
B.M. Proskurnin**RUSSIAN RECEPTION OF GEORGE ELIOT AND GENESIS OF SOCIAL REALISM**

The article describes the reception of the works by a leading 19th-century British writer George Eliot in the Russian literary criticism of the 1850–1870s. The analysis of journal articles by M. Mikhailov, D. Mordovtsev, P. Tkachev, M. Tsebrikova et al. shows the ideological basis of addressing to the novels of the English author that raise the problem of the independence of the person, their rights and responsibilities and that are dominated by the original Democratic social paradigm of plots and their conflictological base. This is of particular importance in terms of forming a new social and cultural situation in the post-reform Russia. Primarily the research focuses on the special attention of Russian literary critics to the nature of the writer's realism that, in their view, is characterized by a certain synthesis of socio-psychological analysis, essayism (physiologism), writing about routine life and naturalism. George Eliot's attention to the everyday life of a simple (small) person was in line with the search of the Russian writers of the time and with the establishment of the classical Russian realism of the 19th century.

Keywords: George Eliot, novel, long story, realism, physiological sketch, naturalism, character, literary criticism, literary process, Nineteenth century.

All historians of English literature when speaking about one of the greatest English novelists *George Eliot* (1819–1880) mention two periods of her creative activity: the early one – between 1858 and 1863, and the later stage – 1863–1876 (after 1876 the writer did not produce fiction, though in May 1879 she published quite an experimental book *Impressions of Theofrastus Such*, the genre of which since then has always been the matter of debate). The early works – *Scenes of Clerical Life*; 1858; *Adam Bede*; 1859; *The Mill on the Floss*; 1860; *Silas Marner*; 1861) – are narratives, which depict morals and manners of the country England in the XVIII–XIX centuries; the novels of the second period are *Romola*; 1863; *Felix Holt, the Radical*; 1866; *Middlemarch*; 1872; *Daniel Deronda*; 1876); they direct readers' attention to the topical social issues of the time, to the political and intellectual aspects of the society; they show the author's increasing interest towards means of social analysis in fiction and philosophical and intellectual sharpness of her ways of narration.

The reception of George Eliot in Russia has quite a long history. The main works of her fiction began to be published in translation in the late

1850s, and since then there have been three major periods of the Russian reception of her creative work rather different in the very ideology of the process: late 1850s – 1917; the Soviet period (1917–1991); the New Russian period (from 1991 till nowadays). The main idea of this essay – *the reception of George Eliot's art coincided with the forming of great Russian realist tradition* – makes me concentrate on the first period of George Eliot reception in Russia. Though the first stage of George Eliot reception in Russia seemed to be thought over in our literary academic writings¹, many approaches to it in the Soviet time had the burden of the domineering ideology, and not all aspects of the process are fully and adequately observed by nowadays.

For the first time in Russia the name of George Eliot was mentioned in 1859 in Russian literary 'thick' journals, which to a great extent at that time determined the shape of Russian intellectual life. It happened because of the publication of her novel *Adam Bede* – the most widely read of her works in pre-1917-Russia. It should be noted here that for more than a half a century the very name of George Eliot was associated in common readers' minds with this novel (as *Adam Bede* or as *Infanticide*) which was published in pre-1917 Russian translations eight times (1859, 1865, 1899, 1900 – twice, 1902, 1903, 1909) – more than any other novel of George Eliot².

George Eliot entered Russia's reading field, which seriously grew every year, in the period of Russian culture when a new paradigm of Russian social and cultural life was forming and began to influence the literary process of the time: Russian *intelligentsia* began to dominate in the intellectual and moral spheres, and it was looking impatiently for imperatives and ways of thinking about life, the individual and society. No doubt, Russian interest to George Eliot's works³ could also be explained

¹ See two essays by Kazan academic Irina Bushkanets: [1], [2]. See also: dissertation of Olga Demidova: [3], her bibliography [4] and an essay by Irina Gnyusova about G. Eliot and Leo Tolstoy: [5].

² In the period of 1859–1915 the following works of George Eliot, besides *Adam Bede* were translated into Russian and published – either in full (or close to it) form or abridged, adapted, retold for more common readers: *Silas Marner* (or *A Girl with Golden Hair*, or *Money is Not Happiness* or *Weaver from Ravenlow*) – 7 times (1889, 1901, 1904, 1906, 1910, 1912, 1915); *The Mill on the Floss* (or *Brother and Sister*) – 4 times (1865, 1902, 1904, 1915); *Felix Holt, the Radical* (or *The Storm in Quiet Pool*) 3 times (1867 – twice in different translations, 1915; *Middlermarch* – 1873, twice in different translations; *Scenes of Clerical Life* (*Janet's Repentance*) – 1860; *Romola* – 1891, 1892; *Daniel Deronda* – 4 times: 1877, 1902, 1904, 1915.

³ See: [6. Vol. 43. P. 300. Vol. 48. P. 23. Vol. 60. P. 477], [7–10].

by the fact that Eliot, especially in her later works, wrote about English reflexive people¹. That's why in the 1870s – 1900s Russian critics were much more attentive and spoke very highly of *The Mill on the Floss*, *Felix Holt*, *Romola*, *Daniel Deromda*, *Middlemarch*, though the last one was definitely underestimated by Russian critics and readers of that time thus producing a sad tradition.

In this essay I am more interested in the fact of Russian literary critics' rapt attention to her early novels just when the very idea of Russian socio-psychological realism was in the process of emerging, when a very important role of literature (and arts on the whole) in current life was debated.

The ideological approaches to George Eliot's works by pre-1917-Russian literary critics of various and sometimes if not opposite socio-political views – Mikhail Mikhailov [11, 12], Alexandre Druzhinin [13], Pyotr Tkachev [14], Pyotr Boborykin [15], Seraphim Shashkov [16], Pyotr Veinberg [17], Maria Tsebrikova [18] – are practically similar: with the help of her works they wanted to show how contrary the fate of an individual in Russia of that time was, to open the means by which literature could not only be true to life, but could bring up new free-thinking people. Russian literary critics of the 'thick literary journals' from the time of Vissarion Belinsky had been reigning over the minds of the booming reading and intelligent public in Russia in the second half of the XIX century. The novels of George Eliot and the critical comments on them (and on English Literature of Eliot's time in general) quite regularly appeared in such journals as *The Contemporary*, *The Affair*, *Fatherland Notes*, *The Herald of Europe*, *The Russian Herald*, *Library for Reading*, etc. They were the main medium of social, political and moral thought and the centers of serious aesthetic and socio-political discussion of the time.

The history of the reception of George Eliot by Russian literary journals starts with two essays by a famous Russian democratic critic Mikhail Mikhailov published in the most radical journal of the time *The Contemporary* ('Sovremennik') in 1859 and in 1860. These essays lay down the foundations and determine the perspectives of the Russian assessment of George Eliot's works as a brilliant example of social realist fiction for many decades. The first essay was inspired by his reading of the first

¹ It should be noted that Dostoevsky, who knew English and adored, for example, Dickens (he tried to translate into Russian Dickens's *Old Curiosity Shop*) did not write on George Eliot in the way Tolstoy, Chernyshevskiy, Goncharov did.

George Eliot's novel, *Adam Bede*, and by reviews of the novel published in *The Times* and in *Westminster Review*. Mikhailov begins his essay of 1859 with a categorical statement that 'in *Adam Bede* George Eliot presents herself in full maturity of her thought, sense and artistic strength' [11. P. 104]. He gives profound and detailed analysis of the novel with decent citation from the original in his own (quite good!) translation. In his essay on *Adam Bede* Mikhailov launches the Russian literary critical tradition to compare Eliot's art with Dutch realist (genre) painting (though Eliot herself, as we all know, gives serious grounds for that when she speculates about Dutch/Flemish genre painting and its example for literature the XVIII chapter of the novel). He admires 'the adorable simplicity' [11. P. 128] of Eliot's narrative in this novel. Although at that time he did not know yet that the author of the novel he analyzed was a woman, he wonders at the author's capacities to produce a very strong moral impact on a reader without being openly didactic [11. P. 129]. He is sure that the 'philosophy of the novel' is able 'to nourish morally the next generations' [11. P. 130].

By Mikhailov, George Eliot achieves this effect due to her character-making mastery; here the critic compares her with great Shakespeare: like him, George Eliot constructs her personages' characters 'in the total entirety of life' [11. P. 129], and because of that her personages 'make an impression of live life itself' [11. P. 107]. Mikhailov specially stresses that 'there is no in George Eliot's book any premeditation, no any attempt to prove some literary theory or theory on the whole', of which contemporary Russian literature suffers' [Ibidem].

In his essay of 1860 Mikhailov already knew the gender of the author of *The Mill on the Floss* which was in the center of his interest. That is why he added to his discussion of the novel and its realist peculiarities some speculations about women-writers (based on his understanding of George Sand and Beecher Stowe) and female preference for the content and the subjects of their novel-writing, rather than the form. It explains much of Mikhailov's interpretation of the image of Maggie Talliver based on the conflict of 'this passionate and gifted girl' and stagnant milieu which ends with her 'setting herself in the world of her own dreams and fantasies, where there was nobody to put any obstacle for her' [12. P. 379]. Nevertheless, the critic speaks high of this novel as the one which 'is true to life' [12. P. 413] in every sense, and most of all – social truth and verity. It is remarkable that Mikhailov distinguishes George

Eliot from the type of women-writers he spoke about, by stressing that her novelistic art demonstrates a 'combination of the vital and close to essential moral issues content with genuinely beautiful and even factually true to life form' [12. P. 317].

Mikhailov was the first Russian critic who linked the art of George Eliot with 'true-to-life art' – realism, what is more, he admired the heights of George Eliot's art in presenting the psychology of her person-ages, and of children, first of all; since the publication of those essays, this aspect of her creative capacities has been highly and rightly praised by Russian academics and critics of various periods: see the works of Maria Tsebrikoova (1871) [18], Lydiya Davydova (1891) [19], Kirill Rovda (1935 and 1963) [20, 21], Valentina Ivasheva (1974) [22], Astra Lugais (1987) [23], Maya Tugusheva (1990) [24], Karen Hewitt and Boris Proskurnin (2004) [25] and others.

Surveying pre-1917-Russian works on George Eliot I agree with Natalia Maslova from St. Petersburg who writes in her dissertation 'The Regional Novel in the Creative Work of George Eliot' (2001), that contemporaries of the writer in Russia preferred her early novels as 'being more fresh and ingenuous', while critics of the later periods thought of them as being too simple in many ways [26. P. 3]. At the same time, Natalia Maslova argues that one of the reasons of this special interest and appraisal of George Eliot's early novels in Russian literary thought of the XIX century was connected with the fact that 'in the middle of the XIX century the accent on the pictures of rural life happened to be allied to widely spread interest to social issues' [26. P. 6]. The critic writes that in the realism of the XIX century there existed an inclination to analyze 'social microstructures, and rural communities among them' [Ibidem].

Here, one cannot avoid mentioning the aspect of George Eliot's art which is widely discussed in the pre-1917-Russian literary criticism – the character of her realism. It should be noted that in the middle of the XIX century in Russian literary criticism two terms – realism and physiologism – were more-or-less synonymouss. This fact seems quite an obvious reason for the critics who favored social realism and the turn of Russian literature towards depicting ordinary life of ordinary people to praise so high George Eliot's early works, which were interpreted as the ones containing a serious 'physiological' element, i.e. the interest to depicting the very flow of everyday life in its details of various levels. A famous representative of the democratic trend in the Russian social

thought of the time Daniil Mordovtsev in his essay ‘The Missions of Contemporary Novel’ (1870) puts forward Dickens as an example of a brilliant painter ‘of general pictures of the physiology of English life’ [27. P. 52]. He argues that Dickens ‘showed how much social confusions threaten an individual’ and that ‘his disciples should demonstrate what repulse an individual can give to all these confusions’ [Ibid]. He continues by the statement that they (he includes in the list George Eliot) already do it, and that their novels just because of that (the urge to help a man to understand the laws of life around him) ‘are the fruits of studies similar to those of historians or natural scientists.’ [Ibidem]. But, he stresses, there is one crucial difference: their study is not based on ‘the specimen of plants, animals and human corpses’; it is based on the study of ‘streets, side-streets, factories, markets, basements – of all places where a contemporary man lives, suffers and rejoices’ [Ibidem]. It directly corresponds with the idea which inspires Leo Tolstoy in his works, more obviously, in early ones: to prove by means of literature that any human being is a complex substance, that even plain people have complicated inner worlds, their own ideology and psychology¹. The very fact that George Eliot depicts such a kind of heroes from the people puts her closer to many writers and thinkers in Russia of the pre-reform and after-reform (1861) Russia on the grounds of the tradition, as Lidiya Lotman defines it when speaking about Tolstoy, to ‘open the *conceptness* of non-realizing itself conscience’ of a human being who is not used ‘to expressing any abstract ideas and thoughts’ [28. P. 144].

The points mentioned before bring me to the issues I want to develop within the topic of the essay. When we look at the Russian writers and critics who wrote about George Eliot in the second half of the XIX century, and when we look at the Russian literary process of the 1850s – 1870s, we are able to understand much more easily why her works attracted such an interest and became a fact of the Russian culture of the time. Those years are the period when the Russian realistic tradition was formed. The name of George Eliot from the very beginning was decidedly associated with realistic aesthetics by all those who wrote about her and her works. It may be definitely said when we look at the names of those who introduced her and her works into Russian reading practice, those Russian writers who are worldwide supposed to be the ‘great Rus-

¹ See on that: [28. P. 137–168.]

sian realists' – Turgenev, Goncharov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Tolstoy (I am deliberately putting aside the matter of difference which existed in aesthetics and practices of those writers). I am trying to call readers' attention to the literary situation that emerged when the works of and on George Eliot began their history in Russia.

That was the time when a new socio-cultural and political force was coming into existence. It got the name of '*raznochinzy*' (people not of noble birth) who mostly formed the Russian *intelligentsia*. It marked the process of democratization of Russian reality which began at the end of the reign of Nicholas I and got a sort of a push when one of the greatest reformers took the throne – Alexandre II.

In the history of Russian literature this socio-cultural phenomenon is connected with the emergence and swift popularity of the so-called *Russian Natural School*. According to Russian literary historians, the Russian Natural School in the 1840s – 1850s brought into Russian literature (developing Alexander Pushkin's and Nikolai Gogol's traditions) democratization and de-idealization of a hero, the depicting of 'true life' (without any idealization), 'humanizing of natural aspirations' (as the critic Genady Pospelov wrote in his study of the Russian literature of the XIX century [29. P. 71]), the unity of typification and psychological distinctiveness, i.e. generalization and individualization simultaneously. The great Russian critic Vissarion Belinsky gave a metaphorical but precise notion for this character-making: 'a familiar stranger' or (and) 'the whole world in one man' [30. Vol. 1. P. 296.]. It is said in one of the most programmed works of Belinsky in which the proclamation of new Russian Literature, the realistic one, took place.

Belinsky, and after him some other critics, Nikolai Chernyshevsky among them, established an obvious linkage between the emergence of the Russian realistic tradition in the literature of the 1840s – 1850s and *physiological sketches*; what is more we, Russians, think that three collections of such essays – *Physiology of Petersburg* in two volumes (1845) and *Petersburg Collected Stories* (1846) – are a sort of a manifesto of the Russian Natural School with its turn of narrative to depiction of everyday life and moral and manners of common people. That hero came from the very depth of Russian life (the national specificity was seen in this social sphere with all its pluses and minuses), and he (male characters dominated) was both thinking and analyzing (reflexing), marked by peculiar spirituality. It should be stressed that the

followers of the Russian Natural School inclined, as Lidiya Lotman writes, to 'portray consciousness in its elemental forms' [28. P. 172], and that was why the Russian Natural School 'trained' Russian Literature to a very democratic hero, and moreover – to paint a picture of the masses' life.

It is not by chance that the 1850s is the period of formation of the so-called 'people novel'. I am sure George Eliot's early novels which had become the part of Russian literary culture by that time played its important role in that formation. One of the most interesting inventors of such a genre happened to live and get education in Perm in the 1850s. I mean here Fyodor Reshetnikov (1841–1871) and his famous long story ('povest' – in Russian) titled *Podlipovtsy* (1864) which is very close to *Silas Marner* and *Adam Bede* as rural novels; though Reshetnikov's narration is more concentrated on depicting the dark and sad sides of rural life and it is deprived of the lyric and romantic idealization of the peasantry peculiar for Eliot. Experts on Russian history of the XIX century know well such a powerful socio-political movement of the 1860s as 'narodniks' which contributed a lot to changing the political climate in Russia and favored the ideas of socialism (both trends of it – Marxist and that which extrapolated Marxist ideas on Russian patriarchal peasant communes pattern). The increasing interest in rural life and its depiction went hand in hand with that 'narodnichestvo'. Having said that, I do not mean that there was a direct connection and interdependency between literature and politics; I just want to stress that those were equal-order things which characterized Russian social, political and cultural life of those decades very distinctively.

The special interest in rural life and peasants in the 1850s–1860s (Ivan Turgenev began as a writer with his brilliant pictures of that life in the sketches titled *Hunter's Sketches* with 'Bezhin Meadow' as the best known) we have to say that it did not turn Russian literature away from constructing a hero as a 'complex ethical and psychological system', as Lidiya Lotman writes [28. P. 153]. In this respect the critic discusses Reshetnikov's long story *Podlipovtsy*, as well as his novel *The Glumovs* (1866) arguing that Reshetnikov's heroes when going through hard trials of life and when analyzing their way through those hardships rise themselves morally and intellectually. Some other Russian critics, Aleksey Chicherin, for instance, write that in Reshetnikov's works there is quite a remarkable conjugation of private life, history of a family, saga

of a kin, and the history of the people [31. P. 18]. Lidiya Lotman, in her turn, says that with the help of 'the narrative structure built on the basis of the line 'hero – family – kin – community – society' the writer reconstructs 'some definite stage of the historical development of the country' [28. P. 159]. To show that, she draws our attention to the final triumph of the two sons of the main character in Reshetnikov's *Podlipovtsy*. The critic rightly connects it with the fact of their mental development, when both Ivan and Pavel 'began to understand more than their father, Sysoiko and Matrena' [32. Vol. 1. P. 69], and it brings them rescue, gives rise to new sources of strength and capacities to live through all hardships of life.

In other words, the tendency to portray an ordinary man socially and morally strong due to his/her inner strength and to his/her rising from the depth of nature morality and vitality is quite common in Russian literature about rural life. I am putting aside at the moment the tendency in Russian literature, as Maxim Gorky once said, to reveal 'the idiocy of village life', such as *The Power of Darkness* by Tolstoy. That thirst for eternal values makes George Eliot and the 'vital wisdom' (both mental and moral) of her characters in *Silas Marner* or/and *Adam Bede* closer to Russian writers' and to some of their personages' searches. Here I understand the difference between the English peasantry of George Eliot's time and the Russian peasantry on the eve and just after the abolition of serfdom, as well as between the social identifications of the both. But the very fact that of all her novels *Silas Marner* and *Adam Bede* were the most frequently translated, published and reviewed in Russia is very much remarkable (we count just 8 and 7 editions of both novels respectively within half a century; for novels of a foreign writer it is an impressive figure).

Only this fact, as well as the closeness of her 'doubting intelligent hero/heroine' to the Russian intelligentsia, gives us the right to say that George Eliot's art, thoughts and ideas drew a serious response from Russian critics, writers, intelligent people – amidst the Russian reading public of the period. What is more, complicated, often debatable response of pre-1917 Russian literary thought to the works of George Eliot in many ways (and sometimes in respect of some aspects and novels) drew the main outlines of Russian *Eliotiana* and even formed its paradigm. That is why any Russian novice who is making the first steps towards understanding George Eliot's role in the history of Russian literary thought

may find much help in the works of the critics of the XIX – early XX centuries. Many understandings of that time are still very much in demand.

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РУССКАЯ РЕЦЕПЦИЯ ТВОРЧЕСТВА ДЖОРДЖ ЭЛИОТ И СТАНОВЛЕНИЕ СОЦИАЛЬНОГО РЕАЛИЗМА

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Ключевые слова: Джордж Элиот, роман, повесть, реализм, физиологический очерк, натурализм, литературный герой, литературная критика, литературный процесс, XIX век.

В статье осмысливается ряд особенностей восприятия творчества ведущей английской писательницы XIX в. Джордж Элиот (1819–1880) русской литературной критикой 1850–1870-х гг. Анализ журнальных статей М. Михайлова, Д. Мордовцева, П. Ткачева, М. Цебриковой и др., посвященных произведениям Дж. Элиот, показывает, что русскую литературно-критическую мысль прежде всего интересовала возможность обратиться к особенностям художественного решения писательницей проблем личности, ее независимости, прав и обязанностей.

В статье подчеркивается, что особое внимание русской критической мысли к героям произведений Элиот, изображаемых писательницей в ситуации глубоко внутреннего конфликта и нравственного выбора, обосновывается в том числе и процессом становления русской интеллигенции, совпавшим с появлением произведений Элиот в русской литературно-художественной периодике. Русские критики тщательно, прибегая к подробному пересказу и обильному цитированию произведений Дж. Элиот в собственных переводах, анализировали изначально демократическую социальную парадигму сюжетов романов и повестей английского реалиста и их

конфликтологическую основу. Подобный поворот внимания к творчеству Дж. Элиот приобретает особую актуальность в условиях формирования новой социокультурной (разночинной и демократической) ситуации в пореформенной России.

Однако исследовательский акцент в статье делается на особом внимании русских литературных критиков к характеру реализма писательницы, по их мнению отличающемуся своеобразным синтезом социально-психологического анализизма, очерковости (физиологизма), бытописательства и натурализма. Подчеркивается, насколько внимание Дж. Элиот к повседневной жизни простого (маленького) человека, принципы сюжетостроения и жанрового реконструирования взаимоотношений человека и меняющегося мира оказались созвучными поискам русских писателей того времени и становлению классического русского реализма XIX в. – как признанных классиков русской литературы второй половины XIX в., так и менее известных писателей, чей вклад в динамику отечественного социального реализма еще не до конца осмыслен. Именно поэтому автор статьи обращается к традиции «сельского романа» в творчестве Элиот и видит своеобразные переклички ряда ее произведений с романами и повестями Ф. Решетникова.

Кроме того, в статье доказывается, что непростая, нередко дискуссионная рецепция творчества Дж. Элиот в русской литературной критике до 1917 г. прочертила основные линии отечественной «Элиотианы» на многие годы вперед. Именно поэтому всякое новое обращение к произведениям английского реалиста должно учитывать достижения русской критики того периода.

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