

## THE INTELLECTUAL DEPTH OF GEORGE ELIOT: AN ANALYSIS OF HER WRITINGS

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### Abstract

*George Eliot, one of the most intellectually formidable novelists of the Victorian era, integrated philosophy, psychology, and social critique into her literary works, setting her apart from her contemporaries. Her engagement with German philosophy, moral realism, and rationalist thought profoundly influenced her narrative style and thematic depth. This review explores Eliot's intellectual depth by analysing her philosophical influences, psychological realism, and social critique, emphasizing her ability to intertwine narrative artistry with deep ethical inquiries. Through an examination of Middlemarch, The Mill on the Floss, Silas Marner, and other seminal works, this study underscores Eliot's commitment to portraying human complexity with nuance and precision. Her lasting impact on literature, philosophy, and feminist discourse confirms her position as a central figure in Western literary tradition, making her works enduringly relevant for contemporary scholarship.*

**Keywords:** *Intellectual, influenced, literature, philosophy, social critique, psychological realism*

## 1. Introduction

One could barely find a more towering figure in the realm of 19th century English literature than Mary Ann Evans, known to the literary world as George Eliot. There is such praise of her works because of the profound philosophical, ethical and sociopolitical insights she interweaves in them (Haight, 1985). Eliot's portrayal of human nature is nuanced where none is impervious to psychological depth (Postlethwaite, 2013).

Born on November 22, 1819, in Warwickshire, England, Eliot was a child who showed signs of being a precocious learner, which was not very common in her generation. Despite Victorian England's social norms that limited women's intellectual growth Eliot received advanced learning and wide reading that formed her thinking style (Ashton, 1996). She displayed early signs of intelligence by studying literature theology and science which later guided her writing. Her studies in rationalism German philosophy and theological criticism made her challenge established beliefs which became her main writing subject (Carroll, 1992).

Eliot was also a woman who struggled with the social expectations of her time and was not allowed to engage in serious discussions about literature. The male-dominated Victorian literary culture did not take women writers seriously and placed them in the category of writing sentimental or moralistic stories (Showalter, 1999). To overcome these prejudices, Eliot decided to write under a male pen name, which not only helped her works to be taken seriously but also gave her the freedom to write what she wanted as a female writer of the time (Beer, 1986).

The moral, ethical, and psychological issues that are present in Eliot's novels make her stand out from other writers of her time. However, unlike Charles Dickens, whose focus was in the use of social satire and melodrama, or Thomas Hardy's emphasis in fate and pessimism, Eliot presented her stories in analytical, philosophical manner (Levine, 2001). She was not interested in plot as much as she was interested in character, moral questions, and the interdependence of people and the world. Her most famous work *Middlemarch* written in 1871 and 1872 is considered as one of the greatest works in the English literature not only because of the complexity of plot but it discusses the realistic aspects of human life and its daily issues and challenges such as ambition, marriage, and reform with a focus on human weakness (bloomsbury.com, n.d.)

Eliot's literary career began with *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857), which was a set of stories that explored the ethical and cultural life of the midland of England (Ashton, 1996). They demonstrated how she was able to blend her own drama with social themes, thus providing the context for her later works. In *Adam Bede* (1859), she focused on the issue of sin, forgiveness, and the issue of judging others and oneself, which are all realistic issues that people face in their daily lives (Levine, 2001). The novel's realistic outlook and its main character were rather pioneering at that time, which reflected contemporary people's dilemmas (Karl, 1995). *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) is another novel that also demonstrates Eliot's ability to depict psychological realism. Maggie Tulliver, the protagonist of the novel, represents the struggle between the self and the community (DAVIS, 2021). Eliot focuses on Maggie's inner conflicts, and the depiction of the soul and the process of its awakening is as painful as it can be (K. M. Newton, 2018). This portrayal of personal development within the confines of society underlines Eliot's determination to portray real-life experiences ("George Eliot," 2025).

Eliot studied isolation and community dynamics in her novel *Silas Marner* which she published in 1861 (Cooke, 2004). Through his journey from solitude to fatherhood Silas Marner proves that people can change and rebuild their relationships with others (*The Carlyle Encyclopedia: Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming: Internet Archive*, n.d.). Through her depiction of Silas's mental growth Eliot shows her knowledge about how people can recover and transform themselves (*George Eliot*, n.d.). Between 1871 and 1872 George Eliot released *Middlemarch* which stands as her most accomplished work while showing 19th-century English society (Albrecht, 2021). It shows how tradition fights against modern ideas and explores political change and women's empowerment. Eliot demonstrates how human nature is made up of a number of interrelated ambitions, ethical decisions and community constraints (Haight, 1985). In her character analysis, Eliot reveals to the readers how people think and feel in the novel (Postlethwaite, 2013).

Eliot pursued knowledge through means other than writing novels. Through her translations of David Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach she brought German religious criticism to English readers who then faced new spiritual ideas (Levine, 2001). She demonstrated her dedication to serious study and her interest in exploring difficult subjects (Stray & Stray, 1998) by her work. Through her own relationship with George Henry Lewes Eliot gained understanding of people who live outside social boundaries (Szirotny, 2015). She lived her life outside Victorian rules while writing about moral gray areas in her stories (K. M. Newton, 2018). Her personal life experiences match the themes she writes about which makes her work more believable and relatable to readers of all ages (Ashton, 1996).

Throughout her literary career, she used realistic techniques. Her books depict real life situations with their real-world problems and unclear moral choices (Miller, 1998). Realism became a dominant literary movement during the 19th century and Eliot was one of its most important supporters. To avoid writing like Gothic authors or Victorian moralists, she created deep character studies of people who struggle with inner battles (*George Eliot's Science Fiction on JSTOR*, n.d.). Eliot was also able to demonstrate her intelligence by engaging in religious and philosophical debates of the period. During this period she read a lot of German philosophy especially the book by Ludwig Feuerbach titled *The Essence of Christianity* and David Strauss's *Life of Jesus* (Eliot (trans), 1846). These philosophical works challenged the religious orthodoxy and stressed the reason, ethics, and social justice, the issues that are reflected in Eliot's novels.

Eliot's ethical focus encompasses individual character plus society's political affairs. In her novel *Felix Holt the Radical* from 1866 she describes how political changes from the 1830s affected working-class. Through this novel she showed her interest in political theory and support slow social transformation over sudden revolutionary actions. Although she was successful, but her later years were marked by both personal and professional difficulties. People criticized her for living differently than expected because she stayed with George Henry Lewes who was married to someone else. Despite

his legal marriage to another woman, Lewes became Eliot's lifelong intellectual and romantic partner until his death in 1878 (Beer, 1986). People's reaction to Eliot's relationship did not hurt her literary fame but her reputation as a woman who lived outside conventions was indeed cemented.

Eliot's passing in 1880 concluded her successful career that transformed the English novel forever. Scholars still study her work today using feminist theory psychoanalysis and political criticism as their tools (J. L. Newton, 2014). People who want to understand 19th-century intellectual and literary development must read her novels because they show realistic stories with deep moral values and philosophical ideas.

George Eliot was more than a novelist; she was a thinker, a philosopher, and a social critic whose works are still thought provoking and debate provoking. It is her ability to conjoin story telling with the deepest research that separates her from being just one of the most significant literary figures of her time. Through the creation of novels that were, in essence, literary masterpieces as well as philosophical cosmologies upon which to base moral and social thinking, Eliot faced up to basic questions about human nature and about the nature of man in society and in relation to others. Her legacy continues to persist; so that her works will continue to contribute to the literature and philosophy studies.

## **2. Eliot's Intellectual Influences**

### **2.1. Philosophical and Theological Influences**

George Eliot studied German philosophy deeply and learned from Ludwig Feuerbach Baruch Spinoza and G.W.F. Hegel. Through her study of these thinkers, George Eliot developed her own perspective on life and literature plus her ethical values (Carlisle, 2023).

#### **2.1.1. Ludwig Feuerbach's Influence on Eliot's Religious and Ethical Thought**

George Eliot's discussions with Ludwig Feuerbach made her abandon old religious practices and develop ethical values based on human existence. In *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), Feuerbach stated that theology represents human self-reflection because people create their religious ideas from their own mental images (*Ludwig Feuerbach - The Essence of Christianity*, n.d.). Eliot became inspired by Feuerbach's ideas so she started translating his work in 1854 which transformed her writing style (Gatens, 2019).

In *Scenes of Clerical Life* from 1857 Eliot shows readers that religious figures must deal with moral challenges like everyone else. Eliot shows readers how faith operates within human beings through her character Mr. Tryan (Ashton, 1996). Her moral system puts human connections first because Feuerbach said ethical life should not depend on divine orders (Gatens, 2019).

#### **2.1.2. Baruch Spinoza's Rationalist Influence on Eliot's Ethical Framework**

During her intellectual growth Eliot studied Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677) to learn his rationalist and determinist views. Through his *Deus sive Natura* concept, Spinoza rejected traditional religious views of God by showing that nature functions as a rational system (*Spinoza, Benedict De | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d.). Eliot discovered core ethical values in Spinoza's teachings especially his belief that people achieve happiness through rational thinking and emotional control rather than through religious salvation (Carlisle, 2023).

In 1876 Eliot explored Spinoza's ideas by showing how *Daniel Deronda* discovered his mission and moral obligations to others. Deronda's inner struggle leads him to find his true purpose which matches Spinoza's idea that freedom comes when people use reason to follow ethical values (K. M. Newton, n.d.). Eliot chose to explain events through human ethics instead of supernatural forces just like Spinoza rejected miracles and divine actions (Carlisle, 2023).

#### **2.1.3. Hegel's Dialectical Influence on Eliot's Narrative Structure**

Eliot deepened her thinking by studying the works of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Through her relationship with George Henry Lewes Eliot learned about Hegelian dialectics which she integrated into her work by showing how society progresses morally and historically (Armstrong, 2020). Hegel's theory of conflict resolution through synthesis matches Eliot's design for character progression in her novel *Middlemarch* (1871-1872). The book shows Hegelian patterns by showing how people's dreams meet and fight against social rules (Ashton, 1996). Through Dorothea Brooke's journey Eliot shows that human development happens when inner desires meet outer society rules in conflict (Armstrong, 2020). The book demonstrates that moral and intellectual growth happens when you balance your private beliefs with social facts which aligns with Hegelian principles (K. M. Newton, n.d.).

#### **2.1.4. Transition from Devout Christianity to Religious Skepticism**

Eliot made a clear transition from her evangelical Christian background to an independent spiritual skepticism. She grew up in a religious Christian home but left traditional faith when she studied Feuerbach, Spinoza, and Hegel (Gatens, 2019). She kept some ethical principles from religious teachings even though she left Christianity behind. She built new moral standards by using humanist methods that put reason and social care ahead of religious power (Carlisle, 2023). *Middlemarch* shows how Dorothea Brooke and Tertius Lydgate face ethical challenges because they need to make decisions without absolute religious rules (K. M. Newton, n.d.).

Therefore, Eliot's later works promote a moral vision grounded in human experience rather than religious dogma. She has been very harsh on religious institutions but at the same time recognizes that they have played a role in promoting ethical values (Gatens, 2019). Thus, her focus on reflection, personal and communal ethical development, and interdependence reveals her lifelong interest in ethical pursuits even if they are not grounded in religion anymore (Carlisle, 2023).

## **2.2. Victorian Intellectual Climate**

The Victorian period, which witnessed socio-political change, scientific revolution and spread of knowledge, played a significant part in shaping the personality and writing of Eliot. This period saw the social, cultural, and scientific changes such as the evolution of Darwinism and industrialization that influenced Eliot's perception of the world and her narrative.

### **2.2.1. Influence of Darwinism**

The book by Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859, changed the perception of people in the society by questioning religious beliefs. Eliot was not indifferent to these concepts and incorporated scientific approaches into her stories. In *Middlemarch*, she portrays the tension between the individual and the society, which reveals her view on the human development, inspired by the Darwinian theory. For instance, her portrayal of characters like Dr. Tertius Lydgate who struggles to introduce scientific advancement in a society that is resistant to change is an indication of her consideration of evolutionary theories (Beer, 2009).

### **2.2.2. Impact of Industrialization**

The life of people in the society was greatly affected by industrialization since it altered their social relationships and economic systems. Eliot examines in *Felix Holt the Radical* how political change and social division influence people in the era of modernization. She revealed the ethical problems of that time by showing how rural areas were confronted with industrial development (Levine & Henry, 2019).

### **2.2.3. Engagement with Contemporary Intellectual Discourse**

Eliot took part in intellectual discussions of her time by translating important works. Through her translation of *The Essence of Christianity* by Ludwig Feuerbach she demonstrated her opposition to organized religion and her developing interest in humanist and rationalist philosophy. Through her translation Eliot opposed church principles because Feuerbach showed theology developed from human thinking and this position matched her expanding perspective on faith and reason (*Ludwig Feuerbach - The Essence of Christianity*, n.d.). Her unusual relationship with George Henry Lewes helped her understand existing social rules and individual power while staying devoted to intellectual and personal freedom.

### **2.2.4. Integration of Scientific and Philosophical Thought in Literature**

Eliot studied scientific and philosophical ideas of her era through her writing style. She treated her novels as testing grounds where she used scientific observation and analysis to create realistic stories. During Victorian times Eliot used scientific methods to create her work which connected literary writing with scientific research. Through her detailed descriptions of physical spaces in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch* she demonstrates her deep study of the developing concept of environment or medium in mid-19th century scientific research (Marshall, 2011).

During Victorian times George Eliot's literary talent grew strong because of the active exchange between scientific research industrial development and philosophical thinking. Through her artistic creations she reflects both the problems of her time and confronts present-day thinking by showing how culture and environment impact human life.

## **2.3. Literary Influences**

### **Literary Influences on George Eliot's Intellectual and Creative Development**

Eliot developed her literary and intellectual abilities through her study of 19th-century thinkers and intellectual schools. Her writing methods and realistic style developed from her close relationships with George Henry Lewes and John Stuart Mill who taught her about philosophy and literature. Her creative approach was enhanced when she studied European philosophy and British intellectual patterns along with her personal mentors.

#### **2.3.1. Influence of George Henry Lewes**

Lewes, a prominent biographer, literary critic, dramatist, novelist, philosopher, scientist, and editor, was a significant figure in Eliot's personal and professional development (Ashton, 1980a). This relationship that started in 1851 provided the environment that encouraged Eliot to develop complex literary and philosophical concepts. Lewes's background in literature and science and his realism contributed to Eliot's character development and thematic concerns (Haight, 1985). Through his teachings Lewes helped Eliot create realistic stories by using scientific principles. His book *The Physiology of Common Life* (1859-1860) studied human actions using scientific and mental methods that matched how Eliot showed her characters in her work (Lewes, 1859). Through scientific realism Eliot showed how characters think and behave in realistic ways (Haight, 1985).

Through his book *Life of Goethe* (1855) Lewes showed Eliot the significance of personal growth and mental development which she used to build her story structure (Lewes, 1859). Through his ideas he taught Eliot to create literary works that focus on real human transformation based on multilayered personal lives and deep emotional turmoil (Carroll, 2013).

Through his support Lewes helped Eliot develop her intellectual abilities which made her feel empowered to write under a male pseudonym and participate in serious literary discussions with other men (Ashton, 1980b). Their shared intellectual bond helped her combine scientific and philosophical ideas into her written work.

#### **2.3.2. Influence of John Stuart Mill**

John Stuart Mill who led 19th century political philosophy deeply influenced Eliot through his ideas. During her time at the *Westminster Review* Eliot studied the major philosophical and political ideas of her era through her editorial work with this journal which Mill had previously managed (Haight, 1985). Eliot found deep agreement between her literary and philosophical views and Mill's support for personal freedom and utilitarian ethics plus equal rights for women. His book *The Subjection of Women* from 1869 promoted women's intellectual freedom and social independence which he repeated throughout his novels especially in *Middlemarch* and *The Mill on the Floss* (Haight, 1985; *The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Subjection of Women by John Stuart Mill*, n.d.).

Eliot's female characters represent Mill's principles by fighting against social rules to develop their own thoughts and actions. Dorothea Brooke's pursuit of intellectual and social goals in *Middlemarch* demonstrates Mill's belief that women should have the freedom to make meaningful social contributions (Carroll, 2013). In *The Mill on the Floss* Maggie Tulliver demonstrates Mill's ideas when she refuses to accept traditional female roles (Ashton, 1980b). Mill shaped how Eliot thought about right and wrong when showing how people deal with their private wants and community duties in her stories. His thoughts about personal growth and group well-being match Eliot's stories that show characters thinking deeply about morals while feeling for others and facing true life situations (Haight, 1985).

### 2.3.3. Broader Intellectual and Philosophical Context

Other European philosophers also influenced Eliot's writings. Her concern with determinism, moral philosophy, and the concept of freedom of man is shown by her translation of Spinoza's Ethics into English (Carlisle, 2023). This is further realized in Eliot's description of the development of her characters which gives us a view that human actions are the result of two determinants, internal and external ones, which shape the actions of people always within the confines of society and a person's mind (DAVIS, 2021). Additionally, we can find reflection of Eliot's humanist philosophy, according to Feuerbach's, because human experience and emotion are emphasized over religious dogma and moral and ethical struggles are portrayed. His ideas are clearly present in *Middlemarch*, which reviews religious institutions and private belief based upon rational ethics in addition to humanistic compassion (Ashton, 1980b).

British empiricism also helped Eliot to develop her realism as a writer. She was influenced by David Hume and Adam Smith and she incorporated psychological realism in her works making the characters created by her own temper and circumstances has pointed out (Carroll, 2013). Eliot was able to combine philosophy, psychology and observation, which was used to develop complex characters whose conflicts are both moral and mental and which mirror the society of Victorian England (DAVIS, 2021). Moreover, Eliot's work as an editor of the *Westminster Review* placed her in the middle of Victorian intellectual life and enabled her to respond to the current ethical, scientific, and social issues. Through her writings and letters to prominent thinkers of her era she demonstrated how interdisciplinary elements influenced her literary creations.

A variety of philosophies and scientific inquiry as well as literary traditions converged to create the lasting intellectual and literary works of George Eliot. Through his partnership with George Henry Lewes Eliot strengthened her dedication to realistic storytelling and scientific observation and received support for social justice and gender equality from John Stuart Mill. Through her studies of Spinoza, Feuerbach and British empiricists she reached a higher stage of literary development which enabled her to write powerful books that are highly intelligent yet compassionate.

Eliot crafted narratives through the combination of realism with philosophy and psychology and critical social analysis which allow modern readers and scholars to keep finding meaning in her literary works. Through her works, she represents the intellectual essence of Victorian times while she creates timeless masterpieces which discuss human moral development and social realities.

## 3. Themes of Intellectual Depth in Eliot's Works

As an intellectual excellence of Victorian times George Eliot explored philosophy of morality together with personal psychological examination of society through literary subjects. The novels *Middlemarch*, *Adam Bede*, and *Silas Marner* present the core elements of her engagement with ethical dilemmas, self-awareness and reformist ideals. The author uses sophisticated discussions about human reasons and moral accountability and societal principles to develop a complex framework of individual and group awareness.

### 3.1. Moral and Ethical Dilemmas in Eliot's Works

#### 3.1.1. Introduction to Eliot's Moral Vision

The literary works of George Eliot are intricately fashioned with complex moral problems in which the characters very ingeniously try to reconcile their ambitions and desires with social norms and ethical obligations. Her protagonists find themselves in morally ambiguous situations to be tested as to what they are made of—how strong are they in terms of their breast, resolve, and self-awareness. Eliot brings in a humanistic approach unlike the rigid moralism that is often found in Victorian literature, and he shows the grey areas of morality rather than sticking to the absolute notions of right and wrong (Ahlawat, 2024).

Eliot's character's journey under the impact of her deep philosophical interest, drawn from Spinoza's determinism and from Lewes's psychological insights. Human actions are situation conditioned, moulded by environment, nurtured by upbringing, or blamed on inner struggles and as such ethical decisions are enormously complicated (Carlisle, 2023). Through this humanistic perspective, the author challenges the Victorian moral rigidity and puts more stress on the importance of empathizing and moral introspection rather than a condemning society.

#### 3.1.2. Dorothea Brooke's Ethical Dilemma in *Middlemarch*

Dorothea Brooke is one of Eliot's most compelling presentations of moral conflict in *Middlemarch*, as an intellectual aspiring woman and embodiment of altruistic ideals. She marries Edward Casaubon, an aging scholar, thinking that she can help him with his academic pursuits and find a higher purpose. But the marriage is a spiritual suffocation, for Casaubon is emotionally remote, possessive, and intellectually rigid.

Dorothea's dilemma is the tension between idealism and reality. She sacrifices happiness for duty but then finds that her sacrifice does not help her intellectual growth or her husband's scholarly work. This ethical struggle reflects the Victorian women's limited agency, which was compelled to choose between the socially approved roles and personal satisfaction (Ahlawat, 2024). In the end, Dorothea's character arc reflects Eliot's criticism of social norms. However, she finally discovers the meaning beyond the bewilderment of patriarchal confines; it implies that she will achieve the moral clarity only through self-awareness not through blind conformity (Henderson, n.d.).

### 3.1.3. Dr. Tertius Lydgate: Professional Ethics vs. Societal Pressures

*Middlemarch* also brings about another powerful ethical conflict through Dr. Tertius Lydgate, a progressive doctor and dedicated revolutionary, intent on changing his field of medicine with scientific advancements. But though he soon makes himself a prisoner of money troubles and a socially ambitious wife, Rosamond Vincy, he falls by moral compromises to her materialistic nature.

At first, Lydgate is a man of high ethical standards, refusing to participate in medical corruption. But his financial troubles force him to accept money from the dubious banker Nicholas Bulstrode, who turns out to have a dark past. Although this decision is not made of greed but out of desperation, it stains Lydgate's reputation and professional ethics (Ahlawat, 2024).

Eliot's belief that moral integrity is fragile in the face of social constraints and financial struggles is illustrated by Lydgate's downfall. Several key questions are raised by his ethical predicament.

- Is moral integrity possible where power and wealth run the society?
- Does an ethical responsibility fall off into the background when the question of practical necessity comes to the fore?
- Should idealistic people give up their values to survive in a cruel world?

Through Lydgate's story, Eliot shows how maintaining personal values costs people their integrity today. Eliot's criticism of corrupt organizations and wealth obsession remains relevant in present ethical work discussions (Henderson, n.d.).

### 3.1.4. Hetty Sorrel in Adam Bede: Moral Responsibility and Social Judgment

Eliot uses Hetty Sorrel's tragic story in *Adam Bede* to show how society fails to understand moral issues. While Dorothea and Lydgate face moral and ethical challenges with their ambitions Hetty experiences the harshness of social judgment and moral strictness.

The innocent Hetty starts a hidden romance with Arthur Donnithorne and gets pregnant. She makes the choice to leave her baby behind to hide her pregnancy which results in her infanticide conviction (Ahlawat, 2024).

Victorian society punished women severely when they broke social rules especially when they became pregnant outside marriage. Society rejects Hetty with its judgment and the law gives her severe punishment. Eliot shows how people judge differently between men and women when it comes to morality.

- Men such as Arthur Donnithorne escape consequences while Hetty receives severe punishment.
- People see Hetty's behavior as criminal yet ignore her desperate situation and limited choices.
- Eliot wants people to examine their own behavior before they enforce strict rules (Gning, 2022).

Eliot's work continues to relate to our present discussions about fairness between men and women.

In George Eliot's novel, moral and ethical dilemmas are portrayed with an element of challenge to Victorian rigidity, and an urge towards empathy and self-awareness, not judgment. Eliot criticizes the constraining social forces that shape human choices by means of Dorothea Brooke, Dr. Lydgate, and Hetty Sorrel. Her observations still have relevance today as the societies are still facing moral ambiguity, gender injustice and ethical rectitude.

## 3.2. Human Psychology and the Nature of Self-Awareness in Eliot's Works

Eliot shows exceptional skill in revealing how people think about themselves through her psychological stories. Through her novels Eliot shows us how her characters think about themselves as she combines her knowledge of philosophy psychology and moral philosophy. Eliot developed her knowledge of human behaviour through her intellectual studies of Spinoza's determinism and Victorian psychology as well as her translation projects and relationship with George Henry Lewes.

### 3.2.1. Eliot's Understanding of Human Psychology

Eliot stands out for her skill at describing realistic human psychology which shows us characters whose true selves change deeply. Through her characters she became one of the first novelists to show readers how people think about their own minds and society (Postlethwaite, 2013).

Eliot examines the inner minds of her characters through their personal desires and moral struggles in her novel *Middlemarch*. Dorothea Brooke wants to live her ideals but her marriage to Edward Casaubon and social rules limit her path. Through the character of Dorothea Eliot shows her focus on understanding moral evolution and personal attributes of individual development (Carlisle, 2023). Dr. Tertius Lydgate's character shows the inner conflict between his own goals and his willingness to break moral rules. After starting as a talented doctor Lydgate faces money problems and social

expectations which force him to break his medical ethics. Eliot shows how Lydgate's decline results from the psychological impact of social expectations on his professional goals (Postlethwaite, 2013).

*The Mill on the Floss* shows Eliot's deep understanding of human psychology by focusing on Maggie Tulliver's character. The way Maggie fights to control her life meets the social rules shows how she deals with personal growth and takes morality seriously. Eliot shows us how Maggie grows emotionally as she moves from self-questioning to rash choices and finally gives up herself for others. Eliot uses Maggie to study how trauma impacts child development while showing how society molds personal identity (DAVIS, 2021).

Eliot uses psychological analysis in *Daniel Deronda* to show how Gwendolen Harleth discovers her true self while Daniel Deronda finds his moral purpose. Following her painful experience Gwendolen shows how Eliot demonstrates her regular theme of finding self-understanding through adversity. Eliot shows through Daniel Deronda that personal growth toward community service emerges from slow self-discovery (Henderson, n.d.).

### **3.2.2. Connection to Eliot's Intellectual Explorations of the Human Mind**

Eliot used her psychological understanding to write stories because it grew from her intellectual studies. She studied modern psychological and philosophical ideas especially those from Baruch Spinoza and George Henry Lewes.

She studied Spinoza's *Ethics* which made her one of few translators of this work. Her translation explored Spinoza's views about how life exists under determination and natural laws. The idea that people do not freely choose their emotional reactions or actions influenced Eliot when she wrote stories about human minds. In *Middlemarch* Eliot demonstrates how society and surroundings decide the available choices for Lydgate and Dorothea (Carlisle, 2023). Eliot shows in her works that characters follow a set path while also taking moral responsibility for their actions because she believes people have both external limits and personal choice.

Eliot developed her psychological knowledge through her relationship with George Henry Lewes who was a famous Victorian psychologist and philosopher. Lewes's research into how the body affects mental processes and his opposition to Descartes' mind-body split helped Eliot understand that our minds develop through both biological and external influences (DAVIS, 2021). She shows characters whose mental problems result from both their personal decisions and their social and cultural surroundings.

Eliot dedicated much of her time to studying moral psychology as it examined how people develop ethical awareness. Her stories show characters progressing toward understanding themselves better as empathy and inner thought shape how they become morally aware. Psychologists during that period believed that our actions result from our life experiences and surroundings (Henderson, n.d.).

### **3.2.3. Psychological and Structural Complexity in Eliot's Narrative Style**

Eliot's approach to the narration is psychological realism. She uses free indirect speech, a technique that enables the readers to hear what the characters are thinking and feeling but without the first-person narrative point of view. It deepens psychological aspect of her stories, which is clearly seen in the inner dialogues of the characters: Dorothea in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot (Postlethwaite, 2013).

Furthermore, the structure of the story in Eliot's work is as complex as the human mind. She uses multiple narrators to show how the same events are seen from different angles due to the psychological and emotional condition of the characters. This is well illustrated in *Middlemarch* where the inner struggles of Dorothea, Lydgate, Rosamond, and Casaubon are depicted in detail, thus giving the reader a complex perspective of human beings (Henderson, n.d.).

One of the most significant aspects of her work is her analysis of the human psyche and the process of self-realization. Her character portrayals, based on her research of Spinoza's philosophy, Victorian psychology, and moral philosophy, are complex and realistic. In the characters like Dorothea Brooke, Maggie Tulliver, and Gwendolen Harleth, Eliot portrayed the concept of self-consciousness and how it is affected by the society. Her work remains a proof of the importance of literature in portraying the fullness of life and therefore, she is among the most formidable intellectual novelists of the Victorian period.

## **3.3. Social Critique and Reform in Eliot's Novels**

The works of George Eliot are a biting critique of Victorian society, especially of the stratification of classes, of women's inequality, and of marriage, in particular. Eliot intends to challenge the strict hard rules of society through her characterizing and narration which is nuanced and intricate; and she uses these devices to offer social progress through empathy, self-awareness, and the growth of the intellect (Henderson, n.d.).

### **3.3.1. Class Hierarchies and Social Inequality**

*Silas Marner*, shows how England's strict social classes work against her by comparing the greedy Cass family with Silas Marner's honest nature. The Cass family uses their wealth to control society even though they lack moral standards while Silas Marner demonstrates strong character through his poverty and social rejection. The author presents these characters to show that moral value does not depend on social rank and to create a new vision of society that treats everyone equally.

*Middlemarch* shows how people face difficulties when they try to move up in life beyond their assigned social rank. Dr. The ambitious doctor Tertius Lydgate wants to advance medicine but must make unethical choices because he cannot afford to practice medicine properly. His story shows how strict social divisions stop talented people from reaching their full potential (Henderson, n.d.).

### **3.3.2. Gender Roles and Female Agency**

Eliot shows how Victorian society restricts women's opportunities. Through Dorothea Brooke *Middlemarch* examines the problems that patriarchy creates in society. Dorothea wants to learn but her society forces women to accept marriage as their only purpose. Her marriage to Edward Casaubon started as a path to intellectual growth but ended in disappointment because she became a decorative object in his life instead of his intellectual partner (Gning, 2022).

The *Mill on the Floss* shows readers how Maggie Tulliver faces social barriers that limit her freedom as a woman. Despite her strong mind and deep emotions Maggie must follow social rules that let men pursue their goals without letting women be free. Eliot shows through Maggie how women in her time faced social barriers when they wanted both mental and personal freedom (Gning, 2022).

### **3.3.3. Critique of Marriage as a Social Institution**

Eliot shows marriage as a system that people enter for financial and social reasons instead of emotional and mental partnership. Dorothea Brooke and Rosamond Vincy's marriages in *Middlemarch* show how Victorian weddings were mainly about creating stable connections between wealthy people and powerful families over physical and mental personal connections. Dorothea's marriage with Casaubon fails because she married him for partnership, but he controlled her and refused to show love. Dr. Lydgate's professional and personal collapse results from his marriage to Rosamond Vincy because they tied the knot for money instead of understanding (Henderson, n.d.).

Eliot opposes the social belief that women need marriage for financial stability instead of emotional and mental partnership. She shows us in her work that relationships should be based on shared respect and emotional support alongside equal minds instead of social requirements (Gning, 2022).

### **3.3.4. The Potential for Individual and Societal Progress**

Eliot sees internal self-examination plus ethical thinking can drive personal growth leading to better society for everyone. Through her stories she shows that personal development through understanding others leads to bettering society (Henderson, n.d.).

Through his bond with Eppie Silas Marner develops from a lonely man into a caring father figure. Human interaction and moral development bring about positive changes in people. Through her personal growth Dorothea Brooke proves that personal enlightenment can break through social rules.

Eliot shows how Victorian society needs change, but she believes this transformation should happen step by step through personal self-discovery and better understanding of our human connections. Through moral responsibility and empathy people can build a better society (Henderson, n.d.).

## **4. Eliot's Narrative Style and Intellectual Complexity**

### **4.1. Use of omniscient narration and psychological realism**

Herman as a narrator the most distinctive characteristics of the plot that focuses on the conflicts of the protagonists' minds and personal fears and doubts. This enables the readers to get in touch with the moral and emotional aspects of her protagonists and the struggle between the self and the society.

#### **4.1.1. Omniscient Narration**

Eliot uses an external point of view where the narrator knows everything that is happening in the story and in the minds of all the characters. It is rather convenient as it allows for illustrating various aspects of the story line and the characters on the one hand and enables readers to have the broad outlook on what is going on on the other. For example, in *Adam Bede*, the narrator often comments on the events of the story, thus standing between the reader and the events depicted. Chapter 17, which is entitled "In Which the Story Pauses a Little," is a perfect example of this technique because Eliot explains and defends her realist approach to the story, turning to the reader to clarify her approach to writing (Mambrol, 2019).

In addition to connecting fiction and reality, this self-conscious narrator further provides the readers with rather complex tasks to contemplate upon the moral and essential questions of the narrative. Using the second person pronouns, Eliot engages the reader in the process of moral evaluation of the characters' behavior and the social standards.

#### **4.1.2. Psychological Realism**

Eliot's narrative art is based on the principle of psychological realism, which means that the author pays much attention to the inner life of her characters. She explores their thoughts and feelings, depicting the human desire and actions. The internal struggles of the characters such as Dorothea Brooke and Tertius Lydgate are depicted with a lot of understanding and depth, showing their individual goals, ethical issues, and the social realities they face. Such a level of psychological characterization is consistent with the realist tradition in which the focus is made on the realistic behavior of characters and the portrayal of the latter as unique personalities.

Eliot's concern with the inner life is part of her more general interest in the human soul and the ethical life. Her stories are usually centered on the conflict between the self and the society, showing how the individual and the society affect each other. This duality in the play demonstrates that there are moral battles within everyone and every organization.

#### **4.1.3. Integration of Narrative Technique and Thematic Depth**

With reference to 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and 'Gerontion', explain how Eliot uses the concept of anticipation through the omniscient narrator and psychological realism in composing themes such as duty, the society's pressure, and individuality. Thus, through the portrayal of the characters' inner worlds, Eliot helps the reader understand

the complexity of the ethical choices and the tension between the individual and the society. It also benefits character build up and forces reader to make certain ethico-critical analysis within them.

The chosen aspects of George Eliot's narrative technique and her focus on psychological realism contribute to the creation of a complex picture of human life. Her narrative technique is used to present the issues of the human mind and the ethical issues of life, thus cementing her place in history as one of the pioneers of literary realism and psychological analysis.

## **4.2. Symbolism and Metaphor in Eliot's Works**

Eliot employs symbolic images and metaphors across her work to show deep ideas about philosophy and builds strong thematic content. Her Eliotian landscapes and repeated symbols help readers understand both what her characters feel inside and the moral values of her stories (Walker & Harbus, 2020).

### **4.2.1. Symbolism in Eliotian Landscapes**

Eliot pays much attention to the construction of her landscapes to reflect the psychological conditions of the characters as well as the themes. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the river Floss is used to represent the passion of the main character Maggie Tulliver and the forces that control her. The river's current and its tendency to flood can be associated with Maggie's temper and her freedom; the deterministic view of life where passion is always in conflict with the world (Eliot, 1860).

Likewise, *Middlemarch* is a provincial town that represents the Victorian society in terms of its social relations and moral shades of grey. The physical environment symbolizes the constraints and the pressure that society puts on the characters, especially women such as Dorothea Brooke. Eliot's description of the geography and architecture of the town is a representation of the societal order that characters have to live in, which underlines the tension between individual desire and societal expectations (Paxman, 2003).

### **4.2.2. Recurring Motifs and Metaphors**

There are several motifs and metaphors that are utilized by Eliot to explore goals that are philosophical about the human life, ethics, and culture. One of the most prominent themes is the one of sight and blindness, symbolizing knowledge and lack of it. Characters with moral or intellectual light are depicted as having good eyesight while those with vices or no knowledge are depicted as blind or having poor eyesight. This extends to social commentary where it suggests that wilful blindness perpetuates social wrongs (Paxman, 2003).

The other important one is the web, used to show how people's actions are linked and how relations among people are intricate. *Middlemarch* presents society as a 'web' in order to illustrate how people are connected and how their actions affect others (Thomas, 2019). Metaphor reflects Eliot's philosophical stance on the duties that people have towards one another and fosters the ethical sense of the community (Walker & Harbus, 2020).

### **4.2.3. Philosophical Implications**

Eliot constructs her inquiry into the vexation of free will within social and natural forces through symbolism and metaphor in an exploration of existential and moral philosophy. Unlike the natural systems themes found in classical European art whereby nature controls man, in the American art, the industrial order presents itself as the dominating force affecting man's life, and thus machine repeated images are employed to symbolise such oppressive deterministic influences that usually hinder personal freedoms (Paxman, 2003). In this regard, it conforms to Eliot's broader philosophical research on the nature of human freedom and on the ethical duties that follow from interrelation between persons (Shotillo Safarovich Shorakhmetov, 2024).

Additionally, Eliot's use of scientific metaphors, which were inspired by the latest developments in natural history and evolutionary theory, shows her dedication to realism and her study of human behavior in the light of more general natural laws. For instance, in her narratives, often makes assumptions that between human societies and natural ecosystems, the human societies can learn some things from the natural ecosystems to help in understanding the moral development or social organization (Thomas, 2019).

Symbolism and metaphor are applied skillfully by George Eliot, making her narratives richer in meaning for human psychology, social situations, and moral philosophy. Far from being merely decorative, her landscapes and recurring motifs are integral components that enhance the reader's engagement with the text and his awareness of the complex interplay between individual lives and a society and a world beyond the individual (Paxman, 2003; Walker & Harbus, 2020).

## **4.3 Ambiguity and Moral Complexity in Eliot's Narrative Style**

Eliot's unique style of narrative lies in its deliberate ambiguity and moral complexity — in forcing the reader to delve into the ethical conundrums and multi dimensional characters, which she uses to explore her arguments on life, suffering, death, humanity, etc. Instead of presenting obvious moral judgements, Eliot's narratives are created in a way that it depicts the reality rather complexities of human experience which urges the readers to learn difficult concepts and their variations (James Buzard | *LIT@MIT*, n.d.).

### **4.3.1. Avoidance of Clear Moral Conclusions**

When it comes to moral conclusions, Eliot is highly known for her novels not offering any definite moral conclusion, a trait that requests readers to engage with the ethical aspects in her novels that her characters face. This encourages a

participatory reading style such as an individual has to go through the moral landscape alongside protagonists which makes it a deeper understanding of human condition (Fessenbecker & Nottelmann, 2022). For example, in *Middlemarch*, the character of Rosamond Vincy is presented in a nuanced and complex way that makes one both empathize with her and criticize her. Her actions and motivations are not easily categorized as purely virtuous or completely flawed, as human behavior is complex (Mambrol, 2019). Such portrayal sits well with Eliot's overall narrative strategy of introduction of characters whose moral rightness or wrongness is determined by the simultaneous influence of a mix of personal desires, societal expectations and exigencies of circumstances (DAVIS, 2021). *Daniel Deronda* is also a novel in which Eliot avoids simple moral binaries, as the protagonist struggles with his Jewish heritage and the responsibilities it entails. Eliot does not prescribe a single moral resolution, but instead offers conflicting views on personal duty and cultural identity, and it is up to the reader to consider the ethical consequences of Deronda's decisions (Postlethwaite, 2013).

#### **4.3.2. Interplay Between Narrative Voice and Reader Engagement**

The way Eliot presents her thoughts combines universal insights with individual character experiences. Through this approach the story gains depth while making readers think about how society affects characters' decisions. In *Middlemarch* Eliot uses her all-knowing narrator to examine human morality while reflecting on the nature of people so readers will deeply think about the story. She uses this method to help readers develop their own moral thinking instead of simply accepting fixed results (Carlisle, 2023). *Adam Bede* faces ethical challenges between doing what is just and showing compassion in his life. His encounters make him change his strong belief in absolute moral rules. Eliot does not offer one right answer but lets readers explore how morality changes when society evolves (Henderson, n.d.).

#### **4.3.3. Realism and Moral Ambiguity**

Eliot shows her realistic approach through her depiction of moral choices that lack clear answers. Through her realistic approach she shows us that life is not simple and moral choices have many shades of gray (James Buzard | LIT@MIT, n.d.). The real emotional portrayal of moral dilemmas helps readers examine their assumptions about right and wrong behaviors. Through the story of Silas Marner Eliot shows how the main character transforms from a lonely man to a caring father. Despite not writing a clear redemption story Eliot explores the multiple forces that led Marner toward moral change. Through this development Eliot shows readers that moral growth takes many forms and does not need to follow a single path (Gning, 2022).

She writes stories that bring out deep thought and moral analysis through their uncertain storylines. She avoids telling readers what to think about morality so they can personally understand the text and their own beliefs. Through this method Eliot creates deeper stories and establishes herself as a writer who deeply understands human nature (Fessenbecker & Nottelmann, 2022).

### **5. The Legacy of George Eliot's Intellectual Contributions**

#### **5.1. Influence on later writers and thinkers**

Through her intellectual work George Eliot guided many later writers and thinkers in their creative efforts. Her literary work about character depth and social topics affected later writers Virginia Woolf and Thomas Hardy.

##### **5.1.1. Influence on Virginia Woolf**

Virginia Woolf respected George Eliot as a key figure who shaped the development of the novel. Woolf wrote in that studying George Eliot reveals the extent of our ignorance about her true nature (*George Eliot*, n.d.). Woolf took inspiration from Eliot because she wrote about human psychology in such detail. Eliot's ways of looking deeply into character psychology and moral dilemmas influenced Woolf to develop better methods for understanding characters and their issues. Woolf further explored modernist storytelling methods because of her connection to Eliot's narrative practices. Through characterization and style Eliot helped build the foundation that Woolf used to experiment with her narratives. Through her characters Woolf adopted psychological realism from Eliot who first used stream-of-consciousness writing. Eliot's literary predecessors strongly influenced how Woolf developed her artistic skills.

##### **5.1.2. Influence on Thomas Hardy**

Thomas Hardy developed his writing style because he studied the work of George Eliot. As a realist He illustrated his characters' problems between personal challenges and cultural experience through this style of writing. He took inspiration from Eliot when he wrote about how people suffer under social rules and destiny. Belle Irene Gillespie studied 1903 how his novels presented Eliot's impact through examining character development and environmental descriptions (GILLESPIE, 2022).

He has shown rural life and character moral challenges in his work just like Eliot shows provincial life in detail. The authors show how people fight between what they want personally and what society demands in real life. Eliot's ideas strongly show up in his writing about characters and his study of fate and society's power over people.

### 5.1.3. Broader Intellectual Movements

Through her works she helped develop both realism and modernism as literary movements. Her focus on real human life and social conditions created the foundation for later writers to study reality and human awareness. The way Eliot blends deep psychological thinking into her stories helps people think about personal moral duties in group life.

Eliot's writing principles and story ideas keep inspiring today's authors to create their work. Her deep knowledge about people and society positions her as the main reference for literary academics and their research.

## 5.2. Relevance in Contemporary Intellectual Debates

Eliot provides modern thinkers with an important starting point for exploring philosophy and social subjects today. Her exploration of moral philosophy and psychology plus her social analysis impacts today's talks about ethics gender equality and social hierarchy. She merged rationalist thinking with emotional knowledge in a way that helps us understand modern problems today (Carlisle, 2023).

### 5.2.1. Philosophical Insights

Eliot showed her philosophical interest through her translation of Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics* where she explained deterministic moral concepts and the characteristics of reality. Through this intellectual pursuit she demonstrates her dedication to rational thinking and her belief that people need to examine their own ethics (Carlisle, 2023). She has shown Spinoza's influence through her stories about people whose moral choices depend on their surroundings because her work follows this philosophical system.

Her interest in secular humanism stays important today because society still argues about how individuals should behave without religious rules. By showing characters who wrestle with their ethical personalities she gives us new ways to understand how people discuss their personal freedom and moral progress today. Eliot combines psychological realism with philosophical ideas in her fiction which makes her works important for ethical philosophy research (DAVIS, 2021).

### 5.2.2. Social Critiques

Through her novels Eliot exposes the strict Victorian social rules about class positions gender roles and marriage practices which still affect our present society. Through Dorothea Brooke's character *Middlemarch* shows how Victorian society blocked women from pursuing their intellectual goals just like today's gender equality debates (Henderson, n.d.). The book shows how women face barriers to their career goals which matches today's feminist talks about educational and professional equality.

She used *Silas Marner* to show how society deals with economic differences between people today. The book studies how wealth affects privileges in society through its depiction of societal rules about smart people. Eliot shows social class through characters who need support and changes which match our present discussion of social equality (Henderson, n.d.).

Through her detailed portrayal of marriage Eliot shows that relationships should exist on personal terms rather than follow economic and social rules. *Middlemarch* examines how mismatched needs and financial pressure destroy marriage between Rosamond Vincy and Tertius Lydgate (Gning, 2022).

### 5.2.3. Enduring Relevance

Recent academics discover Eliot's work as an essential reference point for their research on literature and philosophy. Through detailed character analysis and moral examination Eliot gives us essential methods to study present-day ethical conflicts and social systems (Postlethwaite, 2013). Today's society depends on Eliot's works to understand how people think and behave when making ethical choices about identity and justice.

Her teachings about personal moral reflection help people solve ethical problems today. Her ongoing importance to modern thinking results from her support of both emotional understanding and deep self-examination (Carlisle, 2023).

## 5.3. Eliot's place in the canon of Western literature

### 5.3.1. Eliot's Intellectual Depth and Lasting Impact

Throughout her writing career Eliot studied challenging philosophical subjects. She needed both language skills and knowledge of metaphysical ideas to translate Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics* into English which proves her dedication to intellectual study (Carlisle, 2023). Through her translation work she gained knowledge about human emotions and relationships which she later used in her novels.

Eliot uses *Middlemarch* to explore the moral and psychological lives of provincial characters in what many consider the greatest English novel ever written. Through her analysis of ambition and marriage within social systems the author reveals her deep understanding of human behaviour and social structures (Postlethwaite, 2013). Her clear depiction of human relationships makes her work eternal and causes many new writers and scholars to study her work.

Her novels stand out because they show real life and characters accurately which proves her belief that literature can study and understand reality. She shows realism through complete descriptions of social spaces and moral challenges her characters face which help readers understand their own lives and social rules.

Through her philosophy ideas Eliot made important contributions to the study of human morals and ethical judgment. Her deep analysis of ethical decisions shows readers how to look into themselves and feel for others. Eliot shows readers how people think and feel within themselves as they face moral choices through her characters (Postlethwaite, 2013).

Today Eliot continues to influence how people analyze literature and study philosophy. Experts study her works to learn about moral matters and understand society's impact on people's nature as individuals. Eliot set new standards for blending stories and intellectual discussions which modern authors use today making her an important figure in Western literature (Postlethwaite, 2013).

## 6. Conclusion

George Eliot reveals her deep thinking through her novels that mix understanding of philosophy with real character behaviour and society studies. She used her lessons from Feuerbach Spinoza and Hegel to write about difficult moral choices that explain how people make choices and affect others. She brings out psychological details in her characters who face personal struggles because of social demands. She evaluates Victorian society's traditional systems including gender hierarchy's social divisions and official institutions which demonstrate her advanced thinking that remains relevant now and back then. Eliot used her literary works to make deep ideas that helped form modern philosophical and literary thinking and secured her place as a trailblazing intellectual. Researchers need to compare Eliot's ideas with her literary peers and study her effect on early Female and Moral philosophy scholars today. Studying Eliot's works helps scholars identify the lasting benefits her intellectual work gave to Western literature and philosophy.

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