be a good Middlemarch doctor, and by that very means keep himself in the track of far-reaching investigation. On one point he may fairly claim approval at this particular stage of his career: he did not mean to imitate those philanthropic models who make a profit out of poisonous pickles to support themselves while they are exposing adulteration, or hold shares in a gambling-hell that they may have leisure to represent the cause of public morality. He intended to begin in his own case some particular reforms which were quite certainly within his reach, and much less of a problem than the demonstrating of an anatomical conception. One of these reforms was to act stoutly on the strength of a

recent legal decision, and simply prescribe, without dispensing drugs or taking percentage from druggists.

The more Lydgate became interested in medical science, the more he wanted to reach the roots of primary tissue. But other practitioners like Mr. Wrench and Mr. Toller, were growing sullen for his criticism of their earlier method, and his growing popularity among the society. Despite all, Lydgate sounds passionate for his plans when he says "things can't last as they are: there must be all sorts of reform soon, and then young fellows may be glad to come and study here." Yet, eventually he fails as much as Casaubon and Mr. Brooke, and has to leave Middlemarch to escape from the consequences of his unfortunate marriage to Rosamund and dies as a failure.

Railways, which are another aspect of changing social and natural landscape in rural England, are perfect representatives of this idea of reform and progress permeated in the novel from the beginning to the end. Though it is supported by the upper class, other inhabitants of Middlemarch are skeptical towards this new system. When several working men attack the group of gentleman arranging railway project on Lowick in chapter 56, Fred saves the assistant of Mr. Garth, disposing the angry man, saying "But come, you didn't mean any harm. Somebody told you the railroad was a bad thing. That was a lie. It may do a bit of harm here and there, to this and to that; and so does the sun in heaven. But the railway's a good thing" (525). This incident is a very good example of the general Victorian reaction to the idea of reform: on the one hand they (want to) celebrate the achievements and the progress of the times, but on the other hand they are uncertain and skeptical about these changes for they do not know what the consequences would be.

Then the trajectory of the story again goes to the women question under the discussion of railway, but in a more explicit way this time:

In the hundred to which Middlemarch belonged railways were as exciting a topic as the Reform Bill or the imminent horrors of Cholera, and those who held the most decided views on the subject were women and landholders. Women both old and young regarded travelling by steam as presumptuous and dangerous, and argued against it by saying that nothing should induce them to get into a railway carriage. (56, 519)

As one of the heated topics in Victorian intellectual circles, "the woman question" is as highlighted by Eliot, but, as a yet-unrealized reform. From the very beginning of the novel, Eliot ardently comments on the woman question especially through the women characters such as Dorothea, (her ideas on agricultural reform in their territory, her rejection of Mr. Chettam, her childlike understanding of marriage, her failure to have a successful marriage with Casaubon, her entanglement in social and scientific reform, her independence of social constraints in the end, and her marriage to Will Ladislaw), Mary Garth (her honest and strong character, which also changes Fred in the course of the

novel), and Rosamund (her conventionality, her dishonesty toward her husband Lydgate, and her weakness). Rosamund is especially prominent in Eliot's portrayal of the ideal Victorian womanhood, "the Angel in the House," as Coventry Patmore writes. She is the product of the ideology of the age, and "the flower of Mrs Lemon's school," major girls' boarding school "where the teaching included all that was demanded in the accomplished female—even to extras, such as the getting in and out of a carriage" as the narrator tells. Rosamund is a distinguished example to all students for Mrs Lemon: "no pupil, she said, exceeded that young lady for mental acquisition and propriety of speech, while her musical execution was quite exceptional" (11, 62). According to Lydgate, who "did admire Rosamond exceedingly", she will make a perfect wife for him, as she "had just the kind of intelligence one would desire in a woman —polished, refined, docile, lending itself to finish in all the delicacies of life, and enshrined in a body which expressed this with a force of demonstration that excluded the need for other evidence." In the shallow reasoning of Lydgate, "Rosamond never showed any unbecoming knowledge, and was always that combination of correct sentiments, music, dancing, drawing, elegant note-writing, private album for extracted verse, and perfect blond loveliness", but she proves to be an unsuitable life companion, which becomes clearer in their facing of the economic problems (27, 169). Thus, just like Casaubon, Lydgate fails in his judgments as well as his idealistic attempts.

In contrast to Rosamund, Dorothea has a nearly activist character with a "desire to make her life greatly effective." Eliot writes that "a man would think twice before he risked himself" for a matrimonial union, for "women were expected to have weak opinions" but surely Dorothea was much more than that, whether in her religious sensibility, and in her anxiety for greater purposes. As it is described at the very beginning, even in terms of physical appearance is not that feminine, compared to Celia, with her plain dress that included no jewels, which reminds people of quotations from Bible. Throughout the novel, she constantly thinks "what could she do, what ought she to do?" whether in her personal relations (such as helping Lydgate) or in her social concerns (donating to the hospital). When everybody is estranged from him, she is the one offering sincere help to Lydgate and saving his honor. In her marriage to Casaubon, whose stiff posture reminds her of the great intellectuals like Milton, Dorothea is moved with this motivation, and she expects to learn from him like a child learns from a father, and to participate in his 'great' endeavors. The narrator gives clues of her future unhappiness and pities her attempts: "she wished, poor child, to be wise herself" (12, 58). Dorothea wishes to ask Casaubon to teach her Greek and Latin, and offers her help in his project, "Key to All Mythologies":

She would not have asked Mr. Casaubon at once to teach her the languages, dreading of all things to be tiresome instead of helpful; but it was not entirely out of devotion to her future husband that she wished

to know Latin and Greek. Those provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to her a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly. (12, 58).

Yet, Casaubon misunderstand her respect for his 'intellectual grandness' with a "submissive affection" and a docile womanly nature. When he openly faces her desire for knowledge, he retreats and grows brutally cold to her. At this point, what brings Dorothea closer to Will Ladislaw is his understanding and appreciation of Dorothea's vision. When Dorothea decides to discard the inheritance of Casaubon, and marry Ladislaw, her family is surprised. Especially Sir James Chettam does not approve of such a marriage even though he will have to accept it in the Finale:

Sir James never ceased to regard Dorothea's second marriage as a mistake; and indeed this remained the tradition concerning it in Middlemarch, where she was spoken of to a younger generation as a fine girl who married a sickly clergyman, old enough to be her father, and in little more than a year after his death gave up her estate to marry his cousin—young enough to have been his son, with no property, and not well-born. Those who had not seen anything of Dorothea usually observed that she could not have been "a nice woman," else she would not have married either the one or the other.

But given the circumstances, Dorothea realizes that there is no room for idealism in the new world order, and she evaluates her best opportunity. Not only Dorothea but also other major women of Middlemarch could be successful in life in some other way (other than the marriage prospects) if they could be free of the social constraints of the conventional womanhood, and given the chance of a non-sexist education. But this issue of female self-realization remains unresolved in the novel like an unrealized reform, though Eliot frequently refers to it in one way or another.

Conclusion

Middlemarch is one of the greatest novels of George Eliot. The novel interestingly still perpetuates its popularity in all over the world. As a public poll by BBC Culture revealed in 2015, it is "the greatest British novels as voted by the rest of the world" (Ciabattari). This enthusiasm and interest in the novel derives partly from its powers to reflect, represent, and respond to Victorian cultural and intellectual context with all its complexity and variety, as well as to concretize the urge of and even the anxiety for reform and progress. As George Eliot remarks in the Prelude, it is a "study" of provincial life and a "history of man" to see how mankind "behaves under the experiment of Time", especially on such a time of troubles. When Eliot first formulated the book and sent it to her publisher Mr. Blackwood, he immediately realized this power of portrayal and commented in a responding letter in 1871 that it is "a most wonderful study of human life and nature" and called Eliot herself "like a great giant walking

about among us and fixing every one you meet upon your canvas" (qtd. in Norton Critical Edition, 533).

With its fast-changing patterns of life, Victorian society provided a powerful discourse to speak from. With the advent of Industrial Revolution, it was the beginning of modernity and a kind of national remaking. The major change of the time was the shift from a way of life based on the land-ownership to a more modern urban life based on trade and manufacturing. Though early Victorian period was mostly called as "a time of troubles" due to economic and social problems of the time, the conditions of the working class, and the inevitable Chartist uprising, it was also a time of great change. *Middlemarch*, in its complexity and variety, is capable of reflecting this spirit of change and reform in the society, through a representation of not one or two but many major characters on the stage. In the course of their story, the reader learns about the ideas of reform and development, how society felt about political reform, what science meant to them and how the society is transformed after the Industrial revolution. Therefore, a New Historicist reading of *Middlemarch*, as it is intended in this paper, provides a new perspective to reflect the grounds with which the novel "interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes" (Abrams 219).

In the light of these arguments of the idea of reform and progress in the novel, it is remarkable that the Eliot tactfully comments on the political, social and cultural not only offers a realistic picture of the society with a psychological portrayal of its characters, but also makes any kind of survival impossible without this realistic awakening to the societal conditions. Lydgate and Dorothea are idealists "whose dreams are destroyed as they come up against the harsh realities of daily existence" (2). However, the Victorian England is not the time of Romantic idealists like Lydgate, but realists like Marty Garth and Fred Vincy, the happy couple of the novel, and Will Ladislaw, the husband of Dorothea. Yet Eliot attracts the sympathy of readers for all her characters on each side, which is another aim of her, since she says in a letter to Charles Bray in 1959 just before writing the novel, "if Art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally."

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