

EVIDENCED ASPECTS OF GEORGE ELIOT'S ENDURING LEGACY AS A WRITER

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Abstract. *George Eliot's works occupy a significant position in 19th-century realism, marking a shift from mimetic representation—"reproducing reality in the forms of reality itself"—to an analytical reconstruction of time, social consciousness, and the individuals who embody these ideas. Unlike her contemporaries Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, and the Brontë sisters, whose creative processes were often rooted in instinct and imagination, Eliot was an intellectual writer whose themes were shaped by analysis and reflection. Her artistic imagination was inspired not by isolated thoughts or picturesque scenes but by profound themes that redefined the Victorian novel's intellectual and moral scope.*

Key Words: *George Eliot, Victorian realism, Middlemarch, literary authority, psychological realism, feminism, intellectual novelist.*

The literary oeuvre of George Eliot (1818–1880) stands out among the greatest achievements of the Victorian novel, characterized by profound psychologism and intricate portrayals of human relationships, particularly in her female characters. Eliot was not merely an exceptional storyteller but also a moral authority of her era. As Vladimir Skorodenko aptly notes, *"the authority of the writer was huge, one might say, indisputable, not only in the field of literature but also in matters of morality. She was looked upon as a mentor, a teacher of life; she was called the Sibyl."* Her cultural influence reached even Queen Victoria, a devoted admirer, and her London residence became a gathering place for eminent writers of various generations who came to pay homage to her work and intellect [Скорошенко, 1988:7].

Despite her towering status during her lifetime, Eliot's literary prominence waned in the early 20th century. Until the mid-20th century, her works were largely confined to academic specialists. This decline was in part due to the sanitized posthumous portrayal created by her husband, John Walter Cross. In his book *George Eliot's Life as Related in Her Letters and Journals* (1885), Cross edited Eliot's letters to protect her reputation, omitting any content that could invite moral censure or misinterpretation. His efforts produced a polished yet incomplete portrait of her as both a writer and a woman [Cross, 1885:394; 2018:468].

By the 1950s, a renewed interest in Eliot's work emerged in England and the United States, driven by her relevance to 20th-century literary trends. Scholars

identified her engagement with themes such as the complexities of human psychology, social consciousness, and philosophical inquiry—motifs that resonate deeply with modern literature. As V. Ivashova observes, “*many of the motifs in her prose echo the most important trends in Western literature of the 20th century*” [Ивашева, 1990:342].

This revival inspired a wealth of critical scholarship exploring various aspects of Eliot’s legacy. Her novels were reexamined in light of evolving literary, philosophical, and feminist discourses. Key monographs and articles include Allen Walter Ernest’s *George Eliot* (1964), Gillian Beer’s *Darwin’s Plots* (2000), and Barbara Hardy’s *Middlemarch: Critical Approaches to the Novel* (1967). The sustained scholarly interest also led to the republication of critical collections, including *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies* [Evans, 2000], as well as previously unpublished materials such as Eliot’s surviving diaries [Rignall, 2011].

Eliot’s approach to realism set her apart from her contemporaries. While writers like Dickens and the Brontës often relied on emotional instinct and vivid imagination, Eliot constructed her narratives with deliberate intellectual rigor. Her works were informed by a synthesis of philosophical, scientific, and moral inquiry, reflecting her engagement with contemporary debates on Positivism, Darwinism, and the moral role of art.

Eliot’s novels transcend mere storytelling, offering instead a reflective examination of society, history, and individual agency. In works such as *Middlemarch* (1871–1872), Eliot masterfully depicts the interconnected lives of her characters, embedding their personal struggles within broader socio-political contexts. The novel’s exploration of ambition, reform, and human fallibility has earned it recognition as one of the greatest achievements of English literature. Similarly, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) probes the constraints imposed by gender, class, and tradition on individual aspirations, a theme that resonates with feminist critiques of the Victorian era [Hughes, 2001:2944].

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, Eliot’s relevance to contemporary thought became increasingly apparent. Her legacy was revisited in collections analyzing her philosophical and feminist contributions, as well as her influence on the development of the European novel. Critical works such as Kenneth Newton’s *George Eliot: Romantic Humanist* (1981) and Nancy Henry’s *George Eliot and Empire* (2002) explore her nuanced engagement with questions of morality, imperialism, and humanism.

This modern scholarly focus highlights Eliot not only as a literary icon but also as a professional writer and a trailblazer for intellectual women. Her writings, spanning fiction, essays, and editorial work, offer a lens through which to examine the intersections of art, ethics, and societal change. As Gillian Beer argues in *Darwin's Plots*, Eliot's ability to integrate scientific thought into her narratives demonstrates her unique capacity to bridge the realms of art and knowledge [Beer, 2000].

George Eliot's intellectual artistry and moral authority have secured her an enduring place in literary history. From her nuanced character portrayals to her analytical treatment of social and philosophical themes, Eliot reshaped the Victorian novel and left a legacy that continues to inspire scholarly discourse. The ongoing reevaluation of her works underscores their timeless relevance and positions Eliot as one of the most significant figures in 19th-century literature.

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