

**UTOPIAS, DYSTOPIAS, AND ABJECTION:
PATHWAYS FOR SOCIETY'S OTHERS
IN GEORGE ELIOT'S MAJOR FICTIONS**

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ABSTRACT

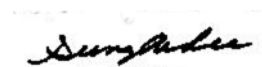
Within a framework based on Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, this thesis investigates how Utopian impulses are manifested in George Eliot's novels. Eliot's utopianism is presented first by a critique of dystopian elements in society and later by placing such elements in a dialogic relationship with utopian ideas articulated by leading characters. Each novel includes characters who are abjected because they have different ideas from the social norms, and such characters are silenced and expelled because society evaluates these differences in terms of its gender, class and racial prejudices. Dystopia is thus constituted as a resolution of the conflict between individual and society by the imposition of monologic values. Dialogic possibilities are explored by patterned character configurations and by the cultivation of ironical narrators' voices which enfold character focalization within strategic deployment of free indirect discourse.

Eliot's early works, from *Scenes of Clerical Life* to *Silas Marner*, focus their dystopian elements as a critique of a monologic British society intolerant of multiple consciousnesses, and which consigns "other" voices to abjection and thereby precludes social progress by rejecting these "other" voices. In her later novels, from *Romola* to *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot presents concrete model utopian societies that foreshadow progressive changes to the depicted, existing society. Such an imagined society incorporates different consciousnesses and hence admits abject characters, who otherwise would have been regarded as merely transgressive, and thus silenced or eliminated. Abjected characters in Eliot's fiction tend also to be utopists, and hence have potential for positively transforming the world. Where they are depicted as gaining agency, they also in actuality or by implication bring about change in society, the nation and the wider world.

An underlying assumption is that history can be changed for the better, so that utopian ideals can be actualized by means of human agency rather than by attributing teleological processes to supernatural forces. When a protagonist's utopian impulses fail, it is both because of dystopian elements of society and because of individual human weaknesses. In arguably her most utopian works, *Romola* and *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot creates ideal protagonists, one of whom remains in the domestic sphere because of gender, and another who is (albeit voluntarily) removed from British society because of his race/class. However, *Romola* can be seen as envisaging a basis for female advancement to public life, while *Daniel Deronda* suggests a new world order through a nationalism grounded in multiculturalism and a global utopianism.

CERTIFICATE

I certify that the work contained in this thesis is entirely original except as acknowledged, and the material has not been submitted to any other institution for higher degree purposes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sung-Ae Lee', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Sung-Ae Lee
20 June 2003

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AB</i>	<i>Adam Bede</i>
"AB"	"Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton"
"Address"	"Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt"
"Antigone"	"The Antigone and Its Moral"
<i>DD</i>	<i>Daniel Deronda</i>
<i>FH</i>	<i>Felix Holt, The Radical</i>
<i>GEL</i>	<i>George Eliot Letters</i>
"German Life"	"The Natural History of German Life"
"GL"	"Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story"
"Intellect"	"R.W. Mackay's <i>The Progress of the Intellect</i> "
<i>ITS</i>	<i>Impressions on Theophrastus Such</i>
"JR"	"Janet's Repentance"
<i>M</i>	<i>Middlemarch</i>
<i>MF</i>	<i>The Mill on the Floss</i>
"Modern Hep!"	"The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!"
<i>R</i>	<i>Romola</i>
<i>Selected Critical Writings</i>	<i>George Eliot: Selected Critical Writings</i>
<i>Selected Essays</i>	<i>George Eliot: Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings</i>
<i>SCL</i>	<i>Scenes of Clerical Life</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Silas Marner</i>