

Abstract

Almqvist Norbelie, B., 1992. "Oppressive Narrowness": A Study of the Female Community in George Eliot's Early Writings. Acta Univ. Ups. *Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia* 80. 163 pp. Uppsala. ISBN 91-554-2982-3.

This study attempts to give a comprehensive view of George Eliot's attitude to her own gender in the 1850s and early 1860s. It centres on the early pastoral fiction, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*, exploring the female communities and the interaction between the female characters as mothers, daughters and friends. Special attention is given to the minor female characters and to *Scenes of Clerical Life*, both of which have been largely overlooked by critics. Chapter 1 provides a short overview of Victorian attitudes to women. Chapter 2 presents a biographical background, with specific emphasis on Eliot's relationship to her mother and to other women. Chapter 3 establishes that there are clear thematic links between the author's non-fictional writings and the early fiction and that, although George Eliot never wanted to commit herself publicly to the women's movement, her non-fiction gives evidence of her interest in and ambivalence to various issues concerning women. The three subsequent chapters examine how, in the early fiction, a culturally conservative, ignorant and narrow-minded society, suffused with misogyny and with strong social control, affects the female characters.

By a close reading of the texts from a feminist point of view and by applying a theory of a double-voiced discourse, this thesis demonstrates the double perspective of a dominant male narrator and a muted female author. It is shown that, on the one hand, the narrator expresses both the conventions of the time and Eliot's own criticism of the ignorance and shallowness fostered by those conventions. On the other hand, in its choice of setting, characters and plot, the muted story uncovers the female author's silent sympathy with the sad destinies of many women who passively suffer under the oppression of the same conventions.

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