Strange Bedfellows?

The Presentation of the Provincial Town in Fyodor Dostoevsky and George Eliot

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CONTEXT

To date, no monograph exists that compares the works of George Eliot (1819-1880) and Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881). Whilst their religious views, narrative styles, and conceptions of the novel are indeed very different, my thesis suggests that by focussing on the novelistic representation of provincial towns, these writers can be brought into productive dialogue. This pairing will lead, I hope, to a better understanding of Eliot and Dostoevsky individually, and will contribute to the study of the provinces in European literature more generally.

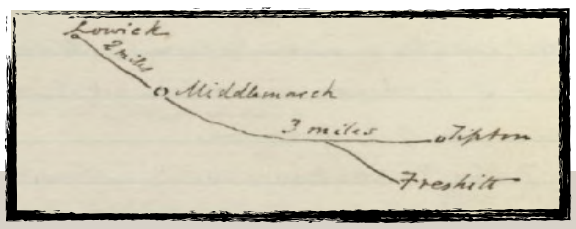
KEY QUESTIONS

- How and why do these writers conceive of the provincial town (in both cases on the cusp of national reform) as a laboratory in which to conduct experiments with new ideas, technologies, and communication networks?
- How does the small-town setting affect narrative design?
- What is the impact of the provincial town on the protagonists' heroic aspirations?
- How do urban developments (for example, in medicine or the law) mutate in the provinces?

KEY WORDS

Good criticism is a matter of bouncing some of the books you have read off the rest of the books you have read [...] The more various they are, the likelier it is that the criticism you write will be of interest.

Richard Rorty



The image to the left is the only "map" George Eliot made when planning *Middlemarch*. The novel exposes the competing worldviews of county folk and the Middlemarch townspeople.

Source: George Eliot, *Quarry for Middlemarch*

Future research opportunities: Other comparative questions that could be addressed include Eliot and Dostoevsky's approaches to the **Jewish Question** and their self-fashioning as **public educators**.

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