

## *Fall/Winter 2017-2018*

**AP/EN 4577 3.0A (F)**

***George Eliot***

**Course Director:**

Instructor: Elizabeth Sabiston  
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**Delivery Format:**

Seminar

**Time:**

Wednesdays, 4:00pm - 7:00pm, SC-224

**Description:**

The course examines the major novels of George Eliot (Marian Evans), one of the most influential Victorian novelists. It sets the fiction in the philosophic, political, and cultural context of Victorian England and earlier.

George Eliot is generally credited with having written the finest novel of the Victorian period, *Middlemarch* (1871-72). Virginia Woolf has called it the only “novel for grown-ups” written during that period, and Henry James wrote that “it sets a limit . . . to the development of the old-fashioned English novel.” It could be argued, in fact, that it does not simply set a limit, but moves the novel into the twentieth century and modernism: Eliot’s influence on James, Thomas Hardy, and D.H. Lawrence has been well documented. Lawrence claimed that Eliot had already broken through the nineteenth-century limits: it was she “who started it all . . . She put the action inside.” Eliot fuses the historical, panoramic novel with the novel of ideas and that of psychological insight. Several of her works, most notably *Middlemarch*, have been made into television mini-series, some of which will supplement the readings.

Although Eliot would probably have described herself as a humanist rather than a feminist, her focus on microcosm and macrocosm, on the individual sometimes opposed to, sometime supported by, the community, led to a number of memorable portraits of strong, if at times misguided, heroines: Dinah Morris, Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke, Gwendolen Harleth. Formidably intelligent, very in touch with the most advanced thinking of her day – Darwinian theory, Social Darwinism, the women’s movement, J.S. Mill’s liberalism, Unitarian Radicalism, Utopian experimentation – she reflects on her own age and the recent past, and on the interaction of character and setting, or environment. Her keen awareness of the past informed her vision of the future in ideal societies she could only imagine. Her dialectic method rejects authoritarianism, and she relies heavily on two-plot novels.

Students may explore the role of women, social history, Eliot’s innovations in the novel, any other aspect they consider relevant. They are encouraged not only to familiarize themselves with biographies and criticism of Eliot, but also to develop their own critical methodologies.

**Category:**

C

**Area:**

4.3

**Period:**

2

**Historical Requirement:**

Time Period II (1700-1900)

**Requirements:**

One 1000-word and one 2000-word essay (30% and 50%); one seminar report and class participation (20%)

**Reading List:**

George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (1859) (Penguin); *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) (Penguin); *Middlemarch* (1871-72) (Norton Critical Edition); *Daniel Deronda* (1876) (Penguin).

**Suggested Reading:** Supplementary critical bibliographies will be distributed in class

**Open To:**

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