

CREATIVE MULTIPLICITY AND  
NARRATIVE EPISTEMOLOGY  
IN GEORGE ELIOT'S  
*THE LIFTED VEIL*

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**Abstract:** This article examines the epistemological status of literary criticism through the lens of scientific models of knowledge, proposing a convergence between the interpretive structures of criticism and the inferential logic of empirical science. Drawing on the logical empiricism of the twentieth century – from Carnap to the Vienna Circle – it argues that both scientific inquiry and hermeneutic interpretation construct hypothetical-deductive frameworks that mediate between theory and data, whether empirical or textual. The analysis then turns to George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil* (1859), read as a site where nineteenth-century scientific paradigms (determinism, evolutionism, thermodynamics) are displaced by an emergent vision of complex, self-organizing systems. In dialogue with Prigogine's theory of dissipative structures and Calvino's reflections on order and chaos, Eliot's narrative exemplifies an *autopoietic* creativity that transforms entropy into renewal. The essay concludes that literature, like science, participates in a creative multiverse where disorder generates form and interpretation becomes an act of cognitive genesis.

**Keywords:** George Eliot and Science; *The Lifted Veil*; Epistemological Fiction; Victorian Scientific Epistemology; Narrative Experimentation; Complexity and Emergence; Hermeneutics of the Novel; Physiology and Psychology in Victorian Fiction; Scientific Method and Narrative Form

This study begins with a central question about the epistemological status of literary criticism: is its mode of knowledge analogous to that of empirical science, or does it belong to a fundamentally different domain? At first sight, literary criticism appears to constitute a distinct interpretive practice, grounded in hermeneutic engagement with texts rather than the application of formal method. Yet, as Gadamer argues, such interpretation cannot be understood as the construction of a neutral mental model derived from an author's intended meaning. Written texts detach themselves from the contingency of their origin and address ever-new readers, so that understanding emerges through a historically effected dialogue in which the horizons of text and interpreter are fused, rather than reconstructed according to authorial intention alone.<sup>1</sup> Literary criticism thus exemplifies the broader structure of hermeneutic understanding that governs the human sciences, in which meaning is not recovered but realized

1 See Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum, 2004, pp. 424–425, 431.

anew in application.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, literary criticism is not best understood as an encounter between two discrete minds – the critic’s and the author’s – but as a dialogical process mediated by language, tradition, and historically effected consciousness. The critic interrogates the text not in order to reconstruct an interior authorial psychology, but to allow what is said to address the present horizon of understanding. Unlike empirical science, literary criticism does not test hypotheses against nature; instead, it assesses interpretive claims in relation to the text’s linguistic structure, rhetorical organization, and internal coherence.

Yet despite these differences, certain patterns of rational inquiry resonate with procedures traditionally associated with scientific reasoning. Both literary criticism and science involve the formulation, testing, and revision of interpretive frameworks, though they diverge decisively in the character of what counts as evidence. Where science appeals to empirical data,<sup>3</sup> criticism engages with textual articulation and meaning as it emerges in application – an event of understanding rather than the accumulation of facts. Nonetheless, both rely on a hypothetico-deductive structure that seeks explanatory adequacy within a selective and provisional system of interpretation.

Nineteenth-century literature already anticipated a productive dialogue with scientific epistemology. George Eliot’s *The Lifted Veil*<sup>4</sup> provides a particularly illuminating example. With its Gothic and speculative inflections, the tale operates as a literary analogue to the scientific thought experiment, probing concealed structures of human consciousness in ways reminiscent of a physicist positing invisible forces before their empirical confirmation. Latimer’s extraordinary sensory and cognitive capacities – his prophetic visions and intuitive apprehension of others’ interior states – function as narrative mechanisms that mirror the imaginative yet logically constrained reasoning characteristic of scientific inquiry. Eliot thereby demonstrates that literature, through its capacity to simulate alternative cognitive states and possible worlds, may itself perform forms of epistemic experimentation.

The Vienna Circle and the broader movement of logical empiricism provide a framework for understanding this parallel. Philosophers, mathematicians, and scientists such as Rudolf Carnap and Otto Neurath

2 Gadamer. *Truth and Method*, pp. 369–370, 400.

3 Rudolf Carnap. *The Logical Structure of the World*. Trans. Rolf A. George. University of California Press, 1967. See esp. pp. 1–6, 281–86, 318–21. Original title: *Der Logische Aufbau der Welt*. Leipzig: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1928. Carnap’s account of scientific knowledge in *The Logical Structure of the World* emphasizes the construction of formal frameworks governed by inference, deduction, and systematic revision. Although Carnap restricts these procedures to empirically grounded science and does not extend them to interpretive disciplines, later theorists have noted that such formal features can, at a high level of abstraction, be analogically compared with the intellectual procedures of literary criticism.

4 George Eliot. *The Lifted Veil and Brother Jacob*. Ed. S. Shuttleworth. London: Penguin, 2001.

emphasized formal logic as the core structure of scientific knowledge.<sup>5</sup> Scientific theories, in their view, attain validity insofar as they establish rigorous inferential chains linking hypotheses to observable phenomena; abstract logical structures generate predictions that can subsequently be corroborated – or dismissed – through experience.<sup>6</sup> The formal, structural emphasis of logical empiricism thus reveals an epistemic architecture that, stripped of its empirical commitments, bears a degree of resemblance to the systematic operations of literary criticism.

Indeed, a similar predictive logic emerges in *The Lifted Veil*. Eliot's narrative events, psychological configurations, and symbolic patterns can be treated as 'data', which the critic organizes into a coherent interpretive framework. Latimer's uncanny foresight and the examination of his cranial morphology operate as textual 'experiments' within the fiction, enabling the critic to infer underlying causal and conceptual structures. Just as Einstein's thought experiments expanded the theoretical boundaries of space and time, Eliot's narrative imagination extends the limits of human consciousness, producing explanatory insights that anticipate subsequent developments in the text.<sup>7</sup> The work thus stages, within imaginative form, a process of conceptual modeling analogous to that of the sciences.

Eliot's engagement with scientific ideas, particularly evolutionary theory and the investigation of consciousness, further underscores her sensitivity to the intellectual climate shaped by the rise of the natural sciences. In a letter commenting on the diffusion of Darwinian theory, she notes:

So the world gets on step by step towards brave clearness and honesty! But to me the development theory produces a feeble impression compared with the mystery that lies under the processes.<sup>8</sup>

This comment reveals an epistemological stance that parallels the logical-empiricist method: hypotheses – whether concerning biological evolution or psychological states – are tested against observable phenomena, and predictive coherence determines their degree of plausibility.

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5 Otto Neurath. *Empiricism and Sociology*. Trans. Marie Neurath and Robert S. Cohen. Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1973. The book contains essays and selections that reflect his broader logical empiricist orientation and the Vienna Circle's shared concern with the formal and logical foundations of scientific knowledge (e.g., logical analysis, protocol sentences, physicalism), especially in sections such as "The Scientific World-Conception", pp. 299–318 and "Empirical Sociology: The Scientific Content of History and Political Economy", pp. 319–421.

6 Arthur Eddington. *The Mathematical Theory of Relativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923, pp. 38–40.

7 Albert Einstein. *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory*. New York: Crown, 1961, pp. 45–47.

8 George Eliot, letter to Barbara Bodichon (dated December 5, 1859), in: *The George Eliot Letters*. Ed. Gordon Haight. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954, vol. 3, pp. 214–217.

The analogy between scientific inquiry and literary criticism extends more broadly. Both domains formulate hypotheses, construct arguments, articulate inferential networks, and select evidence consonant with their conceptual frameworks. Both engage in processes of verification – empirical in science, textual in criticism. Neither fully captures reality,<sup>9</sup> yet both operate within selective structures that remain open to revision. In this respect, literary criticism parallels theoretical physics and mathematical modeling in that it operates through abstraction, model construction, and internally regulated systems of explanation rather than direct empirical access to its object. Like abstract science, criticism employs conceptual frameworks – such as ideology, narrative structure, or subjectivity – that function heuristically to organize complexity and generate interpretive expectations. Its arguments are hypothesis-driven and implicitly predictive, enabling critics to anticipate formal patterns, semantic tensions, or ideological effects across a text or corpus. Epistemic validity in both domains depends less on immediacy than on coherence, explanatory power, and the capacity for revision in response to anomalies or counter-arguments. Thus, although their objects differ, the hermeneutic instruments of literary criticism rest on epistemic foundations structurally analogous to those of abstract, predictive scientific inquiry.

*The Lifted Veil* provides a particularly vivid demonstration of how literary texts may encode logical-empirical structures. Eliot's narrative explores complex causal, psychological, and moral systems, anticipating later theoretical understandings of literary form as a multilayered structure. Just as the empiricist deploys abstract logic to model the universe, Eliot employs imaginative rigor to construct a model of human perception and mental life that is simultaneously speculative and systematic. A passage that captures Eliot's speculative yet systematic modelling of perception and mental life occurs when Latimer describes the mechanics – and the cost – of his clairvoyant faculty:

There was an obtrusion on my mind of the mental process going forward in first one person and then another, with whom I happened to be in contact; and their thoughts forced themselves on my consciousness (Eliot 2001: 15–16).

Eliot here brings imaginative speculation – most notably the fantasy of clairvoyant access to other minds – into contact with a striking degree of conceptual discipline. Consciousness is represented not as a vaguely mystical faculty but as a structured field of impressions, invasions, and receptivity, governed by pressures that resemble quasi-mechanical processes. Latimer's mind is figured as exposed to crowds of impressions, subject to limits of regulation and saturation, and responsive to forces that are transmissible yet patterned rather than chaotic. In this sense, the

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<sup>9</sup> See A. J. Ayer. *Language, Truth and Logic*. London: Gollancz, 1936, pp. 21–25.

passage exemplifies Eliot's effort to model human cognition in a mode that is simultaneously fictional and epistemological, speculative yet internally systematic.

Throughout *The Lifted Veil*, heightened perception is framed not as a form of epistemic mastery but as a condition of cognitive excess that compromises the coherence of the self. Latimer repeatedly represents consciousness as involuntarily permeable, describing himself as a mere receptacle for other men's thoughts, overwhelmed by a relentless crowd of impressions that presses upon his mental life. His mind is not an interpretive faculty capable of selection or judgment, but a site in which foreign mental processes must be followed rather than assessed: "people's consciousness continued to torment me [and] rushed upon me like a ringing in the ears not to be got rid of, though it allowed my own impulses and ideas to continue their uninterrupted course". (Eliot 2001: 16–18). In Gadamerian terms, Latimer's condition dramatizes the collapse of interpretive distance, replacing dialogical understanding with compulsive exposure and thereby rendering judgment impossible. Clairvoyance, accordingly, is experienced as compulsion rather than power, likened to the inescapable murmur of a crowd whose voices cannot be shut out, a metaphor that intensifies the sense of psychic overcrowding and loss of agency. The ethical consequences of such unfiltered access to interiority are equally corrosive. Latimer finds that the exposure of hidden motives does not deepen moral understanding but instead dissolves sympathy, revealing a meaner self beneath the appearance of virtue and rendering ethical judgment both unavoidable and unbearable "this superadded consciousness [...] showed all the intermediate frivolities, all the suppressed egoism, all the struggling chaos of puerilities, meanness" (Eliot 2001: 20). Knowledge in this configuration lacks interpretive mediation and choice: although Latimer can "see through all screens", he cannot determine what he sees, a condition in which perception is total yet indiscriminate, systematic yet destructive: "I was like a man possessed of a vision that sees through all screens, but cannot choose what it shall see" (Eliot 2001: 21). Read against Victorian scientific ideals of prediction and control – particularly those associated with empiricism and the Galilean aspiration to lawful foresight – Latimer's anticipatory vision of the future exposes the ethical limits of predictive knowledge. This excess of cognition extends into time itself, as his anticipatory vision of the future oppresses the present with the certainty of what must occur, collapsing lived experience under the shadow of foreknown outcomes rather than yielding understanding or control. Eliot thus constructs a speculative but coherent model of cognition in which informational excess, severed from interpretive mediation, produces alienation rather than insight, challenging any straightforward alignment of knowledge, prediction, and ethical progress. Taken together, these passages articulate Eliot's skepticism toward forms of knowledge that exceed the limits of interpretation and judgment, constructing a spe-

culative but coherent model of cognition in which informational excess produces alienation rather than insight and complicates any simple association between knowledge, prediction, and ethical clarity.

From this vantage point, parallels between literary criticism and scientific inquiry can be drawn only in a limited and heuristic sense. Both practices involve the disciplined linking of inference to observation and abstract reasoning to particular phenomena, yet they do so under fundamentally different epistemic conditions. While critics, like scientists, attend to patterns, relations, and internal consistency, the 'evidence' of literary analysis consists of historically situated and semantically open texts rather than empirically measurable data. Any shared 'predictive' dimension therefore lies not in formal verification but in the provisional anticipation of interpretive possibilities. The analogy, accordingly, illuminates similarities in intellectual posture rather than suggesting a convergence of methods, aims, or standards of validation.

This procedure anticipates modern concepts in complexity theory, entropy, and emergence, demonstrating that structured yet imaginative reasoning fosters insight across disciplinary boundaries.<sup>10</sup>

Historical examples are sometimes cited to clarify how scientific knowledge proceeds through the articulation and testing of abstract conceptual frameworks. Arthur Eddington's role in the 1919 solar-eclipse observations, designed to test a prediction derived from Einstein's general theory of relativity – that light would be deflected in the gravitational field of a massive body – has become a canonical illustration of theory-guided inquiry. The episode demonstrates that even highly counterintuitive models may yield empirically tractable consequences when observation is methodologically disciplined.

Neo-empiricist philosophers such as Rudolf Carnap and Otto Neurath articulated an explicitly Enlightenment conception of scientific knowledge grounded in rational construction, hypothesis formation, and logical coherence.<sup>11</sup> Their aim was to formalize the conditions under which empirical claims could be systematically justified within the natural sciences. Although the inferential rigor they championed offers a suggestive point of comparison for literary criticism, it does not provide a transferable methodological model. At most, it highlights a shared commitment to disciplined reasoning, without implying predictive symmetry or epistemic convergence between scientific explanation and literary interpretation.

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<sup>10</sup> On complex systems as an analogue to literary structure, see Hayles, N. Katherine. *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.

<sup>11</sup> Rudolf Carnap. *The Logical Structure of the World*. See "Preface to the second edition", pp. v–xi; Otto Neurath. *Empiricism and Sociology*. See "The Scientific World-Conception", pp. 299–318.

Any comparison between literary criticism and the natural sciences must be framed with careful attention to their divergent epistemic traditions. As Dilthey and Weber have argued, the human sciences are oriented toward *Verstehen* rather than causal explanation, privileging interpretive understanding over nomological prediction.<sup>12</sup> Literary criticism, in particular, does not operate through hypothesis testing in the Popperian sense, nor does it proceed under experimental or quantitatively measurable conditions.<sup>13</sup> Its objects – texts – are historically mediated and semantically inexhaustible, and its methods are shaped by contingent theoretical frameworks rather than by universal or pre-arranged protocols. While Kuhn's account of paradigm-dependent knowledge usefully underscores the theory-ladenness of all inquiry, this insight does not collapse the distinction between scientific modeling and literary interpretation.<sup>14</sup> At most, one may observe a loose analogy in the way both fields construct provisional, revisable accounts of complex phenomena. Such an analogy, however, remains heuristic rather than structural and should not be taken to imply an epistemic convergence between the explanatory models of the natural sciences and the interpretive practices of literary criticism.

The findings of complexity science – ranging from the thermodynamics of irreversible processes to the geometry of fractals – do not yield a single, unified conception of reality. Similarly, poetic invention evokes multiple, intricately articulated levels of reality, irreducible to a single schema or truth claim. As Calvino observed, literature operates within language by mobilizing multiple levels<sup>15</sup> of representation simultaneously. In this respect, literary reflection holds potential value for scientists and philosophers of science as well.

To substantiate these claims through a case study, one may examine the transcodification of textual 'materials' in George Eliot's fiction – Eliot being among the nineteenth century's authors most attuned to contemporary scientific developments and their epistemological implications. Her narratives exhibit a proliferation of perspectives, and it is no accident that in chapter XXVII of *Middlemarch* (1871–1876), Eliot recounts a parable – attributed to a philosopher friend – concerning a mirror covered with minute scratches that appear to form concentric circles when illuminated by a centrally placed candle. Moving the light alters the perceived pattern:

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12 Wilhelm Dilthey. *Selected Works, Volume I: Introduction to the Human Sciences*. Ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 82; Max Weber. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, vol. 1, p. 4.

13 Karl R. Popper. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. London: Routledge, 1959, pp. 40–41.

14 Thomas S. Kuhn. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, pp. 23–25.

15 Calvino, Italo. "I livelli della realtà in letteratura". *Saggi (1945–85)*. A cura di Mario Barenghi, vol. 1. Milan: Mondadori, 1995, p. 381.

An eminent philosopher among my friends, who can dignify even your ugly furniture by lifting it into the serene light of science, has shown me this little fact. Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection.<sup>16</sup>

The metaphor indicates that any representation of reality depends on the position of the interpretive 'light'. This reasoning, grounded in the dynamics of illumination, the candle's flame,<sup>17</sup> takes Eliot and Calvino beyond the constraints of a reductive scientism rooted in Cartesian dualism.

John Stuart Mill, concerned with the reciprocal relation between knowledge and critique, maintained that the proliferation of competing theories promotes scientific progress. Eliot reinterprets Mill's ambition to portray the multiplicity of actual and potential relations, echoing his claim that truth consists not in unilateral assertions but in the reconciliation of opposites.<sup>18</sup> This position resonates with a Victorian epistemology that acknowledged both the explanatory power and the intrinsic limits of scientific knowledge. For thinkers such as George Henry Lewes and John Stuart Mill, scientific inquiry advanced through imaginative generalization and hypothetical construction, yet its achievements remained confined to the coordination of phenomenal relations rather than the disclosure of ultimate causes. Eliot's response to evolutionary theory reflects this sensibility: developmental models may illuminate processes and connections, but they do not dissolve the fundamental opacity that underlies reality itself. Within this framework, imagination emerges as a shared cognitive resource across intellectual domains, though its epistemic functions diverge sharply. In the natural sciences, imaginative modeling supports constrained and revisable forms of prediction; in literary

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16 Eliot, George. *Middlemarch*. Edited by W. J. Harvey. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987, p. 297.

17 In *Language and Learning*, Piattelli-Palmarini recalls Piaget's and Chomsky's use of the flame – not as a literal definition, but as a metaphorical figure, contrasted with the crystal, to illustrate a fundamental distinction between thermodynamic order and biological organization. The flame, characterized as exhibiting a “constancy of external form in spite of relentless internal agitation”, serves to evoke modes of stability grounded in dynamic processes rather than static structure. In this context, the image functions heuristically rather than taxonomically, offering a conceptual analogy that can be suggestive for thinking about patterns of persistence and transformation, including – by extension – within literary forms and expressive practices (Piattelli-Palmarini, Massimo. *Language and Learning: The Debate between Jean Piaget and Noam Chomsky*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, p. 6).

18 Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*. In: *Utilitarianism*. Edited by Mary Warnock. Glasgow: Collins/Fontana, 1974, p. 175.

criticism, it enables the interpretive apprehension of form, pattern, and significance without recourse to experimental validation. Any parallel between the two must therefore be understood as historical and heuristic, rather than as implying epistemic equivalence or methodological convergence.

Eliot's intellectual affinity with George Henry Lewes becomes clear in light of his synthesis of materialist and idealist currents, which leads him to affirm that human existence and cosmic harmony involve dimensions that transcend purely biological and physical determinants.

By the mid-nineteenth century, William Thomson's articulation of the second law of thermodynamics<sup>19</sup> – asserting the dissipation of energy as heat and the inexorable increase of entropy – sparked theological and cosmological speculation. Concerns about the ultimate “heat death” of the universe permeated Victorian culture, as evidenced in works such as Swinburne's “The Garden of Proserpine”.<sup>20</sup> Scientific discourse thus contributed to a conception of time as linear, irreversible, mechanical, and progressive. Eliot, however, anticipated an epistemic shift toward composite temporalities. Her early tale *The Lifted Veil*, with its mysterious atmosphere and transgressive charge, marks a departure from realism and reflects a reaction to the bleak implications of contemporary scientific inquiry. The tale has been described as “a cautionary narrative about positive science and the poverty of imagination”,<sup>21</sup> and Eliot's well-documented interest in mesmerism, somnambulism, and other borderline states of consciousness – later absorbed into psychoanalytic theory – further underscores her engagement with non-reductive models of the psyche. George Eliot's interest in phrenology<sup>22</sup> – a now-discredited discipline that sought to link intellectual and moral traits to cranial morphology – emer-

19 In the mid-nineteenth century, Robert Mayer, Hermann von Helmholtz, Rudolf Clausius, and William Thomson (Lord Kelvin) formulated the first law (the conservation of energy) and the second law (the spontaneous increase of entropy) of thermodynamics. Building on Sadi Carnot's 1824 study of the efficiency of steam engines and attempting to reconcile its conclusions with Joule's findings, Thomson extrapolated from the second law the deduction that the Earth's climate was proceeding from an intolerably hot past toward a future of destruction. See Brantlinger, Patrick. *Energy and Entropy: Science and Culture in Victorian Britain*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989.

20 “Then star nor sun shall waken, / Nor any change of light: / Nor sound of waters shaken, / Nor any sound or sight: / Nor wintry leaves nor vernal; / Nor days nor things diurnal; / Only the sleep eternal/In an eternal night”. Swinburne, Algernon Charles. “The Garden of Proserpine”. In: *Poetry of the Transition, 1850–1914*. Edited by Thomas M. Parrott and Willard Thorp. Manchester: Ayer Publishing, 1972, pp. 148–50, p. 150.

21 As Tim Dolin observes, “*The Lifted Veil* dramatizes the dire consequences of the poet's power of insight being exchanged for the scientist's power” (*George Eliot*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005, p. 213). On the supreme value of artistic imagination in *The Lifted Veil*, see also my own article, “*The Lifted Veil*: George Eliot e il peso della realtà”. *Rivista di Studi Vittoriani*, I. Pescara: Tracce, 1996, pp. 111–120.

22 See also D. Postlethwaite. “George Eliot and Science”. In: *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*. Ed. G. Levine. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 98–119.

ges in her detailed description of Latimer's skull. While Eliot does not explicitly theorize this connection, the phrenological resonance implicitly gestures toward her broader concern with the contested boundary between physiology, psychology, and moral character, rather than constituting a sustained endorsement or systematic application of phrenological doctrine.

The metaphorical resonance of entropy grew even more complex in the twentieth century, expanding to encompass not only the irreversible temporality of classical thermodynamics but also the reversible, branching temporalities characteristic of nonlinear dynamics, complex systems, and catastrophe theory.<sup>23</sup> With the disintegration of linear conceptions of time emerged non-Euclidean geometries and pluriform representations of space. This epistemic transformation parallels the shift from classical thermodynamics to the study of dissipative structures, as articulated by Ilya Prigogine.<sup>24</sup> In such systems, situated at the threshold between order and chaos, multidimensional temporalities govern nature, history, and narrative. Narrative itself becomes labyrinthine, composite, and plural.

Calvino, reinterpreting the lessons of Prigogine and Stengers in *Order out of Chaos*, observes that even as the universe seems to drift toward thermal death, artistic forms arise – dynamic structures capable of organic growth and transformation. Poetry becomes the offspring of chance and necessity, a product of both randomness and structural constraint.<sup>25</sup>

Prigogine's account of dissipative systems, in which the breakdown of internal bonds under conditions of entropy may give rise to new forms of self-organization once a degree of order is introduced, has often been invoked as a suggestive framework for thinking about creativity. His re-configuration of classical mechanics into a vision of nature characterized by dynamic instability and "ordered chaos" – frequently illustrated through the image of the butterfly effect – invites analogical extension beyond the physical sciences. When applied to artistic production, however, such parallels remain heuristic rather than explanatory, merely intimating how seemingly minor biographical contingencies might coincide with, rather than determine, moments of significant artistic innovation.

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23 R. Thom. *La teoria delle catastrofi*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 1985.

24 A scholar of Russian origin but Belgian nationality, and winner of the 1977 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for the significance of his research on irreversible processes and nonequilibrium thermodynamics, Ilya Prigogine authored not only specialized works – fundamental for understanding his thought is *Self-Organization in Non-Equilibrium Systems: From Dissipative Structures to Order through Fluctuations* (New York: Wiley, 1977) – but also works shaped by his bold attempt to apply to social systems and to history his theses on spontaneous self-organization: *From Being to Becoming*, 1979; *La nouvelle alliance*, 1979; *Exploring Complexity*, 1989. See also I. Prigogine and I. Stengers. *Order out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature*. New York: Bantam Books, 1984.

25 In *Lezioni americane*. Milan: Mondadori, 1993, p. 78, Italo Calvino similarly reflects on the primacy of imaginative vision.

Creativity arises from the emergence of new forms out of old or familiar elements within complex, nonlinear systems. Prigogine's model transformed conceptions of the universe by demonstrating its fundamentally organic character. Entropy (death) and negentropy (birth) occur simultaneously. Within the multiverse, teratogenesis (processes of dissolution) and morphogenesis (processes of emergence) intertwine, echoing Freud's *thanatos* and *eros*. Traditions, styles, and aesthetic forms die and regenerate, subject to organic historicity.

Seen from this perspective, Eliot – who in *Adam Bede* warns against the illusion of perfect mimesis<sup>26</sup> – produced *The Lifted Veil*, a narrative of ordinary life infused with a Gothic aura and centered on a hyper-aesthetic protagonist who anticipates the postmodern replicant. The elements preceding the tale might, if functioning mechanically, have produced a repetition of realism tending toward entropy; instead, they gave rise to emergence and innovation. Sartre termed such creative divergence *petit décalage*:<sup>27</sup> a minimal deviation that catalyzes autopoiesis. For Eliot, the precipitating factor lay in a convergence of philosophical-religious crisis<sup>28</sup> and traumatic biographical experience – specifically, six weeks before completing the tale, Eliot was struck by the sudden death of her sister Chrissey.

This, fundamentally, is creativity: Eliot, drawing on a rich array of cultural sources without privileging any single one, recombined them under the pressure of biographical crisis to produce the thematic and formal novelty of *The Lifted Veil*. Though the tale echoes earlier motifs, it diverges radically from her previous work. It represents a departure from entropy – an autopoietic act of artistic creation.

Literary criticism stands to gain from shifting from a Newtonian model of linear causality to a Prigoginian model of order and chaos at the threshold of emergence. Applying the conceptual framework of complex dynamic systems and autopoiesis to literary criticism requires one methodological principle: identify the author's sources, relate them to form an interdependent system, and seek the precise factor – the precipitant – that, amid disorder and entropy, catalyzed a new element of order. Often a seemingly minimal factor, a butterfly's wing-beat, precipitates the major emergence of literary innovation.

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26 In chapter XVII of *Adam Bede*, although Eliot claims that her artistic purpose is “to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind”, she nonetheless specifies that “[t]he mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused”. From this follows the philosophical impossibility of articulating any fixed principle of truth. Mill's well-known formula, “their truths are only half-truths,” is reworked by Eliot in the assertion that “it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth” (*Adam Bede*. Ed. Valentine Cunningham. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996, p. 177).

27 Jean-Paul Sartre also touches on this issue in *Situations IX*. Paris: Gallimard, 1972, p. 102.

28 A letter written to Cara Bray by Sara Hennell in February 1846 records a comment from George Eliot expressing how “Strauss-sick... [from] dissecting the beautiful story of the Crucifixion” she felt, so much so that “only the sight of her Christ-image and picture made her endure it” (*The George Eliot Letters*, vol. 1, p. 206).

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Миријам Сете

*Креативна мултиплицираност и нарајивна еписемологија  
у Подигнутом велу Џорџ Елиот*

*Резиме*

Овај чланак испитује епистемолошки статус књижевне критике кроз призму научних модела знања, предлажући конвергенцију између интерпретативних структура критике и инференцијалне логике емпиријске науке. Ослањајући се на логички емпиризам 20. века – од Карнапа до Бечког круга – тврди се да и научно истраживање и херменеутичка интерпретација конструишу хипотетичко-дедуктивне оквире који посредују између теорије и података, било емпиријских било текстуалних. Анализа се затим окреће делу Џорџ Елиот *Подигнути вео* (1859), које се чита као место где се научне парадигме 19. века (детерминизам, еволуционизам, термодинамика) замењују новом визијом сложених, самоорганизујућих система. У дијалогу са Пригожиновом теоријом дисипативних структура и Калвиновим размишљањима о реду и хаосу, нарација Џорџ Елиот илуструје аутопоетску креативност која

трансформише ентропију у обнову. Есеј закључује да књижевност, као и наука, учествује у креативном мултиверзуму, где неред рађа форму, а интерпретација постаје чин когнитивне генезе.

*Кључне речи:* Џорџ Елиот и наука; *Подигнути вео*; епистемолошка фикција; викторијанска научна епистемологија; наративно експериментисање; сложеност и емергенција; херменеутика романа; физиологија и психологија у викторијанској фикцији; научни метод и наративни облик

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