

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

Sung-Ae Lee  
B.A. (Ewha Women's University)  
M.A. (California State University, Fresno)  
M.A. (University of Sydney)

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## ABSTRACT

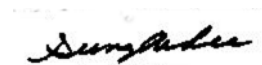
Within a framework based on Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, this thesis investigates how Utopian impulses are manifested in George Eliot's novels. Eliot's utopianism is presented first by a critique of dystopian elements in society and later by placing such elements 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 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>

## INTRODUCTION

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopias. (Wilde: 141)

This thesis investigates how George Eliot uses utopian and dystopian elements in her novels to explore the grounds and possibilities of agency. A persistent theme of Eliot's novels is the conflict between individuals and society, and the critique of the kinds of society individuals are situated within and the possibilities for improved societies. Utopian elements in Eliot's novels are presented by pointing out dystopian elements embodied in the form of "abject" individuals in society. Hence I will draw on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection as frames for analysis. Kristeva regards a human body as a metaphor for the social unit, and anything outside the body, that is, outside its orifices and boundaries, is dirt, excrement, that is abject and therefore expelled. It implies that individuals who do not conform to the norms of society for its preservation and stability are regarded as dirt and expelled. Abjection can be pivotal for agency, however, as such expelled individuals, feeling their abjected condition, may respond to it by submission or by transgression, and by transgression they either gain agency and make changes in themselves or in the world or become more abject, silenced or eliminated (death). In Eliot's novels transgressive individuals are heroes with utopian visions because they do not blindly acquiesce with traditions and values set out by society; instead, they search for a society more ideal and perfect which does not yet exist (thus the twofold definition of utopia as 'no place' (*ou-topos*) and 'good place' (*eu-topos*)), and hence they strive to interrogate and extend the boundaries of their world. (It is not a coincidence that Eliot titled one of her novels *Middlemarch* — the 'normal' place at the center of human experience.) The idea of utopia thus comprehends both a good, ideal, more perfect society, and a society that does not exist — desirable but unattainable (Ferns: 2). Dystopia, on the other hand, is "a community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and relationships between its individuals are organized in a significantly less perfect way than in the author's community"<sup>1</sup> or "significantly

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<sup>1</sup> Bakhtin comments that the author's own real homeland serves as organizing center for the point of view, the scales of comparison, the approaches and evaluations determining how alien countries and cultures are seen and understood (it is not compulsory that the native country be evaluated positively, but it must absolutely provide us with a scale and a background). In the novel of travel, this sense of native country in itself — that is, as an internal organizing center for seeing and depicting that is located "at home" — radically changes the entire picture of a foreign world (1981: 103-4).

less perfect, as seen by a representative of a discontented social class or fraction, whose value-system defines ‘perfection’ ” (Suvin: 9).<sup>2</sup> In the Bakhtinian carnivalistic sense of the world everything is put to question, subverted, and yet the process resists finalization at any certain point and continues on. Any monologic values are discouraged because there is no truth in monologic, closed interpretation of things, including — significantly for Eliot’s fiction — religion, and the kind of utopian society the transgressive heroes aspire for. Individual choice and agency play an important role because changes to the existing society are brought about by those who gain and exercise their agency from the status of abjection without which no transgression occurs.

My thesis will focus on Eliot’s heroes as they are abjected because of their conflict with society and as they respond to this, that is, seek pathways through transgression, gaining agency, submission, further abjection, or death. If the purpose of society is to increase individual happiness while maintaining its sustenance, the existence of abject individuals definitely proves that the society is a dystopia. As M. Keith Booker mentions, one man’s utopia is another man’s dystopia (15) — there is bound to be an oppressing group (political, religious leaders) in the society which enjoys the benefit gained from oppressing the rest of the group. As Hélène Cixous terms “other,” it is the other in a hierarchically organized relationship in which the same is what rules, names, defines, and assigns “its” other (71). The irony is that the oppressed group internalizes the imposed values and does not realize that they are oppressed because they are endowed with forced subjectivity and deprived of agency. Bakhtin’s carnivalistic sense of the world is crucial because it subverts every order of things and puts existing values into scrutiny. It helps individuals gain their own individual subjectivity and agency by questioning the order of things and the position of the self in society.

## **Utopia, Dystopia, and Bakhtin**

Utopian impulses are represented in various ways in the history of human society, but the novel, according to David Harvey, is the primary site for the exploration of utopian sentiments and sensibilities. He argues that novels typically recognize that societies and spatialities are shaped by continuous processes of struggle and the novel form lends itself to a much stronger sense of spatiotemporal dynamics (chronotope) (189). Booker also argues that

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<sup>2</sup> Darko Suvin made distinction between dystopia and anti-utopia, the latter being “a pretended utopia, a community whose hegemonic principles pretend to its being more perfectly organized than any thinkable alternative, while our representative ‘camera eye’ and value-monger finds out it is significantly less perfect than an alternative” (9). The category of anti-utopia will not be included in my thesis because Eliot’s focus is on the dystopian elements in society — on what causes abjection. She does not construct pretend utopias, the anti-utopian strategy.



utopian visions are in a fundamental sense literary in character and literary texts have served as an important source of inspiration for utopian thinking (14). Utopian literature, according to Ashlie Lancaster, exposes the shortcomings of our own individual and collective lives, while also providing normative standards for a better society. Utopian writers advance political or social ideals and then attempt to embody in a literary form the concrete reality of those ideals (110). Eliot's novels are a proper location to investigate the utopian impulse, although they are not traditional utopian literature that exhibits "elements of social utopia which are incorporated in the form of dreams or journeys to unknown lands" (Bakhtin 1984a: 118), or "dream satire" and "fantastic journeys containing a utopian element" (Bakhtin 1984a: 147). As Francis Bartkowski recognizes, there are two types of traditional utopian literature: one is "in the form of long monologues and polemics" — "a crossbreed of tract made palatable as literature through a poorly and hastily constructed romance"; and the other has close ties with travel literature where "the traveler-narrator is traditionally a man who, through dialogue with an inhabitant of utopia or with an interlocutor from the present, poses the questions which this "nowhere" has answered by its re-vision of social practices (9). In *Narrating Utopia: Ideology, Gender, Form in Utopian Literature*, Chris Ferns gives a comprehensive account of various examples of traditional utopian literature and comments that they are lacking largely in two areas: they fail to transcend images of the patriarchal society where women's subordination is inherent as a utopian model; and they lack a notion of dynamic, ongoing change, thus only suggesting a closed and static society. As Bartkowski points out, one problem of traditional utopian literature, beginning with Thomas More's *Utopia*, is that the question of women in utopia is always asked and usually summarily answered. Their "condition" is usually seen as improved relative to the narrator's present, though women themselves tend not to participate in shaping this future in any dramatic way (9). So while earlier utopian writers devoted some time and space to the place of women in their social planning for a fictional future, when they turned attention to the "woman question" they envisaged a social role and position for them that seems only to mask oppression because still situated within a patriarchal utopia (Bartkowski: 13-14). In Chapter V below, I will examine how in *Romola* Eliot explores this tendency within the imagined intellectual utopia that is the Italian Renaissance. Most of the utopian novels devote space to social wrongs that need to be righted, but systematic forms of oppression and repression on the basis of gender are not fully interrogated (Bartkowski: 16). Bartkowski argues that utopian thinking is therefore crucial to feminism, a movement that could only be produced and challenged by and in a patriarchal world. Feminist fiction and feminist theory are fundamentally utopian in that they declare that which is not-yet as the basis for a feminist practice, textual, political, or otherwise (12). For example,

social institutions determine female bodies and thus discriminate against females by suppressing their agency. As Elizabeth Grosz argues, there is not a “real,” material body on one hand and its various cultural historical representations on the other. She claims that these representations and cultural inscriptions quite literally constitute bodies and help to produce them as such (1994: x), an insight clearly grasped by Eliot and embodied in all of her female characters. It is difficult, if not impossible, to have a socially meaningful existence outside of the norms of gender identity, to a degree and in a way that is not the case for national or religious identities, for example. As Judith Butler puts it, “if human existence is always gendered existence, then to stray outside of established gender is in some sense to put one’s very existence into question” (1987: 132). As Ferns argues, the subordination of female to male is thus incessantly re-enacted in utopian fiction (104). The other problem with the traditional utopian literature identified by Ferns is that the model society is monologic, imposing, uniform, and static, which is in opposition to the dialogical principle articulated by Bakhtin, which strives to resist monological petrification. Ferns notices that the tenor of most utopian dialogue is essentially monologic (101). Thus the dystopian distrust of utopia is the fear that human beings are simply creatures of their society — that what they take to be their essential identity is in fact socially constructed, and hence susceptible to radical change under different social circumstances (107). Ferns argues that exercising agency and enjoying freedom is a human being’s right as an individual to do his/her own work as well, and in doing so he/she becomes part of a larger struggle to keep utopia utopia, not by striving to preserve it as it is, but by forcing it to continue changing (223). To him, utopia is a future, but one constantly changing in response to both past and present, whose nature it also shapes. He asserts that utopia is not static, but kinetic (228).

According to Ferns, reactions against the traditional utopian ideal take various forms, the most significant being the dystopia — the term here coinciding with Suvin’s anti-utopia — which both parodies and subverts the traditional utopian model as a means of satirizing and warning against trends in contemporary society (15). Utopias are no longer viewed as fantasies of ideal cities or imagined forms of social organization, but are rather construed as manifestations of pervasive social and ideological conflicts with respect to the desired trajectory of social change (Gardiner: 22). The totalizing traditional “blueprint utopias,” which are commonly confused with the utopian impulse *per se*, as Michael Gardiner argues (22), are succeeded by the notion first of “critical utopia” — “a heterodox manifestation of a diffuse ‘utopian impulse’ which steadfastly resists the systematization and closure characteristic of the traditional utopia and is ultimately concerned with the satisfaction of unfulfilled needs and the perennial human desire for autonomy and voluntaristic solidarity” (25) — and then “transformative utopia,” a mode in

which utopian tropes do important social, cultural and political work by challenging and reformulating ideas about power and identity, community, and the body. Transformative utopianism is thus a productive utopianism which uses the represented subject's limited agency to interact with others in transformative ways as a metonym for social change.<sup>3</sup> The distinction here is important, in that it separates the descriptive critical utopianism of Eliot's earlier fiction from the transformative impulses of the later. Gardiner emphasizes the "functionality" of the utopian impulse and its role in social transformation rather than its formal or generic characteristics (22). The concept of critical utopia can be employed as a methodological approach to literary utopias, allowing for a viable conception of utopia that can withstand both liberal and postmodern critiques. As Lancaster puts it, utopia is no longer the construction of an ideal society but rather a tool for criticism in the present, rendering irrelevant its attainability (112). Critical utopia is defined by Tom Moylan as follows:

traditional utopias can be read as discourses that generate metaphysical models which have served the dominant social formation. Critical utopias can be read as metaphorical displacements arising out of current contradictions within the political unconscious. [They] ultimately refer to something other than a predictable alternative paradigm, for at their core they identify self-critical utopian discourse itself as a process that can tear apart the dominant ideological web. Here, then critical utopian discourse becomes a seditious expression of social change and popular sovereignty carried on in a permanently open process of envisioning which is not yet. (Moylan: 213)

As Gardiner argues, Moylan's concept of "critical utopia" has considerable relevance for the understanding of Bakhtin's carnival and his stress on the potentially subversive function of the utopian imagination and the dialectical interpenetration of ideology and utopia (25). Moylan argues that in critical utopia "particular forms of utopian discourse can function in a more oppositional and subversive manner, and can hint at the possibility of a less oppressive and exploitative form of social organization," a hypothetical mode of being which "bases its drives in the personal experience of unfulfilled human need, rather than in instrumentally rational systemic requirements" (212). Seen in this light, abject human beings in any society are a product of dystopia and the very existence of the abject renders the society dystopian. By presenting various abject figures and thus dystopian societies Eliot criticizes the dystopian elements and gropes toward the possibility of utopia. Therefore, her dystopia functions as "transformative utopia," that is, "critical utopia" in the sense of Moylan:

The critical utopian texts mark a shift in anti-hegemonic culture and politics away from male-dominant, capitalist, hierarchical social structure. The critical utopias give voice to an emerging radical perception and experience that emphasizes process over system, autonomous and marginal activity over the imposed order of a center, human liberation over white/phallocratic control, and the interrelationships of nature over human chauvinism — and they give voice to the seditious utopian impulse itself. The critical utopias still

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<sup>3</sup> I have drawn this definition from an unpublished paper by John Stephens.

describe alternative societies, but they are careful to consider the flaws and insufficiencies of these systems. (Moylan: 211)

Critical utopias are explicit attempts to challenge and undermine hegemonic structures of political power in a common quest for emancipation while retaining and emphasizing the dangers inherent in totalizing visions (Lancaster: 110). The subversion of the existing order in Eliot's novels is manifested in the questioning of the value of Christian patriarchal society that maintains "male-dominant, capitalist, hierarchical social structure." Women and the economically disadvantaged, the lower-class, and the racially different (therefore subscribing to a religion different from that of the ruling society), which are intertwined, constitute a marginalized social group and if they do not conform to the imposed order they become abject. The abject in Eliot's novels are mainly identified as women, men without money or position, working class people, and racially "other" characters. What makes them abject, how abjection is manifested, and how it is related to forms of agency that have the power to transform the course of history and society are main concerns of Eliot's novels. Eliot's cautious delineation of a "less intolerable" alternative society hinges on self-examination and dialogic principles practiced by a society which is, in Moylan's words, "careful to consider the flaws and insufficiencies" of the alternative society. As Elham Afnan argues, small acts can have great repercussions that will change the course of history ... it is not the powerful who make revolutions, but rather ordinary people who "changed how people bought food, raised children, went to school ... who made new unions, withheld rent, refused to go to wars, wrote and educated and made speeches" (Piercy: 198). Eliot recognizes the same aspects in the finale of *Middlemarch*: "the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs" (*M*, 838).<sup>4</sup> As Afnan suggests, "the transformation of existing society into utopia is a precarious enterprise attainable only through a process of making choices and crossing boundaries" (12). "Making choices" means exercising one's agency and "crossing boundaries" challenging and transgressing the existing social norms. As Suvin points out, utopia is a state of a less 'bad' condition, the "avoidance of unpleasantness," and is "no longer an earthly paradise, but the prevention of further deterioration" (1), "the prevention of Hell on Earth" (22). In *Felix Holt, The Radical*, Eliot also comments that the task of practical wisdom is to say, not "This is good, and I will have it," but "This is the less of two unavoidable evils, and I will bear it" (*FH*, 495) — a characteristic formulation of Eliot's meliorism (Hodgson: 104-5), which is the process of

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<sup>4</sup> Page references are from the following editions: *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1973), *Adam Bede* (1980), *The Mill on the Floss* (1967), *Silas Marner* (1979), *Romola* (1996), *Felix Holt* (1995), *Middlemarch* (1994), and *Daniel Deronda* (1995).

improving society. As Ferns comments, Eliot's central premise of utopian fiction is that the world could be changed for the better and it might be possible to create a society preferable to that which exists (ix).

In Eliot's novels human agency plays an important role — human thinking and responsibility for its consequences. Sometimes it is manifested as Nemesis, or causal effects, and she emphasizes that human beings are responsible for their own thought and behavior. W. J. Harvey comments on agency that man's various attempts, often fumbling and frustrated, to chart his destiny are subject to a world deeply swayed by the random tides of chance and contingency. The accumulation and interaction of countless small choices, of insignificant actions of minute and subtle pressures, of invisible motives and unforeseen consequences — all these create a highly complex field of force which acts, now with and now against, the individual will (Harvey: 11-12). (In *Middlemarch* Eliot refers to causal effects in various ways — “the irony of events,” (*M*, 463), “the train of causes,” (*M*, 617), and so on — and opposes them to irrational dependency on God's will.) Characters such as Arthur Donnithorne in *Adam Bede* and Fred Vincy in *Middlemarch* depend on God's providence, forfeit their agency and bring about tragedy. Eliot was familiar with and influenced by Auguste Comte, whose version of the Development theory envisaged all human conceptions proceeding through three stages: the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive, which last was “finally to prevail, by the universal recognition that all phenomena without exception are governed by invariable laws, with which no volitions, either natural or supernatural interfere.” This notion of individual need of agency and responsibility is related to David Friedrich Strauss's assertion that “all things are linked together by a chain of causes and effects which suffers no interruption” (71). What this means to Eliot is that individuals are responsible for their own thoughts, actions and behaviors, which is asserting their subjectivity and exercising their agency.

Agency is defined by Paul Smith as a function of a person who is not simply determined and dominated by the ideological pressures of any overarching discourse or ideology but is also the agent of a certain *discernment*. A person is not simply the actor who follows ideological scripts, but is also an agent who reads them in order to insert him/herself into them — or not (xxxiv-xxxv). As Bakhtin argues, agency can be exercised by resistance and transgression: “man is not a final and defined quantity upon which firm calculations can be made; man is free, and can, therefore, violate any regulating norms which might be thrust upon him (1984a: 59). He also argues that Dostoevsky sought a hero who would be occupied primarily with the task of becoming conscious, the sort of hero whose life would be concentrated on the pure function of gaining consciousness of himself and the world (1984a: 50), which can be interpreted as defining

his own subjectivity and gaining agency. Consciousness is also linked to world- and self-transformation by Lois McNay, who defines agency as “the capacity to manage actively the often discontinuous, overlapping or conflicting relations of power” (2000:16) and the political dimensions of agency as “the capacity of individuals to engender change within the socio-cultural order” (1999: 178; 2000: 46). Subjectivity is crucial to the notion of agency because it is subjectivity that enables a subject to obtain agency, to act as an agent of his/her own destiny. Subjectivity is a condition by which individuals define their often unarticulated thoughts, decisions and actions. In Eliot’s novels religion has a central function in the formation of male and female subjectivity and defines separate male and female roles in society. Alexandra M. Norton defines subjectivity as something evolving outside the consciousness of the subject but producing an ego strong enough to protect the self against incursions by the other as he/she learns firmly to assert his/her position within systems of difference (217). McNay calls it “personal identity or the coherence of the self” (2000: 17). Agency remains primarily a strategy of displacement of constraining symbolic norms, rather than in more active terms an appropriation of cultural resources arising from the broader struggle “for the social control of historicity” (Touraine 1977: 31).

Agency becomes increasingly important because, as Ferns points out, the idea of history “as a process of continuous advance, with change as the norm, rather than the exception” had become a commonplace by the end of the nineteenth century (68). Utopian thinking now occurs in the context of a dynamic social ideal, in contrast to the more static assumptions about society which had pertained during the first flowering of utopian writing in the early modern period. In the later period, assumptions about the relative fixity of society and about the relations of humans to the natural world have become more provisional, and this in turn enables a greater potential for human agency. The utopian vision that human beings might create a better society through the application of reason is, according to Booker, largely an Enlightenment phenomenon, an extension of the Enlightenment belief that the judicious application of reason and rationality could result in the essentially unlimited improvement of human society (4).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Not all modern commentators read Eliot as humanistically as I am doing here. Peter C. Hodgson, in particular, sees a stronger link between human agency and evocations of divine providence. For example, many characters such as Arthur in *Adam Bede* and Fred in *Middlemarch* are apt to think that God will somehow help them instead of trying themselves to solve their problems. Hodgson argues that true divine providence works against the interest of individuals and cuts across normal human passions. Far from serving people’s self-interests and personal agendas, providence demands of them something more, pushes them to the limits of human possibilities. Rather than adjusting the laws of cause and effect to what suits them best, it creates a moral universe in which deeds yield inexorable consequences. Providence presents possibilities for good and evil, and it empowers individuals to make something good of these opportunities; but individuals must be receptive to this empowerment and are responsible for the decisions they make (172). Even though Hodgson’s focus is in God and His providence, it is still human agency that enables individuals to take responsibility for their decisions and choices.

Abjection can function as a transition point, a pathway, for the abject to gain agency and hence participate in the progress of society. Characters with agency are in opposition to abject characters, that is, characters who are socially excluded or self-excluding, and socially and personally astray, without a capacity to orient themselves, feel desire, belong, or refuse (Kristeva 1982: 8). However, the characters who are condemned as socially astray, who are abject, are the ones who make change in history. Eliot's utopian impulse is manifested by describing various abject figures in dystopian societies, questioning and challenging the existing social arrangements, norms, structures, and institutions that produce the abject, while presenting at the same time the characters who wrest agency from the condition of abjection. Her fictional characters are "motivated by the utopian dream of creating some sort of human community that lies beyond existing social forms (Bakhtin 1984a: 280) in spite of their degraded and marginalized, that is, abject, existence (Gardiner, 34). Eliot's heroes like Dostoevsky's heroes are "déclassé members of the intelligentsia ... cut off from cultural tradition," who are "accidental tribes" (Bakhtin 1984a: 22). They are the abject "social wanderer" (Bakhtin 1984a: 30) and "heroes of accidental families and accidental collectives" (Bakhtin 1984a: 102, 280)) in the Kristevan sense because they are outside of the ideal social body and fail to conform to social norms. Nevertheless, their ideas are to be the "determining factor of educated society" (Bakhtin 1984a: 23), in that they have a propelling, transformative power toward utopia. In the struggle, these abject figures either gain agency, find compromise, submit or die. When they gain agency they positively contribute to the construction of utopia (in this case, "educated society") and even when they compromise they contribute to the process because in doing just that they make the world a less intolerable place: as Suvin argues, avoidance of unpleasantness is one phase of utopia.

### **Dystopia and Abjection**

Abjected characters in Eliot's fiction function as both marker and metonym of social dystopia. A major catalyst for abjection in the dystopian society she depicts is religion, which constitutes an overarching framework, structuring society and subsuming society's members under its prescriptions. Religion defines individual roles in every aspect of human society, such as politics, economy, law and morals, and is, as Freud argues, the major force that produces abject individuals. Freud characterizes religion as the "central tool of the forces of repression (and oppression) in society" and attributes to religion precisely the sort of "monologic demand for conformity" that typically informs dystopian regimes. He notes that religion, despite the traditional Christian emphasis on free will, systematically deprives its adherents of choice and imposes equally on everyone its own path to the acquisition of happiness and protection from

suffering (30, 34). This is how Eliot's characters are interpellated by Christian patriarchy, endowed with fixed subjectivity, and deprived of their own choice and agency. Kristeva argues that in Christianity the *exclusion* which marks abjection takes on secondary forms such as *transgression*, and so through the concept of sin becomes integrated as a threatening otherness. Elaborated dialectically within the binary of sin and righteousness, the abject is readily named and evaluated (1982: 17), as when Silas Marner is labeled a vessel of Satan, 'guilty,' a thief and a blasphemer. Marginalized, oppressed individual members appear as a matter of course within the structure of society, and it is assumed they will conform to the subjectivity imposed on them, submit and forfeit agency. Eliot's society is mainly defined by forms of Christianity which suppress human agency in the name of God's Providence and determinism (cf. Pagan self-assertion and Christian self-denial, where individuals are encouraged to "live for others"). Hodgson argues that in a more perfect society a different model of religion is suggested and human agency is encouraged (152), and suggests that Eliot explores this possibility by attempting to envision a religion for the future, a more perfect religion, one that affirms those revelations and disciplines of the past that have more substance than shifting theory (152). Eliot's religious views are, however, far from monologic, pursuing one absolute truth, and allow for a variety of voices in religious matters. She was influenced by the thought of Ludwig Feuerbach, who denounces such monologic values and the concomitant preclusion of individual variety. According to Feuerbach, as A. S. Byatt points out, the great moral failing of Christianity was the subjectivity which turned men's attentions in on their own souls, seeing all men as one "and the same means of salvation for all men, since it sees one and the same original sin in all." For Feuerbach the greatest sin was to fail to recognize the otherness, the difference, of the great variety of individuals (25): "My fellow-man is my objective conscience; he makes my failings a reproach to me.... The consciousness of the moral law, of right, or propriety, of truth itself, is indissolubly connected with my consciousness of another than myself" (Feuerbach: 158). His central theory is that man had created God in his own image by personifying, or projecting, those human qualities he most valued in the human species onto eternal Figures. It was now time, he considered, to unlearn the language and understand the needs that had given rise to the creeds and codes of Christianity. He wrote:

If human nature is the highest nature to man, then practically also the highest and first law must be the love of man to man. *Homo homini deus est*. This is the axis on which revolves the history of the world. The relations of child and parent, of husband and wife, of brother and friend — in general of man to man — in short, all the moral relations are *per se* religious. Life as a whole is, in its essential substantial relations, throughout of a divine nature. (Feuerbach: 271)

Feuerbach's thought on religion and tradition seems to influence not only Eliot but also Bakhtin, both of whom put the unexamined under scrutiny by subversion. Recognition of a variety of



religious practices based on the differences and otherness is the true spirit of Bakhtinianism. Bakhtin argues that “a sense of faith” rather than faith itself is an integral attitude toward a higher and ultimate value, and even atheism is regarded as a lack of faith rather than a rejection of an ultimate position (1984a: 294). Eliot anticipated this position and, as Hodgson comments, appreciated the importance of affirming a diversity of religious views and traditions among which there should prevail what she called “separateness with communication” (*DD*, 725). Separateness is important because each religion has its own distinctive cultural and historical genius. It also involves contingency of language and culture as well as involving a progressive utopia rather than any stable, fixed model. Different societies in different times have different concepts of utopia. This is part of what Richard Rorty means by “contingency of language and culture,” and by his assertion that “languages are made rather than found, and that truth is a property of linguistic entities, of sentences” (7). Truth is a human creation and cannot exist apart from the human mind because truth is a property of sentences, sentences are features of human languages, and “human languages are human creations” (5).<sup>6</sup> The dialogic nature of truth is affirmed by Bakhtin in this way:

The dialogic means of seeking truth is counterposed to official monologism, which pretends to possess a ready-made truth, and it is also counterposed to the naïve self-confidence of those people who think that they know something, that is, who think that they possess certain truths. Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction. (Bakhtin 1984a: 110)

Eliot’s novels challenge the official monologism presented as a ready-made truth and at the same time question the authenticity of the nature of truth. Her way of dealing with the quest for “truth” involves the process of dialogic interaction and as such the search does not end. It is only in the web of history, with all its specificity and contingency, that great ideas are conceived, born, and matured into distinctive contributions to the wider human community. Without their religio-cultural-ethnic determinacy these ideas lose their power; they become abstractions (*DD*, Ch. 42). Communication, according to Hodgson, is important because all religions constitute pathways toward an ultimate, incomprehensible, unattainable divine unity, and because conflicts and rivalries between religions can generate highly destructive forms of human aggression (173). Eliot’s critique of Christianity’s attack on Judaism in *Daniel Deronda* is in line with this idea. Such

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<sup>6</sup>In *Scenes of Clerical Life* Dempster argues with Mr. Byle regarding the origin of the word resbyterian/Presbyterianism and wins the argument by oppressing the latter with his authority as social superior. That Mr. Byle’s historically and etymologically based information is, in fact, correct underlines how “truth” is being asserted (“JR,” *SCL*, 248-49, 422). Truth is asserted, in this case, on the basis of authority rather than on any process of validation.

a dialogic concept of truth is also expressed through the Presbyterian church's practice in psalm-singing as depicted in *Felix Holt*:

"Follow the light of the old-fashioned Presbyterians that I've heard sing at Glasgow. The preacher gives out the psalm, and then everybody sings a different tune, as it happens to turn up in their throats. It's a domineering thing to set a tune and expect everybody else to follow it. It's a denial of private judgment." (FH, 241-42)

This is an apt metaphor for liberating human ideas from all constraining and monologic frameworks, and having one's own voice heard contributes to the whole function of society and its development. Preventing private judgment is the oppression of agency.

Monologic belief eschews such relativistic tendencies as disruptions of truth and order, and seeks to abject them. By naming them as *sin*, it links them with corruption and defilement. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva defines the abject as what is considered disruptive or transgressive of borders or boundaries, and observes that while within the symbolic system abjection might be identified with lack of cleanliness or health, such lack is rather metonymic of a larger principle of disruption (1982: 4). In other words, in Grosz's formulation, "dirt" is what disrupts order, and order is conceived of as an arbitrary arrangement of elements in relative stability or harmony. It is only through the attempted (and always provisional and ultimately impossible) expulsion of the improper, the disarranging, the unclean that the representation of order can continue (Grosz 1994: 201). Therefore, it is not the lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order, what does not respect borders, positions, rules (Kristeva 1982: 4). Disruption appears to come from outside the norm, from the domain of the abject, understood as the "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zone of social life (McNay 2000: 45, reworking Butler 1993: 3). Such an account applies particularly to some of Eliot's female characters, and particularly doomed characters such as Caterina Sarti in "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story" (*Scenes of Clerical Life*) or Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*. Caterina is abjected because alien — in physical appearance, ethnicity, religious affiliation, temperament — and thus entirely unlike her patrons, Sir Christopher and Lady Cheverel. Sir Christopher's affectionate address to her as "you black-eyed monkey" neatly sums up her not-belonging. Maggie is attributed with a disruptive otherness because of her brown skin, stiff hair and "gypsy" features, and is therefore identified with the abject. Maggie is in an impossible position, in that were she to have conformed as far as possible with society's concept of the female social subject she would perforce become self-abjecting. Kristeva has commented on the conditions under which the clean and proper body, the obedient, law-abiding, social body, emerges, the cost of its emergence (which she identifies as *abjection*) and the functions that demarcating a clean and proper body for the social subject have in the transmission and production of specific body types. As Grosz

comments, abjection links the lived experience of the body, the social and culturally specific meanings of the body, the cultural investment in selectively marking the body, the privileging of some parts and functions while resolutely minimizing or leaving un- or underrepresented other parts and functions. Abjection is the consequence of a culture effectively intervening into the constitution of the value of the body (1994: 192). Barbara Creed points out that Kristeva's writing on the abject in relation to religious discourses presents constructions of the monstrous which are grounded in ancient religious and historical notions of abjection — particularly in relation to such religious "abominations" as sexual immorality and perversions; corporeal alteration, decay, and death; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body; and incest (1982: 37). As Mary Douglas comments, "bodily orifices seem to represent points of entry or exit to social units, or bodily perfection can symbolize an ideal theocracy" (3). Therefore, anything outside of them is regarded as abject and liable to expulsion, since, as Grosz remarks, "rituals and practices designed to cleanse or purify the body may serve as metaphors for processes of cultural homogeneity" (1994: 193). The ultimate in abjection is the corpse:

The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. (Kristeva 1982: 3)

Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit — *cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel. "I" is expelled. (Kristeva 1982: 3-4)

Considered from this perspective, the death of a character in Eliot's novels does not signify merely the end of a person's biological life, but the culmination of abjection, the final elimination of being from society. At the same time it is an acute indictment of dystopian elements in the society that drives individuals to death.

Maggie Tulliver is abjected not only because she looks and behaves differently from others, but because she is the bearer of a certain discernment, a carrier of a truth unrecognized by or unwelcome to her society. Such transgressive abjects in Eliot's novels share an important attribute with ridiculous or eccentric characters in Dostoevsky's novels. Bakhtin defines this figure as "a person who is *alone* in his knowledge of the truth and who is therefore ridiculed by everyone else as a madman"; "the carrier of truth vis-à-vis all other people who consider the truth either insanity or stupidity"; these characters can be regarded as being possessed by their "truth," which defines their relationship to other people and creates the special sort of loneliness, that is, the awareness of their abjection, that these heroes know (Bakhtin 1984a: 151). Society would not recognize that the majority is in the wrong, as Dorothea comments in *Middlemarch*: "I still think that the greater part of the world is mistaken about many things. Surely one may be sane and yet think so, since the greater part of the world has often had to come round from its

opinion”(M, 537). The people who are bearers of truth are in fact outside the “proper” social body and thus abject because their truth does not conform to the always already determined and imposed truth of society. They are people not like everyone else; that is, they are the ones who have deviated from the general norm, who have fallen out of life’s usual rut, who are despised by everyone and who themselves despise everyone (Bakhtin 1984a: 138), which is the spirit of transgression. Bakhtin describes this state of abjection as “the sufferings, humiliations, and *lack of recognition* of man in class society: recognition has been taken away from him, his name has been taken away. He has been driven into forced solitude, which the unsubmissive strive to transform into *proud solitude* (to do without recognition, without others)” (1984a: 288). Their total “inappropriateness” and “unseemliness” of life cut off from its folk roots and from the people’s faith, and so on (Bakhtin 1984a: 144) contribute to their abjection.

Abject individuals are cut away from communication with others and allowed no space for dialogue. As Bakhtin argues,

The very being of man (both external and internal) is the *deepest communion*. To be means to *communicate*. Absolute death (non-being) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered.... To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another* or *with the eyes of another*. (Bakhtin 1984a: 287, ellipsis mine)

I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself (in mutual reflection and mutual acceptance). Justification cannot be *self-justification*, recognition cannot be *self-recognition*. I receive my name from others, and it exists for others (self-nomination is imposture). Even love toward one’s own self is impossible.... (Bakhtin 1984a: 277-78, ellipsis mine).

This explains the need of the Other for construction of subjectivity. Central to the construction of subjectivity is the ability of the individual to engage in intersubjective relationship. In order for individuals to assert their subjectivity they require the Other as signifier, the Other as, in Lacan’s formulation, “the locus in which is situated the chain of the signifier that governs whatever may be made present of the subject” (203). In as much as abjection precludes individuals from the opportunity to develop their own subjectivity and thus agency, a society’s static, monologic values will continue unchanging into the future, denying the possibility of creative action to individuals. But changes made to human society originate from the abject who were refused by society but stood up in the midst of condemnation, and hence have a potentiality to alter themselves or to remake the world. Because individual subjectivity is shaped through relationships with others, social change can only come about through the dialogue which, Bakhtin argues, is the basis of communication:

*quoted speech* ... permeates all our language activities in both practical and artistic communication.... we are actually dealing with someone else’s words more often than with our own.... we carry on an inner dialogue, responding to someone’s words (including our own). In each case someone else’s speech makes it

possible to generate our own and thus becomes an indispensable factor in the creative power of language. (Bakhtin 1984b: ix, ellipses mine).

Since human beings are social beings and the ideas and actions are the result of the interaction between human beings, a starting point of ideas is necessary for communication. This starting point is other people's ideas and actions that can be accepted or criticized. Someone else's speech becomes the basis of our own creation of meaning. Bakhtin argues that even the genre of the soliloquy needs a dialogic relationship to one's own self:

the discovery of the inner man — "one's own self," accessible not to passive self-observation but only through an active dialogic approach to one's own self, destroying that naïve wholeness of one's notions about the self that lies at the heart of the lyric, epic, and tragic image of man. A dialogic approach to oneself breaks down the outer shell of the self's image, that shell which exists for other people, determining the external assessment of a person (in the eyes of others) and dimming the purity of self-consciousness. (Bakhtin 1984a: 120)

This asserts the importance of the presence of others and dialogue in the construction of subjectivity and, conversely, the consequent loss of subjectivity by the abjected individual. Bakhtin emphasizes "the dialogic nature of consciousness, the dialogic nature of human life itself." Therefore, being alone, detached from others, naturally produces an "abject" state:

The single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic human life is the *open-ended dialogue*. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (Bakhtin 1984a: 293)

Through the representations of this open-ended dialogue in fiction, readers are positioned in relation to a wide variety of viewpoints, of changing perspectives, which enlarge the understanding of both the fictional and real world:

No human events are developed or resolved within the bounds of a single consciousness. Hence Dostoevsky's hostility to those world-views which see the final goal in merging, in a dissolution of consciousnesses in one consciousness, in the removal of individuation. No Nirvana is possible for a *single* consciousness. A single consciousness is *contradictio in adjecto*. Consciousness is in essence multiple. *Pluralia tantum*. Dostoevsky also does not accept those worldviews that recognize the right of a higher consciousness to make decisions for lower ones, to transform them into voiceless things. (Bakhtin 1984a: 288)

A novel is a locus where multiple consciousnesses exist. As Lahcen Haddad comments, the novel is a tension between a centripetal force — an author's unifying worldview as a regulating and unifying element — and a centrifugal force — various characters' different points of view by way of their disorderly speech (157). In a monologic novel, where the author's worldview is predominant, the characters' views are imposed on by the author, while in a dialogic novel every character is endowed with the ability to present his/her own viewpoint. This function is now commonly referred to as "focalization," following Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan: "the mediation" in the text of a story "of some prism," "perspective," "angle of vision," "verbalized by the narrator

though not necessarily his” (71). John Stephens defines it as “the process by which a perceiving mind (narrator or character) embodies and conveys a point of view in a narrative text” (1992a: 148).

Stephens gives succinct definitions of point of view and focalization. He writes that point of view is the aspect of narration through which a writer implicitly but powerfully controls how readers understand the text (1992a: 42). Point of view may be perceptual — registering the impact of scene or incident on the senses; or conceptual — involving the mental interpretation of perceptions (1992a: 149-50). The act of perceiving can be performed by the narrator of the text, or by a character within the text. Another way to put this is to say that things are focalized by some perceiving agent, whom we call the focalizer (1992a: 42-43). Focalization is the strategy used in fiction to point where subjectivity is concentrated. Its presence in the text is marked by such signals as verbs whose semantic node is thought or perception, slipping between narration and various forms of indirect speech/thought, and the embedding within narrative of registers otherwise associated with a particular character. The relationship between subjectivity and focalization is crucial because to represent a character without endowing that character with the capacity to focalize renders him/her principally as an object of narratorial construction and gaze. In other words, a character who does not focalize cannot evidence a fully evolved subjectivity. Eliot’s grasp of this principle of focalization exhibits the development of her art and awareness of women’s issues as well as other social issues.

Perhaps the subtlest method for presenting character focalization is through the use of free indirect discourse (FID), a technique which Eliot draws on from time to time to produce double-voiced and ironic effects. V. N. Vološinov analyzes “free indirect discourse” as a peculiar linguistic phenomenon where both the languages of the self and of the other coalesce, which epitomizes the working of all linguistic phenomena (115-59). Bakhtin defines it as “a form [that] permits another’s inner speech to merge, in an organic and structured way, with a context belonging to the author” (1981: 319). It is a form of a character’s quasi-direct discourse. Judging by its syntactic markers, it is authorial speech, but its entire emotional structure belongs to the character. This is his inner speech, but transmitted in a way regulated by the author, although the character’s emotional overtones are preserved (Bakhtin 1981: 319). Stephens comments that “its major characteristic is that it allows the narrator’s voice to be present within the speech represented, but at the same time preserves some features of language which seem rather to belong to the character” (1992a: 90). According to Bakhtin, the essence of the novel resides in its multivocality, its stylistic variation, and its dialogism. These characteristics result from its protean ability to include within its “generic domain” a variety of compositional and stylistic units and

devices, namely “authorial narration,” “stylization of everyday narration,” “stylization of semi-literary genres,” the “form of extra-artistic speech,” and the stylization of the “speech of characters” (1981: 262). Haddad comments that FID and point of view are essential to the novel because they not only make possible this process of stylization of characters’ speech (transmission of a character’s inner speech and its regulation through authorial parodying, debunking, or questioning), but also because they shed light on the functioning of hybridization, refraction, and dialogization — on novelistic discourse in general (157). As Bakhtin argues, FID “preserve[s] the expressive structure of the character’s inner speech, its inability to exhaust itself in words, its flexibility, which would be absolutely impossible within the dry and logical form of indirect discourse”(1981: 319). Through the use of focalization and FID Eliot presents multiple consciousnesses and multiple possibilities for shaping a better society, and so is able to use key aspects of novelistic technique to construct characters who, variously, are at odds with humane perceptions or refuse to accept imposed truth and be rendered as voiceless objects.

As a brief example of how Eliot can do this, consider the following passage from *Middlemarch*, which occurs as Dorothea lies awake pondering her husband’s demand for an unconditional, unspecified promise. Casaubon exemplifies one kind of abjection. He is a ridiculous figure cut off from intersubjectivity — even, or especially, with his wife — by his pursuit of an illusion he has mistaken for truth. Dorothea, on the other hand, has abjected herself by her marriage with Casaubon, subjecting herself to a rigid patriarchal authority that deprives her of agency and property. Eliot here uses FID to present Dorothea’s focalization of Casaubon’s perspective, and to incorporate some authorial metaphors which, in their echoing of Virgilian epic simile,<sup>7</sup> deepen the irony of the passage by mocking Casaubon’s insufficiencies as a classical scholar:

And here Dorothea’s pity turned from her own future to her husband’s past — nay, to his present hard struggle with a lot which had grown out of the past: the lonely labour, the ambition breathing hardly under the pressure of self-distrust; the goal receding, and the heavier limbs; and now at last the sword visibly trembling above him! And had she not wished to marry him that she might help him in his life’s labour? — But she had thought the work was to be something greater, which she could serve in devoutly for its own sake. Was it right, even to soothe his grief — would it be possible, even if she promised — to work as in a treadmill fruitlessly? (*M*, 479)

There is a complex interplay here of experienced abjection, both Casaubon’s and Dorothea’s, and of a potentially endless deferral of agency in the linked references to types of “work” which erase the self. Casaubon embodies intellectual and social assumptions which are profoundly

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<sup>7</sup> Compare Virgil’s *Aeneid*, XII.908-12: “And as in dreams of night, when languorous sleep has weighed down our eyes, we seem to strive vainly to press on our eager course, and in mid effort sink helpless: our tongue lacks power, our wonted strength fails our limbs, nor voice nor words ensue: so to Turnus...” (Loeb edition, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough. London: Heinemann, 1922).

dystopian, a travesty of humanistic thought profoundly self-regarding and gender blind. It will, of course, eventually take an action perceived by her society as deeply transgressive for Dorothea to wrest agency for herself and to be able to live in the world in a fully intersubjective way.

Such a refusal to accept monologic “truth” and to be prepared to turn the world upside down is related to another kind of utopian mechanism, the carnivalesque. According to Bakhtin, amid the good things of this here-and-now world are also to be found false connections that distort the authentic nature of things, false associations established and reinforced by tradition and sanctioned by religious and official ideology (Bakhtin 1981: 169). Dystopian elements of this kind, which produce the abject through distortion and false associations are what Eliot aims to criticize. As Bakhtin comments, it is necessary to destroy and rebuild the entire false picture of the world, to sunder the false hierarchical links between objects and idea, to abolish the divisive ideational strata (1981: 169). I will come back to this concept in more detail when discussing *Romola* in Chapter V, below.

A Bakhtinian concept particularly useful for analyzing utopian and dystopian elements of fiction is that of the chronotope. Chronotope (literally, ‘time-space’) refers to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships, that is, the inseparability of space and time, that are artistically expressed in literature (Bakhtin 1981: 84). In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope (Bakhtin 1981: 84). Things happen to the heroes because they happen to be at a certain place at a certain time where a certain belief system and social structure exist and interpellate them. As the narrator in *Middlemarch* comments, heroes “tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement; but after all, to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and formlessness” (*M*, 3). What happens to the heroes for their “ardently willing soul” is that they were not helped by “coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge” (*M*, 3). Eliot called man “the mysterious mixture” and human behavior is tested “under the varying experiments of Time” (*M*, 3).

Two techniques germane to Eliot’s production of literary chronotopes are “defamiliarization” and the principle of narrative polyphony, in the sense of having two or more converging tales. According to Booker, the principal technique of dystopian fiction is defamiliarization: by focusing their critiques of society on spatially or temporally distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable (19). This exploration



of alternative perspectives through defamiliarization obviously recalls the carnivalistic sense of the world. As Booker argues, dystopian fiction plays an important role as social criticism. The treatment of imaginary societies in the best dystopian fiction is always more or less directly relevant to specific “realworld” societies and issues. Dystopian fictions are typically set in places or times far distant from the author’s own, but it is usually clear that the real referents of dystopian fictions are generally quite concrete and near-at-hand (18-19). Eliot’s novels are set in the past rather than in her contemporary time, and *Romola*, in particular, is set in a different place as well as different time (in Renaissance Florence), so that she could emphasize her own or the readers’ different perspectives by defamiliarizing social relationships and human behavior. The difference between dystopian fiction in the traditional sense and Eliot’s dystopian fiction is that the former uses fantasy while the latter uses realism wherein transformative utopian aspects are prominent. As Lancaster argues, the critical utopia serves to identify and expose the contradictions of imposed orders by challenging traditional dualistic modes of understanding political possibilities and showing the ways in which revolutionary changes can take place. This process of exposure reveals the ways in which both human needs and the possibility of autonomy are restrained by existing institutional, social and cultural arrangements (110).

The other strategy that Eliot makes excellent use of is the common novelistic practice of constructing novels on “the principle of two or several converging tales,” which reinforce one another by means of contrast and, as Bakhtin puts it, are linked by the musical principle of polyphony (1984a: 41). In several of her novels Eliot uses the metaphor of a “web” to represent the polyphonic nature of society, by which she is basically referring to intersubjectivity. Polyphony entails dialogism, as different characters represent different ideas placed in opposition and which generate the conflict that propels the novel forward. These ideas generally revolve around the key social issues of classism, sexism, and racism. For example, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858) is composed of three separate stories which are apart in time and yet make one unified narrative. Three different clerical figures and their associated women are depicted in different times in the rural English towns of Milby and Shepperton. The most abject figure, Milly in “The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton,” is sentimentalized and idealized by the narrator as an “Angel in the House,” but this is not allowed to falsify her speech or behavior, or her death in relentless abjection (Lodge: 19). Caterina in “Mr. Gilfil’s Love-Story” is abject because her gender, class and race render her *other* in English society, different from her foster parents who themselves regard her as an object. Her abjection through her love for her social superior, Captain Wybrow, is ended by his death, but when she is comforted and educated by Mr. Gilfil, and dies in childbirth, the narrative implies that she had never entirely regained the will to live.

Contrasted with these two women who die, Janet in “Janet’s Repentance,” due to her education, is depicted in revolt against prescribed female subjectivity, but at the end of the novel compromised under a different kind of misogyny.

On a larger, novelistic scale, in *Adam Bede* (1859) the stories of Adam, Dinah, Arthur, and Hetty are intertwined and reinforce one another in the rural English village of Hayslope, centering on the history of Hetty’s seduction by Arthur, her infanticide, and elimination from Hayslope and from England, a chain of events engendered by the dystopian elements of rigid class hierarchy and the misogyny that it entails. This novel subverts the traditional unexamined notion of class hierarchy and the notion of misogyny through the intersubjectivity of major characters. *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) mainly juxtaposes the lives of Maggie and Tom, and through this depicts how gender norms affect their respective *Bildungsroman* in relationship with the “oppressive narrow” society of St. Ogg’s as it is embodied in public opinion as unexamined tradition. The kind of conflict experienced by Maggie is because of the difference of the norms of the society and her physical and mental traits. In *Silas Marner* (1861) two distinctly contrasting chronotopes — Lantern Yard and Raveloe — and Silas Marner and the church society and Silas Marner and the Casses and the villagers in respective society are interwoven. The former society is structured around a special kind of religion, while the latter is a small rural village where Silas exists as a peripheral being. The questions posed by Q. D. Leavis, “Why was this stooping man [Silas Marner] alien? What country did he not belong to and why?” (14) are essentially asking the cause of his abjection and the kind of society he tried to belong to. The juxtaposition of these two places contrasts utopian and dystopian elements of respective societies prominent. In *Romola* (1863) Romola’s *Bildungsroman* is presented as a process of illusion/disillusionment with the paganism envisioned by her father and husband, and then her spiritual father’s Christianity, until she finds her own religion of humanity through intersubjectivity with people around her. As in the subsequent *Middlemarch*, three kinds of people representing different values pursue life purposes which are variously self-regarding and for their own glory or altruistic and promoting the social good. In *Felix Holt, The Radical* (1866) the lives of major characters Felix, Esther, and Harold centering on Transome Court are situated within the larger scope of Midlands England of Treby Magna at the period of the First Reform Bill (1832). The novel engages with different kinds of radicalism as utopianism, entertained by two male protagonists, but the resolution is determined by the female protagonist. The interactions of these three protagonists revolves around the “inheritance plot,” which functions to subvert the status quo and to question the validity of tradition. By such means, Eliot proposes that genuine improvement of England lies not in radicalism but in the improvement of the moral life of working men.

*Middlemarch* (1872) is a classic example of polyphony, where the separate stories of Dorothea, Lydgate, and Will are intertwined and reinforce one another, as studies in defeated utopian dreams in the relatively backward, small provincial town of Middlemarch. The kind of chronotope that Eliot creates presupposes the heroes' dreams and conflict with society they try to belong to and improve. It determines the existence of the social abject because the kind of society also determines the success or failure of the heroes' dreams and ideals. Dorothea is anxious to do great good in a world which stunts her development, confines her ardor, and renders her a failure; Lydgate aims to combine the reform of medical practice with basic research, but his ambitions wither under the pressure of provincial narrowness, combined with his own weakness; Will due to his racial otherness and outsider status is abjected and expelled from Middlemarch without fulfilling his dreams, although he does so elsewhere. In *Daniel Deronda* (1876) the tales of Daniel, Gwendolen, Mirah, and Mordecai are interconnected and influence one another. In the rigidly class, gender and race conscious society of the nineteenth-century England, a man like Daniel had to be raised in such a way as to conceal his Jewish origin, but he questions exactly that sort of uniformity of value and hierarchy that favors a certain kind of value, including its education system. Gwendolen is rendered abject by a chronotope which allows no space to women as independent thinking and acting agents. *Daniel Deronda* presupposes the view that the positivist utopia, in which all humankind would recognize and obey universal principles, was still a long way off, and that progress can only be achieved by the action of individuals upon their own national and cultural traditions.

In Eliot's novels several tales are intertwined and make the plot line thicker and more enriched — multiple voiced, multiple leveled and polyphonic. She uses this narrative polyphony to explore the interactions amongst individual characters seeking to define their place within particular societies. Characters who become abjected, whether through failure to belong or through the subjection of individual desire and aspiration to already instituted social assumptions, either spiral ever downwards as a marker of social dystopia or wrest agency from their situation to remake the self and, in some way, change the course of history. The polyphonic nature of Eliot's novels makes it possible for seemingly incompatible ideas and beliefs to coexist within one particular chronotope. The dialogic nature of all elements in Eliot's novels is manifested in the contradictory nature of statements such as "character is destiny" but "not all of it" as well as in the conflicting ideas and behaviors of characters regarding class, gender, and race hierarchy. The conflicting ideas and actions do not cancel each other out, but rather make sense in some ways, and, in the wider and deeper context, constitute the ground for dialogue between

utopian and dystopian elements and for envisaged directions for change and transformation.

This is the strength of the dialogic process, as Bakhtin comments:

Indeed, the essential dialogicality of Dostoevsky is in no way exhausted by the external, compositionally expressed dialogues carried on by the characters. *The polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through*. Dialogic relationships exist among all elements of novelistic structure; that is, they are juxtaposed contrapuntally. And this is so because dialogic relationships are a much broader phenomenon than mere rejoinders in a dialogue, laid out compositionally in the text; they are an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life — in general, everything that has meaning and significance. (Bakhtin 1984a: 40)

Eliot's extensive use of this dialogic principle makes her novels open ended, as she intimates when the narrator of *Middlemarch* begins the Finale by asserting that, "Every limit is a beginning as well as an ending" (*M*, 832).

## Thesis plan

Each chapter will deal with Eliot's novels separately as locations for the analysis of utopian and dystopian elements, focusing in particular on representations of abjection and its manifestation as the product, sign and metonymy of dystopia. Through the disclosure of dystopian elements in this way, multiplied through polyphonic stranding, Eliot's novels are able to envisage utopian possibilities. As religion is the framework of society, women are inherently positioned as marginalized beings, their subjectivity determined by religion, and their agency denied because they must conform to an imposed ideal woman figure. Because social progress hinges upon subjectivity and agency, each novel centers on the notion of abjection as a barrier to progress. That is, abjection discloses how society functions to oppress individual subjectivity and agency and thereby hinders the propelling forces of development. In Chapter I, I will investigate in *Scenes of Clerical Life* the kind of society framed by religion that defines every aspect of the social life of individuals, especially the position of women. Women who die as the ultimate object of abjection and women who compromise are presented as evidence of the society's dystopian inherencies. In Chapter II, religion is again shown to produce dystopian effects as characters in *Adam Bede* become abjected by the conflict between desire and the restraints imposed by the social hierarchy and gender norms underpinned by religion. In Chapter III the tragic confrontation of abject and collective consciousness that eliminates the abject will be discussed with reference to *The Mill on the Floss*. Kristeva's theory of abjection is shown to apply precisely to this novel. Chapter IV examines how the hero's abject state, produced by false accusation and expulsion from his community, sharply delineates utopian and dystopian possibilities in *Silas Marner*. The manifestation of abjection is isolation and detachment from intersubjectivity, so that Silas leads the life of an object (or an insect), not a subject. A utopian element is introduced as community spirit when Silas takes in the lost child, and in turn through

the child he regains his subjectivity as a social being. In this novel “truth” is early on shown to be contingent by the practice of religion in Lantern Yard — dissociated from wider social practices, this community has surrendered agency to a strict religious determinism which results only in injustice. In Chapter V — *Romola* — the hero’s journey is presented from abjection through transgression and gaining agency in the phallogentric theocratic state of Florence in the fifteenth century. A transformative utopianism emerges when the heroine drifts to a dystopian village and changes it into a utopian community where no oppressive authority guides women’s work and confines women’s ability. In addition to its subversion of oligarchy by a democratic state as proposed by the historical figure Savonarola, the novel’s recurrent motif of Carnival on the streets and a carnivalesque sense of the world is used to express feminist utopianism. Matriarchy is tentatively offered as a possible utopian model with transformative power. Here the patriarchal order is treated somewhat carnivalistically, in that all subverting and questioning notions can be viewed as carnivalistic laughter. Chapter VI explores how opposing characters’ radicalism functions as utopianism. The hero of *Felix Holt, The Radical* challenges the inherent notion of class hierarchy and how political reform is suggested as a means of achieving utopian society. The construction of utopia in England is achieved not by working men’s enfranchisement but by education and acculturation. The novel shows how Esther, an abjected female figure, gains agency through Felix’s education, transgresses the social norm, and contributes to the building of a better society. Chapter VII considers how three kinds of Utopian dreams in *Middlemarch* — Dorothea’s socialist utopia, Lydgate’s medical science and Will’s political justice — are frustrated because of social prejudice and society’s lack of a capacity to embrace different voices. It shows the kind of dystopian society that suffocates individual dreams and hinders the progress of history and the development of society. Here Eliot’s critique focuses on classism and misogyny as major dystopian elements in *Middlemarch* society, projected as a microcosm of British society. Chapter VIII examines how in *Daniel Deronda* contemporary British society is presented as a dystopia with stultifying monologic values with regard to gender, class, and race, represented by imperialism and colonization processes. The imposition of such values upon other races such as Jews is analogous with the relationship between male and female as colonizing and colonized. As an abject figure because he is of an “other” race as well as with different ideas, the hero leaves for the East to construct a utopia where Jews can build their own nation. Conversion from Christianity to Judaism is regarded as transgression, but the hero gains agency and leaves British society behind to pursue his utopian dreams. Even though Daniel’s exile is voluntary, it can still be regarded as an elimination of an unwanted contaminant from the “pure” English social body.

## Conclusion

As Harvey and Booker mention that novels are the primary location of utopian dreams, Eliot's novels express utopian impulses by exposing dystopian elements, especially in so far as her characters become abjected because they have different ideas from social norms. Abjection leads to transgression, with two further possibilities. Transgressive characters may thereby gain agency and produce change, but transgression may also be self-harming, resulting in further abjection and sometimes death. Eliot's novels examine the life of individuals in society in order to show how a better society can be achieved. Hence she is a social critic moved by a utopian vision, believing in the possible transformation and/or amelioration of society. Her strategy for searching for or formulating a utopian society is by exposing the problems of the existing society as dystopian. Religion plays an important role in making society dystopian, wherever it functions as a means to repress/oppress individual choice and agency. Abject individuals exist mainly because of the structure of society and the norms and standards imposed on those individuals. Transgressive characters question the existing values of society, but Eliot does not suggest any fixed model utopian society. Rather, her novels express utopian ideals: the exposure of the nature of existing society, aspirations for ideal society and the relationship between individuals and society. Her novels are a social indictment, a critique of existing society as dystopia, and a foreshadowing of a possible better society. She employs a dialogic method to include multiple consciousnesses, and hence it is important to pay attention to the functioning of focalization and FID in her novels. The application of focalization and FID enables her to infuse her characters with subjectivity and thus agency which can function as centrifugal forces working against the centripetal force of monologic uniform truth. Eliot's early work starts with criticism of existing society and implications for improvement, but in her later work more distinctly utopian possibilities are suggested. Reconstructing an ideal society based on the suggestions in Eliot's novels offers a model of how history and the future might be shaped if human beings were subjects, that is, speakers of these histories — if they have agency.

## CHAPTER I

### Female Subjectivity, Abjection, and Agency in *Scenes of Clerical Life*

The three short stories which comprise *Scenes of Clerical Life* revolve around abjected characters which function as indicators of profoundly dystopian elements in the society depicted. As the title suggests, religion constitutes an overarching framework for both society and story, especially in so far as it structures female subjectivity through imposed hierarchies of class, gender and race. Human subjectivity, the ideas, thoughts, and emotions based on religion, morality, education, and so on, obliges a certain involuntary behavior response that is still in keeping with the spiritual or innermost desires of the person concerned. Throughout her novels Eliot investigates female subjectivity, how it is formed, what it consists of, and how it differs from male subjectivity in the hierarchized dichotomy of self/other, subject/object, and male/female within the ideological matrix of nineteenth-century English society.

In Eliot's novels religion has a central function in the formation of male and female subjectivity and defines separate male and female roles in society. In the early novels the subjectivity of female characters is shaped by Christianity, in terms of its moral and spiritual precepts and its everyday social formations and structures. Perhaps the most notable example is Milly Barton in "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton." Milly's subjection to a subjectivity determined by the Christian society she inhabits constitutes her as a negative example of female subjectivity, a forerunner of Eliot's many female characters represented in the process of struggling to form a strong subjectivity within a hierarchical society which tries to render them merely as objects rather than subjects, silencing and marginalizing them into the domestic sphere. Women accept themselves as other; they are not the primary focus for humanity; their position is not in a reciprocal process of hierarchization relative to men. Women are men's projections and they are the silent objects of the male gaze. As Carolyn Heilbrun comments, women have behaved "not as an oppressed class struggling to overcome their oppression, but as a caste, identifying with their oppressors, internalizing the oppressors' views of them" (97), that is, as "women misogynists." Most of the time women are more patriarchal than men as a result. Patriarchal ideas are transmitted notably from mothers to daughters, for example, from Milly to Patty Barton, from aunts to nieces, that is, from women to women. According to Hélène Cixous, women have been "kept in the dark about [themselves], led into self-disdain by the great arm of parental-conjugal phallocentrism" (1976: 246). She also comments men have created an "antinarcissism" (1976: 248) in which women have languished.

I suggest that Eliot's seemingly compromising closures, which disappoint many feminist critics,<sup>1</sup> are based on the dialogic principles identified by Bakhtin. Her writing manifests much of feminist awareness and ideas; however, she does not believe in the absolute validity of the feminist idea. According to Bakhtin, disruption, subversion, and transgression are a process, not an end. Eliot does not advocate the superiority of women to men. If she subverts the order and insists on the superiority of feminine traits, she admits the binary opposition advocated by patriarchal law, which is ironic and self-contradictory. For example, class, gender, and race are interrelated issues in all her works and so Felix's decision to remain "a working man," or a member of a lower social order, in *Felix Holt, The Radical* is consistent with Bakhtinian dialogism in that Felix does not believe in the superiority of the middle-class or aristocracy; whatever superiority or special quality a person may have is innate, but not bred or endemic to a whole social group.

Eliot's awareness of the systemic processes which relegate women to secondary social status is manifested in her grasp and usage of the narrative principle of focalization.<sup>2</sup> The relationship between subjectivity and focalization is crucial because to represent a character without endowing that character with the capacity to focalize renders her as principally an object of narratorial construction and gaze. In other words, a character who does not focalize cannot evidence a fully evolved subjectivity. Three female protagonists in the three stories of *Scenes of Clerical Life* reflect aspects of this development. Milly Barton in "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton" does not focalize at all and her feelings and thoughts remain opaque throughout the story. Readers do not have any access to her inner thoughts or the motivations of her actions, and consequently see no possibility of a raised consciousness or an edifying ideal. This may imply that Milly does not have any awareness or contrary thoughts about her plight as a domestic slave. Only the male narrator comments, judges and generalizes her virtue as female destiny, in the traditional denigratory sense, as if hopelessness and such destiny have to be intertwined. In contrast, Caterina Sarti in "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story" is an agent of focalization, but her represented thoughts and perceptions serve to emphasize the nature of her subjection within the patriarchal matrix. Finally, the subjectivity of Janet Dempster in "Janet's Repentance," is portrayed in such a way that her moments of introspection and perception function to reinforce her repositioning from within an undesirable form of the patriarchal matrix to a

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<sup>1</sup> In "Why Feminist Critics Are Angry with George Eliot?" Zelda Austin attacks Eliot for not suggesting exemplary female figures like Eliot herself.

<sup>2</sup> Focalization is marked in the text by such signals as verbs whose semantic node is thought or perception; slipping between narration and various forms of indirect speech/thought; and embedding within narrative of registers otherwise associated with a particular character.



desirable form. On many occasions she questions and laments her situation and once revolts against her husband, but lacks a course of action which would enable a subversion of patriarchy. As in the later novels, the awareness of a need for change is tied to the religiousness of the female protagonist. That is, the more the female characters are interpellated by religious belief and practice, the less they are conscious of their plight and the unfair situation they are in compared with male members of society. The awareness of the problems the female characters face is crucial to the positive realization of subjectivity. The more they are aware of their plight and predicament, the more resistant they become, although their social structure militates against assertion of a strong female subjectivity. In Eliot's stories, therefore, there is a nascent pattern of monologic and dialogic discourses.

Throughout the stories in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, the situation of the female characters and the range of their possibilities are contained within a narratorial assumption that the patriarchal matrix is conterminous with sociality. Thus Milly Barton is praised and the Countess Czerlaski is condemned, but both judgments are grounded in a single narratorial voice. When Caterina Sarti impulsively decides on a course of violent action, it is portrayed melodramatically and hence as not womanly by a male narrator ("GL," *SCL*, 212), in a narrative context where elements of multiple focalization cohere to reproduce the matrix. In "Janet's Repentance" Janet Dempster, Mr. Dempster and Mr. Tryan and other village members are all focalizers, though their views are presented without much exogenous judgment or generalization by the narrator. The quality of writing, capturing the drama, is more important here to the presentation of dramatic subjectivity. The narrator's commentary is one of the many voices in the story, which combine in a dialogic interrogation of social assumptions. The effect of Janet's self-awareness prompts readers neither to acquiesce in her plight, nor to demand that she stoop to her husband's tyranny, but to hope for another possibility. The paradox for female subjectivity is that the other possibility lies in abandoning her old religion and accepting Mr. Tryan's Evangelicalism. The change enables her to see things from a different perspective, without the previous constraints that had limited her choices and opportunities as a female, but what she has taken on is another form of gendered female behavior.

Eliot's strategy in *Scenes of Clerical Life* is to proceed dialogically. She expresses the inadequacy or possible distortion of truth when refracted through the medium of the artist's mind (*AB*, Ch. 17). This medium, that is, the perception in the author's mind about life, makes the novel itself one of the voices searching for truth in life. At this early stage of her writing Eliot strives for dialogic effect by showing readers what happens in society without direct comments on the part of the author, which is the trait of monologic novels. She depicts three female

protagonists' lives in the form of three stories, where narrators are male and the implied reader female. The narrators assume patriarchal modes of thinking, define ideal female life in terms of a domestic environment, and place women in subjection to their fathers, husbands and sons or any male members of the family or community. However, as Eliot admits in Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*, her perception of life can be false, and so her later novels become more dialogic in nature. She is offering a forum for discussion, in an attempt to discuss subjectivity in an objective light. Her attempt at fairness and impartiality demonstrates that she accepted restrictions and goals male writers of the time did not feel compelled to accept.

A crucial issue in the discussion of Eliot's novels is the tension between the tenet of Christian altruism and the possibility of female subjective agency because assertions of selfhood contradict the tenet of altruism.<sup>3</sup> Christianity as a whole emphasizes sacrifice of individual desire and the living of life for others at the expense of one's own life: one's life should be sacrificed for the glory of God and his kingdom. However, for women in a theocentric and patriarchal society sacrifice for God can be translated into sacrifice for the life and benefit of men. Women are regarded as a means of happiness for men as Milly Barton's life is represented as being completely absorbed in Amos Barton's. She works from morning till night only for her husband and children. The narrator and villagers compliment her as an ideal wife and mother and thus an ideal woman. The criteria for an ideal woman stop there. She does not have any idea of formulating and fulfilling desires of her own, and in fact she dies because she does not care for herself. The extremity of this self-sacrifice is her uncomplaining acquiescence in the extra housework caused by the over-extended stay of her husband's friend the Countess. Worse still, she maintains this behavior despite community insinuations that the Countess is Amos's mistress and the invidious position into which she is thus interpellated. Milly's subjectivity is formed by the Bible, especially the Pauline precepts of obedience of wives to their husbands, and it is transmitted to her eldest daughter Patty on her deathbed. Again Patty's life is absorbed in her father's life, that is, she lives for the sake of her father and her siblings. At the ground of the relationships between Amos and the various women in his life is the contrast between those attitudes and behaviors which are self-regarding and those which are other-regarding. The contrast adumbrates a general principle which runs through the three stories in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, and which is central to the constructions of subjectivity therein (that is, both female and

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<sup>3</sup> Subjective agency refers to a subjective formation that posits the "I" as an agent (nondetermined, and capable of intentional engagement with society), in contrast with an idea that people are passive victims of historical and institutional change.

male subjectivities). Eliot's overarching moral perspective privileges other-regardingness, but her narrators consistently envisage this differently for male and female characters.

Janet Dempster is the first of Eliot's female protagonists to embody the possibility of agency. Eliot implies this by assigning her a superior education, but her choices remain limited, and she marries because there is no better option available other than being a governess. Since Dempster is extremely patriarchal, with Janet's subjectivity and pride it is natural that many problems ensue, and Janet resorts to alcohol. Christian marriage requires obedience, sacrifice and patience on the part of the female only. If female figures like Milly completely subordinate and suppress their own desires and feelings of jealousy, the marriage survives. On the other hand, if female partners in marriage demand their own rights and the freedom to respect themselves as sovereign individuals, the marriage ends, just as Janet once resists her husband and is expelled into the dark street at night. She had usually come back and reconciled with her husband, whenever they had quarreled in the past; Dempster thought that there would be again a similar attempt at reconciliation on this last occasion. It is usually females who play the part of apologist, stooping and abandoning their sense of self-worth to save the marriage. In the scene which closes Chapter 4, in which Dempster beats Janet, female suffering is paralleled with the suffering of Christ as the narrative juxtaposes a portrait of Janet's mother, which hangs above the mantelpiece in the room of her degradation, and a hand-drawn head of the Christ crowned with thorns hanging above the mantelpiece in Mrs. Raynor's house. The effect of this juxtaposition is not, however, to constitute Janet as a female Christ figure, but to position her suffering within the long history of the patriarchal matrix. Thus the conjunction of drunken and brutal husband, the patient, enduring Christ, and the witnessing female gaze which affirms resignation to the unfolding scene, impart a sense of inevitability to Janet's experience, implying a connectedness and causality lying deeper than the day's events which are the catalyst for the particular example. Nevertheless, Janet's resigned suffering at her husband's hands and the narrator's rhetorical outburst addressed to Janet's mother — "Was it for this you suffered a mother's pangs ...?" ("JR," *SCL*, 285) — do pose the question whether a marriage which requires such intense self-immolation is worth saving. The question posed here is an indirect challenge to the Christian tenet of sacrifice of one's own life for others. If love is mutual, sacrifices of this type would not be required. Further, according to orthodox patriarchal expectations governing courtship and marriage rituals, when a couple is in love before marriage, women are presumed to have power over men; however, once they are married, all power is to be surrendered to men, and "the proud consciousness of power and beauty" are supplanted by "heart-piercing griefs" ("JR," *SCL*, 284).

*Scenes of Clerical Life* consists of three stories in each of which the female protagonist represents female destiny in an oppressive patriarchal society. In each story it is tacitly admitted that religion contributes to social formation and demarcates the roles of different social classes and genders. As the title suggests, religious figures such as the Rev. Amos Barton, Mr. Gilfil, and Mr. Tryan constitute the pivot of each story in that they are related with female protagonists in a crucial way.

Eliot, as an implied author, employs male narrators, adopts male points of view, and addresses female readers.<sup>4</sup> This is part of her assumed persona, but it is also part of her purpose in peopling her forum for discussion. Since a work of art expresses an artist's perceptions, it seems inevitable that Eliot's own worldview permeates the stories; the narrators' comments tend to be ironic or sarcastic, at least in part because her own views are being refracted through male voices. And also she knows too well English misogynistic culture that disregards and belittles female work, especially female writing. Her way of coping with these problems is to employ male narrators in all of her novels, but to transform their points of view so that they develop from misogynistic to androgynous. The narrators in *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* condemn and despise female traits, with the exception of the narrator of "Janet's Repentance." However, later androgynous narrators in *Felix Holt*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda* show sympathy and empathy to female characters. That is, male narrators assume strong authority to present truth to the reader, whether presenting misogynistic ideas in her early novels or androgynous in her later. Their authority is also gradually diluted and becomes only one of the voices in the novels along with strong feminine voices.

### **Misogynistic Women as Victims of Patriarchy: "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton"**

The representation of Milly Barton demonstrates how in her first work of fiction Eliot was already feeling her way towards a form of critical utopianism. As Nancy Cervetti comments, Eliot here describes woman's situation not in the utopian sense of how things "should be" but rather in terms of what "should not be" (354). The time and location of this story is eighteenth-century England, but the milieu of misogyny is identical with that of Eliot's nineteenth-century England. The values of Eliot's new industrial society are superimposed on an agrarian society,

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<sup>4</sup> We know the narrator is male because, for example, of the way he positions himself as a community insider: "Several of us had just assumed coat-tails ... it is the way with us men" ("JR," *SCL*, 288). The narratees are female: "Here I am aware that I have run the risk of alienating all my refined lady-readers, and utterly annihilating any curiosity they may have felt to know the details of Mr Gilfil's love-story" ("GL," *SCL*, 127), followed by an actual address to his readers: "But in the first place, dear ladies,..." ("GL," *SCL*, 128).

and shown to have cogent explanatory force. Misogynistic ideas are expressed in the narrator's comments, in dialogues between misogynists, and by female misogynists who are ingrained with the ideas of patriarchy. Barbro Almqvist Norbelie argues that Mrs. Patten's circle in "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton," Mrs. Linnet's in "Janet's Repentance," and the Irwine sisters in *Adam Bede* constitute a "gallery of pictures of women's lives in an oppressive society" (5). She suggests that a conspicuous quality in the female community is its "narrow-mindedness," which exists in family and home as well as in society; Eliot calls it a voice of the "world's wife" and "world's bride" (MF, 619) in *The Mill on the Floss*. Thus Mrs. Patten's narrow-mindedness has come about because she is a woman who has completely assimilated the patriarchal values of her time. Under patriarchal rule and convention, her happiness is dependent less on any active contribution she makes than on her regard of herself as a good wife because she "never aggravated [her] husband" ("AB," SCL, 48). What she reveals about herself in Chapter 1, under the narrator's mordant gaze, is a life lived entirely under self-regard and self-interest, and she proves in this to be typical of the little community gathered in her house.

The story presents three conspicuous victims of patriarchy and its oppressive and narrow notions of womanhood: Milly Barton, Countess Czerlaski and Patty Barton. Their subjectivity is formed rigidly by patriarchal notions of womanhood, which demand that women should be submissive, sacrificing, and meek, with no resisting opinions. The subjectivity of the main female character, Milly Barton, is shaped only in connection with the relationship with her husband and children. As the narrator comments:

A loving woman's world lies within the four walls of her own home; and it is only through her husband that she is in any electric communication with the world beyond. ("AB," SCL, 99-100)

The narrator is authoritative and defining the values on which Milly Barton's subjectivity operates. He presents the truth as a matter-of-course statement and defines the female position in society. Milly is thus depicted as a specimen of "soothing, unspeakable charm of gentle womanhood! which supersedes all acquisitions, all accomplishments" ("AB," SCL, 54). Countess Czerlaski's social position posits her differently because of her pretensions to rank and because she exploits her foreignness to gain some behavioral latitude, but society nevertheless imposes idleness and financial dependence on her. Her social position enables her to get some education, albeit it is shallow. Her mind is not developed for inquiry or to challenge the social values which interpellate her. Patty Barton is also an example of patriarchal victimization in that she inherits her mother's destiny literally, except that she is not married and serves her father instead of her husband.

Through the male narrator's perception women's nature is presented thus:

A woman always knows where she is utterly powerless, and shuns a coldly satirical eye as she would shun a Gorgon. ("AB," *SCL*, 79)

It is within the conventions of women's lives to be submissive; they often feel aggravated by attempts to redirect their ways of thinking, or feel threatened and become hostile towards the voice that seeks to change them.

### **Subjectivity and Narrative Technique**

The representation of female subjectivity is shaped by narratorial stance, by a dialogue constructed between the narrator and his narratees about probability, realism and literary convention, and by the distribution of focalization amongst the characters. The effect of these narrative devices is to present a monologic view of woman.

The male narrator directly addresses the reader as "you," evoking the convention that a narrator is like an oral storyteller, present at the time of reading and eager to involve his audience in the process of narrative production. In practice, though, he plays out the role of badgering and cajoling his narratees into yielding to his authoritative "true pictures" ("AB," *SCL*, 97) of the state of affairs. He contrasts his own concern for the commonplace and everyday with his narratees' artificial and literary expectations about what constitutes narrative interest and social significance:

THE Rev. Amos Barton, whose sad fortunes I have undertaken to relate was, you perceive, in no respect an ideal or exceptional character; and perhaps I am doing a bold thing to bespeak your sympathy on behalf of a man who was so very far from remarkable, — a man whose virtues were not heroic, and who had no undetected crime within his breast; who had not the slightest mystery hanging about him, but was palpably and unmistakably commonplace; who was not even in love, but had that complaint favourably many years ago. "An utterly uninteresting character!" I hear a lady reader exclaim — Mrs. Farthingale, for example, who prefers the ideal in fiction; to whom tragedy means ermine tippets, adultery, and murder; and comedy, the adventures of some personage who is quite a "character". ("AB," *SCL*, 80)

In this self-reflexive turn, which sets aside the literary conventions evoked by "exceptional," "remarkable," "heroic," "mystery," by the expectation that characters must be racked by guilt or love, and by the generic contrasts of tragedy and comedy, the narrator leads his narratees, and the implicit readers beyond them, towards a specific reading subject position. Not only will their interest be turned towards the "commonplace" but they will also accept the narrator's construction of what constitutes that commonplace. Crucially, this construction will hinge on particular representations of female subjectivity.

The narrator enables only limited access to the inner lives, perceptions and feelings of female character. That is, there is minimal focalization by female characters and only occasional use of represented thought. Focalization is mainly the domain of the male narrator, and it is in the light of his perceptions that both women's and men's natures are presented. The thoughts

and perceptions of the characters are expressed mimetically through conversation or represented thought, especially free indirect thought. *Scenes of Clerical Life* differs in this respect from Eliot's later novels, where a greater proportion of character focalization is found, including female as well as male characters. A central aspect of how Milly's subjectivity is portrayed in this story is that she is never a focalizer. Rather, she is constructed within the story's patriarchal community by the narrator's masculine perceptions and judgments of her, and by conversations about her amongst other characters. The narrator judges and anticipates readers' resistance to his picture of abject femininity, and himself defines the values of her self-effacement (see, for example, his droll explanation of why she is an appropriate marriage partner for Amos, so patently her inferior).

Amos's thoughtlessness and lack of sensitivity towards Milly's hardships pervade the story, amounting to callousness. He is markedly selfish and so absorbed in his own work — a trait which places his standing as a Christian cleric in an ironical light — that he neither shows tenderness of heart nor has the time to find out how overworked she is or how frail in health. His solitary dialogue with the dead Milly after twenty years ("AB," *SCL*, 114-15) shows that time and experience without her make him realize his loss only in vain. His regret cannot recuperate years of inaction, inconsiderateness and oppression. The narrator earlier in the story comments that Amos is an "affectionate husband" but he adds "in his way": he values Milly much, as his best treasure ("AB," *SCL*, 55). However, a treasure is a useful thing, of course; if Milly were not useful, she would not be valued. Amos's realization of his past inadequacy constitutes, for him, his greatest moment of self-knowledge:

Amos had been an affectionate husband, and while Milly was with him he was never visited by the thought that perhaps his sympathy with her was not quick and watchful enough; but now he re-lived all their life together, with that terrible keenness of memory and imagination which bereavement gives, and he felt as if his very love needed a pardon for its poverty and selfishness. ("AB," *SCL*, 111)

His insight here, however, is not an insight into Milly's nature and subjectivity. Milly is nowhere a focalizer, so readers comprehend her subjectivity only through the narrator's comments and the perceptions of other characters, rather than through dialogue with other characters or access to her inner life. The outcome of this representation is that her subjectivity is defined as "Christian duty" ("AB," *SCL*, 100), especially as a curate's wife. She is quintessentially the "Angel of the House," effaced and self-effacing, subordinated and trapped (and see Adams 1996: 42).

### **"The Essential Fitness of Things": Construction of Female Subjectivity in "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story"**

By drawing on the familiar pattern of the blighted love triangle, with a female character at the apex of the triangle, "Mr Gilfil's Love-Story" is able to examine the powerlessness and lack

of agency of a female whose subjectivity is narratively constructed not merely by her positioning as an object of two different kinds of desire, but also by the extent to which male attitudes towards her are determined by issues of religion, gender, socio-economic class, and race. The opening paragraph places the narration some time after the death of the story's eponymous character, and in reflecting on appropriate signs of mourning leads up to the introduction of a phrase which has systemic resonance for both story and theme: "the essential fitness of things." The story offers a different version of female subjection from the other two stories in *Scenes of Clerical Life* because the self-imaging attributed to the society depicted positions its central female character, Caterina, as radically *other*. Her confined, and brief, life is throughout shaped by what the characters who wield social power, and particularly the three main male characters, deem appropriate for her. Narratively, her attempt to resist the social rigidity of the perceived "fitness of things" is represented as febrile and melodramatic, despite the perception that she has been treated unjustly.

At the end of Chapter 1, the narrator asserts his possession of the knowledge and insight requisite for telling this story, as distinct from the gossip and misinformation attributed to one of the characters, Mrs. Patten. Implicitly, then, male knowledge is privileged over female knowledge. This becomes still clearer when the address of the male narrator to female readers in the story discloses particular assumptions about female subjectivity. He assumes an audience of "refined lady readers" ("GL," *SCL*, 127) whose primary interest lies in gossip about things like love stories and other facile matters, shallow as they are, and who are easily alienated by discussion of spiritual doctrine, for example, which is considered a male topic. The narrator concludes that "feminine ambitions" are "small" ("GL," *SCL*, 129), confined as they are to the domestic environment.

These assumptions about female subjectivity are then reflected within the story in its principal female character, Caterina. An alien from another country, but raised now within a different religion and culture, she is haphazardly subjected to the social formations of English society. It is nevertheless suggested that instead of being a socially-produced subject she is inherently a child of nature, a "little monkey" ("GL," *SCL*, 136), and has "the eyes of a fawn," which are "large and dark" ("GL," *SCL*, 133), and show intense desire. On many occasions, Eliot describes her female protagonists as gypsies. Gypsy is a metaphor, among many others used by her, to denote their otherness, their unconventional thoughts and behavior. In Caterina's case, the metaphor functions to highlight Wybrow's advantage and Caterina's disadvantage in society, especially when their appearances are contrasted in terms of "the youthful grace of Anthony and Caterina, in all the striking contrast of their colouring — he, with his exquisite



outline and rounded fairness, like an Olympian god; she, dark and tiny, like a gypsy changeling” (“GL,” *SCL*, 146).

Positioned by the text in these ways, with little education and no talents except musical ability and a talent “for loving,” Caterina is totally unprepared for a social discourse which assumes that women must experience love, but must also experience it principally in an other-regarding way. Her desire to love and to be loved by Captain Wybrow is natural, but he induces her to love him for the sake of his own pleasure and self-gratification. His self-regardingness and rigid loyalty to a class hierarchy forbid him to contemplate her as his partner. He is thus an example of conservative patriarchy, seeing no reason to question the established behavior that has characterized his life. To him Caterina is a pet, a different species, not a complete human being, although this is only an extreme case of how he regards women more generally. For Caterina unhappiness results from the conflict between her own desire and that of Wybrow. She is represented as too full of passion and devoid of reason so that her untrammelled subjectivity takes charge of her. In contrast, throughout the story Wybrow is depicted as an object of contempt. The weak heart which ends his life functions also as a metonym for his inability to feel strong emotion and his failure to imagine that another’s concerns and feelings might ever take precedence over his own.

In contrast, the love felt for Caterina by Mr. Gilfil includes an other-regarding component. Thus throughout Caterina’s period of turmoil when Wybrow and Miss Assher are courting at Cheverel Manor, he is able to subordinate his own unrequited love for Caterina to a genuine concern for her welfare and well-being. The story leaves no doubt that he is a better man than Wybrow — physically, mentally, morally and emotionally — but his inferior social position places him on the margins of his own life, as it were. This marginality is emphasized in the story’s opening frame, where he is depicted as an affable old man whose feelings, and indeed the very quality of his life, are shut up in the unvisited room in his house which memorializes his short marriage with Caterina.

As suggested above, in “Mr. Gilfil’s Love-Story,” like other stories in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, the story is mediated through the presuppositions of the male narrator. The male narrator is the one who perceives and speaks, but at key moments — such as Caterina’s first night of anguish at Wybrow’s betrayal of her, or Wybrow’s self-contemplation in the mirror in Chapter 10 — sporadic character focalization is employed to produce ironic, heightened, or even melodramatic effects. The slippage between narrator and character perception in the following passage, when Caterina decides to kill Wybrow, simultaneously expresses the strength of her emotion and distances readers from that emotion by employing the discourse of melodrama:

See how she rushes noiselessly, like a pale meteor, along the passages and up the gallery stairs! Those gleaming eyes, those bloodless lips, and swift silent tread, make her look like the incarnation of a fierce purpose, rather than a woman. The midday sun is shining on the armour in the gallery, making mimic suns on bossed sword-hilts and the angles of polished breastplates. Yes, there are sharp weapons in the gallery. There is a dagger in that cabinet; she knows it well. And as a dragon-fly wheels in its flight to alight for an instant on a leaf, she darts to the cabinet, takes out the dagger, and thrusts it into her pocket. ("GL," *SCL*, 211-12)

In the first sentence the narrator directly addresses the reader as if he engages a private conversation with her. The repeated deictic "those" in the second sentence also indicates direct speech addressed to the reader; but the latter half sentence, that is, the predicate, is a statement, which is colored by the narrator's judgment of Caterina. That it is not womanly to kill her lover out of revenge or anger is grounded on the contrastive presupposition that it would be appropriate manly behavior to do the same. The third sentence begins as a narrative statement, but when it reaches "mimic sun" it is the character, Caterina, who is the site of perception, a shift which begins a series of slippages between character and narrator focalization, ranging from instances of free direct thought in the fourth sentence and the first clause of the fifth sentence, through free indirect thought (second clause), to the narration of the sixth sentence in which the (mock-)epic simile underscores the melodramatic tone. The use of present tense indicates the immediacy and intensity of Caterina's emotions as the narrator and the character are brought into close alignment. This process of shifting focalization between the narrator and Caterina closes the narrative distance between them, but the melodramatic element pulls the distance back again, directing attention towards the gendered nature and quality of the narrator's judgments.

### **Chronotope: Social Framework**

The position of events and participants in physical and social time and space is specified when the narrator sets the story in "the evening of the 21st of June 1788" and introduces "two ladies ... carrying out their cushions and embroidery, and seating themselves to work on the lawn in front of Cheverel Manor" ("GL," *SCL*, 132). Within that late eighteenth-century, aristocratic time-space framework Caterina is shown to be confined within and by her chronotope. She is born into a tradition of Catholicism and lower class culture and her social position has been determined by her class, gender, and race. Once she has been relocated within a late eighteenth-century, aristocratic, English chronotope, she is defined by her minority status with respect to religion, gender and class. When transplanted into the traditions of English society she is treated as a pet, "monkey," and gypsy, not eligible as an adopted heiress, and therefore, not able to be educated properly. In the passage dealing with her adoption Eliot's narrator depicts the limits of the English aristocrat's Christian charity:

Why should they not take the child to England, and bring her up there? They had been married twelve years, yet Cheverel Manor was cheered by no children's voices, and the old house would be all the better

for a little of that music. Besides, it would be a Christian work to train this little Papist into a good Protestant, and graft as much English fruit as possible on the Italian stem. (“GL,” *SCL*, 151-52) Put to a test, they can show a little charity, but they can never sacrifice their position and be inclusive. They believe in hierarchies of class, gender, and race. First, Lady Cheverel qualifies her image of the Manor at last “cheered by ... children’s voices” by the functional proselytizing of “a good Christian work to train this little Papist into a good Protestant” (the “little Papist,” incidentally, is still “not three years old”). Then Lord Cheverel confirms this restricted perspective:

They were much too English and aristocratic to think of anything so romantic. No! the child would be brought up at Cheverel Manor as a protégée, to be ultimately useful, perhaps, in sorting worsteds, keeping accounts, reading aloud, and otherwise supplying the place of spectacles when her ladyship’s eye should wax dim. (“GL,” *SCL*, 152)

The narrator here satirizes the narrow social (and human) perspective of Lord Cheverel, especially by the strategy of shifting from narration in the first sentence to a mode which echoes the free direct speech of Lord Cheverel and hence places “in his own mouth” the merely functional role envisaged for Caterina. That Cheverel has no concept of the gap between possibility and intention is underscored by the inadvertent contrast between what might be entailed by “protégée” and what is intended.

Caterina — female, foreign, and lower class — is thus triply marginalized by a chronotope predicated on patriarchy and privilege. The way the story has ordered its information has a strategic function in defining this chronotope. Before readers learn of the events which originally brought Caterina to Cheverel Manor, she is already depicted as engaged in hopeless struggle, though the metaphor of a caged bird used to introduce this also has wider implications for women’s struggle in patriarchal society:

The poor bird was beginning to flutter and vainly dash its soft breast against the hard iron bars of the inevitable, and we see too plainly the danger, if that anguish should go on heightening instead of being allayed, that the palpitating heart may be fatally bruised. (“GL,” *SCL*, 147)

“The hard iron bars” are the society’s norms and regulations and tacit traditions, a rigid framework. The bird or woman that does not accept submission or captivity is likely to destroy itself or herself in any attempt to escape.

Lady Cheverel is also a product of patriarchy in that she has “too religious a view of a wife’s duties, and too profound a deference for her husband to regard submission as a grievance” (“GL,” *SCL*, 159). She does not entirely approve of Miss Assher because she finds “[Miss Assher’s] occasional air of authority towards Captain Wybrow” (“GL,” *SCL*, 194) offensive. The narrator continues to depict Lady Cheverel as “a proud woman who had learned to submit, carries all her pride to the reinforcement of her submission, and looks down with severe superiority on all feminine assumption as ‘unbecoming’ ” (“GL,” *SCL*, 194). She has turned

submission into a strength, an admirable quality suggesting strength and dignity; it could be said her subjective demiurge is completely corrupted.

The complex of race, class and religion which informs the chronotope that shapes the assumptions of the Cheverels has disastrous implications for Caterina. Raised as an elevated servitor, her musical talent cultivated in order to entertain the Cheverels, she is denied any possibility of developing subjective agency. The narrator says that “her singing was what she could do best and it was her one point of superiority” (“GL,” *SCL*, 143), but she is not given more “elaborate education” (“GL,” *SCL*, 159). Crucially, the narrator attributes to her only one talent apart from her music, a talent “in loving,” which is indeed “[the] supreme talent of hers” (“GL,” *SCL*, 160). She is thus rendered vulnerable because her nature is not enabled to mature enough to control her passion. This disabling lack of agency is reflected in the narrator’s misogynistically-grounded comment that “a passionate women’s love is always overshadowed by fear” (“GL,” *SCL*, 162) and its implicit disclosure that if Caterina had had more education and more agency, and the opportunity to fashion a firm subjectivity for herself, she may have had more chance to see through the motivation and the purpose of Wybrow, and hence her love and life would not have been wasted.

### **Female Positioning and Social “Duty” in “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story”**

Caterina is thus an abjected figure because she is ambiguously positioned in relation to the society within which she has been raised. Because her abjection is over-determined — by gender, race, class and economic dependency — she can make no agential response to Wybrow’s rejection of her love. In turn, Wybrow’s careless treatment of her is born out of his own solipsism, the systemic misogyny of their society, and a concept of social duty dedicated to preserving existing hierarchies of wealth and power. Through the character representations of this story, Eliot is drawing on the mode of sentimental fiction to explore “human relations that rest on the deep emotional sympathy of affection” (“GL,” *SCL*, 236), and beyond that the relations between empathic emotions and moral behavior. Caterina, having formed an intent to kill Wybrow, concludes that these are incompatible, and that her powerful emotions have made her “wicked” and “deceitful” (“GL,” *SCL*, 236). Wybrow is incapable of either empathic emotions or moral behavior, whereas Gilfil, his rival for Caterina’s love, manifests both to a high degree. Wybrow’s lack is shared by the other characters of his class, perhaps most obviously in the way Lady Cheverel and Sir Christopher, having taken up the orphaned Caterina, keep her in a state of perpetual childhood. There is an implication here that, at the end of the eighteenth century (the main events of the story occur between 1788 and 1790), gentility was no longer the

prerogative of the aristocracy but a quality attainable by anyone capable of a deep response to suffering and joy. A disproportionate comparison between the French Revolution and Caterina's emotional turmoil intimates a deeper significance in the story.

Wybrow himself lacks agency, principally because he offers no resistance to his interpellation as the heir of a baronet. His inability to engage in intersubjective relations, and his total incapability for feeling love ("GL," *SCL*, 164), are aspects of a personality characterized by terms such as "indolent" ("GL," *SCL*, 135, 136), "languid" ("GL," *SCL*, 170), and "lassitude" ("GL," *SCL*, 191). The portrait that introduces him does so in negative terms that invite reader antipathy by indicating that he is both effete and solipsistic, and the effect is then clinched by a retrospective turn which suggests that both the portrait and framing scene have been presented through the focalization of Maynard Gilfil ("GL," *SCL*, 135-36). Gilfil's own rugged health (here) and moral superiority (throughout the story) function in conjunction with narrator perspective and Caterina's focalization to construct a satirical depiction of Wybrow's lack of compassion or human kindness.

The society's systemic misogyny is encapsulated in a scene immediately following the introduction of Wybrow, when the widow of one of Sir Christopher's tenants begs an audience to petition for permission to retain her late husband's lease and continue farming in order to avoid total impoverishment. Sir Christopher's response is grounded in his misogynistic assumption that women are governed only by negative qualities:

"You'll be obliged to have some managing man, who will either cheat you out of your money or wheedle you into marrying him."

"O, your honour, I was never that sort o' woman, an' nobody has known it on me."

"Very likely not, because you were never a widow before. A woman's always silly enough, but she's never quite as great a fool as she can be until she puts on a widow's cap. Now, just ask yourself how much the better you will be for staying on your farm at the end of four years, when you've got through your money, and let your farm run down, and are in arrears for half your rent; or, perhaps, have got some great hulky fellow for a husband, who swears at you and kicks your children." ("GL," *SCL*, 138)

Sir Christopher is a stern patriarchal character who has a condescending and patronizing attitude toward women and lower-class people. His attitude is infused with his sense of arrogant and blunt superiority towards all his social inferiors, but is especially disrespectful of women. He is convinced that a woman is unable to look after her own affairs; and any understanding she has of them he dismisses as insignificant. In his insensitivity, Sir Christopher refuses the role of charitable benefactor the scene offers him, and the concomitant manifesting of empathic emotions and moral behavior, choosing instead to break up a home and inflict hardship on a woman and her children.

At the other end of the spectrum of male attitudes represented in the story, Gilfil's deeply abiding love for Caterina is still strongly patriarchal. Even though the narrator praises it as

if it is nurturing motherly love — “In the love of a brave and faithful man there is always a strain of maternal tenderness; he gives out again those beams of protecting fondness which were shed on him as he lay on his mother’s knee” (“GL,” *SCL*, 230) — the praise is a comment on Gilfil’s thoughts in which he anticipates finally possessing Caterina’s love, cherishing her as he might a frail, injured bird. When he sits all night by her bed, the scene is structured around the symbiosis of female suffering and male sympathy, under the male gaze. Because Caterina has been kept in a child-like state and lacks mental and emotional maturity, she does not have any firm subjectivity. She needs some (male) mentor like Mr. Gilfil to help her endure life’s crises. In Eliot’s novels women suffer in love affairs much more than do men. They are shown to be victims of betrayal and deceit, and the social order is interpreted, or even made, in favor of men. For example, men’s promiscuousness is overlooked, while women’s is condemned. Wybrow cannot “love” Caterina, he only “likes” her. The victimization of women in love affairs provides one foundation of patriarchal society. Women should be passive, and uncomplaining, or they risk being condemned as unwomanly. Eliot shows with Caterina’s decline in health, wounded as she is by her heartbreak, how narrowly oppressed women are, with little scope for changing the circumstances that force them to submit to male control. Her rival, Beatrice Assher, is adjudged a virago by both Wybrow and Lady Cheverel because she is outspoken and assertive. In pointing out that Wybrow’s behavior is unacceptable, she is the prototype of a more agential female subjectivity. She demands equal partnership and standing with Wybrow:

“I decline any share in the affection of a man who forfeits my respect by duplicity.” ...

“Why should there be anything you are unable to explain? An honourable man will not be placed in circumstances which he cannot explain to the woman he seeks to make his wife. . . .” ...

“Now, Beatrice dear,” he said imploringly, “can you not understand that there are things a man doesn’t like to talk about — secrets that he must keep for the sake of others, and not for his own sake? Everything that relates to myself you may ask me, but do not ask me to tell other people’s secrets. Don’t you understand me?”

“O yes,” said Miss Assher scornfully, “I understand. Whenever you make love to a woman — that is her secret, which you are bound to keep for her....”

“Confound it, Beatrice! you’ll drive me mad. Can a fellow help a girl’s falling in love with him? such things are always happening, but men don’t talk of them. These fancies will spring up without the slightest foundation, especially when a woman sees few people; they die out again when there is no encouragement....” ...

“You mean to say, then, that Miss Sarti is in love with you, without your ever having made love to her.” ...

“... You naughty queen, you,... You are only tormenting me, to prove your power over me. But don’t be too cruel; for you know they say I have another heart-disease beside love, and these scenes bring on terrible palpitations.” (“GL,” *SCL*, 187-88, ellipses mine)

Miss Assher has authority over her wooer because she has equal status, possesses money, power, and beauty, and is not in love with him. Hence she is different from Caterina in almost every way. She can pose probing, logical questions, while Caterina’s character is made too emotionally

vulnerable by her love, and she is too dependent on having Wybrow's love to effectively ensure her equality.

There is an apparent double standard here that requires control and restraint of strong feeling by a judicious recognition that indulging and revealing the emotions is harmful especially for females. Caterina and Wybrow both follow their own spontaneous feelings, but it is Caterina who suffers the consequences. Eliot depicts a male character who cannot transcend social standing and fortune and sees Caterina only as a source of gratification. Likewise, Arthur Donnithorne in *Adam Bede* cannot transcend the social barriers prescribed by patriarchal tradition; both these men neglect and abandon the women with whom they trifle, and so cause tragedy to follow.

Finally, Wybrow's rather indolent acceptance of the concept of his social duty militates against empathic emotions and moral behavior. Before Sir Christopher proposed the strategic marriage with Miss Assher, Wybrow had behaved like a lover towards Caterina, neither alerting her to the probable obligations of his class and rank nor reflecting on his own intentions. Thus, when the possibility of his marriage is raised he attempts to elicit her acquiescence by arguing, "You know I have duties — we both have duties — before which feeling must be sacrificed" ("GL," *SCL*, 145). The concept of duty is handled by the narrator with a satirical touch:

Sir Christopher and Lady Cheverel thought [Wybrow] the best of nephews, the most satisfactory of heirs, full of grateful deference to themselves, guided by a sense of duty. ("GL," *SCL*, 164)

This sense of duty is further defined as duty without a moral component, but strictly a product of interpellation by social codes and expectations. Because reader perspective is aligned with Gilfil or Caterina, the equation of Wybrow's "duty" with subjective shallowness is all the more cutting. Thus he "always did the thing easiest and most agreeable to him from a sense of duty," and this governed every aspect of his life. Whatever excuses Wybrow also condemns him. As Gilfil points out, he is only trifling with Caterina, and he engages in indiscretions simply for a moment's pleasure. These indiscretions are contrary to a proper concept of "duty." Pointing out Wybrow's narcissism and lack of moral sensibility, Gilfil attempts to advise Caterina:

"Pray be careful, Caterina, and try to behave with politeness and indifference to him. You must see by this time that he is not worth the feeling you have given him. He's more disturbed at his pulse beating one too many in a minute, than at all the misery he has caused you by his foolish trifling." ("GL," *SCL*, 190)

### **Abjection and Agency in "Janet's Repentance"**

The representation of female subjectivity in "Janet's Repentance" pivots on Janet Dempster's initial abjection — her moral decline into despair and alcoholism — and her subsequent reclamation. This trajectory is played out within and always informed by her social

context: the determination of woman's lot and function by religious discourses, economic practices, and the distribution of sexual power. The story suggests that Janet's life is immeasurably better after her reclamation — from a depressed, drunken, self-absorbed woman, brutalized by her overbearing and violent husband, she has become an other-focused, tranquil, useful member of the community. But it is still a life which has been shaped by the same social and religious constructions of female subjectivity.

The Christian religion emphasizes the total submission of the human will to that of God: "There is nothing that becomes us but entire submission, perfect resignation" ("JR," *SCL*, 362). The pursuit of individual desire and happiness should be subsumed under God's will. Human reason asks the cause of human troubles and it is summed up as "blasphemous thought" ("JR," *SCL*, 362); to question God's will is sinful, so that questioning is immediately precluded for any good Christian or lawful citizen in a God-fearing community. In the debate about faith and religion which opens "Janet's Repentance," the vociferous opponents of the Evangelical movement, as represented by the outsider, Tryan, conflate questioning of God, doctrinal debate, challenging church structure and organization. This conflation is presented metonymically in Tomlinson's slippage from "Sunday evening lectures" about religious matters to complaints about fractious servant-maids ("JR," *SCL*, 247), a slippage which asserts that the very fabric of society is under threat. Significantly, his focus is on female servants only, as the narrator neatly anticipates the focus on female subjection which will emerge as the center of the story.

The denial of self and the outward realization of altruism is what Christian religion allegedly pursues, though it is contradictory with subjectivity and individualism. The underlying conflict is between individual desire and the survival of society, individuals in harmony with others. In a truly regenerative society, implies Eliot, the traditional patriarchal system should accommodate women's potential as a useful contribution, within the scope of their own subjectivity, not as subordinate entities. Letting female voices be heard does not mean the abolition of male voices in society; unlike modern-day feminists, Eliot may not even have been thinking of social equity along gender lines, but simply that where there was a proven capacity a woman's voice could be allowed, and that women could be given opportunity to develop such voices. As Bakhtin argues, the process of accommodation and compatibility is endless; Eliot was only at the beginning of a seminal influence in a long process of growth.

In "Janet's Repentance" the male first-person narrator again comments, judges, and generalizes the events, characters, and the nature of human beings. The most conspicuous of his generalizations is that it is the nature of women's lives to be tragic. In saying that "Janet had lived through the great tragedy of woman's life" ("JR," *SCL*, 408), he affirms that it is not Janet's



individual case but the generic and collective lot of women. That is, she had gone through hardships because she is a woman. Rather than commenting that the “tragedy” of femininity is produced by social circumstance, as the events of the story itself firmly show, he implies that it is inherent in an essentialized female subjectivity: “It is such vague undefinable states of susceptibility as this — states of excitement or depression, half mental, half physical — that determine many a tragedy in women’s lives” (“JR,” *SCL*, 394). Although in his stance and language the male narrator shows sympathy for women’s lot, he nevertheless essentializes them and avers that their lives only have meaning within the patriarchal world of his own assumptions.

The narrated embodiment of that patriarchal world is Robert Dempster, Janet’s husband. His propensity for bullying renders isomorphic his efforts to maintain local church structures and the domestic violence perpetrated against Janet. They are part of the same patriarchal matrix, and the story’s patterning confirms this sameness. At the core of his objection to Tryan’s proposed lecture is the belief that Evangelical doctrine, which he dismisses as “methodistical” is “demoralizing” (“JR,” *SCL*, 247), that is, *demoralizing* in its original sense of ‘to corrupt the morals or moral principles of; to deprave or pervert morally’ (*OED*, definition 1). The alternative is the “sound instruction” of Milby’s “venerable pastor,” incumbent for the past fifty years and, readers may well assume, fixed, unchanging and unquestioning in his ways. Dempster’s opinions are shown to come out of bigotry. His social position, wealth, and other social signs of power and conditioning enable him to impose his opinions and beliefs on others; he silences and expels Mr. Byle who in fact does speak the truth. Mr. Dempster criticizes his eponymous John Presbyter on the basis of his appearance (“who wore a suit of leather” (“JR,” *SCL*, 248)), not mentioning his actual doctrine. That Mr. Byle’s historically and etymologically based information is, in fact, correct underlines how “truth” is being asserted (“JR,” *SCL*, 422) on the basis of authority rather than on any process of validation. As the story unfolds, there emerges a parallel between the authority to control and promulgate what is doctrinal truth and the patriarchal subjugation and silencing of women, and because both positions are maintained by such a patriarchal bigot as Dempster, whose obvious errors are immune to rebuttal from within his community, there is a parallel interrogation of those authoritative positions. There is thus a correlation between official religious belief and antifeminism that is both enlightening and alarming. Insofar as Dempster adheres unquestioningly to mainstream religious doctrine, he assumes a structure of beliefs which is patriarchal and misogynistic. This structure is further evident in his paternalistic belief that the morality of people depends on religion; they are incapable of behaving morally because of any natural capacity for good:

“[Mr. Tryan] preaches against good works; says good works are not necessary to salvation — a sectarian, antinomian, anabaptist doctrine. Tell a man he is not to be saved by his works, and you open the flood-gates of all immorality. (“JR,” *SCL*, 251)

This argument touches on the essence of the debate as to whether a Christian is justified by faith alone or by faith in combination with good works. Dempster holds to the latter position. However, the story suggests that it is too easy to substitute good works alone — the outward forms of faith — for a religion with a spiritual and moral substance. Whatever virtue is in such works is mitigated by the sense of constraint which motivates them. The solution to this doctrinal and spiritual dilemma is embodied, however, not in the figure of the good pastor, Tryan, but in the exemplary life of the post-repentance Janet.

### **Female Subjectivity**

The doctrinal argument about justification by faith or works is imbricated with issues of female subjectivity in “Janet’s Repentance.” Female subjectivity is characteristically determined within marriage, which is demonstrated to be a relinquishment of liberty, replacing it with a woman’s vows to “honour and obey” her husband. The status and resources of wifehood, however, contribute to a woman’s capacity to perform good works. But if faith is sufficient in itself, then a possible alternative female subjectivity is enabled, such as that constructed retrospectively at the end of a single life such as Miss Pratt’s:

Miss Pratt was in that arctic region where a woman is confident that at no time of life would she have consented to give up her liberty, and that she has never seen the man whom she would engage to honour and obey. (“JR,” *SCL*, 268)

The term “arctic” is clearly pejorative (contrasted with the “temperate zone” of the Miss Linnets), but also allows Miss Pratt dignity and self-esteem; the narrator may mock her with the implication that her life is not the outcome of choice, and that she has an inflated view of its significance, but she does also display a clarity of purpose and sureness of intellect that preserve her self-respect, even if she is obliged to winter out a life of social exclusion and loneliness. Significantly, in turning away from “the English Church” she had adopted as the cornerstone of her faith “that cardinal doctrine of the Reformation,” justification by faith alone (“JR,” *SCL*, 270), and reshaped her female subjectivity through Mr. Tryan’s preaching.

But how is a woman to live or, better, shape her life in a society where “to honour and obey” extends well beyond the bounds of marriage? Janet marries because “she had nothing to look to but being a governess” (“JR,” *SCL*, 272) and she marries Dempster because he is the cleverest man in Milby; at least she has had the sensibility to choose a partner who seemed to share her own capacity for inquiry and perspicacity, and whose boorishness would not dampen

her too much, if at all. There are not many young men fit to talk to Janet because of her superior education. However, even in this best of all possible choices, a subjectivity marked by intelligence and independence of mind proves to undermine her marriage and married life instead of enhancing her happiness because of the framework of women's role in family and society: the statute requiring her "to honour and obey" leaves her subject to an autocratic and tyrannical husband, and deprives her of any domain of subjective agency.

Women are not supposed to speak their opinions; as one villager, Mrs. Jerome, says, "little gells must be seen and not heard" ("JR," *SCL*, 307), literally "silencing" girls. Women's subjectivity is constructed negatively and passively by patriarchs and the patriarchal thinking of women who are most often mothers. In her later novels, Eliot was to suggest that this transmission of patriarchal ideas by mothers who have accepted repressed roles is blocked when the girls are orphaned and motherless, like Eppie in *Silas Marner*, Esther in *Felix Holt*, and Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, and their upbringing is taken over by men apparently freed from such repression, yet somehow enlightened by some experience that has put them outside the generality of their peers.

The male narrator of "Janet's Repentance" understands the background of susceptibility and vulnerability of the female situation, and shows some sympathy towards female characters and female readers in general:

Poor women's heart! Heaven forbid that I should laugh at you, and make cheap jests on your susceptibility towards the clerical sex, as if it had nothing deeper or more lovely in it than the mere vulgar angling for a husband. Even in these enlightened days, many a curate who, considered abstractedly, is nothing more than a sleek bimanous animal in white neck cloth, with views more or less Anglican, and furtively addicted to the flute, is adored by a girl who has coarse brothers, or by a solitary woman who would like to be a helpmate in good works beyond her own means, simply because he seems to them the model of refinement and of public usefulness. ("JR," *SCL*, 275)

The painful irony in female subjectivity is that it is formed in response to dominant males with little or nothing to offer that is positive. The joke about the third sex — "the clerical sex" — suggests that non-clerical masculinity is precisely lacking in "refinement and public usefulness"; but the mocking depiction of the clergy here also suggests that this third sex is a matter of surface without substance. The problem for women is that they cannot perform some good works independently because society is formed in such a way as to prevent their direct access to autonomous power. They need men, and specifically husbands, to realize their dreams. The passage thus functions as a clear expression of the correlation of religion and social formation that restricts women's potential and position, so constructing women's subjectivity, and imposing on them a predetermined role.

Women's fate is succinctly summarized in the passage:

O it is piteous — that sorrow of aged women! In early youth, perhaps, they said to themselves, “I shall be happy when I have a husband to love me best of all”; then, when the husband was too careless, “My child will comfort me”; then, through the mother’s watching and toil, “My child will repay me all when it grows up.” And at last, after the long journey of years has been wearily travelled through, the mother’s heart is weighed down by a heavier burthen, and no hope remains but the grave. (“JR,” *SCL*, 297)

Again the narrator is sympathetic to women’s fate. In the light of Christianity her life is very meaningful, a sacrifice for her husband and children. However, as an individual her life is full of unfulfilled desires, dissatisfaction and abnegation. Her lot is to be patient and unhappy. The alternative is to internalize the tenets of patriarchy as female virtue.

“Janet’s Repentance” depicts the typical patriarchal woman in the figure of old Mrs. Dempster, an “ideal” woman who is obedient to her husband, bears children, and keeps house well. She “had that rare gift of silence and passivity which often supplies the absence of mental strength; and, whatever were her thoughts, she said no word to aggravate the domestic discord” (“JR,” *SCL*, 296). Thus only women’s obedience and patience are required to maintain married life. Old Mrs. Dempster becomes the voice of social patriarchy when she asserts that the cause of Janet’s domestic unhappiness and of Dempster’s domestic cruelty is that Janet is a poor housekeeper and does not have any children (“JR,” *SCL*, 334-35). Her criticism of Janet’s propensity for performing good works (“always running about doing things for other people”) at the expense of “neglecting her own house” has an acute bearing on the issue of female subjectivity, in that caring for her house entails constant availability and absolute submission to the smallest whim of her husband (“JR,” *SCL*, 334).

The narrator then immediately foregrounds this image of erased subjectivity in the sharply observed, perspicacious account of the regime of domestic violence under which Janet lives. He stresses that it was no failing in Janet which provoked her husband’s cruelty; rather, cruelty requires no motive outside itself — it only requires opportunity (“JR,” *SCL*, 334). Dempster is described as an “unloving, tyrannous, brutal man” (“JR,” *SCL*, 335), whose sole motive for cruelty is the perpetual presence of a woman he can call his own. A further consequence of this brutalizing of Janet’s body and spirit is her drift into incipient alcoholism, a further annihilation of selfhood. When Dempster dies and leaves her all his property, Janet is given a chance to forge her own subjectivity.

On the morning of the day which culminates in Dempster thrusting her out of the house at midnight, wearing only a thin nightgown, Janet, in a drunk and depressed state, had visited her mother and complained bitterly and self-pityingly about her lot:

“Yes, that is what you always think, mother. It is the old story, you think. You don’t ask me what it is I have had to bear. You are tired of hearing me. You are cruel, like the rest; every one is cruel in this world. Nothing but blame — blame — blame; never any pity. God is cruel to have sent me into the world to bear all this misery.”

“Janet, Janet, don’t say so. It is not for us to judge; we must submit; we must be thankful for the gift of life.”

“Thankful for life! Why should I be thankful? God has made me with a heart to feel, and He has sent me nothing but misery. How could I help it? How could I know what would come? Why didn’t you tell me, mother? — why did you let me marry? You knew what brutes men could be; and there’s no help for me — no hope. I can’t kill myself; I’ve tried; but I can’t leave this world and go to another. There may be no pity for me there, as there is none here.” (“JR,” *SCL*, 338-39)

Janet thus equates female existence, and the apparent impossibility of agency, with a radically dystopian state. Her mother’s recommendation of quiet submissiveness is in effect acceptance of the absence of female agency, invoking a religious frame that can neither explain nor comfort, and which precludes the end-point of abjection, suicide. Janet had felt it impossible to escape from her tyrannical husband and develop her own life because her life was so dependent on him; systematically, she, like most women, has been coerced into a set of circumstances where she is economically and emotionally constrained:

she felt too crushed, too faulty, too liable to reproach, to have the courage, even if she had had the wish to put herself openly in the position of a wronged woman seeking redress. She had no strength to sustain her in a course of self-defence and independence: there was a darker shadow over her life than the dread of her husband — it was the shadow of self-despair. The easiest thing would be to go away and hide herself from him. But then there was her mother: Robert had all her little property in his hands, and that little was scarcely enough to keep her mother; and if she did go away — what then? She must work to maintain herself; she must exert herself, weary and hopeless as she was to begin life afresh. How hard that seemed to her! Janet’s nature did not belie her grand face and form: there was energy, there was strength in it; but it was the strength of the vine, which must have its broad leaves and rich clusters borne up by a firm stay. And now she had nothing to rest on — no faith, no love. (“JR,” *SCL*, 350)

In her “self-despair,” depression and alcohol-dependency Janet has added self-abjection to the downward spiral of abjection set in train by her emotional and economic dependency on her increasingly abusive husband. Her attitudes are conveyed here in free indirect discourse, and so the metaphor equating her strength with the strength of the vine, and which precludes any form of independence, is the product of her abjected state. Her selfhood has been dismantled, she is abject, and with no discernable future she contemplates death. But after her interview with Mr. Tryan she sees a way forward through renewed faith and a commitment to altruistic activity instead of self-absorption. Hence the abject is returned to the social world and allowed the possibility of agency by being surrounded with characters who believe in her ability to achieve these things. It is fortuitous, however, that her life of devotion to others is finally enabled by the sudden death of her husband and, inheriting his property, an income which grants her a comfortable widowhood.

## Conclusion

The three stories in *Scenes of Clerical Life* have a firm historical grounding on the basis of which they present readers with “true pictures” of the lives led by three heroines. Eliot thereby

offers a critique of England as dystopia where females are made abject and die or live under another kind of submission. The portrayals impute generative misdeeds to religion and society which make the heroines' lives abject; for example, Milly's death and Patty's sacrifice of her life, Caterina's untimely death, and Janet's sufferings are presented as accusations of society. The male narrators' presences are strong. They praise female virtues as defined by patriarchy, and condemn strong feminist resistance uttered by women; perhaps Eliot is aware that the arguments she offers are bound to meet with clever, well-formed reaction and resistance from the established patriarchy and its defenders.

The narrator expresses sympathy for women even though he is a male. This might be because the author is female, but it also points to a capacity crucial for genuine and sustainable social equity, especially since the influence of religious awakening of women in patriarchal society can move only through "narrow conduits of doctrine" ("JR," *SCL*, 321). Reactionary attitudes obstruct the attainment of equal status for men and women. When Mrs. Pettifer asks Janet to listen to Mr. Tryan's preaching, she gets angry and says she does not want to disobey her husband ("JR," *SCL*, 330); traditional women function as their own tyrants and the allies of patriarchy. Such effacement of selfhood is a travesty of self-perception and self-identity — a denial of what Bakhtin was subsequently to define as intersubjectivity:

Even when looking within oneself, one looks in and through the eyes of the other: one needs the other's gaze to constitute oneself as self. Even the apparently simple act of looking in the mirror, for Bakhtin, is complexly dialogical, implying an intricate intersection of perspectives and consciousnesses. To look at ourselves in the mirror is to oversee the reflection of our life in the plane of consciousness of others; it is to see and apprehend ourselves through the imagined eyes of our parents, our brothers and sisters, through the supportive look of our friends or the hostile regard of our enemies, as well as through the more abstract panoptical "eyes" of mass-mediated culture, with its implicit norms of fashion and acceptable appearance. (Stam: 5)

Elaine Showalter argues that women's fiction can be read as a "double-voiced discourse," which contains a "dominant" and "muted" story and that men constitute a dominant group while women form a muted group (1985: 266). She comments that both groups "generate beliefs or ordering ideas of social reality at the unconscious level, but dominant groups control the forms or structures in which consciousness can be articulated. Thus muted groups must mediate their beliefs through the allowable forms of dominant structures" (1985: 262). The male narrators in Eliot's fiction reproduce patriarchal attitudes towards women and the women characters accept and internalize the beliefs and doctrines of the dominant group. If women were not complicit in their own repression, their liberation would be prompt; but while a majority do comply, those who strive to break away can only expect to be dragged back, or to be regarded as undesirable others and abjected.

Even though independent female subjectivity is contradictory to Christian altruism and seeks personal development, it can readily be distinguished from selfishness. Subjective agency is in the spirit of the rise of individualism rather than selfishness. Female sacrifice or compromise should also be viewed in this light, in that female protagonists compromise because of society, in accordance with their primary social roles relative to men, that is, wife and mother. It is not an easy or speedy task to change societal norms. However, Eliot does not present her ideas gloomily or despondently; she sees the possibility for a compromise, perhaps some way off from her temporal perspective, but still within a foreseeable future.

Through these three stories Eliot depicts the emotional and physical exploitation of women by men who systematically, even if unconsciously, utilize the society's prejudices against women and in favor of men, the great and rigid framework of patriarchy. Milly Barton is a paradigmatic victim of the system. Women are tools that make men's life easier. The altruism that supposedly marks Christianity does not serve to benefit women. Caterina's hardships stem from society's prejudice against gender, which, in this case, is also intertwined with race and class. She transgresses the boundaries imposed by her gender, race and class by loving a man who is above her rank, and her fragile subjectivity incurs irremediable damage as a consequence (even her subsequent death in childbirth after her marriage to Gilfil is still imputed as a consequence). This tragedy is caused by Wybrow's assumptions about his position in society. Janet's high intelligence and marked subjectivity cause her marriage breakup. She marries conforming to the social tradition that women's mission is in the domestic environment as wife and mother. She tries to fight with the contrary reality and to conceal her situation from society, but inevitably reveals herself, as her discontent grows and cannot be contained.

The male narrators comment, judge and generalize and present the characters' dialogues and inner speech, but there is a female author behind the narrator who is questioning the validity of each comment and the contents of the dialogues and monologues. Eliot's early novels are descriptions of social phenomena, not a prescription of what society should be, and to the extent that their dystopian representations — describing the world as it should not be — foreshadow a different kind of society they function as critical utopianism. Many devices explain and investigate where misogyny stems from and what kind of presumptions patriarchal figures have, including patriarchal women. Eliot is criticizing the society that makes women so, not women themselves. And it is a gloomy, but a damning fact that society cannot be changed drastically and artificially in a short period of time. By revealing the ways that society can accept the flaws in those in power, Eliot assails the dominant ideology of her time, thereby positioning herself as a major reformer.

## CHAPTER II

### A Questionable Utopia: *Adam Bede*

In his argument in defense of realism in Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*, Eliot's narrator contrasts realism as "a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind" with the utopian mode of "represent[ing] things as they never have been and never will be" (*AB*, 221). The language of mirroring and representing foregrounds the selection processes of fiction writing, and despite the narrator's undertaking to offer as faithful an account as the distorting mirror of the mind will permit, readers are reminded that realism is a form of representing: "The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath" (*AB*, 221). Further on in the same chapter, the narrator's own fictionality is clearly declared by the very claim to historicity. When he refers to an interview conducted with the novel's principal character — "I gathered from Adam Bede, to whom I talked of these matters in his old age...." — he breaks the diegetic frame and enters the fictive text. The implication of this contrast for a study of utopian modes of writing is that realism does not directly project a utopian future but concentrates rather on a dystopian moment within historical time, depicting what is and thereby what should not be.

The events of *Adam Bede* take place in 1799-1807, concluding approximately half a century prior to the date of publication of the novel (1859). Its historicity, and through that its critical utopian mode, are grounded in specificity of setting — rural England, Hayslope, in fictive Loamshire — but, as John B. Lamb points out, the novel elides major issues from that period involving political conflict, agricultural unrest and reform agitation (264). There are implicit political issues in the novel's representation of the failure of the landed class to maintain their side of the social contract (and thereby their right to rule); in the spread of dissenting religious forms; and in the education of the lower classes to fit them for enfranchisement. *Adam Bede* suggests that constructing a utopia in England involves "mak[ing] the world a bit better place" (*AB*, 516), not through top-down political reform, but through a grass-roots rectification of what is wrong. The process is thus to depict a society's systemic dystopian elements and invite the readers' awareness and response. I pointed in Chapter I to the importance of the relationship between empathic emotions and moral behavior in "Mr Gilfil's Love-Story," and that relationship is again important for *Adam Bede*. Eliot helped to create the Victorian aesthetic of sympathy, as Suzanne Graver points out: "This aesthetic, based on a belief in the power of art to



enlarge the reader's capacities for sympathetic response, sought to effect so comprehensive a change of sensibility as ultimately to change society" (1984: 11). Eliot writes: "the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings is that those who read them should be better able to imagine and feel the pains and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring human creatures" (*GEL*, III, 111). Eliot's utopian impulse is manifested in the fact that "a community of readers could lead to a community of feeling and that collective response could be an agent for social change" (Lamb: 276; cf. Graver 1984: 11).

Thus Eliot's discussion of realism in Chapter 17 has significant implication for the mode of critical utopian writing. Authors are not to beautify or exaggerate but to present "a faithful account of men and things" and let the readers have sympathy, understand "others," and apply the insights gained to their own experience:

These fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people — amongst whom your life is passed — that it is needful you should tolerate, pity, and love: it is these more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people, whose movements of goodness you should be able to admire — for whom you should cherish all possible hopes, all possible patience....

So I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things seem better than they were; dreading nothing, indeed, but falsity, which, in spite of one's best efforts, there is reason to dread. Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult.... Examine your words well, and you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth, even about your own immediate feelings — much harder than to say something fine about them which is not the exact truth. (*AB*, 222-23, ellipses mine)

If anything is amiss, identifying problems can initiate the remedial process. Since it is not easy to represent truth, Eliot incorporates different points of view. Opposing ideas are expressed mimetically in the characters' own dialogues, or diegetically in the narrator's comments. Eliot sometimes employs what Bakhtin refers to as doubly-oriented/doubly-voiced speech to show hidden polemics or irony, using a "plurality of equally authoritative ideological positions and an extreme heterogeneity of material" (Bakhtin 1981: 305). There is, furthermore, a calculated naivety in the notion of "my simple story," which is repeated in the analogy with Dutch realist painting: characters in fiction are not depicted as still moments, as in the paintings, but are conventionally subject to change and development. The narrator thus ignores the teleology of the novel within which he is embedded.

The world of *Adam Bede* is organized according to a patriarchal system and to assimilate the view Eliot again deploys a male narrative voice, which is handled ironically to subvert the misogyny and worldview it ostensibly asserts. The male point of view is evident, for example, in the narrator's comment on an incident when Adam is less tender than usual to his mother, but contrives to be ordinarily caring to his dog Gyp: "We are apt to be kinder to the brutes that love us than to the women that love us. Is it because the brutes are dumb?" (*AB*, 86). To Adam his

mother is a woman before she is his mother and “we” represents males in general (including the narrator). The male psychology recognizes that men are cruel to women who love them. The narrator implies that men will be caring to women, if women are completely dependent on them, never show any opinions of their own and try not to direct or influence their ways of life, as if they were pets. The narrator’s misogyny continues as he advises his “philosophical reader” that “you will never understand women’s natures if you are so exceptionally rational” (*AB*, 294). He insists that the reader should eliminate his/her “rational prejudices” and “study[ing] the psychology of a canary bird” (*AB*, 294). Canary birds are caged, owned, and looked at for the pleasure of the owner, which is associated with the presence of the male as a “creator-spectator-owner-judge” (Finn: 46). A male gaze exists as a Godlike presence that gives the meaning and standard for female existence as a sexual object. However, under this misogynistic male voice there lies an ironic, double voice that simultaneously subverts the contents of the claim.

Patriarchy in *Adam Bede* is intricately bound up with religion, which upholds gender and social hierarchies and, because issues of sign and interpretation are pivotal for religion, impacts on language itself. Hence the male narrative perspective reflects the reality perceived by the members of the rural community of Hayslope in 1799 when established Christianity was represented by Mr. Irwine, a member of the gentry, but some influence was beginning to trickle in from the dissenting churches, especially Methodism. In either case, Christianity espoused the prevalent misogynistic ideas entertained by male members of the society. The date of 1799 is also significant: a new century is about to be ushered in, but there are to be no new liberties or dignities for women, despite the democracy introduced by the American and French Revolutions that have shaken other traditional, political values.

In the eyes of the anonymous stranger who rides through the opening chapters of the novel, Hayslope appears as an Arcadian pastoral landscape, blessed in climate and economic conditions. Dinah Morris, contrasting it with the harsher world of the industrial towns, and offering an explanation for its spiritual dullness, invokes Psalm 23 to describe a community, “where the people lead a quiet life among the green pastures and the still waters, tilling the ground and tending the cattle” (*AB*, 137). But death lurks in Arcadia,<sup>1</sup> as the drowning of Matthias Bede in Chapter 4 reminds readers, and Hayslope has numerous faults and flaws. The predominant mentality of its inhabitants is perhaps complacency, epitomized by the remark about Irwine that, “however ill he harmonised with sound theories of the clerical office, he somehow harmonised extremely well with that peaceful landscape” (*AB*, 113). So while Hayslope

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<sup>1</sup> See Erwin Panofsky’s famous analysis of the *Et in Arcadia Ego* theme in *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer*. Oxford: OUP, 1936, 223-54.

is without the apparent dystopian elements that Dinah glimpses in villages such as Hetton-Deeps (“the aged trembling women at the doors, and the hard looks of the men ... dumb oxen that never looked up to the sky” (*AB*, 136)), there are utopian projects that critique the existing society: the need for working men’s education recognized by Adam; the need for reform in management in Donnithorne estate identified by Adam and Arthur; and the need to develop a humane spiritual life, identified by Dinah with Methodism and by Adam Bede with an uninstitutionalized religion of humanity.

First, the education of working class men is represented in the scene at Massey’s night school, where his artisan students are described as “rough animals ... making humble efforts to learn how they might become human” (*AB*, 281), a precursor to the Mechanics Institute movement discussed in *Felix Holt* and briefly mentioned by Will in *Middlemarch*. Emphasis on the education of working men indicates that their ‘animal’ status is not due to inherent deficiency, but is the result of systemic disadvantages in society. The men described in this scene are relative beginners, and their struggle to learn is given greater poignancy because the early part of the episode is focalized by Adam, himself now an advanced student after several years of such weekly lessons, who experiences “a momentary stirring of the old fellow-feeling,” a sympathy for those “rough men painfully holding pen or pencil with their cramped hands, or humbly labouring through their reading lesson” (*AB*, 278). Eliot shows by Adam’s perception (and again in Mrs. Poyser’s outburst against the squire in Chapter 32) that working men are not animals, but the same human beings as the rest of the reading public, which is composed mainly of middle-class Victorians.

Second, Adam and Arthur’s recognition of the need for reform in the management of the Donnithorne estate would have reduced the exploitation of the labor of tenant farmers by the landed gentry. The degree of altruism required is too utopian, however, and the scheme is frustrated by Arthur’s lapse from the moral behavior expected of his position at the top of the local social hierarchy, and by his substitution of narcissistic desire for appropriate empathic emotions. By highlighting the very need for reform, however, the novel critiques dystopian elements within the existing system. Third, and paralleling the need for material reform in the squire’s estate, is the need to develop a humane spiritual life. For much of the novel this is presented dialogically, engaging both the reform of religious institutions and practices in the form of Methodism (Lovesey 1991: 37), and Adam’s redefinition of religion. Although Dinah stimulates society by her preaching, pointing out its materialism and spiritual laxity, the novel eventually (and notoriously) fails to sustain its dialogism and Dinah’s voice is eventually subsumed under Adam’s. Although the decision to forbid women to preach is made by the

Methodist Conference, and thus beyond the boundary of Hayslope, Adam accedes to its rightness and Dinah submits to it to set an example (*AB*, 583). This is a complex decision, arising out of the dystopic circle whereby a misogynistic society forbids women a public voice because they lack education, and denies them an education because they are women. As Adam argues to Seth, Dinah's gifts of eloquence and spiritual insight are very rare, and she maintains the personal ministry which is a large part of her spiritual gift. Dinah is, indeed, the true utopist, almost totally devoid of any self-regardingness. Thus her faith and sense of calling make her insensible to the fact that, while preaching, she is "a lovely young woman on whom men's eyes are fixed" (*AB*, 136), as Irwine puts it. It is, indeed, Dinah who rectifies the uproar caused by Arthur's immoral behavior, bringing, as is her wont, a "sense of order and quietude" (*AB*, 157). It is her intervention which is ultimately responsible for the preservation of the community by reviving the emotional ties that bind Adam and Arthur and by keeping the Poysers in Hayslope. As Nancy Paxton comments, through Dinah a new definition of women's function emerges which enables a subjective independence going beyond the "helpmate" role (1991: 44), even though she has lost her public voice and operates only in the domestic sphere. Through her the world is made a better place.

Adam regards everyday life as worship. Like Caleb Garth in *Middlemarch*, his good is doing something that makes people's lives easier and more tolerable, which is his utopian project. He considers making other people's lives easier as "doing more good" (*AB*, 53) and just "as near to God, as if he was running after some preacher and a-praying and a-groaning" (*AB*, 53-54). Adam's work is God's will and his religion is Mr. Garth's "business." Adam's view of religion is underpinned by the established versus evangelical difference in religion:

"I've seen pretty clear ... religion's something else besides notions. It isn't notions sets people doing the right thing — It's feelings. It's the same with the notions of religion as it is with math'matics, — a man may be able to work problems straight off in 's head as he sits by the fire and smokes his pipe; but if he has to make a machine or a building, he must have a will and a resolution, and love something else better than his own ease...." ...

"I've seen pretty clear ... religion's something else besides doctrines and notions. I look at it as if the doctrines was like finding names for your feelings, so as you can talk of 'em when you've never known 'em, just as a man may talk o' tools when he knows their names, though he's never so much as seen 'em, still less handled 'em...." (*AB*, 226-28, ellipses mine)

In his critique of doctrinal religion, Adam emphasizes good works instead of mere faith. He is a practical man of trade, rather than an idealistic dreamer. At the beginning of the novel Adam is judgmental and harsh toward other people's mistakes, but as the story continues he is changed through suffering, "a regeneration, the initiation into a new state" developing "a soul full of new awe and new pity" (*AB*, 471-72). He is repentant over his harshness to his father and becomes loving and forgiving. He forgives repentant Arthur and tells him, "We are human beings who are

apt to err. So live in loving forgiveness" (*AB*, 514), promising he would never be hard again. Through Hetty's suffering and deep sorrow Adam learns "sympathy," "the one poor word which includes all our best insight and our best love" (*AB*, 531), which is the key word for the construction of utopia. It implies a changeover from conception of a judging, condemning God to a loving and forgiving one. In fact, to share loving communion with people is the greatest good the novel insists on and the best pathway towards utopia. And regenerated Adam values human relationships much more, is more tender toward his mother and Seth and visits the Poysers more often at the end of the novel. Adam's religious asceticism, moderation, and devotion to vocation are defined as "the English national character" (Weber: 172-73), and in these terms the novel embraces the Victorian notion of historical progress and the belief that work, duty, tradition, and obedience may replace religious faith. In this light, Adam may be regarded as one of the first "secular clerics" in Eliot's canon (Lovesey: 47), a utopist with a vision for a better society.

The principal origins of dystopian elements in *Adam Bede* are rigid class hierarchy and systemic misogyny. Thus the depiction of Hayslope as a dystopia is focused through the ever downward pathway of Hetty's abjection (seduction; abandonment; pregnancy and homelessness; infanticide; transportation; and death), which results from Arthur's assumptions about class superiority in combination with the social construction of Hetty's femininity. Class hierarchy is presented as a major source of dystopian effect. There are four classes identifiable in Hayslope: an upper class of landed gentry — the Donnithornes and the Irwines; established farmers, for example the Poysers; skilled artisans — the Bedes; and farmworkers. As David Carroll argues, at the beginning of the novel the hierarchy is rigid and the higher class is respected as the upper echelon of a natural hierarchy, but at the end of the novel the hierarchy is radically subverted (1992: 84). *Adam Bede* shows the processes of subversion of this rigid class hierarchy through Adam's *Bildungsroman*, in particular his development of consciousness because of Hetty's fall and his marriage with Dinah, and through an increased awareness of the exploitation of farmers by the landed gentry.

At the beginning of the novel class hierarchy in Hayslope is rigidly enforced and accepted by community members as natural and not subject to question. The stability of society is sustained by the attitude of lower class people based on their traditional feelings towards their social superiors, which Lamb identifies as "deference" (267). The good qualities of those higher in the social hierarchy are presumed to exist through tradition. It is a deferential community, claiming of its working-class inhabitants that "in those days the keenest bucolic mind felt a whispering awe at the sight of the gentry, such as of old men felt when they stood on tip-toe to

watch gods passing by in tall human shape” (*AB*, 124). The Donnithornes and Irwines are always treated with respect, and it is a mark of this habitual stance that even Mrs. Poyser, who simmers with resentment against Squire Donnithorne, shows “an air of perfect deference” (*AB*, 389) when he visits Hall Farm. However, *Adam Bede* shows that the “deference” must be based on mutual trust and responsibility between higher and lower classes and is not unconditional. As Lamb argues, although the rural hierarchy of Loamshire is sequestered from the turbulent social conditions of city life, the novel’s exploration of the politics of deference is more complex and ironic than the behavior of Hayslope’s villagers at first suggests (271). Arthur’s seduction of Hetty is the catalyst for the subversion of class hierarchy based on “deference.” Its first manifestation is the physical fight between himself and Adam, in which after stunning Arthur and knocking him down, Adam renders deferential assistance. More drastically, the coincidence of Hetty’s trial and Arthur’s homecoming to take up the position of squire after his grandfather establishes that Arthur is too morally compromised to do that. Thus instead of Adam and the Poyser leaving the district to escape their places in the hierarchy, Arthur imposes exile upon himself.

Where Hetty had deluded herself with daydreams about such a disturbance of social hierarchy as would make her Arthur’s wife, Arthur, deeply conscious of his superiority in this class hierarchy, was always incapable of regarding Hetty as a future marriage partner. Their relationship is a flirtation, a “little thing” (*AB*, 184). He looks upon her not as a human being with whom he can share love and life but as an inferior specimen from a different social standing, and even public knowledge of their dalliance would mean for him such a falling in his own esteem as if he were to “break both his legs and go on crutches all the rest of his life” (*AB*, 184). The love affair initiated by him is lame because of such snobbish thoughts of worldly reputation and self-esteem, based on selfishness. Arthur’s thoughts on the impossibility of a union with Hetty invert the basis of her daydreams, when he concludes, “No gentleman, out of a ballad, could marry a farmer’s niece. There must be an end to the whole thing at once. It was too foolish” (*AB*, 184).

In allowing the affair to develop as he does, Arthur plays at relinquishing agency. Thus when he follows “a prudent resolution founded on conscience” (*AB*, 171) and decides to go on a fishing trip in order to get away from Hetty, he is prevented by an injury to one of his horses, and then (mis-)plans his day in order to meet Hetty “accidentally,” leaving the circumstance to Providence. He constantly justifies himself with the thought that it is not him but the circumstances that lead to the relationship with Hetty. He does not think ethically about Hetty’s future, as she is only a temporary means to satisfy his curiosity, self-gratification and desire (*AB*,

361). As Adam rightly points out to Hetty, “[Arthur]’s been trifling with you, and making a plaything of you, caring nothing about you as a man ought to care” (*AB*, 367). Arthur is morally loose (*AB*, 310), and the narrator’s comparison of Arthur to a defective ship is appropriate:

Ships, certainly, are liable to casualties, which sometimes make terribly evident some flaw in their construction, that would never have been discoverable in smooth water; and many a “good fellow,” through a disastrous combination of circumstances, has undergone a like betrayal. (*AB*, 171)

When there is a storm and rough winds and waves smash the ship, the flaw in construction reveals itself; otherwise, the fault remains unnoticed. By analogy, in prosperous circumstances an individual’s integrity is not tested, while adversity reveals his/her weaknesses. Arthur makes an irrevocable mistake because of the central defect in his character. A “sinister omen” (*AB*, 216) in a remark by Mrs. Irwine is like a foreshadowing of Arthur’s mistake. Mr. Irwine says to Arthur:

“[Mrs. Irwine] thinks your lady-love will rule you as the moon rules the tides.... But I feel bound to stand up for you ... and I maintain that you’re not that watery quality. So mind you don’t disgrace my judgment.” (*AB*, 216)

Mr. Irwine unconsciously points out Arthur’s lack of moral fortitude. The failing, however, can only be elicited by a female temptress; only she would have the temerity to prey on a man’s weakness, just as only men can protect each other from their weakness. The reference to the moon is also telling, in that Chloe or Phoebe as ruler of the moon is responsible for exploiting the mutability of the tides. Exploiting such mutability is a sign of witchery, which Arthur, having failed to guard himself against Hetty’s beauty, attributes to her: “A man may be very firm in other matters, and yet be under a sort of witchery from a woman” (*AB*, 216). It is a common trait of misogynistic thinking that men deny any responsibility for their own actions, and place all the blame on women. The woman only has to be beautiful. She can be passive and do nothing, and still a man will say that he was carried away by the power of her beauty. Men try to make their conceptions of women into women’s reality, and sometimes succeed in trapping women in this web of the male gaze. Without knowing the intention of Arthur’s confession of his relationship with Hetty, Mr. Irwine continues:

“if you detect the disease at an early stage and try change of air, there is every chance of complete escape without any further development of symptoms.... I daresay, now, even a man fortified with a knowledge of the classics might be lured into an imprudent marriage, in spite of the warning given him by the chorus in the Prometheus.” (*AB*, 216-17)

Irvine tries to warn Arthur about the dangers of an imprudent marriage and destructive female

sexuality by alluding to Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*,<sup>2</sup> though he does not know all the parallels between Hetty and Io. Hetty is haunted by visions of a marriage with a social superior. Arthur, however, misunderstands the meaning of Irwine's allusions to *Prometheus Bound*, and counters with an argument that one should be forgiven for acting on impulse or unanticipated "moods." Mr. Irwine responds by offering his more deterministic view of free will:

"Ah, but the moods lie in his nature, my boy, just as much as his reflections did, and more. A man can never do anything at variance with his own nature. He carries within him the germ of his most exceptional action; and if we wise people make eminent fools of ourselves on any particular occasion, we must endure the legitimate conclusion that we carry a few grains of folly to our ounce of wisdom." (*AB*, 217)

Arthur, however, is unwilling to give up his belief that the world is providentially organized to satisfy his own desire. Having rejected Irwine's earlier warning not to dally with Hetty or feed her vanity by telling her she is a "great beauty" (*AB*, 146), his seduction of her continues as the deliberate indulgence of his own wayward fancy.

Arthur's immoral behavior makes Adam disregard his deference towards the gentry. Thus when he says to Arthur, "I don't forget what's owing to you as a gentleman; but in this we're man and man" (*AB*, 354), his concomitant recourse to violence is a symbol of social revolt (Lamb: 274) and has national implications: "Europe adjusts itself to a *fait accompli*, and so does an individual character — until the placid adjustment is disturbed by a convulsive retribution" (*AB*, 359). The contrast between Arthur and Adam, as Paxton comments, is that the former believes in classism, in God's partiality towards those from higher society, while the latter sees the world in more evolutionary terms (1991: 44). As Lamb argues, Adam's lack of deference towards his father functions as a foreshadowing analogy, with the family functioning as a microcosm of society. Thus the instability within the family hierarchy indicates his capacity to rebel in response to Arthur's behavior: just as Thias is not a good father to Adam (because of his alcoholism), Arthur is not a good father to the people on his estate. Both examples illustrate Adam's tendency "to admit all established claims unless he saw very clear ground for questioning them" (*AB*, 209). His natural respect for people in higher social positions is flagged by the narrator's comment that, "the word 'gentleman' had a spell for Adam" (*AB*, 209); however, it also entails respect for inherited order and tradition only when it is righteous. Hence Adam's belief in his judgment on right and wrong functions as a type of agency. Arthur's other claim to distinction is that he is a soldier. John R. Reed points out that the soldier is an uncommon figure in Eliot's fiction, and in

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<sup>2</sup> Ah, sage, sage in sooth, was he who first pondered  
this truth in his mind and with his tongue gave  
it utterance — that to marry in one's own degree is far  
the best, and that neither among them that are puffed  
up by riches nor among them that are mighty in pride  
of birth should marriage be desired by him who toileth  
with his hands.



*Adam Bede* she deftly toys with its stereotype. At his first appearance in the novel, Arthur's sobriquets are listed as "the young squire; the heir; the Captain," so that his military status seems interchangeable with his status as landed gentry. The soldier is in general represented as a marker of a contradictory masculinity — on the one hand distrusted as a sexual predator, while on the other respected for his military discipline and self-control (Reed: 269). Military officers are capable of battle and willing to risk their lives, but Arthur is not trained to risk his life (Reed: 272). The novel opens on June 18, 1799, when Britain was at war with France, and at this time being in a militia ("only a captain in the Loamshire Militia" (*AB*, 105)) indicates that he is not in a regular regiment (Reed: 272), and thus not a genuine soldier. Arthur lacks internal and external discipline, while fulfilling the role of seducer, and has thus fallen into the stereotype of the sexually unlicensed soldier rather than the disciplined military man (Reed: 272). In contrast, Adam's skill, strength, and discipline are qualities of the true soldier, and thus, "A tinsel officer from the gentry is dismissed in favor of a manly soldier from the artisan class" (Reed: 279).<sup>3</sup>

The transfer of honorable qualities away from the gentry also involves the shire's farmers, whose solid virtues are commendable despite the notion about social hierarchy that places farmers in a lower social class:

[Mr. Poyser] and his father were simple-minded farmers, proud of their untarnished character, proud that they came of a family which had held up its head and paid its way as far back as its name was in the parish register; ... (*AB*, 459)

Hetty's sexual transgression and infanticide cause a "sense of family dishonor" and "disgrace that could never be wiped out" (*AB*, 459). Farmers are regarded as respectable folk, and it is hence deeply significant that the respectable gentleman Arthur brings shame on them by abusing his privilege as landed gentry.

This challenge to class hierarchy is supported by resistance to another kind of exploitation. When the old Squire proposes that the Poyseres should have the running of two farms, Mrs. Poyser rejoins with "We're not dumb creatures to be abused and made money on by them as ha' got the lash in their hands, for want o' knowing how t' undo the tackle" (*AB*, 394). What she opposes is the exploitation by landlords of tenants by exploiting an established injustice. Due to this kind of exploitation, social position and wealth are commensurate with each other. Thus when Hetty contemplates marrying Arthur, she not only assumes her upward movement in social position but also a luxurious life full of material abundance. It has been argued that Mrs. Poyser's revolt is motivated by financial self-interest rather than by any abstract notion of speaking for her class against the oppression enforced by "their betters" (Corbett:

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<sup>3</sup> Reed supports this with the observation that that the Crimean War shifted respect from the largely aristocratic officer corps — incompetent and unprofessional — to the ordinary soldier (279).

298). Corbett therefore classifies Mrs. Poyser as a Philistine, embodying indifference to whatever exists beyond her own “narrow province,” and extends this to include some element of moral culpability for Hetty’s fall, due to a lack of understanding of human needs and human failings (299). This may be so, but it also seems a narrow, univocal reading of the metonymic effect of Eliot’s realism to understand these characters principally in terms of lack, whereas Mrs. Poyser’s sense of a “little bit of irregular justice” in her conversation with Squire Donnithorn embodies a subversive opposing of class structure wider than her own self-interest: “I know there’s them as is born t’ own the land, and them as is born to sweat on ’t” (*AB*, 392), but she adds, “I know it’s christened folks’s duty to submit to their betters as fur as flesh and blood ’ull bear it; but I’ll not make a martyr o’ myself, and wear myself to skin and bone, and worret myself ... for no landlord in England” (*AB*, 392). Her outburst seems part of a growing consciousness of the exploitation of tenant farmers by aristocratic landlord and expresses an alternative and less patriarchal standard of justice. Such consciousness of class exploitation results from her contribution to the family economy, a fact which survives the narrator’s patronizing, misogynistic suggestion that this encourages a woman to forget her proper standing:

The woman who manages a dairy has a large share in making the rent, so she may well be allowed to have her opinion on stock and their “keep” — an exercise which strengthens her understanding so much that she finds herself able to give her husband advice on most other subjects. (*AB*, 234)

Status is therefore a matter of economic contribution and power as well as being a male or female in the family. Mrs. Poyser is acknowledged by her husband to be “not like the women in general” (*AB*, 234) because of her “discernment” (*AB*, 235).

That Mrs. Poyser fully expects the family to lose the lease of the farm because of her outspokenness reflects a dystopic space in the society of a kind which is to be overtly thematized in the feminist utopian fiction of the following century. That is, gender domination is linguistically constructed in that language is an instrument of men’s domination. The theme is still more overtly realized within the Poyser household, of course, in the controversy over Dinah’s preaching. The following items from Ildney Cavalcanti’s list of the ways in which women have been silenced are pertinent to *Adam Bede*: strongly regulated forms of address and turn-taking; enforced use of formulaic or contrived speech (sometimes reaching the extreme circumstance in which the female protagonist has to communicate by following a script); prohibition of access to public speech, reading and/or writing, specially creative writing; and denial of representation in political forums (Cavalcanti: 152). Mrs. Poyser breaches these regulations by speaking “out of turn,” whether in expressing her views on farm management to her husband, or in her outburst against Squire Donnithorne; Dinah speaks publicly and, as an extempore preacher, without a script; once imprisoned, Hetty withdraws into silence, a mere

plaything of discourse. Because social communication is predominantly inflected through language, linguistic control is both metonymic of and an instrument of other forms of social control — ideological, political, and institutional.

The metaphor of the narrator's mind as a distorting mirror in Chapter 17 opens the text up to such considerations of the relationships between signs and meanings, and hence of the issue of (mis)interpretation and (mis)reading. As subverting elements, such as democratic movements, outside the text are associated with the discrepancy between sign and meaning, Eliot raises a fundamental question of the relationship between society and individuals within sign system evolving through their mutual interaction. If there is no fixed, one-to-one relationship between sign and meaning, assumptions about class within a rigid class hierarchy and about fixed gender roles within a patriarchy may be an illusion, inherited from the past without scrutiny. Eliot shows this in Adam's misinterpretation of Hetty and of Hetty's "fall." The narrator ironically presents his notions about Hetty as a misreading of physiognomy based on a misconceived, androcentric "language of nature":

Every man [who is in love] is conscious of being a great physiognomist. Nature, he knows, has a language of her own, which she uses with strict veracity, and he considers himself an adept in the language. Nature has written out his bride's character for him in those exquisite lines of cheek and lip and chin ... the husband will look on, smiling benignly, able, whenever he chooses, to withdraw into the sanctuary of his wisdom.... It is a marriage such as they made in the golden age, when the men were all wise and majestic, and the women all lovely and loving. (*AB*, 197-98, ellipses mine)

Paxton argues that Eliot, in critical opposition to Herbert Spencer's assumption that females are naturally inferior and subordinate, depicts both Adam and Arthur as mistaken in seeing Hetty as Eve and assuming "her beauty as a sign of her virtue" (1991: 44). She continues, "[Eliot] traces the error to its source in the teleology that organizes their conceptual world and describes how both young men are taught to interpret their society, and the women in it, in light of prevailing myths about the origins of life, love, and human responsibility" (Paxton: 44). That objects only signify in the context of the interpretive frame into which they are drawn is further confirmed by the contrast between the ways the abjected body of Hetty is interpreted in the courtroom. Adam sees the *corpse* of his former construction of an idealized Hetty, whereas "Others" see a body that signifies moral blight.<sup>4</sup> Through the analogy of looking at a corpse — in which action the viewer sees the likeness of a loved one and is acutely sensible to the difference: "something else *was*, and *is not*" (original italics) — Adam sees Hetty, even "the Hetty who had smiled at him in the garden

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<sup>4</sup> Showalter points out that the crime of the infanticidal woman — "the worst that could be imagined by a society that exalted maternity" — was much more likely to occur in conjunction with illegitimacy, poverty, and brutality. Recognition of post-partum depression as a form of insanity meant that "Victorian judges and juries ... were reluctant to sentence infanticidal women to death ... and responded compassionately to the insanity defense generally used in their behalf" (1985: 58-59). Hetty, whose story is set several decades earlier, could not benefit from this compassion.

under the apple-tree boughs" (*AB*, 477), but what he finally sees is Hetty abjected. The overt evocation of the moment in Eden just before the Fall, combined with the insistence that he is looking at "that Hetty's corpse" and this is his way of viewing what someone else sees as the "pale hard-looking culprit," both invokes the great Christian myth of human abjection and testifies to the complexity of sign systems. In a much earlier sequence about "looking at Hetty" (in Chapter 15), the narrator had remarked on "the intricacies of [Nature's] syntax" and the likelihood of arriving at the opposite of "her real meaning," and had pre-empted Adam's courtroom perception by using "long dark eyelashes" as an example of a physical feature attributed with significance but which in fact only signifies as it is drawn into a pre-existing semiotic system. Likewise, "others" in the courtroom regard her appearance as a prefiguration of a guilty verdict, since her abjection is linked to an evil *blighting*: "she looked as if some demon had cast a blighting glance upon her, withered up the woman's soul in her, and left only a hard despairing obstinacy" (*AB*, 477). Thus preconceptions change the perception and interpretation of signs, so that the "same" sign can be read in opposite ways. Again the effect is complicated here because the sign being read is Hetty's *abjected* body, so interpretation will pivot on the meanings attributed to abjection.

Throughout the novel the way in which sign systems are interpreted divides people into two types: one faithfully believes the correspondence between sign/meaning and the other tries to find new meanings to the sign. On the one hand, the stranger who chances to hear Dinah's preaching (and is later revealed to be a magistrate with influence at the prison where Hetty is incarcerated) belongs to the former. He meditates, judging by Dinah's appearance: "Nature never meant her for a preacher" (*AB*, 67). The narrator comments: "Perhaps he was one of those who think that nature has theatrical properties, and with the considerate view of facilitating art and psychology, 'makes up' her characters, so that there may be no mistake about them" (*AB*, 67). On the other hand, as Corbett argues, nature does not affect the formation of human character (297), which is supported by the fact that nature functions in an "entirely negative" way in *Adam Bede*, a realm totally divorced from human society which can be made meaningful only through human projections onto it (Corbett: 295). In her conversation with Mr. Irwine, Dinah discerns complex discrepancies between nature, spirituality and human society:

"I've noticed, that in these villages where the people lead a quiet life among the green pastures and the still waters, tilling the ground and tending the cattle, there's a strange deadness to the Word, as different as can be from the great towns, like Leeds.... It's wonderful how rich is the harvest of souls up those high-walled streets, where you seem to walk as in a prison-yard, and the ear is deafened with the sounds of worldly toil. I think maybe it is because the promise is sweeter when this life is so dark and dreary, and the soul gets more hungry when the body is ill at ease." (*AB*, 137, ellipses mine).

Dinah's paradox is that, within her semiotic system, the Arcadian setting of the pleasant rural English landscape, with which Mr. Irwine seems so consonant, is spiritually a dystopia; and the more evidently dystopian setting of the city, defined by a lexical set whose node is *miser* (high-walled; prison; deafened; toil; dark and dreary), offers utopian hope. More practically, as Corbett argues, working-class Methodism is represented as a solution to the problems of alienation expected to be present in the industrialized city (298).

That Dinah speaks from within a specific semiotic system is marked by her characteristic Biblical register (both vocabulary and syntax). This functions most effectively here in the "rich harvest of souls" cliché, which as a metaphor effectively inverts an expected contrast between the material abundance of the country and urban lack, but is actually an evangelical cliché drawn from Biblical pretexts.<sup>5</sup> It is a semiotic system predisposed to constructing the world as a dystopia — *both* settings are dystopias in her terms — and exemplifies how the novel's various sign systems are apt to produce dystopian readings of the world. The narrator's more mechanistic view of the universe represents it as cold and indifferent, exhibiting "the disparity between nature's appearance and the anguish of the human beings who pass through it" (Corbett: 295). The unarticulated conclusion is that there is no God who comforts and consoles human misery, therefore human beings should "help each other the more" (*AB*, 338), emphasizing the importance of sympathy. Tragic things happen to people, but the world remains the same, as Lisbeth feels when her husband is dead:

it was right that things should look strange and disordered and wretched, now the old man had come to his end in that sad way; the kitchen ought not to look as if nothing had happened. (*AB*, 149)

Nature displays little solicitude for the "individual lot" (*AB*, 338). It remains "unmindful, unconscious" (*AB*, 338) of the suffering of individuals. The narrator asserts:

There are so many of us, and our lots are so different: what wonder that Nature's mood is often in harsh contrast with the great crisis of our lives? We are children of a large family, and must learn, as such children do, not to expect that our little hurts will be made much of — to be content with little nurture and caressing and help each other the more. (*AB*, 338)

Eliot offers an alternative metaphor that personifies nature as a "great tragic dramatist" which "knits us together by bone and muscle, and divides us by the subtler web of our brains; blends yearning and repulsion; and ties us by our heart strings to the beings that jar us at every moment" (*AB*, 83-84). Reading the language of nature then depends on the "subtler web of our brains," on the skill, knowledge, and disciplined self-awareness of the reader, and on a necessary humility before the often inscrutable spectacle of Nature. The most delicate conception of sign and its

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<sup>5</sup> Mt. 8:37-38, Lk. 10:2, "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few"; Mt. 13:39, "the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels"; John 4:35-36, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest./And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal."

interpretation comes from the narrator's comment on Adam and Dinah's confession of mutual love:

That is a simple scene, reader. But it is almost certain that you, too, have been in love — perhaps, even, more than once, though you may not choose to say so to all your lady friends. If so, you will no more think the slight words, the timid looks, the tremulous touches, by which two human souls approach each other gradually, like two little quivering rain-streams, before they mingle into one — you will no more think these things trivial, than you will think the first-detected signs of coming spring trivial, though they be but a faint, indescribable something in the air and in the song of the birds, and the tiniest perceptible budding on the hedgerow branches. Those slight words and looks and touches are part of the soul's language; and the finest language, I believe, is chiefly made up of unimposing words, such as “light,” “sound,” “stars,” “music” — words really not worth looking at, or hearing, in themselves, any more than “chips” or “sawdust:” it is only that they happen to be the signs of something unspeakably great and beautiful. I am of opinion that love is a great and beautiful thing too; and if you agree with me, the smallest signs of it will not be chips and sawdust to you: they will rather be like those little words, “light” and “music,” stirring the long-winding fibres of your memory, and enriching your present with your most precious past. (*AB*, 537)

Within the proper context, the world as a sign system, the sign can effectively signify the desired range of meaning, because there is a social convention to enable this: as the narrator says, “if you agree with me.” Because the context is love between two people, such words as “light,” “sound,” “stars,” and “music,” refer to meanings implied in addition to the original referents, that is, they are metonymic.<sup>6</sup> These apparently small signs carry a heavy weight of meaning, “the signs of something unspeakably great and beautiful,” thus pointing to the arbitrariness of the sign and its interpretation. Adam's misinterpretation of Hetty's love for him is caused by the tendency towards misinterpretation and misreading due to the arbitrariness of the sign system. When Adam visits Hetty in the garden:

He could see there was a large basket at the end of the row: Hetty would not be far off, and Adam already felt as if she were looking at him. Yet when he turned the corner she was standing with her back towards him, and stooping to gather low-hanging fruit. Strange that she had not heard him coming! Perhaps it was because she was making the leaves rustle. She started when she became conscious that someone was near — started so violently that she dropped the basin with the currants in it, and then, when she saw it was Adam, she turned from pale to deep red. That blush made his heart beat with a new happiness. Hetty had never blushed at seeing him before. (*AB*, 265)

Adam misreads Hetty's blushing in the “half-neglected abundance” of the Poyser's garden and sees her as Eve with “Roses blushing round” (*Paradise Lost* 9: 425). His misinterpretation of Hetty's blush as a sign of love for him is the possibility most convenient to his desires, but in fact Hetty has been absorbed in thoughts of Arthur, and Adam, “like many other men ... thought the signs of love for another were signs of love towards himself” (*AB*, 266). In contrast, Adam is very imperceptive with regard to the signs of Dinah's love for him. The indication that Dinah is

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<sup>6</sup>John Stephens defines metonymy as a device which has “a literal and figurative function which overlap.” In other words, the *tenor* of the figure is produced by a chain of conventional, *culturally* determined meanings and signified by something which is already an aspect or attribute of that tenor. Metonymy is deduced from a perception that in some way the sense of an utterance is incomplete, but because the literal meaning of a metonymy still functions in its context meaning is extended to include both literal and figurative significances. While a metonymy may be quite complex, it is therefore also immediately accessible with almost no effort on the part of the audience. Metonymy thus plays a major role in the language of realist fiction, being responsible for much of its figurative scope and depth (1992a: 67, 131).

in love with Adam first appears in the sentence “A faint blush dies away from her pale cheek” (*AB*, 521). Then many sentences ensue such as “her face was flushed” (*AB*, 522) and “the bright uneasy glance which accompanies suppressed agitation” (*AB*, 528). It is Lisbeth who discerns the sign of it: “Thee [Adam] think’st thy mother knows nought, but she war alive afore thee wast born” (*AB*, 545). Adam does not trust his mother’s insights, thinking that “she had seen what she wished to see” (*AB*, 545), which is exactly what happens when he interprets Hetty’s blushing.

The fact that language is not a transparent medium of reality is also in accordance with the arbitrariness of a sign/meaning system. Dinah says, “we can’t say half what we feel with our words” (*AB*, 163). And sometimes if we say openly what we think the idea becomes trivial or the intention becomes vague or the thing wished for is not achieved. This is what Arthur wants to achieve when he tries to tell Mr. Irwine about his relationship with Hetty:

The mere act of telling it would make it seem trivial: the temptation would vanish, as the charm of fond words vanishes when one repeats them to the indifferent. In every way it would help him, to tell Irwine. (*AB*, 184)

This notion that significance can be leached out of language reflects Arthur’s abandonment of agency and willingness to allow chance signification to determine important decisions in his life. When he enquires of Adam, “you are never shilly-shally, first making up your mind that you won’t do a thing and then doing it after all?” (*AB*, 212), the question is virtually directed at himself. Adam is very faithful to his promises. This attentiveness can be regarded as a determination to control one’s own life through control of language and its power. However, it is natural to change one’s views and actions as Dinah does when she marries, contrary to the terms in which she had earlier refused Seth’s proposal. In arguing that, “God’s work is too great for me to think of making a home for myself in this world” (*AB*, 79), she invokes the idea that Snowfield is a dystopia.<sup>7</sup> However, the novel suggests that the life of self-abnegation is not a utopian pathway, and a richer mode of intersubjective relationship — one grounded in mutual love, and which now incorporates sexual desire — is to be favored. Instead of allowing her life to be shaped by “leadings of Providence” or opening her Bible at random, Dinah chooses the pathway of agency. This then situates her acquiescence in the decision to forbid women to preach, despite her acknowledged ability as a preacher, and entails “having herself move from a ministry of preaching to the more effective ministry of human caring” (Gill: 21).

Hetty, Dinah’s opposite in femininity, morality, and agential capacity, is a metonymy for the discrepancy between sign and meaning, both because her beauty does not denote morality; and because she does not interpret religion as her personal “fears” or “hopes,” as religion for her is only the sign devoid of meaning. Therefore, Hetty is described as irreligious, even though she

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<sup>7</sup> “Where the trees are so few that a child might count them, and there’s very hard living for the poor in the winter ... it has pleased God to fill my heart so full with the wants and sufferings of his poor people” (*AB*, 79-80).

goes to church every Sunday and learns her catechism. She does not interpret her situation from within a religious perspective; on the contrary, she is very worldly, as the narrator comments:

Religious doctrines had taken no hold on Hetty's mind: she was one of those numerous people who have had godfathers and godmothers, learned their catechism, been confirmed, and gone to church every Sunday, and yet, for any practical result of strength in life, or trust in death, have never appropriated a single Christian idea or Christian feeling. You would misunderstand her thoughts during these wretched days, if you imagined that they were influenced either by religious fears or religious hopes. (*AB*, 430)

Hetty is described as a pagan hedonist. Her suffering is the result of a conflict between individual desire and social prescription, which favors the higher class and its life style. She is not supposed to love Arthur because he is above her in position, let alone think about marriage with him. This apparent transgression is possible for him because she does not comprehend the fixity of social hierarchy and the behavior that entails. She cares more for Arthur and deserts Adam because her love for the former is motivated by the desire to raise her position and enter into a life of luxury.

When feminine beauty exists devoid of moral virtue, the woman concerned is verging on the vile and is abjected as a corrupt woman. Thus when Hetty is depicted fondling the earrings given to her by Arthur, the narrator comments:

it is too painful to think that she is a woman, with a woman's destiny before her — a woman spinning in young ignorance a light web of folly and vain hopes which may one day close round her and press upon her, a rancorous poisoned garment, changing all at once her fluttering, trivial butterfly sensations into a life of deep human anguish. (*AB*, 295)

This passage is about fear of female sexuality, social constraints and the physical consequences which negatively define women's lives. The narrator seems to ask the reader to consider Hetty's condition with sympathy because she is one of those "lovely things without a soul," like "kittens," "downy ducks," or "babies" (*AB*, 127). There is then a measure of condescension in her representation, as if a pretty woman cannot be expected to demonstrate moral sensibility or restraint. Hetty's beauty makes others confused:

There are various orders of beauty, causing men to make fools of themselves in various styles, from the desperate to the sheepish; but there is one order of beauty which seems made to turn the heads not only of men, but of all intelligent mammals, even of women. It is a beauty like that of kittens, or very small downy ducks making gentle rippling noises with their soft bills, or babies just beginning to toddle and to engage in conscious mischief — a beauty with which you can never be angry, but that you feel ready to crush for inability to comprehend the state of mind into which it throws you. (*AB*, 127-28)

Hetty is described as a "distractingly pretty girl" (*AB*, 127) and a "distracting kitten-like maiden" (*AB*, 128). Mrs. Poyser scolds her niece the more fiercely after a glance at her beauty to which she unexpectedly finds herself susceptible (*AB*, 128). This passage about Hetty's beauty, however, also reveals Eliot's narrative difficulties, because part of her strategy in creating her narrator's male persona depends upon her appropriation of the "reifying language" of men about women (Goode: 28). Because too strenuous a protest against traditional "readings" of the



beautiful female body would threaten the credibility of Eliot's male narrator, his sympathy for Hetty in particular seems to vacillate, especially when she is seen against the background of the natural world or when her beauty is compared to that of "kittens," "downy ducks," or "babies." Perfect beauty reflects intellectual perfection in men but moral virtue in women. Hetty's beauty disguises her true nature; men assume that her capacities and skills for motherhood are innate. By exposing the fatuousness of these fantasies about Hetty, Eliot challenges men's view of women.

What this proves is that to the community seventeen-year-old Hetty is guilty of beauty. She is guilty of using her beauty to manipulate others. Male gazes, desires, misreadings, and entrapments empower Hetty to be a potential seductress, regardless of whether or not she has any latent tendencies to virtue. She is obliged by social expectations to manipulate and take advantage of her sexual power, almost despite herself; or at least such behavior seems to be the expectation of the narrator, who is able to excuse her. Eliot, likewise, understands the pressure that a woman like Hetty is under, but does not necessarily condone it. She does not condemn or feel unsympathetic to Hetty because of the men she ensnares, but because by responding to the male gaze as she does, she is debasing the dignity and integrity of women, and making them subject to a charge of manipulation. She is blamed for others' errors of judgment, and the effect her beauty has on them. Others have certain expectations of her character, based on her beauty. When she does not live up to or conform to their expectations, they condemn her.

These judgments of Hetty's beauty have important implications for the understanding of nature and Nemesis. Firstly, community members tend to judge Hetty by her body, rather than her nature. We are shown throughout the novel the faulty premise of the scene of the primeval fall of Eve, which equates Hetty's sexual fall and the Fall in Genesis. The link between Hetty and Eve informs Eliot's representation of the scene of the fall, in which Adam is observer rather than participant:

The two figures were standing opposite to each other, with clasped hands about to part; and while they were bending to kiss, Gyp ... gave a sharp bark. They separated with a start — one hurried through the gate out of the Grove, and the other turning round, walked slowly, with a sort of saunter, towards Adam, who still stood transfixed and pale, ... and looking at the approaching figure with eyes in which amazement was fast turning to fierceness. (*AB*, 286, ellipses mine)

It is not clear whether the tragedy can be attributed to her own moral predilections, or to her yielding of herself up to the discourse of romance, or whether it is largely the tragedy of a child's seduction, illicit pregnancy, and abandonment by her lover and family. Secondly, the narrative argues that Hetty's punishment under the law is a result of Nemesis, a poetic justice and inevitable result of her crime; therefore, even if there is legal doubt of her wrongdoing, she cannot evade the punishment meted out to a woman that society intuitively feels to be evil. In response to

Adam's demand that Arthur be punished for bringing "a *child* like her to sin and misery" (*AB*, 467, italics added), Mr. Irwine argues:

"you have no right to say that the guilt of her crime lies with him, and that he ought to bear the punishment. It is not for us men to apportion the shares of moral guilt and retribution. We find it impossible to avoid mistakes even in determining who has committed a single criminal act, and the problem how far a man is to be held responsible for the unforeseen consequence of his own deed is one that might well make us tremble to look into it." (*AB*, 468)

The effect of his and the community's decision to focus all attention on the apparent fact of Hetty's infanticide (simply, "her crime" in Irwine's formulation) is, despite Irwine's gestures towards the problem of indeterminacy, to determine which signs are to be read and in what way, and thereby to open up a gap between signs and causality which suggests to many readers that Irwine's arguments here are morally culpable and motivated by class solidarity. Hetty is thus identified as the prime actor, the one responsible for the chain of tragic events with repercussions for herself and others, and the scene Adam accidentally witnesses presents a sexual fall to be read as the Fall of humanity, and more poignantly, of womankind.

The narrative emphasis on Hetty's narcissism — self-love, excluding love for others — is placed in her adoration of her own image. Her narcissism is a major reason for her family's immediate belief in her guilt, when Mr. Irwine brings the news of her arrest, Mrs. Poyser has said to her husband:

"She's no better than a peacock, as 'ud strut about on the wall and spread its tail when the sun shone if all the folks i' the parish was dying: there's nothing seems to give her a turn i' th' inside, not even when we thought Totty had tumbled into the pit. To think o' that dear cherub! And we found her wi' her little shoes struck i' the mud an' crying fit to break her heart by the far horse-pit. But Hetty niver minded it, I could see, though she's been at the nussin' o' the child iver since it was a babby. It's my belief her heart's as hard as a pibble." (*AB*, 201)

Hetty's lack of genuine feelings can be viewed as resulting from her narcissism. She is comparable with Tito in *Romola* in his amorality and narcissism. Both are compared with a cipher, displaying physical beauty and moral emptiness (Corbett: 296).<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the novel Hetty is only on one occasion clearly a focalizer, and is otherwise merely a surface to be described, commented on and condemned by the narrator. The revelation that she is pregnant is initially presented as a surprise in the chapter devoted to it (Chapter 35, "The Hidden Dread"). Introduced by means of the short phrase "swift-advancing shame" (*AB*, 410), the information unfolds through a section written in urgent present tense narration (*AB*, 410-11) and culminating in the brief moment of focalization when she contemplates drowning

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<sup>8</sup> Hetty and Tito in their lack of genuine feelings and amorality will be further investigated with respect to narcissism in Chapter V on *Romola*.

herself. It is only after she has been condemned to death for infanticide that she is given a voice, when, in the prison cell, she finally confesses her guilt, such as it is, to Dinah:

“I did do it, Dinah.... I buried it in the wood ... the little baby ... because it cried.” (*AB*, 497, ellipses mine)

In an extended sequence (*AB*, 497-500) she is given a voice and narrates the event that only she witnessed — her attempt to kill her newborn baby and its eventual death from exposure. The downward pathway into ever deepening abjection that begins to accelerate with the disclosure of her pregnancy and seems to culminate in the trial, is now reprised in Hetty’s own voice in a fragmented staccato discourse that re-enacts the confused haze of post-natal depression. It is clear that she both did and did not intend to kill her baby. Giving her a voice at a time when post-natal depression is passing into grief for the baby and fear at her coming execution emphasizes how her lack of focalization throughout the novel has deprived her of independent thought or judgment. She drifts on the flow of events, so that even her accidentally successful attempt to kill the baby emphasizes her lack of agency and radical abjection.

Hetty’s fate is determined by the prevailing construction of femininity. The hierarchy reinforced by misogyny plays a major role in rendering Hayslope dystopic, precluding women’s potential from being realized in the public sphere by, for example, identifying women with animals without souls. An aggressive misogyny, to the point of comic caricature, is the characteristic discourse of the old school-teacher Bartle Massey, who, it is understood, bases his judgments on some kind of unsuccessful relationship in his undisclosed past (*AB*, 287, 291). He has a scathing opinion of women, and habitually equates them with animals. However, his dismissive criticisms do not appear to be very shrewd (or, finally, even negative) because the narrative’s humorous overtones subvert his one-sided, exaggerated misogyny by employing double voiced irony. This “diglossia” is even brought to a reader’s attention by Massey’s habit of duplicating parts of his utterances. He calls his dog “Vixen,” “the sly, hypocritical wench” (*AB*, 284), and attributes both “true feminine folly” (*AB*, 284) and tyranny to her:

“Law? What’s the use o’ law when a man’s once such a fool as to let a woman [Vixen] into his house?” (*AB*, 284)

He sees woman in a perspective typical of a patriarchal bachelor and continues confusing the dog with women: “That’s the way with these women, they’ve got no head-pieces to nourish, and so their food runs to fat or to brats” (*AB*, 285). The very fact that women are not dogs, nullifies his argument. He does not go to the Hall Farm because there are too many women in the house for him and he does not want to hear women’s voices (*AB*, 285). To Massey’s complaint about women Adam responds:

“don’t be so hard on the creatures God has made to be companions for us. A working man ’ud be badly off without a wife to see to th’ house and the victual, and make things clean and comfortable.” (*AB*, 285)

Though Adam is not so harsh towards women in general, unlike Massey, he has traditional notions about women and regards them as secondary beings who help men work. Women are only seen as housewives with aprons (*AB*, 285) who clean the rooms and prepare meals. At this stage Adam sees women only in domestic circumstances. Thus Mrs. Poyser wants to recommend Hetty to Adam by showing him that she would make a good housekeeper (*AB*, 409). But at the end of the novel, as critics such as Paxton (1991: 67-68) comment, his marriage with Dinah is viewed as having its basis in equality, as the juxtaposition of his work and Dinah’s preaching indicates. Mr. Massey further rejects the notion that women are good companions for men, citing the Biblical myth that Eve was the cause of the loss of Paradise:

“I don’t say but He might make Eve to be a companion for Adam in Paradise — there was no cooking to be spoilt there, and no other woman to cackle with and make mischief, though you see what mischief she did as soon as she’d an opportunity. But it’s an impious, unscriptural opinion to say a woman’s blessing to a man now; you might as well say adders and wasps, and foxes and wild beasts are a blessing, when they’re only the evils that belong to this state o’ probation, which it’s lawful for a man to keep as clear of as he can in this life, hoping to get quit of ’em for ever in another — hoping to get quit of ’em for ever in another.” (*AB*, 286)

Massey’s dialogue with Adam in Chapter 21 (*AB*, 285 ff.) is full of negative comments about femininity. His ideas about women are based on the Bible, Christianity and observations drawn from his undisclosed personal experience. He has an overall negative notion about family and thinks “bachelors are wiser than married men, because they have time for more general contemplation” (*AB*, 320) without the usual unreasonable wifely intervention. To such men as Bartle Massey, a woman like Dinah must be a challenge and a puzzle, even though he finds “preaching woman hateful” (*AB*, 375). On the other hand, it is natural for him to ignore such women as Hetty. He wonders why “so sensible a man as Adam must be reflecting on the small value of beauty in a woman whose temper was bad” (*AB*, 308). At the murder trial he does not care for Hetty at all, and he only cares for Adam saying, “I don’t value her a rotten nut” (*AB*, 462). He refers to Hetty derogatorily as “that bit of pink-and-white,” “vermin” (“eating the victual that would feed rational beings”) (*AB*, 464), and “poor castaway” (*AB*, 501). He also thinks it is better for such women as Hetty to be put out of the world (*AB*, 463-64). Even if he adds that “men that help ’em to do mischief had better go along” (*AB*, 464), he is too judgmental about Hetty, generalizing that her fall results from women’s inherent nature. However, his voice, the voice of a misogynist, is an effective way to call into question the patriarchal, misogynistic judgment on a “fallen” woman. His extreme antipathy and lack of objectivity, let alone compassion, colors his reception by the reader and facilitates an interrogative orientation towards such opinions.

As remarked above, Dinah is a puzzle to Massey, an example contradictory to his construction of womanhood and subversive of his misogyny. Her behavior is also opposed by patriarchal women, as exemplified by Mrs. Poyser at many points in the novel. Women's preaching is regarded as a disgrace, corroborated in the words of Mrs. Poyser to Dinah, "I've said enough already about your bringing such disgrace upo' your uncle's family" (*AB*, 123). Dinah defends her unusual profession for a woman by arguing that both sexes are called by God to preach:

It isn't for men to make channels for God's Spirit, as they make channels for the watercourse, and say, "Flow here, but flow not there." (*AB*, 134)

My heart is not free to marry. That is good for other women, and it is a great and a blessed thing to be a wife and mother; but "as God has distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every man, so let him walk." (*AB*, 79)<sup>9</sup>

Dinah is seen to be empowered by her appropriation of the language of men. Her appearance and demeanor suggest a signifying system to be interpreted quite differently from the signifying system associated with Hetty (as is explicitly suggested by the contrast between them in Chapter 15, "The Two Bed-Chambers"). Thus, according to Adams, Dinah is an "androgynous spirit" (1996: 47). She has the gentleness, selflessness, and sympathetic heart Eliot considered characteristic of a woman, and the authority and power of a man (*GEL*, IV, 468). She transcends her body as well as her gender. When Mr. Irwine asks:

"And you never feel any embarrassment from the sense of your youth — that you are a lovely young woman on whom men's eyes are fixed?" (*AB*, 136)

He, in fact, asks her whether she is conscious of the male gaze. She replies:

"No, I've no room for such feelings, and I don't believe the people ever take notice about that. I think, sir, when God makes His presence felt through us, we are like the burning bush: Moses never took any heed what sort of bush it was — he only saw the brightness of the Lord. I've preached to as rough ignorant people as can be in the villages about Snowfield — men that looked very hard and wild — but they never said an uncivil word to me, and often thanked me kindly as they made way for me to pass through the midst of them." (*AB*, 136-37)

Dinah's attitude contrasts with Hetty's extreme consciousness of the male gaze and construction of her image to conform to the expectations of the gaze. Her contemplation of herself in the mirror wearing the earrings given her by Arthur is ironical in several ways: diegetically, she is positioned by the narrator's overt male gaze; and mimetically, she is entrapped in her room (the only place she can wear the earrings without exposing her affair), entrapped by her gender, and entrapped by her class. Where Hetty's posturing is always oriented towards the male gaze, Dinah is not conscious of it, taking it not as sexual but as that of a fellow human being. In this way she can give something to others like the light from the burning bush, whereas Hetty is imprisoned

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<sup>9</sup> I Cor. 7:17.

in herself, with nothing to give to others. On the other hand, Dinah's unconsciousness of the male gaze can be viewed as a consequence of her innocence about sexuality. Like Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, she is often compared to a "little boy" (*AB*, 66), and this boyishness implies both sexual innocence and immaturity. Further, her fashioning of herself within an extreme religious practice constitutes a further suppression of her femininity and sexuality. As she develops as a character, and enters into a more comprehensive form of intersubjectivity, she realizes her sexuality and becomes conscious of the male gaze by appropriating it.

As David Carroll points out, Hayslope tries to exclude erotic love and "the reality of sin, suffering, and death," both of which threaten the status quo and thus subvert "stability and coherence" of community (1992: 75). It is in fact the processes of transgression and abjection which prompt the community's endeavor to cleanse itself of transgressors and abjected figures in order to maintain "the hierarchy and stability of the community" (Lamb: 274). The "strange contrast" (*AB*, 204) between Hetty and Dinah in Chapter 15 presents them as opposites, but nevertheless both are equally censured by the narrator. Hetty is condemned as vain and lacking maternal love, while Dinah is described as too spiritual and other-worldly ("almost like a lovely corpse into which the soul has returned charged with sublimer secrets and a sublimer love" (*AB*, 204)). Hetty's abomination of babies and interest in physical adornment are treated as indications of her lack of a proper maternal impulse, while Dinah's maternal impulses have been diverted into pastoral care — a point made by a kind of visual pun when, looking out of the window at "the peaceful fields" and "the pasture ... where the milch cows were lying" she rather diverts her gaze inward to the contemplation of "all the dear people whom she had learned to care for" (*AB*, 202). Simultaneously, in the adjacent room Hetty's gaze is fixed on her mirror. Both characters are self-fashioning, in the sense that their notions of selfhood are modelled on scripts — Hetty's on narratives of the Cinderella tale-type, and Dinah's on literal application of Biblical precept, as her aunt Mrs. Poyser earlier complains (*AB*, 122) — and both consequently lack a capacity for deep intersubjective relations. In this contrast, Hetty is represented as a grotesque form of femininity, ripe to be expelled from a society that abjects the abnormal, while Dinah, a different kind of female anomaly, can be incorporated into society once she discovers that intersubjective capacity. Her attempt at the end of the chapter to offer Hetty maternal/spiritual comfort (at 25, she is eight years older than Hetty) discloses an almost solipsistic failure to envisage another's subjectivity in any terms other than her own. It is a parody of caring.

Hetty's pregnancy and infanticide are the tragic consequences resulting from controlled ignorance about sexuality (Paxton 1991: 52-53) on the one hand and the heavy responsibility of women in childbearing on the other hand. First, because women are deemed defective they are

therefore regarded as an “object of protection” (*AB*, 413), subject to men’s “ownership and control” (Paxton 1991: 52), and are kept ignorant as an equation with innocence. Hetty is “strangely out of place” in Hayslope, but at the same time she is the product of the materialistic society. Carroll notes that “Hetty is simultaneously criminal and scapegoat, carrying the sins of the community to their extreme of harshness and despair where she sinks finally into the great gulf of complete isolation” (1992: 97). Eliot’s critique of Hayslope as a dystopian society focuses on the failure to “help each other the more” (*AB*, 338), embodied in its inadequate responses to Hetty and its rejection of the view that Adam gropes towards — that she is the victim of society grounded on rigid class distinctions (Corbett: 296), which condemns her affair with Arthur as transgressive because it crosses a rigid class boundary. Further, Hetty’s antipathy towards children results from the patriarchal system which imposes a heavy burden of childbearing and caring on women. The abandonment of her baby which results in its death is foreshadowed in the comment on the tedious work she has to endure at her uncle’s farm, as the narrator comments, “Hetty would have been glad to hear that she should never see a child again” (*AB*, 200).

Therefore, Hetty’s infanticide is not only her crime but the community’s that drives her into it. By this Eliot criticizes the dystopian elements of Hayslope that encourage “Hetty’s materialism and Arthur’s privilege” (Corbett: 293). Adam voices a criticism of class and gender hierarchies based on patriarchy and a double standard when he demands that the primary blame should be laid upon Arthur:

“It’s *his* doing,” he said; “If there’s been any crime, it’s at his door, not at hers. *He* taught her to deceive — *he* deceived me first. Let ’em put *him* on his trial — let him stand in court beside her, and I’ll tell ’em how he got hold of her heart, and ’ticed her t’ evil, and then lied to me. Is he to go free, while they lay all the punishment on her ... so weak and young?” (*AB*, 455, ellipsis mine)

Adam indicts Arthur for his deception, for his failure to live up to the role he has been born to play in the social hierarchy and the society’s double standard that winks at men’s mistakes and condemns women’s. McDonagh, whose illuminating discussion of the novel’s relationship to the law I am drawing on here, documents how some writers of the late Eighteenth Century argued that women and children on such occasions as infanticide are the double victims of men’s crimes of seduction, or other forms of exploitation or enslavement (244).<sup>10</sup>

Eliot carefully sets *Adam Bede* just prior to the 1803 amendments to the infanticide laws, under which Hetty would probably have been charged with a lesser crime (McDonagh: 251). Tried under a harsher law, she is subjected to a patriarchal indictment that has no space for

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<sup>10</sup> At the time of publication of this novel infanticide had become a controversial social problem (see also Showalter 1987).

compassion. Hence she will be abjected and expelled from society. That compassion is possible, if belated, is dramatized by the cliché of the gallows-foot reprieve, but the process of abjection is not commuted: after Arthur obtains a commutation of Hetty's death sentence, it is reduced from execution to transportation,<sup>11</sup> and she dies in the colonies at the end of her sentence but before she is able to return to Hayslope (*AB*, 582). Thus the process of eliminating the abjected follows its pathway to the culmination in death.

For those remaining, upon whom the condemnation of Hetty has greatest impact, the specter of self-abjection looms, as both Adam and the Poyseres contemplate leaving the district. The impact of this has been anticipated in the episode when Mrs. Poyser speaks out and risks putting the farm lease in jeopardy. Mr. Poyser articulates the fear of abjection: "I should be loath to leave th' old place, and the parish where I was bred and born, and father afore me. We should leave our roots behind us, I doubt, and niver thrive again" (*AB*, 395). Any change in habitual life will be threatening to the Poyseres, for their 'habitat' Hall Farm is not just a dwelling place, but the location of their *habitual* life (Li: 28). The effect of displacement and exile will be discussed in the following chapters, especially in Chapter III on *Silas Marner*.

Self-exile is averted, however, because Arthur chooses abjection and thus opens the way for the others to remain. In parallel with Hetty, he undergoes a seven years exile, and when he returns at the end of that time he is frail of body, but ready for healing and reinstatement to his place in Hayslope society. The novel closes with references to anticipated meetings between Arthur and, first, Dinah and then the Poyseres. These are to be meetings of healing and reconciliation, metonymic of social inclusiveness and an end to abjection. However, many readers have been teased by the conversation about Dinah's cessation of preaching that is placed a few paragraphs before the end of the novel. It is often read as a mark of abjection — the "domestication of Dinah," as Corbett puts it (289). It is, of course, not the marriage which puts an end to Dinah's preaching, but a ruling of the Methodist Conference, and Seth's protestation that Dinah should have resisted the edict indicates quite clearly that Dinah had not formally given up preaching until then, and so must be understood to have continued for a year or so after the marriage.<sup>12</sup> As Paxton convincingly argues, Dinah's early defence of her mission makes her Adam's equal and not his subordinate, and at the outset of the novel the juxtaposition of Adam's workshop and Dinah's preaching in the Green makes them equal (Paxton 1991: 68).

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<sup>11</sup> Presumably to Australia and for a standard term of seven years (1800-1807).

<sup>12</sup> Eliot's carefully articulated chronology should cue readers to reach this conclusion. The marriage took place in November 1801. The Methodist ban on women preachers was enunciated in 1803, and Lisbeth, Dinah's first child, was born in May-June 1803 (she is just over four at the end of June 1807). Reading into the gap, we can conclude that Dinah preached throughout 1802.



That Dinah represents a new female subjective agency is signalled within Adam and Dinah's marriage by Adam's recognition of Dinah's work and promise not to interfere with her autonomy (Paxton 1991: 67): "I'd never think putting myself between you and God" (*AB*, 552). As Paxton argues, "In Dinah, Eliot thus represents all the female energy and intelligence wasted by narrow definitions of gender roles that recognize woman's only 'natural' vocation in marriage and motherhood" (1991: 56). The alternative notion — that she is simply silenced — is grounded in an inadequate conception of subjectivity. The society that *Adam Bede* envisages is where abjected figures like Hetty are eliminated but where, in a time of change, an unusual woman such as Dinah finds agency. The novel's trajectory is thus to suggest that Hayslope, an Arcadian setting with utopian overtones, is in fact another dystopia, but out of it can emerge a more humanly substantiated pathway towards utopia.

## Conclusion

If, as Morgan argues, the theme of Eliot's novels is the apparent sense of the randomness of life, the difficulty of presuming a moral universe when the order, the value, the morality are male (273), her employment of utopian/dystopian thinking charts the possible pathways to be followed by characters occupying the margin of society — the thinkers, the dissenters — and those who place themselves on the margin by transgressing against social order. Patriarchy is grounded in Christian morality, so when the authority of patriarchy is questioned, the views of its grounding Christianity, including doctrinal dogmas, and the roles of gender, class, and race, come under critical scrutiny. For example, when Adam hears about Hetty's pregnancy, he not only denounces Arthur but criticizes the gender and class foundations of patriarchal law itself. He sees the fault in the patriarchal system of justice that is based on Christianity. That is, in protesting that Arthur goes unpunished for his crime, Adam sees some of the inequalities women face under the law of church and state in nineteenth-century England.

The two main determinant issues of *Adam Bede* influenced by patriarchal religion are gender and social distinction as a *fait accompli*, and these induce people to accept their social positioning with regard to gender and social hierarchy. The characters of *Adam Bede* are configured across a continuum of attitudes towards religion and gender roles: at the beginning of the novel, Dinah is entirely subjected to the discourse of fundamentalist dissenting religion, and has thus renounced her femininity in favor of an ascetic existence, whereas Hetty is worldly and obsessed with her femininity. Dinah achieves a more balanced subjectivity by the end of the novel, but Hetty has been abjected beyond the point of death. The middle ground is occupied by the likes of Mr. Irwine and Mrs. Poyser, with their modest ideas about religion and life. A central

concern of *Adam Bede* is the constraining and confining impact of religion upon femininity, emphasized by the relatively brief period of liberty and equality enjoyed by Dinah before her public voice is again silenced, but most effectively overturned, as Paxton argues (1991: 63-65), by Dinah's personal revelation that the beliefs which sustain her are ineffectual for reaching out to Hetty in her condemned cell, and that more is achieved by embracing Hetty in a maternal/sisterly intersubjectivity.

Hetty's is a tragic story of female abjection and death, balanced by Dinah's significant development of subjective agency. Where Hetty is moved so far to the margin she is transported to a penal colony, dismissed as "other" to a place where social abjects are eliminated, Dinah moves from margin to center, and in her marriage with Adam embodies the novel's utopian possibilities.

### CHAPTER III

#### Dystopia and the Frustration of Agency in the Double *Bildungsroman* of *The Mill on the Floss*

Eliot's consciousness that one man's utopia is another man's dystopia (Booker: 15) is clearly foregrounded in the seeming digression about the "good society" embedded within the account of Maggie Tulliver's discovery of the life of self-renunciation (*MF*, 385-86). There is a subtle conjunction of ideas here, however, which links Maggie's abjected state — now being augmented by further self-abjection — with the dystopian existence endured by "unfashionable families" (*MF*, 385). The narrator's mordantly ironic depiction of a luxurious and indolent life enjoyed by a few is contrasted harshly with an account of the massive human misery which sustains it. There is an underlying contrast here between a self-identified "good society" and the idea of a Good Society suggested by utopian thinking. What the "good society" pivotally lacks is a moral sense which might enable social transformation: hence its principles and beliefs are not only "moderate" but "always presupposed," and then to be discussed only "with a light and graceful irony." Space is filled with luxuries, and time with pleasures; and religion is the domain of "the superior clergy who are to be met in the best houses." What is radically lacking is "belief and emphasis" (*emphasis*, 'intensity or force of feeling' (*OED*, definition 3)). For the rest of society, here characterized by grinding labor and physical deprivation, "life is based entirely on emphasis — the emphasis of want" and it is therefore not surprising that it seeks "an emphatic belief." What is then offered as the best form of that belief is a utopian vision grounded in notions of altruism and intersubjectivity:

something that will present motives in an entire absence of high prizes, something that will give patience and feed human love when the limbs ache with weariness and human looks are hard upon us — something, clearly, that lies outside personal desires, that includes resignation for ourselves and active love for what is not ourselves. (*MF*, 386)

In the immediate context, Maggie grasps this insight only in part, and as the account of her "abandonment of egoism" (*MF*, 387) unfolds, it becomes clear that her development is cramped by another "always presupposed," that is, by female gendering.

That gender roles may place such a utopian vision beyond realization is disclosed here by the novel's dialogic strategies. The section is presented predominantly from narrator perspective, with a couple of points where Maggie briefly focalizes, but toward the end presents Maggie as an object of gaze as focalized by Mrs. Tulliver (with some embedded, "quoted" speech underscoring the shift in focalization):

Hanging diligently over her sewing, Maggie was a sight any one might have been pleased to look at.... Her mother felt the change in her with a sort of puzzled wonder that Maggie should be 'growing up so good'; it was amazing that this once 'contrairy' child was become so submissive, so backward to assert her own will. Maggie used to look up from her work and find her mother's eyes fixed upon her.... The mother was getting fond of her tall brown girl, the only bit of furniture now on which she could bestow her anxiety and pride.... (MF, 388, ellipses mine)

Each note of approbation here emphasizes Maggie's diminishing possibilities for agency. Depicted in part as a figure in a genre painting (Vermeer's *The Lacemaker*, for example), she is characterized by proper female virtues: diligence, submissiveness, and lacking individual will. There is perhaps a reminder that this is loss, not gain, in the somewhat convoluted "so backward to assert her own will," where the presumed primary sense of *backward* here — 'reluctant, averse, unwilling; shy' (*OED*, definition B.6) — is shadowed by its more overtly negative sense, 'behindhand in respect of time or progress' (*OED*, definition B.7).

As with Eliot's other novels, *The Mill on the Floss* is dialogic in the sense that a variety of perspectives are presented. In this example, the conflicting and subverting ideas are represented through shifts between the discourse of the omniscient narrator and the perceptions and language of the characters. More widely in the novel, differing positions are presented as a medley of conflicting social voices, as Susan Fraiman notes: those of men and women, of members of the dominant and labouring classes, of whites and "Gypsies" (149). In fact, the whole novel is propelled by differing consciousnesses, although the major theme is the conflict between Maggie and St. Ogg's society, with the dystopian element inherent in that society discernible in its refusal to accommodate Maggie's opposing voice and silencing of her.

Eliot's critical utopian impulse is manifested in *The Mill on the Floss* in the representation of two individual *Bildungsromane* where two figures from the same family develop differently because of social expectations, especially with respect to gender. As many critics point out, the novel is a double *Bildungsroman* which enables contrasts and foregrounds social absurdities (Fraiman; Goodman; McDonnell; and Abel, Hirsch, and Langland). By contrasting two *Bildungsromane* Eliot poses a question: Is it a just society which causes a better qualified female's *Bildung* to be stunted, while a less qualified male is encouraged to develop despite his lack of intelligence? The female protagonist is so abjected that even minor acts are construed as transgressions, and any attempt to offer her some agency, such as Dr. Kenn's offer of employment, is reinterpreted as further transgression on her part. Eliot locates the origin of gendered social expectations in tradition based on religion and investigates the "truth" of tradition, questioning every aspect of society that abjects individuals. Eliot's primary concern is to depict the dystopian elements in the provincial society of St. Ogg's, whereby Maggie is so condemned to the periphery and unrecuperably abjected. Dystopia is located in the monologic,

homogenic values that the society adheres to without scrutiny. In exploring the manifestations of abjection in the heroine Maggie — the range of abjection, transgression, renunciation (submission), and death — she suggests some possibilities for transforming the dystopian elements of St. Ogg's into social progress. Therefore, this chapter will proceed to investigate 1) how religion, patriarchy, and education as teleology affect an individual's *Bildung*; 2) how they make individuals abject and how abjection is manifested; and 3) how Eliot's critiques are manifested in the novel as a transformative force of society.

### ***Bildungsroman* – Religion, Patriarchy, and Education as Teleology**

Bakhtin defines the relation between human beings and chronotope as the “special connection between a man and all his actions, between every event of his life and the spatial-temporal world” (1981: 167). The protagonists' lives are developed as they belong to such a society at a particular time in the history of society. The events of *The Mill on the Floss* take place between 1829 and 1844, so the beliefs and behaviors of St. Ogg's society may be deemed to reflect a particular chronotope. The lawsuit over water rights and irrigation, which plays a central role in the lives of Maggie and Tom, depends on a point of law uncertain only between 1829-30. Eliot catches the moment of uncertainty and uses it in her dystopian chronotope, so that her contemporary readers can thus look back, bringing the different perspectives of hindsight, and thereby experience English provincial society as defamiliarized. As I have argued previously, this is an important tactic for utopian writing.

Individuals are products of society and the older generation influences the younger generation by educating the latter, passing down what is deemed valuable in the cultural history of society. The chronotope of *The Mill on the Floss* is grounded in a social practice ingrained with patriarchal values upheld by what Eliot refers to as a semi-paganism masquerading as Christian religion. Individuals who are incapable of critical thinking, such as Tom, accept traditional social practice as simply the way things are, while those who tend to be more free-spirited transgress and question the existing values. In Chapter 1, Book 4, Eliot gives detailed rendering on the Dodsons' and Tullivers' semi-paganism conceived falsely as Christian religion:

Observing these people narrowly, even when the iron hand of misfortune has shaken them from their unquestioning hold on the world, one sees little trace of religion, still less of a distinctively Christian creed. Their belief in the Unseen, so far as it manifests itself at all, seems to be rather of a pagan kind; their moral notions, though held with strong tenacity, seem to have no standard beyond hereditary custom. You could not live among such people; you are stifled for want of an outlet towards something beautiful, great, or noble; you are irritated with these dull men and women, as a kind of population out of keeping with the earth on which they live, with this rich plain where the great river flows forever onward and links the small pulse of the old English town with the beatings of the world's mighty heart. A vigorous superstition that lashes its gods or lashes its own back seems to be more congruous with the mystery of the human lot than the mental condition of these emmet-like Dodsons and Tullivers. (*MF*, 362-63)

Religion is degraded into mere forms and structures without any transcendent spiritual or moral underpinnings. In its gendering, it becomes phallogocentric (with the logos, under erasure). As she denies the very validity of the Dodsons' and the Tullivers' religion, Eliot challenges the notion of religion as teleology. The essence of Christianity is self-denial that involves genuine love and regard for others; however, as the Dodson sisters manifest, their regard for their sister in adversity is not genuine, but full of self-regarding and self-assertion, striking a moral note consonant with the account of "paganism" above. They find faults with others rather than forgive, count their profits rather than give charity. These cold, inhumane responses from the Dodson sisters are tragi-comic in their ill-founded logic. For example, they think it is a judgment upon Mr. Tulliver and it is against the will of God to help his family and make things easier, as "it would be an impiety to counteract [the judgment] by too much kindness (*MF*, 279). As Hodgson points out, the negative aspect of the Dodsons' morality grounded in this kind of religion is an impulse to accuse, blame, humiliate, and punish those who do not conform to social custom or who defile family honour (70).

### **Religion and Patriarchy as Teleology**

The fundamental conflict between individual and society is whether priority should be given to social stability and progress or to individual development and well-being. On the one hand is the view that the individual exists for the preservation and improvement of society, while on the other society is perceived as a means to improve the individual's happiness and well-being. The difference is reflected in two conflicting views on human excellence: pagan self-assertion and Christian self-denial (Mill 1977[1859]: 265-66). "Live for others," is a motto in Christianity, while altruism obliterates the self, which is not compatible with individualism. (Eliot has pursued this theme since her portrayal of Milly Barton, who lives for others, her husband and children, and because she does not care for herself she dies.)

Endemic to the idea of progress is the concept of teleology: 'the doctrine of the final causes of things; the doctrine of design, which assumes that the phenomena of organic life, particularly those of evolution, are explicable only by purposive causes, and that they in no way admit of a mechanical explanation or one based entirely on biological science; the doctrine of adaptation to purpose' (*Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, 1996, 1998 ed.). In *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition, teleology is defined as 'belief in or the perception of purposeful development toward an end, as in nature or history'; telos, 'the end of a goal-oriented process' (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition), presumes that "every kind of thing or species has its own nature or end and its characteristic

excellence is realized in performing whatever conduces to this end” (*Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 1972 ed. s.v. “Natural Law,” by Richard Wollheim). As applied specifically to the natural laws of Comtean Social Statics, for the human species that end is society or community. “The only principle on which Politics can be subordinated to Morals,” Comte writes, is “that individuals should be regarded, not as so many distinct beings, but as organs of one Supreme Being” (402-3). According to him, the end of the human organism is membership in the collectivity. That idea in turn sanctions duty and self-renunciation. For Comte “the only real life is the collective life of the race; ... individual life has no existence except as an abstraction” (404). Another thinker with whose work Eliot was familiar, Herbert Spencer, inclined toward the other view:

The society exists for the benefit of its members; not its members for the benefit of the society. It has ever to be remembered that great as may be the efforts made for the prosperity of the body politic, yet the claims of the body politic are nothing in themselves, and become something only in so far as they embody the claims of its component individuals. (Spencer: 449-50)

In this debate as to whether priority should be given to society or to individuals, Eliot clearly tends toward the position as here articulated by Spencer. In her narrativization of the concept, she suggests that a society that abjects individuals by subordinating them to social processes in the name of stability and progress is dystopian.

Throughout her novels Eliot assumes that individual development and happiness should not be sacrificed in the name of social stability and progress, and hence society should exist for the benefit of individuals, not vice versa. The utopian perspective she reaches for, however, is where individual well-being and social progress and stability coincide (that is, where inward law and outward law are in harmony). Her belief that human agency without restraint can create utopia is manifested in *The Mill on the Floss*, since she laments the lost opportunity whereby women with Maggie’s potential could contribute to the development of society. The suggestion is tentative, must wrestle with the problem of altruism, and is contingent upon context, so there can be no generalization such as a teleological worldview. For example, Maggie’s best chance to gain some agency comes toward the end of the novel when Lucy approaches her in secret, offering to restore their friendship. But Lucy is herself ill, lacking agency, and being taken to the seaside, and Maggie is drowned before they can meet again. Frederic Harrison argues that living for others does not mean dying to self. It means a life of sympathy — happiness sought in a social ideal (237-38). However, to demand altruism in an age of individualism unbalances any easy equation between individual and social ends, and tragedy arises from the collision between individual desires and the general well-being (Meyer: 128-29).

Christian teleology defines every aspect of human society and especially emphasizes self-denial for the sustenance of society. Religion and tradition, having become custom, supply the

monologic values that are performed to maintain a society such as St Ogg's. What constitutes an acceptable community member is already fixed and determined and personal variety other than conformity to the prescribed norms is suppressed. Women, for example, are regarded as dependent upon men and this is accepted as natural without any resistance. As Freud argues, religion is a repressive and oppressive force in society because it limits choice and "imposes equally on everyone its own path to the acquisition of happiness" (34). Education has a comparable function in reflecting teleology because it too is structured patriarchally. The curriculum at King's Lorton is composed of Latin grammar and Euclid, which are regarded as masculine knowledge which will be the bases for other knowledge, although it has nothing to offer Tom, with his lack of capacity for abstract thought. That this is not a dystopian element confined to the past is suggested by the narrator's ironical evocation of utopian present, "All this, you remember, happened in those dark ages ... before schoolmasters were invariably men of scrupulous integrity, and before the clergy were all men of enlarged minds and varied culture" (MF, 240-41). Maggie, on the other hand, whose aptitude for complex learning is dismissed by Mr. Stelling as typically female ("superficial cleverness ... quick and shallow" (MF, 220-21)), is educated at Miss Firniss's, where she is taught basic skills thought to be necessary for ladies. Both of the protagonists are abjected because Tom is not inclined to classical knowledge and has difficulty coping with his study, while intelligent Maggie, hungry for knowledge, is precluded from such formal education.

The suggestion of utopian possibilities through description of dystopian actuality is manifested in *The Mill on the Floss* in the tracing of the developmental pathways of two individuals, brother and sister, in the literary tradition of *Bildungsroman*, and indicting the absurdities of the society that differentiates potential for growth on the basis of gender. *Bildungsroman* is defined by Northrop Frye as "human character as it manifests itself in society" (308), and is particularly suited to the novel genre, which finds its distinctive form in depicting individuals within society. Abel, Hirsh, and Langland comment that the relationship between the individual and society, as it is represented in the novel, is marked by clashes of unique human possibility with the restraints of social convention (6). To Eliot, utopia is the kind of society that facilitates and encourages an individual's growth, balancing social stability and progress by accommodating unique individual possibilities, while dystopia discourages and stunts growth, not to mention kills the individual off by suppressing differences on the ground of uniformity. In *The Voyage In* a good society is defined by Abel, Hirsh, and Langland as "a social context that will facilitate the unfolding of inner capacities, leading the young person from ignorance and innocence to wisdom and maturity" (6). In dystopia, on the other hand, if individual inner



capacities are at variance with the prescribed social norms, the individual is condemned as abject and prohibited from society. As Abel, Hirsh, and Langland argue, a vision of individual development is a series of disillusionments or clashes with an inimical milieu, which functions as a restraining force on individual uniqueness. According to them, these clashes often culminate not in integration but in withdrawal, rebellion, or even suicide. Social integration in such novels can be achieved only by severe compromise (6). Maggie's life procedures range from transgression (rebellion), renunciation (compromise and compliance) to death, a lifelong struggle to accommodate her desire and social constraints. Her life is, in fact, perceptively described by her friend Philip as a process of "long suicide" (*MF*, 429).<sup>1</sup> As Abel, Hirsh, and Langland rightly point out, while male protagonists struggle to find a hospitable context in which to realize their aspirations, female protagonists must frequently struggle to voice any aspirations whatsoever. For a woman, social options are often so narrow that they preclude explorations of her milieu (7). In the *Bildungsroman*, social conventions play a crucial role in repressing the individuality of the hero, but if the hero is female there is no doubt that she will be excluded from any active role in shaping the world. Tom struggles unsuccessfully to cope with the (useless) classical education, but he finally finds a business field in which he can use his potential; Maggie does not find any place in society except as governess and teacher, which is regarded as a "menial condition" (*MF*, 575). The restraining society which deprives Maggie of any opportunity drives her to death, which is the manifestation of utmost abjection. In this sense *St. Ogg's* is definitely a dystopia.

Characters such as Maggie are socially positioned by *doxa* — common knowledge, shared opinions, received ideas, prejudices.<sup>2</sup> Eliot uses a metaphor of a staff and a baton for *doxa*, here called "prejudices" (*MF*, 579), where the former stands for a prop or support and the latter for a sign of authority and weapon. Conflict arises when "the world's wife" and "men of maxims," upheld by the staff of self-evident *doxa*, impose uniform, monologic values on young minds with unique possibilities. Like Bakhtin later, Eliot is in opposition to uniform values that the society imposes upon individuals regardless of individual variations and differences in desire and capability. In the name of the maintenance of social stability, these uniform, monologic values produce abject individuals regardless of gender, but under the Christian patriarchy women are required to submit and be subordinated to men and are thus more prone to abjection. Through Tom and Maggie's *Bildungsroman* Eliot shows and contrasts how "stupid" lads like Tom, despite some brief period of abjection, advance in the world with agency, while "acute" wenches like Maggie are deprived of opportunity in spite of potential and ability and made abject. Jules

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<sup>1</sup> See Elizabeth Ermarth, "Maggie Tulliver's Long Suicide," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 14 (1974): 587-601.

<sup>2</sup> See Ruth Amossy, "Introduction to the Study of *Doxa*," *Poetics Today* 23, 3(2002): 369-94.

Law terms the pairing of a “feminine” boy and a “masculine” girl “chiastic exchange,” or “chiasmus” (55), and it is the purpose of the novel to show how society deals with this chiasmus. Eliot’s challenge is then to question the justice of the society, indicting it for suffocating Maggie’s potential based on gender norms and focusing on the way society deals with the exceptions like Tom and Maggie. By showing this Eliot questions the value of Christian telos: Do individuals exist for society?; Why is it women who have to submit?; Is women’s place private, domestic?; What is an appropriate curriculum for female education?

## Informal Education

As Thomas H. Huxley argues, there are two locations where people seek recognition: family and public opinion. According to him, the two specific forms of culture are “the mutual affection of parent and offspring, intensified by the long infancy of the human species,” and the great susceptibility of human individuals to public opinion: the greatest restrainer of the anti-social tendencies of men is fear, not of the law, but of the opinion of their fellows (28-29). Tom and Maggie’s parents and relatives are ingrained with the patriarchal doxa of their semi-pagan culture and infuse these commonplaces into Tom and Maggie. Mrs. Tulliver plays an important role in their informal education. As a patriarchal woman (a point I will return to below) she encourages Tom’s patriarchal worldview and misogyny, while discouraging and disapproving Maggie’s potential. Produced by the informal education disseminated by parents and relatives, Tom is an agent of patriarchy who firmly believes in the assigned roles of men and women, since he is “a boy born with a deficient power of apprehending signs and abstractions” (*MF*, 242-43). Mr. Stelling suspects him of having “something more than natural stupidity; ... obstinacy or indifference” (*MF*, 208). In contrast, Maggie resists the ideas that oppress her and put her into a prescribed frame as a female child, since she is equipped with imagination, creativity and sensibility. Eliot’s narrator calls Tom “a boy who adhered tenaciously to impressions once received” (*MF*, 239), who believes in tradition without examination, a person whose mind “gives prejudice a habitation”:

But to minds strongly marked by the positive and negative qualities that create severity — strength of will, conscious rectitude of purpose, narrowness of imagination and intellect, great power of self-control and a disposition to exert control over others — prejudices come as the natural food of tendencies which can get no sustenance out of that complex, fragmentary, doubt-provoking knowledge which we call **truth**. Let a prejudice be bequeathed, carried in the air, adopted by hearsay, caught in through the eye — however it may come, these minds will give it a habitation: it is something to assert strongly and bravely, something to fill up the void of spontaneous ideas, something to impose on others with the authority of conscious right: it is at once **a staff and a baton**. Every prejudice that will answer these purposes is self-evident. Our good upright Tom Tulliver’s mind was of this class: ... (*MF*, 579, emphases added)

The contrast between brother and sister with regard to imagination is manifested in the argument concerning the Latin word, *bonus*. Tom insists that it only means ‘good,’ while Maggie adds the meaning ‘a gift’ (MF, 214). The conflict of monologic and dialogic voice is manifested in the dialogue between them. Tom’s voice is to observe the monological truth and confine its meaning in one, while Maggie’s searches for various meanings, saying, “It may mean several things. Almost every word does” (MF, 214). Throughout the novel Tom acknowledges the superiority of men to women and sees his world and position in such a patriarchal way and is judgemental about Maggie’s “unwomanly” behavior. Eliot traces its origin in informal education, education at home and society. As Mary Jacobus points out, Tom is the novel’s “chief upholder of general rules and patriarchal law” (67); he accepts the traditional notion of the distinction between proper manly and womanly behavior and standing. Since he was young, he feels superior to Maggie solely on the grounds that he is a boy and she a girl:

“I don’t want *your* money.... I’ve got a great deal more money than you, because I’m a boy [and] ... you’re only a girl.” (MF, 87)

To Tom, Maggie’s stories based on her imagination are just stupid things and he concludes that “girls’ stories always are [stupid]” (MF, 237).

Maggie’s family, relatives and the other villagers put her in stifling situation where she cannot develop her imagination or originality. Maggie is discouraged in her spontaneity and creativity at home by her mother and aunts, and her father, despite admitting her intelligence, does not do anything other than worrying and despairing about her difference and consequent rejection by society. The disapproval of her family and relatives functions as a debilitating influence on her subjectivity. Maggie’s unconventional appearance and behavior lead to her abjection by the pressures from society in the form of her mother and her aunts.

## Formal Education

Formal education plays an important role in individual *Bildung* and Eliot depicts how the “stupid lad” is offered formal education as an investment for his future (“[observed Mr. Riley], ‘Better spend an extra hundred or so on your son’s education than leave it to him in your will’ ” (MF, 69)), and is otherwise funded to enable him to advance in society, while the “acute wench” is deprived of such opportunity and left to wither and to lose her intelligence and vitality as she grows older.

Tom’s *Bildung* is the opposite to Maggie’s, in the sense that he is neither bright nor intellectually motivated like Maggie but receives formal education, deemed to be masculine knowledge. Mr. Tulliver, though he admits that Maggie is more intelligent than Tom, spends

much money for Tom's formal education, but little for Maggie's (whose education is partially funded by Aunt Glegg.) A. S. Byatt comments that Maggie's first education consists of early and powerfully emotive English religious texts (Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Defoe's *History of the Devil*) followed by Thomas à Kempis, whilst Tom is offered a training in classical heroism which his circumstances as well as his temperament render him incapable of receiving (1979: 19-20). Mr. Tulliver, who chose his wife "because she wasn't o'er 'cute," is puzzled by the apparent genetic reversal, "like as if the world was turned topsy-turvy" (MF, 69). Maggie's quick intelligence is thus condemned by such doxa as, "a woman's no business wi' being so clever; it'll turn to trouble" (MF, 66) or "girls [are] quick and shallow" (MF, 221). Tom's brief moment of abjection is when he cannot cope with the curriculum and feels like a girl and evinces a girl's susceptibility. Tom is abject in school because his natural tendency toward abstract thinking is weak. He has a very practical sort of mind. He feels like a girl (MF, 210, 212) whose properties he despises all the time; feels "a silly" (MF, 205). He feels that he was all wrong somehow (MF, 204), which is quite a genuine experience for him.

The narrator comments that Tom is "imprisoned within the limits of his own nature, and his education had simply glided over him, and left a slight deposit of polish" (MF, 630). Therefore, informal education encourages his prejudices and formal education does not broaden his mind. His formal education, however, provides him with the basis of getting a position in the world and gaining agency. In the end he is the one who pays back his father's debt and can do something because society is organized in such a way that men's potential can be realized or cultivated, while women's is suffocated or drowned. As Byatt argues, Eliot sets herself to understand the grown Tom and Maggie by following their growth and an aspect of this growth which cannot be ignored is their contact with the world's culture, with the developed arts and sciences and literature which were possibly their heritage (1979: 19). Maggie is not given this opportunity and she gradually stagnates since, as Bakhtin argues, our knowledge and understanding grow when dealing with other consciousness, and through communication with 'quoted speech' (1984b: ix). Tom's formal education is patriarchal — even Latin grammar embeds patriarchal doxa, as in the example of the misogynistic astronomer (MF, 220) — and grounded in an assumption of male superiority. In contrast, Maggie with her full potential for intelligence is put to a finishing school for ladies. The novel's treatment of Tom's and Maggie's education offers a further contrast. Tom's education is depicted in some detail — the subjects, Mr. Stelling's teaching method, and content of the curriculum — while Maggie's education is summarized in one sentence: Miss Firniss's boarding school for ladies (MF, 286). Even this slight

education is regarded as a means of subduing her as a mistake of nature: it would not prevent her being so brown, but might tend to subdue some other vices in her (MF, 195).

### **St. Ogg's as Dystopia — Manifestations of Abjection**

In respect to Maggie, St. Ogg's is a dystopia. As Kristeva argues, society as an organism tries to keep the body clean by expelling the elements of dirt. In a monologic homogenous society like St. Ogg's the element of dirt can start with the very physical shapes of human beings. Since childhood, Maggie has faced hostile comments on her looks, brown skin, stiff hair and gypsy and Medusa-looking features. In addition, she transgresses the prescribed desirable behavior pattern for girls — to be seen, not to be heard — by her prattle and by expressing her ideas spontaneously. She also reads voluminously, discusses unusual subjects, such as witch trials and the misogynistic astronomer, and tenders meaningful comments based on her own interpretation. However, her intelligence and “acuteness” are only dismissed and discouraged as “quick and shallow” (MF, 221), the inferior mark of femininity, “superficial cleverness” (MF, 220).

Mr. Tulliver knows the kind of society that condemns otherness and predicts that Maggie will face difficulties in the world. He is delighted by Maggie's cleverness, but he also knows that the society will condemn her and abject her, not to mention depriving her of opportunity, because she is not the type of woman that the society prescribes or approves. He says Maggie is “too 'cute for woman” (MF, 60) and clever women will “turn to trouble” (MF, 66). Manifestations of Maggie's abjection, as he predicts, range from transgression and renunciation to death.

#### *Transgression, renunciation, and death*

In its incapacity for recognizing otherness, difference, the great variety of individuals, St. Ogg's is convicted as dystopian because of the stifling monologic values which hold sway over the minds of its people. The novel embodies this monologism in the idea of “the world's wife,” a hypothetical, symptomatic representative of received ideas and public opinion. The monologic values mainly serve the preservation of society, and especially the homogeneity of the society, so that people who are not pink-and-white, but brown-patch and gypsy-like such as Maggie, should be expelled. As Susan Meyer points out, the marks of race play a central figurative role in *The Mill on the Floss*: Maggie's brown pigmentation in a society of people with “pink-and-white” complexions represents her resistance to conventional female roles, and ultimately, her tragic tension with the society around her (130). Grosz comments that the prevailing social

conceptions of relations between sexes determine the conception of bodies and bodies are actively influenced by social pressures; and in fact bodies are the very products of such social constitution (1994: x). Maggie's exclusion from society due to her physical difference is because the body is a metaphor for the social unit and anything that is outside of it is dirt, excrement, that is abject. Maggie is therefore regarded as a "small mistake of nature" (MF, 61), one of the things out of nature that will never thrive (MF, 82). Maggie does not fit into the conventions of society, the proper figure of the female, and this means she is regarded as outside of the body, outside of its orifices. As Douglas comments, bodily orifices represent points of entry or exit to social units (3), so anything outside of the orifices is regarded as abject and is liable to expulsion. Grosz also comments that "rituals and practices designed to cleanse or purify the body may serve as metaphors for processes of cultural homogeneity" (1994: 193). This cultural homogeneity involves monologic authoritative values that suffocate individual possibilities, which is in opposition to the spirit of transformative utopia, which encourages individual agency and choice, challenges unquestioned values, rectifies false assumptions and contributes to the improvement — that is, transformation, of society.

The world's wife as public opinion deals with Maggie and makes her abject when she returns unmarried from the apparent elopement with Stephen:

Maggie had returned without a *trousseau*, without a husband — in that **degraded and outcast condition** to which error is well known to lead; and the world's wife, with that fine instinct which is given her for the preservation of society, saw at once that Miss Tulliver's conduct had been of the most aggravated kind.... she had been actuated by mere unwomanly boldness and unbridled passion. There was always something questionable about her. (MF, 620, ellipsis mine, emphasis added)

Her abject state is described as the "degraded and outcast condition" as a result of her transgression, "error." However, the "fine instinct" of the world's wife can be merely a prejudice that judges morality of individuals based on their bodily features. The prejudice is manifested in the passage: "To the world's wife there had always been something in Miss Tulliver's very physique that a refined instinct felt to be prophetic of harm" (MF, 621). This ironic comment deriding prejudice based on physical features is a "protest against the narrow homogeneity" (Meyer: 144), since, in fact, Maggie makes her own moral choice and renounces Stephen, contrary to the "unwomanly boldness and unbridled passion" attributed to her. It is ironical that no one believes in her struggle and the general assumption is that she has been refused by Stephen. Maggie is an abject figure who "collective consciousness" — the world's wife — viewed as a potential threat to the "clean" body of society since she is regarded as a "temptress" who has the potential to destroy the ordinary family and threaten the stability of society. Their lack of imagination and tolerance toward otherness and acceptance of the other as another subject is apparent.

Maggie is repeatedly compared to a gypsy (*MF*, 125, 168, 172). According to Meyer, the reason that this comparison is so frequent is that the gypsies, though a “dark race” of reputedly Eastern origins, were living, at the early nineteenth-century date at which the novel is set, within England itself. The gypsies thus provide an especially apt metaphor for an English girl who feels alien within her society, just as the gypsies are the bearers of “marks of race” which are repulsive to the majority English population around them (133-34). Maggie is also compared to Medusa (“looking like a small Medusa” (*MF*, 161); “with her small Medusa face” (*MF*, 164)), which evokes fear of female sexuality as it implies that she is regarded as a dangerous being because the Medusa’s head takes the place of a representation of “the female genitals” — “the toothed vagina” — the vagina that castrates. And a counterpart, the other side, is the so-called “phallic mother,” a motif perfectly illustrated in the long fingers and nose of the witch (35). “The Medusa, with her ‘evil eye,’ head of writhing serpents, and lolling tongue, was queen of the pantheon of female monsters; men unfortunate enough to look at her were turned immediately to stone” (Creed: 35-36). The difference of female sexuality is regarded as a difference which is grounded in monstrosity and which invokes castration anxiety in the male spectator (Creed: 36). The effect of the constant allusion to such figures associated with abomination with Maggie is that people see her as an object of horror, the abject. Countering those assumptions, Eliot presents a witch trial scene through young Maggie’s rendering:

“That old woman in the water’s a witch — they’ve put her in, to find out whether she’s a witch or no, and if she swims she’s a witch, and if she’s drowned — and killed, you know, — she’s innocent, and not a witch, but only a poor silly old woman. But what good would it do her then, you know, when she was drowned? Only, I suppose she’d go to heaven, and God would make it up to her.” (*MF*, 66-67)

Maggie’s explication shows the inherent absurdities of the logic of the trial, and through it the narrator offers a metaphor for clever women in patriarchal society, women who transgress their prescribed destiny, where subjectivity is destiny. The “Witch” is an object of abjection, “ancient figures of abjection” as defined by orthodox religion. Religious patriarchy defines women’s subjectivity and confines their potential and directs their pattern of growth as in the female *Bildung*. Women who do not fit the norm are regarded as witches in one way or another. Eliot points out the fundamental wrong inherent in religious views on women, especially women who try to have their voice and are usually condemned to death, either by drowning or burning at the stake. Maggie’s final obliteration by drowning in a flood fulfils the desires of her society as voiced in the passage: “It was to be hoped that she would go out of the neighbourhood — to America, or anywhere — so as to purify the air of St. Ogg’s from the taint of her presence, extremely dangerous to daughters there!” (*MF*, 621). As the novel moves into a representation of the adulthood of this troublesome heroine, Eliot does construct a conclusion that finally

removes the dark “taint of her presence” (Meyer: 144). In this ending the teleology of the novel reproduces the teleology of the society which would see Maggie obliterated as a cause of social taint.

Maggie is made abject by the constraining society in the form of the world’s wife’s opinion and the manifestations of abjection range from transgression, renunciation and death. The opening books which are devoted to Maggie’s childhood establish a central thematic opposition between female individuality and the norms of society (Meyer: 130). Maggie is seen to be “transgressive” and this is characterized by a harsher attitude simultaneously toward “savage” races and toward the transgressive “savage” impulses in women (Meyer: 131). Meyer terms renunciation as “Maggie’s transformation from subject into visual object, into household decoration (141) as she becomes “the only bit of furniture now on which [Mrs. Tulliver] could bestow her anxiety and pride” (MF, 388). A spontaneous individual with much potential to develop is reduced to an object rather than a subject with agency. This shows how society constructs Maggie’s subjectivity and suppresses agency. Maggie as a young girl is more attractive, with her own agency. Philip also says,

“It makes me wretched to see you benumbing and cramping your nature in this way. You were so full of life when you were a child — I thought you would be a brilliant woman — all wit and bright imagination. And it flashes out in your face still, until you draw that veil of dull quiescence over it.” (MF, 428)

Philip as an opposing voice initiates dialogue with Maggie: he describes Maggie’s renunciation as “narrow asceticism” (MF, 402), “a narrow self-delusive fanaticism,” “stupefaction” (MF, 427), “self-torture,” “what is unnatural,” “mere cowardice to seek safety in negations,” (MF, 428) and even “[a] long suicide” (MF, 429). Philip’s voice is in opposition to public opinion and emphasizes development of Maggie’s own subjectivity. And this is Eliot’s criticism of society that wrongs an individual with potential, taking away the opportunity to fulfil or nurture his/her full potential and yet ironically praising the negative product of society’s norm. She is asking a question: what is wrong with asserting our own will?

Young Maggie’s transgression ranges from cutting off her hair (MF, 120), putting Lucy into cow-trodden mud (MF, 164), to running away to the gypsies (MF, Bk. 1, Ch. 11). These incidents can be regarded as Maggie’s resistance to prescribed social norms, especially gender norms. After the bankruptcy of her father, Maggie manifests abjection as isolation and renunciation. As Bakhtin argues, human beings develop ideas through dialogue with others, and once Maggie suspends dialogue with others her development is virtually stagnant. Thomas à Kempis’s *The Imitation of Christ* provides her with a version of Christian teleology and gives her an idea of renunciation. Except for the brief period of one year’s dialogue with Philip, Maggie is left alone, with no possibility of intersubjective development. There is virtually no one around her to



understand and nurture her inner needs and desires for communication. Tom has only a negative influence on her, because he is not willing to communicate but imposes his ideas on Maggie. Tom's lack of imagination and sympathy is manifested in several places, the most prominent of which is when Maggie compares her brother with Samson and herself with his Delilah:<sup>3</sup>

“Oh, how brave you are, Tom! I think you're like Samson. If there came a lion roaring at me, I think you'd fight him — wouldn't you, Tom?”

“How can a lion come roaring at you, you silly thing? There's no lions only in the shows.” (MF, 86)

According to Bakhtin, this is an instance of subjectivation through intersubjectivity: An individual cannot manage without another consciousness and can never find complete fullness in him/herself alone (1984a: 177). As Diana Postlethwaite explains, here Maggie appropriates Tom's masculine strength as a surrogate for her own lack of agency (306). Maggie's dependence on Tom's love and approval, as Jane McDonnell argues, is a form of psychological “incest” and a real impediment to her further growth, a refusal to accept a wider community and a refusal to accept her own individuality and autonomy (386-87). But Maggie is forced to accept the situation, rather than entering it by her voluntary choice. As Peter Thorslev argues, incestuous love symbolizes the hero's complete alienation from the society around him (similar to Maggie's case) and also the hero's narcissistic sensibility is his predilection for solipsism (50). All these are symptoms of abjection when an individual is left alone without opportunity to develop agency based on his/her own subjectivity through interaction with another consciousness.

As a consequence of this common confinement to the domestic sphere, women languish and become secondary beings rather than engaging with the world at first hand and making changes. Maggie's struggle is inward, a struggle with herself, as any other woman, while Tom's is with the outward world. This contrast is conditioned by social gender norms, as stated in the opening passage of Chapter 2, Book V:

While Maggie's life-struggles had lain almost entirely within her own soul, one shadowy army fighting another, and the slain shadows for ever rising again, Tom was engaged in a dustier, noisier warfare, grappling with more substantial obstacles, and gaining more definite conquests. So it has been since the days of Hecuba, and of Hector, Tamer of horses: inside the gates, the women with streaming hair and uplifted hands offering prayers, watching the world's combat from afar, filling their long, empty days with memories and fears: outside, the men in fierce struggle with things divine and human, quenching memory in the stronger light of purpose, losing the sense of dread and even of wounds in the hurrying ardour of action. (MF, 405)

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<sup>3</sup> Some critics such as Jacobus argue that there is an implication of incestuous love between the brother and sister, seeing an example of this in their embracing when found dead from the flood and Maggie's refusal of Philip and Stephen on behalf of her brother (68). Catherine Waters also notes in her analysis of the relationship between brother and sister in *Dombey and Son*, that there is “a tension between the idealisation of [the intimate] bond, and the demonstration of the sexual ambiguity and solipsism” (1988: 9). Whether this does underlie Maggie's natural sisterly love towards Tom in her seeking of knowledge and love remains a matter for conjecture.

Female character is gripped by an agonizing, claustrophobic circularity, while the male, like Tom, traverses a more spacious landscape. Insisting on the manifestly gendered aspect of these divergent plot lines is the first step in making sense of such a seeming generic discontinuity and its organization of *The Mill on the Floss*. Eliot accuses society of deprivation of equal opportunity to grow and develop. As Abel, Hirsch, and Langland argue, confinement to inner life, no matter how enriching, threatens a loss of public activity and enforces an isolation that may culminate in death (8). Even if Maggie is allowed spiritual growth, she is “barred from public experience and grapples with a pervasive threat of extinction” (9). According to them, in the social conditions that thwart Maggie’s emergence in the context of nineteenth-century social possibilities, Maggie’s death is a logical and artistically valid consequence of her situation (9).

The development of female figures is forbidden because of social prejudices, and therefore “the ordered pattern of maturation is disrupted.” Maggie’s history reveals the female hero’s *Bildung* to be a “disjunctive and tragic process ... trapped in the class and provincial margins of pre-Victorian England,” living in “the liminal zone between traditional and modern arrangements of gender and power” (Esty: 149, 150). Maggie cannot realize her full potential and is killed off at the end, reduced to nothing, the corpse, the utmost in abjection. Cut off from the maturation process, she finds herself unable to assert agency and thus incapable of establishing an independent sense of self (that is, agency). She has to depend on Tom or Philip, unsure of herself, unlike Tom who is always self-righteous. Paxton traces the origin of this difference in attitudes to the difference between the “egotism that is natural and that which is fostered by a patriarchal society and used to justify the unsympathetic and authoritarian domination of the self-conscious male adult” (1991: 74), which is related to male pagan self-assertion and female Christian self-denial. Maggie is constructed by society, and particularly by its narrow-minded patriarchal values, in such a way that self-denial rather than self-assertion has become her second nature. From this perspective, she can discern that Tom’s self-righteous attitude based on his upbringing as a male child is a solipsistic lack of self-denial and of other-regardingness:

“You have been reproaching other people all your life; you have been always sure you yourself are right: it is because you have not a mind large enough to see that there is anything better than your own conduct and your own petty aims.” (*MF*, 449)

Here in Maggie’s criticism of Tom’s lack of imagination and regard for otherness Eliot places in

sharp relief the social construction of female dependency.<sup>4</sup>

*Submission (renunciation)*

From the perspective of her society, Maggie's state of submission (renunciation) designates the 'cured' state reached by the formerly abject. Without the exhibition of her own will or opinion she is accepted as a good woman, since it conforms to the prescribed figure of women. Tom is pleased that people say she is a fine lady, and Mrs. Tulliver cherishes her as a substitute for the lost furniture she valued so much. But Maggie's happiness is based on negation, a prolepsis to death, without self or individual desire, as she herself is depicted as acknowledging:

"I've been a great deal happier ... since I have given up thinking about what is easy and pleasant, and being discontented because I couldn't have my own will. Our life is determined for us — and it makes the mind very free when we give up wishing and only think of bearing what is laid upon us and doing what is given us to do." (MF, 397)

"Is it not right to resign ourselves entirely, whatever may be denied us? I have found great peace in that for the last two or three years — even joy in subduing my own will." (MF, 427)

In fact, it is a pathway whereby a vibrant spontaneous character is suppressed to become a dull character. At this stage of renunciation she takes everything as predetermined — gender, race, social class, and money and power as a consequence. Maggie submits herself under the social convention rather than following her desire or sense of herself. By doing so she is abandoning her own potential for agency, accepting ready-made truth without questions. That is, in Christian teleology women's nature and telos are predetermined and passivity and renunciation are the best way for women. However, as Graver comments, the solace she finds in à Kempis means at best a "negative peace," at worst, continued privation and starvation (197), which is indeed a continuation of abjection.

Dale Bauer argues that communities exercise their power by the threat of exclusion or by a misuse of power; by authority, a hierarchical structure — like Michel Foucault's "agencies of

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<sup>4</sup> As I have pointed out elsewhere (see Lee 2003), male characters are also abjected in this novel. There is a distinction here between characters "cast out within the terms of sociality," such as Maggie or her father (abjected by the shame of bankruptcy), and characters such as Philip Wakem or Tom, who experience transient periods of abjection. Whether the latter characters are incorporated or abjected is less significantly an aspect of represented sociality (determined by orientation toward other characters) than a perspective based on the implication that narrator and reader share a common judgment. Philip transcends the potential abjection suggested by his physical deformity because his altruism and other-regardingness are overtly commendable: a character dwelling intersubjectively will not be abject. Tom, on the other hand, recovers from the social abjection of his boyhood failure as a classical scholar, but his smallness of mind and solipsism, which prompt him to abject Maggie, for example, invite readers to perceive that those aspects of being that he abjects in the name of social order and propriety dwell within him in implicit self-repudiation (see Butler 3). Tom thus properly belongs with certain characters in other Eliot novels (Wybrow in "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story" (*Scenes of Clerical Life*); Grandcourt in *Daniel Deronda*) whose untimely deaths function as a narrative sign of their abjected state, regardless of their social positioning.

power” — which maintains the essential form and boundaries of a particular community, assuming an essential identity in reading. This authority determines what the community will or will not countenance, what it can (or cannot) incorporate into its theoretical ground. Inclusion requires playing by the rules of the community, although rejecting the rules can also be part of the game; resistance can be appropriated into the interpretive community, depending on whether that resistance can be manipulated or reabsorbed into community (xi). This coincides with Kristeva’s theory of abjection and transgression, whereby the boundaries of a community are crossed. When the abject succeeds in transgression, he/she can change the community and be incorporated into it. Bauer’s “interpretive community” is thus analogous with Eliot’s transformative utopia, in that individual variation and differences are accommodated as one of potential and variety, not as an object of condemnation marked for elimination as an element that taints. Far from being an open, interpretive society, St. Ogg’s is a dire form of dystopia. In the novel the dystopian elements take the form of the doxa attributed to the “world’s wife” as representative of public opinion. The authority the world’s wife holds is enabled by people’s fear of public opinion rather than their inner moral feelings. According to Huxley, the “innate tendency to self-assertion was the condition of victory in the struggle for existence”; but “the necessary condition for the origin of human society” is control over “this free play of self-assertion, or natural liberty” (27, 81). Huxley locates those checks not in law, but in culture. The two specific forms of culture he identifies are, as noted above, the affection between parents and offspring and human susceptibility to public opinion.

What society sanctions can be in conflict with an individual moral sense, or inner feeling of righteousness. To envisage a resolution of this conflict is to envisage a utopian condition, whereas its continuation, even if not downright dystopian, will have a propensity to produce abjection. In her essay “The Antigone and Its Moral,” Eliot posed the problem in terms of “that struggle between elemental tendencies and established laws by which the outer life of man is gradually and painfully being brought into harmony with his inward needs. Until this harmony is perfected, we shall never be able to attain a great right without doing a great wrong” (“Antigone,” *Selected Critical Writings*, 245-46). In *The Mill on the Floss*, the struggle is encapsulated by the moral conflict underlying Maggie’s struggle to renounce Stephen. It is the conflict between a vision of “daily incense of adoration” and “long deep memories of early discipline and effort, of early claims on her love and pity” (MF, 555). She does not choose the pathway of self-gratification, but instead follows her own judgement and her own feelings and tries to be faithful to the people who trust and love her. Her course of action does not produce harmony between “outer life” and “inward needs,” however, since the rules sanctioned by society would

themselves need to be an achieved utopianism for this to have been enabled. The perfection of harmony Eliot wrote about presupposes an eventual, utopian coincidence of individual desire with social stability and progress. The kind of struggle with society exemplified by Maggie will be continued in the future as long as human desire and social well-being are in conflict — where society fails to accommodate individual desire and difference, or where individual desire threatens social stability.

Maggie's strong bond with her brother and her past and her subsequent rejection of Stephen's love can be regarded as adherence to the inner law. Renunciation of Stephen's love also stems from her belief in the purport of Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, the renunciation of self for others, that is, Christian self-denial. As a piece of genuine Christian creed, the text provides appropriate contrast with the Dodsons' and the Tullivers' religion as custom derived from semi-paganism. The moral superiority of Maggie to the rest of the community, including her own family and relatives, is manifested when she defends her father when the Dodson sisters do not show genuine sympathy to their unfortunate sister. Maggie's outburst is a condemnation of their lack of genuine love: "Why do you come then, ... talking, and interfering with us and scolding us, if you don't mean to do anything to help my poor mother" (*MF*, 296). The pettiness of their response is summed up in Mrs. Glegg's almost comical decision to buy spotted table cloths because she has never had as many as she wanted but not checks because she has too many (*MF*, 282-83). Maggie's strong opposition to Tom's following their father's order to inscribe his curse in the Bible stems from her belief in Christian love and forgiveness. Her superiority to Tom and Mrs. Tulliver is also evidenced when the latter two blame Mr. Tulliver for the ruin. Maggie scolds her mother for not caring for her husband, rather than mourning for the lost property: "Mother, how can you talk so? As if you cared only for things with your name on, and not for what has my father's name too" (*MF*, 284). The strong and clear character of young Maggie, with its strong potential for the development of subjective agency, diminishes through the process of growing up because of such social pressure and expectations. And finally Maggie's existence becomes nil, a corpse, the most abject state as a consequence of exercising her agency. Eliot shows by tracing Maggie's growth and death, in contrast to those of Tom, how society plays the role of suppressing an individual's full growth because the individual happens to be a woman with potential for agency.

Maggie's abjection is caused by the difference of the views she holds as well as by her different appearance. For a society to develop, younger generations should be given an opportunity to grow and realize their full potential. That is why a benevolent society that nurtures individual potential is very important to individual *Bildung*. In the novel, some members

of the younger generation, especially Maggie, are far superior to the older generation of the Dodsons and the Tullivers, and the problem arises because this older generation does not provide a nurturing, friendly environment for Maggie to grow and fulfil her potential. What they do, instead, is stunt Maggie's growth, persecute her and finally reduce her to a state of "desolation" and exile (*MF*, 646) whose analogue and apogee is her death. The narrator insists that readers must grasp the impact of the oppressive narrowness of hereditary custom: "how it has acted on young natures in many generations, that in the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them, to which they have been nevertheless tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts" (*MF*, 363). Accidentally situated in a society with beliefs and moral sensibilities different from hers, and which constitutes the context for her decisions and actions, especially renouncing Stephen's love, Maggie acts with a moral superiority that is based in Eliot's inward law. She is an agent and makes a choice, but she is condemned by society due to the choice. Compared to the rest of the women in St. Ogg's, Maggie is brave in that she transgresses according to her belief and faces the condemnation of society: "Not that St Ogg's was empty of women with some tenderness of heart and conscience: probably it had as fair a proportion of human goodness in it.... But until every good man is brave, we must expect to find many good women timid: too timid even to believe in the correctness of their own best promptings, when these would place them in a minority" (*MF*, 637).

Maggie complies with the higher moral demands to renounce Stephen's love because she is faithful to the moral principle not to betray those who trust and love her. Her response to his self-regardingness is to invoke the principle of: "obeying the divine voice within us — for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives" (*MF*, 604). Therefore, even under the society's oppression she is equipped with her own subjectivity, different from imposed Christian subjectivity, and exercises her agency. However, the consequence of her exercising of agency is disaster, so that she is more isolated and more severely condemned by society, abjected and self-abjecting: "All hard looks were pain to Maggie, but her self-reproach was too strong for resentment" (*MF*, 623). Like Antigone, she listens to her inner voice and summons the courage to face society. In Bakhtinian terms, the catastrophe of her death is not the end, but sign of an ongoing struggle for those who follow inward, higher laws rather than the outward laws such as patriarchal, societal rules and regulations, which are in fact temporary and thus contingent. It also constitutes Eliot's scheme for the formation of a utopian society by foregrounding current society's dystopian elements and using them as indicators of utopian transformative power. Maggie is an unconventional woman in that the novel implies that most women in her situation

would have married Stephen, raised her social position, and improved her economic situation, which is the easiest and most agreeable way, as she admits:

Faithfulness and constancy mean something else besides doing what is easiest and pleasant to ourselves. They mean renouncing whatever is opposed to the reliance others have in us, whatever would cause misery to those whom the course of our lives has made dependent on us. (*MF*, 602)

She chooses the difficult and hard way, that of renouncing all material convenience and conquering selfish feelings of love for Stephen. Her guiding article of faith is that her happiness should not be based on others' pain. Her argument is that she "must not, cannot, seek her own happiness by sacrificing others" (*MF*, 571). Her prayer to God is to "preserve [her] from inflicting [pain], give [her] strength to bear it" (*MF*, 582), which is self-denial/sacrifice.

As I have already suggested, the catastrophe of Tom and Maggie's death it is not an ending, but another beginning, as Bakhtin argues. His view of catastrophe is that it is not finalization, but continuation:

Catastrophe is not finalization. It is the culmination, in collision and struggle, of points of view (of equally privileged consciousnesses, each with its own world). Catastrophe does not give these points of view resolution, but on the contrary reveals their incapability of resolution under earthly conditions; catastrophe sweeps them all away without having resolved them. Catastrophe is the opposite of triumph and apotheosis. By its very essence it is denied even elements of catharsis. (Bakhtin 1984a: 298)

The catastrophe is the culmination of Maggie's life in that social condemnation has left her isolated and vulnerable to the natural disaster which occurs. But the problem of the conflict between individuals like Maggie and constraining society will remain. As Byatt eloquently argues, "the Flood is no resolution to the whole complex novel — to the problems of custom, development, sexuality, intellectual stunting, real and imaginary duty.... The Floss may be the river of time and history, ... but all it ends is the relationship between Tom and Maggie" (38).

### **Transformative Utopia — Eliot's Critique of St. Ogg's as Dystopia**

By killing both brother and sister, Eliot indicts the society that makes individuals non-existent, deprived of subjectivity or agency. She portrays the procedures so that readers are informed what propels society to bring individuals to death and what is wrong with society. She puts every aspect of society under scrutiny: religion (semi-paganism, without true love; religion which has become a custom), tradition (in the form of public opinion and maxims), law, and so on. In its pursuit of homogeneity, the society Eliot portrays is discriminatory. St. Ogg's, as Bauer explains, "reduce[s] experience (here, women's experience in culture) to some manageable minimum, to erase heterogeneity and Otherness" (ix-x).

Eliot questions any rigid teleological view of things and people that is opposed to the dialogic formation of truth and of people's subjectivity and intersubjectivity, because if the

purpose of things and people is determined and fixed already there is no room for negotiation or dialogue. Bakhtin argues that in contrast to a teleological worldview in which truth is fixed, truth should be negotiated and is contingent: “Truth ... is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (Bakhtin 1984a: 110). The conflict arises when individual tendency and desire are in conflict with the convention of society. No individuals perfectly fit into the prescribed role of telos. Maggie’s abjection derives from the chronotope of the early nineteenth-century English town of St. Ogg’s where monologic values and homogeneity of society are accepted as norms.

What should be a paradox of gendering is that female abjection is inflicted by women who have internalized patriarchal ideas of gender identity and more strictly adhere to them than men themselves. The voice of the world that condemns Maggie is repeatedly identified as “the world’s wife” (*MF*, 619), or “the world’s bride” of “the feminine gender” (*MF*, 619). That is, it is public opinion formed around female community. Ingrained with monologic patriarchal values and homogeneity, women are more critical in judging Maggie and cannot comprehend her moral struggle. These may be characterized as “patriarchal women.” Mrs. Tulliver is one such, and when Maggie is young she constantly criticizes her, judging her against the patriarchal gender norms. Elaine Showalter argues that “women themselves have constituted a subculture within the framework of a larger society, and have been unified by values, conventions, experiences, and behaviours impinging on each individual” (1977: 11). The female subculture in *The Mill on the Floss* consists of women in patriarchal society who have accepted and internalized patriarchal ideology and are more forceful bearers of its tenets than men. The women in fact comply with the system that oppresses them and are instrumental in oppressing individuals of their own gender. As Barbro Almqvist Norbelie argues, not only have they themselves accepted their inferiority, they also wield power and oppression through denial and negative control (120). Those who impose the severest restrictions on Maggie and those who judge her most harshly are the female members of her society — family and community. Norbelie also comments that patriarchal women, as the bearers of traditional male values, “repress every endeavour in their own gender to transgress set boundaries” (121).

The lack of moral insight presaged by such a mentality is encapsulated and castigated in the narrator’s comment on “men of maxims”:

All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims; because such people early discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy. And the man of maxims is the popular representative of the minds that are guided in their moral judgment solely by general rules, thinking that these will lead them to justice by a ready-made, patent method, without the trouble of exerting patience, discrimination, impartiality, without any care to assure themselves whether they have the insight that comes from a hardly-



earned estimate of temptation, or from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human. (*MF*, 628)

Unlike the humane and humanistic people here proposed as insight's touchstone, men of maxims adhere to tradition because maxims are the aggregate of customs passed down from the past. Norbelie terms the embodiments of the world's wife "women of maxims" (138) in the sense that they are the firm supporters of tradition, especially patriarchal norms, as "patriarchal women." Men of maxims also do not believe in individual variation and try to apply the general rules to any case. As Eliot's narrator comments, with reference to the relations between passion and duty, "we have no master key that will fit all cases" (*MF*, 628), every case should be considered as special because of "the truth, that moral judgments must remain false and hollow, unless they are checked and enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot" (*MF*, 628). Maxims concerning patriarchal putdown of women show that even though an individual has potential to grow, people around the individual have negative expectations and therefore the individual's potential cannot be fully realized, because subjectivity and agency need the Other to develop. Teleological views on women's nature and ability and place in society are also subsumed under this kind of generalization. In Christianity women's place is a private, domestic sphere and women are encouraged to live for "others" — especially for men. Women's nature and the telos of their lives are imposed upon them by Christian patriarchy. The problem that arises is that if it is true that women can put society ahead of their own benefit, then their nature is more suited to activity outside the private domain, in public. That women's sphere should be domestic, while men's is the outside world, is society's determination. Because the world is organized in such a way, even if Maggie has potential to grow, she is reduced to a passive object instead of a speaking subject, and finally to nothing, despite her struggle to gain agency and make change. Making full use of women's potential is conducive to the formation of a better society, and wasting it is the element of dystopia. Graver points out the paradox of a telos regarding women's role that is public and social, but a domain that is private and domestic, while the social organism depends on virtues traditionally designated "feminine" such as "sympathy, commitment to others, peacefulness, and the capacity to nurture" (168). Christopher Kent rightly points out that if women are denied a place in the public sphere though they excel in social feeling, and men are made the governing force both within and outside the home, women's "ideal superiority" is turned into "practical subordination" (101).

If, as Graver argues, men excel at pagan self-assertion and women at Christian self-denial (167-70), and if society is the end for which individuals serve, women are better qualified for social responsibility because they have more capacity for empathy and other-regardingness. The

irony is that women are thought to excel in sympathy, which is indicative of social nature, but are confined to private life and thus under the domination of men who excel in egoistic pursuits. This is literally manifested in the novel when better qualified Maggie is excluded from formal education and confined within private life, while less qualified Tom receives a classical education in the assumption that he will ascend in the world. In every respect Maggie is an individual with more potential, sensitivity, imagination, and intelligence than Tom (just as in “The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton” Milly is clearly Barton’s superior as a human being, but is made to serve him in a domestic function). A question posed by *The Mill on the Floss* is what would happen to a society such as St. Ogg’s if it were not challenged by thinking agents like Maggie, or if it failed to respond positively to such a challenge. The answer is that it will become mired in dystopian stagnation, incapable of progression toward a “better” society. More specifically, can a society be just if, simply on the basis of gender norms, boys are given opportunity regardless of merit while intelligent girls are denied opportunity? The poignancy of Maggie’s despair at the way society operates on gender norms, and the illogic of those norms, is sharply felt:

“Because you are a man, Tom, and have power, and can do something in the world.”  
“Then, if you can do nothing, submit to those that can.” (MF, 450)

In Eliot’s depiction, it is an upside-down world where better abled women are forced to submit to inferior males. The profound sense of what is lacking from this unjust world implies its opposite, a transformative utopia in which individual potential is accepted and realized regardless of differences in gender, belief, and social background.

## Conclusion

Some minds are wonderful for keeping their bloom in this way, as a patriarchal goldfish apparently retains to the last its youthful illusion that it can swim in a straight line beyond the encircling glass. (MF, 134)

Like the goldfish that cannot adjust to its physical context, a dystopian society that renders individuals abject is based on false assumptions, that is, on monologic, fixed values that survive as unquestioned custom. *The Mill on the Floss* attributes the causes and processes of abjection to those monologic values that cherish cultural homogeneity and figuratively conflate a desirable society with a wholesome body. Eliot’s depiction of dystopian elements in St. Ogg’s society includes religion — specifically, the variation of Protestantism that has become merely a custom — a legal system that serves the rich and powerful, the weight of tradition, and the very nature of “truth,” passed down in the form of maxims. People who are different or other are regarded as abject and persecuted, and can only be reintegrated into society if they conform to the conventions of society. Although the abjected can transgress, overcome the pressures to conform, and make some difference in society, Maggie’s transgression and concomitant

abjection is established when she is still immature, resulting in her reduction to an object (a piece of furniture) and her self-abjecting renunciation of agency. Her return to St. Ogg's after spending some days with Stephen can be seen both as a transgression and an exercising of agency because she has not followed the social norms, that is, the outer law that would prefer marriage as the outcome, but the inner law that she cannot base her happiness on other people's pain. The choice she makes is an exercise of agency, but in the view of society her disappearance with Stephen is transgression enough and erases the possibility of self-denial. As Dr. Kenn says to Maggie, the St. Ogg's community does not believe her because they would not think and behave as she did in that situation: "The persons who are the most incapable of a conscientious struggle such as yours, are precisely those who will be likely to shrink from you on the ground of an unjust judgment; because they will not believe in your struggle" (MF, 626). This shows the lack of understanding of otherness and other kinds of consciousness than their own, a narrow mindedness which Eliot calls "oppressive narrowness" (MF, 363).

*The Mill on the Floss* portrays a destructive conflict between the individual and society. Society is thus constructed as a chronotope where individuals are made abject because of the conflict between their inner law and the contingent culture surrounding them. This novel, the most extended exploration in Eliot's early fiction of the constraints on women's lives (Meyer: 129), depicts the processes of male and female *Bildungsroman* as a social critique. Intelligence and potential are wasted because of the expectations of society, especially of gender identity. Eliot's double *Bildungsroman* contrasts the paths of development and emphasizes the crucial role played by society's expectations and conventions on the lives of individual characters, especially on the basis of gender. By depicting the disparate development of two major protagonists, the novel discloses the dystopian effect of a society that not only arbitrarily inhibits individual growth and diminishes potential but also condemns and expels the nonconformist individual. The utopian vision that this bodies forth is of a society that enhances and encourages the potential of individual growth by providing an open, beneficent and nurturing environment. The more positive vision emerges from the novel's critique of the dystopian conditions which render Maggie abject, in contrast to an ideal society that facilitates all kinds of differences and possibilities regardless of gender, race, or socio-economic hierarchy.

In tracing the history of Maggie's abjection from its origins in her childhood through its various stages from transgression, to renunciation, and to death, Eliot criticizes the kind of society that produces and ultimately destroys abject figures like Maggie. The main cause of her abjection is her "otherness" — physical as well as mental — and the society that condemns the otherness and tries to eliminate it. *The Mill on the Floss* critiques the social impulse toward

homogeneity, toward a society in which uniform values about race, gender, and class prevail. The society depicted in the novel is in direct opposition to Bakhtinian dialogism where various values coexist. In pursuit of cultural homogeneity, St. Ogg's actualizes a dystopian reality. Races other than English such as gypsies, blacks, and Orientals are regarded as inferior and should be exterminated and cultural purity should be preserved. In many respects it is in the tradition of dystopia masked as utopia, where eugenics, controlled social stratification, and the motto of "preservation of preferred races" is commonly conceptualized.

The main concern in the novel is that because society encourages gender demarcation, more intelligent Maggie's potential is feared and discouraged, while less intelligent Tom is offered a formal education and enabled to flourish to a greater extent. Female *Bildungsroman* diminishes vibrant, intelligent Maggie as abject, drives her to transgression and thus more abjection, later renunciation, and finally death — the ultimate abjection. Tom is also abjected in his school days because he is neither motivated nor talented enough to understand classical education. The value of that education is itself questioned, however, because it is yet another patriarchal goldfish swimming in a straight line: while considered essential for understanding higher knowledge and cultivating the mind, it is not practical enough to prepare Tom for the immediate employment he needs. Education without consideration of individual variation and adaptability is not very effective, at least not to Tom's *Bildung*.

Meyer argued that the novel is deeply conflicted in that it both censures female and racial rebellion and regrets racial annihilation and the loss of female rebelliousness (156), but if its dystopian elements are examined we see rather a critique of a society in which individual voices are silenced and diversity condemned as threatening to the development or preservation of society. *The Mill on the Floss* is a critique of society that cannot and will not accommodate an individual's free spirit because it is bound by old traditions. It is a dystopia that does not change but stagnates or regresses, eliminating valuable individuals who, if allowed agency, would have the potential to propel history in more positive directions.

## CHAPTER IV

### Abjection and Exile in *Silas Marner*

In *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) Eliot contrasts two individuals who grow up in the same society but are treated differently. She shows how their individual potentialities are realized according to social gender norms, and how abjection is manifested. In *Silas Marner* (1861) Eliot juxtaposes two societies which, although coeval, are different in chronotope, and since time and space shape the social situations and mentality of individual subjects, Silas Marner's experience of human society is different as between the two chronotopes. The society in which he has his origins abjects and purges him, while the other society, to which he exiles himself, succeeds in integrating him with the passage of time, having overcome on the one hand society's innate fear of "foreigners" or otherness, and on the other Silas's own "proud solitude" (Bakhtin 1984a: 288, see Introduction, above, 13) and the trauma which has been the catalyst for his abjection. By juxtaposing the ways two societies deal with one individual, Eliot examines individual and society both in their development as an organic unity and in their interaction, here with a particular focus on religious tenets and practices. The contrast between chronotopes tracks how the abjected subject recuperates meaning — in short, a beneficent, concrete historical and social situation — through intersubjective relationships. Silas's life processes consist in his development of a coherent subjectivity through the phases of abjection (expulsion; death of the spirit, manifesting as miserliness; and despair) and of subjective agency through a widening sphere of intersubjective relationships.

The societies Silas in turn inhabits exhibit distinct phases of development. Lantern Yard is presented as a dystopia capable of abjecting and expelling an individual on the basis of false assumptions, and is itself doomed to disappearance because of its lack of rational faculties and refusal to engage with social process and change. Raveloe, in contrast, is a progressive society with utopian overtones, in which change is slow and measured by the relationships between individual lives and social praxis. In her analysis of the cause of the conflict between individual and society in *Silas Marner*, Eliot suggests that the relationship should be one of mutual shaping ("The Natural History of German Life"), rather than a situation within which individuals are the passive subjects of historical and institutional processes.

By presenting an individual's relationships with two chronotopes Eliot shows how the rigidity of human beliefs influences both individual and social development. The effect is enhanced by temporally locating the novel at the end of the eighteenth century, a strategy which

defamiliarized both chronotopes for readers of 1861 and enabled an insight informed by the vantage points of distance and hindsight. As Graver comments, Eliot moves the body of the work into the past while simultaneously using a variety of devices to remind the reader of the present (30; Booker: 19, see Introduction, above, 18). A telling effect of this move is to place a distance between readers and two social groups in different phases of development. Graver offers a very helpful insight here by drawing on a typology of community which modern thought owes to the late nineteenth-century social theorist Ferdinand Tönnies — specifically, the distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*.<sup>1</sup> *Gemeinschaft* refers to “local, organic, agricultural communities that are modeled on the family and rooted in the traditional and the sacred” (Graver: 14). In literary tradition, such a social formation is apt to be identified as utopic, and Eliot herself, despite her strictures on the tyranny of custom in rural life (“German Life,” *Selected Essays*, 119-20), thinks utopically: “a return to the habits of peasant life is the best remedy for many moral and physical diseases induced by perverted civilization” (120-21). *Gesellschaft*, by contrast, “denote[s] urban, heterogeneous, industrial societies that are culturally sophisticated and shaped by the rational pursuit of self-interest in a capitalistic and secular environment” (Graver: 14). A version of *Gemeinschaft* is vividly dramatized in *Silas Marner* by the eponymous hero’s trajectory and outcome, from solitary existence in a barren wilderness to dwelling amongst family and neighbors in a fashion that replicates traditional ties and habitation of place, surrounded by a garden open to the world in place of a stony wilderness. Although *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* are theoretical principles, not realized empirically, and the characteristics of either may appear within a single social group, the distinction is useful for describing the kinds of chronotope Eliot has constructed in *Silas Marner*. Lantern Yard is situated within a town in the process of industrialization, a representation of *Gesellschaft*, but with some characteristics of *Gemeinschaft*, while Raveloe is an agricultural society, *Gemeinschaft*, exhibiting some characteristics of *Gesellschaft*. Raveloe’s movement toward tolerance of difference and otherness, its dialogic approach to religion as opposed to Lantern Yard’s authoritative, monologic conception of religion, and its subversion of existing values and social order (epitomized late in the novel by Eppie’s refusal of the chance to move up the class hierarchy), function as a progressive utopian force with a transformative potential for social change. As Courtney Berger comments, by imagining new ways to describe how individuals “belong” to groups, Eliot simultaneously accepts a world driven by commerce — *Gesellschaft* — and one governed by tradition or custom — *Gemeinschaft* (309).

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<sup>1</sup> *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* are translated as ‘community’ and ‘society’ respectively, however, in this thesis the original German terms will be used because the distinction between the English words remains ambiguous. In fact, “society,” being a larger set, includes “community.”

*Silas Marner* presents an analysis of dystopian and utopian societies represented by Lantern Yard and Raveloe, whereby dystopian and utopian elements are aligned, respectively, with the characteristics of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. It is a dystopian society which expels an individual characterized as “both sane and honest” (*SM*, 57), and a more utopian society which integrates that abjected individual into society even though he begins as a stranger, “come from unknown parts” and “comical-looking” (*SM*, 66). This in turn is explained by the antithesis between the monologism represented by Calvinism in Lantern Yard and the Feuerbachian dialogism represented by Raveloe’s religion of humanity. Hence the two chronotopes in their representations of how human ideas and behavior are influenced by and restrained within the frame of time and space draw heavily on contrasting representations of industrialized fundamental Christianity (Lantern Yard) and traditional pre-industrialized and rural religion (Raveloe). This antithesis plays a crucial role in understanding the nature of two societies and their dealings with an individual. *Silas Marner* can be viewed as dealing with the contingency of language and culture in the sense that Lantern Yard and Raveloe have distinct customs and discourses pertaining to religion and human thoughts and behavior. By choosing exile in a different geographical locale, Silas also encounters a religion of a different era, which reflects and shapes social conditions in a different way. Thus the same individual experiences society differently in each chronotope because of the different kinds of religion, belief systems, social customs and traditions. Felicia Bonaparte (1991: 40) also picks up the point that in *Silas Marner* different eras are suggested in different places. She argues that Lantern Yard, which seems to Silas “God’s kingdom upon earth” (*SM*, 63) represents the age of theology, while Raveloe is “a secular Eden” in which Silas finds not the salvation promised by Lantern Yard but “salvation ... in human fellowship” (1991: 53), although this broadly humanistic culture does not stir any religious feelings in Silas. In fact, like Dolly, Silas inarticulately subscribes to a kind of polytheistic view that different gods govern different regions. As an exile and under different god Silas has to learn a different language and culture to produce meaning in Raveloe.

### **Lantern Yard and the Production of the Abject**

In Lantern Yard Eliot portrays Silas’s reduction from an exemplary member of society to the state of abjection, and by showing how absurd are the processes by which a society abjects an individual Eliot critiques the dystopian elements of the society. Before his betrayal by his supposed friend William Dane, and thence the false accusation of theft which leads to his expulsion from the community, Silas is an active community member conforming to the beliefs of the religious society of Lantern Yard. He is described as “both honest and sane” and his

humble attitude toward God is the antithesis of that of William, who has a firm belief in predetermination and his own place amongst the elect (*SM*, 57-58). William's immoral behavior in betraying his best friend and promptly marrying his fiancée indicates special interpretation of a chosen people's licence to fix their own behavioral parameters.<sup>2</sup> The false accusation initially renders Silas speechless and defenseless. However, because of his knowledge of his own innocence, the arbitrary determination of his guilt based on drawing lots leads him to blasphemous conclusions because he loses his trust in God and men. The refusal to accept the decision made by the drawing of lots is thus a refusal of the discrepancy between a human sense of righteousness and that attributed to God. He is made abject, alienated and finally expelled from the community. A simple metonym of his abjection is the inverted signification now placed upon his "cataleptic fits" or "trances": at first generally regarded as a divine favor, marking him as "a brother singled out for special dealings" (*SM*, 58), they are resignified by William as "a visitation of Satan" (*SM*, 58), a sign that he is guilty and already abjected.

That a human attribute can be so arbitrarily made to signify and resignify is itself an indicator of the failure of the rational faculty within the mentality of the Lantern Yard sect. In this example, as in their misdeductions derived from the finding of Silas's knife, they fail to grasp the principles of cause and effect. Eliot had already a decade earlier (1851) expressed a distinct critique of this mode of thought in her review of R. W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect*: "the master key to divine revelation ... is the recognition of the presence of undeviating law in the material and moral world — of that invariability of sequence which is acknowledged to be the basis of physical science, but which is still perversely ignored in our social organization, our ethics and our religion" ("Intellect," *Selected Essays*, 271). As Q. D. Leavis comments in a note to the opening chapter of *Silas Marner*, the Lantern Yard sect appears to have been fundamentalist in that they adopted practices sanctioned by the Bible instead of those of their contemporary society, but their fundamentalism belonged to a tradition that was "ascetic, self-righteous and emotionally repressive" (*SM*, 251). Where the Dissenter chapels more generally offered utopian possibilities in their structures of democratic governance and rejection of hierarchy, Lantern

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<sup>2</sup> Biblical stories are metanarratives for this novel. Two verses — "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? (Jas. 2:14) and "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Rom. 3:28) — show a discrepancy in their emphasis on, first, the interdependence of faith and good deeds, and, second, faith on its own. William's immoral behavior seems to stem from the latter verse, focusing on faith, especially supported by his strong "calling and election sure" (*SM*, 58), contrasted with Silas's "hope mingled with fear" (*SM*, 57).

The story of David's killing of Uriah in order to take his wife (2Sa. 11:2-27) is a precursor to the story of William Dane's false accusation and elimination of Silas and subsequent marriage with Sarah. In fact, the whole story of Silas's abjection, exile and reincorporation into society is a reflection of the verse, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone" (Mt. 21:42; Mk. 12:10; Lk. 20:17; Psal. 118:22). It is also a tale of teleology: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28), where abject Silas despite adversity finds his happiness in human society.



Yard stands out as a dystopian perversion of that possibility in its inward-turning attempt to apply old laws to a modern society.<sup>3</sup> Hence the democratic implication of the descriptor, “the church assembling in Lantern Yard” (*SM*, 56), is negated by the misguided, superstitious practice of casting lots to decide what should have been investigated by reason (*SM*, 260). In a similar vein, Silas had earlier called into question his continued use of his knowledge of the curative properties of herbs on the ground that “herbs could have no efficacy without prayer, and that prayer might suffice without herbs” (*SM*, 57). Once again, the “invariability of sequence” is overlooked at the expense of human agency. The sect’s assumption that God will suspend natural laws to intervene on behalf of truth and true believers (see Sonstroem: 551) illustrates how false belief at a particular time and place can blur the distinction between utopian and dystopian impulses. The religion in Lantern Yard demands that individuals abandon their agency and choice in favor of total submission to God’s providence, where rational thought would indicate there is usually something that can be done. It is from this narrowly focused chronotope that Silas is abjected, expelled and forced to seek exile.

### **Dystopian Elements**

One form of dystopian experience lies in the inability to make meaning. John Preston argues that in Lantern Yard the qualities of being “both sane and honest” (*SM*, 57) have literally no voice, and a subject without a voice is at risk (114). Silas’s lack of reasonable response to the false accusation is ascribed to the lack of the power of “reflection”:

To people accustomed to reason about the forms in which their religious feeling has incorporated itself, it is difficult to enter into that simple, untaught state of mind in which the form and the feeling have never been severed by an act of reflection. We are apt to think it inevitable that a man in Marner’s position should have begun to question the validity of an appeal to the divine judgment by drawing lots: but to him this would have been an effort of independent thought such as he had never known; and he must have made the anguish of disappointed faith. If there is an angel who records the sorrows of men as well as their sins, he knows how many and deep are the sorrows that spring from false ideas for which no man is culpable. (*SM*, 61-62)

Within the chronotope of Lantern Yard it is impossible for Silas to question the validity of the religion he depends on with his reason and emotion. His subjectivity is formed by the imposed monologic religion exercised in the society, and this precludes any possibility of a subjective agency shaping thought and behavior. Silas does not have the right language and assertive attitude to defend himself, and all he can say when he is falsely accused is, “I am sore stricken; I can say nothing. God will clear me” (*SM*, 60). He wants to depend on providence rather than

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<sup>3</sup> Another Biblical metanarrative for the necessity of an appropriate application of the Bible to a new era is in the following verse: “Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins and both are preserved” (Mt. 9:17; Lk. 5:37).

trying to make himself innocent, repeating the words, “God will clear me” (*SM*, 59, 60).<sup>4</sup> Kate E. Brown comments that what is at issue here is a separation of form and signification — that is, that Silas’s emotional crisis, registered as his sudden loss of faith, is instantiated not when he realizes he has been betrayed by his presumed friend, but when the chapel’s drawing of lots leads to a formal, but unjust, assertion of his guilt (225). She contrasts this with Macey’s later story of the problem of the transposed wedding vows and the solution that the “register” — the formal, societal recognition of the validity of the marriage — is the “glue” that binds, not the actual spoken formulae. Hence signification can be present despite the misuse of signifiers. In Silas’s mistreatment in Lantern Yard, however, the gap between signifier and signification is not resolved by the outcome of the lots, but rather rendered unclosable. Eliot’s narrator points out (*SM*, 61) that a self-reflective frame of belief enables the subject to distinguish between “religious feeling” and “the forms in which [it] has incorporated itself,” whereas an unreflective mind such as Silas’s does not separate “form and feeling” and experiences the awareness of difference as traumatic shock. As Brown argues, once the separation of form and feeling has invalidated the forms of belief in which Silas’s faith had incorporated itself, “Silas can neither doubt the existence of God nor yet retain a belief in God’s providence. The result is an experience of living bereft in a world both malignant and ruined” (225). This issue has important implications for the representation of dystopic societies, in that it is often the lack of certain and grounded meanings that produces dystopia.

Contrary to Preston’s argument that Silas acquiesces in the judgment that his guilt is proven by the drawing of lots, he, in fact, reacts quite violently to the sudden rupture of form and feeling: “you [William] may prosper for all that: there is no just God that governs the earth righteously, but a God of lies, that bears witness against the innocent” (*SM*, 61). And this blasphemous response — an act of palpable transgression — turns him into an outcast, an abjected figure. Before his guilt is determined, he still depends on providence. He abandons afterwards, however, his upbringing and environment that do not allow him to make the effort of independent thought necessary to question the judgment (*SM*, 61-62). Preston concludes that both Lantern Yard and Raveloe are failed communities (116); on the contrary, Raveloe is an “interpretive community,” in Bauer’s use of the term (xi, see Chapter III, above, 92), which succeeds in integrating abject Silas into the community and thereby shows potential for a transformative utopianism. That is, Raveloe includes Silas when he changes his attitude and begins engaging intersubjectively with his neighbors, and provides him with necessary help. The

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<sup>4</sup> Gilbert and Gubar comment that this speechlessness or aphasia is a metaphor of feminine repression (58). *Silas Marner* is Eliot’s only novel with a single protagonist as male, but he represents feminine experience as a ‘feminized foreigner’ discussed later in this chapter.

two societies are thus antithetical in that Lantern Yard, reducing signification to a state of ungroundedness, arbitrarily abjects and discards an innocent individual, whereas Raveloe furnishes meaning through social “glue” to incorporate the abjected individual into the society. David Sonstroem also comments on utopian elements of Raveloe, arguing that it was not Lantern Yard revisited, since Silas’s run of disasters did not continue; unlike Lantern Yard, with its vertical orientation, Raveloe has a horizontal orientation, where neighborliness is paramount (554). Lantern Yard produces obstacles to culture and to freedom of the mind and spirit by imposing monologic values and suppressing human agency and choice, forcing its members to conform to norms regardless of the contradiction of human feelings towards justice along with the means to reach justice. Silas could remain there if he confessed that he robbed the dead deacon (*SM*, 61) rather than being an exile, which he chooses to be and faces the experience of abjection for a long time.

### **Raveloe and Meaning-making in an Interpretive Community**

As antithesis to the portrayal of the loss of meaning and Silas’s process of abjection in Lantern Yard, Eliot presents the reverse process of social integration from abjection in Raveloe. In contrast to the exclusionary nature of the interpretive community of Lantern Yard (or even, on a larger scale, that of *The Mill on the Floss*), the rules of the Raveloe community are sufficiently flexible to accommodate Silas once it is recognized that his difference can be absorbed into community. Initially as a stranger to the village, his abjection is manifested physically, geographically, and mentally. Physically, he is a “pallid undersized” (*SM*, 51) man, looking like one of “the remnants of a disinherited race” (*SM*, 51), an “alien-looking” figure (*SM*, 51), who invokes suspicion and fear amongst ordinary people.<sup>5</sup> By appearance only he is abject enough. His myopia prevents him from meaningful participation in the social world (he gazes, is seen to gaze, but does not perceive), and his silence, whether interpreted as aphasia or general lack of language, alienates him from society. His cataleptic fits, or trances, also make him abject because they situate him in an ambiguous subject position — ambiguous, because he can be alive and dead, with his soul in and out of his body. This negative response toward Silas’s body is strictly a matter of perceptual (and hence conceptual) point of view, as is made abundantly clear by the

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<sup>5</sup> In George Eliot’s novels society is shown to produce abjected individuals on the basis of metonymic readings of their bodies, whereby, within the shaping framework of a conventional interpretation of signs and meanings, the body becomes a location and standard of abjection. I have argued elsewhere that there are three principal body types represented in this way: the beautiful body, the deformed body, and the foreign body. The characters so represented struggle against conventional attributions of bodily significance in a quest for subjective agency in a society that renders people “other” and therefore abject, based on gender, race and class, but figured as physical appearance (See Lee in *Gender Forum*).

presentation of weavers in general in the novel's opening two pages, and by the inversion of the significance attributed to his trances by Lantern Yard. The physical contrast between Silas and William when their friendship is first introduced (*SM*, 57) again reads bodies metonymically, when the narrator makes it explicit that Silas's innocence and William's treachery are written on their respective bodies: "The expression of trusting simplicity in Marner's face, heightened by that absence of special observation, that defenseless, deer-like gaze which belongs to large prominent eyes, was strongly contrasted by the self-complacent suppression of inward triumph that lurked in the narrow slanting eyes and compressed lips of William Dane" (*SM*, 57). Readers are thus expected to align their sympathies with Silas, who is presented positively by the connotations of openness and gentleness in such words as "defenseless" and "deer-like," contrasted with William who is represented as designing and cunning by the use of pejorative words such as "self-complacent," "lurked," "narrow slanting," and "compressed." However, among the brawny farmers of Raveloe Silas's pallid smallness is interpreted as "comical-looking" (*SM*, 66), "a queer and unaccountable creature, who must necessarily be looked at with wondering curiosity and repulsion" (*SM*, 189). This reflects the impact of chronotope on how an individual's body is perceived and interpreted. His dwelling on the periphery of the village, having minimal contact with the villagers, is spatially metonymic of his marginalized being and abjection. He inhabits a "liminal zone" (Gilbert: 359) as one of the figures ordinary country folk see at the edges of time and place — "on the upland, dark against the early winter sunset" (*SM*, 51), "far away among the lanes, or deep in the bosom of the hills" (*SM*, 51). As a weaver, moreover, he is associated with those transformations that take place on the borders of culture — activities that seem to partake "of the nature of conjuring" (*SM*, 52). The need to deal with the villagers in the course of his occupation emphasizes his ambiguous state of being necessary but not belonging.

Mentally traumatized by his experience in Lantern Yard, Silas's response and way of coping is to choose exile, isolation and concentration on his work — "to reduce his life to the unquestioning activity of a spinning insect" (*SM*, 64-65). With all his senses dulled, he becomes a miser, obsessed with hoarding gold. This metamorphosis is a great contrast with the Silas who was an active church member in Lantern Yard. It is the process whereby a human being is reduced from a subject to an object — that is, it is the process of abjection. Commenting on the importance of border states to the representation of exile, Katarzyna Marciniak points out that an abjected exile can only be defined according to the ambiguity of an indefinite border. He simultaneously is and is not a man (33-34). In Silas's case, he is like one of "the remnants of a disinherited race" (*SM*, 51), or identified as a "gnome or brownie" (*SM*, 189). The experience of

exile itself creates what Marciniak calls, “the space of uncertainty” (34), as an exile is always suspended between his or her old and new identities. This is not a fixed space, however, even though Silas is said to have occupied it for fifteen years (*SM*, 70). Marciniak comments that the ostracized foreigner is also often constructed as feminized as Alice Jardine suggests that “the space ‘outside of’ the conscious subject has always connoted the feminine in the history of Western thought — and any movement into alterity is a movement into that female space” (59-60). Thus, Silas, a stranger upon his entrance into Raveloe, is “put into a discourse of ‘woman.’ ” As Catherine Clément writes, Silas is one of “the defeated ... the weak sons, the lame, the hunchbacks, the blacks, the foreigners, and the old men — those who are like women” (22). Silas’s placement in the discourse space of femininity functions ambiguously, however. It is represented by his lack of assurance of salvation in his Lantern Yard period, by his work (weaving), and by his speechlessness as an indication of feminine repression. But after he adopts Eppie the Raveloe interpretive community uses the traits marked as feminine to incorporate him into the community. This identification pivots on child-rearing, but also includes such modifications as the unattributed community voice which declares, “you’re partly as handy as a woman, for weaving comes next to spinning” (*SM*, 189).

### **Manifestations of Abjection: Silas as an Exile and Abject Figure**

Arguing from a psychoanalytic concept of trauma, Emery and Keenan identify Silas’s withdrawal as a common response to traumatic loss. They argue that, “Silas’s isolation, his hoarding, and his deadened senses are attempts at mastering loss, but they keep him numbed and incapable of healing” (209). Lewis A. Kirshner, applying the observations of Sandor Ferenczi, points to the “unbearable sense of injustice, helplessness, and despair” (18) which characterize the narrow, closed life of a person suffering the effects of trauma. Withdrawal from others and from self-awareness leads the subject to lose contact with reality, since a sense of reality is grounded in contact with others. A consequence of trauma which has crucial application to Eliot’s representation of Silas is described by Lacan as a tearing of the network of signification which supports symbolic relationships (Kirshner: 238). I have earlier commented on Eliot’s concern with the rupture of signification in *Lantern Yard*, and when this is linked to the ideas of trauma and exile it becomes clear how deeply abject Silas becomes. The novel sums it up in these terms:

Even people whose lives have been made various by learning, sometimes find it hard to keep a fast hold on their habitual views of life, on their faith in the Invisible, nay, on the sense that their past joys and sorrows are a real experience, when they are suddenly transported to a new land, where the beings around them know nothing of their history, and share none of their ideas — where their mother earth shows another lap, and human life has other forms than those on which their souls have been nourished. Minds that have

been unhinged from their old faith and love, have perhaps sought this Lethean influence of exile, in which the past becomes dreamy because its symbols have all vanished, and the present too is dreamy because it is linked with no memories. (*SM*, 62-63)

In this evocation of the loss of the network of signification, especially in the idea of a mind unhinged from the faith and love which has hitherto sustained it, Eliot acutely expresses the trajectory from trauma through exile to chronic abjection which becomes Silas's lot.

Silas is marked as an alien, a figure that for fifteen years remains on the margins of the chronotope he enters. Even before this, the novel has employed devices of narrative perspective, in particular editorial commentary, character focalization, and FID, to construct a subject position for readers which places them in the abject's position.<sup>6</sup> Using FID the narrator lets readers know what happens in Lantern Yard and the state of Silas's mind, so that readers can align with Silas. Silas's subsequent "problem" in Raveloe is that his identity differs from that of other villagers in that as a migrant he is barely tolerated as somebody "other," and his abjected and self-abjecting state preclude him from functioning like any other member of the community ("there was nothing that called out his love and fellowship toward the strangers he had come amongst" (*SM*, 65)). Graver identifies Raveloe's suspicion of a person "from unknown parts" (*SM*, 66) as one of the characteristics of *Gemeinschaft*, in the sense that Raveloe pursues its solidarity in the uniformity of members and anything foreign and unfamiliar becomes the target of abjection (99). As Marciniak comments, the abject, being discriminated against, tries to escape to the supposedly sheltered realm of the domestic space (16-17), and Silas accordingly leads an isolated life in his cottage, having minimal dealings with the villagers. Silas has a further reason to do this, as he is doubly abject, in the sense that having been traumatized by the experience in Lantern Yard he is already abject when he arrives in Raveloe. As often happens with the abjected, his way of dealing with abjection makes him even more abject. Here is the moment when Silas begins his slide into the life of a miser:

Now, for the first time in his life, he had five bright guineas put into his hand; no man expected a share of them, and he loved no man that he should offer him a share. But what were the guineas to him who saw no vista beyond countless days of weaving? It was needless for him to ask that, for it was pleasant to him to feel them in his palm, and look at their bright faces, which were all his own: it was another element of life, like the weaving and the satisfaction of hunger, subsisting quite aloof from the life of belief and love from which he had been cut off. (*SM*, 65)

The delicate shifting here amongst narrator commentary, FID ("But what were ...?"), and character focalization "to feel them in his palm, and look at their bright faces" deftly catches this

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<sup>6</sup> "Subject position" refers to the position with which an actual reader enters into a relation with the text. Various narrative strategies involving perspective and voice can, if only for the space of a reading, impose particular social and ideological assumptions upon reader subject position — for example, a particular moral judgment about elements of social praxis. By engaging imaginatively with a represented chronotope, a reader becomes susceptible of such impositions.

moment when, in his solipsistic abjection, the materiality of money supplants its social purpose. The reader position constructed by these shifts enables both an alignment with Silas's falling further into abjection and a moral judgment on the confusion of object and purpose.

Silas's physical abjection as an exile is highlighted in the narrative as other characters continually read his figure as clumsy, troublesome, and too different from everybody else. When he alleviates Sally Oates's suffering with his knowledge of herbs, the villagers offer him a chance to be integrated into society, but it fails mainly because he refuses to be interpellated as "a wise man" (a kind of male witch) and so compounds the villagers' prejudices against him — his rejection of their demands is reinterpreted as "ill-will and irritated glances." Thus the gap between him and the villagers increases, and along with it the intensity of his abjection and isolation (*SM*, 66-67). As Kristeva suggests, the foreigner, the exile — historically perceived as a stranger, the other, or the enemy "responsible for all the ills of the polis" — already lives *within* the "I," an insight that is an invitation to a new epistemological model that does not lead either to the homogenization of foreignness or to its abjection (1991: 1). She comments that this model insistently questions the privileged ontological status of the subject that likes to write itself as "unitary and glorious," while burying its incoherences and "strangenesses" (1991: 2). Marciniak comments that such an understanding of the foreigner presents the reason for the fear of "foreignness" that has historically arisen out of a phobic model of community that wants to secure its own coherence and "purity" by projecting otherness onto the body of the foreigner. Moreover, this projection of otherness is an act of aggression that marks the stranger's body as an object of violence, for example, expulsion and elimination by killing off.<sup>7</sup> The foreign body — the abject — needs to be expelled beyond the realm of privileged symbolic representations so that the community may proclaim itself "clean" and unaltered. It is precisely the foreigner's alien ontological status, his or her quivering sense of being, that disturbs the presupposed stable and coherent identity of the community (18).

Silas's condition of exile — its disorientation, instability, and confusion — is exacerbated by two further elements. First, he is partially invisible as a member of the community, since, being a foreigner, he is not quite a "full" subject like everyone else; and second, the position of an exile is in itself contradictory, caught between the freedom born of mobility and the subjective loss caused by disconnection from the symbols of the past chronotope and a present chronotope uninformed by memory. The formulation of this condition in *Silas Marner* is grounded in the paradox that leaving one's native region requires the courage to face the

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<sup>7</sup> As remarked in Chapter III, Maggie's death in *The Mill on the Floss* can be viewed as the result of this treatment of "foreigners," since she is constantly compared with the gypsies who are "dark races" of Eastern origin (Refer to Chapter III, above, 87).

unknown, but the prognostication is already negative because the exile is the result of abjection and expulsion, and may be met with incomprehension, if not hostility, by members of the host community (for him such a physical uprooting may appear to be “a course as dark and dubious as a balloon journey” (*SM*, 68)). The acceptance of a foreigner in a new place may be slow in coming, if it comes at all, and the opportunity is initially lost for Silas when the first step, the transition from the status of a foreigner to that of a contract worker (see Mallen: 60), becomes an end in itself because of the onset of his miserliness. Final acceptance then comes not so much because he struggles to find a space for his alien identity, but because the second trauma he experiences — the loss of the gold he has hoarded for fifteen years — becomes the catalyst for a new and surprising behavior which integrates him into Raveloe society. That is, his unexpected decision to raise Eppie inspires the help of villagers, and eventually brings him to adapt himself (much like the processes of learning a foreign language and culture) to that Raveloe practice of religion that had not initially stirred any religious feelings in him:

By seeking what was needful for Eppie, by sharing the effect that everything produced on her, he had himself come to appropriate the forms of custom and belief which were the mould of Raveloe life; and as, with reawakening sensibilities, memory also reawakened, he had begun to ponder over the elements of his old faith, till he recovered a consciousness of unity between his past and present. (*SM*, 201-2)

The formulation here captures precisely what Bakhtin was to term *intersubjectivity* — the development of subjectivity through dialogue with otherness. Silas’s relation with the villagers thus completes the development from alien through the contracted exchange of his labor for their money to community membership. In retrospect, his first fifteen years in Raveloe had functioned as the foundation for the villagers’ acceptance of him, with first the robbery and then his adoption of Eppie functioning as catalysts for his social integration.

## Utopian Elements

The village of Raveloe to which Silas exiles himself stands “aloof from the currents of industrial energy and Puritan earnestness” (*SM*, 71). Contrary to the progress of history from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, the setting moves from industrialized city life to the pre-industrial setting of rural England, to a village where “the old echoes lingered, undrowned by new voices” (*SM*, 53), thus evoking a nostalgic form of utopia. The utopian element of Raveloe is denoted by its shape, “[a] low, wooded region, where he felt hidden even from the heavens” (*SM*, 63) and, at the end of the novel, by Eppie’s garden with its reminiscences of an Edenic garden, “fenced with stones on two sides, but in front there was an open fence through which the flowers shone with answering gladness” (*SM*, 244). This remains a limited utopia, however, in that, although the wasteland of the Stonepit has been recuperated, and the finding of Dunstan’s remains where



they had lain beneath the water for sixteen years erases an always implicit blot on the proto-utopian community, the sterility of Godfrey and Nancy's apparently placid married life lingers as a reminder that not all things can be mended (*SM*, 237).

The privileges and degree of privacy enjoyed by the gentry enable Godfrey to conceal the secret that condemns him, but in the wider community the good of the society is maintained by depending not only on the villagers' good will but also on the structures of village life that discourage anti-social behavior. Because there are a variety of people in society, it is needful that there be some means of encouraging good and discouraging evil, protecting the weak from the strong, and so on. Reward for good deeds and the threat of punishment for evil deeds function as a system of justice. Sonstroem comments that the protective closeness of the community can also produce ungenerous behavior, because it feels threatened by strangers, as evidenced by the xenophobia directed against Silas during his early years in Raveloe (556-67), and also against the pedlar suspected of stealing Silas's gold, to whom an evil disposition can be attributed on account of his "swarthy foreignness of complexion which boded little honesty" (*SM*, 113) and the "large rings in his ears," which develop from a surmise to a pseudo-fact, because that is what would be expected (*SM*, 113, 114, 115, 127). Sonstroem also points to how the closeness of the community defends against dangers from within by discouraging predatory acts by its members (557). The lack of privacy ensures morality, and a pervasive readiness to help one another is embodied at its fullest in Dolly Winthrop. Unlike Lantern Yard, Raveloe is not a competitive society, as, for example, villagers regard zealous church going as "a greedy desire to stand well with Heaven, and get an undue advantage over their neighbors" (*SM*, 133). In this neighborly and other-regarding atmosphere the healing of Silas's abjection can begin. Thus when Silas appears in the Rainbow to report the robbery of his gold, the village people do not turn him away, but are interested in actively helping him. Likewise, Molly Farren's abject death brings out all the people in the village with an intention to help. They are part of a community which offers compassion and help when other people are in need.

What I suggest here is a proto-utopian tendency in the Raveloe community is not perceived by all commentators. John Preston, while arguing that the strength of the novel is that it assembles and constructs a dialogue amongst various social attitudes, focuses on the novel's bleaker remarks about the Raveloe community. Thus he comments: "Marner's helplessness derives essentially not from rejection and withdrawal, but from the cultural poverty which produces such things. For what Silas encounters at Raveloe is a society as blind and mechanical as is his own life, though less obviously so. It is a community still in the dark, ignorant and fearful, made up of men to whom a life of hard toil has never been illumined by any enthusiastic

religious faith, and whose ‘imagination is almost barren of the images that feed desire and hope, but is all overgrown by recollections that are a perpetual pasture to fear’ (*SM*, 53). Of course Marner can get no help from such a community” (117-18). If more emphasis is given to the larger dialogic structure, and particularly as exemplified in the stumbling, but spiritually enriching, conversations between Silas and Dolly, it can be seen how Silas does get help from the community and is reincorporated into human society, freed from morbid and debilitating isolation, albeit at a later stage of his life there. Silas’s reintegration to society is made possible first because Raveloe has utopian elements that include different individuals, and second because his trauma at being robbed pushes him to reach out for help. This impulse, and the incident in which, having wrongfully accused Jem Rodney of being the robber and recalling how his own innocence was abused, produces “a movement of compunction” (*SM*, 109) which is a catalyst for intersubjectivity (although the novel more simply refers to it as “growth” (*SM*, 108)). This process is already under way when his unpremeditated choice to adopt Eppie contributes to his integration into society, combined with the willingness of his neighbors to accept him as one of them. As Gilbert comments, Silas’s transformation from outcast to parent means that the man without a place, the dispossessed, attains the status of father to a golden-haired daughter, and this definitively integrates him into a community that had previously thought him diabolic (360). It is thus a summation of the novel’s strongly developed teleology when the guests at Eppie’s wedding articulate the simple conclusion that, “when a man had deserved his good luck, it was the part of his neighbours to wish him joy” (*SM*, 243).

### **Eliot’s Transformative Utopia — *Silas Marner* as Social Critique**

In her oft-cited review, “The Antigone and Its Moral,” Eliot examines a text representing a situation in which “the strength of a man’s intellect, or moral sense, or affection brings him into opposition with the rules which society has sanctioned” (*Selected Critical Writings*, 246). In her focus text, and by extrapolation in society itself, this opposition can be an “antagonism between valid principles” (*Selected Critical Writings*, 245), and the conclusion she (in part) draws is that some degree of moderation is desirable when opposing the established rules of human law. Although such an even-handed representation of the dialogical principle is not always the province of the novels, its possibility does serve as a reminder that dystopian and utopian tendencies are largely a matter of point of view, and that fictive representation can exploit a reader’s horror of abjection to induce an alignment against whatever, or whoever, induces that abjection. In its handling of utopian and dystopian elements, *Silas Marner* is a critique of the propensity of both individual and society to acquiesce to culturally established regulations which are framed mainly by religion and

assumed to be beyond critical examination. Society may conform to such external regulation, disregarding any alternative perspective, while individuals may extinguish the inner light of conscience or moral sense in order to conform to external regulation. Lantern Yard's practice of determining difficult issues by drawing lots, and its prohibition of applied medicine are examples of the former, while Nancy's refusal to adopt a child in order to overcome the childlessness of her marriage is an example of the latter, even though it appears to be an oddly personal application of the belief in a divinely managed teleology.

It is an indication of the existence of agency in an individual when established laws are opposed by a subject's intellect or moral sense. Transgression — resisting established laws — can lead to abjection, but when it is identified as having a positive effect and society accepts it as a way of improving society or an alternate way of pursuing social good, it can be adopted by society and the individual is attributed with agency and can bring about change. Courtney Berger suggests that by beginning “with that moment of extraction from a social group that calls into question the unstable connection of the self to the group,” *Silas Marner* examines social identity at its fundamentals (324): how do people feel a sense of belonging, as opposed to feeling alienated, othered, abjected, and why do people abide by the standards of a group rather than resisting or transgressing against those standard? Such a fostering of social ties, she contends, evokes John Stuart Mill's argument for the necessity of cultivating unfamiliar standards and transforming them into meaningful beliefs that have real moral grounding. The conflict that arises for a subject confronting different standards or bases for moral judgment may have its outcome in integration or abjection. Where the abject subject transgresses social standards but still gains acceptance, abjection becomes a catalyst for social change and the abject functions as an agent for social amelioration. This process appears to be the model for Silas's assimilation into the Raveloe community. Berger further points to Mill's argument that custom, rather than being grounded in received beliefs, can be acquired through the repetition of actions and their naturalization as a belief. This leaves room for agency, as subjects choose “standards that seem most beneficial to themselves and to society” (325). In *Silas Marner*, production of the social good is attributable to an interaction of religious tenets, habitual practice, and the cultivation of moral sense as “conscience.”

Throughout Eliot's novels, moral sense is assumed to be an innate human attribute enabling discriminations between good and evil, whereas established laws are contingent attributes of a particular chronotope, that is, what is imposed on people's behavior and ideas at a specific time and place to bind what Berger termed, “the unstable connection of the self to the group” (324). Problems arise when the moral sense and established laws are in conflict, so that

when individuals assert their moral sense in opposition to established laws, they enter a transgressive space which is a gateway to abjection, but also to the possibility of agency. Tragic outcomes may also occur when people, to avoid becoming abjected, disregard their moral sense to conform with established laws. However, acquiescence to the contingency of established laws means desertion of agency by disregarding genuine feelings as human beings. This brings us to a paradox of Silas's being. Terence Dawson argues that "Silas is acted upon. Things happen to him.... When he acts ... it is compulsively. Silas is never an agent" (33), but this argument is grounded on an over-narrow concept of agency as action that changes its material context, rather than action that can transcend its material context. The pivot is moral sense. Silas constantly depends on his own judgment — his moral sense — and chooses to do certain things according to that judgment. Except when seized by cataleptic trances — as when watching over the dead deacon, or when Eppie crawls into his cottage — his life is a succession of choices which involve the exercise of some form of agency. A key point about subjectivity and abjection is involved here: are choices impelled by a moral sense necessarily made by ratiocination? His choice to adopt Eppie and become a parent to her is made obscurely, and by the time he begins to reason about it has already become an example of exercising agency by affirming a choice that has been pre-empted. Dawson's purpose is to contrast Silas with Nancy, arguing that "each of the main stages in Nancy's story is characterized by a decision which she makes.... The main events in Nancy's story correspond to her various attitudes and decisions. She is an agent" (33). Nancy's refusal to adopt a child contrary to her husband's wish can be regarded as exercising her agency, but in fact she is depicted as abandoning agency under the name of providence and is not active in pursuing her happiness. Her moral sense is grounded on a dogmatic principle as narrow as that of Lantern Yard. She is controlled by a fixed idea — established law — which does not allow scope for her own thinking. On a wider scope, it can be interpreted as rigid observance of existing social customs and traditions without any criticism or regard for change of social conditions. Thus, adoption of a child can be regarded as a metaphor for adoption of new values and principles to adapt to a changing world. Nancy, however, is not endowed with a capacity for cultivating unfamiliar standards and transforming them into meaningful beliefs. Rather, Nancy's only concern is "respectability" rather than genuine human well-being; and her obsession with "respectability" makes her feel relieved when Eppie does not choose to live with them, because the decision will secure Godfrey's secret so that she can keep her "respectability." As Caroline Arthurs comments, Eliot implies doubt about providential power and justice, suggesting rather that individual thought and action contribute largely to human happiness (41). The novel indicates that Nancy would have been happier if she had adopted Eppie, as Priscilla comments:

“I could ha’ wished Nancy had had the luck to find a child like that and bring her up” (*SM*, 242). Eliot demonstrates that decisions, commitments, hesitations, and relationships are matters of individual moral choice. Individual choice stemming from agency determines the pattern of events in the novel’s major concern — human agency and the change it can affect for both individual and society. As Berger argues, “liability” guides individual behavior through a sense of social responsibility, but it also maintains that individuals have an autonomous relation to their own thoughts and actions (309).

The teleology of *Silas Marner* distributes just outcomes to individuals who are, respectively, faithful to their own moral sense or disregard it. Silas is faithful to his own feelings and judgment regardless of his shift from one society to another, and makes choices based on his inner feelings not conscious of social pressures or conformity. By contrast, the history of Godfrey Cass is one of denial of inner feelings under the constraints of established laws and social sanctions, shaped especially by his desires for his father’s approval and for Nancy’s love. Mr. Cass highlights his son’s lack of agency, defining him as “a shilly-shally fellow” in need of a wife who has a will of her own since he does not have one (*SM*, 125). His life is full of lies and cover-ups because he is not ready to face his responsibilities, hoping instead for “some unforeseen turn of fortune, some favorable chance” — that is, some improbable event which will transform his insincerity into the appearance of “prudence” (*SM*, 126). He thus misses the opportune time to act. He denies his wife and daughter and even when his wife dies his thoughts immediately turn to the possibility that his marriage to the wretched low class woman might yet be disclosed:

There was one terror in his mind at that moment: it was, that the woman might not be dead. That was an evil terror — an ugly inmate to have found a nestling place in Godfrey’s kindly disposition; but no disposition is a security from evil wishes to a man whose happiness hangs on duplicity. (*SM*, 171)

The very word “duplicity” indicates Godfrey’s conflict between inner feelings and consciousness of established social laws which oppress him and threaten to bring his private abjection into public scrutiny. The passage is a moment of interiority which culminates a sequence of actions pivoting on looking and scrutinizing. At the opening of the scene, Godfrey is enjoying secret “long glances” cast at Nancy, but looking away his eyes “encountered ... his own child carried in Silas Marner’s arms” (*SM*, 171). As all other eyes turn to the strange intruder, and Silas utters the reason for his presence there, the scene pivots on looking and expectation. A key narrative effect is a sustained slipping between narrator perspective and Godfrey’s focalization, so that the negative emotive words in the cited passage — “evil,” “ugly,” “terror,” and “inmate” — hesitate between narratorial judgment and Godfrey’s perceptions about himself, between narrative commentary and free indirect speech. The question Nancy puts directly to him, “What child is

it?” (*SM*, 172), prompts a public denial — “I don’t know — some poor woman’s who has been found in the snow, I believe” (*SM*, 172) — and hence compounds his duplicity. The rest of the chapter circles around the moral imperative that he should acknowledge his dead wife and their child, but he always lacks the “moral courage.” Again the text moves into free indirect discourse to express the tension between invited moral judgment and the character’s self awareness of his abject behavior:

Godfrey was too painfully preoccupied to feel a twinge of self-reproach at this undeserved praise.... Deeper down, and half-smothered by passionate desire and dread, there was the sense that he ought not to be waiting on these alternatives; that he ought to accept the consequences of his deeds, own the miserable wife, and fulfil the claims of the helpless child. But he had not moral courage enough to contemplate that active renunciation of Nancy as possible for him: he had only conscience and heart enough to make him for ever uneasy under the weakness that forbade the renunciation. And at this moment his mind leaped away from all restraint toward the sudden prospect of deliverance from his long bondage. (*SM*, 174, ellipsis mine)

Like so many of Eliot’s other characters, Godfrey is afflicted with “moral stupidity,” and, being too conscious of social reputation and public opinion, allows social practice to win out over moral sense. His behavior culminates here in Chapter 13 with an example of Eliot’s most heavily ironical use of free indirect discourse:

Perhaps it [the child] would be just as happy in life without being owned by its father, seeing that nobody could tell how things would turn out, and that — is there any other reason wanted? — well, then, the father would be much happier without owning the child. (*SM*, 177)

The sophistry is self-evident, but the disintegration of the syntax at and following the parenthesis drives home both the sophistical nature of the argument and the moral bankruptcy of the speaker. A further irony is that Godfrey’s fear of becoming abject becomes the catalyst of his unrecuperable, life-long abjection. This point is already anticipated in the moment when he glances at his dead wife’s face (*SM*, 175) and a prolepsis discloses that he will conceal “the full story” for a further sixteen years. Glancing back from the end of the chapter, a reader might grasp that Molly’s abject corpse functions as a symbol of Godfrey’s own abjection. Spurred by consciousness of other people’s opinions and his own self-regarding desires, he abandons moral sense and human feelings. The result is the abjection inherent in a childless hearth and the realization that even Nancy is not worth the renunciation of his wife and daughter.

The relationship between moral sense and agency is here the reverse of that relationship in Silas’s case, where, as argued above, moral sense operating ahead of reason has an agential effect. In Godfrey’s case, the refusal of moral sense and the corruption of reason lead to permanent abjection, despite any public illusion of agency. When, sixteen years later, events prompt him to acknowledge his daughter and attempt to reclaim her, it is too late. Eppie’s decision to reject her biological father and go on living with Silas and other lower class people is

a further instance of the victory of moral sense over established laws. Society judges that the higher class lifestyle is preferable to that of the lower class. However, Eppie declines the privileges and status offered her, choosing to remain in the class within which she has grown up in love and affection. By making her choice based on her true feelings rather than on judgments imposed by society as to what is good she finds her true happiness. She is not ashamed of marrying a working man and living a working class life. Her walled garden and flowers are an image of utopia, where solidarity based on genuine human feelings counts and no imposition of established laws such as consciousness of class hierarchy exists.

As with Eliot's other novels, *Silas Marner* is about the conflict between individual and society, pivoting on society's propensity to abject and expel individuals, and the capacity of individuals to achieve agency through transgressive actions grounded in moral sense. In "The Natural History of German Life" Eliot mentions that social progress depends upon that of individual members, when there is the "delicate union ... between the moral tendencies of men and the social conditions they have inherited" (*Selected Essays*, 128). As she comments, development can happen when there is consent between society and individuals. Abjection and transgression take place when these two are not "consentaneous," but depending on the kind of society transgression may be incorporated as the process of development or eliminated as abjection:

[Riehl] sees in European society *incarnate history*, and any attempt to disengage it from its historical elements must, he believes, be simply destructive of social vitality. What has grown up historically can only die out historically, by the gradual operation of necessary laws. The external conditions which society has inherited from the past are but the manifestation of inherited internal conditions in the human beings who compose it; the internal conditions and the external are related to each other as the organism and its medium, and development can take place only by the gradual consentaneous development of both. ("German Life," *Selected Essays*, 127)

Within this evolutionary theory of history, Eliot is considering the growth and change of chronotopes (her "conditions" — geographical place, social formations, customs, mentalities and beliefs, ways of speech, and so on — invokes the same concept as the chronotope). Her argument that development depends on a synergy between individual and society, and that change must implicate the "moral tendencies" of individuals, is played out narratively in *Silas Marner*.

As Sally Shuttleworth aptly points out, the history of both the world and the individual is shaped not only by uniform laws of causal relations but also by abrupt interruptions such as catastrophe, such as the flood in *The Mill on the Floss*, and the cataleptic fits in *Silas Marner* (1986: 253, 259). Human agency or responsibility is rendered useless when these abrupt changes happen. As Harvey comments, even though the world is swayed by the random tides of chance and contingency (see Introduction, above, 6-7), which may lead humans to perceive events as

chaotic and random,<sup>8</sup> the progress of history largely depends on human agency and choice. Shuttleworth also comments that the internal conflict between the two models of history in *The Mill on the Floss* is reproduced in *Silas Marner*. The abrupt breaks in historical continuity signalled by Silas's expulsion from Lantern Yard, and his cataleptic fits, dramatize Eliot's doubts concerning the necessary relation between uniformitarian principles of causation, and optimistic theories of social progress (1986: 262). But abrupt changes and random events are realistic in human affairs and Eliot is interested in describing these changes and events as they are as a motivation for individual agency and choice. They can also be interpreted as metaphoric of social forces. As Bakhtin argues, catastrophes constitute beginnings rather than endings (Bakhtin 1984a: 298, see Chapter III, above, 95): Silas's expulsion from Lantern Yard seems to be the ending of the story, but in practice he starts from the seeming ending and builds a new life in a new environment. In fact, in the novel itself Silas's Lantern Yard days occupy only a small space (about 3.5 percent of the whole). By the two modes of uniform laws and abrupt changes beyond human agency Eliot shows the interaction within a particular chronotope of what (following Comte and Mill) she thinks of as social dynamics and social statics (Graver: 45). As Graver explains these terms, social dynamics and social statics are "coordinate concepts," the former dealing with "progress, succession, and continuous historical change," and the latter with "order, coexistence, and with people living in the same period within a given culture" (47). The solidarity and consensus of social statics complement the historical and evolutionary perspective provided by social dynamics. Seen in this light, catastrophic events beyond human agency in *Silas Marner* — Silas's cataleptic fits, Molly's death, Dunstan's death, and so on — can be interpreted as a force of social statics that combines with the force of change and modification. Eppie's irruption into Silas's life makes him like the rest of the villagers, a parent rather than an alien. Within a simple teleology, catastrophe may eliminate a character, so that change is arrested and the status quo of a "clean" society is maintained — as when the flood cleanses St. Ogg's by eliminating Maggie, or Dunstan's death forestalls Godfrey's exposure, or when Molly Farren's death eliminates an abjected character who threatens social stability by her desire to assert her rights within her inter-class marriage. But such events are only moments of pause, and their significance is enfolded within a more comprehensive teleology. Silas's return to Lantern Yard in the penultimate chapter is a succinct example of this larger teleology at work, as although Silas is denied the closure he seeks, readers see the moral fitness of the unknown events which, within

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Dunstan's misfortunate history is in the form of a chain of events: waste of money, threatening Godfrey, securing Wildfire, betting on Wildfire, death of Wildfire, stealing Silas's money, falling in the stone pit, and death. The events apparently look random, but there is always room for human agency and opportunity of regeneration, and tragedy ensues when he does not accept his responsibility. Readers therefore perceive a teleology in his history.



five years of the injustice perpetrated against Silas, caused that community, which could neither see by the light of reason nor discern the abject from the innocent, to be “all swep’ away” (*SM*, 240). Dolly Winthrop gropes toward that teleology when she assures Silas that, “it seems as you’ll never know the rights of it; but that doesn’t hinder there *being* a rights” (*SM*, 241).

## Conclusion

*Silas Marner* critiques the dystopian elements existing in a society because of human rigidity, whether the rigidity of weakly grounded religious beliefs, and thence the social injustice perpetrated by the unreasonable practice of such beliefs, or the rigid sense of class hierarchy and appropriate behaviors within that hierarchy. The novel thus suggests three domains in which utopian (or proto-utopian) motifs emerge.

First, the monologic values held by the Lantern Yard community produce social regression in an age of apparent progress. By abandoning both agency and reason, and extrapolating random Biblical incident (such as the drawing of lots to resolve an issue) into their own epistemological structures, the community both falsifies reality and abjects a valuable member of society (Silas). The dystopian elements are evident in the fact that a consequence of their beliefs and practices is to drive a perfectly ordinary individual to the margin as abject, and soon to disappear. By contrast, the abjected figure is incorporated into Raveloe society when he breaks his self-imposed isolation to seek help when distressed, and when he chooses to adopt an orphaned child, and these events become a chain which leads to acceptance by other members of the society. The idyllic utopian close of the novel implies a teleology within which Raveloe’s more open qualities, especially a capacity for integrating outsiders if they are willing to engage intersubjectively, can be interpreted as proto-utopian elements.

A second utopian possibility can be discerned in the potential for deconstructing the notion of inherent class hierarchy. Eppie’s refusal to be raised out of the class she was reared in reveals a concept of class which is based not on accidents of birth but on quality of human communication. The extended scene in Chapter 19, in which Godfrey and Nancy propose taking Eppie and turning her into a lady, interrupts a dialogue in which Silas and Eppie expound the “blessing” of their shared love, in contrast with the empty significance of Silas’s recently recovered hoard and with the poverty of spirit each would have endured had events gone differently. The contrast between materialism and the wonder of intersubjective being is a potent introduction to the ensuing discussion, in which reader perspective is kept aligned with the values identified by the preceding dialogue. Godfrey and Nancy are presented as emotionally and morally blind to the human implications of their proposal, seeing only the presumed material and

social (in a narrow, hierarchical sense) advantages. They cannot imagine that working people might have deep and complex feelings; they assume that “gentle” birth implies both social and physical distinctiveness, and express abhorrence of the thought that Eppie “may marry some low working-man” (*SM*, 232). By aligning readers against Godfrey’s and Nancy’s insensitivity and with Silas’s and Eppie’s simple moral superiority, the novel questions the class hierarchy and its implications. Graver argues that in this scene “a sense of natural equality” overcomes “prescriptive respectability” and curtails upper-class dominance (99), affording an example of Tönnies’s theory that the essence of *Gemeinschaft* is the unity of unequal beings. This is a limited motion, however, and as Graver argues, in the studies of an earlier time Eliot also explores the disharmonies in *Gemeinschaft* — disharmonies “caused by abuses of rank and privilege among the rural gentry, and by the fixity of peasant ways” (97).

Third, by constructing a teleology within which the often muddled life of Raveloe offers a closure quite different from anything associated with Lantern Yard, Eliot presents the possibility of just society that tends towards utopia. Her weaving of a changing chronotope extends over a considerable length of time. Dunstan’s body, his sin, and Silas’s gold are revealed with time; Godfrey’s secrets are revealed with time; the villagers’ suspicious attitudes toward Silas disappear with time, even though it has to be paralleled with the change of Silas’s own attitude.

*Silas Marner* proceeds dialogically to explore how a dystopian society like Lantern Yard, reflected in a narrow religious sect and contextualized within the instabilities of an industrializing *Gesellschaft*, is too rigid, limited and inefficient to survive, while Raveloe, an evolving *Gemeinschaft*, is attributed with the characteristics of progress toward an ideal society as symbolized by Eppie’s Edenic garden at the end. The unexpected incidents and events which prompt the integration of Silas into society are catalysts for change in the balance of society, as Raveloe’s own dystopian elements are displaced by the trend toward a more utopian society. Eliot shows how human agency and individual decisions can affect a society in the shaping of its utopian elements.

## CHAPTER V

### Justice and Feminist Utopia in *Romola*

Who shall put his finger on the work of justice, and say, 'It is there'? Justice is like the Kingdom of God — it is not without us as a fact, it is within us as a great yearning. (R, 549)

*Romola* (1863) revolves around the idea of justice in the construction of utopia and locates it in the status of women by juxtaposing the *Bildungsroman* of its fictional female protagonist, Romola, and the struggle of the historical male authoritative protagonist Girolamo Savonarola to establish a republic in Florence after sixty years of oligarchy. The chronotope of *Romola* is the city state of Florence from 9 April 1492, one day after Lorenzo de' Medici's death, to 23 May 1498, Savonarola's execution day (with an Epilogue, dated eleven years later on 23 May 1509). This period captures a critical moment in the historical development of Florence as a state, encompassing the early years of republican government led by Savonarola, the French invasion of Italy by Charles VIII in 1494, and Piero de' Medici's failed attempt to re-establish his power in Florence in 1497 — and all caught up in the power struggle and factions among three parties: the Republican party led by Savonarola, the Mediceans (the *Arrabbiati*, 'the Angry Ones'), and the aristocratic party (*Compagnacci*, 'evil companions'). Even though Lorenzo de' Medici's rule was considered to have been efficient, it was nevertheless a dictatorship from 1469 to his death on 8 April 1492, and this is the key impulse for Savonarola's endeavor to establish democratic government as a utopian state. Florence, which for both Romola and Savonarola is analogous with their own quests for "order, autonomy, and direction" (Bernardo: 89), has inner conflicts and contradictions, the major of which is the conflict between Medieval superstition and Renaissance humanism (Lovesey 1991: 68): "the same society has had a gibbet for the murderer and a gibbet for the martyr ... a mixed condition of things which is a sign, not of hopeless confusion, but of struggling order" (R, 475-76).

As a historical novel set almost four centuries before its date of publication, *Romola* defamiliarizes issues of immediate concern to Victorian readers. Dorothea Barrett (xii -xiv) suggests that there are at least three kinds of correspondence (in the implications of events) in the chronotope between Renaissance Florence and Victorian England. Firstly, religious faith was under challenge. *Romola* was published four years after Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and contemporary readers were aware of the view that history is evolution rather than divine creation — a perspective which the fifteenth-century spirit from *Romola*'s Proem could find in the Roman poet Lucretius or the Renaissance free-thinker Luigi Pulci. A tension between the teleological

worldview of Christianity and the “free thought” of paganism is represented respectively by Savonarola and Bardo (and Tito). Shuttleworth also points to this parallel between Renaissance and Victorian England, formulating it as a conflict between belief in human power, or agency, and Catholic mysticism (111). Secondly, the Risorgimento as “symbolic of all movements for political freedom” (Barrett: xiii), is analogous to Victorian reform movements, especially the quest for electoral reform. As in Victorian England, working men were not counted as citizens and did not have suffrage (R, 312), and here, in an obvious analogy with the question of working men’s enfranchisement addressed in the Victorian Second Reform Bill, the Florentines are depicted debating whether to adopt an electoral system “where all the officers of government might be elected, and all laws voted by a wide number of citizens of a certain age and of ascertained qualifications, without question of rank or party” (R, 313). Finally, the status of women is identical in each chronotope, with the same misogyny holding sway regardless of belief, and women reduced to objects, *belonging to* men, especially with regard to married women’s property.<sup>1</sup> Tito’s right to dispose of the Bardi library without reference to Romola, to whom the library rightfully belongs, is an instance of the absurdity of such laws.

The novel is polyphonic in that, while centering on Romola, the lives of the characters are intertwined within the weblike Florentine society (Romola asks herself, “What if the life of Florence was a web of inconsistencies?” (R, 562)). In the beginning of the novel Romola is allowed access to male knowledge, but oppressed by misogyny, at first by her father, and then by Tito after they marry. Later Savonarola’s teachings rule Romola’s life until she finds her own moral basis. As Hilda Hollis points out, Savonarola, Bardo, and Tito represent philosophically different life-positions brought into dialogue with each other, which I will interpret as different utopian projects — different approaches to the construction of an ideal state of being. Savonarola’s utopian project is through religion, through devotion to God; Bardo’s through academic work, through studying ancient texts; and Tito’s through the pursuit of “pleasure and power.”<sup>2</sup> These are analogous to structures within nineteenth-century Britain: “religious authority, the authority of learning and tradition, and that of economic and political power.” Even though Romola was silent and excluded from those male-dominant values in the

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<sup>1</sup> The Married Women’s Property Acts, which were passed in 1870 and 1882, were the culmination of a long struggle by Victorian feminists such as Barbara Bodichon to secure legal protection for the incomes and property of married women and to amend property law for women (Barrett, xiv). As Alison Booth points out, wrongs of inheritance law are indicated in the facts that daughter is supplanted by son-in-law as heir and that the daughter is prohibited from becoming a scholar in her own right in *Romola* (1993: 118).

<sup>2</sup> The trinity of ideas, truth, goodness, and beauty, which are respectively represented by study, religion, and art/politics, will be dealt with in Chapter VII on *Middlemarch* in the characters’ pursuit of utopian dreams: Dorothea through goodness, Lydgate through truth, and Will through art/politics. This idea is incipient in *Romola*, with the female protagonist excluded at the beginning, whereas in *Middlemarch* Dorothea is the central character who distinctively pursues Utopian dreams.

beginning, by the end of the novel she has earned her own voice, and those other three voices, their owners now silenced by death, are heard through her dialogic interpretation (Hollis 2001b: 244). Romola pursues her utopia through religion as Savonarola does, but once she has become disillusioned, she constructs her utopia through the religion of humanity. The matriarchy that she creates in her home supports Comte's argument that women are "the purest and simplest impersonation of Humanity" (Comte: 234). Indeed, on two occasions in the novel she is perceived as an avatar of the Madonna — a secular equivalent of the Virgin Mary. Further, as her *Bildungsroman* unfolds and she interacts with the different voices, she progresses through Comte's three stages of development: polytheistic, when she learns from her father's pagan humanism; monotheistic, when she is guided by Savonarola's Christianity; and positivistic, when she is guided by her own moral sense. Romola's disillusionment with polytheism stems from Tito's immorality and egoism and her disillusionment with monotheism emerges when she becomes aware of Savonarola's narrowness, selfishness and corruption.

*Romola* is the most utopian among Eliot's novels. By intermingling historical and fictional figures and events, thereby blending history with romance, Eliot is able to represent the most ideal state of utopia where justice is done and women's potential is incorporated. The juxtaposition of a historical authoritative male figure and a fictional subordinate female figure makes it possible to suggest an analogy between their missions and the pursuit of utopian visions results in failure and success, respectively. Savonarola and Romola are the main utopists in this novel because they are the participants who have ideal social visions, in contradistinction to Bardo and Tito, neither of whom attempts to change the world beyond his own selfish purposes. *Romola* traces the failed utopian dreams of Savonarola, while tracing Romola's *Bildungsroman* out of oppression and imposition of subjectivity by patriarchal figures until in the end, through the successful pathway of transgression, she gains agency and makes her own choices. Thus Eliot's only eponymous heroine (other than in "Janet's Repentance" in *Scenes of Clerical Life*), Romola is the most feminist (utopian) figure in Eliot's novels,<sup>3</sup> through whom Eliot shows the conflict between love and duty, and submission and rebellion, and emphasizes the importance of education and legal reform for women (Paxton: 123). Romola is a counter-example of the argument that education will unsex women (*GEL*, IV, 468); she proves a feminine and lovable woman (Paxton: 125), despite her classical, masculine education.

When, after the execution of her godfather and her loss of faith in Savonarola's purpose, so oppressed by her then abjected state she had surrendered any thought of agency and gives herself up to the sea, the plague-stricken village to which she drifts becomes a site for the

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<sup>3</sup> As Barrett, for example, recognizes in naming her as such: "the utopian heroine" (xvi).

recuperation of the self from abjection, and for utopian transformation. In its profoundly dystopian elements the village is analogous to that politically enmeshed Florence that Savonarola aims to renovate, but where Romola succeeds in transforming the village into a utopia and carries the spirit back to Florence and applies it to her life, Savonarola fails and is executed, his body reduced to utter abjection, and his voice being said to have “passed into eternal silence” (R, 579). Romola solves the villagers’ practical problems, curing their plague, burying the dead, and dealing with racism and rescuing the remnants of the marooned Jewish refugees, while historical Savonarola had attempted a metaphorical rescue of Israelites, seeking to save their souls rather than their bodies. However, Savonarola’s influence on the Risorgimento is so great that it is simply wrong to regard him as only a failure, especially from the perspective that constructing a utopia is an ongoing, long-term process. This is the reason why in the Epilogue even though Romola is a matriarch, a breakthrough image at the time of readership, she still reverences Savonarola on his eleventh memorial day.

### **Feminist Utopia: Romola’s *Bildungsroman***

Romola’s utopia resembles traditional utopian travel narratives in that she gets there accidentally by drifting away from the world she belongs to, a place detached from history in time and place — a parallel chronotope; and it has a physical utopian shape: landing after drifting around in a “crescent shaped nook” (R, 550), which is a traditional utopian shape, with a “soothing sense of peace and beauty which she felt in her first waking” (R, 551), surrounded by “the speckless sapphire-blue of the Mediterranean” (R, 550). But the crucial difference is that despite the utopian shape, the village is a dystopia, attacked by plague. Therefore, instead of being guided by a host to show how advanced and wonderful the place is, Romola has to create utopia herself, and thus finds herself endowed with a mission. Through the transformation that occurs, *Romola* redefines women’s function in society, showing it to be infused with the religion of humanity, the final phase of Comte’s development.

Disillusioned with her world’s competing ideologies and frustrated by not finding her place in society, an utter abjection drives Romola to the water in a suicidal frame of mind: “To be freed from the burden of choice when all motive was bruised, to commit herself, sleeping, to destiny which would bring death or else new necessities that might rouse a new life in her!” (R, 503).<sup>4</sup> To set herself adrift in a boat is to abandon her agency and close off the choices that may

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<sup>4</sup> Eliot (R, 502) cites as pre-text a remembered image in Gostanza’s story from Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (1351), which Romola had read against the orders of both father and husband. Romola doesn’t recall the whole story, which culminates in the reuniting of Gostanza and her lost love, Martuccio. The use of the plague in Chapter 68, “Romola’s Waking,” again evokes the *Decameron*, whose frame story involves characters leaving Florence to avoid the plague.

be open to her. Deprived of any purpose in life and wanting to be freed from the bond of marriage, she makes the most abject of choices, to seek death without even the limited transgressive agency of taking her own life. But that small holding back, leaving open the possibility that her transgressive act could “bring ... new necessities that might rouse a new life in her,” becomes a crucial turning-point. Hence she follows the pathway through utmost abjection, an act of transgression which could take her into life or death, into the gaining of agency by means of a utopian experience.

Transforming the dystopian, plague-stricken, “village of the unburied dead” (R, 553), into something like paradise is possible because of the novel’s romance element, but it can also be viewed as representing a utopian impulse, or the vision of an ideal society, where there is no racism or sexism to prevent the accomplishing of the vision. Romola can function usefully there because society gives her space to work without male restraint, no longer subservient to Savonarola, Bardo, or Tito and their misogynistic, patriarchal laws: “She was alone now: she had freed herself from all claims, she had freed herself even from that burden of choice which presses with heavier and heavier weight when claims have loosed their guiding hold” (R, 504). In so far as this freedom also applies to the author of the novel, Eliot is freed by Romola’s phantasmagoric, night-sea journey from subservience to historical facts, and can enter the discourse of the utopian fantastic. There is, as Robin Sheets points out (1997: 338), a further genre shift into hagiography at the end of Chapter 68, “Romola’s Waking,” which records that in later times Romola’s deeds in the village became the stuff of legend.

In a variation on the name Piero di Cosimo gives her as a filial daughter — “Madonna Antigone” — Romola buries the dead, as Antigone buried her brother against the law of Creon, according to her own moral law. The name also suggests a blending of Christianity and paganism, and thus a hybridization of traditions. The principal characteristic of the utopia that Romola constructs is that it uses female potential without reference to patriarchal laws and therefore disregards racism and sexism, which result from traditional binary oppositions inherent in patriarchy. Romola rescues the Jewish baby, who the villagers perceive as a metonymy for the plague (R, 551), and disregards the prejudices against Jewish people. The representation of human misery and suffering engendered by imposed beliefs interrogates and challenges prejudices based on hierarchies of power, as in the case of the Jewish baby whose parents were expelled from Spain or Portugal because they were Jews, and were thus victims of religious and political systems:

The strongly marked type of race in their features, and their peculiar garb, made her conjecture that they were Spanish or Portuguese Jews, who had perhaps been put ashore and abandoned there by rapacious sailors, to whom their property remained as a prey. Such things were happening continually to Jews

compelled to abandon their homes by the Inquisitions: the cruelty of greed thrust them from the sea, and the cruelty of superstition thrust them back to it. (R, 552)

Through Romola's conjecture Eliot indicts the racism and religious prejudice that abjected them as alien and expelled them from their homeland, exposing them to the degradations of opportunists and cut-throats.

Just as the dystopian village is a space for Romola to realize utopian dreams, the re-built village is her utopia in its concrete form. There, she can put into practice whatever she regards as right. Acting at last as a full agent, she demonstrates sympathy, altruism and selflessness in the construction of a new idealistic world. Her space for action is brought into being by the vacuum created by the plague, which makes even the priest afraid of death and willing to follow her instruction. She thus exercises authority over the Church and, in rescuing the Jewish child reconciles Jews and Gentiles (cf. Bullen, 433).<sup>5</sup> That Romola's activity falls within the domains of utopian romance and hagiography foregrounds the ahistorical nature of this sequence and thereby implies a critique of the dystopian aspect of Florentine society that *in* history women cannot function as meaningful social beings. As Barrett puts it, "the symbolic implication is that woman cannot realize herself while trapped in the net of history" (xvi).

### **Carnival as a Central Metaphor for Utopia**

In many ways throughout the novel Carnival functions as a central metaphor for Romola's utopia. In her utopia women's voice is louder, as in the market in Carnival time there occurred, "a change which was apt to make the women's voices predominant in the chorus" (R, 15). Her utopia is the Carnival in that "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" (Bakhtin 1984b: 10). There, "all one-sided seriousness (of life and thought), all one-sided pathos is handed over to the heroes, but the author, who causes them all to collide in the 'great dialogue' of the novel, leaves that dialogue open and puts no finalizing period at the end" (Bakhtin 1984a: 165).

As Bonaparte points out, there are two contrasting worlds in *Romola*: the pagan (Greco-Roman/Bacchic) world symbolized by the triptych Tito gives her on the day of their betrothal, and the Christian world symbolized by the cross given her by her brother, Dino (1979: 20). Each is associated with carnival, but in rather different ways. The former is associated with the Saturnalia of carnival, Carnival under the Medici reign, while the latter, Savonarola's "new

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<sup>5</sup> Jews were condemned by Christians because they do not subscribe to Christian doctrine, and placed on the same level as lepers and heretics — assumed to be abject and unclean. They were held responsible for the plague of the late fourteenth century and presented in the image of the Devil who tries to subvert Christian order and reduce the world to chaos. Condemning Jews from the Christian perspective is equivalent to imposing monologic values. Study of Jews and their culture will be investigated in Chapter VIII on *Daniel Deronda*.



Carnival, which was a sort of sacred parody of the old” (R, 419) replicates the bonfires and processions of the traditional Carnival, but invests them with new significance: they are now a repressive attack on the topsy-turvy celebration of the body and its physical functions associated with traditional carnival (Hollis 2001b: 231-32). By reinscribing *carnival* as a “Bonfire of Vanities” under the control of Savonarola, Utopia is created by the actions of a cohort of youths described by Savonarola as, “the future glory of a city specially appointed to do the work of God” (R, 419).

Bakhtin’s carnivalistic sense of the world is manifested in the street scenes on festival day. The whole of Chapter 8, “A Face in the Crowd,” is a depiction of parade of carnival, the great summer festival of Florence, the day of San Giovanni, and thus a depiction of a carnivalistic sense of the world. San Giovanni had been the patron saint of Florence for at least eight hundred years (R, 81), and the conflict between paganism and Christianity is ironically described by the narrator by contrasting people’s perception of Mars and San Giovanni: “the Florentines deposed their idol Mars, whom they were nevertheless careful not to treat with contumely” (R, 81). Mars, the pagan god of war, is debased to the level of the spear and shield that can be bought: “For spear and shield could be hired by gold florins, and on the gold florins there had always been the image of San Giovanni” (R, 81). What happens here is the sacred become desacralized, the high becomes lowered, as Cennini comments, “There are new wits who think they see things more truly because they stand on their heads to look at them, like tumblers and mountebanks, instead of keeping the attitude of rational men” (R, 90). Old Carnival transforms the existing order of things, manifesting utopian impulses through “so much piping, music and song, with balls and feasts and gladness and ornament, that this earth might have been mistaken for paradise!” (R, 83). Carnival under Savonarola, however, is regulated by a monologic voice and is confined within the frame of the burning of vanities (R, 419) — the destruction not only of cosmetics but of tapestries, artwork and literature (R, 421). It is carnivalistic only in the paradoxical sense that this monologic voice is “subverting” the existing (dis-)order.

Tessa functions as a carnival fool and as such questions the conventionality of society. As Bakhtin argues, the fool is a character in novels because “by his very uncomprehending presence he makes strange the world of social conventionality” (Bakhtin 1981: 404). As a female who does not think, Tessa represents the object of patriarchal desire in an extreme, parodic form. Her status as fool is established by various animal images — kitten (R, 294, 568), little pigeon (R, 147, 306, 424), and little goose (R, 309) — and by the image of babyhood repeatedly used of her as focalized by Tito in their first encounter (R, 24, 25, 26). She is represented as mentally impaired and as having difficulty in following conversation. She is not a focalizing character, and in so far as her inner thoughts are represented at all they are muzzy and confused by the human

intricacies that surround her. She lacks the moral sense to be able to comprehend Tito's lack of morality and is thus unable to formulate any criticism of him, whereas for Tito it is a carnival time to be with her.

The propensity of Carnival to invert the world as-it-is is also evident in the crossing of gender borders that occurs in *Romola*. Romola is educated as a male and in her ultimate role as a matriarch displaces and replaces the father figures who had dominated her life for most of the novel. Women's knowledge about classical material is also regarded as transgression and a crossing of the borderline of gender definition. On the other hand, Savonarola also crosses gender border by appropriating for himself the role of "mother" and his task as "travail": he says his heart yearns "as the heart of a mother over the children she has travailed for" and the fruit of his travail is to "let this people be saved" (R, 229). It is a significant subversion in that important public matters such as reform are undertaken in the name of the mother, thus implicitly recognizing the absence of the actual female possibility later enacted by Romola in her utopian sequence. More ambiguously, Baldassare, repudiated as a father, is also viewed as playing a female role. He is seen through feminine metaphors: as a mother, as a maenad, and finally as a woman watching "on a headland for the ship which held something dear" (R, 543).

The principle of carnivalization is to overturn the dominant social perspective. A key method for effecting this in fiction is to present various consciousnesses through the strategies of free indirect discourse (FID) and focalization. As I argued in the Introduction to this thesis, FID enhances the multivocality of the text by enabling a plurality of speakers and attitudes, while the continued presence of the narrator variously brings into play an ironic distancing or an empathetic alignment of reader with character. Savonarola is the only major character not represented by means of extensive focalization, so that as far as his "inner life" is disclosed it is a matter of an ongoing commentary by an omniscient narrator. This technique produces the effect of making his character uncertain, but also suggests that Savonarola lacks self-knowledge because of his doubleness. Romola, Tito, and Baldassarre are all portrayed through the presentation of their thoughts and feelings, and this reinforces, for example, the distinct perception each has of Savonarola (Lovesey 1991: 73).

Susan M. Bernardo discusses how in the "Drifting Away" chapter the narrator both "enter[s] the character's mind" and maintains a distance from her (98). She argues that the narrator's shift from 'she' to 'we' in describing Romola's state is a marker of the duality of the narrator's voice: it is both a distanced voice making detached comments, and a sympathetic voice

sharing Romola's misery:<sup>6</sup> "With the sinking of high human trust, the dignity of life sinks too; we cease to believe in our own better self, since that is also a part of the common nature which is degraded in our thought; and all the finer impulses of the soul are dulled" (R, 501-2). The effect is much more systemic than pronominal shifting, however. This moment is succeeded by a passage of extended character focalization (signalled by "Romola felt ..." (R, 502)) as Romola's represented perspective on the landscape before her is mingled with free indirect thought ("Had not *she* had her sorrows too?" (R, 502)) and memory. The section thus moves between perceptions experienced by the character ("as she paused again in her walking to and fro, she saw gliding black against the red gold another boat with one man in it" (R, 502)) and the narrator's commentary on her mental processes ("she felt a sudden eagerness ... which disclosed the half-unconscious growth of a thought into a desire" (R, 502)).

If the novel's critics attempt to read "Romola's Waking" (Chapter 68) within the genre of historical fiction, without cognizance of the narrative shift into a hybrid form which might be called *utopian carnivalesque*, the chapter will seem implausible. Leslie Stephen, for example, interpreted the novel as an experiment in depicting the Comtean progress of religion because it lacks the kind of verisimilitude expected of a historical novel. He argues that Romola is not a fifteenth-century Florentine woman, but a nineteenth-century Victorian woman. Indeed, her *Bildungsroman* does progress through polytheism under Bardo, monotheism under Savonarola, and, as a final stage, the Positivism she finds through her own experience and reasoning. But it is part of Eliot's transformative utopian vision, her "experiments in life," and as Barrett comments, her endeavor to extend the range of her fiction (xvii). In her letter to Sara Hennell, Eliot comments that Romola is "pure idealism" (*GEL*, IV, n. 8, 103) and admits: "You are right in saying that Romola is ideal — I feel it acutely in the reproof my own soul is constantly getting from the image it has made.... The various *strands* 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" (*GEL*, IV, 103-4).

The novel's utopian desire requires it to transcend the convention of verisimilitude and to aim at visions and hopes which seem impossible and implausible. The historical and realist elements function as critical utopianism, representing how the world is and should not be, while

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<sup>6</sup> Bernardo is one of a relatively few commentators to have directed attention to this aspect of Eliot's fiction, although she seems still unaware of the distinctive contributions made to the effect of "entering the character's mind" by FID and focalization, and hence of Romola's extensive focalization of the scene in this episode. In comparison, a narratorial shift from *he* to *we* in Chapter 64, "The Prophet in his Cell," does not produce the same effect of reader alignment with Savonarola because it is not linked with FID or focalization attributable to the character.

its romantic elements are a transformative utopianism, suggesting something idealistic yet concrete, which looks impossible from the perspective of realism, but which will be eventually realized from the perspective of vision.<sup>7</sup> As Laurie Langbauer comments, “romance becomes for the novel the imaginary locus of dissatisfaction, rebelliousness; it becomes the traditional epitome of that which challenges or escapes restraint, namely, desire itself” (129). Since the form — history or romance — determines the content, *Romola*, as a hybrid of the two traits, is represented ambiguously, as Booth argues: she is feminist/non-feminist, dutiful/undutiful, because the standard of obedience and rebellion is ambiguous (1993: 115-16).

Through the combination of history and romance in her narrative Eliot offers a critique of the dystopian elements of society and an envisioning of utopian dreams. While realist narrative can sustain a reasonable degree of coincidence, Eliot’s frequent use of foreshadowing or prolepsis and coincidences — such as *Romola*’s helping Tessa at the Carnival, her finding lost Lillo, and Baldassarre’s encounter with Tito after his escape from mob violence and near drowning — are beyond the limits of realist teleology, and aspire instead to utopian vision. Set over against this desire, Machiavelli’s motto, “The end justifies the means” encapsulates the dystopian elements of a society where the world is with Tito the betrayer, who “had the air of a man well satisfied with the world” (R, 354), while Baldassarre the betrayed always feels the world is against him (R, 447, 450). Further, the execution of a venerable man (R, 494) and the prospering of a meaner man (R, 582) are presented as examples of dystopian elements, as a critique, not as a vision of society. The narrator comments ironically on the dystopian elements of Florence:

Although this world, with its partitioned empire and its roomy universal Church, seemed to be a handsome establishment for the few who were lucky or wise enough to reap the advantages of human folly: a world in which lust and obscenity, lying and treachery, oppression and murder, were pleasant, useful, and when properly managed, not dangerous. (R, 208)

Therefore, when the narrative shifts from history to romance Tito is killed by Baldassarre, whereby justice appears to be done in the form of Nemesis. However, the narrator does not confirm what justice is, but describes it as something lying beyond human apprehension. Thus the quest for justice which sustains Baldassarre as life and hope both ebb is concluded in a highly ambiguous way. In his anticipation of a witness to whom he might declare his action and its meaning, he looks for vindication for his maltreatment, but dying himself while clutching Tito’s dead body, he remains unidentified and the “truth” behind the tableau of the two interlocked bodies unknowable. Thus the return from the realm of coincidence and romance to that of

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<sup>7</sup> Mordecai in *Daniel Deronda* will later function as the spokesperson for the importance of such vision.

governance and law is a return from the fantastic to reality, but the significance of the event cannot survive the transfer. The intricacies of plot have rendered it inscrutable, but it is also insignificant in relation to more significant, chronologically parallel, events: the torture of Savonarola (the historical realist plot) and the waking of Romola (the utopian carnivalesque plot). Thus Chapter 67 closes with the narrator's cryptic comment on the contingency of justice and its embodiment in utopian desires: "Who shall put his finger on the work of justice, and say, 'It is there'? Justice is like the Kingdom of God — it is not without us as a fact, it is within us as a great yearning" (R, 549).

The great yearning that is fortuitously answered by Tito's death is Romola's yearning for freedom and agency — a space for woman.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the novel she negotiates her space and extends her boundaries, first out of her father's library and outside the confining walls of the city. When she is in the city after her brother's death she feels that "The fresh sense of space revived her, and helped her to recover her self-mastery" (R, 159-60). Both library and the city are ambiguous in that the former can be both an intellectual cradle and prison, while the latter is an open but enclosed place within the wall (Simpson: 54), and thus implies both "growing freedom" and "deadly imprisonment" (Simpson: 57). Romola is sharply aware of this ambiguity when she runs away for the first time from her marriage with Tito:

She would have entered on her new life — a life of loneliness and endurance, but of freedom. She had been strong enough to snap asunder the bonds she had accepted in blind faith.... (R, 328-29)

She was free and alone. (R, 330)

Freedom has its price, as it is accompanied by loneliness and requires endurance (R, 328). Romola conceives her escape from the city as freedom from imposition of any values by authority, an escape from the enclosed space of Florence, escape from all names, all labels, from the "imposition of all badges" and duties (David: 193): "The sense of freedom and solitude: her escape from the accustomed walls and streets.... For the first time in her life she felt alone in the presence of the earth and sky, with no human presence interposing and making a law for her" (R, 355). Uncertain as to whether "any Florentine woman had ever done exactly what she was going to do" (R, 322), she sets out with the intention of seeking advice from her role model, Cassandra Fedeles. Cassandra Fedeles (1465-1558) is first mentioned in the novel when Romola cites her example as an objection against her father's scepticism about women's capacity for scholarship in general, and Romola's in particular: "I will become as learned as Cassandra Fedeles. I will try and be as useful to you as if I had been a boy, and then perhaps some great scholar will

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<sup>8</sup> She is of course through Tito's death spared the opprobrium of separating from her husband, although at the time of his death he had already left Romola to flee Florence, taking Tessa and the children.

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” (R, 54). As Deirdre David comments, this is the “abject lament of so many daughters” (191). On the occasion of Romola’s first attempted flight from her husband, the narrator comments, “She had invented a lot for herself — to go to the most learned woman in the world, Cassandra Fedele, at Venice, and ask her how an instructed woman could support herself in a lonely life there” (R, 322). The desire for agency through becoming a scholar in her own right is frustrated by Savonarola’s intervention and strong insistence that agency is not possible, and she cannot “choose for [her]self a new name and a new place, and have no rule but [her] own will” (R, 355-56). Instead, he imposes upon her the role of serving the sick and poor, “the debt of a Florentine woman” and “the debt of a wife” (R, 357), which foreshadows “the systematic charity of Victorian women’s movements” (Booth 1993: 116). His insistence that marriage is a holy bond, rather than an arbitrary human invention, disregards Tito’s treachery and only requires Romola’s sacrifice in continuing in what eventually becomes “simply a degrading servitude” (R, 468).

A more agential form of female service is suggested in the plague-stricken village. It is a way of showing women’s calling and redefining women’s function as a response to the question Eliot jotted in her copy of Comte’s *Catechism*, “What should women worship?” (cited in Paxton 1991: 139). The suggested answer is not just parents, husbands, and children, but all who experience abjection. *Romola* thus exemplifies women’s purpose as not only for bearing and rearing children (and Romola herself remains childless), but to perform a moral function within society, to nurture “all those whom the heart recognizes in spontaneous sympathy: the sick, the weak, the helpless, the forlorn” (Paxton 1991: 139). Romola’s social mission is represented in her resolution: “If everything else is doubtful, this suffering that I can help is certain; if the glory of the cross is an illusion, the sorrow is only the truer. While the strength is in my arm I will stretch it out to the fainting; while the light visits my eyes they will seek the forsaken” (R, 560). Romola is one of only two female characters in Eliot’s novels to gain agency after suffering oppression in the name of the guidance of father, husband, and spiritual father. George Levine comments that, “Romola is one of the few characters in George Eliot’s novels (Dorothea is an interesting though qualified exception) who reaches a stage where she is utterly on her own to choose which way to go. She has nothing to decide with but her own nature, her own sense of life” (1970: 93), that is, her subjective agency.

In the Epilogue, Romola is presented as an independent woman, a matriarch, socially looking after the needy, that is, dependent woman Tessa and old woman Brigida, and two illegitimate children, without recourse to marriage or man. As Booth comments, she is the head

of a family replacing all father figures and endowed with “a limited agency and a disembodied voice” (Booth 1993: 115). Romola’s eventual displacement of the father (Tito) is foreshadowed when she visits Tessa’s house:

She sat down in Tito’s chair, and put out her arms towards the lad, whose eyes had followed her. He hesitated: and, pointing his small fingers at her with a half-puzzled, half-angry feeling, said, “That’s Babbo’s chair,” not seeing his way out of the difficulty if Babbo came and found Romola in his place. (R, 463)

Romola effectively replaces Tito, appropriating not only the chair but also the role of the father, subsequently educating the child in a reversal of traditional, patriarchal gender hierarchy. At that stage Romola as matriarch is confined to the domestic arena, rather than being a public figure, and hence can be said to have achieved only “a limited agency” (Booth 1993: 115), but in the process Romola will ultimately occupy a space in the future, just as Savonarola’s execution did not prevent his teachings from being taken up and revived in the Risorgimento movement. That is, Romola’s role at the end of the novel shows her diminished role, her exclusion from formal participation in Florentine politics, but given the fact that there is no space in society for her the role of matriarch implies that she can function as a valuable member of society. Blurring distinctions between the “public” world of politics and the “private” world of the home, Eliot insists that Romola’s decision to support a sexually betrayed woman and her two illegitimate children be seen as a socially significant action (Sheets 1997: 340).

The space in which the novel ends is an open space, in contrast to the closed room in which the novel starts (Hollis 2001b: 247). The last phase stands in opposition to Savonarola’s command during their first meeting on the road out of Florence (“Come, my daughter, come back to your place!” (R, 362)) and the title of Chapter 42, “Romola in Her Place.” David identifies a conservative attitude in Romola’s teaching Lillo while letting Nina arrange flowers: Why is she not also tutoring Tito’s daughter, “a delicate blue-eyed girl of thirteen” (R, 580)? Savonarola is a painted icon, the male figure of authority, looking down upon a household of women (David: 195). Shona Elizabeth Simpson also points out that there is “matriarchy” which however projects a contradictory message: “silent acceptance of duty and work; children, and the perpetuation of a system in which boys learn while girls do not” (64). However, the much subtler reading of the apparent paradoxes of the close offered by Booth illuminates the genuine utopian pathway foreshadowed in the Epilogue. Arguing that the structure “seems to affirm a patriarchal succession only to disrupt it” (1993: 125), she suggests that the Epilogue challenges the “tradition of oppressive closure for women” and the gendered narrative which produces it, opening the way for new narrative possibilities (128). That the novel does challenge the link between gender and narrative is a crucial step for the development of utopian possibilities in fiction.

A central plank of Booth's exposition of the novel, the analogy between Romola's quest for a space in the world and the reforming impulse of the Victorian women's movement, discloses a further aspect of Eliot's utopian thinking. Romola becomes a reformer, serving the general good rather than decorating a private drawing room (Booth 1993: 115). She steps outside nineteenth-century ideology which celebrated women's moral contribution to the progress of history while excluding them from historical action and change (Booth 1993: 113). In the novel's final tableau, Romola appears to be isomorphic with traditional models of femininity, but has reached this point by transforming the position within which the male gaze would interpret her role. This replica of the traditional model now has its own agency which speaks to actual women struggling for gender reform in the nineteenth century (Booth 1993: 112-13). That Savonarola, the silenced "great man," is reduced to an iconic position more usually occupied by the Virgin Mary speaks volumes about the agency which has effected this inversion of the place of male and female voices (Booth 1993: 117). Finally, Booth argues, the greatest lesson Romola learned from Savonarola was the failings of the law of the father (1993: 128). If, following Karl Mannheim,<sup>9</sup> we think of the utopian mode as a dynamic force contesting the static nature of ideology and system, the connection between Romola and nineteenth-century reformers gains still more force.

### **The Utopian Project of Religion: Savonarola's Theocracy**

Juxtaposed with fictional Romola, historical Savonarola's utopian dreams are manifested in the creation of the kingdom of justice, a popular government based on democratic principles, morality and religious austerity — a theocracy, "a pure community, worthy to lead the way in the renovation of the Church and the world" (R, 314) — as opposed to the autocracy of the Medici. The impulse is utopian in its similarity with Christian millenarianism, which likewise emphasized world renewal and a spiritual Church (see Weinstein 1970, Chapter 1 and *passim*). Savonarola perceives the dystopian nature of the city state, very evident in church corruption and consequent absurdities in the order of things, and warns the city that God will execute His justice. At a time of political upheaval, those who are inside the palace and already have power want only moderate change, since for them Florence is already a kind of utopia, while those outside the palace want radical change (R, 313),<sup>10</sup> since to them Florence is rather more like a dystopia, denying them social ascent and autonomy. And those outside the palace support Savonarola's ideas in accord with the revived "spirit of the Republic":

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<sup>9</sup> *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. Trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils. London and New York: Routledge, 1991.

<sup>10</sup> The conservative position parallels Victorian middle class appeals to culture and education in opposition to working men's enfranchisement.



Our resuscitated Spirit was not a pagan philosopher, not a philosophising pagan poet, but a man of the fifteenth century, inheriting its strange web of belief and unbelief; of Epicurean levity and fetichistic dread; of pedantic impossible ethics uttered by rote, and crude passions acted out with childish impulsiveness; of inclination towards a self-indulgent paganism, and inevitable subjection to that human conscience which, in the unrest of a new growth, was filling the air with strange prophecies and presentiments....

But he felt the evils of the time, nevertheless; for he was a man of public spirit, and public spirit can never be wholly immoral, since its essence is care for a common good. That very Quaresima or Lent of 1492 in which he died, still in his erect old age, he had listened in San Lorenzo, not without a mixture of satisfaction, to the preaching of a Dominican Friar, named Girolamo Savonarola, who denounced with a rare boldness the worldliness and vicious habits of the clergy, and insisted on the duty of Christian men not to live for their own ease when wrong was triumphing in high places, and not to spend their wealth in outward pomp even in the churches, when their fellow-citizens were suffering from want and sickness. The Frate carried his doctrine rather too far for elderly ears; yet it was a memorable thing to see a preacher move his audience to such a pitch that the women even took off their ornaments, and delivered them up to be sold for the benefit of the needy.

"He was a noteworthy man, that Prior of San Marco," thinks our Spirit; "somewhat arrogant and extreme, perhaps, especially in his denunciations of speedy vengeance...." (R, 6, ellipsis mine)

The Spirit, which Booth identifies as "a male bourgeois Spirit" (1993: 123), is a hybridization of paganism and Christianity, displaying a combination of "belief and unbelief," "levity and dread," and "passions and ethics." To the Spirit, Savonarola's criticism of the corruption of the church, his emphasis on altruism, and his social vision of justice augur a better and advanced society.

Savonarola is compared to a Hebrew prophet and the Florentines to a chosen people (R, 208):

there was a man in Florence who for two years and more "had been preaching that a scourge was at hand; that the world was certainly not framed for the lasting convenience of hypocrites, libertines, and oppressors. From the midst of those smiling heavens he had seen a sword hanging — the sword of God's justice — which was speedily to descend with purifying punishment on the Church and the world. In brilliant Ferrara, seventeen years before, the contradiction between men's lives and their professed beliefs had pressed upon him with a force that had been enough to destroy his appetite for the world, and at the age of twenty-three had driven him into the cloister. He believed that God had committed to the Church the sacred lamp of truth for the guidance and salvation of men, and he saw that the Church, in its corruption, had become a sepulchre to hide the lamp. As the years went on scandals increased and multiplied, and hypocrisy seemed to have given place to impudence. Had the world, then, ceased to have a righteous Ruler? Was the Church finally forsaken? No, assuredly: in the Sacred Book there was a record of the past in which might be seen as in a glass what would be in the days to come, and the book showed that when the wickedness of the chosen people, type of the Christian Church, had become crying, the judgments of God had descended on them. Nay, reason itself declared that vengeance was imminent, for what else would suffice to turn men from their obstinacy in evil? And unless the Church were reclaimed, how could the promises be fulfilled, that **the heathens should be converted and the whole world become subject to the one true law**? He had seen his belief reflected in visions — a mode of seeing which had been frequent with him from his youth up.

But the real force of demonstration for Girolamo Savonarola lay in his own burning indignation at the sight of wrong; in his fervid belief in an Unseen Justice that would put an end to the wrong, and in an Unseen Purity to which lying and uncleanness were an abomination. To his ardent, power-loving soul, believing in great ends, and longing to achieve those ends by the exertion of its own strong will, the faith in a supreme and righteous Ruler became one with the faith in a speedy divine interposition that would punish and reclaim. (R, 209-10, emphasis added)

Savonarola inveighs against the dystopian elements of the world: its organization for the convenience of hypocrites, libertines, and oppressors, which is not the way the world is supposed to be. He prophesies the execution of God's justice as a way of rectifying the evil ways of people. The climax of Savonarola's warning to the city occurs when he preaches his Advent

sermon in the Duomo as the French army, as a means of executing God's justice, enters Florence on 17 Nov. 1498, thereby imposing his own vision upon the turbulent city (Carroll 1998: 110): "What was it that filled the ears of the prophets of old but the distant tread of foreign armies coming to do the work of justice? (R, 211). Even though his vision of utopia is based on justice, the absolutization of his religion and his logic, as expressed in the conversion of pagans and his vision of the world ruled under "one true law," is not in accordance with democratic principles, and thus an inward contradiction is disclosed. The final phase of Savonarola's progress is "[that] blending of ambition with belief in the supremacy of goodness" (R, 573), the duplicity into which Savonarola was forced, but about which the narrator gives an understanding comment: "And perhaps this confession, even when it described doubleness that was conscious and deliberate, really implied no more than that wavering of belief concerning his own impressions and motives which most human beings who have not a stupid inflexibility of self-confidence must be liable to under a marked change of external conditions" (R, 573).

Savonarola, social and religious reformer, declaiming the corruption of the church and need for the reform of religion, is regarded as a precursor of the Protestant Reformation:

he knew that excommunication was imminent, and he had reached the point of defying it. He held up the condition of the Church in the terrible mirror of his unflinching speech, which called things by their right names and dealt in no polite periphrases; he proclaimed with heightening confidence the advent of renovation of a moment when there would be a general revolt against corruption. As to his own destiny, he seemed to have a double and alternating prevision: sometimes he saw himself taking a glorious part in that revolt, sending forth a voice that would be heard through all Christendom, and making the dead body of the Church tremble into new life ... sometimes he saw no prospect for himself but persecution and martyrdom: — this life for him was only a vigil, and only after death would come the dawn. (R, 439-40, ellipsis mine)

His Lenten sermons in 1495 show his attempt to balance the roles of priest and politician; this-worldly and other-worldly imperatives alternate without reconciliation because they are innately in conflict, incompatible with each other (Carroll 1998: 111). Eliot emphasizes the similarity between the central questions in the lives of Romola and Savonarola, as the narrator comments, "The law was sacred. Yes, but rebellion might be sacred too. It flashed upon her mind that the problem before her was essentially the same as that which had lain before Savonarola — the problem where the sacredness of obedience ended, and where the sacredness of rebellion began" (R, 468). Here Romola recognizes that her estrangement from her degrading marriage is basically the same as the liberation of people from the tyrannical authority of oligarchy. In Savonarola's resistance to Papal authority Romola sees a questioning of "where the duty of obedience ends, and the duty of resistance begins." In his words she interprets the basic tenet of Protestant radicalism: "there comes a moment when the soul must have no guide but the voice within it" (R, 490), caught in "the conflict between the demands of an outward law ... and the demands of inner moral facts" (R, 468).

The cause of Savonarola's failure is depicted as two-fold, an external and an internal factor. On the one hand, as David Carroll comments, defeats occur in *Romola* when "mythic visions, Christian or pagan, become entangled in the gritty realities of Florentine life" (1998: 111). Savonarola becomes abjected by the very dystopian elements, in church and state, he had opposed. Further, because its members accepted unquestioningly that the Church was "a living organism, instinct with Divine power to bless and to curse" (R, 457), the power of excommunication proved irresistible. Second, his personality was conflicted, as the narrator repeatedly comments: "Savonarola's nature was one of those in which opposing tendencies co-exist in almost equal strength: the passionate sensibility which, impatient of definite thought, floods every idea with emotion and tends towards contemplative ecstasy, alternated in him with a keen perception of outward facts and a vigorous practical judgment of men and things" (R, 523).

Savonarola's utopian vision is frustrated by the dystopian elements of Florence. Lorenzo Tounabuoni comments: "This theory of Frate's, that we are to have a popular government, in which every man is to strive only for the general good, and know no party names, is a theory that may do for some isle of Cristoforo Colombo's finding, but will never do for our fine old quarrelsome Florence" (R, 344).<sup>11</sup> The fact that the idea of popular government is possible in America, which Eliot elsewhere praises as "that cradle of the future" (*GEL*, II, 85), but not in Florence indicates the latter's dystopian nature. Savonarola is sacrificed because of the power play among factions. As proven by history, his advanced ideas are silenced not because they lack worth, but because of the greed for power by such men as Dolfo Spini, "leader of the Compagnacci, or Evil Companions, ... of all the dissolute young men belonging to the old aristocratic party, enemies of the Mediceans, enemies of the popular government, but still more bitter enemies of Savonarola" (R, 392).

But Savonarola is also flawed. Using a metaphor she will later apply to Lydgate in *Middlemarch*, Eliot also attributes his failure to the ambiguity, or doubleness of his nature: he is a "spotted" character (R, 235), "whose spiritual purity is blended with ambition and egoism." *Romola* perceives his ambiguity: "on one side she saw a man whose life was devoted to the ends of public virtue and spiritual purity, and on the other the assault of alarmed selfishness..." (R, 457-58). Savonarola seeks his own glory (Lovesey 1991: 69), in that his striving after the renovation of the Church and the world was in fact striving after a mere name to strengthen his

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<sup>11</sup> Utopia was usually thought to be located on an island. In Columbus's first report to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, he observed that the native populations he encountered seemed to share most of their property. He also reported rumors about an island with endless supplies of gold. The combination was lethally attractive, of course. (Cited in Alain Milhou, "*Mundus novus et renovatio mundi*. Messianic and Utopian Currents in the Indies of Castille" in *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World*, ed. Roland Schaer, Gregory Claeys, and Lyman Tower Sargent. New York: The New York Public Library/Oxford University Press, 2000, 142).

own position in Florence (R, 501), just as Bardo seeks immortality through his study. Savonarola's solipsism (Lovesey 1991: 67) — or, to borrow Maurice Natanson's acute term, "metaphysical solipsism" (241) — drives him to experience "a destabilizing desire for power and personal predominance, and his words about longing for martyrdom cease to have external truth" (Lovesey 1991: 75).

Savonarola yields to "the doubleness which is the pressing temptation in every public career, whether of priest, orator, or statesman" (R, 532). Corrupted by the "excitement of the pulpit" and "the seductions of a public career" (R, 571), Savonarola falls into irrevocable errors, self-justifying evasions, and lies. In addition, he is a misogynist. In his preaching, he describes women as "cows, and lumps of flesh, and wantons, and mischief-makers" (R, 125). In his *Bonfire of Vanities* his two principal targets are what focuses attention on human corporeality: "all the implements of feminine vanity — rouge-pot, false hair, mirrors, perfumes, powders, and transparent veils intended to provoke inquisitive glances" (R, 419), and creative art — paintings, sculptures, musical instruments, books by Ovid, Boccaccio, Petrarca, and Pulci (R, 418). His will to power is thus invested in hatred of the flesh, especially women's bodies. In his desire to return to medieval religious austerity, Savonarola is ideologically anti-Renaissance, in direct opposition to the Medici fostering of secular humanism.

Savonarola's doubleness is represented in the dialogues in Nello's barbershop, a microcosm where "the relationship of macrocosm to microcosm" (Lovesey 1991: 68) is exhibited, where opinions converge and many voices are heard, similar to "The Philosophers" Club in *Daniel Deronda*. The ambiguity of the space of Nello's shop — it is neither inside nor outside — indicates a location for a dialogic process. Many different voices are represented uttering different views about Savonarola in Nello's barbershop. As fitting his double nature, Savonarola is perceived both positively and negatively. Macchiavelli praises him for his oratory, "saying things with a certain power that moves the hearers," whose life is "spotless: no man has impeached it" (R, 166); Cennini defines his "prophetic visions" on terrors and tribulations (R, 166); and Corona perceives, his "pure life and strong faith, which stamp him as a messenger of God" (R, 166). On the contrary, Cei criticizes him for his satisfaction with the "pleasant lust of arrogance" and comments that "He hears the air filled with his own name — Fra Girolamo Savonarola, of Ferrara; the prophet, the saint, the mighty preacher, who frightens the very babies of Florence into laying down their wicked baubles" (R, 166).

Savonarola's negative attribute is revealed through the Medicean conspiracy that makes him disregard Romola's pleas for her Godfather. Romola sees through his narrow political opportunism and criticizes him:

“Do you, then, know so well what will further the coming of God’s kingdom, father, that you will dare to despise the plea of mercy — of justice — of faithfulness to your own teaching? Has the French king, then brought renovation to Italy? Take care, Father, lest your enemies have some reason when they say, that in your visions of what will further God’s kingdom you see only what will strengthen your own party.”

“And that is true!” ... “The cause of my party *is* the cause of God’s kingdom.”

“I do not believe it!” said Romola, her whole frame shaken with passionate repugnance. “God’s kingdom is something wider — else, let me stand outside it with the beings that I love.” (R, 492, ellipsis mine, italics original)

He gives her two choices only: either submit or be silent. Savonarola listens to her “plea of mercy — of justice — of faithfulness to [his] own teaching,” but he hears only “the voice of his enemies” in her, a voice he must silence (Nardo: 358). By rejecting Savonarola’s assertion that “the cause of [his] party *is* the cause of God’s Kingdom,” Romola defies those who claim divine authority. In this declaration she discerns his “ring of egoism,” and she questions such egoism in all energetic belief (R, 501). When she is disillusioned, she can see “all the repulsive and inconsistent details in his teaching with a painful lucidity which exaggerated their proportions” (R, 501). Romola’s revolt against Savonarola’s authority is based on reasoning that he shows partiality toward Lorenzo Tornabuoni’s flattery, not Bernardo’s honesty (R, 489-90). Savonarola defends himself with “sophistry and doubleness” (R, 492), which leads to Romola’s awakening from “purblind delusion” (R, 492): “You see one ground of action, I see many” (R, 492). The upshot is that she is again deprived of a father figure, and thus without a moral framework (Johnson: 229), which casts her whole life into doubt, devoid of meaning: “What if [Savonarola] had been wrong? What if the life of Florence was a web of inconsistencies? Was she, then, something higher, that she could shake the dust from off her feet, and say, ‘This world is not good enough for me?’ ” (R, 562). *Romola* vividly presents the pathway to abjection of a woman who depends on male authority to give meaning to her life — in succession, father, husband, godfather, and finally spiritual father — and repeatedly loses that authority. As Anna K. Nardo argues, hers is the loss experienced by daughters who long for paternal love and guidance but must reject fathers who value them only as a means to an end (357). Hence she must resist and overcome in particular Savonarola and Tito, both of whom attempt to refashion her into an object rather than a thinking subject (Booth 1993: 117). To become her own subject, Romola needs to break the “cycle of hope and despair” (Corner: 68) generated by the adherence to male mentors.

That Savonarola dies as an abjected figure, the novel denying him the “last decisive word” that Romola had hoped for — “O people, I was innocent of deceit” (R, 577) — has often

seemed to readers an offensive departure from historicity.<sup>12</sup> All that Romola hears at his execution are “gross jests, taunts, and curses” (R, 579). The novel’s structural contrast between Romola, now a quasi-saint after Chapter 68, and Savonarola, now reduced to a quasi-martyr requires this descent into total abjection, “eternal silence” (R, 579). As Foucault argued, public execution is a display of power, the “anchoring point for a manifestation of power” (1991[1977]: 55), “strengthened by its visible manifestations” (1991[1977]: 57), with torture “strongly embedded in legal practice ... because it revealed truth and showed the operation of power” (1991[1977]: 55), but at the same time it is an opportunity for victims to ridicule the power. Since they know they will die, they are not afraid of anything and thus speak anything they want, cursing “judges, the laws, the government and religion.... under the protection of imminent death, the criminal could say everything ... [enjoying] the luxury of those momentary saturnalia” (1991[1977]: 60). This is the moment Romola expects Savonarola to grasp, but Eliot does not allow him to have the final word (Hollis 2001b: 243).

Just as *Romola* redefines women’s role in society, it redefines martyrdom through Savonarola’s life and death. If his story is contextualized within Comte’s three stages of development, his position and importance signal the very end of the collapse of monotheism, and thus the transition period towards the phase of Positivism (see Bullen 1975).<sup>13</sup> Second, Carroll shows how through a redefinition of the novel of martyrdom, dealing with priest and politician in the struggle to build a utopian theocracy, “the events in Florence in the 1490s are presented as the birth of modern European civilization” (1998: 109). Savonarola’s endeavor to construct utopia and his frustration and abjection are evaluated by the narrator:

The idea of martyrdom had been to him a passion dividing the dream of the future with the triumph of beholding his work achieved. And now, in place of both, had come a resignation which he called by no glorifying name.

*But therefore he may the more fitly be called a martyr by his fellow-men to all time.* For power rose against him not because of his sins, but because of his greatness — not because he sought to deceive the world, but because he sought to make it noble. (R, 575, italics original).

Savonarola’s failure is both as visionary and politician. Although the dystopian elements and his own weakness drive him into abjection and failure, as a man of conflicted personality, combining

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<sup>12</sup> Savonarola did say the last triumphant words. His final bold response to his excommunication is given in Villari: When the bishop proclaimed, “I cut you off from the Church militant and triumphant,” Savonarola is reported to have replied calmly, “From the Church militant, but not the Church triumphant; that you cannot do” (763, n. 4). Some critics such as Sheets (1997: 339) comment on Eliot’s omission of the great last words of Savonarola, an omission that made the nineteenth-century male readers complain, as the twentieth-century female readers complain of the smallness and submission of women to men. See also Carroll 1998: 114-15.

<sup>13</sup> Catholicism is regarded as feminine and Protestantism as masculine. The former is “feminine” because of “the manner in which it teaches its votary to throw himself perpetually on authority” and Protestantism is “a religion which recognizes no authority between man and his Creator, which asserts at once the dignity and duty of private judgment” (Lecky, cited in Sheets 1997: 322). Catholicism is considered to subject human beings because of its authoritative attitude, while Protestantism embraces human agency, and the individuals’ own judgement.

nobility and selfishness, he can be evaluated solely on his nobility, which is the worth that is in him.

### **Research as Utopian Project: Paganism versus Christianity**

The foundation text of modern utopianism, Thomas More's *Utopia*, is a product of Renaissance humanism, and we might well look to that historical impulse for a pervasive utopian mode whereby the practical wisdom of the ancient world might broaden moral and ethical perceptions to envisage an expansion of human possibilities. However, *Romola* presents this as mostly a lost opportunity. Bardo is a representative of pagan humanism, and his aim in life is to edit great literature and leave a library for the Florentines and for the world so that they gain knowledge about people and the world. The failure of this dream is embodied in the two men who might have carried it to fruition, his son and his son-in-law. His counterpart Baldassare also represents the world of research, but stands in contrast with Bardo in the method and content of research. Bardo is an editor, while Baldassare is a historian (see the discussion in Carroll 1992: 174). Both editing and recording history need subjective discretion, sifting meaning and truth from collective data. Both of them fail in their pursuit because of their blindness, Bardo's literal blindness and Baldassarre's amnesia, a metaphorical blindness for a historian whose memory is the crucial tool for research.

Further, the aim of Bardo's research is to enhance his name, fame, and immortality, rather than seeking to contribute to the world by increasing knowledge: "[the Bardis] father and son might have been held reverently on the lips of scholars in the ages to come" (R, 52). All he wants is to be remembered: "I have a right to be remembered" (R, 56). He talks about the reason why he does not publish his work, because he does not want to be vulnerable to "a system of licensed robbery" (R, 56) — in this regard he anticipates *Middlemarch*'s Casaubon who likewise, as Dorothea discovers, has not brought anything to publication even though his research is already out of date. If living with the past (as with both Bardo and Casaubon) can contribute to build a better future by interpreting the past, it has meaning, but when research is for the sake of research and only for fame, it has no social vision, and fails as a utopian project. *Romola* contrasts Bardo's selfishness and Bernardo's nobleness: "I know [Bernardo] is prejudiced and narrow, but he is noble. It is folly in my father to want to keep his library apart, that it may bear his name; yet he would try to get my father's wish carried out. That seems to me very great and noble — that power of respecting a feeling which he does not share or understand" (R, 179), which shows tolerance toward other voices.

Bardo's library becomes a multivalent symbol. To Bardo it is his immortality; to Romola it is the focus of her filial piety; and to Tito it is ready cash. In the narrator's descriptions it is a heterogeneous collection of fragments (Carroll 1992: 181-83). Bardo's library, then represents "the Renaissance revival of classical learning, the sterility and pettiness of academic culture cut off from the lived lives of human beings, patriarchal knowledge that defines and limits the lives of daughters, and the betrayal of a father for money" (Nardo: 352). In this sense, it represents a comprehensive failure of utopian desire.

Bardo's misogyny is intensified by his blindness and functions to oppress Romola's subjectivity, where he might have pursued the more utopian course of offering her a chance for intellectual equality. He is a great scholar himself but because of his misogyny he fails to educate Romola to become another Cassandra Fedele, and instead limits her knowledge and educates her just sufficiently to be able to act as his amanuensis, in a process which Paxton aptly describes as "psychological violence" (1991: 126). The opening portrait of Romola represents the clash between the scholarly male and care-giving female, as identified by the artist Piero di Cosimo when he asks them to pose for the portrait of Oedipus and Antigone. (Piero is a representative of the artistic vision which has the insight to discern the traits of people and is the novel's only male voice surviving at the end. It is he who recognizes Tito's duality and fear, along with Bernardo.) Romola suffers conflict between filial piety for her father and resistance to his misogyny (Paxton 1991: 125-26). By Bardo's oppressive standard, based on gross gender generalization, Romola is an unexpected exception, but basically framed as inferior:

And even in learning thou art not, according to thy measure, contemptible. Something perhaps were to be wished in thy capacity of attention and memory, not incompatible even with the feminine mind.... thou hast a ready apprehension and even a wide glancing intelligence. And thou hast a man's nobility of soul: thou hast never fretted me with thy petty desires as thy mother did. It is true, I had been careful to keep thee aloof from the debasing influence of thy own sex, with their sparrow-like frivolity and their enslaving superstition.... (R, 54)

I cannot boast that thou art entirely lifted out of that lower category to which Nature assigned thee, nor even that in erudition thou art on a par with the more learned women of this age;... (R, 54-55)  
(There is no such thing as picking out the best [woman]: one is worse than another,... ("Notes," R, 602))

Bardo's low expectation of Romola based solely on her gender elicits the conflict between filial piety and humiliation on her part. Romola's subjectivity is shown to be controlled by her father. When Bardo talks to Tito about her intelligence, in fact he unintentionally brings up the general problem of editing:

I constantly marvel at the capriciousness of my daughter's memory, which grasps certain objects with tenacity, and lets fall all those minutiae whereon depends accuracy, the very soul of scholarship. But I apprehend no such danger with you,... (R, 64)

Selecting what is more important and what is less depends on the editor's discretion, and Bardo disregards Romola's and trusts his own gendered superiority. His negative, misogynistic



perception fails to recognize or accept Romola's peculiarity as an individual. When Tito defends Romola's intelligence, she admits to him:

"You are mistaken.... I am by no means sufficient to my father: I have not the gifts that are necessary for scholarship." (R, 68, ellipsis mine)

The approximation of self to the imposed norm indicates that Romola sees herself but projects her self-image in terms of male perception. Bardo extends moderate praise to Romola, but frames it within a rigid and innate misogyny that attributes to her a gender-linked physical frailty associated with mental weakness:

Thou art not destitute of gifts; rather, thou art endowed beyond the measure of women; but thou hast withal the woman's delicate frame, which ever craves repose and variety, and so begets a wandering imagination. "My daughter" — turning to Tito — "has been very precious to me, filling up to the best of her power the place of a son. For I had once a son...." (R, 69)

Bardo yearns for Dino, lamenting his loss to religion (R, 152), while Romola devotes herself to his demands. She has no life of her own, devoting herself instead to her father's needs and comfort, and in turn is only a second-rate substitute for his son, "filling up ... the place of a son." Because he has not taught her properly there is no prospect that she could have carried on his work after his death. The only warning against such misogyny toward his daughter is from Bernardo, "Remember, Bardo, thou hast a rare gem of thy own; take care no man gets it who is not likely to pay a worthy price" (R, 74). Bardo's blindness signifies self-concern and failure to notice even those who are near him (Greenwood: 172).

Tito and Dino are opposites, but neither has any inclination to carry on the humanistic work of his father/step-father, so that the efflorescence of learning appears not to have endured for more than a generation. Tito instead embraces pagan hedonism, while Dino chooses Christian asceticism (Carroll 1998: 172-73). Both sons betray their father's wishes: Baldassare's demand that Tito live a serious scholarly life, the life of a historian, is rejected and instead he chooses a hedonistic way of life (Carroll 1998: 174): "What, looked at closely, was the end of all life, but to extract the utmost sum of pleasure?" (R, 115). Dino refuses Bardo's request to help his research — editing — of pagan knowledge in order to become a Dominican friar. Dino has left "all liberal pursuits that he might lash himself and howl at midnight with besotted friars — that he might go wandering on pilgrimages befitting men who know of no past older than the missal and the crucifix" (R, 53). Dino offers his visions for his father's blindness, while Baldassare's sense of history is overthrown by Tito's desire to forget his past. Baldassare represents the Greek moral view of the world, abstaining from evil desires, following the dictates of justice and Nemesis, in stark contrast with Tito's "value-free world" (Carroll 1998: 186).

Bardo's worldly desire for immortality contrasts with Dino's "stoical detachment" (Carroll 1998: 176), but also with Tito's self-regarding hedonism and propensity to live for the present.

### **Politics as Dystopia: Tito**

While the utopists Savonarola and Bernardo lose their lives because of the interactions between the dystopian elements of Florence and their respective character traits, Tito — thief, opportunist, misogynist, the very embodiment of a dystopian society — flourishes through his political stratagems and calculated betrayals. He believes in the survival of the fittest, "adaptability not continuity," which he understands to be power over other fellow human beings (Shuttleworth 1984: 109), and embraces political systems which sever ties with tradition. His political vacillation is a reflection of his lack of faithfulness (allegiance), and in the ambiguity of his character "Eliot's ambivalent attitude towards organicist theory" is represented (Shuttleworth 1984: 113).

Tito manifests the imposition and abuse of power most overtly in the domain of sexual politics — in his relations with Romola and Tessa. Female sexuality is made into a commodity and male desire a means of domination (Paxton 1991: 127). The pattern of male domination and female submission is passed from one generation to the next, as Tito follows Bardo in restricting Romola's access to knowledge. Tessa is also victimized by Tito's exercise of his power over her (Paxton 1991: 127). After eighteen months of marriage Romola becomes submissive because of her sexual experience (Sheets 1997: 336). With her "affectionateness and unexpected submissiveness," Tito expects Romola's complete submission to "his will" (R, 284). Marriage brings Tito freedom and domination because of social custom and sex. Romola is confined to home, while Tito freely covers public places such as palaces, monasteries, Rome, including San Giorgio, where he keeps Tessa as his mistress (Sheets 1997: 336). Romola's space at home is defined by Tito because he does not want her to be in the library as it is a male space. He says, "Romola, I wish you would give up sitting in this library. Surely our own rooms are pleasanter in this chill weather" (R, 248). She is confined in her saloon with fake openness and naturalness, with pictures of nymphs and the birds: "Before [Tito] came she intended to leave the library and sit in the pretty saloon with the dancing nymphs and the birds. She had done so every evening since he had objected to the library as chill and gloomy" (R, 279).

Eliot's critique of married women's restricted property rights culminates in Tito's selling of the Bardi library without Romola's consent. His unilateral notice of the disposal leads to Romola's "scorn and anger" (R, 285): "But I partly foresaw your opposition, and as a prompt decision was necessary, I avoided that obstacle, and decided without consulting you. The very

care of a husband for his wife's interest compels him to that separate action sometimes — even when he has such a wife as you, my Romola.... I mean ... that I have arranged for the transfer, both of the books and of the antiquities, where they will find the highest use and value ... instead of remaining in a city which is exposed to ruin" (R, 284). By declaring, "The event is irrevocable, the library is sold, and you are my wife" (R, 287), Tito tries to prevent Romola from seeking help. Like Victorian England, in the fifteenth-century Florentine society women are regarded as their husbands' property. Inherited property belongs to their husbands and law allows husbands' control of their wives' assets. Later when Romola requests to live separately, Tito says, "I do not submit to part with what the law gives me some security for retaining" (R, 482), where Romola is regarded as an object, property, in fact "she belonged to that furniture of life which he shrank from parting with" (R, 276).

A narratorial comment on marriage — that it must be a relation either of sympathy or of conquest (R, 414) — raises a wider issue of intersubjective relations. Tito increases social dystopia because his self-regardingness precludes intersubjectivity. Thus, viewing marriage as the relationship of master and slave, he strives to reduce Romola to the kind of abjected position more readily associated with Tessa. When, in Chapter 46, she inadvertently discovers his involvement in a plot to assassinate Savonarola, and threatens to expose him, he grasps her wrists "with all his masculine force," and whispers, "I am master of you. You shall not set yourself in opposition to me" (R, 405). For Romola, marriage to Tito is "emotional pain, economic powerlessness, and personal humiliation" (Sheets 1997: 337) because it encourages "the husband's determination to mastery" (R, 412) and inhibits the wife's independent action, thus blocking agency and choice.

Tito, described by Peggy Fitzhugh Johnson as "the most villainous character in Eliot's fiction" (2) is shallow in both academic and political works, and lacking in genuine human feelings. He exploits everybody he has relationships with: Baldassarre, Romola, Tessa, Bardo, and Savonarola. When he asks Piero to portray him and Romola as Bacchus and Adriadne, he implies that he is a rescuer instead of an abandoner. This rewriting of the myth in order to rewrite his own story is, according to Johnson (following Kernberg: 1975), an indication of his narcissism in "a confusion of realistic and idealized self-images.... A quality of shallowness in relationships, achievements, and convictions, along with a deficiency in genuine feelings of sadness or guilt, enable the narcissistic personality to exploit others without remorse" (2). Eliot's narrator seems to characterize precisely those qualities in Tito: "It was not difficult to him to smile pleadingly on those whom he had injured, and offer to do them much kindness: and no quickness of intellect could tell him exactly the taste of that honey on the lips of the injured" (R,

306). Tito's extreme dread of destruction of his good fortune by his stepfather is another indication of his narcissistic personality. That is, his dread about the attack is the projection of the attack from within him. The artist Piero discerns it from the beginning and his portrait of Tito is full of fear: Tito "saw himself with his right hand uplifted, holding a wine-cup, in the attitude of triumphant joy, but with his face turned away from the cup with an expression of such intense fear in the dilated eyes and pallid lips" (R, 186). Tito does ask Baldassarre forgiveness (R, 306-7), but it is not genuine. The narrator points out instead that Tito is overwhelmed by fear, "The repentance which cuts off all moorings to evil, demands something more than selfish fear" (R, 223). His past betrayal that caused too much pain in Baldassarre cannot be pardoned by such easy words, "I came to ask your forgiveness!" (R, 308). Contrasted with Tito's shallow feeling based mainly on fear, Baldassarre's is intense and genuine: "I saved you — I nurtured you — I loved you. You forsook me — you robbed me — you denied me. What can you give me? You have made the world bitterness to me; but there is one draught of sweetness left — *that you shall know agony*" (R, 308, italics original). Baldassarre kills Tito and he also dies of exhaustion, "to die with his hold on this body, and follow the traitor to hell that he might clutch him there" (R, 548). In his intense feelings of betrayal and thus abjection Baldassarre reminds readers of King Lear in despair of his two daughters' betrayal: "Curses on him! I wish I may see him lie with those red lips white and dry as ashes, ... It is all a lie — this world is a lie — there is no goodness but in hate" (R, 270).

In the character of Tito Eliot raises a profound moral question pertaining to agency. Does Tito ever really have agency, even when he is depriving others of agency? Or is the episode which culminates in his death — the almost random action of the mob moving to attack his house, the flight through the streets, the desperate plunge into the river that finally brings him, almost unconscious, to Baldassarre's feet — a dramatic reprise of the twists and turns of his own plots and counterplots that eventually, under the inexorable force of cause and effect, bring him undone? His duplicities have been relatively easy to perpetrate because for most of the characters to see him as evil would overturn their assumptions about the relationship of signs and meanings. Characters are apt to derive his personality from his appearance, although readers are early warned in a comment by the percipient Piero. At their first encounter, at Nello the barber's, Piero tells Tito that he would like to paint his face as the betrayer Sinon, in the "picture of Sinon deceiving old Priam" (R, 42). Nello finds this an absurd idea, suggesting that Tito's beautiful appearance would have to be distorted in order to signify a villain, but Piero counters, "a perfect traitor should have a face which vice can write no marks on ..." (R, 42). Beauty to Nello is a guarantee of virtue: "I shall never look at such an outside as that without taking it as a sign of a

lovable nature” (R, 44). Romola also interprets Tito’s good looks as an indication of good morality: “It seems to me beauty is part of the finished language by which goodness speaks” (R, 191). Tessa’s belief in simple one-to-one correspondence between sign and meaning also makes her believe in Tito’s goodness based on his good looks: when Tito asks her what makes her feel so safe with him, she answers, “Because you are so beautiful — like the people going into paradise: they are all good” (R, 106). Piero’s insight that Tito’s beauty would make him “the more perfect traitor” (R, 42) is much closer to the truth and his insight also functions as a prolepsis. Tito’s reaction to Piero’s request is similarly proleptic: “[He] started and looked round with a pale astonishment in his face as if at a sudden accusation.” There are many cues in the beginning of the novel to indicate that Tito is a betrayer of his stepfather and each time he is reminded of words such as “father,” “ransom,” and “betrayal” he reacts in a similar way, which, from the perspective of moral expectation, readers will be apt to interpret as guilt, although the narrator eventually confirms that it is “selfish fear” (R, 223), and Piero is shown to interpret correctly when, in the “Bacchus and Ariadne” painting he depicts Tito as fearful. To Bernardo, Tito is a devil: “he is one of the *demoni*, who are of no particular country, ... his mind is a little too nimble to be weighed with all the stuff we men carry about in our hearts” (R, 191).

Tessa’s response to Tito’s physical appearance is based on a simplistic understanding of sign and meaning relationships she learns from looking at religious art in churches. The more complex terms of the exchange between the artist Piero and Nello involve the social construction of sign systems whereby meaning is seen to be imposed by an interpretive frame rather than inhering in the thing itself. For Bratti Ferravecchi, Tito is literally illegible because he is a foreigner to whom available interpretive codes do not appear to apply: “I picked up a stranger this morning ... and I can spell him out no better than the letters on that scarf I bought from the French cavalier” (R, 23). To Dino he is faceless before he reveals himself as the Great Tempter in Dino’s vision. While Tito is thinking of quitting Florence out of fear that his betrayal of Baldassarre will be disclosed, people around him misread him as “such a pretty image of self-forgetful sadness” (R, 165), a total misinterpretation. The narrator comments: “Was it that Tito’s face attracted or repelled according to the mental attitude of the observer? Was it a cipher with more than one key?” (R, 102). If there is no consistent relation between the signifier and the signified, the relation between sign and meaning which is formed through tradition and custom is called into question. Tito’s good looks contrasted with his amoral behavior functions as a counterexample of this.

The narrator’s omniscient access to Tito’s thoughts and motives furnishes clear grounds for moral judgment of his behavior, but the basis of that behavior in expediency raises

challenging questions about subjective agency. Thus the threat posed by Baldassare's arrival in Florence becomes a site for a narratorial discussion of choice, good and evil:

Tito was experiencing that inexorable law of human souls, that we prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil which gradually determines character. (R, 223)

He [Tito] had simply chosen to make life easy to himself ... and the choice had, at various times, landed him in unexpected positions. (R, 224; ellipsis mine)

As Caroline Levine puts it, "subjectivity is not fixed essence, buried beneath signifying appearance: it is possibility, evolution, agency" (150). The first of the above extracts (and it is also a metafictional comment on how a narrative constructs a character) addresses how the evolution of character enables agency, but Tito will ultimately fail because, as the second extract indicates, his choices are based entirely on self-regardingness with no reference to questions of good or evil in a social or moral sense. He has thus attempted to place himself outside relationships of cause and effect, choosing instead to react to immediate circumstances, whether opportunistically or defensively: "As the freshness of young passion faded, life was taking more and more decidedly for him the aspect of a game in which there was an agreeable mingling of skill and chance" (R, 312). What is missing from this life-as-game attitude is an understanding, as reformulated by Levine in her excellent analysis of Tito's character, that the "inexorable law of human souls" implies a model of subjectivity: "a chronological history of choices which steadily defines a coherent self" (1998: 148). Lacking this, Tito emerges as a character always on the brink of abjection, both a cause and embodiment of social dystopia.

## Conclusion

*Romola* represents a dialogic process between oligarchy and democracy (as a force for change and revolution), between submission to church teaching (Christianity) and free play of mind (paganism) (Shuttleworth 1984: 98). Even within Hellenistic paganism there is discrepancy: Bardo is for the past, while Tito denies the past. Romola's dilemma concerning history is the choice between submission and rebellion. What the novel implicitly suggests is that rebellion against existing laws can be a stepping stone for progress, defining law as "the external expression of the people's historical and moral progress ... not the arbitrary creation of a nation's rulers" (Shuttleworth 1984: 100). Change is necessary when evils descend from the past (Shuttleworth 1984: 102) and reform is regarded as important as continuity (Shuttleworth 1984: 102). As Hao Li argues, while St. Ogg's in *The Mill on the Floss* inherited a long past without thinking of it, without any "critical thinking about customs and past" (70), in *Romola* Eliot suggests that the past should be examined in order to enable the social progress that might lead toward a more utopian world.

Utopia as a good society is where justice is done and good is pursued in the question of “What is just?” This is the central theme of the novel. What is just, and thus good, as pursued by protagonists is not what is just and good as sealed by God. Human beings worship God because He is possessed of good qualities with which humans are endowed, not merely because God is God; not because whatever God does is good, but because He is a reflection of good human nature, as Feuerbach argues through his formulation of the religion of humanity. This position can be equivalent to blasphemy from a Christian perspective, because Christianity basically emphasizes human weakness and dependency on God as superior being. Exercising human agency is viewed as paganism and, at worst, blasphemy, as Savonarola insists when he arrests Romola’s flight and orders her to return to Tito. This is an important argument, because if God exists and directs progress within history, the operation of human agency will produce reverse effects. If human beings have reason and logic, they should by using it discriminately and sift truth from falsehood, not just blindly accept customary truth. Society becomes dystopian when human agency is discouraged and ongoing change based on scrutiny of tradition and custom is neglected. Contingency of language, sign and meaning shows how apt human beings are to misinterpretation and misdirection. What human beings need is not a superhuman being to depend upon but the proper use of agency and the power to make right choices. The need for dialogic perspective and multiple voices is verified when the narration of events is removed from historical process as the sum of tradition and custom. That is the moment when utopian space is opened in *Romola*, especially a space for feminist utopia. It is achieved through the metaphor of Carnival and a carnivalesque sense of the world. Verisimilitude through realism is limiting because reality is in fact a limitation of social projection. Romance, or utopian dreams, can extend the possibility and redefine what has been defined and limited thus far. Therefore, *Romola* is for Eliot a landmark between realism and romance, and between a critical utopianism which observes how the world should not be and a transformative utopianism which envisages what it might be.

## CHAPTER VI

### Radicalism as Utopianism in *Felix Holt, The Radical*

It is constantly the task of practical wisdom not to say, "This is good, and I will have it," but to say, "This is the less of two unavoidable evils, and I will bear it." ("Address," *FH*, 495)

*Felix Holt* is the first of Eliot's novels to make a direct reference to utopian thinking, when the novel's basis in critical utopianism is foregrounded by the ironical use of the term to describe Esther's design for happiness (*FH*, 360, 361, 379, 429). The attempt to shape one's own world or happiness can be described as an attempt to construct a utopia, but the description may also incorporate a sense of the project's limitations, as this particular example discloses how Esther's utopian dreaming is entirely personal and shaped according to her individual needs: it is "her little private utopia, which, like other utopias, was filled with delightful results, independent of processes" (*FH*, 360). Her sudden elevation of rank and fortune (*FH*, 360), which is equated with a "delightful aristocratic utopia" (*FH*, 379), with material abundance and high position devoid of any personal endeavors or any spiritual pursuit such as her minister father's, is made possible by the novel's deployment of the conventional inheritance plot and its informing assumptions of a beneficent teleology. But Esther's notions of utopia are modified by her personal growth and development under the stimulation of Felix Holt's criticism, so that she renounces both of her rank and position to marry a poor working man. Esther's choice is "virtue over wealth" (Starr: 69), and although the choice stops there, its formulation — "This bride, who had renounced wealth, and chosen to be the wife of a man who said he would always be poor (*FH*, 476) — is radical in terms of the aspirations of nineteenth-century English society and the trajectories of fictive plots. The narrator's toying with the reality/fiction boundary in asserting the need to conceal the secret destination of the couple's voluntary exile alludes to traditional utopian associations whereby the access to utopia is difficult and accidentally achieved, if ever possible.

The wider deployment of utopian ideas in *Felix Holt* pivots on intertwined ideas about radicalism and agency. The novel depicts utopian possibilities through three kinds of radicalism — Felix's conservative radicalism, Esther's feminine radicalism, and Harold Transome's nominal radicalism — and articulates the centrality of agency to these concepts. Felix's radicalism can be viewed as a utopianism to be realized by means of working-class men's enfranchisement and empowerment through enlightenment. Human agency and choice are the pivotal concern because the right choice made by a discerning majority influences the direction of progress of society, nation, and world. Esther's unassuming influence, like that of Dorothea at the end of *Middlemarch*, contributes to the construction of utopia by functioning as a criticism of women's lot in a



misogynist society. Harold's self-claimed, ersatz radicalism drives the nation toward dystopia because it is no more than a disguised conservatism which incorporates the evils of the past — imperialism, racism, classism, and sexism — with no program for rectifying these. As Booth puts it, he is “a composite of all the prejudices of the privileged European male” (1992a: 227; 1992b: 153), a personification of conservatism.

In searching out new social directions, Eliot's critical utopianism presents, critiques and opposes prejudices and wrongs within social formations. The process in turn becomes a transformative utopianism as she envisages change by positively suggesting ideal models. Those who believe in teleology and history as a process without a subject try to eliminate and oppose “those who pretend to be that subject” (Robbins: 94), or, in E. P. Thompson's formulation, they “evict agency from history, which then becomes ‘a process without a subject,’ ” a sort of structural fate discouraging active intervention (281). Agency can thus be regarded as a “senseless accumulation of individual actions” that counters the progress of history, where “comfortable inaction” is encouraged (Robbins: 89). Fiction may be seen as replicating this perspective in so far as it functions teleologically: a “visible and unbroken causal sequence is a convention of realism that reveals hidden social connections and thus makes society intelligible, but at the cost of a general denial of agency” (Robbins: 94). Fiction, however, as a location of utopian impulses, may be employed to countervail this perspective because, as Robbins also argues, fictions represent agents/agency as having an influence which promotes changes in the world by encouraging or discouraging specific actions (90). Further, the unbroken causal sequence can be disrupted when individuals as subjects are manifested as abjected people who gain agency, make choices, and make changes. This is the case with *Felix Holt*, formulated as a critique of dystopian elements within English society but suggesting positive utopianism in its rather abstract and insinuating form at the end of the novel.

Published in 1866, one year before the passing of the Second Reform Bill (1867), *Felix Holt, The Radical*, deals with social and political uproar centering around the proposal to enfranchise working men immediately after the passing of the First Reform Bill (1832). Events are contained within a relatively compact time scheme, encompassing a nine months period from 1 September 1832 (Harold's arrival) to the following May (Esther and Felix's wedding).<sup>1</sup> The thirty-five year gap between the historical events and the publication of the novel places its contemporary readers in a defamiliarized vantage point, which includes an “active forgetting” (Lesjak 1996: 88) of the

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<sup>1</sup> The coach journey in the Introduction of *Felix Holt, The Radical* deals with the perspective of events one year before the passing of the First Reform Bill (1832), that is 1831, since the narrator gives a time reference of “Five-and-thirty years ago” (*FH*, 3), and cites historical events such as the controversy about Birmingham's lack of parliamentary representations, the prevalence of pocket boroughs, and the Nottingham riots of 1831 (“Notes,” *FH*, 500).

working men's riot and the Chartist movements of the 1840s, and a diminishing of readers' prejudices against the working class and of consciousness of class conflict. The novel is commonly regarded as political in theme, mainly dealing with the lives of the protagonists in the context of a changing political situation and revolving around the election riot in the Midland town of Treby Magna and questions of working men's enfranchisement and status (and, more implicitly, those of women). As the narrator comments, "There is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life" (*FH*, 50). The interdependence of private and public life is traced through the experiences of the main protagonist, the self-styled "radical" Felix Holt, and the female protagonist Esther Lyon, whose moral development is guided by Felix Holt. Their interaction implies a parallel moral development and hence "an affinity between women and the lower classes" (Booth 1992a: 204), so that even though women's suffrage is not directly mentioned in the novel, working men's enfranchisement implies women's enfranchisement.

A *radical* may be defined as 'one who holds the most advanced views of political reform on democratic lines, and thus belongs to the extreme section of the Liberal party' (*OED*, definition B.5). It is also defined as 'one who advocates radical changes in government or social institutions, especially such changes as are intended to level class inequalities; — opposed to conservative' (*Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, 1996, 1998 ed.). Felix's radicalism is inspired by utopian yearnings, but in practice is a "hybridization" of radical and conservative thinking — what Bakhtin defines as "a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance" (1981b: 358). His methodology is based on the acceptance of existing values, especially his acknowledgement of class structure and the presumption that women and working men are inherently inferior and therefore should only gain political representation of a limited kind. Eliot further clarifies this political position in her subsequent "Address to Working-Men, by Felix Holt" (1868), which over time has come to be treated as an extension of the novel itself. Here Felix advocates "Taking the world as it is — and this is one way we must take it when we want to find out how it can be improved" ("Address," *FH*, 489). Within the novel, the objective of his education of Esther is to prevent women from being a hindrance to men's pursuit of Utopian dreams (a theme Eliot will return to with the prime example of Rosamond in *Middlemarch*), but this also functions as a parallel illustration for the education of working men to prevent the nation from becoming a dystopia. His criticism of 'fine-ladyism' — "the coquetry and materialism of middle-class women" (Rogers: 379) — shapes Esther to be a good influence on men and hence to contribute (albeit at one remove) to the making of a good society. In contrast, Harold's radicalism is merely disguised conservatism, functioning as a means to use politics to pursue his own good. While the main focus of Felix's argument is, as rephrased in the "Address," "the turning of Class Interests into Class Functions or

duties” (FH, 491), Harold does not show any distinct aim in politics; instead, he displays an extremely class-conscious attitude, as for example toward Jermyn, because the latter is not a gentleman. His radicalism is only nominal, appropriating the term for his political ambition, as Mr. Wace recognizes in his remark that “[Harold] does it only to get into Parliament; he’ll turn round when he gets there” (FH, 209). A critique of the dystopian tenor of such behavior indicates a utopian desire. Again, the “Address” articulates the problem clearly: “The deepest curse of wrong doing, whether of the foolish, or wicked sort, is that its effects are difficult to be undone.... We who are living now are sufferers by the wrong-doing of those who lived before us; we are sufferers by each other’s wrong doing; and the children who come after us are and will be sufferers from the same causes....” (“Address,” FH, 487, 488). To rectify the wrongdoings of the past and present by means of a future-oriented, progressive vision is to admit the system of cause and effect in human affairs, and the function of human agency and choice in the improvement of the world. Utopian dreams that endeavor to make the world better for future generation are manifested in Mr. Wace, the brewer’s remarks: “I’d make a good fight myself before I’d leave a worse world for my boys than I’ve found for myself” (FH, 206). He exhibits the same aim as Caleb Garth in *Middlemarch*: doing a bit of planting and improving one’s buildings (FH, 206). It is expressed in the metaphor of a web — “It’s all one web, sir. The prosperity of the country is one web” (FH, 208) — a metaphor for interdependence and mutual influence. Although the particular example describes the interdependence of the gentry and the moneyed classes, it extends to the whole social fabric. Interdependence and mutual influence are emphasized in the “Address” in the admittance of the distinction between classes, but not the hierarchy: “No society is made up of a single class: society stands before us like that wonderful piece of life, the human body, with all its various parts depending on one another, and with a terrible liability to get wrong because of that delicate dependence” (“Address,” FH, 489). Felix’s main aim is to empower working men, but by an achievement of the good through steady grass-roots moral improvement, rather than by sudden political reform or legislation from above.<sup>2</sup> This explains why he does not extend unconditional approval to the idea of working men’s enfranchisement, or any enhanced public role for women, because they are not ready in intelligence and vision. Unless educated, the working man will merely assume that extension of the suffrage “must at last resolve itself into spare money — meaning ‘sport’ and drink, and keeping away from work for several days in the week” (FH, 137),<sup>3</sup> for example, and women are too caught up with their ‘littleness’ and ‘fine-ladyism.’ A practical utopian

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<sup>2</sup> The “Address” grounds change in a sense of “responsibility to the nation at large,” but cautions, “this end will not come by impatience. ‘Day will not break the sooner because we get up before the twilight’. Still less will it come by mere undoing, or change merely as change” (“Address,” FH, 491).

<sup>3</sup> This is a narratorial comment, as if presenting the words of the men themselves, now confirming and extending this view as expressed by Felix on page 130.

scheme for improving working men's education is to set up a lending library, as Felix envisages in the penultimate chapter: "I shall be able to set up a great library, and lend the books to be dog's-eared and marked with bread-crumbs" (*FH*, 474).<sup>4</sup>

While two self-claimed radicals are manifest in their pursuits, Esther also exhibits her own radicalism in her ideas and actions. As Paxton comments, "Esther's choice to resist the conventional marriage of convenience and upward mobility ... her resistance to the status quo" (1991: 168) makes her a "hybrid," combining like Felix "two semantic and axiological belief systems" (Bakhtin 1981b: 304) because her resistance to social norms is radical but her submission to Felix is based on conservative misogyny. She does not conform to the social norm, refuses the upward mobility by marrying Harold for fortune and position, instead renounces her own inherited fortune, and marries a poor working man (*FH*, 476). However, her willing submission to Felix makes her a conservative. On the other hand, in response to Felix's questions about her decision to renounce the inheritance and decline Harold's marriage offer, Esther responds with an affirmation of her agency: "I made a deliberate choice" (*FH*, 473). Her time at Transome Court, and especially her insight into the abjected state of the Transome family, enable her to understand that the "Utopia" of her imagination was in fact a dystopia which betokened on the one hand "an air of moral mediocrity to all her prospects" (*FH*, 407) and on the other a total negation of any possibility of agency, "a silken bondage that arrested all motive" (*FH*, 465). The novel's explicit correction of Esther's notion of Utopia anticipates subsequent uses of utopian thinking to challenge existing social formations and norms, so that idealism should be measured against processes which suit the human condition. Thus, faced with an actualization of her dreams of fortune and position, "independent of processes" (*FH*, 360), she discovers that her only chance for agency lies in the renunciation of her dream. Utopia does not lie in material abundance and idleness, but in a subjective agency grounded in the mental and moral aspects of individuals.

The town to which Felix and Esther exile themselves at the end of the novel is implicitly a utopia because real happiness exudes despite the claim of dearth of material means. The two other radicals, the "conservative" and the "nominal," fail to achieve their goals or suffer diminishment, but Esther succeeds because she perceives and achieves the level of subjective agency allowed to

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<sup>4</sup> Felix's utopianism is a reflection of the historical movement of the Mechanics Institute, which was initiated by George Birkbeck (1776-1841) in Glasgow and later in London. Aimed at liberating the mind, improving the self by acquiring skills and changing society for the better, and with the desire it would function as a "means of working for a changed society" (M. Smith: 2). Birkbeck gave "a free course of Saturday evening lectures to artisans, intended to familiarize them with some of the scientific principles underlying the employment of tools and machinery" ("Mechanics' Institutes," *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 18 Volumes* (1907-21). Vol. 16, Education, Chapter 20, 39). The admittance of working men's female relatives and friends as well as their sons to lectures and circulating library made membership of women of the institution substantial (M. Smith: 2). The novel's reference to Felix's medical training in Glasgow is an allusion to the work of Birkbeck, who was a medical doctor and started a program for educating working men in Glasgow before he came to London. (See T. Kelly, *George Birkbeck:*

her within a social structure that defines women as somehow always secondary beings, deprived of any space for direct influence. In that sense, Esther is at the same level as Romola in *Romola* and an evolved and wiser version of Dorothea in *Middlemarch* because, initially confined to Romantic ideas because of her narrow education and environment, once she gets education, “schooling” (FH, 410), from Felix she turns her intention to improving her life and learns to value what is truly precious in life, such as personality and social vision, and altruism rather than egoistic pursuits. She is a utopist in the sense that she contributes to the reduction of misery in the world and increases the happiness of at least one individual, but thence has an effect, in the words used by the narrator of *Middlemarch* to define Dorothea’s influence on others around, which is “incalculably diffusive” (M, 838).

The novel is polyphonic in form, built around a “mutual influence of dissimilar destinies” (FH, 50) and pivoting, as the narrator declares, on the circumstance whereby “A young man named Felix Holt made a considerable difference in the life of Harold Transome, though nature and fortune seemed to have done what they could to keep the lots of the two men quite aloof from each other” (FH, 51). Those two men are entangled with each other mainly through politics and Esther. The different consciousnesses of these protagonists, as well as numerous other characters, constitute the novel’s dialogic nature. The form is somewhat reflected in Felix Holt’s mischievous account of a church congregation’s singing as a parody of polyphonic principles, in which opposing voices now sing in disharmony (FH, 150, see Introduction, above, 11). A variety of voices representing different consciousnesses (“private judgment”) is constituted by a narrative method employing free indirect discourse and focalization, direct dialogue, and narrated events. Many consciousnesses are presented through FID and focalization in *Felix Holt*, including the narrator’s, without the presence of an authoritative authorial voice. Thus the dialogic processes of the core of the novel — the working-men’s enfranchisement — are presented as two opposing views by direct dialogue, namely, the trades-union men’s criticism of high class society and demand for working men’s suffrage, and Felix’s responding opposition to it on the basis of the working men’s lack of education and social awareness. Neither view cancels the other, maintaining validity and the possibility of further dialogue. The outcome of events is also envisaged as a product of dialogue, as, for example, the trades-union man is not ignorant, even though he is working-class, and conceives of a social operation of power through “universal suffrage and annual Parliaments, and the vote by ballot, and electoral districts” (FH, 290), while the mob violence on the actual election day confirms Felix’s opposing view that working-men have such power as “ignorant numbers” have and thus destructive “wicked power” (FH, 292).

The issue of human agency and the determination to accept or refuse tradition and the status quo explored in *Romola* continue in *Felix Holt*. The narrator of *Romola* comments, “the question where the sacred of obedience ends, and where the sacredness of rebellion begins could in no case be an easy one” (R, 457). Tradition and the status quo or custom do not always prove to be timelessly right, and it behoves human agency to resist the wrong conceptions and lay a foundation in distinguishing between what is right and what is wrong and what is truth. Therefore, the agencies of abjected heroes which lead to the procedures of abjection, transgression, gaining agency and contributing to changes in society, thus contributing to the construction of utopian possibilities, are essential for the progress of society and nation.

The struggles of the protagonists and other characters are made plausible by the extensive delineation of human conditions and values within a specific chronotope. The narrator-nuanced commentary of Mr. Sampson the coachman, “an excellent travelling companion and commentator on the landscape” (FH, 8) in the novel’s Introduction demarcates the geographical and temporal distinctiveness of the Midlands. As the narrator comments, “town and country had no pulse in common” (FH, 7) and “in these midland districts the traveller passed rapidly from one phase of English life to another” (FH, 6-7). The coach journey presents naturally the responses of people in a particular space and time to such social and political events as pocket boroughs, unrepresented Birmingham, unrepealed corn laws, pauperism, rick-burning, the Irish question, Catholic Emancipation, the Nottingham riots, the recent initiation of Railways (which had embittered the coachman (FH, 8)), and finally introduces Transome Court and its long entanglement in the law, and hence foreshadows the complicated entailment plot. The Introduction concludes with an allusion to the dolorous enchanted forest of Dante’s *Inferno* as a metaphor for Transome Court and its abjected inhabitants.

The novel stresses that a chronotope may be a process of temporal and physical change when it introduces the town of Treby Magna in Chapter 3 and the processes whereby it had taken on “the more complex life brought by mines and manufactures, which belong more directly to the great circulating system of the nation than to the local system to which they have been added” (FH, 47). Both religious Dissenters and political agitation threaten to destabilize the once sleepy town:

Treby Magna, which had lived quietly through the great earthquakes of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, which had remained unmoved by the “Rights of Man,”<sup>5</sup> and saw little in Mr Cobbett’s “Weekly Register”<sup>6</sup> ... began at last to know the higher pains of a dim political consciousness; greatly helped

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<sup>5</sup> Written by Tom Paine, *The Rights of Man* (1791-92) stresses “the rights of all men to equal representation and to a due share in the affairs of government” (FH, “Notes,” 510). The government classified the book as “seditious literature” and outlawed Paine. Continued to be read among working-class men and Radicals, it influenced the expansion of suffrage in The First Reform Bill (“Notes,” FH, 507).

<sup>6</sup> William Cobbett’s *Political Register*, which reached a multitude of working-class men at low cost by declaring it was not a newspaper and thus eliminating stamp duty, sold 50,000 copies a week, and influenced their opinions, with “the cause of reform” as “its main impetus” (“Notes,” FH, 510-11).

by recent agitation about the Reform Bill. (*FH*, 49, ellipsis mine)

The town's insularity is denoted by indifference to world events such as the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars and its disregard for such social issues as working-class men's rights as advocated in the "Rights of Man" or "Weekly Register." The awareness of wider social problems, a "dim political consciousness," signals the incipient stage of a socio-political enlightenment. Treby Magna, as a metonymy and synecdoche of the world, functions as a dystopia, unenlightened, stagnating, a backward community which expels abjected figures such as Felix Holt and Esther, abjected because they are Dostoevskian heroes, whose ideas are different from the rest of a society that cannot accommodate their differences, so that at the end they go into exile, albeit "voluntary exile" (Greenfeld: 68).

The chronotope is given more specific focus as it is narrowed down from the wider Midlands through Treby Magna to Transome Court. The dolorous enchanted forest of Dante's *Inferno*, introduced at the end of two pages of reported rumors about the Transome family history, is offered as a parable whose significance for the novel is yet to be explained, and will eventually be seen to function as a metonymy of the tragic, limited life of Mrs. Transome and women's narrow lot in general in relation to the wider society of Treby Magna and the whole of England beyond:

The poets have told us of a dolorous enchanted forest in the under world. The thornbushes there, and the thick-barked stems, have human histories hidden in them; the power of unuttered cries dwells in the passionless-seeming branches, and the red warm blood is darkly feeding the quivering nerves of a sleepless memory that watches through all dreams. These things are a parable. (*FH*, 10-11)

The past history as a hidden cause for a present effect afflicts individuals involved as well as the nation as a whole. This passage clearly models how Mrs. Transome's abjection, derived from her past history, is also related to the kind of society she had to live in. Therefore, it is not only individual past history that makes an individual abject that should be taken into consideration, but also the kind of society in which the individual is situated. The relationship between individual and society is that of interdependence, where individual reflects society, while society reflects individual simultaneously. Thus Adam Smith's chessboard metonymy is an apt one, where the chessboard represents a microcosm of the provincial milieu of *Felix Holt*. As Imraan Coovadia comments, Smith's principles range beyond economic and political life to cover all forms of human interaction (821), as Eliot's narrator also notices:

Fancy what a game at chess would be if all the chessmen had passions and intellects, more or less small and cunning; if you were not only uncertain about your adversary's men, but a little uncertain also about your own; if your knight could shuffle himself on to a new square by the sly; if your bishop, in disgust at your castling, could wheedle your pawns out of their places; and if your pawns, hating you because they are pawns, could make away from their appointed posts that you might get checkmate on a sudden. You might be the longest-headed of deductive reasoners, and yet you might be beaten by your own pawns. You would be especially likely to be beaten, if you depended arrogantly on your mathematical imagination, and regarded your passionate pieces with contempt.

Yet this imaginary chess is easy compared with the game a man has to play against his fellow-men

with other fellow-men for his instruments. (FH, 278)

As Coovadia points out, a game of chess as a metonymy shows that society is not an autonomous force, but the effect of interactions among many individuals. The chess player believes that he or she can manipulate society by “social engineering,” but it is impossible because society has its own mind. Its structure is generated by the interest and purpose of every individual and the complex nature of human affairs originates from the interaction and entanglement of every movement of individuals with others (821).

### **Radicalism as Utopian Vision and Method: The Dialogics Regarding Working-Class Men’s Enfranchisement**

Felix aspires to offer leadership to working people, and perceiving that this entails taking on the role of a demagogue desires to become “another sort of demagogue” (FH, 65, 262).<sup>7</sup> Felix’s different, new sort of demagogue refers to a utopist who envisions achieving a better society neither by “appealing to the passions and prejudices” of the mob, a position manifested by his reasoned opposition to working men’s universal enfranchisement, nor by “obtaining power or furthering his own interests,” represented in his determination to remain in the working class and not seek fortune, position or class status. He provides a “vision” and argues that the importance of such a vision lies in its very possible realization as reality:

For what we call illusions are often, in truth, a wider vision of past and present realities — a willing movement of a man’s soul with the larger sweep of the world’s forces — a movement towards a more assured end than the chances of a single life. (FH, 184)

He thus envisages widening vision from individual interest to social responsibility and development, which directly involves the construction of a better society. In this respect he is a self-identified utopist:

“I am a man who am warned by visions. Those old stories of visions and dreams guiding men have their truth: we are saved by making the future present to ourselves.” (FH, 262)

The responsibility for shaping the future in accord with such visions falls on him as other potential heroes like Mordecai in *Daniel Deronda*. Therefore, he has to become a demagogue to arouse working-class men, generally characterized by terms such as “rabble” and “mob,” and transform them through education into orderly, cultured beings.

While Eliot expressed Felix’s utopian impulses more directly in “Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt,” where he is represented as defining utopia and how to construct it mainly with

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<sup>7</sup> By the nineteenth century *demagogue* had evolved only negative denotations: ‘a leader of a popular faction, or of the mob; a political agitator who appeals to the passions and prejudices of the mob in order to obtain power or further his own interests; an unprincipled or factitious popular orator’ (OED, definition 2).



regard to class distinctions and functions, and culture and moral standards, the novel suggests that for him utopia is where social justice is realized. This is evident in his emphasis on how to give power to working men and improve their status. His scheme to educate working men by way of a lending library is one of the basic means of constructing utopia. Meanwhile, until working men are enlightened he will delegate the task of building utopia to wise representatives. What Felix envisions is a socialist utopia that admits class distinctions, a kind of modified, “hybridized” communism. He fails in his aspiration because of the dystopian elements of a society which reads his body, above all, as “queer” and abject, and thus refuses his ideas in their entirety. A striking contrast between society and an individual such as Felix is that the former cherishes the sign/meaning system, while the latter disregards the conventional system. This disregard for the conventional sign/meaning system includes class distinctions and their implied meanings, such as preferences for higher classes over lower. Felix declares, “I’m a radical myself, and mean to work all my life long against privilege, monopoly, and oppression” (*FH*, 182). His concern naturally leads to concern for other people who are underprivileged and oppressed; therefore, Felix’s utopianism is grounded in altruism. He defines a hero as one who finds the meaning of life in helping others and making their lives a little easier:

“the finest fellow would be the one who could be glad to have lived because the world was chiefly miserable and his life had come to help some one, who needed it.” (*FH*, 258)

His altruism manifests itself in his attempt to lead the rioting mob from “places where they would get in the midst of intoxicating and inflammable materials” (*FH*, 316). Diverting attention from the fallen Constable Tucker, and finding a stratagem to effect the release of the hostage Spratt, Felix does not consider that his actions might be misconstrued by witnesses. Foregrounding his predominant altruism, the narrator comments, “Nature never makes men who are at once energetically sympathetic and minutely calculating” (*FH*, 316), even though Felix is conscious of his involvement with “tangled business” (*FH*, 316). He tries to take the crowd down Hobb’s Lane and thence out of the town, but they go to Treby Manor in spite of him (*FH*, 319, 355). He finds it intolerable to witness the “blind outrages of this mad crowd” (*FH*, 314) without making some attempt to counteract them. Mob psychology and consequent violence (*FH*, 318), inflamed by drink and agitators imported to disrupt the election, confirm that working men are not ready for enfranchisement. Lyon’s later comment on Felix’s action in directing the mob’s attention to the lesser violence is a commendation, based on a wider vision, of Felix’s altruism: “We discoursed ... on the perplexed condition of human things, whereby even right action seems to bring evil consequences; if we have respect only to our own brief lives, and not to that larger rule whereby we are steward of the eternal dealings, and not contrivers of our own success” (*FH*, 355-56).

Lyon is in many aspects Felix's double. As a dissenting clergyman, the Rev. Rufus Lyon, minister of the Independent Chapel, usually spoken of as "Malthouse Yard" (*FH*, 51), represents church reform in the era between the passing of the First and the Second Reform Bills. Along with women, Dissenters are analogously classified within the same set as working men. An old-fashioned Puritan (*FH*, 57), he is regarded as of no account in society (*FH*, 340). Lyon is located in the tension between the Dissenting and established churches and the matrons who attend his chapel were apt to complain about "far too much mixing up of politics with religion" (*FH*, 194). Another idealist, he challenges the Rector of the established church to engage in a debate, "a theological duel" (*FH*, 230), on the Constitution of the true Church and the bearing thereupon of the English Reformation (*FH*, 170), but this does not happen because of the rector's authoritative attitude and the precipitous flight to avoid the debate by the nervous young curate appointed as substitute. The rectory itself is a metonymy of the attitude of the Rector and the established church toward dissenters and women:

It was one of those rectories which are among the bulwarks of our venerable institutions — which arrest disintegrating doubt, serve as a double embankment against Popery and Dissent, and rally feminine instinct and affection to reinforce the decisions of masculine thought. (*FH*, 230)

The rectory represents the epitome of conservative power, the bastion of middle-class, Anglican males, which shores itself up by pejorating other ways of thinking and consigning them, along with women, to a secondary status. By contrasting masculinity and femininity by means of binary oppositions organized as a hierarchy — femininity is characterized by the inferior, emotional areas of "instinct" and "affection," while higher-order cerebral functions such as "decisions" and "thought" are attributed to masculinity — the established church exemplifies patriarchal, hierarchical thinking. Thus the conservative Rector thinks that people like Lyon encourage feminine-type judgment and hence "make the ignorant multitude the judges of the largest questions, both political and religious" (*FH*, 231), areas where the higher functions of the brain are requisite. As Valentine Cunningham observes, Rufus Lyon "is being pressed into two irreconcilable roles" (175): "a relic of days gone by" (175) and a post-1832 "political dissenter" (176). In other words, he is, like Felix, another "hybridization" of conservatism and radicalism.

Felix's altruism also manifests itself in other ways. First, he encourages Esther: "I want you to have such a vision of the future that you may never lose your best self" (*FH*, 262). In an extended example of FID which closes Chapter 15, and which deftly coalesces character self-reflection and narratorial judgment, Esther begins to understand that "Her life was a heap of fragments, and so were her thoughts: some great energy was needed to bind them together" (*FH*, 173). Helping her to sustain her "best self" does not mean flattery, but rather a case such as Esther needs bitter scolding to the degree of sadism, as critics such as Rogers (381) acknowledge. Second,

Felix repudiates material wealth, assuming that instead of enabling him to pursue his altruistic ideals it will hinder them:

“I will never be rich.... I wed it [poverty] because it enables me to do what I most want to do on earth. Whatever the hopes for the world may be — whether great or small — I am a man of this generation; I will try to make life less bitter for a few within my reach....” (*FH*, 263, ellipses mine).

The altruistic vision and personal material wealth are not compatible with each other. This is also one of the reasons Lydgate in *Middlemarch* fails in his utopian dreams. His wife’s materialistic desires and demands frustrate his enthusiasm for research.

The essence of Felix’s argument is that working-class men should not seek enfranchisement because they are not yet sufficiently developed in morality and intelligence; instead, he suggests that they should have a genuine leader, a good representative, someone like Ambrose Paré,<sup>8</sup> who knows the solution to the problems (“Address,” *FH*, 497). In the “Address,” Felix explicitly advocates government by the wise, but in turn defines this as a utopian desire endemic to human societies:

To get the chief power into the hands of the wisest, which means to get our life regulated according to the truest principles mankind is in possession of, is a problem as old as the very notion of wisdom. (“Address,” *FH*, 498)

In the novel, and by contrast, the trades-union man opposes all forms of monopoly, which he implicitly equates with oligarchy as he develops the concept from monopolies in trade to monopolies on power. Monopoly, he argues, results in those being governed kept in ignorance. Thus he asserts that, “The greatest question in the world is, how to give every man a man’s share in what goes on in life” (*FH*, 289). Opposing the argument advanced in the “Address,” the trades-union man argues against the notion that a privileged few from the upper-class should have a monopoly on power, including the proportion of it which properly belongs to lower-class people, thereby exploit their natural rights. He demands due rights for working men by presenting a roughly deconstructed fable:

“We want a freeman’s share, and that is to think and speak and act about what concerns us all, and see whether these fine gentlemen who undertake to govern us are doing the best they can for us.... There’s a fable told where the nobles are the belly and the people the members. But I make another sort of fable. I say, we are the belly that feels the pinches, and we’ll set these aristocrats, these great people who call themselves our brains, to work at some way of satisfying us a bit better.” (*FH*, 289, ellipsis mine)

Originally told in Plutarch and retold in Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*,<sup>9</sup> the metaphor of body parts

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<sup>8</sup> A better solution to stop bleeding was suggested by Paré by tying up arteries rather than amputating limbs, an example of “right remedies and right methods” (“Address,” *FH*, 497), which lessened human suffering.

<sup>9</sup> *Life of Coriolanus* by Plutarch (A.D. 46?-A.D. c. 120): Menenius Agrippa concluded at length with the celebrated fable: “It once happened that all the other members of a man mutinied against the stomach, which they accused as the only idle, uncontributing part in the whole body, while the rest were put to hardships and the expense of much labor to supply and minister to its appetites.”

changes its signification here as the aristocrats are to be displaced from the belly, the idle part, and be assigned a more dependent, instrumental function; the workers, on the other hand, are identified with the belly, not on account of its idleness, but because of its capacity to feel hunger pains, and hence to figure the pinches of social injustice. He rejects the principle of law imposed from above, and instead demands that the law should work for lower-class people, should reflect working men's problems, and should incorporate their perspectives and voices. His demand is crucial in that it shifts the perspective and center of focus, articulating a utopian impulse that would locate working-class men at the very center and focus of reform, incorporating their voices. It also makes a crucial move in its identification of religion as a mainstay of existing power structures and the oppression of the lower classes, and its communistic advocacy of justice here on earth rather than in afterlife. He declares of the ruling class, "It's part of their monopoly. They'll supply us with our religion. Give us plenty of heaven" (*FH*, 290). Religion, then, is recognized as having a major role in the construction of society, demarcating the roles of class, gender, and race and imposing unequal status as natural. He is clear in his demand and knows what he wants: "If we working men are ever to get a man's share, we must have universal suffrage, and annual Parliaments, and the vote by ballot, and electoral districts" (*FH*, 290). As Hollis (2001a: 166-67) points out, the trades-union man stands as an opposing voice to Felix's presumption that working-class men are ignorant and crass, "crude, brutal, and stupid" (*Kettle*: 109-10).<sup>10</sup> The trades-union man deploys logic, reason and knowledge and asks whether the aristocrats do the job properly for all classes of people, for the body politic, and for national wealth. He demands that people from all classes, not just the working class, exercise control over governance. Felix, however, as a voice opposing this request for immediate suffrage, distinguishes two kinds of power, one wicked, or ignorant, and the other political, whereby education and discernment for the national good should precede suffrage:

"I want the working men to have power. I'm a working man myself, and I don't want to be anything else. But there are two sorts of power. There's a power to do mischief — to undo what has been done with great expense and labour, to waste and destroy, to be cruel to the weak, to lie and quarrel, and to talk poisonous nonsense. That's the sort of power that ignorant numbers have. It never made a joint stool or planted a potato. Do you think it's likely to do much towards governing a great country, and making wise laws, and giving shelter, food, and clothes to millions of men? Ignorant power comes in the end to the same thing as wicked power; it makes misery. It's another sort of a power that I want us working men to have, and I can see plainly enough that our all having votes will do little towards it at present. I hope we, or the children that come after us, will get plenty of political power some time. I tell everybody plainly, I hope there will be great changes, and that some time, whether we live to see it or not, men will have come to be ashamed of things they're proud of now. But I should like to convince you that votes would never give you political power worth having while things are as they are now, and that if you go the right way to work you may get power sooner without votes." (*FH*, 292)

Felix argues that mere acquirement of the right to vote does not automatically guarantee working

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<sup>10</sup> Mr. Wace the brewer is also a representation of working men with intelligence: he is the one who has utopian ideas for future generation (*FH*, 206), points out interdependence of individuals in society (*FH*, 208), and sees through Harold's disguised Radicalism (*FH*, 209).

men's power. Real power comes from raising their mental capacity, or cultivating intelligence through education. In fact, once they are so equipped, they would already wield power without. Felix places priority on moral development rather than political change and urges that "they should refrain from agitating for the extension of the suffrage until a future time when the existing political system is actually reformed and when participation in it would be less morally compromising" (Paxton: 159). Eliot's reservations about the enfranchisement of working men and women derive from her "evolutionary understanding of human psychology and social development" which "prevented her from accepting ... an optimistic prediction about the immediate intellectual and moral benefits of the vote for disenfranchised women or men" (Paxton: 159).<sup>11</sup> Felix tries to persuade his audience that social and moral development should precede any indiscriminate right of vote. Enfranchisement is regarded as a system and in order for the system to work, working men should be equipped with insight underpinned by education:

"All the schemes about voting, and districts, and annual parliaments, and the rest, are engines, and the water or steam — the force that is to work them — must come out of human nature — out of men's passions, feelings, desires. Whether the engines will do good work or bad depends on these feelings; ... I'll tell you what's the greatest power under heaven, ... and that is public opinion — the ruling belief in society about what is right and what is wrong, what is honourable and what is shameful. That's the steam that is to work the engines.... And while public opinion is what it is — while men have no better beliefs about public duty — while corruption is not felt to be a damning disgrace — while men are not ashamed in Parliament and out of it to make public questions which concern the welfare of millions a mere screen for their own petty private ends, — I say, no fresh scheme of voting will much mend our condition." (*FH*, 293, ellipses mine)

By "the ruling belief in society" Felix means "cultural hegemony" (Said 1985 [1978]: 7) where certain ideas about what is right and what is wrong are more influential than others. While public opinion is the greatest power under heaven, it can be corrupted if the majority of people are not moral enough. When the majority of people's morality is enhanced, public opinion is a real power with its "right" and "honourable" belief. However, as Mill points out, there is "despotism of Public Opinion" (Mill and Bentham, *Collected Works*, X, 107), and need for "protection ... against tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling (of the majority)" ("On Liberty," *Collected Works*, XVIII, 217, 220). Eliot's belief in the gradual evolution of human psychology and social development induces reservations about working men's (and women's) suffrage. Felix's "condescending attitude toward the working men he addresses" (Paxton: 159), his ironical conservatism, which discloses its innate radicalism, is what Hollis terms, "conservative in disguise"(157), a hypocrite. However, as I mentioned earlier, I would term him "a radical with a tinge of conservatism," which is based on reason. Ironically a genuine conservative, Harold, is given the same title, "conservative in disguise"

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<sup>11</sup> Barbara Bodichon suggested that the enfranchisement of women could motivate them to actively participate in public life such as cultural, political, economic areas of society by self-education and interest in a wider society than mere domestic affairs ("Objections to the Enfranchisement of Women Considered," London: Warrington Crescent, 1866, from Paxton 1991: 4-5). Eliot took the opposite position.

(“Tory by another name” (Hollis 2001a: 164), e.g.) by many critics, while Felix is genuinely radical in many aspects. Felix’s radicalism manifests itself in defending his right to resist the law in attacking a constable, a metonymy for established law, when “it is a pretext for wrong, which it should be the very object of law to hinder” and refers to a higher law which authorizes his resistance: “I hold it blasphemy to say that a man ought not to fight against authority; there is no great religion and no great freedom that has not done it in the beginning” (*FH*, 442). From their different perspectives, his approach and that of the trades-union man tend to converge here in a notion of transgression which will lead to the attainment of agency and thence contribute to changes in society and the enunciation of a utopian world.

### **Harold Transome’s Radicalism as Utopian Impulse, or Disguised Conservatism as Pseudo-Utopianism**

John Johnson defends Harold Transome as an aristocrat radical candidate, “What he has at heart is the welfare of the working man.... He’s rich ... but he doesn’t want to keep it to himself. What he wants is, to make a good use of it.... He means to use it for the good of the working men in these parts” (*FH*, 137), but Harold’s ambition is only pseudo-utopian, selfish and thus narrow, since he cannot eradicate his prejudices against women, lower classes, and other races. Harold is the type of representative Felix criticizes as a “platform swaggerer” (“Address,” *FH*, 498), misleading the people, rather than a genuine leader who supplies solutions to problems. Harold’s treatment of his own mother as a woman suggests an analogy for national politics, and his egoism and lack of empathy with others is critically focalized by Esther:

[Harold] had a way of virtually measuring the value of everything by the contribution it made to his own pleasure. His very good-nature was unsympathetic: it never came from any thorough understanding or deep respect for what was in the mind of the person he obliged or indulged; it was like his kindness to his mother — an arrangement of his for the happiness of others, which, if they were sensible, ought to succeed. And an inevitable comparison which haunted her, showed her the same quality in his political views: the utmost enjoyment of his own advantages was the solvent that blended pride in his family and position, with the adhesion to changes that were to obliterate tradition and melt down enchased gold heirlooms into plating for the egg-spoons of ‘the people’. (*FH*, 410-11).

His radicalism displays an extremely egoistic tendency, a blending of lack of sympathy and the imposition of his own will and interest on others. Esther here charts a continuity between the “unsympathetic” nature that is revealed in Harold’s relationship with his mother, his deficiencies in understanding and respect, and his political views. As a part of the process which brings her to reject his offer of marriage, she is here represented as discerning some character traits which the narrator had remarked upon in the extended character sketch of Harold in Chapter 8:

Harold Transome was a clever, frank, good-natured egoist; not stringently consistent, but without any disposition to falsity; proud, but with a pride that was moulded in an individual rather than an hereditary form; unspeculative, unsentimental, unsympathetic; fond of sensual pleasures, but disinclined to all vice, and attached as a healthy clear-sighted person, to all conventional morality, construed with a certain freedom, like

doctrinal articles to which the public order may require subscription. (*FH*, 110 -11)

He is a combination of loose conscience, materialism, egoism, and lack of discipline. It suggests that powerful and wealthy men like Harold cloak their self-aggrandizement beneath their professed but utterly unsympathetic concern for the poor. The lack of discipline in his radicalism is indicated in the phrase, “not stringently consistent,” “unspeculative,” “unsentimental,” and “unsympathetic.” The character sketch is a way of questioning plutocracy, anticipating the rhetoric of the “Address”:

It has been held hitherto that a man can be depended on as a guardian of order only when he has much money and comfort to lose. But a better state of things would be, that men who had little money and not much comfort should still be guardians of order, because they had sense to see that disorder would do no good, and had a heart of justice, pity, and fortitude, to keep them from making more misery only because they felt some misery themselves. (“Address,” *FH*, 493)

What Felix points out is that working men lack empathetic representation and suggests that it would be better if working men’s representatives should be drawn from the working-class, and thus truly represent working men’s perspectives. There is an incompatibility between wealth based on materialism and a wider-visioned altruism which looks towards a levelling of class interests. In contrast to the stance suggested in the “Address,” Harold is in favor of “plutocracy” (*FH*, 177), despite his averred criticisms of it (“men who will be satisfied if they can only bring in a plutocracy, buy up the land, and stick the old crests on their new gateways”(*FH*, 177)), but the very fact that he, as a rich aristocrat, intends to stand for the poor working men is aiming at plutocracy. As Mr. Wace points out, his action demonstrates an inherent deficiency of understanding toward the poor. Further, the moral development needed for the progress of society is conspicuously lacking in him because he understands the world in terms of materialism, not spirituality, which is important for moral development.

Harold’s sense of his own innate superiority is also manifested in his self-identification as an Orientalist,<sup>12</sup> since what Harold learned from a foreign country is the attitude of the colonizer toward the colonized. He may call himself “an Orientalist” (*FH*, 108), but this does not mean he analyzes the Orient from the perspective of its exotic politics and culture as did his predecessors (such as Byron), but simply that he was there and knows how things operate, especially with respect to commercial affairs and exchange of commodities, and thus knows the Orient merely from an economic, materialistic, and colonialist perspective.

Harold’s deformation of orientalism links to one of the novel’s most complex aspects, the dismantling of his political position through the interplay of Englishness and otherness which

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<sup>12</sup> Edward Said defines an Orientalist thus: “anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient — and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist — either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism” (1985 [1978]: 2). Orientalist and Orientalism entail colonialism and imperialism, in that this is how the Orient is conceptualized.

underpins the representation of his attitudes and recent history. He holds fixed ideas on rigid class distinctions, with all that implies about maintaining a particular version of Englishness, and this finds metonymic exemplification in his reluctance to deal with Lawyer Jermyn because he does not belong to gentry. Harold is provoked when Jermyn mentions his wife's abomination of smoking, since he does not consider they could be on such a footing that he should be expected to wish to know anything of Jermyn's wife (*FH*, 40). To people of Harold's class, Jermyn is not a gentleman, but a middle-class upstart aspiring to rank with gentlemen (*FH*, 33): "Jermyn was a man of business; his father, his uncle, and Sir Maximus Debarry did not regard him as a gentleman and their equal" (*FH*, 36). This attitude makes readers question how Harold could favorably represent lower-class working men when he has contempt even for a middle-class lawyer. It is also a dramatic irony that Harold is unaware that he is himself illegitimate, the product of an illicit relationship between his (recently) gentrified mother and middle class lawyer Jermyn, and so derives half his immediate heritage from the commercial class he despises. The infant son, Harry, whom Harold brings back with him from Greece, as the future owner of Transome Court embodies a further and more drastic dilution of English Blood, as is figured in the "broken lisping polyglot" of his speech, which is indicative of his origin in miscegenation between English and Oriental (Greek). As Alicia Carroll remarks, Harry is symbolic of "the dangers of the post-1832, post-reform political world," in which the transfer of power gives teeth to those not of the gentry. Hence Harry's habit of biting is "a metaphor for his father's 'low' heritage and political radicalism" (1997: 246-47). In the eyes of his relatives, Harold himself has fallen away from Englishness, and has become "a regular beast among Mahometans — he's got neither religion nor morals left. He can't know anything about English politics" (*FH*, 97). Otherness, of ethnicity or religion, is regarded as low and to be associated with it is thus alienating and immoral. Moreover, otherness of class or race is associated with savagery: for example, Harry is hated by his grandmother because he behaves like an animal, and he attracts such comments as "doesn't look like a lady's child" (*FH*, 95) and "little savage ... little gypsy of a son" (*FH*, 202); and Jermyn is attributed with "a latent savageness of ... nature" (*FH*, 38).

As pointed out above, the novel draws an analogy between Harold's political ideas and his treatment of his mother, who is rendered powerless by his lack of genuine love for her and his misogynistic attitudes. Her management of the estate as a virtual head of the family is lightly dismissed by Harold as "worry[ing] about things that don't properly belong to a woman" (*FH*, 21) and is immediately superseded by the encouragement to be a "grandmamma on satin cushions" (*FH*, 21). Harold's misogyny and offer of "satin cushions" are an excuse to dominate her, manage family affairs himself, and deprive her of whatever power she has. When Mrs. Transome offers the



opinion that his embracing of radical politics is contrary to his birth and station (*FH*, 39), Harold responds with typical misogyny by reassigning her to her proper position as a woman:

“it is natural that you should think in this way. Women, very properly, don’t change their views, but keep to the notions in which they have been brought up. It doesn’t signify what they think — they are not called upon to judge or to act. You must really leave me to take my own course in these matters, which properly belong to men.” (*FH*, 39)

As a radical who aspires to construct a better England through Parliament he dismisses women’s voice and defines their position in domestic affairs, a course any conservative would take. Harold in fact encourages Mrs. Transome to remain a Tory and uphold his family’s Toryism because it symbolizes wealth, power and old honor: “A woman ought to be a Tory, ... and graceful, and handsome, like you. I should hate a woman who took up my opinions, and talked for me. I am an Oriental, you know” (*FH*, 108). His regard for women is only as an ornament and decoration like furniture, as his family’s Toryism makes his radicalism more striking:

Harold Transome regarded women as slight things, but he was fond of slight things in the intervals of business; and he held it among the chief arts of life to keep these pleasant diversions within such bounds that they should never interfere with the course of his serious ambition. (*FH*, 175)

Women are regarded as diversions separate from men’s serious application of business. There is a strong resemblance here with Lydgate’s choice of Rosamond over Dorothea as his spouse in *Middlemarch* because the former would make a domestic heaven for him with her decoration while the latter would make him tired with moral questions. Women who have thoughts of their own abominate Harold. His late wife epitomizes his attitude to women, since she was a slave he had bought and married (*FH*, 421). Esther’s moment of shock when he discloses this fact in a rather offhand way, her inability to speak, and the identified need for her to adjust her notions about the Orient, foreground at a crucial point how tainted Harold is by the Orient. His earlier description of himself as an Oriental in his attitude towards women (*FH*, 108) takes on a new aura with this coalescing of women and slavery, and shows he regards women as commodities to buy and sell, objects which will never hinder his ambition:

Western women were not his taste: they showed a transition from the feebly animal to the thinking being, which was simply troublesome. Harold preferred a slow-witted large-eyed woman, silent and affectionate, with a load of black hair weighing much more heavily than her brains. He had seen no such woman in England, except one whom he had brought with him from the East. (*FH*, 344-45)

His ideas on women and marriage are shaped by conquest, mastery and colonization, as the relationship between men and women is analogous to that of the conqueror/conquered, master/slave, and the colonizer/colonized. His preference of a Greek slave to an English woman as his wife reflects his abomination towards women as a thinking being with agency and choice. He never regards women as a thinking being: “A woman ought never to have any trouble. There should always be a man to guard her from it” (*FH*, 384). He also begins to think wooing of Esther

as “a conquest” (*FH*, 407), wishing to act as “the guardian of [her] interest” (*FH*, 386), which reflects his dismissal of the possibility she might desire independent agency. His preference for passive women makes him regard Esther’s emerging independent attitude as not lovable in a woman (*FH*, 384). Esther perceives the difference between the misogyny of Harold and that of Felix. Some critics such as Rita Bode argue that Esther chooses Felix over Harold because she finds some scope for controlling Felix, but not Harold (770); however, she chooses Felix because, even though he is a misogynist, his attention is focused on some deficiencies produced by female acculturation, which he strives to correct, rather than blocking women from doing something useful. Women are not a commodity for Felix. Esther cannot find any room for dialogue with Harold so that his wooing of her is experienced as “a stifling oppression” (*FH*, 465).

Politicians like Harold exemplify the limitations of reform from above. He cannot envision a better society because, bound by the prejudices involving race, class, and gender with which his class is acculturated, his perspective is old-fashioned, closed, and tradition-bound, whereas an improved society can only be brought about by “change.” Therefore, his self-claimed radicalism, and thereby its implied utopianism, is doomed to reproduce the prevailing dystopian social condition. Again, Mrs. Transome functions as a measure of future possibility, as the processes of her relationship with Harold propel her into ever-deepening abjection. By depicting Harold and his radicalism Eliot shows that if Parliamentary representation is drawn from such people, England will stagnate and no progress can be achieved because the very human ideas are reflected in the legislation, reflecting human conditions with respect to society and envisioning better conditions. The corruption of election that Felix warns Harold of reflects anachronistic ideas and presages regression for the nation. If Harold is to be elected by working men without knowledge of politics or wider social issues, who, in a corrupt misconception of a utopian future, equate suffrage with self-indulgence and “boozing,” then progress will only be hindered.

### **Critique of a Dystopian World — Manifestations of Abjection**

Utopian projects fail because of the dystopian elements within a society and the limitations in approach of utopian dreamers. This aspect of the novel is epitomized by Felix Holt, the Dostoevskian hero who both chooses and is expelled to the social margin. His very physical otherness inspires people to abject him. Thus in the conversation between Mrs. Tiliot and Mrs. Muscat which functions briefly as a dramatic chorus during the scene of the aborted debate between Church and Chapel (Chapter 24), Felix’s physical appearance is assumed to signify a “dangerous character” (*FH*, 239): “Such great eyes and such a great head of hair — it is enough to frighten one” (*FH*, 239). Rufus Lyon, who is in many ways an inverted double of Felix, is also

abjected by his appearance, which is then treated as a metonymy of his social place as a Dissenting minister. He is an “odd-looking rusty old man” hooted after by schoolboys, (*FH*, 52), and to the *vox populi* (“many respectable Church people”) his physical appearance is read as a signifier for the preposterousness of Dissent (*FH*, 52). He is also another of Eliot’s short-sighted characters (*FH*, 52), which suggests an impediment in communication with other people and the possible lack of a wider vision, but myopia also functions to signify strength in inner view or insight, as suggested by the comment that he is “too shortsighted to notice those who tittered at him — too absent from the world of small facts and petty impulses in which titterers live” (*FH*, 52). His remoteness from worldly affairs and concentration on inward contemplation and consequent spiritual insight make Lyon another Dostoevskian hero.

Felix Holt calls himself a radical and has some ideas which differ from the conventional ones. The scope of his radicalism is defined, however, by his conservative attitude towards working men’s enfranchisement — as David Carroll puts it, he is “conservative gradualist mistrustful of political change” (1992: 205). His aim is to build a utopia, to make the world a better place, but the forces of change for the better “must come out of human nature — out of men’s passions, feelings, desires” (*FH*, 293), rather than a mere change to the system such as enfranchising working men. His unconventional thinking disregards social conventions such as proper clothing and thus he embarrasses his mother by going out without a stock.<sup>13</sup> Lyon’s congregation finds him rude and rash and people who see the riot from their windows regard him as a “leading spirit of the mob” (*FH*, 315) rather than a hero striving to contain the violence. Society’s aptitude for judging an individual metonymically — that is, extrapolating the whole from appearance and birth, rather than attending to ideas and personality — is in effect a dystopian tendency. Harold, for example, demonstrates that he internalizes the social convention of sign and meaning when he evaluates Felix as, “a little queer and conceited ... but that is usually the case with men of his class when they are at all superior to their fellows” (*FH*, 417). The term queer is applied to Felix throughout the novel — by his mother (*FH*, 353), by Esther (*FH*, 120), by the gentry, and by working men (*FH*, 317) — and functions as an index of his otherness. A particular example of this queerness, or otherness, is his decision to curtail sales of his father’s bogus medicine and return to his artisan trade of watch cleaning and making to sustain his life and support his mother. His altruism and anti-materialism are evident in his application of his medical training to establish that his father was ignorant of the complexity of the human system and the counteraction of the various drugs he used (*FH*, 61). In this action Felix is the precursor of Lydgate in *Middlemarch* when the latter

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<sup>13</sup> A stock is a close-fitting neck cloth, a usual item of male apparel at the time. In the Church-Chapel debate scene, Mrs Tiliot notices that Felix is “without a cravat” (*FH*, 238).

criticizes the dispensing of “strengthening medicine” (*M*, 446) in the cause of improving medical practice and thereby reducing human misery. As with Lydgate, Felix’s behavior is seen as eccentric, in this case “contrary to the nature of buying and selling,” since the drugs were saleable (*FH*, 353). Carolyn Lesjak suggests that Felix’s action presents two opposing perspectives: a utopian vision in regarding artisanship as a balance of manual and mental labor; and a falling behind the modernization of the world (1996: 89). This is so, but the nexus is paradoxical, since it is Felix’s awareness of medical progress which enables his decision, and the desire to work with his hands anticipates later nineteenth-century utopian thought (William Morris, for example).

Felix’s radical ideas on class mobility run counter to everyday aspirations for ascendancy because he does not accept conventional ways of regarding class distinctions:

“Why should I want to get into the middle class because I have some learning? The most of the middle class are as ignorant as the working people about everything that doesn’t belong to their own Brummagem life. That’s how the working men are left to foolish devices and keep worsening themselves: the best heads among them forsake their born comrades, and go in for a house with a high door-step and a brass knocker.” (*FH*, 64)

The essence of Felix’s radicalism lies in his active disregard of the conventional sign system in society. He refuses to move upwards in the social hierarchy, not accepting the conventional social privileging of and preference for higher classes over lower. On the contrary, he criticizes their life as “Brummagem.”<sup>14</sup> He accepts the existing structure of class, with its gradual construction of class distinctions as three natural ranks or estates — the hereditary landed aristocracy, the citizens or commercial class, and the peasantry or agricultural class — and the day-laborers with the quill, the literary proletariat as the “Fourth Estate” (“German Life,” *Selected Essays*, 134-35), but imagines utopia can be achieved by the levelling of interests and the abolition of exploitation of lower classes by higher classes, while preserving the distinctions. Therefore, Felix is not a genuine radical, but has a tinge of realistic/practical conservatism. It is this which enables Johnson to twist Felix’s “straightforward words” during their encounter at the Sproxton public house (Chapter 11) and suggest that the underpinning ideology shows that Felix is “most likely a Tory in disguise — a Tory spy” (*FH*, 138). Hollis, on the other hand, surmises that Felix wants to remain in the working class because he does not want to be at the bottom of the lower middle class and by remaining in the working class he can stand out (2001a: 165). As she also points out, however, *Felix Holt* presents multiple perspectives, especially where Felix is involved. To me Felix’s concern for working men’s education is genuine because he recognizes “the spawning life of vice and hunger” (*FH*, 160) of the working man and desires to redress it.<sup>15</sup> He also fears he could not remain true to himself if he

<sup>14</sup> *Brummagem*, ‘counterfeit, sham, not genuine; of the nature of a cheap or showy imitation’ (*OED*, definition B.1).

<sup>15</sup> The similar movement in Russia in the 1870s called “Vnarod Movement,” with its literal meaning ‘Into the people’ as a motto, where young intellectuals from aristocratic and landed nobility background went to the backward peasant society and attempted to reform the peasants through infusing them with the ideas of liberation and self-awareness. Felix’s resolution not to move up but to stay and educate ignorant working men is in the same spirit as that of those

changed class, and would lose his self-respect in exchange for “a ridiculously small prize — perhaps for none at all — perhaps for the sake of two parlours, a rank eligible for the church-wardenship, a discontented wife and several unhopeful children” (*FH*, 260).

The conservative tinge to Felix’s radicalism is also evident in his attitudes towards women. In its depiction of characters such as Esther and Mrs. Transome, in particular, the novel recognizes that femininity is socially constructed and that a utopian project would envisage a different kind of gendering regime. Felix is perhaps groping towards such a perspective, but it still lies in the realm of what is by him unthinkable, so that instead he conceives of the femininity of the gentry as a summation of the failings of that class. The nature of his radical ideas encourages his misogyny and shows an inherent contempt for refined versions of femininity: thus when Esther proffers a definition of a fine lady he counters with the retort that, “A fine lady is a squirrel-headed thing, with small airs and small notions” (*FH*, 71). Felix elsewhere links women’s sensibility with small animals, as when during his first visit to Lyon he said, “I am not a mouse to have a nose that takes note of wax or tallow” (*FH*, 60), making Esther a mouse because she does take note and minds the smell of tallow. He considers Esther a “peacock” (*FH*, 69, 72), who needs to be scolded every day and made to “cry and cut her fine hair off” (*FH*, 72).

Felix’s solution to his initial revulsion from Esther’s femininity is to desire to render her abject, although what is disclosed through this attempt is his failure to grasp that his contemporary society already perceives women as abjected. Lyn Pykett offers the instructive comment on the novel’s narrative strategy that “the narrator’s taking up of Felix’s perspective is primarily a means of taking up a perspective on Felix; it is an important distinction and one which does not apply in quite the same way in the case of Rufus and Esther Lyon where there is a tendency for the character’s and the narrator’s perspective to fuse” (236-37). There needs to be a critical distance between readers and Felix, especially in his treatment of Esther. His apparently sadistic attempt to abject her is in fact an expression of fear, a projection of his own past experience of abjection, such as his six weeks of “debauchery” in Glasgow (*FH*, 62). He is judgmental about everything pertaining to Esther, including her addiction to Byron’s poems, which he considers to be both immoral and mawkish (*FH*, 122). Felix’s arrogance in criticizing Esther’s reading and way of life is grounded in patriarchal misogyny: he wants to direct her life. In fact, as Esther surmises in an extended FID segment towards the close of Chapter 10, after she and Felix had parted after a very angry exchange, Felix’s criticisms and averment that he will never love or marry are an oblique acknowledgment that he is already falling in love with her. He is apt, however, to be swept along by the flow of his own rhetoric, as in the slippage in the following sequence from a recognition of an

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intellectuals who went out amongst the ignorant peasants and sought to educate them.

innate superiority in Esther to an angry denunciation of all women:

“I can’t bear to see you going the way of the foolish women who spoil men’s lives. Men can’t help loving them, and so they make themselves slaves to the petty desires of petty creatures. That’s the way those who might do better spend their lives for nought — get checked in every great effort — toil with brain and limb for things that have no more to do with a manly life than tarts and confectionery. That’s what makes women a curse; all life is stunted to suit their littleness. That’s why I’ll never love, if I can help it; and if I love, I’ll bear it, and never marry.” (FH, 124)

Because men cannot avoid women’s influence, it is part of a utopian project that women’s weaknesses should be remedied. Underlying this notion is a recognition that female coquetry and materialism are socially projected, so that if women are properly educated they can follow an idealistic path to the benefit of men and society as a whole. Bode comments that Felix “admits the power that women have over men through his fears concerning their influence. His very resolution never to love and not to marry indicates his awareness of his own susceptibility” (779). Likewise, he sees women and marriage as potential obstacles to his desire to improve society, again anticipating Lydgate in *Middlemarch*:<sup>16</sup>

“I’ll never marry, though I should have to live on raw turnips to subdue my flesh. I’ll never look back and say, ‘I had a fine purpose once — I meant to keep my hands clean, and my soul upright, and to look truth in the face; but pray excuse me, I have a wife and children — I must lie and simper a little, else they’ll starve’; or, ‘My wife is nice, she must have her bread well buttered, and her feelings will be hurt if she is not thought genteel.’” (FH, 74)

Felix regards women as hindrances to men’s attainment of nobility, but fails to take into account the societal structure that encourages women’s littleness. Part of Felix’s radicalism is that he can grasp that this littleness of women is wrong, even if he does not locate the source, whereas by contrast Harold seeks to perpetuate such littleness in woman. Esther’s responses to Felix’s criticism such as these are a critique of the dystopian elements of a society that shapes women’s subjectivity in such a way. Felix expresses negative expectations about women and their beauty:

I wonder ... whether the subtle measuring of forces will ever come to measuring the force there would be in one beautiful woman whose mind was as noble as her face was beautiful — who made a man’s passion for her rush in one current with all the great aims of his life.” (FH, 261)<sup>17</sup>

Esther initially feels indignant at Felix’s criticism of her selfishness, dismisses him as “coarse and rude” (FH, 73), and wonders why he does not admire her like everybody else. Instead, she “had only a mortified sense that he was quite indifferent to what others praised her for” (FH, 122). The dismantling of acculturated femininity which produces the “inward revolution” (FH, 464) that transforms her from a “fine lady” to a noble woman occurs under the catalyst of Felix’s critical

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<sup>16</sup> *Felix Holt* was published in 1866, earlier than *Middlemarch* of 1871, but it deals with socio-historical events which take place immediately following the close of *Middlemarch*. Despite the order of the novels, Esther and Felix are evolved and improved versions of Rosamond’s worldliness and Lydgate’s “spots of commonness,” respectively. The later novel envisages a less than utopian outcome for a superficially similar couple.

<sup>17</sup> The example of this is Dorothea and Will in *Middlemarch*. Dorothea’s nobleness as well as beauty shapes a “dilettantish,” “amateurish” artist Will into a legislating politician. Will begins to be interested in politics because he

assaults on her subjectivity, but the disturbing of her “self-contentment” (*FH*, 125) also produces perceptions she voices at various points of the novel about the formation of women’s subjectivity in a misogynistic society:

“It is difficult for a woman ever to try to be anything good when she is not believed in — when it is always supposed that she must be contemptible.” (*FH*, 261)

“A woman can hardly ever choose in that way; she is dependent on what happens to her. She must take meaner things, because only meaner things are within her reach. ” (*FH*, 263)

“she herself had no sense of inferiority and just subjection when she was with Harold Transome” (*FH*, 406)<sup>18</sup>

“A woman must choose meaner things, because only meaner things are offered to her.” Her lot is made for her by the love she accepts. (*FH*, 407)

She is well aware of the kind of society she inhabits and blames society for narrowing down women’s lot. Prejudices against other races such as Jews, Orientals, and gypsies is so conspicuous and irrational that it can be directly identified as wrong, but as the narrator comments, less overt prejudice such as classism (and implicitly sexism) is so naturalized as to seem beyond criticism, even though it is identical in nature: “She [Esther] had a native capability for discerning that the sense of ranks and degrees has its repulsions corresponding to the repulsions dependent on difference of race and colour” (*FH*, 405-6). Her discontent at Felix’s scolding is not, then, merely offence at being undervalued, but also derives from his imperfect understanding of the kind of society within which women have to develop their subjectivity:

“But it was very narrow of you to judge me in that way, when my life had been so different from yours. I have great faults. I know I am selfish, and think too much of my own small tastes and too little of what affects others. But I am not stupid. I am not unfeeling. I can see what is better.” (*FH*, 261)

The awareness of what is better, set against a consciousness that female subjectivity is produced as an effect of particular social conditions, points towards a kind of critical utopianism, in so far as the situation could be changed if women were given the right to receive a proper education in a proper society.

Such potential is evidenced by the makeover of Esther’s moral sensibility, which, quite remarkably, occurs within a period of only nine months. Felix seems to underestimate her potential which flashes out now and then in her intuitive remarks, and which Harold sometimes notices and identifies as not lovable in a woman (*FH*, 384). Esther’s ironical definition of herself as a “lower kind of being” is also an articulation of the demand for a proper education, as thereby she indicates that it is nurture rather than nature that makes women “low.” Where Felix seems to share this

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wants to be close to Dorothea.

<sup>18</sup> That is, she recognizes and rejects the expectation that she should be inferior and subjected.

perspective it is apt to be qualified by association with conditional or concessive clauses, and so subordinated to his assumption that men are superior in judgment to women:

“There’s just the difference between us — I know why I don’t do those things. I distinctly see that I can do something better. I have other principles, and should sink myself by doing what I don’t recognize as the best.” ...

“I am a lower kind of being, and could not so easily sink myself.”

“If a woman really believes herself to be a lower kind of being, she should place herself in subjection: she should be ruled by the thoughts of her father or husband. If not, let her show her power of choosing something better. You must know that your father’s principles are greater and worthier than what guides your life. You have no reason but idle fancy and selfish inclination for shirking his teaching and giving your soul up to trifles.” (*FH*, 122-23, ellipses mine)

“Choosing something better” than “subjection” is an impossible task for women, whose subjectivity is imposed by a society which provides no alternative space. The positive effect of Felix’s criticism of Esther’s “littleness” is that it functions to stimulate and awaken her moral sense, so that an enhanced capacity for self-reflection and intersubjective relationships (evident, for example, in her warmer attitude toward her father (*FH*, 126) and her sympathetic dealing with Mrs. Transome) mark a change from egoism to altruism. Her awareness of this evolving moral sense is underpinned and affirmed by the fusion of character and narrator voices, as in the following example which moves deftly from direct thought to a mixture of reported thought, and, to varying degrees, a blurring of free indirect discourse and narrator voice:

[She thought,] “His behaviour to-day — to his mother and me too — I should call it the highest gentlemanliness, only in him it seems to be something deeper. But he has chosen an intolerable life; though I suppose, if I had a mind equal to his, and if he loved me very dearly, I should choose the same life.”

Esther felt that she had prefixed an impossible ‘if’ to that result. But now she had known Felix, her conception of what a happy love must be had become like a dissolving view, in which the once-clear images were gradually melting into new forms and new colours. The favourite Byronic heroes were beginning to look something like last night’s decorations seen in the sober dawn.... [I]f Felix Holt were to love her, her life would be exalted into something quite new — into a sort of difficult blessedness, such as one may imagine in beings who are conscious of painfully growing into the possession of higher powers. (*FH*, 228, ellipses mine)

As Booth comments, Esther is shown to have moved from Byron’s sensuality to Wordsworthian duty (1992a: 216). Thus Felix’s utopian impulses have borne fruit in the change in Esther’s attitude because women with such a developed moral sense have great potential for social impact. This potential is played out when she testifies at Felix’s trial, when what once lay deep and unplumbed within her wells up to subvert the function of women expected by society:

This bright, delicate, beautiful shaped thing that seemed most like a toy or ornament — some hand had touched the chords, and there came forth music that brought tears. Half a year before, Esther’s dread of being ridiculous spread over the surface of her life; but the depth below was sleeping. (*FH*, 449)

Esther abandons the role of passive woman and adopts that of active agent by telling the court how Felix felt and behaved just before the riot (*FH*, 448). Against the usual constraint Esther lets her voice be heard, transgresses (despite the possibility that she will be regarded as unwomanly and



dismissed), succeeds and gains agency, and contributes to mitigating Felix's punishment. Her action, within her society, is depicted as a form of peculiarly female agency, with the further implication, as Judith Wilt (62-63) comments, that as an answer to male violence women's influence "penetrates the law's justice and wins a pardon for a guilty person" (Wilt: 61). This seizure of agency, and her subsequent "deliberate choice" to refuse Harold and renounce the inheritance, confirm the possibility of female agency which Esther had earlier glimpsed in perceiving that her life was like a text: "Her life was a book which she seemed herself to be constructing — trying to make character clear before her, and looking into the ways of destiny" (*FH*, 383). She is in fact an agent and can make choices, as an author telling stories, shaping their courses and contents.

*Felix Holt* in several ways makes such links between represented behaviours and literary conventions. Significantly, I suggest, much of the flirtatious communication between Esther and Harold during her stay at Transome Court is overtly encoded as a version of literary convention. For example, the elaborate dialogue which culminates in Harold's disclosure of his former wife's slave status and the shattering of Esther's Byronic notion of Orientalism (*FH*, 420-21) had pivoted on notions of *genre*:

[Harold] "Well, I am conscious of not having those severe virtues that you have been praising."  
 "That is true. You are quite in another *genre*."  
 "A woman would not find me a tragic hero."  
 "O, no! She must dress for genteel comedy." ...  
 "Confess that you are disgusted by my want of romance."  
 "I shall not confess to being disgusted. I shall ask you to confess that you are not a romantic figure."  
 (*FH*, 420, ellipsis mine)

The flippancy and superficiality deftly set the scene for Harold's shocking revelation that he had bought his wife, but the allusions to genres also connect with a metafictional strain that runs through the novel and, it can be argued, points both to codes of behavior of a more deeply humanistic nature than those enabled by conventions and to the conventionality of the novel's pivotal fictive cliché, which lies underneath their exchange, unremarked by either character — the inheritance plot.

By its grounding principle of a sudden change in position and fortune, often projecting the worthy abject into states of well-being and economic power, the inheritance plot functions as an element that subverts existing values of social hierarchy and inverts accepted ideas. The associations of higher social classes with fortune and position and lower class people with ignorance and lawlessness are based on the assumption that fortune and position are thought to be innate and interrelated. Social hierarchies are formed over time, as the prestige attached to hierarchy is tied to higher ranks. However, the inheritance plot of *Felix Holt* subverts the notion of inherent hierarchy and the inherent attributes of social rank by making illegitimate Harold inherit

the estate and retain the Transome title, while the legitimate heir, Esther, renounces her position and fortune and assumes agency by choosing to become the wife of a poor working man. Esther's act of renunciation also shows that the possession of property does in itself signify a higher class. By making Harold inheritor of the Transome title and estate, the novel shows the discrepancy between appearance and true value. Gallagher argues that by showing how values attached to certain social positions are not natural, but socially formulated, Eliot reveals the necessary gap between culture and society: "the gap created is really a magnetic field across which culture and society hold one another in a state of static tension precisely because neither can claim any grounding in nature" (1985: 261).

Thus Esther, the apparently lower class Dissenter's daughter who is actually high born, becomes a lady overnight, but renounces her position and fortune and chooses to remain in the lower class. Harold is deemed to be aristocratic because his family occupies the Transome estate, but his forebears have purchased the property and appropriated the name, so according to the inheritance law, as Jermyn informs him, "the settlement of the estate made in 1729 ... renders your father's title and your own title to the family estates utterly worthless as soon as the true claimant is made aware of his right" (*FH*, 331). Harold's claim to aristocracy is doubly false because he is also not a legitimate "Transome" but the product of his mother's adultery with Jermyn, the commercial class lawyer. That Harold's ownership of the estate and title is only nominal thus shows the gap between representation and reality. The hierarchical values of rank and position are also subverted by the fact that the working class man Felix is much nobler than the "aristocratic" Harold, a comparison presented through Esther's comparison of the two: "there was a light in which he [Harold] was vulgar compared with Felix. Felix had ideas and motives which she did not believe that Harold could understand" (*FH*, 406). As Peter Coveney comments, the purpose of the legal plot is to show how Esther, who yearned for an aristocratic utopia where fortune and position are guaranteed, refuses to remain in the aristocracy and returns to rough lower world of working men ("A Note on the Law of Entail in the Plot of 'Felix Holt,' " 637). He emphasizes that the reason she chooses the "rougher, commoner world" is what *Felix Holt* is about. As Paxton comments, the novel represents "[t]he potentially radical consequences of Esther's choice to resist the conventional marriage of convenience and upward mobility ... her resistance to the status quo" (168).

The factitiousness of the inheritance plot is also implied in the scene, again mingling narrator voice and free indirect discourse, in which Esther articulates the perception that Harold's "love ... gave an air of mediocrity to all her prospects" (*FH*, 407). The demise of her "day-dreams" finds an analogy in another textual form:

She would not have been able perhaps to define this impression; but somehow or other by this elevation of fortune it seemed that the higher ambition which had begun to spring in her was for ever nullified. All life seemed cheapened; as it might seem to a young student who, having believed that to gain a certain degree he must write a thesis in which he would bring his powers to bear with memorable effect, suddenly ascertained that no thesis was expected, but the sum (in English money) of twenty-seven pounds ten shillings and sixpence. (*FH*, 407).

The ridiculous over-specification of the precise amount to be paid renders painfully comical Esther's disillusionment with the life of high rank and fortune. If the means is not genuine, the end is not worth having, but is rather ludicrous and risible. On the other hand, Harold regards Esther as an object to conquer, disapproving of any tendency in her to think independently or desire her own agency, or, in other words, to "bring [her own] powers to bear with memorable effect."

Many commentators (see, for example, Lesjak 1996) condemn Esther's submission to Felix, albeit voluntary, but as Paxton argues, she submits to the principle of love and not that of male domination (1996: 168). Esther's willing submission is indicated in her assumption of inferiority — "I wish to do what you think it will be right to do" (*FH*, 474); "I am weak — my husband must be greater and nobler than I am" (*FH*, 475) — whereby she seems to abandon her agency and leave choice to Felix. But her stance is also, if not rather, Eliot's censure of a society that does not prepare women to be independent agents by providing spaces other than domesticity and helper. Esther's subjection is internalized because it is voluntary, and there seems some plausibility in Lesjak's argument that it is somewhat worse than apparent colonization because, as the colonized, Esther's consciousness is subordinated to Felix's and hence the colonizer does not need to exert any external force (1996: 93). However, there are also good grounds for arguing that their relationship in marriage is not that of the colonizer/colonized, but that of "partnership" (Paxton 1991: 166) and "mutual submission" (Paxton 1991: 170). By this gradual amelioration, starting from the family and domestic stage, women can, by analogy, influence politics in the wider world, as indeed in the case of Romola, who becomes head of a household rather than of a wider social domain. As Paxton argues, by the close Felix does not regard Esther as a secondary being, but rather worries about being a sleek dog (*FH*, 478) under Esther's nurture. Therefore, it is more reasonable to regard their relationship as negotiated, mutual submission and recognize the limitation imposed on women as a result of improper education and social acculturation. In order to function women need male mediators who are more interactively exposed to social ethos and process. Esther is a good example of the result of education by such a mentor as Felix with access to education and social disputation. By analogy, working men also need good representatives to help educate them and improve their lives. Bonnie Zimmerman also comments that the arguably misogynistic closure of the novel is Eliot's reflection of a realistic and practical apprehension that women and working-class people do not independently develop intelligence and morality without

the aid of mentors, and that it is also a long, time-consuming process. Through Felix, Eliot expresses her fear that seventy percent of ignorant people can rule the intelligent thirty percent of wise people if the former are allowed suffrage (1979: 448). The function of human agency within the progress of history is important in Felix's argument that working men are not yet ready for enfranchisement. In fact, it is because of this belief that he also argues that the quality of human life should be improved before people can properly exercise agency.

## Conclusion

*Felix Holt* is primarily a critique of dystopian elements of English society, but suggests elements of transformative utopianism through its three kinds of limited radicalism: Felix's conservative radicalism, Esther's feminine radicalism, and Harold's nominal radicalism. As the novel's Epilogue settles Treby Magna into historical process, recording departures and changes, and even in a small way distributing rewards and punishments, closure is framed by the idyll of Felix and Esther's marriage, and the unidentified place of their exile presages a utopian state. Here women's voices are equally heard, as Felix and Esther have become equal partners, rather than living a version of a colonizer/colonized, master/slave relationship. Here, too, is a place where science and knowledge are advanced untainted by materialism or mammonism, as suggested by the reference to the next generation with which the novel concludes: young Felix has more science, but not much more money than his father (*FH*, 478). The narrator's wry speculation about whether the parish of Treby Magna has progressed towards a utopian state (where "the farmers are all public-spirited, the shopkeepers nobly independent, the Sproxton men entirely sober and judicious, the Dissenters quite without narrowness or asperity in religion and politics, and the publicans all fit ... to be the friends of an apostle" (*FH*, 477)) indicates that systemic dystopian elements of English society will continue to push Utopists such as Felix into marginality and exile, compelling them to seek Utopia somewhere else.

The point about Utopia is that it does not exist here and now. Hence Hollis (2001a: 172) comments that Felix's failure is that he does not make the world different. The narrator's concluding comments that "North Loamshire does not yet return a Radical candidate" and young Felix has more knowledge, but not much money, are reminders that redistribution of power and wealth has not happened. Felix's reduction from the hero he wanted to be is suggested by his abandonment of his ascetic principles to the extent that he worries about becoming a "sleek dog" within the ambience of Esther's beneficence. But perhaps this finally says no more than that Felix, too, has settled into historical process. Great change takes longer than one generation. The lending library, a facility suggestive of the Mechanics Institute, is Felix's endeavor to pursue his vision, his

utopian dream of educating working men and narrowing the gap of privilege between classes. In this way he is still contributing towards the ongoing process of achieving utopia.

In Chapter VII I will further examine (among other issues) a strand shared by *Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch*, the question of how women's status and voice may impact on society, whether to its betterment, as in the cases of Esther and Dorothea, or more negatively, as in the extreme case of Rosamond, whose smallness of being contributes substantially to the destruction of Lydgate's utopian dreams. Women like Rosamond are the product of a dystopian society, so broadening their vision through education is a utopian project. An aspect of Felix's utopian radicalism lies in his attempt to rectify the beautiful and worldly through scolding rather than through loving indulgence. Lydgate's error is to choose the feminine specimen most conforming with his society's expectation of femininity, rather than the more intellectually restless Dorothea. Eliot represents women's abjection as a vicious cycle, a product not of women's nature but of social acculturation that constructs and constrains female subjectivity. The novel suggests that the cycle should be broken by education, and depicts Felix's informal "schooling" of Esther as a small example of possibility.

## CHAPTER VII

### The Pursuit of What Is Good: Utopian Impulses in *Middlemarch*

*Middlemarch*, centering on society and politics, suggests that if England is to further the progress made across the middle of the nineteenth century, radical changes will have to be made. Offering in its opening sentence the theme of “the history of man ... under the varying experiments of Time” (*M*, 3), the novel investigates how human aspirations are frustrated or achieved depending on the chronotope in which they are located. Published between 1871 and 1872 and set between September 1829 and April 1832, in the years immediately preceding the First Reform Bill (1832), *Middlemarch* presented its contemporary readers with a perspective removed by forty years, although a simply defamiliarized setting is both offered and resisted by such (at times wryly ironical) narratorial comments as, “in those days the world in general was more ignorant of good and evil by forty years than it is at present” (*M*, 188) or “when the habits of the different ranks were less blent than now” (*M*, 432). The hindsight of those forty years allows readers to examine the utopian endeavors of key characters — Dorothea Brooke/Casaubon, Tertius Lydgate, and Will Ladislaw — in the context of potential transformative social events such as Catholic emancipation (1829), the death of George IV (1830), the dissolution of Parliament and the general election of 1831, cholera in 1832, machine-breaking and rick-burning, the construction of railways, and the lead-up to the First Reform Bill (June 1832). Reminded both of significant historical events and their distance from them, readers are positioned to see clearly the struggle of characters to make a better society, striving for agency and a capacity for choice, sometimes with the whole of society placed in opposition to them.

Located in the Midlands, Middlemarch is a microcosm of society where classism, racism, and sexism are the prevalent ethos, but at the same time the novel itself looks toward a time when the unequivocal distinctions of class and rank are to be blended in the process of history. The interdependence of individual and social life is invoked by employing as teleology metaphors of a web and the railway. The narrator thus assumes the role of scientific investigator: “I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web” (*M*, 141). As J. Hillis Miller comments, Middlemarch society is a part to whole, a sample to the whole cloth (1975: 126), a study of a form of provincial life which as metonymy or synecdoche represents the whole of England: “not only in the Midland but in the Middle of the world”

(Beer: 173).<sup>1</sup> Utopian possibilities are implicit in the metaphors of web (the Midlands as a centre for textile production) and railway (whose construction is begun and completed in the course of the novel), which figure a change of life in England from the rigid distinctions of class and rank to interdependence and a nation as a single geographical whole (Bonaparte 1998: xxviii).

*Middlemarch* anticipates that the only means of progress can be changes in the form of Reform. *Middlemarch* is regarded as “the condition-of-England novel” (Bonaparte 1981: 108), decrying the ills of industrial society and envisaging the progress of civilization — civilization as an army on the march (Bonaparte 1998: xxxii). The novel, in the spirit of critical utopia, is Eliot’s assessment of her age and its place in human progress. Compared with France, which is advancing so rapidly — “in the next century” (*M*, 382), as the admittedly unreliable Mr. Brooke says — England finds itself “lagging behind” (*M*, 382), no further along than the middle of the march. Yet, that a march as an ongoing process, not a static point, is also suggested.

The novel is mainly composed of two stories of failed attempts to construct a utopian society: one, represented by the female protagonist Dorothea Brooke, conceives a utopian world grounded in religious premises; and the other, represented by the ambitious young physician Tertius Lydgate, embraces science as the means to human progress. These are in turn subsumed into a third, more humanistic, attempt to build an ideal society, represented by Will Ladislaw, now through politics inspired by art. The former two fail because of an interaction between the dystopian elements of the society they inhabit and their own innate “follies” — Dorothea’s “myopia” (her hasty trust (e.g., *M*, 26), “her usual tendency to over-estimate the good in others” (*M*, 798), and even “blindness” (*M*, 372)) and Lydgate’s “spots of commonness,” (“personal pride and unreflecting egoism” (*M*, 349)). Underlying the contrast is a dialogical paradox, which the narrator articulates within such contradictory comments as, “There is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it” (*M*, 838), and “It always remains true that if we had been greater, circumstance would have been less strong against us” (*M*, 587). As the epigraph to Chapter 61 expresses it, “inconsistencies cannot both be right, but imputed to man they may both be true” (*M*, 612, citing Johnson’s *Rasselas*). The novel is polyphonic in nature, since the stories of the three protagonists are intertwined and influence one another in a thematic convergence, and it employs a polyphonic discourse, with a narratorial range from an assumed historian’s role to biting sarcasm, with diverse focalizing characters (not only the principal three), and a frequent use of FID to move in and out of a focalizing

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the town plays on kinds of “middles”: as the middle of a *march*, or ‘territory’ (OED, *March* sb.<sup>3</sup> b.), it connotes centrality; as the middle of a *march*, or ‘forward movement, of time, events, population, knowledge’ (OED, *March* sb.<sup>4</sup> 2.), it denotes a state of transition, or a stage in the process of transition. Either way, it functions as a metonymy for the wider world.

character's consciousness in order to establish multiple points of view and hence to expose and critique the attitudes of those focalizing characters (compare Ashton, xvii).

By such means, *Middlemarch* examines the role played by human agency in shaping the lives of individuals and possible courses of action. It investigates the nature of abjection and transgression, and how transgression fails as a transformative force for Dorothea and Lydgate, whereas in Ladislaw's case transgression succeeds in enabling the once abjected figure to gain agency and participate in making history and advancing social progress. As a woman, Dorothea is not allowed agency and she has only a narrow choice of becoming a wife and mother; Lydgate does have agency but, losing it, is left with no choice and forced to compromise his dream; but Will gains agency and chooses to participate in the process of reform from his abjected status. The three protagonists are always implicitly abjected figures because they are all newcomers and outsiders in Middlemarch: when the novel begins, Dorothea has been living in Middlemarch for a year, following her Puritanical English and Swiss education; Lydgate studied in London, Edinburgh, and Paris; and Ladislaw is a literal "foreigner," of Polish (-Jewish) descent. Their ideas clash with those of Middlemarch society because they bring different perspectives due to their contact with a culture different from that of Middlemarch. By the end of the novel they all have been expelled from the Middlemarch society that regards them as abject: Dorothea and Will move to London, and Lydgate alternates between London and a Continental bathing-place, all frustrated with their aspirations to found some elements of a utopian society in Middlemarch. Dorothea's dream is reduced to the second-hand channel of wife and mother; Lydgate looks after rich patients in a resort in an abandonment of his research, a slave to Mammonism and his wife, considering himself to be a failure; and Will participates in the passing of the First Reform Bill, which by making drastic changes to the English franchise laws contributes to the construction of a better England.<sup>2</sup>

The novel's range of represented perspectives yields various teleologies adumbrated by individual characters, varying not just because of individual circumstances but also because of

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<sup>2</sup> Even though the First Reform Bill (1832) rectified many absurdities in the existing law, it largely excludes the enfranchisement of women and the working class. According to Steedman, the First Reform Bill achieved the political incorporation of the heads of middle-class households. The franchise was extended to some of the urban middle-classes (those whose property was valued for rating purposes at £10 per annum — "ten-pound householders" (*M*, 499)). Rosamond foreshadows the larger exclusions and stratification that shape British political life between 1832 and 1867, a period in which, despite enfranchisement of the middle classes, a majority of the House of Commons will come from landed families until the very end of the century. Women had never voted in Parliamentary elections, but the 1832 Act made the first explicit exclusion of them by its limit of the franchise to "male persons," the first of many overt and legal exclusions made by Parliament between 1832 and 1867. The second effect of the Act of 1832, which was symbolic as well as political, was the way it profoundly altered how people saw and understood the social structure of the society they live in. The Act implicitly defined all those who were not £10 householders as working-class; and all those who were, as middle-class. These terms efface enormous differences in wealth and status.... The English working class was certainly made in the long years before 1832 ... but it was made after 1832 as well, in the oppositions and exclusions set in place by the Reform Act (4-5).



differing degrees of egoism and altruism. The narrative process involved is adroitly illustrated by the “scientific” metaphor of the pier-glass which opens Chapter 27, in which the courtship of Lydgate and Rosamond begins:

Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection. These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent. (*M*, 264)

The parable illustrates that individuals as subjects perceive the world in a self-centered way, as the scratches function as an analogy with the random elements of the environment or society, and the candle denotes the perceiving self which organizes those elements into a pattern.

Narrative strategies of FID and focalization thus mediate how the imagination works on the matter of the world and orders it in line with the egoism or altruism of the perceiver. The crucial relevance of this passage to the novel in general and individual characters in particular is that it enables various consciousnesses to be felt. What the novel does by way of FID and a variety of focalizers is to present various points of view and to show largely two kinds of characters: those who regard themselves as the center of the world and those who regard others’ consciousnesses, and perceive others not as object but as subject. In order to understand others, their points of view, their problems, “that roar which lies on the other side of silence” (*M*, 194), we need imagination. As Catherine Waters points out, “imagination is valued ... for its role in promoting sympathetic feeling and benevolent action” (1984: 234). Imagination is a very important concept in Eliot’s work because it underlies many concepts such as sympathy, altruism, egoism, philanthropy, Philistinism, worldliness, as well as the very means of pursuing utopian dreams (for Dorothea, altruism ‘by imagining other people’s lives’; science by inference in Lydgate’s “imagination that reveals subtle actions inaccessible by any sort of lens” (*M*, 164); and the conception of a better state of human life and progress as conceived by Ladislaw’s artist’s imagination). Those who can imagine what is not real and visible can understand other people’s plights rather than satisfy their own mundane practical needs. Imagination is very important in the construction of utopia in that it can “reconceive the world” and suggest a better world. As Bonaparte comments, it can create new universes. If the conceptual world has crumbled it should be reconstructed and only through imagination is it possible to reconstruct those ideal world — visions, ideas, etc., “those possibilities, that universe of the ideal, in whose likeness it could be shaped” (1998: xxii).

Almost every character in *Middlemarch* pursues “what is good,” yet the notion of “what is good” varies depending on the individual’s perception. Characters can be largely divided into two

categories: altruists and egoists. The pier-glass metaphor crucially suggests how “other-regarding” altruists switch their perspectives to other people’s views and interests, while the “self-regarding” egoists, confined to their own self-centered position, perceive others to serve their selfish purposes. Pursuing what is good in an altruistic way is a utopian impulse, since egoism hurts other people and produces abjection, while altruism, in the process of helping other people, eventually helps altruists themselves. The novel’s employment of polyfocalization engages readers in the represented consciousnesses of other people, while FID enables a simultaneous distancing from and commentary on those consciousnesses. As the narrator concludes, “It is a narrow mind which cannot look at a subject from various points of view” (*M*, 66). Middlemarch society itself does not pay attention to the perspectives and ideas of newcomers or outsiders, and the society can therefore be viewed as a personification of an egoist which allows no space for progress. *Middlemarch* is a critique of dystopian elements of English society that frustrates utopian impulses of those altruistic individuals and suggests the possibility of the construction of utopia by way of constant political reform. It shows regret for the loss of individual potential in the name of a tradition which is merely misogyny, classism, and racism, where women’s agency is ignored and the advanced ideas of newcomers, essential for progress, are discarded. In *Middlemarch*, as Graver points out, Eliot shows “how social customs and institutions arrest, if they do not override, individual and social development” (215).

Eliot’s critique mainly concerns the victory or mastery of the egoists over the altruists. Dorothea compares her pain when she misunderstands the relationship between Will and Rosamond, with that of the mother’s whose baby is divided into two, which symbolizes her sense of pain over Will’s betrayal:

There were two images — two living forms that tore her heart in two, as if it had been the heart of a mother who seems to see her child divided by the sword, and presses one bleeding half to her breast while her gaze goes forth in agony towards the half which is carried away by the lying woman that has never known the mother’s pang. (*M*, 786)

As Paxton points out, by this Eliot demonstrates the injustice felt by the altruist with the egotist. However, Dorothea transcends the selfish desire and pain and turns it into altruistic force because “It was not in [her] nature ... to sit ... in the besotted misery of a consciousness that only sees another’s lot as an accident of its own” (*M*, 787). Hence she suppresses her own desires and thinks about the needs of others. Eliot’s narrator is acutely aware that a developed, humanistic self has completed a transition from the infantile solipsism which perceives everything as “accidents” of its own being to mature altruism: “We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves” (*M*, 211). At the close of this episode, Dorothea’s second experience of “the dark night of the soul,” she opens the curtains

“and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond, outside the entrance-gates” (M, 788). This is a powerfully metonymic moment, a physical, mental and spiritual reaching out beyond the confines of the self and moving through a glimpse of distant, anonymous figures in the landscape to an epiphanic apprehension of the world which raises her beyond the despair caused by misunderstanding the relationship between Rosamond and Will:

On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving — perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining. (M, 788)

Graver comments that “this awakening leads to the self-subduing act of fellowship” that brings her into communion with Rosamond and Lydgate, leading in turn to the restoration of her faith in Will (224). What Eliot suggests is that altruism is the ultimate good to transform the world and make it a better place in which to live, since it saves everybody from misery. The egoistic/solipsistic figures remain abjected, while altruistic figures transcend their abjection and find agency, however limited it is.

As remarked above, utopian ideals are pursued in *Middlemarch* through varied attributes: ‘goodness’ pursued through religion or philosophy, ‘truth’ through science or study, and ‘beauty’ through art and politics.<sup>3</sup> The combination or harmony of these three attributes makes human life perfectible; however, as Iris Murdoch insists, the sovereignty of ‘goodness’ over the other concepts should be recognized (6). As the sovereign notion, goodness can contain the other two. That is, truth and beauty should be subsumed under goodness because human beings are the supreme idea and to achieve their necessary goals the other two attributes should be used as a means to achieve goodness. As will be discussed below, Dorothea argues with Will that the expense of art that excludes poor people from enjoying it gives her pause, whereas Will only enjoys art as ‘what is beautiful’ without thinking about other people’s misery. However, the pursuit of what is good through truth and beauty loses its meaning if it does not contribute to the good of the human condition. (Similarly, the point of Dorothea’s criticism of Mr. Brooke is that he talks about politics and Parliament but is not interested in the condition of his land and laborers.) The three main approaches to utopian society are constructed through the dialogue between Dorothea and Will, representing ‘goodness’ and ‘beauty,’ respectively; the relationship between Dorothea and Casaubon; and that of Dorothea and Lydgate, the latter representing ‘truth.’ The interrelationship amongst these three attributes shows their traits and the reason why

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<sup>3</sup> See Aristotle’s *Poetics* for a source note on this trinity of ideas.

‘goodness’ and ‘truth,’ that is, religion and science, fail to instantiate their utopian vision, in contrast with art, and later politics.

The first utopian impulse is manifested primarily by Dorothea’s pursuit of what is good through a self-renouncing religious faith focused on goodness and altruism. Her ideal of altruism, that is, to improve the lives of others, is compelled to seek an oblique outlet and to stumble into failure or compromise because of the social constraints that do not allow women to use their full potential. She is another example of the Dostoevskian hero, since she has different ideas from the rest of the society she lives in and is consequently made abject and compromised. Even before she is introduced, the novel’s opening meditation on St. Theresa’s unknown counterparts offers the powerful, proleptic metaphor of the “cygnet ... among the ducklings in the brown pond” (*M*, 4), which “never finds the living stream in fellowship with its own oary-footed kind” (*M*, 4). Before readers meet Dorothea, she is already the cygnet as ugly duckling, doomed to oblivion by a social context lacking a “coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul” (*M*, 3).

The second utopian impulse lies with Tertius Lydgate, who pursues what is good through a quest for truth by way of medical science. His dream is to contribute to the good of the world by renovating the medical system in Middlemarch society and contributing to the betterment of the world by research. His dream fails for two main reasons: first, because he chooses his spouse based on his patriarchal notion of women; and second, because society is not capable of understanding and tolerating his difference, in particular his advanced and empirical approach to his profession. In tracing the endeavors and failure of yet another Dostoevskian hero, Eliot also points out that the positivist and materialist approach inherent in scientific research has significant weaknesses as a foundation for building a better society.

The third utopian impulse comes from Will Ladislav, who is an artist/poet, “an unacknowledged legislator,” and later becomes a literal legislator of the nation, “an ardent public man” (*M*, 836). A commonality between the utopian desires of Will and Dorothea is the centrality of beauty — he pursuing what is good through the beauty of art, and she wishing to make everybody’s life “beautiful.” For all his vision and imagination as an artist, Will is sufficiently practical to participate in the process of making the nation progressive, by his active support for the making of the First Reform Bill.

Eliot shows the interrelationship among those three approaches by from time to time engaging the representative characters dialogically, and thereby suggests that the realization of utopia depends on a politics which envisions and imagines a better state of the human condition through social improvement and education. If Middlemarch society had been more open to

differences, it could have used the potentials of Dorothea, Lydgate, and Will. Through their failures Eliot poses a significant question: what has Middlemarch gained by expelling those aspiring young souls? It is clear that what Middlemarch does is abolish 'dirt' — abjected figures (in the Kristevan sense of abjection) — in order to make itself clean. As with so many social abjects, however, — it is they who have the potential to produce an advanced and progressive society. Women's potential, advanced scientific knowledge with altruistic aims, and the potential for much needed political reform are lost and as a result Middlemarch remains backward and stagnant. The novel thus pivots on a critique of Middlemarch's dystopian elements, and, further, those of England as a whole.

### **Dorothea's Utopian Dreams — A Religious Base for the Pursuit of the Good**

Even though she has beauty, wealth and position, Dorothea is placed on the margin of society, partly because she is a newcomer and social outsider, but principally because her ideas are too different to allow her to be easily assimilated like her sister Celia. Other characters formulate a range of epithets which reflect her difference from the socially prescribed female subjectivity: she is "Quixotic" (*M*, 421, 763), socially distanced like a queen (*M*, 536, 821, etc.), "a sort of Christian Antigone" (*M*, 190), "an Aeolian harp" (*M*, 80, 209), and "the reclining Ariadne" (*M*, 188). Even her acknowledged superiority — she is "too unlike other women for them to be compared with her" (*M*, 435) — constitutes her as a *déclassé* member of society.

Dorothea's failure is foreshadowed early in the novel by two metonymies — the Maltese puppy she refuses as a proffered gift, and her myopia. When her then suitor, Sir James Chettam, offers her the puppy, she rejects it because its sole purpose for existence is to be a pet and such creatures "are too helpless: their lives are too frail" (*M*, 30). The puppy functions as a metonym for women's function and status in society, which defines them as likewise "helpless" and "parasitic," and hence anticipates Dorothea's failure to establish a public role for herself. Second, her myopia (*M*, 30, 36), or "blindness" (*M*, 372), is metonymic of her failure to see the world or her surrounding environment in the same way as others, with a resultant lack of communication and understanding. Celia comments that Dorothea always sees what nobody sees, but she never sees what is quite plain (*M*, 36). Even though she aspires to improve other people's lives, she does not interpret them properly because of her short-sightedness, and hence is prone to an over-hasty trust in people (*M*, 26, e.g.) and an over-estimation of the good in others (*M*, 798). By these two metonymies Eliot shows that Dorothea's altruism cannot be accommodated in society, partly because she is a woman, and partly because of occasional slippages in judgement due to her lack of 'sight.' On the other hand, her belief in Will and Lydgate — both altruistic, outsider

heroes marginalized because of social prejudices against their ability and superiority — is clear-sighted and justified, and helps them shape their lives.

Dorothea's own underlying altruistic principle in life is expressed in her words, "What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult to each other?" (*M*, 733-34), which coincides with Suvin's claim that utopia is a less difficult state of life (1). She later says, "How can we live and think that any one has trouble — piercing trouble — and we could help them, and never try?" (*M*, 795). Throughout the novel Dorothea is in search of what she can do for others to "make other people's lives better to them" (*M*, 765): "What could she do, what ought she to do?" (*M*, 27); "Think what I can do" (*M*, 593); "I have very little to do" (*M*, 763); "What should I do?" (*M*, 788); "What was to be done?" (*M*, 805); and "If I can do anything" (*M*, 806).

Because she is not moulded into the prescribed femininity of the time, Dorothea, like Dostoevsky's outsider hero, is a representative of an "accidental tribe." Not anchored within a particular cultural tradition, she is a rare woman who knows many passages of Pascal's *Pensées* and Jeremy Taylor by heart (*M*, 8). In contrast, Celia belongs to a different cultural tradition. "Amiable and innocent-looking" (*M*, 9), she represents a more traditional view of the role of women and is regarded as more "knowing and worldly-wise" than Dorothea, who is "too unusual and striking" (*M*, 9), like her religion. Celia is a character who has exactly the opposite view on what is good to that held by Dorothea. She views her sister as the "dangerous part of the family machinery" (*M*, 815), and to Celia Dorothea is always wrong, as she says, "you always were wrong; only I can't help loving you" (*M*, 821). To her Dorothea has "a wrong notion in [her] head as usual" (*M*, 489).

For Dorothea an intention to do good becomes an idea-force, defining and distorting her consciousness and her life. The idea leads an independent life in her consciousness. Although she is a female whose subjectivity is socially shaped, Dorothea is different from other women in her concern for the human lot rather than for her own physical materiality. Her desire is to improve other people's lives and thereby lead a meaningful life — "a grand life here — now — in England" (*M*, 29). Her desire to improve the cottages on her uncle's estate (*M*, 11, 29, 31) is an endeavor to improve other people's lives. She comments: "I think we deserve to be beaten out of our beautiful houses with a scourge of small cords — all of us who let tenants live in such sties as we see round us.<sup>4</sup> Life in cottages might be happier than ours, if they were real houses fit for human beings from whom we expect duties and affections" (*M*, 31). At one point she says to Celia of her utopian plans:

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<sup>4</sup> The quotation from John 2:15 (Christ driving the merchants and money-changers from the temple) reflects Dorothea's religious education and sensibility, but the note of apostolic communism struck by her application of it here underpins the utopian idealism which inspires her cottage scheme.

“I have delightful plans. I should like to take a great deal of land, and drain it, and make a little colony,<sup>5</sup> where everybody should work, and all the work should be done well. I should know every one of the people and be their friend. I am going to have great consultations with Mr. Garth: he can tell me almost everything I want to know.” (*M*, 550)

Her model village suggests an ideal communal life where interdependence is recognized and co-operation prevails, as Bonaparte comments (1998: xxviii). Here Dorothea indirectly criticizes the exploitation of hierarchical society where lower class people are excluded from basic goodness of life such as housing, while they are exploited for their labor. There is a communistic voice in her remarks on shared labor and shared property, the ideal communist utopia. Her mention of getting help from Mr. Garth indicates that Dorothea shares her utopian dream with him. Garth once expresses altruistic wishes similar to hers:

“it’s a fine thing to come to a man when he’s seen into the nature of business; to have a chance of getting a bit of the country into good fettle, as they say, and putting men into the right way with their farming, and getting a bit of good contriving and solid building done — that those who are living and those who come after will be the better for. I’d sooner have it than a fortune. I hold it the most honourable work that is.” (*M*, 403)

In dreaming of a better world by constructing better buildings, Caleb Garth is identified as another character in the novel who pursues what is good. In his case, ‘goodness’ is represented by “business” (“his virtual divinities were good practical schemes, accurate work, and the faithful completion of undertakings” (*M*, 251)), which he placed before profits. By valuing “the young ones’ ... claim on the old to help them forward” (*M*, 563), he shows a desire to make the future a better world than the present. His altruistic ‘business’ has the same aspiration as Dorothea’s philanthropism. A sensitive and upright person, when he discovers Bulstrode’s past from Raffles he refuses to work for him, renouncing the benefits he could derive if he were more flexible. His only fear is to hurt other people. He and Dorothea are the most genuinely honest and ethical people in the novel, straightforward and true Christians in the spirit of “Love Thy Neighbor.”

The obvious antithesis to the idealists is Bulstrode, whose narrow, apocalyptic view of the world is overtly set against the utopian:

He was a simply a man whose desires had been stronger than his theoretic beliefs, and who had gradually explained the gratification of his desires into satisfactory agreement with those beliefs. If this be hypocrisy, it is a process which shows itself occasionally in us all ... whether we believe in the future perfection of our race or in the nearest date fixed for the end of the world. (*M*, 619, ellipsis mine)

But this is not the final word here, as the slipping between narration and FID in the extended analysis of Bulstrode’s motives in this chapter operates with devastating effect. The next paragraph slips into FID, exposing Bulstrode’s deeply hypocritical mode of thinking. Returning to his habitual rationalization of his motives by giving them the name of “God’s cause” (*M*, 619)

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<sup>5</sup> The word *colony* is used to mean ‘a farm, estate in the country; a rural settlement’ (*OED*, definition I.1), not in the sense of ‘settlement in a new country, a community subject to or connected with their parent state.’

— “divine glory” (*M*, 519, 689), “a providential thing” (*M*, 522), “the divine scheme” (*M*, 525), “Providence” (*M*, 689, 697, 704, 709, 717), “the will of God” (*M*, 697), a belief that he does everything “for God’s sake” (*M*, 617) — the paragraph unfolds an exposure of a contempt for humanity as Bulstrode’s “neighbors” turn out to be dismissed by him as “God’s enemies, who were to be used merely as instruments, and whom it would be well if possible to keep out of money and consequent influence” (*M*, 619). As Bulstrode’s voice takes over, the narrator’s initial sympathy for human weakness is gradually withdrawn and the crux of the issue is identified as a failure in intersubjectivity:

There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men. (*M*, 619)

The “habit of fellow-feeling,” or living intersubjectively, motivates Dorothea. During an early conversational exchange with Will, however, a discussion about some cameos she has purchased for Celia pivots on the long-standing debate over the relationship of art and morality, and exposes limitations in the capacity of both religion and art to instantiate utopia. Will objects to Dorothea’s belittlement of cameos as not “a great object of life” (*M*, 219):

“I fear you are a heretic about art generally. How is that? I should have expected you to be very sensitive to the beautiful everywhere.”

“I suppose I am dull about many things,” said Dorothea, simply. “I should like to make life beautiful — I mean everybody’s life. And then all this immense expense of art, that seems somehow to lie outside life and make it no better for the world, pains one. It spoils my enjoyment of anything when I am made to think that most people are shut out from it.”

“I call that the fanaticism of sympathy,” said Will, impetuously. “You might say the same of landscape, of poetry, of all refinement. If you carried it out you ought to be miserable in your own goodness, and turn evil that you might have no advantage over others. The best piety is to enjoy — when you can. You are doing the most then to save the earth’s character as an agreeable planet. And enjoyment radiates. It is of no use to try and take care of all the world; that is being taken care of when you feel delight — in art or in anything else. Would you turn all the youth of the world into a tragic chorus, wailing and moralizing over misery? I suspect that you have some false belief in the virtues of misery, and want to make your life a martyrdom.” (*M*, 219-20)

Will’s equation of Dorothea’s urge for “fellow-feeling” with “fanaticism of sympathy” points to a gap between their utopian dreams at this time. What the gap discloses is the absence of a higher order thinking which spans the two positions in this dialogue — in other words, a common principle underlying both “beautiful action” and “beautiful creation.” Eliot had formulated this principle several years earlier in her essay, “John Ruskin’s *Modern Painters*, Vol. III” (1856):

The fundamental principles of all just thought and beautiful action or creation are the same, and in making clear to ourselves what is best and noblest in art, we are making clear to ourselves what is best and noblest in morals; in learning how to estimate the artistic products of a particular age according to the mental attitude and external life of that age, we are widening our sympathy and deepening the basis of our tolerance and charity. (*Selected Critical Writings*, 247-48)

Dorothea’s sense of the confined nature of most lives and her concern with saving people from their misery leads her to conclude that art does not function to make the world a better place.



Her stoic voice contrasts with what seems here to be an epicurean voice in Will, and the sense of “what is best and noblest in morals” is too weighty to be sustained by Will’s “enjoyment radiates.” Will’s “epicurean indulgence,” exhibiting “the immorality of the dilettante’s detachment” (Waters 1984: 244), is contrasted with Dorothea’s altruistic willingness to help others in trouble. There is no narratorial voice intruding upon this extended exchange, so we are left with an open-ended argument, neither view condemned by an authorial voice, but neither entirely satisfactory. In a subsequent dialogue, however, in which Dorothea attempts to explain her sustaining beliefs to Will and seeks to elicit his in return, the good and the beautiful have begun to move much closer together:

“I have no longings.... I mean, for myself. Except that I should like not to have so much more than my share without doing anything for others. But I have a belief of my own and it comforts me.”

“What is that?” said Will, rather jealous of the belief.

“That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don’t quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil — widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower.”

“That is a beautiful mysticism — it is a — ”

“Please not to call it by any name,” said Dorothea.... It is my life. I have found it out, and cannot part with it. I have always been finding out my religion since I was a little girl. I used to pray so much — now I hardly ever pray. I try not to have desires merely for myself, because they may not be good for others, and I have too much already....”

“What is *your* religion?” said Dorothea. “I mean — not what you know about religion, but the belief that helps you most?”

“To love what is good and beautiful when I see it,” said Will. “But I am a rebel: I don’t feel bound, as you do, to submit to what I don’t like.”

“But if you like what is good, that comes to the same thing,” said Dorothea, smiling.  
(*M*, 391-92, ellipses mine)

The similarity between Dorothea’s aspirations and Will’s is that both of them pursue what is good, even though their methods of approach are different. Dorothea’s desire for “what is perfectly good” implicitly transcends a narrowly religious sense of a struggle between “light” and “evil,” and unfolds into making the world a better place to live by the gradual building of a utopia, not by revolution but by evolution, and therein by the endeavors of individuals rather than by unspecific temporal meliorism. Dorothea’s persistent concern is the redistribution of wealth, as she perceives economic inequality to be the fundamental problem of human misery. She feels responsible for having too much (and hence her request to Casaubon to return Will’s due property; or her donation to a new hospital), while the majority of people are excluded from the comforts that money affords. She feels responsible because, as in gambling, one’s gain is another’s loss. By this she constantly criticizes capitalist English society, which, by its exploitative practices, creates poverty and inequality among classes of people. Like Garth, she thinks “it is better to spend money in finding out how men can make the most of the land ... than in keeping dogs and horses only to gallop over it” (*M*, 17) and declares that “it is not a sin to make [one]self

poor in performing experiments for the good of all” (*M*, 17). Such exploitation is not confined to class and physical property, however, but can also be extended to women and other races.

The discrepancy between legal and moral rights of inheritance and marriage laws that Dorothea attempts to debate with Casaubon shows yet another instance of social injustice and the powerlessness of married women. Her appeal to Casaubon to return property (fortune) to Will and change the will, which she feels bestows too much upon her, is frustrated, which reflects Casaubon’s misogynistic ideas on the subject and his jealousy towards Will (*M*, 371-75). Laws make Casaubon regard Dorothea as a part of his property, while he remains “lawmaker and judge in questions of inheritance” (Paxton 1991: 193). As Dorothea points out to Casaubon, the entailment of the eldest in inheritance law results in Casaubon depriving Will of his due property. As Paxton comments, “the legal subordination of the woman to her husband and depriving her of her moral freedom as an individual” (1991: 193-94) is equivalent to the imposition of subjectivity and deprivation of agency. Dorothea’s rational appeal “to set the wrong right” by returning property to Will is dismissed as “a judgment on subjects beyond [her] scope” (*M*, 374). What she basically asserts is the responsibility of the haves towards the have-nots. Against Casaubon’s complacent remark that such things “are providential arrangements” (*M*, 373) is opposed Dorothea’s belief in human agency, choice and constant endeavor to construct a utopia, rather than dependence on a supernatural God.

The idealism of Dorothea’s utopian dreams frames her view of marriage, because she wants to contribute to the “growing good of the world” as a helpmate to an eminent scholar theologian. However, part of her idea of marriage is “childlike” (*M*, 10), and she ‘myopically’ looks for a “father” figure (*M*, 10) rather than an equal partner in the marriage. Her misconceptions swiftly result in abjection, so that on her honeymoon she is already depicted as “sobbing bitterly” (*M*, 192), and “in a fit of weeping” (*M*, 194), implying disappointment with Casaubon both sexually and intellectually. The narrator trenchantly points out that Dorothea’s mistake constitutes a criticism of the society that produces ignorance and submissiveness in young women, so that in her desire to be worthy it does not occur to Dorothea that Casaubon might not be good enough for her (*M*, 51). Education does not allow her to pursue independently her own means to achieve her aims, because it is “narrow and promiscuous” (*M*, 8), chief part of which is the “toy-box history of the world adapted to young ladies” (*M*, 86), “the shallows of ladies-school literature” (*M*, 25). Like Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss*, her potential is not realized because formal education is denied her and reserved as the “provinces of masculine knowledge” (*M*, 64). A large-minded female character is confined because of society’s prejudices against women’s education. The conflict with Casaubon arises because she resists the self-

renunciation implicit in becoming a mere cipher for his research: “she wished, poor child, to be wise herself” (*M*, 64).

Dorothea’s marriage with Casaubon does not lead to liberation from the “gentlewoman’s oppressive liberty” (*M*, 274) but further and more “stifling oppression” (*M*, 290). The difficulty of married life is the choice between self-denial and self-realization, as Dorothea always has to conform to her husband’s standard rather than her own desire:

It was another or rather a fuller sort of companionship that poor Dorothea was hungering for, and the hunger had grown from the perpetual effort demanded by her married life. She was always trying to be what her husband wished, and never able to repose on his delight in what she was. The thing that she liked, that she spontaneously cared to have, seemed to be always excluded from her life; for if it was only granted and not shared by her husband it might as well have been denied. (*M*, 475)

Dorothea lacks subjective agency in marriage; she exists as a subordinate to Casaubon.

Therefore, her marriage is like living in “a virtual tomb” (*M*, 475), devoid of activity and warm fellowship, especially suffocating her desires and voice. She is abjected because she has to bear her melancholy in “spiritual emptiness and discontent” (*M*, 475). In the oppression of marriage, her abjection is to “shut her best soul in prison, paying it only hidden visits, that she might be petty enough to please him” (*M*, 426). Therefore, after Casaubon’s death what she needs most is “repose of mind” and “perfect freedom” (*M*, 491) from the “strain and conflict of self-repression” (*M*, 492). Dorothea’s marriage is seen as self-denial and restraint on her true emotion and feelings as she recovers a “more childlike impetuous manner which had been subdued since her marriage” (*M*, 389) and regains her spontaneity in speech, having been suppressed and literally silenced by Casaubon. Her marriage has had a chilling effect that almost quenched her ardor to do good for others. Thus when Lydgate asks for her help for the New Hospital, she responds:

“I shall be quite grateful to you if you will tell me, how I can help to make things a little better. Everything of that sort has slipped away from me since I have been married.” (*M*, 438)

In many conversations of this sort Dorothea expresses a sense that she has been constrained from performing good in the course of her married life. This feeling of repression is due in large part to the fixed ideas of women’s role in the nineteenth-century England. Casaubon’s beliefs are a typical example of the way women and marriage are regarded, according to the perspective of the entrenched patriarchal system. In a speech during their engagement party Casaubon remarks:

“The great charm of your sex is its capability of an ardent self-sacrificing affection, and herein we see its fitness to round and complete the existence of our own.” (*M*, 50)

The narrator promptly dismisses “the frigid rhetoric” of the speech as “sincere as the bark of a dog, or the cawing of an amorous rook” (*M*, 50). Dorothea is not regarded as Casaubon’s equal partner, but a kind of subordinate, a tool to realize his life-long achievement. Her enthusiasm for

study is not properly responded to by Casaubon. He consigns her to a copyist's role and is not willing to share his research out of both selfishness and misogyny. Dorothea's decision to marry him stems from pure altruism in that she wants to "help some one who did great work, so that his burthen might be lighter" (*M*, 363). Casaubon becomes willing to share some of the intellectual content of his research only after he learns that his death may be imminent, but he then wants to bind Dorothea's life after his death:

"It is that you will let me know, deliberately, whether, in case of my death, you will carry out my wishes: whether you will avoid doing what I should deprecate, and apply yourself to do what I should desire?" (*M*, 477)

Dorothea responds:

"but it is too solemn — I think it is not right — to make a promise when I am ignorant what it will bind me to. Whatever affection prompted, I would do without promising." (*M*, 477-78)

Dorothea points out that a distinction should be made between the moral obligations propelled by love and affection and those by patriarchal prerogatives. Casaubon's reply — "You would use your own judgment: I ask you to obey mine" (*M*, 478) — is an authoritarian imposition of his will, formulated as if it were a request. Thus when Casaubon considers the possibility of Dorothea remarrying after his death, he does not take her ideas or feelings into consideration as in his perception she is only an object without any agency or proper discernment, and he decides for her (*M*, 421). His thinking is characteristic of his androcentric society. The communication between Casaubon and Dorothea is one-sided, precluding any possibility of dialogue. The novel contrasts it with the genuine dialogue between Will and Dorothea, which, as Bonaparte points out, is underpinned by classical allusion which associates Casaubon with Hades (death) and Will with Dionysus (exuberant life). Casaubon's association with death and winter and his ultimate abjection is evoked by other characters in the novel before his marriage with Dorothea. His smile is like "pale wintry sunshine" (*M*, 26 — Celia), Dorothea's marriage is deemed a "funereal" affair (*M*, 49 — Celia), and he is compared with "a mummy" (*M*, 58 — Sir James), with "one foot in the grave" (*M*, 58 — Sir James). On the contrary, the narration associates Will with life and spring, "he looked like an incarnation of spring" (*M*, 471), irradiates a "sunny brightness" (*M*, 209), and is always followed by children (*M*, 463).

Early in the novel, the narrator incorporates a lengthy discussion of the negative assessments made by the other characters of Casaubon, and offers an ambiguous defence of him, as he does with the later example of Bulstrode. The defence is an argument that Casaubon's egocentricity and solipsism ("others were providentially made for him") are characteristically human:

Suppose we turn from outside estimates of a man, to wonder, with keener interest, what is the report of his own consciousness about his doings or capacity: ... Doubtless his lot is important in his own eyes; and the chief reason that we think he asks too large a place in our consideration must be our want of room for him.... Mr. Casaubon, too, was the centre of his own world; if he was liable to think that others were providentially made for him, and especially to consider them in the light of their fitness for the author of a *Key to All Mythologies*, this trait is not quite alien to us, and, like the other mendicant hopes of mortals, claims some of our pity. (*M*, 84-85, ellipses mine)

Apart from the fact that Casaubon is an egoist and lacks an other-regarding faculty, the narrator implies that he might not be an apt target for condemnation, and suggests that readers switching the mind from the perspective of the other characters to see the things from Casaubon's perspective. A similar strategy is used later in the novel, when the narrator abruptly shifts the point of view from Dorothea's to Casaubon's by stating, "Dorothea — but why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage?... Mr. Casaubon had an intense consciousness within him, and was spiritually a-hungred like the rest of us" (*M*, 278). This metafictional turn complicates reader positioning. It draws attention to the novel's strategies for aligning readers with Dorothea's perspective, and by invoking a common humanity points to the human moral problem of solipsism and self-regardingness. The earlier example is subtler, but as it continues, elaborating first Casaubon's failure to find joy in his fortunate marriage and then his intensifying loneliness, it withdraws the proffered pity. The emotional turning-point comes with an oblique allusion to the abduction of Persephone by Hades:<sup>6</sup>

as the day fixed for his marriage came nearer, Mr Casaubon did not find his spirits rising; nor did the contemplation of that matrimonial garden-scene, where, as all experience showed, the path was to be bordered with flowers, prove persistently more enchanting to him than the accustomed vaults where he walked taper in hand. (*M*, 85)

Readers can be expected to experience a moral revulsion from a character whose response to joy and life is an intensification of his abjection — the spiral away from life toward death.

For Dorothea, abjection is a part of life because she is a woman. The epigraph to Chapter 1 is a prolepsis to the failure and compromise of her dreams:

Since I can do no good because a woman,  
Reach constantly at something that is near it. (*M*, 7)

Dorothea's failure to bring her utopian schemes to fruition is clearly presaged by the patriarchal views of most members of her society — how can a woman realize her dreams in such a misogynistic society? When Dorothea acknowledges that Lydgate's aspiration to "lead a higher life than the common, and to find out better ways" (*M*, 764) has failed, she comments, "There is

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<sup>6</sup> Felicia Bonaparte (1981: 130-31) has thoroughly documented the association of Dorothea with Persephone (as well as with Ariadne) and Casaubon with Hades. The evocation here, through language and isomorphic structure, is an addition to her list of examples.

no sorrow I have thought more about than that — to love what is great, and try to reach it, and yet to fail” (*M*, 764). Even though her comment addresses Lydgate’s failure, it applies to her own. The general conception of female subjectivity, which Dorothea has inevitably internalized to some extent, is most overtly voiced by Mr. Brooke’s misogynistic remarks. For example, he tells Casaubon that women are too light of mind not to find “classics, mathematics, that kind of thing” too taxing (*M*, 65). According to him, women “do not understand political economy” (*M*, 17); they are “flighty” (*M*, 20) and “capricious” (*M*, 55); and they are “not thinkers” (*M*, 46). Further, scholarly knowledge does not run in the female line, “it runs underground like the rivers in Greece,” but comes out in sons (*M*, 46).

In addition to such misogynistic ideas about women’s ability, which themselves exercise a heavy negative influence on women’s lives, Dorothea also lacks knowledge of how to contribute to society. Except for drawing plans for cottages and making scattered donations, she lacks any meaningful social purpose. She envies Lydgate his new hospital, declaring, “How happy you must be, to know things that you feel sure will do great good! I wish I could awake with that knowledge every morning” (*M*, 440). Her lack of higher formal education leaves Dorothea unprepared for productive work, and this lack overshadows her life and prompts the sense of dissatisfaction expressed in the Finale: “Many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done” (*M*, 836). This calculated understatement constitutes a severe criticism of the dystopian element of a patriarchal and misogynistic society that cannot find a space for women’s potential contribution.

In her zeal to improve society by doing good, Dorothea is compared with Saint Theresa although the chronotopes they inhabit are contrasted. Saint Theresa could reform a religious order because of the confluence of social demand and her own desire, but Dorothea becomes “a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing, whose loving heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are dispersed among hindrances” (*M*, 4). The hindrances referred to here are society’s dystopian elements, that conjunction of time, place and ideology which, in Dorothea’s case, precludes her from performing “some long-recognizable deed” (*M*, 4). The impact of such a chronotope on female subjectivity is tellingly expressed during the conversation in which Celia tries to persuade Dorothea not to marry Ladislav. Celia proffers the futile idea that Dorothea could pursue her “plans” and go on “all your life doing what you liked,” but is met with a forceful recognition that this is utopian dreaming in its negative sense of a desire for the impracticable: “I never could do anything that I liked. I have never carried out any plan yet”

(*M*, 820). As Graver points out, Dorothea's failure "uncovers the absence of social structures adequate to individual life" (217). Dorothea constantly seeks for what she can do, but society does not respond by presenting her with space to actively participate in the shaping of the better society. Her independent voice is ignored, her life is "absorbed into the life of another," and she loses her identity, subjectivity, and overt agency.

Not permitted to make a radical, first-hand contribution, Dorothea contributes to the furtherance of the social good only through oblique, secondary means, as a helpmate to Will. In abandoning position and fortune by marrying (*M*, 835), however, she transgresses against Middlemarch's class-conscious society and thereby chooses what her family and social peers conceive as a form of abjection, as Celia's disparaging complaints convey: "you will go away among queer people.... I shall never see you.... How can you always live in a street?... you will be so poor" (*M*, 820-21). The narrator's simple assessment of Dorothea's achievement coincides with the aim of utopianism, that is, to bring about gradual improvement by lessening evil rather than by actively increasing the good: "But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs" (*M*, 838).

Dorothea's choice of humble obscurity is the novel's final critique of the limited scope offered by society, "the poverty of choice and meanness of opportunity that confront women, even those with the beauty, wealth, and status of Dorothea" (Paxton 1991: 173). Her mistake in marrying Casaubon was prompted by the irresolvable clash between her "active conscience and ... great mental need" and the "narrow teaching" of her education and "a social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth of petty courses" (*M*, 28, 29). Her society does not perceive that this is already an abjected state, and hence to overcome it she must transgress. The novel poses that the narrowness and pettiness to which women are condemned (and which women such as Celia accept as natural) must be overcome by formal education. Despite a nature and capacity equal to any man's, Dorothea is reduced to a secondary role, forced to be satisfied with "social arrangements which provided no other objects for a woman's intellectual energy than the vicarious pleasures of marriage and motherhood" (Paxton 1991: 182), and this is a waste of her great potential to contribute to social betterment and give substance to her utopian dreams. Although *Middlemarch* employs the marriage formula to effect a close, this does not constitute a resolved closure. Hina Nazar offers the perceptive comment that readers are still in a position to "critique the absence of meaningful vocation for women without identifying marriage in itself as a negative phenomenon" (303), although the marriage of Lydgate and Rosamond does furnish a

negative example. In contrast with Lydgate, whose research offers a chance for rich self-fulfilment, and with Ladislaw, with his enthusiasm for life and history, Dorothea faces fundamental exclusion from a society which “den[ies] women a life of significant agency, containing them instead within a round of petty domesticity” (Nazar: 303). Like Lydgate, she settles for much less than she had hoped to achieve, although the crucial difference between them is that in her case it is “opportunity denied,” whereas Lydgate’s is rather a matter of “opportunity lost” (Deresiewicz: 723). Dorothea’s opportunity is denied mainly because she is a woman, deprived of effective agency, and allowed only a limited choice.

The dystopian society nevertheless also abjects male members. If Dorothea’s failure and abjection, and lack of access to a transformative form of transgression is mainly due to her gender, Lydgate’s failure originates in society’s incomprehension of otherness and tendency to expel the new — in his case, the outsider, the Dostoevskian hero whose dedication to his cause as a pioneer in research makes him injudiciously intolerant of the old ways.

### **Lydgate’s Utopian Dream — The Pursuit of the Good as Scientific Truth**

Lydgate enters the narrative as a youthful idealist. His plan for furthering the social good as a country doctor pursuing research in his spare time is “to do good small work for Middlemarch, and great work for the world” (*M*, 149). It is in association with Lydgate that occur the most overt allusions to Utopianism in *Middlemarch*. The first, exemplifying his “benevolently contemptuous” conceit, is a passing reference to a notion he had once formed of joining and subverting the Saint Simonians, a French Utopian socialist movement (*M*, 150). The second follows soon after in a reference to his former roommate, Trawley, who, according to Lydgate, “was hot on the French social systems, and talked of going to the Backwoods to found a sort of Pythagorean community” (*M*, 173). These allusions have two functions: they highlight Lydgate’s contrasting pragmatic approach to social change; and they are a prolepsis of his own failed utopian dream. Lydgate expresses scorn at Trawley’s succumbing instead to materialism (practicing at a German bath and married to a rich patient), but he in his turn will make his own compromise with materialism, abandoning his original dream of building a better society by improving medical science and by research. In this same conversation a judicious forewarning is expressed by Farebrother, an unconventional religious man who gambles, smokes a pipe, is interested in entomology, and calls himself, “not a model clergyman — only a decent makeshift” (*M*, 176):

“Your scheme is a good deal more difficult to carry out than the Pythagorean community, though. You have not only got the old Adam in yourself against you, but you have got all those descendants of the original Adam who form the society around you. You see, I have paid twelve or thirteen years more than you for my knowledge of difficulties....” (*M*, 173, ellipsis mine)



Farebrother foresees that Lydgate's utopian dream will be frustrated because of his spots of commonness and because it demands engagement with, not withdrawal from, human society. As Farebrother is speaking, Lydgate's attention is on a specimen jar, however, and the conversation turns elsewhere, so the scene functions strictly as a prolepsis, not a warning. Lydgate will underestimate the difficulties in Middlemarch because it is provincial, and as a character within the novel he cannot see that the Midlands is a synecdoche, the center of the world. His imprudence in dealing with the hostility in the town (*M*, 455), his entanglement in money matters with Bulstrode (*M*, 456), and his marriage with a worldly woman will be his undoing.

As mentioned above, Lydgate's failure is regarded as "opportunity lost," as opposed to Dorothea's "opportunity denied." In contrast to Dorothea, he does have opportunity but loses it mainly by surrendering agency and narrowing his range of choice. As William Deresiewicz points out, making of choices is central to the moral scheme as well as to the plot of Middlemarch, and the refusal to make choices is central to Lydgate's failure (13). He argues that the admirable characters are those who make choices "against the inertia of social position and socially determined desire — who think their way toward unexpected and unconventional decisions" (Deresiewicz: 13). Deresiewicz cites the following as key examples of Lydgate's failure to make choices:

- He refuses to choose between Tyke and Farebrother in the matter of deciding the chaplaincy, regarding it as "trivial Middlemarch business" and "petty politics" (*M*, 178), and then votes the wrong way because the "petty medium of Middlemarch had been too strong for him" (*M*, 187).
- He does not choose to marry Rosamond, but leaves the outcome to circumstance and impulse — sudden tears, the outrush of tenderness and passionate love (*M*, 301).
- Faced with the need to retrench his finances, he dithers for months rather than displease his wife, saying, "things are not coming to a crisis immediately. There is no hurry" (*M*, 701).
- Finally, he allows his negative association with Bulstrode to become public out of a feeling that he has no choice, "What could he do? He could not see a man sink close to him for want of help" (*M*, 729).

The failure to make choices, and the subsequent defeat by the pettiness of Middlemarch, indicate a loss of agency in the face of social pressure. Shortly after the affair of the chaplaincy vote Lydgate is represented as thinking that "there was a pitiable infirmity of will in Mr. Farebrother" (*M*, 187) — readers will not miss the irony that he here scorns a fault which is also his own.

Lydgate's failure, then, originates from his own shortcomings, especially his egotism; from Middlemarch's resistance to change; and from self-interested opposition ("most people never consider that a thing is good to be done unless it is done by their own set" (*M*, 439)). In contrast to Dorothea's pure altruism, his "ambition of making his life recognized as a factor in

the better life of mankind" (*M*, 165) shows that his utopian dreams and altruistic impulses are tinted with egotism. He also takes Middlemarch too naively, whereas it has the same dystopian aspects as big cities like London. Farebrother once warns him, "But we Middlemarchers are not so tame as you take us to be" (*M*, 175), and he quickly encounters its capacity for intrigue in the already resident doctors. Eliot is quite ironical about their inferior education and pursuit of self-interest:

By not dispensing drugs, [Lydgate] intended to cast imputation on his equals, and also obscure the limit between his own rank as a general practitioner and that of the physicians, who, in the interest of the profession, felt bound to maintain its various grades. Especially against a man who had not been to either of the English universities and enjoyed the absence of anatomical and bedside study there, but came with a libellous pretension to experience in Edinburgh and Paris, where observation might be abundant indeed, but hardly sound. (*M*, 182)

Exploiting the double-voicing enabled by free indirect discourse, and using the second sentence to undermine the stance of the first, the narrator ironically transforms attributed criticism into oblique praise, while rehearsing contemporary criticism of the inadequacy of medical training at Oxford and Cambridge. As a stranger and reformer, Lydgate anticipates hostility, but to Bulstrode's advice that he will thereby incur "jealousy and dislike" he says, "I acknowledge a good deal of pleasure in fighting" (*M*, 125). Later when Lydgate recommends Farebrother to Dorothea for the living at Lowick, he points out that Farebrother too has enemies because "there are always people who can't forgive an able man for differing from them" (*M*, 495-96). Farebrother — perhaps the only genuine friend Lydgate makes in Middlemarch — preserves his dignity and good will throughout his various vicissitudes because he consistently retains at least a modicum of agency. It is much smaller than the agency that Lydgate aspires to, an agency which might transform the world, but it staves off abjection. In contrast, the lack of agency concomitant with Lydgate's failure to exercise self-reflective choice pushes him ever closer to the brink of abjection.

Lydgate aims to contribute to "the general advance" of medical knowledge and practice by resisting "irrational" practices as well as by clarifying fundamental principles of nature (*M*, 145). He is inspired by

the conviction that the medical profession as it might be was the finest in the world; presenting the most perfect interchange between science and art; offering the most direct alliance between intellectual conquest and the social good. Lydgate's nature demanded this combination: he was an emotional creature, with a flesh-and-blood sense of fellowship which withstood all the abstractions of special study. He cared not only for 'cases,' but for John and Elizabeth, especially Elizabeth.

There was another attraction in this profession: it wanted reform, and gave a man opportunity for some indignant resolve to reject its venal decorations and other humbug, and to be the possessor of genuine though undemanded qualifications. He went to study in Paris with the determination that when he came home again he would settle in some provincial town as a general practitioner, and resist the irrational severance between medical and surgical knowledge in the interest of his own scientific pursuits, as well as of the general advance: he would keep away from the range of London intrigues, jealousies, and social truckling, and win celebrity ... by the independent value of his work. (*M*, 145, ellipsis mine)

Lydgate's utopian desire is focused through his practice and research in medical science as a powerful tool for making a difference (*M*, 146), for making human life better (*M*, 153), for having a utopian effect. Eager to reform, he hopes to improve medical science as well as advance biological research, looking for a unitary sign of origin, the "homogenous origin of all the tissues" (*M*, 455), through which he means to alter the world a little (*M*, 144). It has been argued that there is a predisposition to failure in the kind of imagination and insight inherent in Lydgate's scientific method. Empirical science is a description of existing reality, not a way of envisaging an alternative, better world. Paxton comments that scientific methods "overemphasize the visible and do not acknowledge the subjective power of the imagination in the observer" (1991: 174). The method for discovering truth is described as "careful observation and inference" (*M*, 147), and the kind of imagination is limited to the testation of experimental, visible truth ("the exercise of disciplined power — combining and constructing with the clearest eye for probabilities and the fullest obedience to knowledge; and then in yet more energetic alliance with impartial Nature, standing aloof to invent tests by which to try its own work" (*M*, 164)). Thus, as Bonaparte comments, "science could only furnish a picture of the world as it actually was. It could never formulate a notion of how it ought to be" (1998: xv). Lydgate's belief that human life might be made better (*M*, 153) focuses only on the material side. Eliot thus criticizes not only society but also the bases for utopian endeavor. It cannot be done through science (any more than through religion or art), but is best channeled through political action.

Lydgate is nevertheless compared to "a pioneer," a Columbus, "a spirited young adventurer," of "the dark territories of Pathology" (*M*, 147). He is a philanthropist (*M*, 91), displays "chivalrous kindness" (*M*, 150) and cares for his patients not only as cases but as individual human beings. He fails to realize the potential in all this for a variety of personal and societal reasons. He himself lacks a capacity for self-reflection which would enable him to see the role played by his own moral flaws. His complaint to Dorothea midway through the novel that, "there is no stifling the offence of being young, and a new-comer, and happening to know something more than the old inhabitants" (*M*, 440) exemplifies his (just) sense of opposition. The novel depicts at some length the vexation felt by the established practitioners, and in such scenes as the dinner party of Chapter 45 narratorial point of view is ranged against them. On the other hand, however, Lydgate makes enemies not just by offering correct diagnoses where his professional colleagues had erred, as in the case of Fred Vincy's typhoid fever (*M*, 260), but by being carelessly outspoken, directly challenging the existing medical system, and not always being very careful about other doctors' feelings, although he is aware of the potential problem this might cause. As Mr. Vincy points out, Lydgate "makes enemies" (*M*, 344), instead of making

income. He is a “proud” (*M*, 345, 641), “arrogant” (*M*, 454), and “haughty” man (*M*, 114). As a result of this lack of strategy in human relationships, he is faced with financial and professional ruin when Bulstrode decides to withdraw his financial support from the Hospital.

A comparable doubleness is to be discerned in the ground of his disappointing marriage. On the one hand, Rosamond’s Aunt Bulstrode is quick to perceive a looming problem in the incompatibility between Lydgate’s small income and Rosamond’s worldliness and taste for luxury (*M*, 347). On the other, the narrator comments that Lydgate “was no radical in relation to anything but medical reform and the prosecution of discovery” (*M*, 348). His “commonness” is again adduced, now glossed as “personal pride and unreflecting egoism” (*M*, 349). In short, he has typical patriarchal notions about marriage and women:

Lydgate thought that after all his wild mistakes and absurd credulity,<sup>7</sup> he had found perfect womanhood — felt as if already breathed upon by exquisite wedded affection such as would be bestowed by an accomplished creature who venerated his high musings and momentous labours and would never interfere with them; who would create order in the home and accounts with still magic, yet keep her fingers ready to touch the lute and transform life into romance at any moment; who was instructed to the true womanly limit and not a hair’s breath beyond — docile, therefore, and ready to carry out behests which came from beyond that limit. It was plainer now than ever that his notion of remaining much longer a bachelor had been a mistake: marriage would not be an obstruction but a furtherance. (*M*, 352)

The overstatement of this evocation of an androcentric Utopia verges on the comical, and effectively satirizes the patriarchal thinking which envisages “perfect womanhood” as accomplished but without ambition, talented but docile and without desire to use those talents other than in acts of submission. Woman is inherently limited, and subject to male authority exerted “from beyond that limit.” It is the same view of woman expressed in their own terms by Casaubon and Brooke. Lydgate even calls Rosamond “my pet” (*M*, 437), attributing to her no more than a subsidiary existence to enrich his own life — hence she will indeed be a furtherance. The lack of consideration of Rosamond’s point of view is evident, but her upbringing has trained her not to make a public display of that. The irony of Lydgate’s paeon to docile femininity is even more apparent when it is seen as a different formulation of Rosamond’s education, which has trained her to guide her ways “by wary grace and propriety” (*M*, 268):

Rosamond never showed any unbecoming knowledge, and was always that combination of correct sentiments, music, dancing, drawing, elegant note-writing, private album for extracted verse, and perfect blond loveliness, which made the irresistible woman for the doomed man of that date. (*M*, 268)

Further, she never thought about money, other than something that would be provided, and her spoken utterances were entirely intended to please, rather than offering any “direct clue to fact” (*M*, 268). The cultivation of a surface, and a concomitant absence of any apparent desire for

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<sup>7</sup> Presumably this is a reference to the “impetuous folly” (*M*, 150) of the Madame Laure episode recounted in Chapter 15 (*M*, 150-53), when, after making a complete fool of himself, he resolves henceforth to take “a strictly scientific view of woman” (*M*, 153)

subjective agency, thus produces a femininity which seems the ideal object for egotistical male desire. The abiding problem with the marriage, which continues to the point of the financial crisis that almost overwhelms it, is the preclusion of intersubjectivity — this lack of mutual regard and lack of communication. An education such as Rosamond's, which not only limits but deforms subjectivity, is a further example of the systemic dystopianism Eliot discerns in nineteenth-century society.

Where Lydgate's goal in life is definite, Rosamond's life consists of an aimlessness manifested as "(utter) ennui" (*M*, 601, 661, 753). The demand for "self-suppression and tolerance" (*M*, 753) germane to "the conditions of marriage itself" (*M*, 753), are predicated upon some capacity for altruism, which lies well beyond the experiential range of a thorough solipsist such as Rosamond. She means always to live as she pleases (*M*, 297), not believing "the world is not ordered to her liking" (*M*, 649), and is obstinate in pursuit of what she sees to be her own good. Lydgate regards this "obstinacy" (*M*, 585), "resistance" (*M*, 652), and "terrible tenacity" (*M*, 586) as undesirable feminine dictation; he would rather accept feminine weakness (*M*, 650). According to Steedman, Rosamond embodies Middlemarch and hence the force that defeats Lydgate: "as the town belle she is its quintessence: she is its dreadful, self-regarding provincial vulgarity" (536). Lydgate's mistake is to think lightly of the challenges that Middlemarch poses and he is defeated as a result.

Rosamond is a Philistine who is only interested in personal desire and need.<sup>8</sup> Social problems wider in scope than her own personal concerns do not interest her at all. When she is planning her wedding, the dialogue between herself and her father indicates she is only self-regarding and vulgar:

"I hope [Lydgate] knows I shan't give anything.... Parliament going to be dissolved, and machine-breaking everywhere, and an election coming on."

"Dear papa! What can that have to do with my marriage?"

"A pretty deal to do with it! We may be ruined for what I know — the country's in that state. Some say it's the end of the world, and be hanged if I don't think it looks like it." (*M*, 353-54, ellipsis mine)

Such seeking her own interest indifferent to broader social issues is part of her selfishness. Her self-regardingness is further manifested when, for example, she perversely accuses Lydgate of "plac[ing] [her] in the worst position rather than giv[ing] up [his] own will" (*M*, 659) in response to Lydgate's wish to move to a smaller house and pay off their debts.

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<sup>8</sup> Eliot defines *Philister* "the personification of the spirit which judges everything from a lower point of view than the subject demands — which judges the affairs of the parish from the egoistic or purely personal point of view — which judges the affairs of the nation from the parochial point of view, and does not hesitate to measure the merits of the universe from the human point of view" ("German Life," *Selected Essays*, 137). Rosamond's egoism thinking only of her marriage disregarding important social issues such as national reform, shows that she is the prime example of this.

As flirtation, mistaken for love, blooms into infatuation, the courtship and later marriage between Lydgate and Rosamond are conducted in the discourse of domination and mastery, instead of understanding and love. Flirtation as a pleasant game has deployed this discourse since the late Middle Ages, so that here Lydgate ironically calls himself Rosamond's "captive, meaning ... not to be her captive" (*M*, 267); and to Rosamond Lydgate is a man, "delightful to enslave" (*M*, 118) and "worth captivating" (*M*, 267). Beyond such empty signs, Lydgate regards himself as a master and believes Rosamond should obey him, but he cannot "tell her brutally that he was master and she must obey" because "it was not the fact" (*M*, 660), but rather a "vain boast" (*M*, 667). Enslavement, bondage, and captivity are images of war (Bonaparte 1981: 126). By that association they turn quest into conquest, while marriage should not be a matter of conquest, but of sympathy. Contrary to Lydgate's intention of mastering Rosamond, he is mastered by her (*M*, 436). Paxton comments that by Rosamond's eventual mastery of Lydgate egotism rather than altruism, and women rather than men, dominate in married life (1991: 178). Rosamond does not make a sympathetic, intelligent wife who can share his life and help when he is in adversity.

*Middlemarch* does suggest that, even given the limitations of female education, there are still superior and inferior choices. Lydgate's patriarchal conservatism prompts him to reject the possibility of an intelligent partner and to choose appearances only. The point is made early in the novel when Lydgate's judgments about Dorothea and Rosamond are juxtaposed. Since he assigns "the first place among wifely functions" to "adornment," it is unsurprising that he finds Dorothea off-putting:

"She is a good creature — that fine girl — but a little too earnest," he thought. "It is troublesome to talk to such women. They are always wanting reasons, yet they are too ignorant to understand the merits of any question, and usually fall back on their moral sense to settle things after their own taste." (*M*, 93)

"To his taste, guided by a single conversation, here was the point on which Miss Brooke would be found wanting, notwithstanding her undeniable beauty. She did not look at things from the proper feminine angle. The society of such women was about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form, instead of reclining in a paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes, and blue eyes for a heaven." (*M*, 95)

The first instance, expressed as direct thought, introduces readers to Lydgate's preference for shallowness in women, reinforced by his ready equations of earnestness with ignorance, and feminine moral sense with mere taste. In the second instance, the double-voiced effect of free indirect discourse is again used to distance readers from the character's point of view. Looking at things "from the proper ... angle" is precisely what Lydgate does *not* do when he here looks at Dorothea, now implicitly dismissing her "interest in matters socially useful" (*M*, 93) which had singled her out at the time of their meeting. The element of ironical, humorous overstatement in the male Utopian associations of female tendance with "paradise" and "heaven" mocks his

reduction of woman to a diversion. The irony returns in a more biting form at the Finale of the novel, where Rosamond is described as resembling “the bird of paradise” (*M*, 835) while Lydgate calls her his “basil plant” which thrives “on a murdered man’s brains” (*M*, 835). When Rosamond retorts that it is a pity he couldn’t have married Dorothea, whose superiority he (by now) recognizes, there is a bitter realization of the consequences of the misguided thinking that shaped his life and, in his own eyes, rendered him an abject figure.

In the systemic dystopia that Eliot surveys in *Middlemarch*, women’s subjectivity and potential are so cramped and circumscribed, and men’s expectations of them so limited, that Rosamond, a complete solipsist who “had always acted for the best — the best naturally being what she best liked” (*M*, 665), can wreck Lydgate’s great aspirations. The root cause is the social construction of femininity which entrenches Rosamond in her solipsism and renders her incapable of imagining the altruism which informs Lydgate’s utopian ideals. Having “accepted his narrowed lot with sad resignation” (*M*, 800), Lydgate goes on to become “what is called a successful man” (*M*, 835) in a worldly view, but considers himself a failure: “he had not done what he once meant to do” (*M*, 835). His insight into his failure is expressed succinctly to Dorothea, in response to her acknowledgment that he “had meant to lead a higher life than the common, and to find out better ways”: “I had some ambition. I meant everything to be different with me. I thought I had more strength and mastery. But the most terrible obstacles are such as nobody can see except oneself” (*M*, 764). The most complete form of abjection is self-abjection.

### **Ladislaw’s Utopian Dream — What Is Good Pursued through Politics and Art**

The immense dialogic process of *Middlemarch*, as it bears on utopian impulses towards social progress, brings into relation the macro-reform envisaged by broad political vision and the micro-reforms of more local efforts to improve the lives of individual human beings. The greatest possibility for progress as macro-reform lies in change wrought to structures of political governance, articulated here in Will Ladislaw’s “enthusiasm for liberty, freedom, and emancipation” (*M*, 359) and explicitly associated with the political creed of Shelley. As Bonaparte comments, “Shelley saw the poetry of ancient Rome in its political institutions, for he believed that to make a world was one way to make a poem” (1981: 147). Ladislaw’s development from nomadic dilettante to focused politician embodies the view that art should function to enhance human life, or, as Dorothea puts it, art should “make life beautiful.” She objects to art for art’s sake, insisting in her conversation about art with Will that art should not “lie outside life” (*M*, 219) but should work to improve the human lot.

Will is another outsider, and the only member of the Middlemarch gentry who acknowledges and accepts him is Mr. Brooke. Where Will begins his career as a dilettante in the world of art, Mr. Brooke is a dilettante in politics. Throughout the novel he expresses interest in national reform and plans to be elected to Parliament, but what he does is practically the opposite of what he commends. As he is himself aware, he is full of ideas, but they need to be given form and shape, and this is where he finds Will's knowledge and cleverness potentially useful. The fundamental weakness underlying Brooke's position as a reformer is his neglect of the conditions of his own tenants, a point trenchantly made by Dorothea:

“you mean to enter Parliament as a member who cares for the improvement of the people, and one of the first things to be made better is the state of the land and the labourers.... That is one reason why I did not like the pictures here, dear uncle — which you think me stupid about. I used to come from the village with all that dirt and coarse ugliness like a pain within me, and the simpering pictures in the drawing-room seemed to me like a wicked attempt to find delight in what is false, while we don't mind how hard the truth is for the neighbours outside our walls. I think we have no right to come forward and urge wider changes for good, until we have tried to alter the evils which lie under our own hands.” (M, 389, ellipsis mine)

Dorothea feels intensely the social injustice stemming from the system of rank and status. While her uncle's political discourses pay no heed to the misery of the living standards of his laborers and the state of his land, they are like “a wicked attempt to find delight in what is false,” ignoring the immediate evil while talking abstractly about good in a wider spectrum such as national reform.

Despite his enthusiasm for “liberty, freedom, and emancipation,” Will is the principal character most threatened with abjection. Along with Dorothea and Lydgate he is a new-comer to Middlemarch, with his outsider status further accentuated by his foreign origins: he is of “foreign extraction” (M, 358), “some emissary” (M, 358), and “a quill-driving alien, a foreign emissary” (M, 379). He is suspected of contaminating Middlemarch with his “queer genealogy,” and is described as “the grandson of a thieving Jew pawnbroker” (M, 772), “a grafting of the Jew pawnbroker” (M, 719), “any cursed alien blood, Jew, Corsican, or Gypsy” (M, 719), and “an Italian with white mice” (M, 490, 492, 496, 498, 772). His abjection is clearly manifested in invocations of common procedures for eliminating abjected figures from society: Sir James's hope to ship him off to another country by buying him a post in the suite of a Colonial Governor (M, 485, 816), and Mrs. Cadwallader's speculations as to why Casaubon did not make Will *attaché* or send him to India, which is “how families get rid of troublesome sprigs” (M, 380). Will is definitely an abjected figure whom the majority of society wants to eliminate. However, to Mr. Brooke Will is “a young man capable of putting ideas into form” (M, 292), and so he makes him the editor of the Middlemarch newspaper, *The Pioneer* (M, 367), and thus initiates a career. Mr. Brooke's defence of his individuality and originality (M, 816) marks him as a Dostoevskian hero, “a young man who was starting in life with a stock of ideas” (M, 291), but faces “ostracism,



persecution, martyrdom,” which “always happen to the best men” (*M*, 384). He is multi-talented, fluent in the discourses of art and literature, possessed of acute political acumen, an able speaker, and a cogent and expressive writer (*M*, 359). His difference is implied by his decision, after completing his schooling at Rugby (*M*, 81), to study at a German university, Heidelberg, rather than an English university. He thus has something in common with Lydgate, and anticipates the eponymous protagonist of *Daniel Deronda*.

Unlike Dorothea or Lydgate who begin with utopian dreams and fail, Ladislav does not set out with any definite aim in life. His first appearance in the novel is as a poor cousin of Casaubon, without money or position, a wanderer, mistaken as a gardener (*M*, 76), an abjected figure. He feels anger and frustration at his social position, but his anger is motivated by the prejudices about rank and status that keep him from Dorothea — what the narrator succinctly defines as “those barriers of habitual sentiment which are more fatal to the persistence of mutual interest than all the distance between Rome and Britain” (*M*, 435). Middlemarch is a society very much conscious of class. Aristocrats, gentry, and laborers do not deal with one another, outside their hierarchical relationships; as the narrator comments, “there were nice distinctions of rank in Middlemarch” (*M*, 231). Sir James’s antipathy towards Will is tinged with the classism prevalent in society, though it is also shaped by xenophobia and overt racism. As Li comments, Middlemarch communal life is “ossified, exclusive and unprogressive” because members of its society observe, without any criticism, outdated forms of tradition (130). Their “inherited feelings and moral standards” are reflected according to the class into which they are born (Li: 130-31).

One of the greatneses of Will is that he does not belong to any class, nor does he want to elevate himself through marriage with Dorothea. He is a reformer in another way as well, in that he prides himself on the “sense of belonging to no class” (*M*, 461), of never having belonged to “any caste” (*M*, 462). As Graver points out, he belongs to Riehl’s “Fourth Estate,” composed of “the day-labourers with the quill, the literary proletariat” (“German Life,” *Selected Essays*, 135) — indeed, the reference to him as “a quill-driving alien” (*M*, 379) implies the difference of this class by associating it with the undesirable alien. Graver also comments that, “Will is one of the major agencies by which law is brought into harmony with individual needs and society. In Middlemarch such harmony is yet to be seen. Will’s inadequacies of character — his dilettantism, moments of cruelty, extravagant flights of idealism — speak of a world in which reform and reformer alike are far from perfect or complete” (223). However, incompleteness and ongoingness are inherent to the process of constructing a utopia.

As shown in the dialogues with Dorothea (*M*, 219-20, 391-92), Will initially pursues his utopian dreams by creating works of art, pursuing what is good through beauty. For the first part of *Middlemarch* he appears to be “dilettantish and amateurish” (*M*, 190) and has no particular aim in life or to do good,<sup>9</sup> but subsequently is shown to change his attitude and involve himself in politics and the reform of Middlemarch, in view of the coming of the railway, and the granting of limited franchise to an expanded electorate. He is described as a young man trying to get a position in the world, and thereby attempting to change society and thus construct a version of utopia. He is contrasted with Lydgate in many ways. Lydgate starts his life in Middlemarch with an ambition to do good for Middlemarch and for the world, whereas Will begins his career as an undirected painter or poet. Lydgate approaches his aspirations in a scientific spirit, but Will with an artistic and finally political focus. Lydgate ends up in failure, but Will is a success and participates in the process of “progress and reform” in politics. One of the reasons for their different outcomes is reflected in their respective marriages, although this is only one factor. Where Lydgate thinks light of marriage and woman and drifts into marriage with Rosamond accordingly, Will finds his equal match in Dorothea. Conversations between Dorothea and Will are invariably meaningful and spontaneous, and show how well they communicate with and influence each other. In contrast, Rosamond and Lydgate inhabit separate worlds without mutual understanding, or interest in each other’s hopes for the future. The contrast is important, for while the narrator appears to put Rosamond in a constant bad light for her resistance to Lydgate, Will’s consideration for Dorothea indicts the underlying selfishness and phallocentrism of Lydgate.

Lydgate and Will understand each other: they are both intelligent men with a cosmopolitan education, and they both face the same obstacles — a comparable ostracism from Middlemarch society. As a representative of the scientific approach to utopian ideals, however, Lydgate criticizes Will’s political solution as “crying up a measure as if it were a universal cure, and crying up men who are a part of the very disease that wants curing” (*M*, 465); “You go against rottenness, and there is nothing more thoroughly rotten than making people believe that society can be cured by a political hocus-pocus” (*M*, 465). The analogy conveyed through the sustained medical metaphor is, of course, grounded in Lydgate’s struggle for reform of medical practices, so it is ironical that he accuses Will of the “charlatanism” he himself is accused of. Will’s response — “But your cure must begin somewhere, and put it that a thousand things

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<sup>9</sup> He is variously described as “trying his wings” (*M*, 330), a “Byronic hero” (*M*, 380), “a sort of Burke with a leaven of Shelley” (*M*, 499), “a sort of gypsy” (*M*, 436; 461), “a rising young man” (*M*, 291), “[a young man] whose only capital was in [his] brains” (*M*, 291), “a sort of Daphnis” (*M*, 496); and self-descriptions (the first two here attributed to him by Casaubon), include “Pegasus” (*M*, 82), “Genius” (*M*, 83), and “[inheriting] rebellious blood” (*M*, 366).

which debase a population can never be reformed without this particular reform to begin with” (*M*, 465) — leads into an extended and at times heated argument pivoting on the possibility of uniting ends-and-means pragmatism and personal idealism and altruism and furnishing a substantial gloss on the ideology underlying the leitmotif (Graver: 220) of reform which runs through the novel.

As seen in Ladislav’s attempt to educate the politically vacillating and eclectic Mr. Brooke in the necessity of constitutional reform and the ideological coherence needed to bring it about (*M*, 460), Ladislav’s ideal is the balancing of different class interests and claims, but in class-conscious dystopian society like *Middlemarch* the response he receives suggests how difficult or almost impossible this will be to achieve (Graver: 220). An ideal micro-level example is set by Dorothea’s altruistic concern which, regardless of differences in social rank, demands acquaintance with people’s lives and situations. When Celia says, “Dodo is fond of melancholy things and ugly people” (*M*, 326), Dorothea answers, “I am fond of knowing something about the people I live among.... It seems to me we know nothing of our neighbours, unless they are cottagers. One is constantly wondering what sort of lives other people lead, and how they take things” (*M*, 326). Dorothea’s constant interest in people makes Will also interested in politics as the best means for correcting wrongs systematically perpetrated in the name of social mores and traditions that maintain the distinctions of status and rank. Thus he comes to study the political situation “with as ardent an interest as he had ever given to poetic metres or medievalism” (*M*, 461); his desire to be near Dorothea (combined with his lack of alternative purpose) brings him to “meditat[e] on the needs of the English people” and to “criticiz[e] English statesmanship” (*M*, 461). As he develops a sense of purpose, “the easily-stirred rebellion in him helped the glow of public spirit” (*M*, 461).

Eliot espoused the responsibility of the artist through moral education, declaring the highest education to be a moral one through art: “I think aesthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching because it deals with life in its highest complexity” (*GEL*, Vol. IV, 300). The narrator’s prelude to the description of the depressed and dilapidated hovel called Freeman’s End, a satirical comment on a romanticizing tradition in landscape painting — “that softening influence of the fine art which makes other people’s hardships picturesque” (*M*, 393) — is a critique of art that fails to engage with moral responsibility, reinforcing the earlier demands for a morally engaged art articulated by Dorothea. In that her novels are a critique of British society and an exhortation to improve society by eliminating social evil, she is opposed to art for art’s sake. In fact, at the end of the novel she makes Will a literal legislator, rather than artist as

“unacknowledged legislator” as formulated by Shelley. Thus Dorothea is shown to commend Will’s change of perspective from caring only for art to caring also for the lives of people:

“And you care that justice should be done to every one. I am so glad. When we were in Rome, I thought you only cared for poetry and art, and the things that adorn life for us who are well off. But now I know you think about the rest of the world.” (*M*, 542)

Such a change of attitude is testament to the dialogic relationship between Dorothea and Will, as each influences the other through communication and negotiation, so that the former goes through “a sort of desecration” (*M*, 551) and the latter “consecration” (*M*, 772). Dorothea’s “fanaticism of sympathy” is mitigated through the dialogue with epicurean Will who in turn becomes interested in the moral responsibility of art. The concept that an Other is needed for the construction of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, often associated with the thought of Lacan, is to be found already in the work of Feuerbach: “A man existing absolutely alone would lose himself without any sense of his individuality in the ocean of Nature; he would neither comprehend himself as man nor Nature as Nature” (82). The characters in Eliot’s novels who are most successful in finding subjective wholeness are those who enter into a dialogic relationship with other characters and receive due responses. The prime example is Will. In contrast with Will, Casaubon is confined within his own world, refuses to enter into a meaningful dialogue with Dorothea, cannot endure correction, and is unable to change. Dialogic relationships also extend to embrace altruism and egoism, so that altruists are willing to listen and accept other points of view, whereas egoists refuse to be influenced by other consciousnesses, remaining instead in the confined world of selfhood. Similarly, characters who break the barriers of class and rank due to their altruistic vision are empowered to reshape society along utopian lines. Dorothea, Mr. Farebrother (as a clergyman, with “the clergyman’s privilege of disregarding the Middlemarch discrimination of ranks” (*M*, 403)), Lydgate (as a doctor), and Will (as a person without caste) can broaden their understanding, transcend the debilitating barriers, comprehend, as Dorothea says, that “the greater part of the world is mistaken about many things” (*M*, 537), and glimpse some element of truth. Other characters such as Rosamond, Celia, Sir James, and Mrs. Cadwallader, who, in the “huge whispering-gallery” of the world (*M*, 412), are the chief critics of heroic strivers such as Dorothea, Lydgate, and Will, are confined within the distinctions of class and rank and remain “Philistines.”

Altruism is thus an ameliorating force coextensive with the utopian impulse, whereas egoism is a destructive force. But Utopia is never here and now, and altruism will only slowly transform the world. The First Reform Bill, which began to mitigate the intensity of classism, sexism and racism, and hence suggested the possibility that society would gradually improve, is usually considered to have inaugurated the modern state of England. It held out the hope that

the failures and frustration of aspiration experienced by Dorothea and Lydgate can be forestalled by establishing a society able to accommodate individuals, no matter how “other” they seem to be, who happen to be individuals with different ideas or far advanced ideas. That is, a society that does not cope with innovatory and progressive ideas may have to undergo top-down, legislative change. Prior to the Reform Bills, the law lagged behind changing social realities, resulting in some absurd disjunctions as anachronistic legal statutes were out of step with the progressive direction of social change. Mr. Brooke’s comment that “This Reform will touch everybody by-and-by — a thoroughly popular measure — a sort of A, B, C ... that must come first before the rest can follow” (*M*, 500) is about laying a foundation for construction of utopian society (a suggestion reinforced by the immediate resistance offered by Mawmsey’s here-and-now, materialistic self-interest). Artists as politicians are equipped to shape a utopian future because they have imagination and vision, are not confined in the phenomenal world like scientists (or shopkeepers) who interpret the world only in materialistic terms. Because social reform is a process, once it is set in motion it guarantees individual endeavors to further improve society.

## Conclusion

As Graver comments, “the resistance of traditional community to change and the need to break free from provincial boundaries — from hereditary custom, habitual practice, and inherited institutions — are suggested all the way through the novel, in part by locating the desire for reform in characters who are outsiders. Those who most disapprove of present conditions are newcomers: Dorothea objects to the inequality of the woman’s lot, Lydgate to the medical system, and Ladislav to social and political institutions. Their final return to the world beyond Middlemarch speaks to the limits of provincial life, but it carries also some new affirmations” (222). The novel, then, is the tracing of the process of abjection: three abjected protagonists are defeated in their struggle with the “community of vice,” (*M*, 442) are expelled, and end up in London.

*Middlemarch* is Eliot’s evaluation of her time and its place in the unfolding of social progress. Although the novel foreshadows what the world might be like, its utopian effect still lies predominantly in the depiction of dystopian situations — of things in the world that should not be. She criticizes the insularity of England that makes it fall behind the times so that the potential of a Dorothea is wasted in the name of secondary help; young scientific aspirations are frustrated because society is incapable of accommodating new ideas or their proponents. The burden of utopian possibility falls on artists like Ladislav, as a legislator of change for the better,

because of their vision and imagination of a better society. Eliot suggests that only abjected figures such as Ladislav can originate genuine change, because from their radically different perspectives they are positioned to generate such change.

The frustrated utopian dreams of Dorothea and Lydgate are represented as failures of religion and goodness, and science and truth, respectively. Greater potential is shown to inhere in Ladislav, the creative artist turned politician. The novel does not represent that success, but the original readers could know from their vantage point of forty years on that the Reform Bill of 1832 was a breakthrough change that moved England closer to a modern state, where individual capacity is valued rather than subsumed under class, gender, and race. Thus the narrator contrasts past in present in an allusion to a recent past “when the habits of the different ranks were less blent than now” (*M*, 432), now being the beginning of the 1870s. Even though the First Reform Bill maintained sexism and classism by excluding women and the working class from enfranchisement, for example, it is the procedure, not the immediate result as a closed case that counts. The ensuing two reform bills, the Second Reform Bill (1876) and the Third Reform Bill (1882), indicate that through history changes are made gradually for the better and they are ongoing; both society and individuals change over time.

Eliot’s account of the failed aspirations pivots on the dystopian elements of English society — the misogyny which blocks Dorothea’s plans, and the materialism and self-regard in which Lydgate becomes enmeshed. If society can be changed by top-down political reform, such as entailed in the Reform Bills, individual dreams to make society a better place in which to live will be realized — just as Saint Theresa could form a religious order within the supportive atmosphere she found in her time. Eliot’s advancement of politics as a vehicle for utopian construction continues in her next and final novel *Daniel Deronda*, where the protagonist has a vision and a larger imagination than religion or science. Eliot’s characterization of Dorothea, Lydgate and Will as pursuing utopian dreams shows “the goodness that ‘belongs to the finest natures’ of both men and women, ... and this goodness arises from a ‘responsiveness to duty and pity,’ under the command of human intelligence and will” (Paxton 1991: 183), which are key elements in human agency.

**CHAPTER VIII**  
**Nationalism and Multiculturalism:**  
**Shaping the Future as Transformative Utopia in *Daniel Deronda***

With the consciously Utopian pictures of his own future (*DD*, 324)

But were not men of ardent zeal and far-reaching hope everywhere exceptional? — the men who had the visions which ... were the creators and feeders of the world — moulding and feeding the more passive life which without them would dwindle and shrivel into the narrow tenacity of insects, unshaken by thoughts beyond the reaches of their antennae. (*DD*, 684-85, ellipsis mine)

*Daniel Deronda* (1876) is evidence of the claim that novels are an important utopian impulse and a force for shaping futures, as its proto-Zionism was influential within the movement which led to the establishment of Israel in 1948,<sup>1</sup> although the novel had not envisioned the constant conflict that has wracked the region ever since: the moral difficulties facing Israel today and, more broadly, the difficulties inherent in any national movement as it moves from an ideal to a reality. Eliot's utopian impulse is represented in her own words as "experiments in life":

But my writing is simply a set of experiments in life — an endeavour to see what our thought and emotion may be capable of — what stores of motive, actual or hinted as possible, give promise of a better after which we may strive — what gains from past revelations and discipline we must strive to keep hold of as something more sure than shifting theory. (*GEL*, VI, 216)

Until *Middlemarch* (1872) Eliot's utopian impulse was manifested in the study of English rural life. *Romola* is the exception, where fifteenth-century Renaissance Italy is the setting, although it is by analogy a critique of English society. However, in *Daniel Deronda* (1876) her vision is extended to international relationships among nations and the issue of race is more prominent, and hence the novel introduces themes pertaining to nationalism and multiculturalism. That is, her utopian vision is extended to a global level rather than to the improvement of British society, so that progress of world society is now at issue.<sup>2</sup> By criticizing

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<sup>1</sup> Proto-Zionism refers to a Zionist impulse that preceded the actual Zionist movement. *Daniel Deronda*, set in the 1860s and published in 1876, well precedes the first use of the term "Zionism." According to Bonaparte, it was not until 1882 that Nathan Birnbaum coined the term and not until 1895 that Theodore Herzl published *Judenstaat*, where he urged the Jews to recreate their ancient nation (1993: 37). For a brief history of the reception and impact of *Daniel Deronda* within Jewish communities, and its relation to the Zionist movement, see Kerker.

<sup>2</sup> According to Paula Marantz Cohen, in 1948, at Israel's independence, Abba Eban extolled Eliot as one of their "first visionaries" (2002: 195). Yet, it ignores the Arab world which was not palpably present to Eliot's experience in the way that the Jews of the West [sic] End were. Cohen claims that Eliot's aim was less to forward Jewish settlement in Palestine than to critique her native Britain: to reveal the moral challenges facing a powerful and prosperous nation with respect to a much-maligned people living within it (Cohen 2002: 2). This claim is in opposition to my view — Eliot is not interested in only Britain, rather, she anticipates globalization and the relationship between nations and further the improved world society. For Eliot's global consciousness see Lee (2004).

her own country as dystopian and presenting an ideal Jewish nation as utopian, she suggests a new world order and its progress. The novel is set in 1865-66, only a decade prior to its publication in 1876, so instead of the defamiliarizing effect of historical distance the novel invokes recent memory and compels a reinterpretation of contemporary British imperialism and colonialism and its influence on other nations such as Jamaica.<sup>3</sup> It juxtaposes and contrasts the lives of two protagonists, Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda, who respectively represent English and Jewish culture, British imperialism/materialism<sup>4</sup> and colonialism and Jewish spirituality. Eliot's critique of dystopian elements of British society is manifested by exposing the abjection of both protagonists: Gwendolen is a suppressed figure, as her young aspiration of domination and mastery is destroyed by the gender politics of marriage, while Daniel is abjected because he is illegitimate and does not know his origin (parentage) and finally proves to be an exile, a Jew. The major difference between Eliot's earlier novels and *Daniel Deronda* is that Eliot presents a powerful, concrete vision as a utopian alternative as well as a critique of the dystopian elements of British society. Her critique of British society stems from recognition of the immorality of imperialism and colonialism and its analogy with the position of women as the colonized, contrasted with that of men as the colonizer (See Carroll, Lesjak Linehan, and Meyer). Eliot's presentation of a powerful vision of utopia is in the form of the Jewish theocratic nation, specific in geography, race, religion, culture and politics, where religion, law, and moral life are combined. The Jewish state is an exemplar which will enrich other nations, not through any imposition of its uniform, monologic values, but through multiculturalism and diversity — "the balance of separateness and communication" (*DD*, 724) or "separateness with communication" (*DD*, 725). In developing this as a novelistic principle, Eliot anticipates Bakhtin's formulation of the dialogic accommodation of difference and otherness — that is, his argument that every "voice" in a novel is "a point of view, a socio-ideological conceptual system of real social groups and their embodied representatives" (1981: 411). If not, then the novel will represent a colonization, a subjugation of other cultures under monologic authoritative values which require assimilation. Visions and ideas become reality through their transforming power, where human agency and choice are important determining factors. That is why Mordecai is presented as a

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<sup>3</sup> Meyer gives a succinct account on Jamaican uproar in 1865, where Governor Eyre responded to the rebellion of the emancipated, landless and exploited blacks with the cruel murder of 430 men and women, the flogging of 600, and the destruction of more than 1,000 black homes. Grandcourt in his dealings with Gwendolen is compared with Governor Eyre in his treatment of Jamaicans, who are subject to cruel imperial domination (165).

<sup>4</sup> The relationship between materialism and imperialism is explained by Bonaparte, who cites Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* where characters who regard themselves as pure materialists feel alive only by exercising their wills and imposing them on others. The marriage between Gwendolen and Grandcourt is in the language of imperialism and colonialism — such as "mastery," "command," "rule," and "domination" (1993: 27) — because they view their lives from the pure perspective of materialism.



visionary who believes in ideas and their transforming power. The Utopia imagined by Eliot in this novel is not confined to one society, but concerns the coexistence of multiple nations with different religions, politics and cultures, and aims to embrace the entire world in its progress. That there is no teleological view of the world or the framework for progress, and (Judaism's) history depends on human choice amongst a multiplicity of possible pathways is in accordance with the Bakhtinian principles of *dynamics, openness and limitlessness*, where human agency and choice can intervene and change the direction of the progress of history. (I will return to this question below in discussing the argument between Daniel and Lilly about progress versus development theory (*DD*, 526)).

Unlike her previous novels where she presents dystopian elements as a way of expressing a utopian impulse, where realism is the dominant mode, Eliot adopts different narrative strategies for *Daniel Deronda* in order to model a visionary, powerful utopia, which does not yet exist except in its transformative potential. Sarah Gates, for example, points out that the novel does not proceed by “a straight chronology, as we have had in every other Eliot novel.... Instead, we are given an almost modern series of flashbacks and ‘prologues’ which move backwards and forwards from the opening scene (701). David also comments on Eliot’s departure from realism, and identifies “the abrupt opening, the fracturing of temporal and spatial continuity, and the repeated instances of coincidence and fulfilled visions” (1981: 184). Grandcourt’s death is long foreshadowed, even from the “upturned dead face” that provokes a silent shudder when first encountered at Offendene (*DD*, 27), then Gwendolen’s Gothic horror when the face is unexpectedly exposed during the game of charades (*DD*, 60-61), and her later nightmare vision of a white dead face (*DD*, 674): that these images are proleptic is realized only with Grandcourt’s death. Gates has drawn attention to the use of Gothic mode in the Gwendolen/Grandcourt story, as in this particular example (701). Mordecai’s instant identification of Daniel as founder of a new nation, declaring that he had been waiting for him for five years (*DD*, 493), is another instance of fulfilled visions. Eliot’s departure from realism is also indicated by her description of Daniel as a descendant of aristocratic Jews — a “Sephardic (Iberian) Jew” rather than “the Ashkenazi Jews” who are commoners (*DD*, 842). Daniel is described idealistically as a perfect human being, which is a far cry from, for example, the *Adam Bede* narrator’s claim, in describing Mr. Irwin, that, “I aspire to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind” (*AB*, 221). The novel begins with FID of Daniel as a focalizer, and throughout the novel there is an abundance of FID and focalization of various characters and consciousnesses, along with the presentation of different points of view. This polyphony finds its fullest expression in the form of debate in

“The Philosophers” Club at the Hand and Banner in Chapter 42, which presents the central theme of the novel — the construction of utopian ideals.

The novel starts with a powerful metonymy in the gambling scene in a foreign casino, a microcosm of a mixture of peoples of different race, class and gender. As Shuttleworth remarks, Gwendolen “dwells in a world without apparent fixity, whether of place, social class, fortune, or religion” (1981: 278). Luck or chance rather than application of rule or morality determines the gain or loss of fortune. Its immorality is represented by Daniel’s words, “[one’s] gain is another’s loss” (*DD*, 337). Gambling is also criticized as a false desire to improve the human lot not by agency, but by chance. His criticism of Gwendolen’s gambling is presented in free indirect discourse, Daniel as a focalizer:

Was she beautiful or not beautiful? And what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil; else why was the effect that of unrest rather than of undisturbed charm? Why was the wish to look again felt as coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents? (*DD*, 7)

Daniel’s scepticism about Gwendolen’s beauty is associated with his condemnation of her immoral behavior in gambling. Even though at this stage Daniel’s Jewishness is not revealed to himself it is Jewish spirituality condemning British materialism. In addition, Daniel shows a mild sexism: when the two have a brief encounter later, Gwendolen asks Daniel whether it was disagreeable for her to gamble because she was a female and Daniel says it was the more regrettable because she is a woman (*DD*, 337). His association of Gwendolen’s beauty with morality and questioning the very nature of beauty indicates that human beings are not only body, but also spirit, and beauty is not only physical but has to be accompanied by morality. Later Gwendolen feels Grandcourt’s physical attractiveness is more detestable than ugliness (*DD*, 671) because of his immorality. Thus Gwendolen and Grandcourt both are a metaphor of degenerate British society, with the difference that Gwendolen is female and therefore an object to be conquered and colonized. Her determination to be happy and to exercise agency over her own destiny is destined to fail because of the structure of society where materialism, imperialism, and colonialism are the prevalent ethos.

### **England as Dystopia — Manifestations of Abjection**

The dystopian traits in England are manifested in the attitude of people who are conscious of the hierarchies of race, class and gender. Male, British aristocratic people are favored over people lower in the hierarchy, and rank and relationship to great people are assumed to be boastworthy. This consciousness that people are classified hierarchically with regard to race, class and gender results from imperialism (materialism) and colonialism (thus

racism and sexism), and an ethnocentric assumption that British culture is the best in the world. Eliot rails against this attitude in her oft-cited letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe:<sup>5</sup>

As to the Jewish element in 'Deronda,' I expected from first to last in writing it, that it would create much stronger resistance and even repulsion than it has actually met with. But precisely because I felt that the usual attitude of Christians towards Jews is — I hardly know whether to say more impious or more stupid when viewed in the light of their professed principles, I therefore felt urged to treat Jews with such sympathy and understanding as my nature and knowledge could attain to. Moreover, not only towards the Jews, but towards all oriental peoples with whom we English come in contact, a spirit of arrogance and contemptuous dictatorialness is observable which has become a national disgrace to us. There is nothing I should care more to do, if it were possible, than to rouse the imagination of men and women to a vision of human claims in those races of their fellow-men who most differ from them in customs and beliefs. But towards the Hebrews we western people who have been reared in Christianity, have a peculiar debt and, whether we acknowledge it or not, a peculiar thoroughness of fellowship in religious and moral sentiment. Can anything be more disgusting than to hear people called "educated" making small jokes about eating ham, and showing themselves empty of any real knowledge as to the relation of their own social and religious life to the history of the people they think themselves witty in insulting? They hardly know that Christ was a Jew. And I find men educated at Rugby supposing that Christ spoke Greek. To my feeling, this deadness to the history which has prepared half our world for us, this inability to find interest in any form of life that is not clad in the same coat-tails and flounces as our own lies very close to the worst kind of irreligion. The best that can be said of it is, that it is a sign of the intellectual narrowness — in plain English, the stupidity, which is still the average mark of our culture. (*GEL*, VI, 301-2)

Imperialism and colonialism are the product of a degenerate "worldly" religion, and their impact is represented in the novel by marginalized Jews living in a segregated East End of London, allusions to the Jamaican uprising which recur throughout, and subjugated female characters, including Gwendolen in her relation to Grandcourt. The contrast is stark between the lifestyle of the English aristocracy, occupied with hunting, archery and parties, ignorant of world events such as American Civil War (1861-65), and the situation of the Jewish spiritual leader Mordecai, who barely has somewhere to sleep and hardly anything to eat or wear, is dying of consumption, and yet is full of spiritual energy and vision for the future world. In contrast with his spirituality, the British clergyman Mr. Gascoigne, Gwendolen's uncle, is worldly and materialistic: for example, he observes nothing in Gwendolen but an object to barter on the marriage market (*DD*, 37), apt to make a "brilliant marriage" (*DD*, 38), "with one who can give her a fitting position" (*DD*, 78-79). Ill-prepared to be a spiritual guide, his thinking had become "ecclesiastical rather than theological; not the modern Anglican, but what he would have called sound English, free from nonsense: such as became a man who looked at a national religion by daylight, and saw it in its relations to other things" (*DD*, 31). Barbara Hardy comments that "modern Anglican" recalls the doubts and divisions troubling "the Victorian Anglican": Tractarianism, and "the ideological challenge to faith proffered by science, Biblical criticism and Positivism" (1967: 887). A more overtly ironical depiction of his mentality is included later in the novel when, in urging Gwendolen to accept a position as governess at Bishop Mompert's, he reports that the Bishop's

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<sup>5</sup> Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* (1853), is another instance of novels influencing society. It is said to trigger the Civil War (1861-65) among other factors.

wife “is a woman of taste and also of strict principle, and objects to having a French person in the house” (*DD*, 268). No comment is required!

Gascoigne thus simplifies the world from his materialistic, “relation of means to ends” (*DD*, 38) perspective. Bonaparte, drawing attention to the novel’s recurring interest in questions of interpretation, observes that materialism creates incompetent interpreters: “imprisoned in the empirical world and so deprived of the criteria for evaluating events, materialists cannot decipher moral or historical meaning” (1993: 29). Most of the English characters do not have visions, ideals, or morality, and so lack access to deeper, spiritual meanings because their materialistic perspective confines them to literal, empirical meaning. By commenting on the materialism and thus imperialism of contemporary society, with its emphasis on physical activities such as horse-riding, hunting, and archery, Eliot suggests that its trajectory is toward war and she therefore is concerned to redirect its course into more mental or spiritual channels (Bonaparte 1993: 28). Katherine Bailey Linehan similarly draws attention to Eliot’s disaffection from her contemporary society, and argues that as a corrective to the imperialism she saw as “a corrupting force in English national life” Eliot constructs a “nationalist and essentialist ideal” (325). That is, Eliot concretely suggests a transformative utopian model in the form of a Jewish nation state by criticizing elements that constitute a British dystopia where women, foreigners, and people with different ideas are rendered abject and eliminated out of insistence on a conformity to values that themselves should be under scrutiny.

The most sustained dystopian discourse in *Daniel Deronda* is the story of the abjection of Gwendolen Harleth. In this strand, Eliot traces a vivacious, if not always likable, heroine whose principal objective is to gain agency over her own life and to dominate others: “I have made up my mind not to let other people interfere with me” (*DD*, 29). Her motto is “doing as she liked” (*DD*, 136). The society she has access to does not supply her with activities that will satisfy the spirit of a self-regarding “princess in exile” (*DD*, 25). Constantly bored, and on the look-out for excitement, she even considers gambling a “refuge from dullness” (*DD*, 411). Lacking in other-regardingness and ignorant about the wider world, she is imprisoned with her own needs and desires within her own “Ptolemaic world.” Such solipsism and lack of a moral sense reduce her to an abjected figure and, along with an element of “calculation” she develops in her early twenties (*DD*, 25), this induces her to marry Grandcourt for material gain, even though she knows of his mistress and children. As she confesses to Deronda later, “I was afraid once of being poor; I could not bear to think of being under other people; and that was why I did something — why I married” (*DD*, 766). As a way of “manag[ing] her destiny” (*DD*, 54) when she is reduced to poverty, she tries to be a singer/actress. Although she has mastered French and

music, which are regarded as “two justifying accomplishments of a young lady,” her talent is only moderate and in fact to succeed as a singer she would have to “unlearn” years of drawing-room performance habits. Indeed, what stings her sharply in the interview with Klesmer is her “first experience of being taken on some other ground than that of her social rank and beauty” (*DD*, 256). Not able to endure poverty, nor to be a governess, Gwendolen gains financial security through marriage — what Klesmer, now acknowledging her beauty, characterizes as “entering on a luxurious life by a short and easy road” (*DD*, 260). Daniel’s comment “one’s gain is another’s loss” is proper because by marrying Grandcourt Gwendolen deprives Mrs. Glasher of her right. Eliot’s depiction of Gwendolen as the product of a materialistic society includes the recognition that it is her gender acculturation that frustrates her desire to control and dominate. Mr. Gascoigne declares that “Marriage is the only true and satisfactory sphere of a woman” (*DD*, 143), and Gwendolen’s entire short life has been nothing but preparation for her to make a “brilliant marriage.”

Gwendolen is often associated with the image of empire: she is described, in metaphors for the colonized, as “the princess in exile” (*DD*, 25), “the queen in exile” (*DD*, 41), “a queen dethroned” (*DD*, 290), “again she seemed to be getting a sort of empire over her own life” (*DD*, 292) and Offendene is described as her “domestic empire” (*DD*, 41). She also considers herself to be an “empress of luck” (*DD*, 156) when in the gaming room. Even when she is in Genoa, with Grandcourt, they are described as an imperial couple:

This handsome, fair-skinned English couple manifesting the usual eccentricity of their nation, both of them proud, pale, and calm, without a smile on their faces, moving like creatures who were fulfilling a supernatural destiny — it was a thing to go out and see, a thing to paint. (*DD*, 681)

The irony of such allusions is not lost. Gwendolen has a keen sense of the inequality between women and men, and had asserted that “when I married, I should not do as other women do” (*DD*, 70). Instead she is entirely subjected — colonized, in effect. The powerful contrasting example is Alcharisi, who has to obey her father and marry to gain freedom, but she has her own way and rules her husband rather than being ruled. But in her case she has the gift of being a professional singer/actress. Gwendolen’s worldly notion of happiness was to equate it with “personal pre-eminence and *éclat*” (*DD*, 273), and once she discovers she is not equipped for this, and her choices are restrained by her economic situation and her value in material things, she has to accept subjection as a dominated wife. The account of her “world-nausea” (*DD*, 272) just prior to Grandcourt’s proposal is a model of abjection: she cannot imagine a future; she has no wish to live; she lacks spiritual sustenance; she blames others for her troubles.

The root cause of Gwendolen's abjection, at this point and as it is sustained throughout the novel, is the conflict between social expectations of women and her own desires. In an earlier exchange with Grandcourt she had proleptically sketched her own future:

"We women can't go in search of adventures — to find out the North-West Passage or the source of the Nile, or to hunt tigers in the East. We must stay where we grow, or where the gardeners like to transplant us. We are brought up like the flowers, to look as pretty as we can, and be dull without complaining. That is my notion about the plants: they are often bored, and that is the reason why some of them have got poisonous." (*DD*, 135)

Rather than becoming a poisonous plant, Gwendolen's otherness as a female attracts numerous negative epithets: she is compared to a serpent (*DD*, 12), Lamia (*DD*, 12), sylph (*DD*, 39), witch (*DD*, 77, 95), a Calypso (*DD*, 101), the Vandyke duchess (*DD*, 655) — all negative sexual images, which reflect social expectations of her. It is not difficult to expect that it is impossible for her to be happy in the society that has such negative and contrasting notions about her. She is constantly under the male "gaze," first Daniel's moral gaze in his disapproval of her gambling, then Grandcourt's "exploring gaze" (*DD*, 112) and later Grandcourt's "narrow, immovable gaze" (*DD*, 672), as it renders her a part of a yacht, a commodity. Always mastered in these ways, her picturing of her prospects as a "mastering wife" is an illusion. It disappears at the moment of decision to marry, forcefully enacted through a discourse of power within which focalization switches from Grandcourt to Gwendolen:

At that moment his strongest wish was to be completely master of this creature — this piquant combination of maidenliness and mischief: that she knew things which had made her start away from him, spurred him to triumph over that repugnance; and he was believing that he should triumph. And she — ah, piteous equality in the need to dominate! — she was overcome like the thirsty one who is drawn towards the seeming water in the desert, overcome by the suffused sense that here in this man's homage to her lay the rescue from helpless subjection to an oppressive lot. (*DD*, 301-2).

Already, in seven short weeks ... her husband had gained a mastery which she could no more resist than she could have resisted the benumbing effect from the touch of a torpedo. (*DD*, 423, ellipsis mine).

Both extracts pivot on Gwendolen's abjection: it mocks the notion of "equality in the need to dominate," and the perception that domination is the basis of marriage indicates that, from her already abjected state, she is entering a contract which denies all possibility of subjective agency, as the metaphor of the desert mirage confirms. The second extract confirms that her state has been made permanent. Further, throughout this discourse of domination and mastery no space is left for love or other intersubjective relationship. In this marriage market place there is no room for "equality" of any kind: Grandcourt "had won her by the rank and luxuries he had to give her"; and Gwendolen "had meant to rule and have her own way," but had "sold herself" (*DD*, 669). Grandcourt's immediate success in achieving mastery over Gwendolen is due to his material resources and his rigid patriarchal notion of female subjection in matrimony. This materialistic view is expressed through animal analogies, as opposed to any spiritual dimension,

as Grandcourt is described as various cold-blooded animal figures: a “handsome lizard of a hitherto unknown species” (DD, 137), “(as neutral as) an alligator” (DD, 157), and “sleepy-eyed animal on the watch for prey” (DD, 412).

The total mastery and domination of Gwendolen is explicitly couched in terms of colonized and colonizer, with Grandcourt described as particularly merciless in the cruelty of his rule:

If this white-handed man with the perpendicular profile had been sent to govern a difficult colony, he might have won reputation among his contemporaries. He had certainly ability, would have understood that it was safer to exterminate than to cajole superseded proprietors, and would not have flinched from making things safe in that way. (DD, 593-94)

The reference is usually taken as drawing a parallel between Grandcourt as cruel agent and Governor Eyre. Earlier in the novel, with reference to the Jamaican uprising, Grandcourt had maintained that the Jamaican Negro was a beastly sort of Baptist Caliban (DD, 331) — and the Caribs were, indeed, “superseded proprietors” who had been “exterminated.” When Deronda mentions, “our gain is another’s loss” criticizing Gwendolen’s gambling, it also refers to British exploitation of its colonized nations such as Jamaica. Grandcourt regards Gwendolen as commodity and he wants to control her opinion as well: “What do you know about the world? You have married me, and must be guided by my opinion” (DD, 593). Gwendolen even feels like “an imprisoned dumb creature” (DD, 590). However, Grandcourt ironically becomes the most abjected figure in the novel despite such dominance and mastery over Gwendolen — there is an obvious analogy with Tito and Romola. According to Kristeva, what is more abject than a cadaver? Grandcourt is a metaphor for England itself, with his materialistic view of life and flattering view of his own attractiveness. It could not even occur to him that anyone could feel either physical or moral repulsion towards him (DD, 670, 671). The process of Gwendolen’s mastery and domination by Grandcourt ends in his death and liberates her from the prison of marriage as she repeats, “I shall live. I mean to live” (DD, 806, 807). However, her future life is left open because it is not known where she can find a partner who will offer such an open intersubjective relationship as Daniel, a man without a sexist desire for domination and not subject to the imperialist trope. Daniel poses the question, “Is it absolutely necessary that Mrs. Grandcourt should marry again?” (DD, 799) — it is not, but there are no other societal expectations of her.

Where Gwendolen wished her life to be shaped by a dominating agency, Mirah, her foil within *Daniel Deronda*, acquiesces to the tradition of women’s subordination and secondary position. Because she is a Jewess, a member of another (and diasporic) race, as well as a woman, a figure like Mirah is “doubly ‘other’ ” in such an imperial and patriarchal society (Lovesey 1999:

117). She is described as a refined Jewess, who knows Italian and music (*DD*, 200) and unlike Gwendolen she is professionally trained. Eliot's criticism of the Philistine culture of England is represented by the fact that all the artists in the novel, including musicians, are from foreign countries: Mirah, Klesmer, and Alcharisi, and Hans Meyrick also studies in Italy. In another prolepsis, looking forward to her marriage with Daniel in the final chapter, Mirah is compared to the *Arabian Nights* character "Queen Buddor" (*DD*, 209), the destined partner of Prince Camaralzaman, the figure Daniel is compare to (*DD*, 184, 371). Their linking through this pre-text is compelled when young Mab asks if Mirah might sing for Prince Camaralzaman (*DD*, 371). Mirah, too, is afflicted with unhappiness, but she attributes this to the racism that she regards as the collective lot of Jewish people:

"the unhappiness in my life came from my being a Jewess, and that always to the end the world would think slightly of me and that I must bear it, for I should be judged by that name; and it comforted me to believe that my suffering was part of the affliction of my people, my part in the long song of mourning that has been going on through ages and ages." (*DD*, 215)

Mirah's abjection reaches its lowest point when she tries to end her life by drowning:

"Then I thought of my people, how they had been driven from land to land and been afflicted, and multitudes had died of misery in their wandering — was I the first? And in the wars and troubles when Christians were cruelest, our fathers had sometimes slain their children and afterwards themselves; it was to save them from being false apostates." (*DD*, 222).

Mirah has a sense of history and her place in the history of her own people. She can interpret her ordeal as part of the racism enacted generically toward her race. Lady Mallinger's wish to convert her to Christianity (*DD*, 226) is the common sentiment of British society in its inability to accept "otherness." Mirah is rendered doubly abject because of her strong sense of cultural identity and because, as a foreigner, the pressure of society to convert her is felt more stringently.

Mirah is compared with "a pearl" washed in mud (*DD*, 223) by Mrs. Meyrick, referring to the abjected state she had been brought to by gender, racial and religious subjection. Her submissive nature is an image of passivity without "planning and devising" (*DD*, 224), contrasted with Gwendolen's defiant spirit. When Amy asks why women should sit apart behind rails in the synagogue, Mirah replies that she never thought about it: "I like what I have always seen there, because it brings back to me the same feelings — the feelings I would not part with for anything else in the world" (*DD*, 362). The marriage between Daniel and Mirah at the end of the novel still takes place within the frame of patriarchy and subjugation of women, so that even though there is no image of dominance and mastery as in the case of Gwendolen and Grandcourt, the transformative utopianism seems not to embrace gender equality. However, Mirah is not always described as meek and obedient; but finds an independent voice in the interpretation of an old text:



“women are specially framed for the love which feels possession in renouncing, and is thus a fit image of what I mean. Somewhere in the later Midrash, I think, is the story of a Jewish maiden who loved a Gentile king so well, that this was what she did: — She entered into prison and changed clothes with the woman who was beloved by the king, that she might deliver that woman from death by dying in her stead, and leave the king to be happy in his love which was not for her. This is the surpassing love, that loses self in the object of love.” (*DD*, 735)

This seems a story of a powerful love that sacrifices selfish desire and pursues the happiness of a loved one. Beneath this seemingly beautiful love story Mirah sees a tale of jealousy. In an earlier reference to unrequited love, the narrator had commented, “all meanings, we know, depend on the key of interpretation” (*DD*, 57), a comment again relevant here because Mirah interprets the story in the context of her jealousy of Gwendolen’s love for Deronda. To her, a woman like Gwendolen is “increasingly repugnant” (*DD*, 653). She says, “The Jewish girl must have had jealousy in her heart, and she wanted somehow to have the first place in the king’s mind” (*DD*, 735). This is surprising on Mirah’s part because she had been described as an obedient, mild, and passive character so far. According to her, as Zimmerman observes, it is self-expression not self-sacrifice that motivates the woman (1993: 168). This shows how a text is interpreted differently with different keys.

As in Eliot’s other novels, characters who defy outer laws in order to pursue inner laws either increase the intensity of their abjection or gain agency and make some change in history. Catherine Arrowpoint, like Alcharisi, is a powerful Dostoevskian hero in that she does not blindly conform with customs and traditions, but is prepared to abject herself by transgression. When her parents oppose her marriage with Klesmer on the basis of his foreignness, dismissing him as “a gypsy, a Jew, a mere bubble of the earth” (*DD*, 246) and reminding her of her duty as a transmitter of property (*DD*, 246-47), she criticizes public “good” as public “evil”; it is a means by which autonomy and self-respect are dismantled, and through which patriarchy thrives:

“Why is it to be expected of an heiress that she should carry the property gained in trade into the hands of a certain class? That seems to me a ridiculous mish-mash of superannuated customs and false ambition. I should call it a public evil. People had better make a new sort of public good by changing their ambitions.” (*DD*, 247)

Arrowpoint, as Zimmerman argues, directly challenges the assumptions of a male-centered political economy. According to Zimmerman, in refusing to embody a mere vessel or a note of exchange, Catherine revises the mandates of English society (1993: 168). When asked to perform her duty, she declares that she gives priority to following her feelings, which are inner laws contrasted with outer laws, saying that she will not give up the happiness of her life to ideas that she does not believe in and customs she does not respect (*DD*, 246).

Catherine courts abjection by resolving to marry a man who, because of his foreign origin, is also an abjected figure in the eyes of British society (*DD*, 246). Klesmer is not self-abjecting, however, instead he regards himself as an “unacknowledged legislator”:

“We help to rule the nations and make the age as much as any other public men. We count ourselves on level benches with legislators. And a man who speaks effectively through music is compelled to something more difficult than parliamentary eloquence.” (*DD*, 242)

His comment on music functions as a critique of British society in general which pursues Philistine values. He has cosmopolitan ideas anticipating “a fusion of races” (*DD*, 242), and when he criticizes the lack of idealism in English politics and the materialistic and self-regarding grounding of its relationship with other races — in short, its imperialism and colonialism — the party man Mr. Bult dismisses his ideas as “flighty” and “political refugeeism” (*DD*, 241), erroneous simply because he is a foreigner. But Klesmer’s ideas challenge the opinion held by the majority and suggest an alternative way of thought. In maintaining her agency through her insistence on marrying Klesmer in opposition to family and societal pressures, Catherine, in conjunction with Klesmer, models the pathway to agency through transgression, since they finally overcome that opposition and establish a rich and creative life for themselves.

Alcharisi, too, is another abject figure who gains agency through transgression. She finds it unbearable to have a Jewish framework for female subjectivity and hence to be a means to transmit Jewish culture, rather than an agent for her own action and course of life. She says she was “put in a frame and tortured” (*DD*, 662). Alcharisi’s resentment of her Jewishness is confined to how it genders her as a woman, however, so her function within Eliot’s scheme is as an example of universal female abjection. When Daniel sympathizes with her anguish of “enforced renunciation” (*DD*, 631), she says:

“You are not a woman. You may try — but you can never imagine what it is to have a man’s force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl. To have a pattern cut out — “this is the Jewish woman; this is what you must be; this is what you are wanted for; a woman’s heart must be of such a size and no larger, else it must be pressed small, like Chinese feet; her happiness is to be made as cakes are, by a fixed receipt.” That was what my father wanted. He wished I had been a son; he cared for me as a makeshift link. His heart was set on his Judaism....” (*DD*, 631)

The pressure she feels as a Jewish woman with desires differing from those dictated by the gender schema of her culture makes her abject, but she follows the pathway through transgression to agency and hence pursues what she wants to do in life. As she says, her nature and talent gave her a charter (*DD*, 664) to follow her feelings and pursue the life of an artist. Alcharisi’s spirit has something in common with Gwendolen’s, but the kinds of education they received differentiated the course of their lives. The former is taught professionally, while the latter incompetently, as Klesmer comments, whereby one made a singer/actress with the power to subject the men in her life, while the other is reduced to a subjected wife.

Alcharisi attempted to intervene in her son's life by erasing his origin and protecting him from the abjection of being a Jew, one of a marginalized and wandering people:

"I delivered you from the pelting contempt that pursues Jewish separateness. I am not ashamed that I did it. It was the better for you." (*DD*, 635)

"And the bondage I hated for myself I wanted to keep you from. What better could the most loving mother have done? I relieved you from the bondage of having been born a Jew." (*DD*, 627)

The irony in her action is that in attempting to shelter Daniel from the opprobrium of Jewishness she has reproduced the process she herself resented: she chooses his identity and thereby frames his subjectivity. In the event, ignorance about his origin makes Daniel abject and rootless, unable to decide what to do with his life. Daniel is glad to be a Jew and asks Alcharisi, "How could you choose my birthright for me?" (*DD*, 627), responding to her comment, "Why do you say you are glad? You are an English gentleman. I secured you that" (*DD*, 627). But the revelation results from Alcharisi's scepticism about the rightness of her action and her reinterpretation of the relationship between individual and society, specifically between Jewish people and the concept of nation. Daniel regards the revelation of his origin as a restitution — "you have been saved from robbing my [Jewish] people of my service and me of my duty" (*DD*, 662) — since he is to fulfil the task of national foundation. Nevertheless, the chest which Alcharisi delivers to Daniel, from grandfather to grandson, contains the tradition that excludes daughters who are regarded as "an instrument" (*DD*, 662). This kind of patriarchy is what Alcharisi is indignant about. The Jewish pawnbroker Cohen says, "A Jewish man is bound to thank God, day by day, that he was not made a woman; but a woman has to thank God that He has made her according to His will. And we all know He has made her — a child-bearing, tender-hearted thing is the woman of our people" (*DD*, 575). Patriarchy defines men's and women's separate roles and puts women in a secondary position within society and history, depriving them of agency, imposing a limited subjectivity. Although Alcharisi is a Jewish woman who lived in Italy, Eliot uses her as a universal example for the situation of nineteenth-century women in European society in general.

The conflict of individual and society exists when individuals do not conform to the general social views and ideas. Exiles such as Daniel, Mordecai and Klesmer are regarded as abject because of their different ideas and opinions about the belief of the majority. They are Dostoevsky's *déclassé* members of society — abjected within British society because they differ in ideas and origins (as foreigner, as exile) from the majority of people.

Daniel's abjection is manifested in his different ideas, for example, his altruism in a materialistic world makes him regarded as "other"; in his illegitimacy (not knowing his parents, and thus his origin); and in his "foreign look" (Jewish look) and his "exile." He is laughed at for

having something of the “knight-errant” (*DD*, 325) in his disposition, and because of his empathetic and altruistic tendencies, “his early habit of thinking himself imaginatively into the experience of others” (*DD*, 511). The tour of the stable, which had been converted from the former Abbey’s choir, represents an important point. When Daniel shows respect by taking off his hat, Grandcourt sneers at him, saying, “Do you take off your hat to the horses?” (*DD*, 420). The stable can be a metaphor for British society; while Grandcourt is a typical materialist British male who looks at only the appearance, regardless of history and meaning, Daniel sees through to the historical meaning behind the appearance.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, when at University he had viewed the purpose of study not as a means to success in life, as the majority of people consider, but “to feed motive and opinion” (*DD*, 179). He has a wider view than the Anglocentrism and ethnocentrism of England, which the narrator attributes to his “boyish love of universal history, which made him want to be at home in foreign countries” (*DD*, 180). He quits Cambridge and goes to study abroad in Germany. The following dialogue contrasts Daniel’s otherness and Sir Hugo’s habitual narrow perspective which embraces Englishness but is suspicious of empathy:

“So you don’t want to be an Englishman to the backbone after all?”

“I want to be an Englishman, but I want to understand other points of view. And I want to get rid of a merely English attitude in studies.”

“I see; you don’t want to be turned out in the same mould as every other youngster. And I have nothing to say against your doffing some of our national prejudices.... But, for God’s sake, keep an English cut,... And ... it is good to be unselfish and generous, but don’t carry that too far. It will not do to give yourself to be melted down for the benefit of the tallow-trade; you must know where to find yourself.” (*DD*, 184, ellipses mine).

Sir Hugo is all affability, however, and is represented as tolerant of the difference, “the deep-lying though not obtrusive difference in their notions and tastes” (*DD*, 321), and loves Daniel all the same. However, being regarded as “other,” even in a genial and affable way, detaches Daniel from society. As he explains to his mother later on, what he tried to do was to “have some understanding of those who differ from [him]self” (*DD*, 630).

When Daniel discovers that he is a Jew he says that his Englishness will remain in him even though he chooses to be a Jew (*DD*, 661). As Said comments on exiles, this shows his “*contrapunctual*” — or polyphonic — worldview as an exile because exiles, conscious of their own liminality, are aware of at least two perspectives (1990: 366). Allegorically, this means he will embody in his consciousness the whole Judeo-Christian tradition (Bonaparte 1993: 38). As Carl T. Rotenberg comments, Daniel is a person in search of a core identity. Is he an Englishman or a Jew, or is he both? If both, how can he reconcile this conflict? He encompasses core

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Wilson Carpenter observes that the converted stable also figures Gwendolen’s humiliating subjection to Grandcourt in marriage as well as the decay of English Christianity into the worldliness represented by Mr. Gascoigne (1986: 150-51).

manifestations of abjection as a person who has no place in society, a wanderer, a man uprooted from his origins who must define his identity for himself (3).

Daniel's transgressive spirit is noted by Sir Hugo, who says it is impossible to "ticket him off easily, he has notions of his own" (*DD*, 322). Through abjection and transgression Daniel finds his mission in life — social captainship: "the heart and brain of a multitude — some social captainship, which would come to [him] as a duty" (*DD*, 750) — to re-establish a national homeland for his race. Had he identified himself as an "Englishman to the backbone," interested only in success in life, he could not have accepted the project of national reconstitution, let alone developed empathy with human misery or the vision of a world consisting of distinct but intercommunicating nationalisms as his grandfather articulated. Joseph Kalonymos reminisces of Daniel's grandfather:

"What he used to insist on was that the strength and wealth of mankind depended on **the balance of separateness and communication**, and he was bitterly against our people losing themselves among the Gentiles; 'It's no better,' said he, 'than the many sorts of grain going back from their variety into sameness.' " (*DD*, 724, emphasis added)

This is a denunciation of the monologic uniformity that, in a nation such as England, pressures Jews to convert to Christianity, and an affirmation of distinct cultural identities and diversity that leads to multiculturalism. In inheriting his grandfather's mission, Daniel wishes to exercise his agency and choice:

"I shall call myself a Jew," ... "But I will not say that I shall profess to believe exactly as my fathers have believed. Our fathers themselves changed the horizon of their belief and learned of other races. But I think I can maintain my grandfather's notion of **separateness with communication**. I hold that my first duty is to my own people, and if there is anything to be done towards restoring or perfecting their common life, I shall make that my vocation." (*DD*, 725, ellipsis mine, emphasis added)

Daniel's mission is stated in the spirit of proto-Zionism:

"I am going to the East to become better acquainted with the condition of my race in various countries there, ... The idea that I am possessed with is that of restoring a political existence to my people, making them a nation again, giving them a national center, such as the English have, though they too are scattered over the face of the globe. That is a task which presents itself to me as a duty: I am resolved to begin it, however feebly. I am resolved to devote my life to it. At the least, I may awaken a movement in other minds, such as has been awakened in my own." (*DD*, 803, ellipsis mine)

Daniel makes clear that Jewish people need an organic center in the form of a re-established nation. He is not clear about the conditions of his race in the East, but he is determined to investigate and dedicate himself to the task.

Daniel's mission in life is inspired by Mordecai, succinctly described by the narrator as having "an ebbing physical life, and a widening spiritual loneliness" (*DD*, 472). Even though Mordecai was born and raised in England, he is an alienated and marginalized figure because his Jewishness and spirituality mark him as "other." He is described as:

A man steeped in poverty and obscurity, weakened by disease, consciously within the shadow of advancing death, but living an intense life in an invisible past and future, careless of his personal lot, except for its possibly making some obstruction to a conceived good which he would never share except as a brief inward vision.... (DD, 533)

Physically and spiritually he is abject; he dwells in the East End of London, in poverty and in spiritual isolation, with hardly anybody understanding or paying attention to his opinion:

“I said, let my body dwell in poverty, and my hands be as the hands of the toiler; but let my soul be as a temple of remembrance where the treasures of knowledge enter and the inner sanctuary is hope. I knew what I chose. They said, ‘He feeds himself on visions,’ and I denied not; for **visions are the creators and feeders of the world**. I see, I measure the world as it is, which the vision will create anew. You are not listening to one who raves aloof from the lives of his fellows.” (DD, 497, emphasis added)

In contrast with the materialism prevalent in “mainstream” British society, he pursues spiritual welfare and a better future and has faith that the world progresses. In a materialistic society that only sees manifest appearances, he is doomed to be alienated, marginalized, and abjected. But he has an unyielding spirit and a vision for his people, and shows that great ideas that become realities stem not from material wealth but from spiritual wealth. Shuttleworth compares his ideas with those of Copernicus and Galileo, who overturned the geocentric perspective of Ptolemy and offered a “social vision, an alternative to the stultifying, enclosed life of English society” (1981: 278). Copernicus and Galileo are said to be “immovably convinced in the face of hissing incredulity” (DD, 511), which is the power of Mordecai who has dwelt alone in his belief until he met Daniel.

### **Israel as Transformative Utopia: Nationalism and Multiculturalism**

Nineteenth-century England perceived Jewish people as the very model of abjection: alien, other, a dispersed and degraded people, practicing a superseded form of belief, apt (in a Darwinian conception of things) to die out, a cancer within a healthy society. But there is another side to this, as Oliver Lovesey explains: the racial and cultural exclusiveness of Jewish nationhood, characterized by admirably pure blood lines and coherent national aspirations, was also a model for Victorian England, proffering a culturally homogeneous and ethically pure identity that some Victorians nostalgically longed for in the 1870s (1998: 3-4). Given the latter, it is less surprising that Eliot suggests a model Utopia in the establishment of a Jewish nation as a contrast with dystopian British society. In her essay “The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!” Eliot makes it clear why she chose Jewish people as exemplary for utopian thought:

Unquestionably the Jews, having been more than any other race exposed to the adverse moral influences of alienism, must, both in individuals and in groups, have suffered some corresponding moral degradation; but in fact they have escaped with less of **abjectness** and less of hard hostility towards the nations whose hand has been against them, than could have happened in the case of a people who had neither their adhesion to a separate religion founded on historic memories, nor their characteristic family affectionateness. Tortured, flogged, spit upon, the *corpus vile* on which rage or wantonness vented themselves with impunity, their name flung at them as an opprobrium by superstition, hatred, and

contempt, they have remained proud of their origin. Does any one call this an evil pride?... The pride which identifies us with a great historic body is a humanising, elevating habit of mind, inspiring for the sake of that ideal whole; and no man swayed by such a sentiment can become completely **abject**. ("Modern Hep!" *ITS*, 156, ellipsis mine, emphases added.)

Jews are thus a dispersed people with no geographical center to call their nation, scattered throughout the world in permanent exile. Living as foreigners in other people's nations, and identifiably other, they are abjected, marginalized, and alienated. This is deemed to be the existence of a degenerated people, and is exemplified in Eliot's description of immoral Mr. Lapidoth and the vulgar family of the pawnbroker Cohen. However, that they have preserved their tradition and their spirituality, in contrast with the degenerating British culture, is interpreted as a powerful regenerating force. This is why Eliot, through the voice of a dying Jewish prophet, suggests a powerful utopian vision of a Jewish nation which will contribute to world progress. Monica Cohen also argues that how a group affiliation can dignify and refine becomes an argument on behalf of Jewish nationalism and a nationalist movement, and it suggests that a national identity and a national homeland offer unifying values that can rescue a people from the baser forms of temptation that degrade them when they must live in abjection as a minority in another culture (1998: 329). According to Gillian Beer, the Jewish people represents a stable race because of its survival despite genocide, keeping a culture intact (203), which shows the survival of the favored races in both Darwinian and biblical terms. "The absence of homeland raises question of the relationship between nationality and race — and between race and culture. Jewish people are considered one of the most developed races — they resisted extinction, and had not been obliterated by genocide, scattering or intermarriage, an old and chosen (or 'favoured') people, who survived culturally by a hermeneutic process — through interpretation and reinterpretation — rather than through transformation" (Beer: 203). Hodgson, in making note of "the spirituality of Judaism, its communal ethos, its ethical universalism, its sense of divine presence and historical process" (136), comments that "Judaism offers a more realistic and less dangerous assessment of history in that the Messiah has not yet come, there is no single way to God, and redemption occurs as an ongoing, unfinished process in a diverse and pluralistic world" (136), whereby human agency and choice play an important role in determining future directions of the world, contrasted with "the triumphalism and absolutism of much Christian theology" (136).

The debate in the Hand and Banner in "The Philosophers" Club in Chapter 42 abounds with polyphonic voices addressing the diverse possibilities of assimilation to the Gentiles and a maintained separateness of Jewish people. The "Philosophers" — "a few poor men given to thought" (*DD*, 521) — are compared to the masters who handed down the thought of Jewish people, and thus "the great Transmitters" (*DD*, 525). The dialogue debates issues of change,

progress and development, and the cause of social change and the power of ideas as the main transforming cause (*DD*, 524). In Daniel's words not all changes can be progress so that those that lead to destruction should be resisted and those to progress should be encouraged:

"Ye're all agreed that societies change — not always and everywhere — but on the whole and in the long-run... I would beg to observe that we have got to examine the nature of changes before we have a warrant to call them progress, which word is supposed to include a bettering, though I apprehend it to be ill chosen for that purpose, since mere motion onward may carry us to a bog or a precipice. And the questions I would put are three: **Is all change in the direction of progress? if not, how shall we discern which change is progress and which not? and thirdly, how far and in what ways can we act upon the course of change so as to promote it where it is beneficial, and divert it where it is injurious?**"

But Buchan's attempt to impose his method on the talk was a failure. Lilly immediately said — "Change and progress are merged in the idea of development. The laws of development are being discovered, and changes taking place according to them are necessarily progressive; that is to say, if we have no notion of progress or improvement opposed to them, the notion is a mistake."

"I really can't see how you arrive at that sort of certitude about changes by calling them development," said Deronda. "There will still remain the degrees of inevitableness in relation to our own will and acts, and the degrees of wisdom in hastening or retarding; there will still remain the danger of mistaking a tendency which should be resisted for an inevitable law that we must adjust ourselves to, — which seems to me as bad a superstition or false god as any that has been set up without the ceremonies of philosophising."

"That is a truth," said Mordecai. "Woe to the men who see no place for resistance in this generation! I believe in a growth, a passage, and a new unfolding of life whereof the seed is more perfect, more charged with the elements that are pregnant with diviner form. The life of a people grows, it is knit together and yet expanded, in joy and sorrow, in thought and action; it absorbs the thought of other nations into its own forms, and gives back the thought as new wealth to the world; it is a power and an organ in the great body of the nations..." (*DD*, 525-26, ellipses mine, emphasis added)

The issue of the progress of history is discussed: what is and what ought to be. Without this distinction there can be no basis for valuation. For if evolution alone is the definition of progress, anything that occurs is progressive, anything that does not is not. Whatever is, whatever happens, must be therefore seen as right. Daniel and Mordecai oppose this and believe in transgression, insisting that the course of human events depends on human beings pursuing deliberate action — it depends on human agency. Answering Lilly, Daniel maintains that many things have come to pass not because they were inevitable but because, seeming to be so, no one attempted to prevent them, while many others did not occur because, appearing not inevitable, no one made the effort to realize them. For Eliot it is "human agency and choice" that are and must forever remain the true "principle of growth." While emphasizing the importance of human agency in the progress (development, evolution) of history, humankind should have a purpose, a vision of an ultimate goal, otherwise it is hard to know what to select and what to reject among the multitude of possibilities. Choice and agency are therefore necessary in determining which direction a society is to take. Deronda takes Mazzini as an example for Italian independence:

"If we look back to the history of efforts which have made great changes, it is astonishing how many of them seemed hopeless to those who looked on in the beginning. Take what we have all heard and seen something of — the effort after the unity of Italy, which we are sure soon to see accomplished to the very last boundary. Look into Mazzini's account of his first yearning, when he was a boy, after a restored



greatness and a new freedom to Italy, and of his first efforts as a young man to rouse the same feelings in other young men, and get them to work towards a united nationality. Almost everything seemed against him: his countrymen were ignorant or indifferent, governments hostile, Europe incredulous. Of course the scornors often seemed wise. Yet you see the prophecy lay with him. As long as there is a remnant of national consciousness, I suppose nobody will deny that there may be a new stirring of memories and hopes which may inspire arduous action.” (DD, 535-36)

The capacity of human agency to change history is emphasized. Mazzini is one who “desire[d] to be an agent, to create, not merely look on” (DD, 475). In giving this example, Daniel defends both nationalism and the transgressive ideas that can enable the abjected to gain agency and bring about change in history. Daniel, Mazzini, Copernicus, and Galileo are Dostoevsky’s *déclassé* heroes of society because their ideas are different from the rest of the world and yet proved to have been a pursuit of truth.

The debate about national consciousness and the stirring of old memories into the reconstruction of a nation with a specific geographic location produces views divided between assimilation and separateness of Jewish nationality, with Pash and Gideon in opposition to Mordecai. Pash’s opinion is that “the sentiment of nationality is destined to die out” (DD, 525). He argues that the idea of nations is becoming obsolete and believes the “current of progress” (DD, 525) is heading toward a global state. Gideon’s opinion is also that Jews should melt gradually into the populations they live among (DD, 527), because he considers assimilation to be progress and Judaism as regressive in its adherence to “superstition and exclusiveness” (DD, 527). Gideon rejects the historical connection of Jewish people with Palestine as “perverted by superstition” (DD, 534) and argues that, instead, rationality demands an abandonment of “a literal fulfilment of the prophecies about restoration” (DD, 534). If this were done, a union between Jewish people and the rest of the world could be brought about. Mordecai, on the other hand, opposes mixing with the Gentiles, and thus assimilation into the Christian world, on the basis that eighteen centuries of “slow deposit” of cultural identity cannot be undone by newly earned citizenship — his view is that “host” societies lack a sense of fellowship and brotherhood with his own race (DD, 528). As Eliot writes on British nationalism, people need somewhere to anchor, emotionally, sharing the same cultural identity:

England itself shall not be subject to foreign rule. The fiery resolve to resist invasion, though with an improvised array of pitchforks, is felt to be virtuous, and to be worthy of a historic people. Why? Because there is a national life in our veins. Because there is something specifically English which we feel to be supremely worth striving for, worth dying for, rather than living to renounce it. Because we too have our share — perhaps a principal share — in that spirit of separateness which has not yet done its work in the education of mankind, which has created the varying genius of nations, and, like the Muses, is the offspring of memory. (“Modern Hep!” *ITS*, 160)

Bonaparte makes the important point here that Eliot’s thinking is in line with the nineteenth century concept of folk, a people who shared a common culture, and with the argument that the existence of a folk is the basis for the existence of a nation (1993: 37). Cultural units should

become political units. Putzell-Korab also defines contemporary folk ideology as “the memory of geographic roots as well as the lived experience of them to bind a people” (180). In Eliot’s works, it is shown that such roots must be preserved not only in memory but must also be eventually recovered if a people are to have a vigorous national life (Putzell-Korab: 180). As Bonaparte comments, Eliot is sceptical about the idea of global government because she does not believe in the ability of human beings to achieve universal love that a global government would demand — rather, people desire to be anchored in something specifically their own (1993: 38). In asserting that “Each nation has its own work” (*DD*, 530), Mordecai is subscribing to this concept of the specificity of a folk, although on the principle of “separation with communication” he argues that the world is enriched by interaction amongst diversity. Such interaction enables creative activity because, as Mordecai also argues, “The life of a people grows ... in thought and action; it absorbs the thought of other nations into its own forms, and gives back the thought as new wealth to the world” (*DD*, 526), while the interaction of individuals with each other and their world allows for a man “who feels the life of his people stirring within his own” (*DD*, 527) to “enkindle the souls of multitudes, and make a new pathway for events” (*DD*, 527).

As opposed to this “separateness with communication,” assimilation inevitably involves some mainstream culture as a standard to be assimilated into. Abolishing other cultures by way of assimilation involves imposing monologic values. The basic assumption of abolishing Jewish culture and religion is the superiority of Christianity to Judaism and Jewish ways of living, culture, and tradition. It is equivalent to imperialism and colonialism that impose the imperialists’ or colonizers’ values upon other nations with different cultures (*DD*, 527-28). As an alternative, multiculturalism, as an outcome of nationalism, is foreshadowed in the arguments by which Mordecai seeks to refute Gideon’s assimilationist position. He also opposes Lilly’s contention that the Jewish people are a stand-still people and there is no development in them as a race by saying that they are the only people who combine religion, law, and moral life:

“Where else is there a nation of whom it may be as truly said that their religion and law and moral life mingled as the stream of blood in the heart and made one growth — where else a people who kept and enlarged their spiritual store at the very time when they were hunted with a hatred as fierce as the forest fires that chase the wild beast from his covert?” (*DD*, 531)

“Who says that the history and literature of our race are dead? Are they not as living as the history and literature of Greece and Rome, which have inspired revolutions, enkindled the thought of Europe, and made the unrighteous powers tremble? These were an inheritance dug from the tomb. Ours is an inheritance that has never ceased to quiver in millions of human frames.” (*DD*, 536)

Through the dying prophet, Eliot suggests a powerful utopian scheme: build a nation of their own on the historical site of their race, enable it to flourish organically and with dignity, and

from this coherent center let it then, as a center of wisdom and knowledge, interact with the world:

“Revive the organic centre: let the unity of Israel which has made the growth and form of its religion be an outward reality. Looking towards a land and a polity, our dispersed people in all the ends of the earth may share the dignity of a national life which has a voice among the peoples of the East and the West — which will plant the wisdom and skill of our race so that it may be, as of old, a medium of transmission and understanding.” (DD, 532)

Mordecai thus demands that people exercise their agency, make choices and make a difference in history. Arguing that disengagement from socio-historical processes is “the blasphemy of this time,” his vision entails the transformation of desire into agency so that a “better future and the better future of the world” can be actualized through human will (DD, 538). The “divine principle,” he maintains, is “action, choice and resolved memory” (DD, 538). National separateness does not mean isolation but a balancing of distinctiveness and the betterment of the world through communication. Rejecting the injunction, “Let us be as if we were not among the populations,” he instead admonishes, “choose our full heritage, claim the brotherhood of our nations, and carry into it a new brotherhood with the nations of the Gentiles” (DD, 538).

In line with Bakhtin’s dialogic principles of recognition of multiple consciousnesses, Paula Marantz Cohen argues that *Daniel Deronda* pivots on a paradox, attempting to balance two opposing principles: the ideal of distinct national and cultural identity; and a “religion of humanity” which preaches a dissolution of barriers between peoples — a willingness to be open to the other point of view and cultivate the empathy and intellectual openness which Eliot embodies in Deronda himself (198). The greatness of the novel lies in its vision of these elements in mutual coexistence, in “the balance of separateness and communication,” (DD, 724) or “separateness with communication” (DD, 725). This vision of ‘separateness with communication’ seems to embody an attempt on Eliot’s part to counteract “the kind of levelling, or creeping sameness and disintegration of experience which threatens English society at large and is, by implication, associated with imperialism. Race, separateness and nationality thus ally themselves against money, uniformity and assimilation” (Lesjak: 34). Eliot censures the imperialist habit of the English diaspora: “We do not call ourselves a dispersed and a punished people: we are a colonizing people, and it is we who have punished others” (“Modern Hep!” *ITS*, 146). As Beer explains, “English exploration and diaspora take always the form of dominance through colony and empire. Their journeying is always unreceptive, their repose a kind of annulment” (200).

Mordecai’s belief in the spirituality of Jewish people (DD, 537), their ideas (DD, 524), agency, and choice (DD, 538) guarantees the right direction of historical development. His main argument about agency and change occurs earlier in the text as a narrator comment:

An insane **exaggeration** of his own value, even if his ideas had been as true and precious as those of Columbus or Newton, many would have counted this yearning, taking it as the sublimer part of a man to say, “if not I, then another,” and to hold cheap the meaning of his own life. But the fuller nature desires to be an **agent**, to create, and not merely to look on: ... while there is warmth enough in the sun to feed an energetic life, there will still be men to feel, “I am lord of this moment’s change, and will charge it with my soul.” (*DD*, 475, ellipsis mine, emphases added)

This encourages people to act on the conviction of their ideas, taking up the responsibility to participate in the direction of history, to be a subject not an object in one’s own life. Mordecai’s vision requires that positive action be done to achieve the goal. The realization of the vision begins when Daniel leaves for Palestine rather than remaining in England and waiting for someone else to accept the mission.

According to Graver, the three pillars of community are family, geography, and shared belief and purpose (236). This is indeed the basis of the concept of the folk, and hence the basis of nationalism, that is, “an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage” (Said 1990: 359). When Daniel sets out at the end of the novel to pursue the (proto-)Zionist dream, all three pillars are in place. However, Graver argues that Alcharisi has undermined the primary pillar of community — the family — and Daniel’s setting out for Jerusalem uproots the pillar of place, and so the question of nationalism is placed under challenge. For all the talk of Jewish separateness leading ultimately to world community, Daniel’s task is the forging of an individual nation. His pilgrimage, in addition, runs counter to organicist theory of the folk, according to which society is a growth, not a transmutation and transplantation. In affirming growth through transmutation and transplantation, and translating an inchoate vision of community into concrete reality, the closing action of the novel makes questionable the organic wholeness of society (Graver: 225, 242). However, von Herder’s eighteenth-century Romantic theory that the nation state is shaped from the culture of the people was already in its time opposed by Rousseau’s theory of civic republicanism (a state is based on collective assent rather than cultural history). Von Herder’s theory has been used to justify the constitution of various states since the eighteenth century (and indeed the idea of cultural continuity justifies the existence of the modern state of Israel), but it is also inescapable that collective assent will come into play in determining the necessary political structures. The organicist theory really only works if the “pillar of place” has been more or less constant, so that it might be sufficient to invoke “shared belief and purpose” as sufficient foundation for a nation, as Mordecai himself does in citing the example of “the great North American nation” forged from diverse elements within a period of two hundred years (*DD*, 537). The marriage of Daniel and Mirah thus functions as a metonymy of nation building: both are displaced wanderers, and effectively parentless, but their marriage establishes a family grounded in shared belief and purpose. The other marriages depicted in the

novel lack this quality, and do not constitute a family, with the notable exception of Catherine and Klesmer. Graver does not take into consideration that Jews are drifting for the lack of a geographic center, and part of the reason for their persecution is that their perceived shared belief and purpose mark them as alien within other nations. To overcome perceived and/or actual abjection, and to establish a utopian society, the novel argues, the Jewish people must resort to transmutation and transplantation. The important issue is “where?” and the concrete picture of a Jewish nation is articulated in the vision of Mordecai, specific in place:

“There is store of wisdom among us to found a new Jewish polity, grand, simple, just, like the old — a republic where there is equality of protection, an equality which shone like a star on the forehead of our ancient community, and gave it more than the brightness of Western freedom amid the despotisms of the East. Then our race shall have an organic centre, a heart and brain to watch and guide and execute; the outraged Jew shall have a defence in the court of nations, as the outraged Englishman or American. And the world will gain as Israel gains. For there will be a community in the van of the East which carries the culture and the sympathies of every great nation in its bosom; there will be a land set for a halting-place of enmities, a neutral ground for the East as Belgium is for the West. Difficulties? I know there are difficulties. But let the spirit of sublime achievement move in the great among our people, and the work will begin.” (*DD*, 535)

It is in the form of a republic, physically between the East and the West, mediator of feud and promoter of peace, which will thereby contribute to the progress of the world. Articulation of the relationship of separation to nationality within Judaic history, assigns to Judaism the status of a national collective which carries “the culture and the sympathies of every great nation in its bosom” as the transmitter of “the brightness of Western freedom amid the despotisms of the East.” Carolyn Lesjak comments that in this argument representation of the East or Easterners is relegated to a purely marginal status, referenced only in order to reinforce through repetition an “oriental despotism” in contrast to Western freedom (31). To theorize this position she cites two central points made by Edward Said: first, he underscores the view of the despotic ‘orientalized’ East upon which the Zionist project is premised and which is supported by the vision of Palestine as an unpopulated piece of land; secondly, he points out the way in which such an attitude toward the East says less about the east than it does about the Occident’s construction and representation of itself vis-à-vis the ‘Orient’ (Lesjak: 31; citing Said 1978: 56-114). The Easterner is never represented as only despotic; in fact, the Easterner is never really represented at all (Lesjak: 31), which results from the absence of consciousness of the Other.

The debate about nationalism or assimilation of the Jewish people is not dialectic, but dialogic, hence the opposing ideals of distinct national and cultural identity and a religion of humanity do not cancel each other out. As Clifford J. Marks argues, Eliot describes how political, religious, and philosophical questions can be debated without the kind of rancor usually associated with disagreement. These debates inform a language that allows individuals to assert their beliefs within a dialogic principle without their core identities being threatened (3).

However, as Terence Cave comments, “the emphasis of the book is firmly in favour of ethnic identity and against assimilation, or the ‘melting-pot’ ”— which is the cosmopolitanism of Klesmer (*DD*, 242) or Gideon (*DD*, 527) (xxiii). Eliot seems to side with Jewish nationalism and multiculturalism by the decision she allots to the main characters and by the turn of events, thus cancelling out the principles of dialogism. However, the content of nationalism and multiculturalism tend more toward Bakhtinian principles; in fact, assimilation, whether by the fusion of races or cosmopolitanism, implies a much more monologic culture.

## Conclusion

A utopian impulse is pursued in *Daniel Deronda* by criticizing the dystopian elements of one society and envisaging another, better society that implies positive future directions, as Cave comments:

her exceptional powers of imaginative projection enabled her to write a novel which enacts a symbolic equivalent of that journey for its readers.... the risk of leaving behind the reassuring form of the realist novel; of disturbing and embarrassing her reading public by drawing them into the world of Jewish culture; of looking towards a future which for many people, including Jews, seemed an absurd dream, and which has now assumed a reality complex beyond even Eliot’s imagination. But it is precisely for that reason that *Daniel Deronda* is capable of making its journey through time and the unspeakable events of the twentieth century. (xxxiii, ellipsis mine)

Eliot does not insist that reason should be abandoned for a vague, implausible, mystical faith, but rather admits that appearances can be challenged and hitherto unexplored alternatives or different forms of thought can be accommodated (Shuttleworth 1981: 275). To her *Daniel Deronda* indeed turns out to be a successful experiment in life, but it has elided an abiding problem. As Gideon’s practical viewpoint shows, invoking a literal interpretation of the Bible to identify Palestine as the organic center to be revived is very problematic (*DD*, 533-34), and Mordecai’s attempt to refute this does not address that problem but instead argues that the land is a dystopia which needs to be redeemed “from debauched and paupered conquerors” (presumably the Palestinian Arabs and the Turks) and prevented from becoming an arena for endemic European wars. He, and presumably Eliot, fails to grasp the significance of Palestine being an already populated land, nor to anticipate the conflict between Israelies and the Palestinians which still continues as the conflict between colonizing and colonized peoples, as once abjected and marginalized Jews are now abjecting and marginalizing people in Palestine.

A critique of Eliot’s transformative utopia stems from two kinds of consideration: one is the patriarchal nature of the utopia, however diluted in its intensity, and the other is her view on the Orient, and thus the problem of the (re-)settlement of Israel in Palestine. Firstly, the nature of patriarchy that the new utopia adopts raises the question of the very nature of utopia. The novel details Mordecai’s vision and Daniel’s agency but nowhere envisages a space for women’s

agency that will enable it to make a contribution to the establishment of a utopian nation. Mirah is submissive and satisfied with being a secondary means. Even though their relationship in marriage is not that of domination and mastery like that of Gwendolen and Grandcourt, Daniel also thinks of Mirah as part of the furniture when he finds a house for Mirah and Mordecai: “But was not Mirah to be there? What furniture can give such finish to a room as a tender woman’s face?” (DD, 546). When it comes to ideas and visions of construction of utopian society, the relationship focuses on that of Mordecai and Daniel. Some critics such as Zimmerman (1993: 155) in fact comment that the marriage is not between Mirah and Daniel, but between Mordecai and Daniel. However, Eliot’s patriarchy is mild where there is no mastery or domination and her analogy between gender politics and national politics implies that the gender hierarchy in utopia is not the relationship between the colonizer/colonized, or that of the oppressor/oppressed.

Secondly, Eliot does not consider the displacement of indigenous Palestinians entailed in the establishment of a Jewish state and the concomitant processes of transmutation and transplantation. Hence it becomes another scheme whereby Europe colonizes “other” races. It seems to me in doing so she accepts literally the biblical myth of Jewish restitution in Palestine, basing her “make-believe of a beginning” (DD, 7) in this premise. Critics such as Reina Lewis (216-17) and Meyer (183-84) argue that, historically, there were two reasons that Britain supported the migration of Jews to Palestine: one is the opportunity to remove undesirable Jews from Britain and the other is to extend the power of the British empire in the name of “protection of European Jews” — thus Jews are regarded as “aliens at home and Britains abroad” (Lewis: 216). As Cave comments, Eliot’s neglect of the political and ethical problems of the displacement of the Palestinian peoples can be criticized, but it was conditioned by the assumptions of the day: Palestine was perceived as a poor, under-populated country, inured to centuries of rule by a power that was now bankrupt and inefficient. Meyer asserts throughout her article that what the novel ultimately does with the Jews, the opposing race with its submerged connection to female rebelliousness against social constraints, is precisely what it does with female rebellion: it firmly ushers both out of the English world of the novel (183-84) — in Kristeva’s terms, *expulsion and elimination of the abject*. It returns those who have strayed and transgressed; it removes them, in the euphemistic language of the novel, “safely to their own borders”:

the beautiful story Plutarch somewhere tells of the Delphic women: how when the Maenads, outworn with their torch-lit wanderings, lay down to sleep in the market-place, the matrons came and stood silently round them to keep guard over their slumbers; then, when they waked, ministered to them tenderly and saw them safely to their own borders. (DD, 195)

However mild and euphemistic in its presentation, there is a stern exclusion of foreigners whose very existence is regarded as a “transgression of the borders.” In order to make their own society clean from dirt, those abjected figures, they have to expel the foreigners. Because Daniel is both English and Jewish he figures as both a continuation of and a break with English culture. His proto-Zionism and ultimate emigration with Mirah (the racial other) — and failure to marry Gwendolen Harleth — safeguards English culture and tradition from miscegenation (but see Wohlfarth for a different version of this argument). The departure of Daniel and Mirah for Palestine is prompted in part by emerging ideology and in part by their abjected state: once they have wrested agency from abjection, they can make active choices and contribute to the progress of the world by working toward the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth. Without abjection in other people’s nation, they would not think about leaving and re-establishing a homeland.

If Lewis’s and Meyer’s comments can be interpreted as a critique of the dystopian elements of British society, that is, its propensity to reject “others” and to impose majority values in an effort to preserve a homogenized culture, they point forward to multiculturalism in one nation in the globalized world. That the Zionist movement and the establishment of a geographic center for the Jewish people in fact entails the removal of the Jews — “other,” unwanted people — from Britain, and thus expulsion and elimination of the abject, raises questions of migration and multiculturalism within one nation. Should people not migrate; and if they do enter another people’s nation, should they assimilate to their culture? What kind of culture should be in the mainstream to be assimilated into? Would their national consciousness allow them to adapt to other culture?

Despite all these entailments, as indicated by the epigraph to Chapter 41 — “It is a part of probability that many improbable things will happen,” (Aristotle, *Poetics*; *DD*, 509) — history proves that improbable ideas by an abject prophet, Mordecai, are in fact realized through followers like Daniel. It is a celebration of all abjected characters with ideas at odds with the society they are located in and the power of human agency and choice in the making of history.



## CONCLUSION

The utopian impulse in fiction is based on the obvious premise that the world could be better than it is, that it might be possible to intervene in social acculturation in such a way as to create a society preferable to that which exists. George Eliot's fiction was written at a time when the literary tradition of creating future utopias was in abeyance. She did not write anything which could be termed "utopian," and it is only in her last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, that she offers at least a minimal sketch of what a utopia might be like. It is possible, however, to expand that sketch of a future possibility on the basis of the fiction that preceded it, because Eliot's pervasive critique of contemporary society pays much attention to what the world should *not* be like (its dystopian realities), and of course readers are invited to extrapolate from that to develop a sense of what the world *should* be like (its utopian possibilities).

At the risk of over-simplifying — and Eliot rarely grants us that luxury — the unarticulated Eliot utopia would be based on the following premises:

- people are entitled to equality before the law
- human value should be determined by ability, not class or rank
- people are entitled to live free from oppression
- society should be free of discrimination on the grounds of gender, class or race
- society should encourage intellectual and religious tolerance
- people should be encouraged to be creative according to their talents
- all people, regardless of gender, class or race should be entitled to engage in productive work
- society should ensure a fair distribution of wealth
- all people should have the opportunity to develop subjective agency to their maximum potential
- human choice and agency are essential for a good life
- quality of education should not be affected by gender or class considerations

In general, these are qualities which pertain to any liberal sense of the good life, but Eliot's fiction is never so naïve as to seek to elicit passive reader assent to such premises. Instead, her novels involve readers in a complex dialogue. Hence this thesis has focused on the examination of Eliot's novels in the light of utopia and dystopia within the framework of Bakhtin's dialogism and Kristeva's theory of abjection. To Eliot dystopia is where abject individuals languish under the monologic values of society, where figures abjected as society's *others* seek pathways to

remedy their states and may, through acts of transgression, win agency for themselves, and through the power to make and act on choices contribute to the progress of society. But dystopian conditions may also determine pathways turning otherwise for society's abjected figures, where transgressive actions compound their abjected states and they become either expelled from society, or silenced and compromised, or simply killed off.

Eliot's critical utopia has significant meaning in that it enters into dialogue with hitherto unchallenged social assumptions. I have suggested that critical utopianism is a mode of fiction which, focusing attention on how the world should not be — that it, on the world's dystopian elements — depicts what is palpably or arguably wrong with the world. Utopia itself is a more open notion, but where reader attention seems more focused on more positive representations, presaging social improvement, for example, I have termed that transformative utopia. The utopian impulses, or utopian leanings, discernible within the fiction are closely imbricated with Eliot's narrative technique in several important ways. Narrative mode shifts from a predominant realism in the earlier fiction (although other genres are already evoked in *Scenes of Clerical Life*) to romance in the later novels. The modes of historical fiction (itself primarily a realist mode) are drawn upon in the novels which depict a chronotope located within the memorable past, so that the strategy of defamiliarization prompts readers to formulate judgments by comparing there-then with here-now, as Eliot feels her way towards the notion of a better society. This is especially evident in *Romola*, where a large separation in space and time (fifteenth-century Florence), both enables the inclusion of a non-realistic utopian idyll and insists, by clear parallels, that there is an analogy with nineteenth-century England. Finally, the novels avoid the effect of monologic didacticism by incorporating multiple perspectives within the text: there are many focalizers and much use of free indirect discourse, techniques which consistently enable dual perspectives. Further, this polyphonic effect is enhanced by the role played by her narrators: these are always male, and exhibit more or less overtly gendered attitudes, subject to various degrees of irony. Earlier narrators are patriarchal and censorious, while later narrators assume a more androgynous and understanding stance, especially with regard to women's issues. Eliot treats her narrators as one of a novel's multiple voices.

Eliot is acutely aware that dystopias produce abjection. As Kristeva argues, in order to keep the social body clean society tries to silence and expel what it finds abject. Abjected characters find voices, however, and readers are aware of these voices because the characters are endowed with narrative status as focalizers. Thus readers witness the cause of abjection, the logic and reason behind transgression, and the particular narrative fork at which the abject may find a pathway toward agency, make choices and thence contribute to the development of society, or

else become more abjected, eliminated and killed off — the ultimate form of abjection.

What Eliot asserts as the causes of abjection (which makes society dystopic) are largely subsumed under three categories: classism, sexism, and racism. Interests pertaining to groups (for example, women), classes and nations, for positive or negative ends, are determined by the society's ideological value judgments. These judgments are shown to be grounded in (usually) nineteenth-century religion, whether established Anglicanism or various forms of dissent. The main force for abjection is the authoritative voice of monologism that imposes one ideological position as absolute truth. Conflict between society and the individual is inevitable, but since society usually assumes priority individual sacrifice is inevitable. The novels reflect two different views of society and its development: one teleological, and the other evolutionary. The former considers history and human society to develop without human intervention, while the latter attributes history and the development of society to human endeavors. Teleology assumes a belief in a superhuman power that leads the world toward amelioration, while the evolutionary model presupposes that human intervention (where human agency and choice is encouraged) can improve and rectify the human condition. There is in fact one principle in operation, namely, the imposition of monologic values, in contrast with the dialogic principle of contingent "truth" articulated by Bakhtin. The underlying assumptions of nineteenth-century religion uphold a *status quo* with regard to attitudes about gender, class and race (because the white Anglo-Saxon male is the pinnacle of both creation and evolution). In religion, human beings are regarded as not capable of deciding important matters, therefore, they have to resort to God for His wisdom (this takes quite extreme forms in the dissenting churches, in, for example, the resort to drawing lots); in gender relations, women are deemed not intelligent enough to make independent decisions, and therefore have to be controlled and protected by men; the lower classes are considered to be in need of protection by the higher class, which is equipped with all the capabilities to rule and decide what is best for the former; and, finally, "inferior" races are deemed to require control by "superior" races, so that the inferior may achieve enlightenment and civilization, thus contributing to an ordered world under the supervision of the superior races. The monologic values under scrutiny are the province of a hegemony over ideas and ideology. Considering the contingency of culture and language, the imposition of one perspective as superior and absolute will contribute greatly to the construction of a dystopian society. Eliot's implicit utopian ideals, on the other hand, encompass plurality and the fostering of the potentials of individuals.

Eliot's protagonists all experience some degree of abjection within their respective dystopian chronotopes. They are "other" in terms of gender, class, race or "ideas" about the

world (for example, altruists tend to get a hard time). In all the societies Eliot describes, most of the women experience the social world as dystopian because its systemic misogyny renders them as objects, secondary beings, confined to the domestic sphere, not permitted a public space or voice. Implicit utopias, such as the Jewish homeland projected in *Daniel Deronda*, may also be involved in effectively suppressing women's voices. As Bakhtin argues, if the dialogism of fiction mirrors the dialogism of society, and multiple voices should be heard, then the exclusion of women's voices leads to a greatly diminished society, a dystopia.

Even though society is bound together as a web (to cite Eliot's prevalent metaphor), and so should be organized on the principle of intersubjectivity, classism divides society and prevents it from functioning effectively and progressing. Eliot's societies disclose systematic exploitation because of the traditional class distinction, enjoyed by "white, male, aristocrats" such as Wybrow, Arthur, Harold, and Grandcourt, but not altruistic and empathetic human beings such as Mr. Gilfil or Adam Bede. By depicting desirable human traits in lower class characters such as Adam Bede or Felix Holt, and an equivalent lack of such traits in aristocrats, Eliot subverts the traditional association of quality with position in class hierarchy.

Foreigners whose races are "other" than British "pink-and-white" and who adhere to a different religion are targets for abjection. Outsiders, and this is worse for foreigners, are not accepted, but regarded as contaminants, and expelled in order to cleanse society. Thus it is hoped that Maggie Tulliver might be shipped off to America because of her "gypsy" looks and unconventional behaviors and ideas, and that Will Ladislaw, ostracized because of his foreign origin (a Polish-Jew), might join the retinue of a colonial governor. Daniel Deronda is subtly expelled from British society because of his race. Foreign women are doubly (or even triply) other (Caterina, Annette, Mirah, and Harold's dead Greek wife), abjected because they occupy three lower categories: woman, lower class, and foreign.

Eliot's implication in her fiction is that if utopia exists it is somewhere else and at some other time in the future, while England here and now is a dystopia. She criticizes England's insularity and exclusiveness, and society's basis in misogyny, classism, and racism, and hence her novels offer subversive readings of traditional views on religion, women, lower class people and foreigners.

Eliot depicts many varieties of dissenting religion, in opposition to the established Church of England, but none is presented as ideal, and all seem to discourage dialogue. Mr. Tryon's evangelicalism still puts Janet in a subordinate position on the basis of her gender. Dinah's Methodism retracts its authorization of women preachers. The Dodson sisters' Christianity is deconstructed as little other than semi-paganism due to its lack of genuine

altruism, and Dr. Kenn adopts a self-regarding position when he has to protect Maggie who is in need. The Calvinism of Lantern Yard shows the misjudgment that occurs when believers abandon human agency and depend on God's Providence, while "them above" sounds polytheistic and primitive, but contains genuine human care and understanding. Savonarola's revolt against church corruption in the pursuit of justice also leaves room for correction, that is, his reform aims at self-aggrandizement. Romola's religion of humanity based on her own morality and altruism is suggestive of the future religion. In *Middlemarch*, no utopian dreams are based on traditional Christianity. Dorothea never prays when the novel begins and her religion is based on the notion of religion of humanity, to make other people's lives better. Lydgate's utopian dream is also based on altruism and his utopia is strictly based on science and positivism. Mr. Farebrother who is a most unconventional priest is presented as the genuine priest and pastor.

Judaism is the religion most comprehensively presented in the novels, but its weakness is seen to be its systemic misogyny. Mirah is not allowed (or she does not expect) to have agency, but internalizes the imposed female subjectivity of a secondary being. In contrast, Caterina and Hetty become abjected and die because they have ideas that differ from the imposed subjectivity and, following a romance paradigm, love someone who is above their class. Maggie is made abject because of her unconventional appearance, which does not conform to a female stereotype, and she is killed off at the end of the novel. Gwendolen Harleth is left alone at the close of *Daniel Deronda*, ill, hysterical and abjected, her declaration that she will live perhaps amounting to little more than physical continuance. Apart from Romola, who becomes a matriarch at the end of the novel and usurps the role of father, all women with different ideas are forced to choose pathways of compromise or death. Dorothea is prohibited from fulfilling her utopian dreams and instead reduced to be a wife and mother, a sad loss of a potential contribution from such an ardent soul, but as with Janet, Esther and Dinah, the nature of her contribution within the domestic sphere is considered to be a significant reconstitution of female subjectivity, and hence a step along the utopian pathway.

Class hierarchies are a dystopian element firmly entrenched in Eliot's societies. Will Ladislav not only has to face the barrier of his racial otherness but is separated from Dorothea by the rigid class distinctions of Middlemarch society. Some small movements across class lines are possible, such as Adam Bede's elevation into a higher class through talent, education and patronage, but Rosamond misapprehends that marrying Lydgate will elevate her status, as he, out of a desire to perform altruistic and productive work, has dropped down the hierarchy. Felix Holt's disregard of the implications of class hierarchy and refusal to go up from the working

class into the middle class is in fact a subversion of the traditional sign/meaning system of binary oppositions. Likewise, the revelation of Harold Transome's parentage — he is the product of an extramarital affair with a middle class lawyer — and that the title to the estate was purchased prove that there is no inherent superiority or inferiority between the classes, as the novel's pivotal inheritance plot neatly illustrates. By showing the tragedies resulting from the class-conscious high-class males such as Wybrow, Arthur, and Grandcourt, Eliot questions who is in fact abject.

Racism is closely connected with gender and classism because all are determined by birth, and the racially other is usually automatically assigned to the lower class. Caterina and Mirah are regarded as lower class because they are racially other (and adherents of a different religion), and are thus other for three reasons. The Jewish Cohen family lives in the East End of London, are regarded as low class, and lead abjected lives. Maggie is associated with a conventionally abjected race, the gypsies, and is eliminated at the end of the novel. Two characters actively engaged in utopian projects — Will Ladislaw and Daniel Deronda — are removed from their original geographical ground, Middlemarch and England, respectively, although utopia does need to be situated somewhere else.

A wry comment in *Daniel Deronda* that, "fifteen years ago ... the perfection of our university methods was not yet indisputable" (*DD*, 180) is symptomatic of Eliot's sustained criticism of English education. Education for boys, as shown in the case of Tom Tulliver, follows a curriculum that will not contribute to the practical advancement of society, and education for girls, as evidenced by Rosamond Vincy, for example, is worse than no education at all. The only local education presented positively is that directed towards working men, especially through the Mechanics Institute system. Most Dostoevskian heroes — idealists, utopists in Eliot's novels — are the product of foreign education — Lydgate from Paris, Will from Heidelberg and Daniel from a German university after dropping out of Cambridge. As Deronda argues, access to different perspectives will help take England along the utopian pathway because insularity leads to stagnation and is contrary to the utopian notion of ongoing change.

Eliot's utopian project thus affirms that subjectivity should not be imposed on the basis of class, gender, or race, but rather individuality should be encouraged as a pathway to agency. Education systems should be changed as the importance of education — both formal and informal — is indicated at many points in her novels. Why does it have to be gender-based? Why is subjectivity attributed on the basis of appearance — woman, lower class, and foreign — rather than for other qualities, when in fact achievements are due to intellectual ability, moral sensibility and personality? The difficulty in interpreting signs is a persistent theme throughout the novels,

because the discrepancy between sign and meaning has an important function in the process of formation of subjectivity, as Kristeva's theory of abjection suggests. The formation of subjectivity pivots on intersubjective relationships between self and other, but the subjectivities of women, lower classes, and colonized people are *subjected* to imposed social values and assumptions, so that they internalize those values.

Utopia demands the impossible, and for this reason has most often been explored through a fantasy genre. Although, as Ruth Levitas suggests, this has the advantage of liberating the imagination from the constraints of possibility, it has the disadvantage of severing utopia from the process of social change (1993: 265). This weakness of utopia as fantasy, and thus as 'no place,' can be rectified by the notion of "critical utopia" demonstrated in Eliot's realist-based critiquing of dystopian societies and privileging an individual agency that endeavors to construct a better, more perfect society. The utopia as a good place and as no place in the critical utopian sense is that it is not static and aspires incessantly to a higher, better ground.

Utopia for Eliot, at least as represented in her novels, is where individuals are judged on their own merit regardless of their gender, class, or race, and are given space for personal development which in turn becomes the basis for the development of society. The utopian dream of a nation without sexism, classism and racism and without risk of stagnation so that new or changing ideas would not find space, ultimately opens out to the hope that, on a global level, there might be diversity in race and culture of such a kind that maintaining one's own culture and race will be important in diversifying the world.

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