



# **Novel Associations: Theodor Fontane and George Eliot within the Context of Nineteenth-Century Realism (Stanford German Studies)**

*Gabriele A. Wittig Davis*

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While Fontane's «Anglophilia» has been gaining wider critical acclaim, the notion of his Verspätung as a writer of realist novels has lingered on. In contrast, this study focuses on Fontane's communality in life, thought, and art with an eminent contemporary English novelist, George Eliot, and delineates how his experience of English life and literature enabled him to join, then transcend the European tradition of the realist novel and develop into a forerunner of modernism. Part I of this investigation emphasizes the impact of Fontane's and Eliot's cross-cultural experience in the formation of a strikingly similar humanist Weltansicht evolving primarily through their attempt to come to terms with predominant philosophical currents of their times, Feuerbachian optimism and Schopenhauerian pessimism. Part II discusses Fontane's and Eliot's aesthetic theories where John Ruskin's principles are revealed to have contributed the catalyst in this communality of aesthetics as Feuerbach's did to their humanism. The unique constellation of humanism and determinism in both Weltansicht and aesthetics then provides the focal point for Part III, an investigation of the author's artistic practice through analyses of three representative novels, Middlemarch, Vor dem Sturm, and Der Stechlin.

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