

SEIJO ENGLISH MONOGRAPHS

————— NO. 26 —————

A STUDY OF *ROMOLA*:  
RETROGRESSION IN ARTISTIC CREATIVITY

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*Romola* is unique among George Eliot's works in many respects. It is her only historical novel and the setting is removed to a foreign land: Florence at the end of the 15th century. It took her a much longer time to finish it than her previous works; she finished *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss* in nearly a year and *Silas Marner* in less than six months. On the other hand, it took her almost two years to complete *Romola*. George Eliot seems to have had the idea for the work as early as 1868,<sup>1)</sup> and she was deliberating it and preparing for the actual writing for three years even while she was writing other works. This means that almost five years were needed to complete it. Once she began to write it, she found it far more difficult to construct the story than she had expected. She suffered from heavy despondency and self-distrust, and she sometimes despaired of completing it. She even resolved to give it up once. Her journal from October 1861 to June 1863 is scattered with testimony of this suffering, and her own words, "I began it a young woman, —I finished it an old woman." <sup>2)</sup> tell us most eloquently how much she suffered over the writing of *Romola*.

But, in spite of all this, the resulting work shows George Eliot at her worst. Because it is set in a place geographically distant from the English countryside which she was familiar with and because it goes back into a distant past, the spontaneous flow of her imagination was blocked. She had to construct a completely new world upon material collected from books. She took such pains in constructing it, and G. H. Lewes, who helped her collect information, became "a sort of Italian jackal, hunting up rare books, and vellum bound unreadabilities in all the second hand

book stalls of London.”<sup>3)</sup> Until she began this book, she had largely relied upon memory; F. R. Leavis says that “George Eliot had only to remember”<sup>4)</sup> in writing *The Mill on the Floss*. But she stepped into an unknown world in *Romola* and the moment she crossed the threshold, she found her imagination refusing to work freely. She was obliged to depend solely upon intellect, and this has caused serious defects in this work. Even her sense of humour was benumbed. George Eliot fails to entertain the reader with her humour. There are, instead, only farces which do not fit the sombre tone of the work.

Before she began to write *Romola*, she called it “a rather ambitious project.”<sup>5)</sup> The reason she called it so is apparent: she was thinking of treating the theme of “conversion to sympathy” with the social and political confusion in fifteenth-century Florence as its background. She was also thinking of treating an actual historical figure, Girolamo Savonarola, as one of the major characters. *Romola*, the heroine, loves Tito Melema and marries him. But the marriage proves a failure. Then she finds spiritual support in Savonarola. She is later disappointed in him and is driven to despair. She drifts in a small boat, and is washed ashore near a village which is stricken by the plague. She receives here “a new baptism”<sup>6)</sup> while she helps the villagers. Though the theme of conversion to sympathy from egoism through suffering is the same as those of her previous works, *Romola* is more “ambitious” in its concept. But she has failed to give an artistic life to this concept. The work is, in short, a failure. Though it is not without virtues, they are only partial and fragmentary.

One of the serious defects is that she has failed in characterization, and this extends even to the minor characters. The social situation of Florence in 1492 is complicated. Soon after the opening of the story, Lorenzo the Magnificent dies; this means the

end of the greatness of Florence and the beginning of the period of its decline. George Eliot tries to communicate the atmosphere of the incipient social and political disturbance in the dialogues among minor figures, notably in those dialogues often held in Nello's barbershop. The barber and several other citizens of Florence discuss the political situation in the presence of Tito Melema, a Greek who has just arrived as a stranger. George Eliot intends to convey the necessary information to the reader in this way, avoiding direct explanation, but it is hard for the reader to distinguish each character. It takes effort to identify them. Those who have read *Silas Marner* inevitably compare these scenes with those at the "Rainbow" which is the center of social communication in Raveloe. George Eliot has shown in that book a brilliant skill in giving the minor characters marked individuality through their dialogues so that it needs no conscious effort on the part of the reader to remember them. Each personality comes out naturally in what he says and how he speaks. But this is not the case with those who come to Nello's barbershop and give us detailed information on the social and political state of affairs in Florence. Though the information is inscribed on the memory of the reader, the characters who give it remain elusive, and their conversations are sometimes tedious and fail to entertain the reader.

Besides there are too many similes and metaphors in their dialogues which seem to be literal translations from the Italian originals. Many of them sound unnatural and are sometimes even hard to understand. Most typical are those made by Nello who is the most talkative in this novel. For instance, he says to Tito: ". . . the secretary is a man who'll keep his word to you, even to the halving of a fennel-seed. . . ." (34) or "You come as opportunely as cheese on macaroni. . . and, as I was saying, you come like cheese ready grated. . . ." (35) This excessive reliance upon

similes and metaphors results from the fact that George Eliot could not imagine the daily speech of the 15th-century Florentines.<sup>7)</sup> The novel itself shows that she had plentiful knowledge about them, but to know about them is one thing and to dramatize and fictionalize them in a novel is quite another.

Other characters of greater importance, such as Bardo de' Bardi, Dino, Tito Melema, and Baldassarre lack depth and complexity. Bardo, the father of the heroine, is described merely as an obstinate, ambitious, and proud old man. He is a monomaniac, being possessed by the ambition to acquire fame as a Greek scholar. He is firmly convinced that he has "a right to be remembered" (48) by the world, from which he wilfully alienates himself. His blindness corresponds to his inner blindness; Romola humours her father by comparing him with Petrarca, saying that he is "happier" than the latter; she does not have the least intention of making the statement ironical, but actually, it carries an ironical tone to the reader:

"And in one thing you are happier than your favourite Petrarca, father . . . for he used to look at his copy of Homer and think sadly that the Greek was a dead letter to him; so far, he had the inward blindness that you feel is worse than your outward blindness." (44)

His confirmed egoism makes him blind to the fact that he is forcing a dreary and solitary life upon his eighteen-year-old daughter by making her his assistant. He is not grateful for her dedication; on the contrary, he emphasizes women's inferiority in learning. He is still unable to overcome the grief and mortification at his son Dino having deserted him to enter the monastery. He hurts Romola by manifesting his disappointment in her being a woman. He is a narrow-minded figure imprisoned in egoism and insensible to human love.

Dino seems to have been conceived simply as a useful instrument to develop the plot. He is not humanized; it is hardly possible to view him as a human. He presents a conspicuous parallel with Tito Melema in this novel; Dino forsakes his father on account of his Christian faith (which his father calls fanaticism) while Tito forsakes his foster father because he prefers pleasure and comfort to his duty. Dino's presence, or rather, his absence, paves the way to his immediate acceptance by Bardo who is eagerly waiting for some intelligent young man to appear and take the place of his son, as Nello says to Tito:

“ . . . . Yet fate seems to have measured and chiselled you  
for the niche that was left empty by the old man's son  
. . . . ” (116)

Dino, or Fra Luca, comes back to Florence “not to renew the bonds of earthly affection, but to deliver the heavenly warning conveyed in a vision” (137). He is a fanatic; even when he is dying, he shows neither brotherly affection for Romola nor repentance at having deserted his sister and father. She feels her heart chilled to know that he has come back simply to warn her against marriage because he has had the same vision three times in which her bridegroom appears with the face of “the Great Tempter” (139). Romola finds him firmly convinced that he was right in having forsaken his father to follow religious faith. Romola gives up the attempt to have any contact with the mind of her brother. There is no inner struggle in Dino because of his narrowness and fanaticism. Yet he is given important functions in the development of the plot and he appears in this novel simply to fulfill them. On his deathbed, Dino asks Savonarola, who stands by him, to give her the crucifix, which comes to have an important meaning as a symbol of her relationship with Savonarola.

Another function of his is to drive Tito into a sham marriage to Tessa whose simplicity reminds the reader of a retarded child. When Fra Luca gives him a letter from Baldassarre, Tito believes that the friar knows his having deserted his foster father. He guesses from Brigida's small talk that Fra Luca is Bernardino, Bardo's son and Romola's brother. Therefore, he is convinced that his fate in Florence is decided. He lets Tessa believe that they are formally married; she seems to him "a refuge from the threatened isolation that [will] come with disgrace" (128). In fact, the friar does not reveal Tito's secret to Romola; yet even when he knows that he is safe from disgrace and her accusation, he refuses to undeceive Tessa, and keeps her as his mistress after marrying Romola. The sham marriage is significant for both Tito and Romola; Tito finds solace and comfort in it, and Romola is to find the meaning of her life in taking care of Tessa and her children.

Bardo is a monomaniac; Dino is a fanatic; Tessa is so simple that it seems as if she had grown up only physically with the development of her intellect having been impeded at an early age. Baldassarre, who suffers from frequent amnesia and aphasia, is an incarnation of a vindictive spirit. The moment he knows that Tito has forsaken him, all the love for him turns into passionate hatred, and he is urged to vengeance. There is a certain pathos in him as Romola feels pity at the sight of him in the Duomo, but his vindictiveness is weird and unearthly. It is hardly possible to take him as an actual figure in the real world. These secondary figures are extreme in characterization and only one aspect is emphasized in their delineation.

This is also true of the hero, Tito Melema. He is simply endowed with a shallow, pleasure-loving nature. His moral deficiency is apparent from the beginning of the work. He is insensible to

“the slender soaring grace of Giotto’s companile, and the quaint octagon of San Giovanni” (27). He shows scorn for the solemn dignity of the Duomo. This scorn means his repugnance for any kind of pain and suffering. For him, the Duomo represents gloom and human suffering. He is extremely vulnerable to fear of anything that gives, or is likely to give, pain. In short, love for pleasure and fear of pain are the main ingredients of his shallow nature, and the most powerful motives for his behaviours. He is not given conscience, so that he is incapable of moral judgement or deep contemplation upon his own conduct. It is inevitable that, unlike Arthur Donnithorne in *Adam Bede*, Tito Melema has no inward struggle; what George Eliot shows us in him is not the analysis of an intricate mind that is caught in a dilemma, but that of clever, facile self-justification.

These characterizations are a serious mistake. George Eliot cannot develop the plot out of character because most of the characters lack complexity which is the mainspring of the plot in her former works. Failing in this point, she is obliged to depend heavily upon elaborate planning in *Romola*, a large part of which is supported by an accumulation of fortuitous coincidences. As a result, this produces the impression of being artificially contrived. In *Silas Marner*, George Eliot employs the unnatural device of catalepsy; the plot owes much to Silas’s fits which occur unpredictably yet very conveniently for its development. The artificiality is partly relieved by the fact that the fits are treated in the superstitious climate of Raveloe, and that the Silas plot is told in the tone of fable. George Eliot has partly succeeded in rendering them part of the mystery that clings to Silas Marner. Yet it is undeniable that her reliance upon the hero’s timely fits is unnatural. There is the same sort of expedient accidental occurrences in *Romola*, especially in the subplot which treats the vengeance of

Baldassarre upon Tito. But, unlike the Silas plot, it is told in a realistic framework, so that these occurrences impress us all the more as unnatural. In addition, the author's mistake in the characterization of the hero mars the Tito-Baldassarre plot. It is reduced to a conventional revenge drama with no particular virtue except that it is written by George Eliot. But, for this to be understood, it is necessary to show how she handles the hero and the Tito-Baldassarre plot.

The most dramatic scene in the subplot is one in which Tito Melema finds himself face to face with Baldassarre Calvo on the steps of the Duomo; Baldassarre appears as an escaped prisoner; he runs away from French soldiers towards "the group of signori" (191), one of whom is Tito. Baldassarre stumbles on the steps and clutches Tito by the arm, and they look at each other. Tito answers to Lorenzo Tornabuoni who asks who he is: "*Some madman, surely.*" [George Eliot's italics] These words decide in one moment the succeeding relationship between Tito and Baldassarre. They are also an indirect cause for the alienation from his wife, Romola, by strengthening her distrust in him. Tito himself thinks that he uttered them impulsively, but the author explains that it was the "work of long premeditation":

He hardly knew how the words had come to his lips: there are moments when our passions speak and decide for us, and we seem to stand by and wonder. They carry in them an inspiration of crime, that in one instant does work of long premeditation. (191)

In fact, Tito's refusal to recognize the foster father on the steps of the Duomo is a natural result of the choices that he has made up to then. He is not definitely conscious of the intention to forsake his foster father until he gets 500 gold florins by selling the jewels which belong to Baldassarre. When he finds himself "sailing

under the fairest breeze" (83) soon after he arrives in Florence, he puts off the departure for the Archipelago to deliver Baldassarre. It is characteristic of him not to contemplate on this problem; he simply puts it aside until he sells the jewels. The moment he gets the money, "the crisis of the first serious struggle his facile, good-humoured nature [has] known" (84) arrives. George Eliot's irony in the use of the words, "serious struggle," is obvious, and the irony deepens as she goes on with the analysis of the easy self-justification which is unfolded in Tito. His reasoning is simple and easy as it is based upon his egoistic desire to be rid of his foster father: it is far from certain that Baldassarre is alive; it is unfair that he should turn his back upon "promised love and distinction" (85) and besides there is no exceptional virtue in delivering one's relatives; he has already made a rich return to Baldassarre for his fatherly cares. His conclusion is that he does not need to spend his life in a futile search for his foster father who he believes is dead.

George Eliot analyses this process with remarkable clarity as if she broke up a piece of machinery and put every part of it before the reader. Her analysis is convincing as far as the machine is concerned. It impresses the reader that the utterance of the words, "*Some madman, surely.*" is an inevitable result of his previous psychological movements. But the machine has some serious defects; its way of working is simple yet abnormal, rarely to be seen in the real world. George Eliot's analysis is convincing so long as we accept the machine as it is; but the problem is that there are probably few readers who will. The lack of every kind of passion in him makes it hard for the reader to accept him as a real character. After the denial of his foster father, he fears his revenge because he knows that his love and hatred are equally violent. He is filled with "that physical dread which is inseparable from a soft

pleasure-loving nature, and which prevents a man from meeting wounds and death as a welcome relief from disgrace” (194). But even when he knows that Baldassarre will try to kill him, he does not entertain any active malignity towards him; nor does it occur to him to kill his foster father before he gets killed, for he shrinks at the thought of giving pain to any mortal. He merely decides to protect himself “by cool deceit —and defensive armour.” Tito is a coward, liar, and traitor who is motivated by love of ease and comfort and by fear of pain; he is so weak that he is unable to take any aggressive measure to rid himself of the enmity of one whom he has forsaken. Therefore, it is a characteristic act of Tito that he should visit Baldassarre and beg him for forgiveness. And at the same time, the subplot comes very close to a melodrama in this scene:

Tito had felt one great heart-leap of terror as he had staggered under the weight of the thrust [of the dagger] : he felt now the triumph of deliverance and safety. His armour had been proved, and vengeance lay helpless before him. But the triumph raised no devilish impulse; on the contrary, the sight of his father close to him and unable to injure him, made the effort at reconciliation easier. He was free from fear, but he had only the more unmixed and direct want to be free from the sense that he was hated. After they had looked at each other a little while, Baldassarre lying motionless in despairing rage, Tito said in his soft tones, just as they had sounded before the last parting on the shores of Greece—

“*Padre mio!*” There was a pause after those words, but no movement or sound till he said—

“I came to ask your forgiveness!” (268–9) [George Eliot’s Italics]

It is also typical of him that, when he mistakes Baldassarre’s

silence which comes from exhaustion for a tacit consent, he has "a darting thought of the irksome efforts it [entails]." It is even grotesque that, when he knows he has failed in conciliating him, he calmly judges it easy to defy Baldassarre as an imbecile old man; pity is never stirred in him at the sight of him who really looks like a madman.

What is equally unnatural is that Baldassarre should happen to find a shelter at the house where Tito has made Tessa live in order to seclude her from the world. Baldassarre succeeds in revenging himself upon Tito in the end because Tito, who plunges into the Arno to escape from the enraged rabble, happens to come ashore, nearly unconscious from exhaustion, at the very spot where Baldassarre happens to be sitting, looking at the river. The development of the subplot is supported by this kind of fortuitous coincidences. The note in which Baldassarre asks Tito to get the money to ransom him by selling the jewels reaches him via Fra Luca, Romola's brother, who receives it from a pilgrim to whom the writer entrusts it. Fra Luca recognizes Tito from "a large onyx ring on his right forefinger" (98). Tito decides to sell the ring to a Genoese because it led to the recognition of him; Baldassarre happens to see it on the finger of the Genoese and thus knows that Tito is in Florence.

This accumulation of improbable coincidences gives the reader the impression that George Eliot does not give much consideration to probability. Moreover, George Eliot seems to be absorbed in a didactic intention; that is, the intention to expound the unerring visitation of God's punishment upon evil, which is only too obvious in the fate of Tito Melema. She is so eager to show the law of cause and effect in the Tito-Baldassarre plot that she is unaware of the awkwardness and artificiality in her handling of it. It appears first as an unnecessary mystification of the reader. From

the very beginning of the story, Tito shows mysterious reactions to anything that is suggestive of stealing, deception or betrayal. For example, "something like a painful thrill [appears] to dart through the listener [Tito]" (9) when Bratti, struck at the incongruity between his dirty clothes and his jewels, suggests that he stole them. Tito flushes when Nello says to him:

"... But it is said of the Greeks that their honesty begins at what is the hanging point with us, and that since the old Furies went to sleep, your Christian Greek is of so easy a conscience that he would make a stepping-stone of his father's corpse." (32)

Immediately afterwards, the author equivocates, merely saying that the flush indicates what *seems* natural resentment at the calumny against the Greeks in general. But, in reality, his flush is a simple response to the words, "make a stepping-stone of his father's corpse." In his mind, there is a vague, half-formed idea of forsaking his foster father. Until it takes a definite shape, George Eliot continues to conceal from the reader the real reason for Tito's strange responses. This concealment is not only confusing, but sometimes gives the impression that she is intentionally deceiving the reader.

We have still other examples. Tito gives a start and shows "a pale astonishment in his face as if at a sudden accusation" (35) when Piero di Cosimo, an eccentric old painter, says to him:

"Young man, I am painting a picture of Sinon deceiving old Priam, and I should be glad of your face for my Sinon, if you'd give me a sitting."

When Bardo asks him about his father, he answers after a brief pause with "a slight shock that [seems] to pass through him, and cause a momentary quivering of the lip" (52). In the ensuing

phrase, George Eliot suggests that the slight shock is caused by “the revival of a supremely painful remembrance.” This is confusing to the reader because what the phrase implies in this context is not the desertion of one’s father, but a deep, genuine affection. When Bardo mentions “a man’s ransom” (60), Tito

gave a slight, almost imperceptible start, and opened his long dark eyes with questioning surprise at Bardo’s blind face, as if his words—a mere phrase of common parlance, at a time when men were often being ransomed from slavery or imprisonment—had some special meaning for him.

He also shows strange hesitations twice while he is talking about himself; he stops short of saying, “my foster father”: “‘ . . . I was born at Bari, and my—I mean I was brought up by an Italian . . . .’ ” (25) He is about to say “our [his and his foster father’s] memory” and suddenly changes the pronoun to “my”: “‘ . . . . The only record left is such as remains in *our*—in *my* memory.’ ” (55) [Italics Mine]

The reason for these responses and hesitations becomes apparent when he decides to sell the jewels, but after concealment comes too much direct explanation by the author. There is too much discourse upon Tito and his evil choices, and too little demonstration. George Eliot intends to show in the Tito-Baldassarre plot that, far from having gone to sleep, “the old Furies” are very much awake. But as Tito has no conscience and therefore does not experience the agony of inwards struggle, to analyse his psychological movements is simply to reveal the egoistic mechanism of his mind and the author herself has to make plentiful comments on inevitable consequences of deeds. She had deprived herself of the possibility of *demonstrating* what Reva Stump calls “the negative movements” of Tito because she

has made a mistake in his characterization.<sup>8)</sup> As he has no guilty conscience, she has to comment every time Tito makes such a choice as drags him further away from "moral vision."<sup>9)</sup> Her didacticism follows Tito persistently. When he explains away Baldassarre's claim upon him, the author points out the absence of dread in him for "the Divine Nemesis" (101) and, quoting Aeschylus, makes the following remark:

Such terror of the unseen is so far above mere sensual cowardice that it will annihilate that cowardice: it is the initial recognition of a moral law restraining desire, and checks the hard bold scrutiny of imperfect thought into obligations which can never be proved to have any sanctity in the absence of feeling. "It is good," sing the old Eumenides, in Aeschylus, "that fear should sit as the guardian of the soul, forcing it into wisdom—good that men should carry a threatening shadow in their hearts under the full sunshine; else, how should they learn to revere the right?" That guardianship may become needless; but only when all outward law has become needless—only when duty and love have united in one stream and made a common force.

Tito Melema is opposite to all that is said in the above passage. Fear is the strongest element in his nature, yet he fears not "the unseen" but only what robs or is likely to rob him of pleasure. Therefore he is unable to recognize "a moral law" and he repeats the same, facile self-justification according to the dictates of his desire. Because of his "absence of feeling", he boldly and cold-heartedly scrutinizes his obligations to his foster father, concluding that they have ceased to have claim on him. He does have "a threatening shadow" in his heart, but it is cast by the fear of his secret being disclosed, not by a sense of guilt, so that he practices one deception after another. It is impossible for Tito to learn a moral lesson; "duty and love" are never united "in one stream"

because he has neither a sense of duty nor love—he has only a pleasure-seeking nature and self-love. Because George Eliot has chosen such a figure as the vehicle of realizing her didactic purpose, she has to make a moralizing comment, following the example of the chorus. For lack of the inward struggle in Tito Melema, she is incapable of describing him by means of represented speech which she has employed, and is to employ, in such an extraordinarily skilful way in the other works.

Her didacticism sometimes comes out crude and impresses the reader as artificial; for example, in Chapter XX (“The Day of the Betrothal”), “a huge and ghastly image of Winged Time with his scythe and hour-glass, surrounded by his winged children, the Hours” (176) suddenly appears when Tito and Romola come out on the steps of Santa Croce after they get married in the church. When the image of Winged Time appears, Tito is filled with happiness which he has obtained by deception and at the sacrifice of his foster father. The sudden appearance of the image is effective in suggesting his fate and casting a gloomy shadow on Romola who is reminded of her brother’s warning vision and entertains a vague fear of their future; but at the same time, it is so timely that the author’s didactic intention becomes too perspicuous.

It is an ironical fact that the impact of the moral lesson upon the reader weakens as the author puts a greater emphasis upon it. As far as the subplot is concerned, the reader is given the most vivid impression not by the law of cause and effect, but by the faithless activities in the political and social confusion in Florence which are based upon the ruthless egoism and cool calculation hidden behind the outward beauty of Tito Melema. The parts that deal with these activities are the greatest of the few virtues of this novel. He is the only one in this novel that moves freely. His being an alien in Florence makes it possible. In the opening scene, Tito

appears as an outsider, lying under the Loggia de' Cerchi; and he remains an outsider to the end of the novel. Lorenzo Tornabuoni, one of the members of the Medicians, is aware of the advantages of Tito's being a stranger and proposes that he should be an agent of the party:

“In truth, Melema . . . I know of no man in Florence who can serve our party better than you. You see what most of our friends are; men who can no more hide their prejudices than a dog can hide the natural tone of his bark, or else men whose political ties are so notorious, that they must always be objects of suspicion. Giannozzo here, and I, I flatter myself, are able to overcome that suspicion; we have that power of concealment and finesse, without which a rational cultivated man, instead of having any prerogative, is really at a disadvantage compared with a wild bull or a savage. But, except yourself, I know of no one else on whom we could rely for the necessary discretion.” (301)

The Medicians agree that “*a wise dissimulation* is the only course for moderate rational men in times of violent party feeling” (299) [*Italics Mine*]. This suits Tito to perfection, for concealment is his second nature. He welcomes the sudden opening of a new path to success not in the form of “favour” but in the shape of “power” (303). He is so much inured to deceit and concealment that the whole situation begins to take on the aspect of a game. He determines that he should become “a tool” for each party and make it dependent upon him by taking advantage of his having no ties, no beliefs, no loyalty:

His position as an alien, his indifference to the ideas or prejudices of the men amongst whom he moved, were suddenly transformed into advantages; he became newly conscious of his own adroitness in the presence of a game

that he was called to play. And all the motives which might have made Tito shrink from the triple deceit that came before him as a tempting game, had been slowly strangled in him by the successive falsities of his life.

He has no home, nor does he want to have one; he is married to Romola, but has no intention of establishing himself in Florence. When he attains his ambition by his skill in deception and plotting and rises to a high position, he has already finished the preparations to leave Florence and seek his fortune in a more complex world of Rome.

He is capable of these activities and decisions because he is spiritually rootless and has no adherence to opinions or ties. He even believes that he has succeeded in burying his past when he sells the onyx ring which “[was] taken from Baldassarre’s finger and put on his own as soon as his young hand [grew] to the needful size” (123). It reminds him of the bonds of the past, and symbolizes the dreary days spent with his foster father. As an excuse for having sold the ring, he thinks of a present for Romola: “a wooden case . . . in the form of a triptych” (162), on the outside of which he makes Piero di Cosimo draw the picture of “the crowned Adriadne” with golden hair “by the side of the young Bacchus” (163). He gives the case to Romola immediately before the wedding and puts into it the crucifix, the “remembrancer of sadness” (174), which Dino gave her on his deathbed in San Marco; then he locks it. It is very typical of Tito that he believes that the selling of the ring has liberated him from the ties of the past, and that he believes that, so long as the crucifix is invisible, locked up in the case and hidden by the “images of youth and joy” (175), Romola can forget her past sorrow. It is no wonder that he should decide to leave his legal wife Romola behind and to take Tessa with him who is so simple-minded and idiotic that there

is no fear of her retaining anything that he has to erase later.

A man who can play several roles easily and skilfully at the same time, who has no compunction in playing the game of intriguing and plotting, who has no passion, no faith, no sense of ties but has only self-love and calculation, who is cruel and egoistic yet cowardly because of an extreme vulnerability to fear of pain—this is the man whom George Eliot has chosen for the hero of this novel, and it is, as I said, hard enough to take him as a real figure.

But what is worse is that the whole work is too much dependent upon this essentially shallow character. George Eliot has failed in establishing an organic relationship between the larger circle which is the social, political life of Florence, and the smaller circles which are the lives of the other major characters. Tito makes his first appearance in Florence when it is at the incipient stage of disorder. He gets a footing there by his scholarship, personal beauty, unpretentious affability and versatility; then, after marrying Romola, he gets into the best Florentine society with astonishing rapidity. On the other hand, the other major figures remain unmixed with, or indifferent to, the larger movements of Florentine life. When they do get involved in it, it is only through Tito. There is an abundance of historical detail of the 15th-century Florence in this work, but there is little sense of their being part of it.

Bardo leads a solitary life, shutting himself up in his house in the Via de' Bardi. He is a descendant of the Bardi, "a proud and energetic stock" (38). He has inherited "the old family pride and energy, the old love of pre-eminence, the old desire to leave a lasting track of his footsteps on the fast-whirling death" (39). He is living with the dead, quite indifferent to the outer world. His only interest in it takes the form of anger at its refusal to

recognize his scholarship and give him "pre-eminence." His only ambition is to "leave a lasting track of his footsteps" by the collection of his manuscripts of ancient Greek texts, but his monomaniac absorption in it makes him insensible to the affection of his daughter. He is what George Levine calls "stationary emigration, the mental but not physical abandonment of one's own world."<sup>10</sup> When Bardo begins to be worried about his library at the death of Lorenzo, who promised that it should always bear his name and should never be sold, Tito makes his timely appearance in his life. Since then, Bardo's alienation from other Florentines is gradually removed, though not entirely. The name Bardo ceases to suggest monotony, and since the engagement of Tito and Romola, visitors often enliven the library because "[the] winning manners and growing favour of the handsome Greek who [is] expected to enter into the double relation of son and husband [help] to make the new interest a thoroughly friendly one" (166). He dies in the midway part of his work in a rather solitary state without committing himself in the affairs of Florence.

Tessa and Baldassarre have no relation at all to the larger circle. Their appearance in the work has significance purely in relation to Tito Melema. The former is so childish and simple that she feels confused when she is in Florence: on the peasants' fair, she has her bag stolen and is "so frightened coming in the crowd" (128). She is also an outsider in the city, incapable of taking any part in its life. It is precisely her lack of moral judgment and her "little loving ignorant soul" (127) that Tito needs; it makes "a world apart" in which he has to fear neither accusation nor suspicion. Baldassarre is another outsider. The unexpected encounter with his foster son Tito, and his unexpected words, "*Some madman, surely,*" give him a great shock; he runs into the Duomo in a state of fierce emotion where Savonarola

is preaching. He has no distinct thought except "the bitter sense of enfeebled powers, and a vague determination to universal distrust and suspicion" (196). Yet he suddenly responds to the preacher when he says, "The day of vengeance is at hand!" At these words, only one emotion vibrates to the utmost in him: he is filled with burning hatred, possessed by the idea of revenge, which forces him to be alienated from others.<sup>11)</sup> He appears in this work simply to function as Tito's Nemesis.

The fates of Tessa and Baldassarre are determined within a very small circle, which lies within the world of Florence, but has essentially no relation to the latter. Tessa lives in a house on a sparsely inhabited hill which Tito, who calls himself Naldo in the presence of Tessa, has provided. It is in its outhouse that Baldassarre finds his shelter. Tessa, now Tito's mistress but believing herself being legally married to him, takes pity on the old man who cannot so much as remember his own name, without knowing that he seeks to revenge himself upon her husband. When he sees Tito coming into the outhouse, he attacks him with a knife but he fails in killing him as Tito wears chain-armour. Romola saves Tess from a group of youths who try to make her deliver her necklace and belt, "those vanities that are the Anathema" (374) and that are "to be burned in the holy Bonfire of Vanities." Baldassarre witnesses this scene in which "the two wives" (376) meet for the first time and guesses correctly that "[the] tall wife [is] the noble and rightful wife." It is Baldassarre who informs her of the presence of another wife. Romola finds a small boy who is lost and, suddenly endowed with "the ready maternal instinct which [is] one hidden source of her passionate tenderness" (399), takes him back to his home. The child turns out to be Lillo, one of Tessa's children by Tito. She knows that his father is no other than her own husband when she recognizes a strong resemblance between

them. As is apparent in this development of the story, the fates of these characters who are close to the protagonists are decided within a very narrow circle, and have no relation to the world. There is a striking cleavage between them and no interaction with each other.

Piero di Cosimo is another figure that is solitary in Florence. He is "a strange freakish" (29) old painter who lives in solitude by choice—he refuses to have anything to do with the outside world, which is symbolized by his "putting the tow" (36) in his ears and always locking up his door. He appears in the work solely to bring to our notice and emphasize Tito's extraordinary vulnerability to fear. While Nello is naive enough to believe that Tito's outward beauty is "a sign of a lovable nature" (37), Piero di Cosimo notices from the first that his handsome, bright face expresses fear extremely well. He draws a picture in which Baldassarre clutches Tito's arm—the sight which he witnesses before the Duomo. In the picture, Tito shows an intense fear on his face. This drawing serves to give rise to Romola's suspicion that "there [is] really something unpleasant, something disadvantageous to Tito, in the circumstances out of which the picture arose" (222). When he has performed these functions, there is no occasion for him to appear in the work.

Even Romola is not an exception; she is also isolated in Florence. But her isolation is different from that of the lesser characters in that hers is directly concerned with the theme of the work. George Eliot treats the process of the heroine's conversion to sympathy from egoism through suffering and the consideration of the theme makes it clear why the author has chosen Florence at the end of the 15th century as its setting at the cost of free working of her imagination: she wanted to treat "the broad sameness of the human lot" (Proem, 1) as the subject. The

idea of the particular time and place suddenly occurred to her at the suggestion of Lewes. The vague idea of an Italian story seems quickly to have developed into a definite one when Lewes suggested that Savonarola's "life and times afford fine material for an historical romance."<sup>12)</sup> The reason George Eliot "at once caught at the idea with enthusiasm"<sup>13)</sup> is that she recognized in Savonarola's life human suffering which transcends time and space. In essence, Romola's suffering caused by her relationship to Tito is the same as Savonarola's suffering produced by his relationship to the Church. Both are derived from the question "where the duty of obedience ends, and the duty of resistance begins" (396).

The process in which Romola is liberated from egoism and is converted to sympathy is described with a certain depth; Romola is not easily rid of egoism. She must undergo experiences filled with hardship and pain. Romola reminds us of Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*, and at the same time, we are struck by the fact that the author still shows the same lack of detachment in her treatment of Romola as in that of Maggie: she is again guilty of partiality toward, and idealization of, Romola. This mars our impression of the main plot. Especially the heroine's drifting away in a boat is quite unconvincing. It gives us the impression that the author has repeated the same mistake again that she committed in the concluding part of *The Mill on the Floss* in which she realized the reconciliation of the heroine with her brother Tom by killing them both in the scene of the flood: namely, the impression that the author has given way to her wishful thinking at the moment of highest tension, and has sought the solution of the heroine's problem in fantasy, which does not coincide with the realistic tone throughout the work up to that point. Now I will proceed with the analysis of the main plot. My principal interest lies in the author's treatment of the heroine, and my intention is to show the

discrepancy between the image of the heroine which George Eliot tries to convey to us and that of Romola which is actually created in the reader's mind.

As I said above, Romola is isolated in Florence; or rather, isolation is forced upon her by her father Bardo de' Bardi who has brought her up in seclusion from the outside world. He firmly believes that the world has denied him the fame which he ought to enjoy. Because he often complains of "the world's injustice" (51), she is even hostile towards it; she does not so much as smile at the strangers who call on them once in a while. One of the conspicuous characteristics of Romola is the strength of her ties of the past, and her sense of family ties is particularly strong. Romola is an antithesis of Tito who seeks only his own ease and pleasure. Yet she is no less egoistic than Tito in the sense that she is indifferent to everything and everyone outside her own narrow circle. Her egoism takes the form of excessively close ties to her father and Bernardo, her godfather. Because of this egoism, she is driven to despair twice: first by Tito Melema, her husband, and then by Savonarola in whom she finds her spiritual support.

When Romola is introduced in this work for the first time, George Eliot emphasizes the "sad dreariness" (45) in the life of this eighteen-year-old heroine who is surrounded by "the lifeless objects." Though she is in the prime of youth, she is forced to live in the past. Her only occupation is to help her father with his scholarly work which is, as mentioned before, to collect and copy rare manuscripts written in a dead language, Greek. She has inherited

nothing but memories—memories of a dead mother, of a lost brother, of a blind father's happier time—memories of far-off light, love, and beauty, that lay embedded in dark mines of books, and could hardly give out their brightness

again, until they were kindled for her by the torch of some known joy. (51)

The author calls the life of this heroine "wintry" (51), and she symbolizes this by writing that Romola's young cheeks are "without any tinges of the rose" (41). But, in reality, George Eliot contradicts herself in asserting the "sad dreariness" of the life of the heroine. To make clear this contradiction, I must analyse a little more in detail how the author makes the life of the heroine dreary and "wintry."

Her life is made all the more desolate by the fact that Bardo is still unable to overcome the anger and disappointment at his son Dino having deserted his family to become a Dominican monk. His blindness, which struck him when Romola was six years old, interfered with his work, and he depended upon his son for its accomplishment. Embittered by Dino's desertion, he trained her to help him in his work. Yet scorn and contempt for women's inferiority is strong in him. He deploras his "want of a fitting coadjutor" (44) and tells her that women are not equal to the pursuit of knowledge because of "the wandering, vagrant propensity of the feminine mind." He unknowingly injures her feelings and implants an inferiority complex in his daughter when he says as follows, regretting the loss of his son:

"... If my son had not forsaken me, deluded by debasing fanatical dreams, worthy only of an energumen whose dwelling is among tombs, I might have gone on and seen my path broadening to the end of my life; for he was a youth of great promise. . . . But it has closed in now," the old man continued, after a short pause; "it has closed in now;—all but the narrow track he has left me to tread—alone in my blindness." (45)

Bardo is not aware how much the word "alone" hurts his daughter who is entirely dedicated to him. He manifests his insensibility when he says to Tito Melema who visits them for the first time that "the capriciousness" (55) of his daughter's memory is a constant surprise to him. Romola at this stage emanates the sorrow of being a woman, and George Eliot's compassion for the heroine is apparent in the following words of Romola which are pathetic, yet sound awkward to the ear of the reader:

"But I will study diligently. . . . I will become as learned as Cassandra Fedele: I will try and be useful to you as if I had been a boy, and the perhaps some great scholar will want to marry me, and will not mind about a dowry; and he will like to come and live with you, and he will be to you in place of my brother . . . and you will not be sorry that I was a daughter." (46)

Romola certainly presents a pathetic figure. She is devoted to helping her father, yet she knows that he is dissatisfied with her and longs for a substitute for his son. But can we really call her life "dreary" and "wintry"? These adjectives suggest that Romola finds neither joy nor meaning in her life, but this is inconsistent with what the author says later about her feelings toward her father. If her "sympathy with her father had made all the passion and religion of her young years" (211), her life devoted to her father could not be entirely joyless or meaningless. George Eliot is guilty of this contradiction because she has to prepare Romola for the appearance of Tito. She has kept the heroine confined in "learned seclusion from the interests of actual life" (213) and has given her little company except for that of her father until she sees Tito Melema. She has placed Romola in ignorance as far as worldly knowledge is concerned. This is all for the purpose of making it seem natural for the heroine to yield to "some strong

magic" (54) of Tito at once. In fact, Romola is strongly attracted by the beauty and amiability of the young, gentle Greek scholar at first sight and "the snow" (51) in her wintry life melts immediately on his approach. Romola is naive enough to believe that "beauty is part of finished language by which goodness speaks" (168), and feels that her former life has been "a preparation to love" Tito:

"How should I not care for you more than anything else? Everything I had felt before in all my life—about my father, and about my loneliness—was a preparation to love you. . . . I used to think about the love I read of in the poets, but I never dreamed that anything like that could happen to me here in Florence in our old library. And then *you* came, Tito, and were so much to my father, and I began to believe that life could be happy for me too." (58)  
[George Eliot's Italic]

The author prepares Romola to love Tito by making her life desolate and joyless before Tito appears in her life. At the same time, she makes her close ties to her father the cause of the dreariness of her life; yet she says that they are the strongest feelings in Romola. The main plot begins in this way with contradictory factors in it from the beginning.

The heroine's devotion to her father, the cause of the above contradiction, is again necessary as the cause of her alienation from Tito after their marriage. For Tito it is realized with comparative ease. He wins the favour of Bardo on being introduced to him by Nello because he has "come as opportunely as cheese on macaroni" (34) to take the place of Bernardino de' Bardi. Dino's desertion of his family has paved the way for Tito's being accepted by Bardo, who is so self-centered and consumed with ambition for fame and pre-eminence that he only thinks of the possibility

of realizing it through Tito's help. There is no fatherly reflection in him on the prospect of his daughter's happiness. Bernardo, who holds "keen suspicion" (112) towards Tito on seeing him for the first time and keeps it to the end, warns Bardo not to be robbed of "a rare gem of [his] own" (64); for he detects in Tito "a lithe sleekness . . . that seems marvellously fitted for slipping easily into any nest he fixes his mind on." But, far from putting Bardo on his guard against Tito, this warning suggests to him the desirability of his daughter's marriage to him. In short, Tito has no obstacles to marrying Romola.

When we see Tito and Romola again, eighteen months have passed. Nothing is told about Romola's joy in her newly married life. As I said before, a dark shadow is cast over their marriage at the very start by "a huge and ghastly image of Winged Time, with his scythe and hour-glass, surrounded by his winged children, the Hours" (176). This is a crude symbol of the approach of Nemesis towards Tito. At the same time, it conveys the impression that their marriage is cursed from the start, and this concept deepens when we find that "[the] the breath of sadness" (211) still clings to her life. The cause of her sadness is that Tito, who once seemed unwearied in assisting her father in his work, is now less keen on doing it than before. George Eliot says that Romola is well aware of the unfairness of asking her husband, who is in "the heart of public business" (214), to be more enthusiastic about it. The author goes on to say that Romola is very understanding of him and does not blame him in the least because she has "very large nature":

It belongs to very large nature, when it is not under the immediate power of some strong unquestioning emotion, to suspect itself, and doubt the truth of its own impressions, conscious of possibilities beyond its own horizon.

And Romola was urged to doubt herself the more by the necessity of interpreting her disappointment in her life with Tito so as to satisfy at once her love and her pride. Disappointment? Yes, there was no milder word that would tell the truth. Perhaps all women had to suffer the disappointment of ignorant hopes, if she only knew their experience. Still there had been something peculiar in her lot: her relation to her father had claimed unusual sacrifices from her husband. Tito had once thought that his love would make those sacrifices easy; his love had not been great enough for that. She was not justified in resenting a self-delusion. No! resentment must not rise: all endurance seemed easy to Romola rather than a state of mind in which she would admit to herself that Tito acted unworthily. (212)

By means of represented speech, George Eliot shows the inner process in which Romola tries to persuade herself that it is not Tito but she that is entirely responsible for the distance between them, that “the inferiority [is] on her side.” (212) But, unlike the psychological movement of Nancy in *Silas Marner*, the inner working of Romola is not described with enough skill to make it natural and convincing; it sounds explanatory and we feel the existence of the author who asserts that Romola is a noble creature with “very large nature.” And the image of Romola that the author tries to convey to us is different from that which is actually created in us.

In the above passage, the author directly gives her own comment. She implies that Tito is responsible for their alienation because of his lack of capacity to love others. In the subsequent inner monologue, Romola blames herself for “being sometimes a little too sad or too urgent about what [concerns] her father’s memory—a little too critical or coldly silent when Tito [narrates] the things that [are] said and done in the world he [frequents]”

(215). While she is waiting for the return of her husband, "listening anxiously for the step of her husband", she tells herself that it is not possible for him to maintain the same enthusiasm in fulfilling her father's wish concerning the library, and that she will be careful "to suppress all those promptings that [seem] to isolate her from him." The author puts all the blame for their alienation on Tito, while she tries to convince the reader that Romola regards herself as wholly responsible for it without accusing her husband at all. But, in fact, we do not feel that the heroine does not blame him at all. There is a gap between our impression and the one that the author tries to give us.

Though Romola tells herself that she must try not to behave as if she urged her husband to do his share of the work in the library, it is in this very room that she is waiting for his return; and she feels hurt when he says with a slight shudder at the chill in the library: "'Romola, I wish you would give up sitting in this library. Surely our own rooms are pleasanter in this chill weather.'" (216) The fact that she feels hurt at these words of Tito reveals that her greatest concern is the library, not to receive her husband with tenderness. In fact, immediately afterwards, Romola indirectly accuses Tito of neglecting his own share in the fulfillment of her dead father's wish:

"I wonder you have forgotten, Tito," she answered, looking at him anxiously, as if she wanted to read an excuse for him in the signs of bodily fatigue. "You know I am making the catalogue on the new plan that my father wished for; you have not time to help me, so I must work at it closely." (216)

The author says that, to Romola, "ceasing to love" (215) would be like "the hideous nightmare in which the world [seemed] to break away all around her, and leave her feet

overhanging the darkness” because all her ardour has been “concentrated in her affections” (214). This implies that Romola has given all her love to Tito; but we do not feel that she really loves her husband. On the contrary, our impression is that she is far more powerfully attached to her father; the initial cause of her disappointment in her husband is that she saw her father “sink from elation into new disappointment” (211) as Tito gradually came to neglect his own share of their joint work. It is only from their relation to the fulfillment of her father’s wish that she becomes interested in the political events in Florence; it is solely “the sense of love and duty to her father’s memory” (214) that kindles her new interest in public affairs, “in the outbreak of war, in the issue of the French king’s visit, in the changes that [are] likely to happen in the State.” Tito tells her “the things that [are] said and done in the world he [frequents]” (215), but she is “critical or coldly silent” while he narrates them. She shows no interest at all in his activities; or rather, she is critical of them because she regards them as his excuses for neglecting his own share of the work in the library. Even if Romola reflects in her mind that she will “make no unfair demands on the man whom she [has] given her best woman’s love and worship” (211), it fails to carry conviction to the reader.

The image of Romola that is produced in our mind through these descriptions is incompatible with that of the heroine which the author intends to create. Romola’s love for Tito is not illustrated; it is only explained by the author. When Bardo dies, Romola feels a sense of relief which is mixed with “the first burst of sorrow” (211). This sense of relief comes from the hope that their marriage will be “more perfect”, that “their young lives [will] flow in one current, and their true marriage [will] begin” (212) because “there [is] no longer any claim to divide” them.

But she does nothing positive to make their marriage "more perfect"; at least, we cannot see her actively engaged in removing the alienation between them; she is only waiting, thinking of "each day an epoch in which their union [may] begin to be more perfect" (215). Moreover, since her love for Tito is not substantiated, this hope has little sense of reality.

That George Eliot does not describe convincingly the heroine's passionate love for Tito inflicts serious damage to the main plot. She uses Romola's love for her husband negatively as the cause of her later suffering. Her idea of the heroine is that Romola cannot live without loving, because all her "ardour [has] been concentrated in her affections"; therefore, says the author, the loss of this love, "ceasing to love" Tito, would be like a "hideous nightmare" to Romola. But, because her love for Tito is vague and indistinct, the question inevitably arises in the reader: why does Romola suffer so much and what is the real cause of her suffering?

Tito Melema is treated with far greater objectivity than Romola. Though the author's concept of the character of the hero is problematic, the analysis itself of the process in which Tito's resolution to sell the library without telling Romola is formed and is put into practice is executed with conspicuous skill. This is because George Eliot puts herself at a distance from Tito Melema and never loses the detachment until the end. But she idealizes Romola and is emotionally too close to the heroine. This is the central problem of the main plot. That Romola is idealized, is apparent the moment she makes her first appearance in the work. She is graceful, dignified and majestic though she is only eighteen years old: she walks across the room "with the queenly step which [is] the simple action of her tall, finely wrought frame, without the slightest adjustment of herself" (42). The author says that "pride and passion [seem] to be quivering in the balance with

native refinement and intelligence" (43) in her face—it is, however, practically impossible to visualize her face from these words—and that it is "transfigured to the most lovable womanliness by mingled pity and affection" when it is turned towards her father.

This idealization is in turn reflected upon Tito's impression of Romola. From the very beginning, he feels himself indefinably inferior to Romola. He cannot remove "an intimate sense that Romola [is] something very much above him" (83). The author gives verbal expressions to his feeling towards Romola for him because it is vague and inarticulate, and compares the heroine to a goddess:

... he felt himself strangely in subjection to Romola with that simplicity of hers: he felt for the first time, without defining it to himself, that loving awe in the presence of noble womanhood, which is perhaps something like the worship paid of old to a great nature-goddess, who was not all-knowing, but whose life and power were something deeper and more primordial than knowledge. (82)

Tito Melema is always viewed with thorough objectivity and his inward mechanism is analysed calmly without emotion, while Romola is idealized and treated with partiality. What is emphasized in the former is his shallowness, treacherousness, the heart of a perfect traitor, cowardice, and lack of conscience which his personal beauty never suggests. On the other hand, it is nobility, majesty, and pride that is emphasized in the treatment of Romola. This causes the author to be excessively conscious that Tito does not deserve Romola, that the heroine's nature is far too large for him. In fact, George Eliot points it out in so many words when a year and a half have passed since her marriage to Tito:

Romola had had contact with no mind that could stir the larger possibilities of her nature; they lay folded and

crushed like embryonic wings, making no element in her consciousness beyond an occasional vague uneasiness. (214)

Probably from this sense of the wide moral gap between them, George Eliot is unwilling to dwell on Romola's love for Tito; hence our impression of Romola as a loving woman is tenuous, and her love is stressed only in her memories of the past.

Two events happen to Romola in succession that have significant bearing on her relation to her husband; one is that she finds him wearing chain-armour, and the other is the disposal of the library by him. They lead to the disruption of their marriage and the whole responsibility is ascribed to Tito. The former gives rise to her suspicion against him, and the latter creates in her thorough distrust of him. When she finds him wearing chain-armour, a flicker of love is suggested in her anxiety for him; she asks him whether he fears some particular person or it is only that he has "a vague sense of danger" (217). But, when she sees a picture in which Baldassarre with a rope round his neck clutches Tito's arm whose features are frozen with fear, she suspects that the chain-armour and the escaped prisoner are connected in some way, and that there is "something disadvantageous to Tito, in the circumstances out of which the picture arose." Since then, her concern is almost entirely directed to the relation between the two:

Very slight things make epochs in married life, and this morning for the first time she admitted to herself not only that Tito had changed, but that he had changed towards her. Did the reason lie in herself? She might have thought so, if there had not been the facts of the armour and the picture to suggest some external event which was an entire mystery to her. (240)

The last sentence written in the subjunctive mood shows that Romola attributes the blame for the change in their married life to

Tito, and that her concern is concentrated upon "some external event" which has caused Tito to wear the chain-armor, not upon the safety of her husband. She retains this suspicion and flings it at Tito in a fit of violent anger.

The violent anger arises in her when she is told by Tito that he has sold the library. To him, Romola's "tenacious adherence to Bardo's wishes about the library . . . under existing difficulties" (240) is nothing but "a piece of sentimental folly". Pressed upon by the continual dread of hatred and vindictiveness of his adoptive father, he decides to use his legal right to sell it and get enough money to live in comfort in another city. He anticipates her indignation and, from his "innate love of reticence" (82) and "an involuntary shrinking from her" (240), he sells it without informing her of his intention. She shows the most violent emotion here in the whole novel, and the analysis of her response in this scene reveals what is most precious to her, what is the real cause of the vehemence of her emotion.

Tito broaches the subject of leaving Florence to prepare Romola for the accomplished fact of his having sold the library. She resists the idea, saying that she has to stay in Florence to fulfill her father's wish. She is firmly determined never to submit to him "on this question of duty to her father" (247). Taking her silence for submission, Tito overestimates his own strength to persuade her and keeps on talking. While she listens to him, there is "a rising contempt within her" (248), and when she talks, there is "a ring of scorn." This contempt and scorn for her husband is quite significant; she does not feel it because she is acutely "conscious of her bruised, despairing love, her love for the Tito she [has] married and believed in" (250). She feels it for a man who calmly proposes to trample on her sanctuary. It means that her ties to her father are the most precious thing in her life. Therefore,

the selling of the library, which is the symbol of the ties, means that she loses her spiritual anchor. The first words that she says on knowing of his disposal by sale of the books and the collection of antiquities are filled with fierce scorn: “ ‘You are a treacherous man!’ ” (249). Her indignation and contempt are a response to his breach of the trust of her father, not to the “disappointment” in her husband. In her consciousness, Tito, whom she regards as being guilty of a grave sacrilege, ceases to be her husband:

All the crushing pain of disappointment in her husband, which had made the strongest part of her consciousness a few minutes before, was annihilated by the vehemence of her indignation. She could not care in this moment that the man she was despising as he leaned there in his loathsome beauty—she could not care that he was her husband; she could only feel that she despised him. The pride and fierceness of the old Bardo blood had been thoroughly awaked in her for the first time. (250)

When Tito says to her, “ ‘. . . The event is irrevocable, the library is sold and you are my wife.’ ” (252), her faint hope is shattered that it may still be possible for her to overtake the buyers and to persuade them to give up the purchase. It is the impact of the realization of its irrevocability, not the loss of her love for Tito, that plunges her into despair. Our contempt for those whom we have ceased to love cannot bring despair to ourselves.

Therefore the scene in which Romola finds her wedding-clothes in a chest and takes off her ring is embarrassing to the reader. It is strongly suggested here that the motive of her decision to quit Florence is the loss of her love. On the eve of her departure from Florence, Romola finds her two wedding dresses and sobs looking at “the shroud of her dead happiness” (277). Then she removes “her betrothal ring”, but there is a great deal of hesitation

before she actually takes it off because:

that force of outward symbols by which our active life is knit together so as to make an inexorable external identity for us, not to be shaken by our wavering consciousness, gave a strange effect to this simple movement towards taking off her ring—a movement which was but a small sequence of her energetic resolution. It brought a vague but arresting sense that she was somehow violently rending her life in two; a presentiment that the strong impulse which had seemed to exclude doubt and make her path clear might after all be blindness, and that there was something in human bonds which must prevent them from being broken with the breaking of illusions. (279)

The scene is not only embarrassing; it is a parade of “outward symbols” and is heavily charged with symbolical meanings—“allegory has replaced memory in the novel.”<sup>14)</sup> After she removes her ring, she unlocks the “tabernacle”, a wooden case, on which Tito had Piero di Cosimo make a miniature painting of “the crowned Adriane by the side of the young Bacchus” (163). This tabernacle is the symbol of pleasure and of Tito’s attempts to “dip her in the soft waters of forgetfulness” (246), to sever her from the ties of the past. In it lies the crucifix which her brother Dino gave her on his deathbed. It has come to symbolize for Romola the antithesis of joy, “that supreme fellowship with suffering” (283), and she associates her own actual lot with “the wasted face” of her brother because she recognizes in it the same question that she confronts: “where the duty of obedience ends, and where the duty of resistance begins.” But Dino himself “characteristically for this book figures in it less as a character than as a symbol.”<sup>15)</sup> As far as we are concerned, the wedding-clothes and the ring never exist until we arrive at this scene. Romola’s familiarity with them is quite new to us, so that we feel that George Eliot

suddenly introduces them in the novel purely as the symbols of the heroine's love for her husband which has little substance. Moreover, the contrast between the tabernacle and the crucifix is too sharp and lacking in subtlety.

Then follows the scene in which Savonarola stops Romola who intends to go to "the most learned woman in the world, Cassandra Fedele at Venice, and ask her how an instructed woman [can] support herself in a lonely life there" (281).<sup>16</sup> After all, she obeys his command that she should stay in Florence. This is because she submits to his "immense personal influence" (314) and not because she is suddenly converted to Christianity. It is true she has her egoism pointed out by him:

"... Of what wrongs will you complain, when you yourself are breaking the simplest law that lies at the foundation of the trust which binds man to man—faithfulness to the spoken word?" ... (312)

"... You seek to break your ties in self-will and anger, not because the higher life calls upon you to renounce them ... What has your dead wisdom done for you, my daughter? It has left you without a heart for the neighbours among whom you dwell, without care for the great work by which Florence is to be regenerated and the world made holy..." (314--5)

His words suggest to her "a possible affinity between her own conduct and Tito's" (312) and they have a certain impact upon her. But what subdues her ultimately is something intuitive: she has "the sense of something unspeakably great" (316) in his presence. Her sudden reliance upon Savonarola cannot be realized in any other way. Romola was instructed to despise religion by her father and she has tenaciously clung to her scorn and contempt towards it. On the morning when she takes up a mirror and looks at herself dressed in the garb of a nun in which she is about to

leave Florence, she is so startled at the sight of her own face because it brings back "the dread lest she should be drawn at last into fellowship with some wretched superstition—into the company of the howling fanatics and weeping nuns who [have] been her contempt from childhood till now" (285).

Prior to Romola's sudden discovery of spiritual support in Fra Girolamo, George Eliot has made careful preparations. Their first meeting occurs in San Marco where Dino is on the brink of death and her first impression is mainly sensory. She vibrates to the sound of his voice. Then she is attracted by his hands which are "very beautiful and almost of transparent delicacy" and "[seem] to have an appeal in them against all hardness" (137). She feels "that subtle mysterious influence of a personality by which it has been given to some rare men to move their fellows" (138). When she sees him for the second time, she is listening to "one of the Advent sermons" (214) in the Duomo. It does no more than slightly deepen her first impression that "it [may] be possible for her to feel personal regard and reverence", yet she is deeply moved to hear him "invoke martyrdom" because it gives her "a new sensation—a strange sympathy with something apart from all the definable interests of her life."

The personal influence of Savonarola is the sole cause of her coming back to Florence. Under his personal magnetism, Romola shows a sudden extreme change from rebellion and repulsion to submissiveness and dependence. To underscore the fact that the influence is purely personal, George Eliot introduces in this scene Fra Salvestro, one of the Dominican monks of San Marco whom Savonarola confides in. Savonarola designates Fra Salvestro as Romola's confessor. On being informed of this, she suddenly feels anxious "lest her new strength in renunciation should vanish if the immediate personal influence of Savonarola [vanishes]" (317).

In fact, as soon as Fra Salvestro speaks, Romola relapses into her old repulsion against “fanaticism and sour monkish piety” (319). In spite of her dependence upon Savonarola, this repugnance and antipathy does not abate at all after she comes back to Florence and devotes herself to self-renunciation for two years:

... if she came away from her confessor, Fra Salvestro, or from some contact with the disciples of Savonarola amongst whom she worshipped, with a sickening sense that these people were miserably narrow, and with an almost impetuous reaction towards her old contempt for their superstition—she found herself recovering a firm footing in her works of womanly sympathy. (336)

This sudden complete dependence of the heroine is familiar to those who have read *Scenes of Clerical Life*; in “Japan’s Repentance”, the heroine is rescued from self-despair and is given faith and strength to reform and lead a noble life by Mr. Tryan, an evangelical curate. The process in which Janet and Romola find their spiritual support in Mr. Tryan and Savonarola respectively are essentially the same. But, while Mr. Tryan dies soon after he saves Janet, Savonarola lives for another two years after he rescues Romola. This means that George Eliot has to treat the heroine’s relation to Savonarola still further. This relation begins as a personal one and remains personal to the end. Therefore, in order to make it convincing, she has to give Savonarola life as an individual, and in this she has failed. He is “the least realized character.”<sup>17)</sup> He does not come out alive as an individual. Because he appears to be the incarnation of an abstract concept, Romola’s feeling towards him is unconvincing to the reader. She is quite uninterested in his doctrine for the above-mentioned reason. This means that there is nothing religious in her relation to Savonarola. What makes him her spiritual support is the sense that he is

greater than herself, that he has "something unspeakably great." This "something" must be his strong personality, yet Savonarola is not given any perceptible personality; nor, for that matter, does the author state in detail what this "something" actually is.

Interest in the life of Savonarola was undoubtedly one of the motives behind George Eliot's decision to write a novel so completely different from her former novels based upon her memory. She must have perceived a great possibility for dramatizing the charismatic quality of Savonarola who attempted religious and political reform and died in martyrdom without attaining sainthood. But the difficulty and disadvantage of creating entirely from material collected from books is most obvious in him. Her analysis of the inward struggle of this historical figure mainly based upon reasoning reads like a treatise rather than a novel. Robert Liddell goes so far as to say that "it is impossible not to feel the Savonarola's presence is unnecessary to the more living part of the book, and that therefore it would have been better without him."<sup>18)</sup>

At any rate, Romola is supported only by her trust in Savonarola. She has "entered into communion with the Church" (337) through his influence upon her, not because she is awakened to religious faith. The author says that she practices self-denial and gives help to the sick and the poor in Florence where "pestilence [is] hovering in the track of famine" (322), that "Florence [has] had need of her, and the more her own sorrow [presses] upon her, the more gladness she [feels] in the memories, stretching through the two long years, of hours and moments in which she [has] lightened the burden of life to others" (336). But her actual activities of altruism are treated only briefly. We are simply asked to believe that Romola is devoted to them in spite of the absence of the details of her self-renunciation. Instead, there is an

intensification of her idealization and Romola is treated as if she were "The Visible Madonna" (332).<sup>19)</sup> George Eliot asks us to admire the heroine all the more because she has to bring "the inspiration of her deepest feelings" (336) to the work of "tending the sick and clothing the ragged" which is irksome to her in itself.

In spite of the author's insistence that Romola has been participating in the public life of Florence, the sense of society is lacking in the main plot, too. She is mainly treated within her inner circle. What the author expatiates on is that Romola saves Baldassarre who is lying unconscious in the street from starvation and gives him money (which ironically enables him to regain enough strength to revenge himself upon her husband), that she hinders Tito's attempt to lure Savonarola out of Florence, that the chasm between them is now hopelessly deep, and that she happens to be acquainted with Tessa and her children by Tito. These events occur within her narrow circle and have nothing to do with the outer circle. There is a cleavage between the two. In this novel, the world seems to have no relation at all to the fates of most of the characters including the heroine.

The process of the disappearance of Romola's trust in Savonarola is also unsatisfactory. Her godfather Bernardo, who appears in this novel only occasionally, is deeply concerned with her loss of trust in Savonarola. Her trust receives the first shock from Camilla Rucellai, "chief among the feminine seers of Florence" (383). In obedience to "a vision" (384), Camilla commands her to disclose certain secrets concerning Bernardo which, if revealed, would save Florence. Romola entertains criticism and doubt towards Savonarola because he does not publicly denounce "these pretended revelations" (385). Then she loses her trust in him completely when he will not try to spare the lives of five

Medicians including Bernardo. Her faith in him is lost in a conflict between his egoism and hers. Savonarola is defeated by his own ambition and feeling: he will not exercise the right of appealing from the death sentence to the Great Council because he wants their death. When her godfather's fate is decided, it seems to Romola that her trust in him has been a "purblind delusion" (427), and she detects only the ring of egoism in every word of the Frate. Savonarola views the question of individual suffering with "the eyes of theoretic conviction" (435) which has a strong element of egoism. "The death of five men . . . is a light matter" (427) to him compared with "the furthering of God's kingdom upon earth", while Romola looks at the same question with "personal tenderness" which is also founded on egoism. She is still confined in her egoism and judges him unfairly with "tender fellow-feeling for the nearest which has its danger" (435). The difficulty of breaking through the hard crust of egoism is obvious in the curve of her orbit, but have we found her feeling for "the nearest", who is Bernardo in this case, so powerful and passionate that it reasonably accounts for her trust in Savonarola swiftly disappearing in a clash with it? The answer is negative.

She moves from one extreme to the other, and undergoes a second despair. This time there is no "arresting voice" (309). She drifts away in a small boat, hoping to "be gliding into death" (437). She lies asleep in the boat, and wakes up to find herself ashore near a plague-stricken village. Then she courageously rescues the village. She is not only fearless, but for some reason she is immune to the disease (she has already proved herself immune to it in Florence). This scene is the most unsatisfactory part of the whole novel. Dorothea Barrett writes as follows in regard to this scene, pointing out its parallel to "the flood scene of *The Mill on the Floss*":

The ending of the novel, especially the plague-stricken village scene, is embarrassing and unconvincing, as is the flood scene of *The Mill on the Floss*. Both scenes involve boats, water—that is to say, George Eliot's recurring network of images of desire—and rescue by a fearless woman who heroically risks her own death. In both scenes there is an attempt to transcend the realism meticulously cultivated elsewhere in the novels. According to Laurence Lerner, in the plague-stricken village scene, realism is not transcended but abandoned (Lerner 1967: 249), and the same might be said of the flood scene in *The Mill on the Floss*.<sup>20)</sup>

As Barrett says, George Eliot probably intended to “transcend” realism in the drifting and plague-stricken village scene; for she tells Sara Sophia Hennell that she had the idea of the scene from the beginning:

The various *standards* of thought I had to work out forced me into a more ideal treatment of Romola than I had foreseen at the outset—though the “Drifting Away” and the Village with the Plague belonged to my earliest vision of the story and were by deliberate forecast adopted as romantic and symbolical elements.<sup>21)</sup> [George Eliot's Italic]

But my impression is much closer to what Lerner says. Before Romola gets in the boat, she fancies herself “floating naiad-like in the waters” (435) and is thinking of a certain story in *The Decamerone*. It is apparent that the work is about to depart from realism and become fable at this moment. In fact, it does become symbolic fable when she drifts away on the sea and reaches the village. She stays there for nearly two months and comes back to Florence, where she sees the execution of Savonarola. Chapter LXVIII (“Romola's Waking”) and the next chapter (“Home-ward”) in which she tends those who have the plague and receives

a new baptism" (485), are sandwiched between those chapters in which there are the grim realities of the deaths of the two main characters: in Chapter LXVII, Tito is killed by Baldassarre, and in the last two chapters, Savonarola's inward suffering and his burning at the stake are described. This makes the heterogenous quality of the scene in question all the more conspicuous. It is in striking discord with the realistic frame of the whole which the author has established so far by laboriously accumulating the details of fifteenth-century Florence. In addition, the idealization of the heroine reaches the point where Romola is apotheosized by the author. She is treated as "the Holy Mother" (480) herself.

All these give us the impression that, taking leave of realism, George Eliot has sought the solution of the heroine's problem in wish fulfillment, and that she has yielded to wishful thinking at the moment of the greatest crisis. She brings the heroine to the brink of despair, and pushes her to its bottom. But Romola does not lie there for long; her despair is of a short duration, and she is soon rescued from it by the author whose pity for the heroine has been manifested in her frequently calling her "Poor Romola." We inevitably feel that George Eliot has chosen a very easy solution. The whole work has been filled so far with such negative words as: dreariness, isolation, deserting a family, abandoning a foster father, betrayal, traitor, alienation, despair. These words naturally produce a negative tone in the work. Those characters who make up the heroine's inner circle die one after another: her brother Dino, her father Bardo, Tito Melema, and Girolamo Savonarola. While drifting in the boat, Romola feels "orphaned in those wide spaces of sea and sky" (437), but she is literally orphaned. Her inner circle collapses and vanishes with their death, and the negative tone, which has pervaded the work, becomes most intense here. Then George Eliot swiftly changes it into a positive one by

Romola's rebirth. This attempt to change the tone radically in a short space is both unnatural and awkward.

Moreover, after Romola is converted to altruism in the village, the question occurs to us forcibly: what has made it possible for her to be converted to sympathy after all? The author answers this question as follows:

. . . from the moment after her waking when the cry ["I am tired of life, I want to die."] had drawn her, she had not even reflected, as used to do in Florence, that she was glad to live because she could lighten sorrow—she had simply lived, with so energetic an impulse to share the life around her, to answer the call of need and do the work which cried aloud to be done, that the reasons for living, enduring, labouring, never took the form of argument. (485)

This experience proves "a new baptism" to Romola, but what is it that has made the experience possible? It is the existence of the plague-stricken village and the villagers who suffer from the plague. In short, Romola owes her conversion to sympathy to the suffering of others. Her moral improvement, her movement towards "moral light", always requires other people's misery. What supported Romola after she came back to Florence in obedience to the "arresting voice" of Savonarola was the tending of the sick and the poor: that is, the misery of Florence which was suffering from famine. When her trust in Savonarola was shaken by Camilla Rucellai, she was rescued from "the threatening isolation of criticism and doubt" (397) by "the spreading Plague and the Excommunication of Savonarola" (395). She does not consciously welcome the misery of others, but it always functions as her salvation. This fact counteracts the positive tone which George Eliot tries to establish by the heroine's conversion in the concluding part.

To reinforce this positive tone, George Eliot shows us the heroine at the age of twenty-six in "Epilogue." It is May 22, 1500; eight years have passed since the opening of the novel, and it is two years since Tito Melema was killed and Savonarola was executed. We find Romola in a happy domestic setting. We are told that she sought out Tessa and is now living with her and her two children. She has found a reason for living in taking care of them. This is what she has got after suffering—a life with her husband's idiotic mistress and her children by him, as well as her foolish aunt Monna Brigida. To take it as an anticlimax may be beside the point. Romola has attained "a placidity" (502) which she never had in her youth. The scope of her sympathy has widened, and she has forgiven Tito. Her life with Tessa and her children simply means that forgiveness involves a paradox. Yet, even if we accept it, there is still no dispelling the impression that it is an anticlimax.

So far I have analysed the problems of *Romola*. In conclusion, I must reaffirm the traditional estimate that this novel shows a marked retrogression in George Eliot's artistic creativity, and that it is a "colossal failure."<sup>22</sup> She has lost much and gained little by abandoning the English rural life which she is familiar with, and setting the novel in Florence at the end of the fifteenth century with its social disturbance and political intrigue as the background. George Eliot had to construct a world completely unknown to her purely from material collected from books, and this caused the paralysis of her imagination. Its refusal to work is evident throughout the work. The result is that there is a discrepancy between the image of Romola that the author tries to convey to us and that of Romola which we actually have. Also we can see the departure from realism in the concluding part. There is a cleavage between individuals and the world. None of the central characters

except Tito Melema are seen through their relations to the larger circle. There is no interrelation between them. George Eliot eventually solves these problems, but, to see them thoroughly understood and solved by her, we have to wait for *Middlemarch*.

## NOTES

- 1) Gordon S. Haight, ed., *The George Eliot Letters* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), Vol. II, p. 463.
- 2) J.W. Cross, *George Eliot's Life* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1965), p. 361.
- 3) *Letters*, III, p. 457.
- 4) F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (Penguin Books, 1962), p. 52.
- 5) *Letters*, III, p. 300.
- 6) George Eliot, *Romola* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood & Sons, n.d.) p. 485. All further references to this work are to this edition.
- 7) See George Levine, "‘ROMOLA’ AS FABLE", Barbara Hardy, ed., *Critical Essays on George Eliot* (London, Boston & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 79.
- 8) *Movement and Vision in George Eliot's Novels* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1959), p. 6.
- 9) *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 10) George Levine, p. 117.
- 11) Baldassarre's passion for revenge is so marked and bizarre that Robert Liddell suggests "a homosexual relation" between him and Tito Melema in *The Novels of George Eliot* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ltd., 1977), p. 91.
- 12) *Letters*, III, p. 295.
- 13) *Ibid.*
- 14) Philip Fisher, *Making Up Society: The Novels of George Eliot* (Pittsburgh Press, 1981), p. 136.
- 15) George Levine, p. 89.
- 16) See Robert Liddell, p. 97; he attacks this scene for its "impertinence." What seems extremely unnatural is that Savonarola should be acquainted with the fact of the heroine's flight from Florence, and the reason for it, that is, the disruption of her marriage. Savonarola does not reveal how he knew them; he only says that:  
"I have a command from God to stop you."/"It was declared to me who you were; it is declared to me that you are seeking to escape from the lot God has laid upon you." (310)/"I have a divine warrant to stop you, which does not depend on such

- knowledge [the knowledge that Romola is not happy in her married life].” (311)
- 17) Philip Fisher, p. 137.
  - 18) Robert Liddell, p. 101.
  - 19) Concerning the use of “Madonna”, Gillian Beer says as follows in *George Eliot* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1986), p. 124:  
In *Romola*, “madonna” is used frequently as a simple term of address, equivalent to “Madam”, and this allows George Eliot to ease the transition between the divine and the ordinary and to keep the whole upon the plane of human affairs.
  - 20) *VOCATION AND DESIRE: George Eliot's Heroines* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 88–9.
  - 21) *Letters*, III, p. 164.
  - 22) Jerome Thale, *The Novels of George Eliot* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 71.

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- , *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).

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