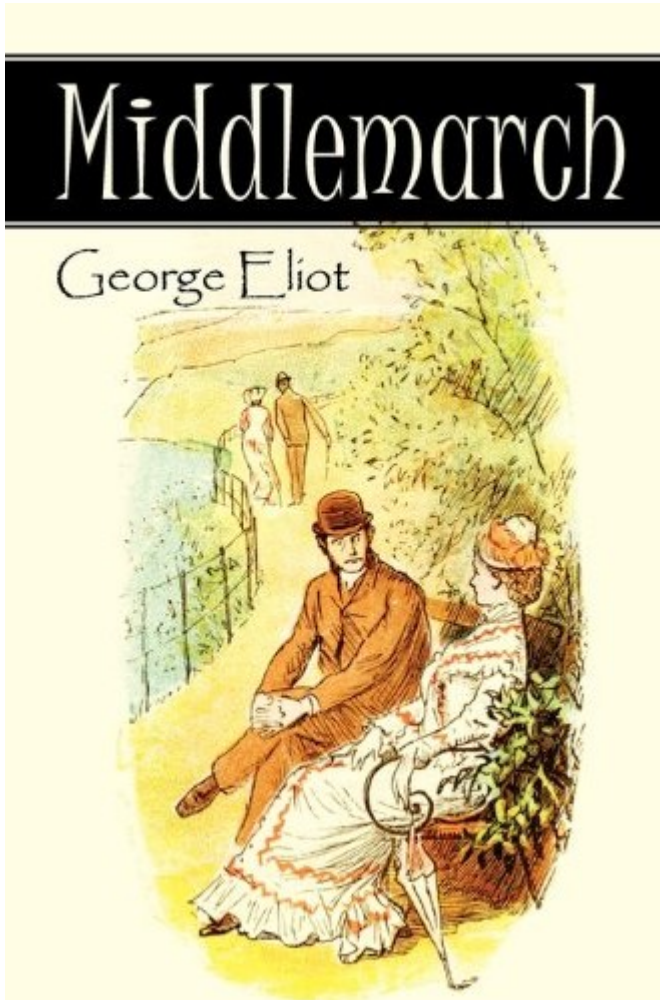


# Summer reading list

By [David Heim](#)

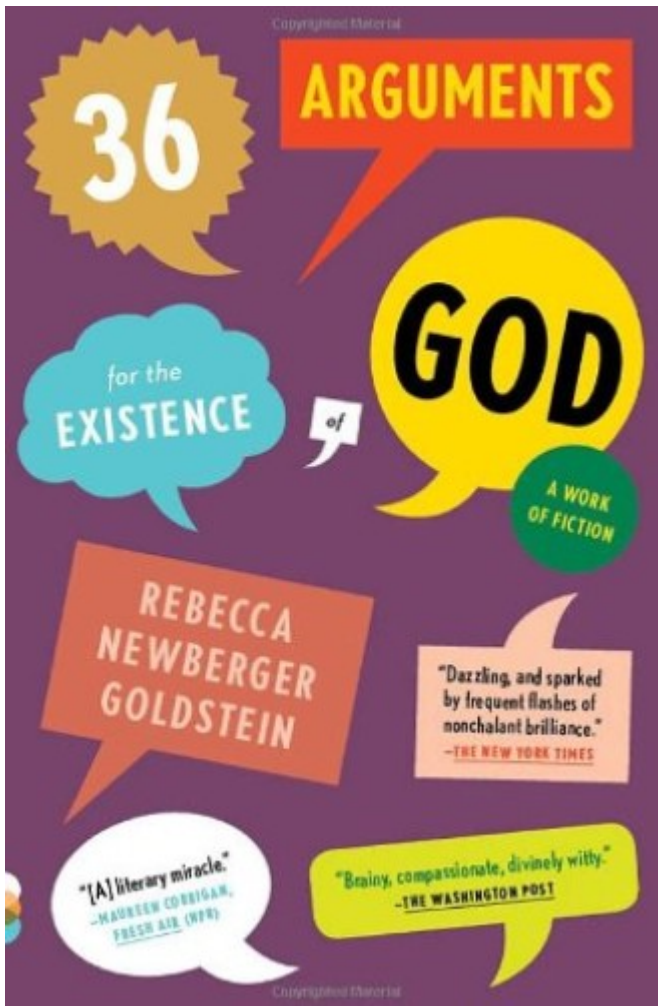
June 30, 2011

## In Review



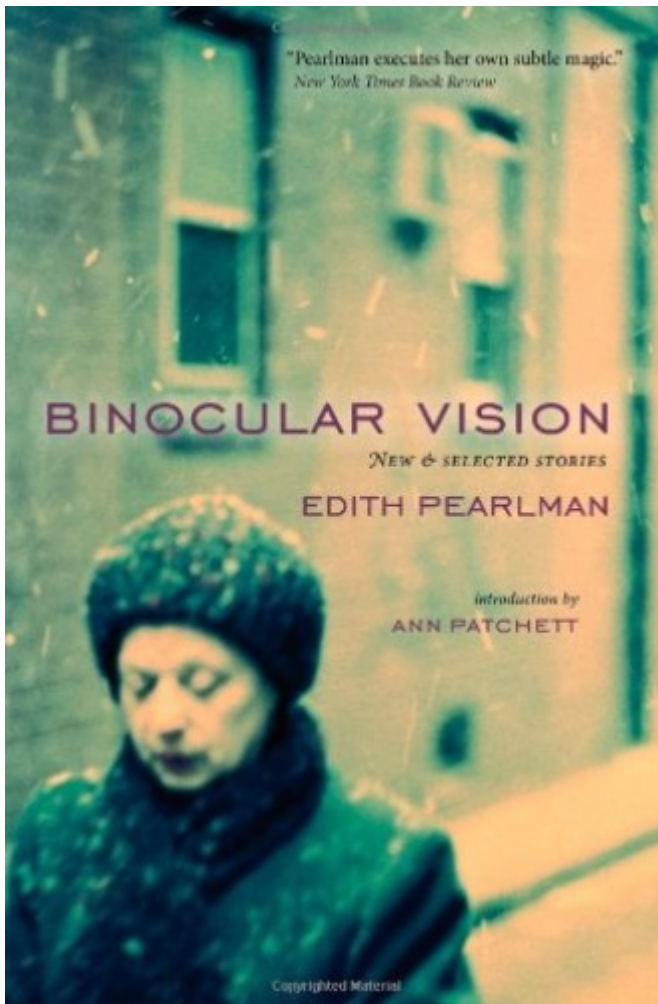
## Middlemarch

by George Eliot  
Simon & Brown



## 36 Arguments for the Existence of God

by Rebecca Goldstein  
Vintage



## **Binocular Vision**

by Edith Pearlman  
Lookout

*What are you hoping to read this summer? We posed this question to the Century staff, a group of people with diverse tastes and interests. Along with commenting on our choices, feel free to post your own in the comments. --Ed.*

The term "summer reading" conjures up leisurely days immersed in fiction. I have a few items in that pile. My church's book group will discuss *Middlemarch* in September, so I'm planning to reread that long novel by George Eliot--"one of the few British novels written for grownups," said Virginia Woolf. I remember the character of

Dorothea Brooke, with her painfully misguided idealism, and Eliot's devastating portrait of the pedant she marries--but that's about all.

I found Rebecca Goldstein's novel *36 Arguments for the Existence of God* sparkling with zany intellectual humor and an insider's knowledge of philosophy and Hasidic Judaism. This satire of academic life includes a theologian named Jonas Elijah Klapper, "Extreme Distinguished Professor of Faith, Literature and Values," whose self-importance and gnomic brilliance is so impenetrable that none of his graduate students has ever managed to finish a thesis. The book culminates in a debate over the existence of God that is not only more entertaining but better informed than most of what has been written by or about the New Atheists. The novel made me want to find the other fiction Goldstein has written, as well as her biography of Spinoza.

I'm looking forward to getting to know the stories of Edith Pearlman by way of a recent collection of hers titled *Binocular Vision*. From the few stories I've read, Pearlman is a quiet but exact observer of modern life. She is hospitable to her characters, most of whom are urban professionals displaced in some way but resilient in the face of loss and disappointment.