THE POLITICS OF SYMPATHY: SECULARITY, ALTERITY, AND SUBJECTIVITY

IN GEORGE ELIOT’S NOVELS

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This study examines the practical and political implications of sympathy as a mode of achieving the intercommunicative relationship between the self and the other, emphasizing the significance of subjective agency not simply guided by the imperative category of morality but mainly enacted by a hybrid of discourses through the interaction between the two entities.

*Scenes of Clerical Life*, Eliot’s first fictional narrative on illuminating the intertwining relation of religion to secular conditions of life, reveals that the essence of religion is the practice of love between the self and the other derived from sympathy and invoked by their dialogic discourses of confession which enable them to foster the communality, on the grounds that the alterity implicated in the narrative of the other summons and re-historicizes the narrative of the subject’s traumatic event in the past.

*Romola*, Eliot’s historical novel, highlights the performativity of subject which, on the one hand, locates Romola outside the social frame of domination and appropriation as a way of challenging the universalizing discourses of morality and duty sanctioned by the patriarchal ideology of norms, religion, and marriage. On the other hand, the heroine re-engages herself inside the social structure as a response to other’s need for help by substantiating her compassion for others in action.

*Felix Holt, the Radical*, Eliot’s political and industrial novel, investigates the limits of moral discourse and instrumental reason. Esther employs her strategy of hybridizing her aesthetic and moral tastes in order to debilitate masculine desires for moral inculcation and material calculation. Esther reinvigorates her subjectivity by simultaneously internalizing and externalizing a hybrid of tastes. In effect, the empowerment of her subjectivity is designed not
only to provide others with substantial help from the promptings of her sympathy for them, but also to fulfill her romantic plot of marriage.
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INTRODUCTION: HISTORICIZING SYMPATHY

Sympathy is a key to understanding George Eliot’s writing. Rather than simplifying or absolutely generalizing Eliot’s works of art, this statement emphasizes the significance of sympathy as an essential term of generating diverse and multiple interpretations of her novels. Eliot’s idea of sympathy serves as a prism through which the complex and delicate nuances of her fiction are illuminated in a wide spectrum of a variety of disciplinary fields such as history, sociology, science, politics, religion, philosophy, psychology, and music.¹ As her correspondence to Sara Sophia Hennell in 1843 suggests, Eliot’s attention to “the truth of feeling as the only universal bond of union” is the foundation of her idea of sympathy to vitalize the human relationship between the self and the other in society (Letters 1: 162). Her insistence upon the importance of enlarging sympathy as an ethical proposition of human solidarity and love is corroborated through her dramatization of human relationship—the interdependence between the self and the other—from Scenes of Clerical Life to Daniel Deronda. Indeed, this emphasis on sympathy raises general important questions: how would it be possible to create the universal bond of human solidarity between the self and the other? Does Eliot’s idea of sympathy only conform to the conventional notion of sympathy with reference to the emotional response of the self to the other’s scene of sympathy? Does Eliot suggest any political implication bound up with the ethical question of the necessity of enlarging the self’s compassion for the other? And how does Eliot’s idea of sympathy involve the necessity of examining the reality of life, the condition of reality, and the discursive systems of signification that determine all kinds of human relationships?

The literary realism in the Victorian period, as George Levine has pointed out in The Realistic Imagination, can be characterized as the attempt to “embrace the reality that stretched
beyond the reach of language” (12). In the case of Eliot’s works of art, the reality that cannot be grasped by the referential system of language embraces the existence of the other, the condition of life under which the self constitutes its relationship with the other, or the underlying logic of social systems which determines the individual’s modes of life. Eliot invites the reader to pay particular attention to the alterity that is suppressed by the symbolic system of signification designed to legitimize the transparent homogeneity of the self immune from the infiltration of the otherness. The importance of listening to the voice of the other, or the necessity of turning to the other side of silence in history is highlighted in the ending of *Middlemarch*. The narrator tells the reader that although “there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside” (824-25), we are indebted to commonplace others whose unheard agonies and sacrifices had motivated the improvement of human welfare in history: “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” (825).²

The encounter between the self and the other in the world signifies the rendezvous of the representation of histories that the self and the other embody in their lives. Eliot asks us to acknowledge the unfamiliar in our ordinary and familiar circumstances. The seemingly unfamiliar and extraordinary scenes of suffering that Eliot portrays in her fiction mostly contain the tragedies of our ordinary fellow human beings who are either blind to their own flaws or restrained by the symbolic systems of social discourses, such as norms, religion, and law. The subject’s perception of the other’s scene of suffering brings the subject home to the familiar scene that it experienced in the past. The emotional sympathy connects the self and the other with the commonality of sufferings that they are experiencing or had undergone, whereas the
practical sympathy enables Eliot’s characters—the awakened and self-reflective subjects—simultaneously to call into question the underlying presuppositions that the symbolic systems of society force the individuals to follow, and to articulate their self-manifestation through the active agency of endeavoring to provide substantial help to others. The relationship between the subject and the other constituted by a bond of fellow feeling leads the subject to become an ethical subject of conscience which both inwardly enables it to reflect its own weakness and blindness, and outwardly empowers its resistance to the authority and legitimacy of religious, social, and political ideologies. Ethics is, as Simon Critchley has pointed out, “anarchic meta-politics” as “the continual questioning from below of any attempt to impose order from above” (13). What Eliot’s fiction suggests, however, is that the ethical subject goes beyond its skeptical awareness of the patriarchal structure of domination and appropriation toward the practical mode of subjective agency for fulfilling its ethical responsibility for satisfying the urgent need of the other in society. Thus the ethical subjects in Eliot’s novels simultaneously embody their political consciousness of anarchic rebellion against the symbolic status quo, and demonstrate their practical consciousness of constructive amelioration for the betterment of society which starts from their immediate attention to the need of their neighbors.

As Mikhail Bakhtin argues in *The Dialogic Imagination*, the novel is a genre of narrative that constitutes a hybrid of different discourses: “the novelistic hybrid is *an artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another*, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another, the carving-out of a living image of another language” (361; emphasis in orig.). Eliot’s novels epitomize the Bakhtinian idea of the hybridity of discourses in that her dramatization of ordinary people orchestrates the interactive connectedness between the self and the other when they exchange their discursive narratives of
the past as a means of ascertaining commonality existing in the difference of their experiences of life. Thus the ethical subjects in Eliot’s fiction are hybridized agencies that discover their self-reflective subjectivities through the discursive relationship with the others. The political subjectivity spells out the significance of the historical productivity of the Bakhtinian “unconscious hybrid” (360), implying that the subject unconsciously internalizes a mixture of selfness and otherness through the discursive and dialogic contact with the other and that the subject demonstrates its political (un)consciousness of rebellion against the established systems of domination and appropriation. As Rita Felski argues in *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, when the subjects recognize the operation of ideology which can be defined as “the mobilization of structures of signification to legitimize the interests of hegemonic groups,” they endeavor to “act upon and modify those structures through the reflexive monitoring of their actions” (56, 57).  

Eliot’s novels also present such female characters as Romola and Esther, who demonstrate their practical consciousness motivated by sympathy for the others, and whose sympathetic actions for the neighboring others can be a cornerstone of social amelioration.

Eliot’s idea of sympathy holds both historical continuity and historical discontinuity in its implication. The double-edged historical implication of sympathy in Eliot’s fiction can be appreciated in the attempt to move beyond the eighteenth-century philosophical configuration of sympathy simply as the emotional response of the self to the scenes of pain and suffering the other experiences. The conventional idea of sympathy conceptualized by David Hume and Adam Smith can serve as a starting point of understanding Eliot’s dramatization of the dynamics of sympathy which is to, in my opinion, further extended to her emphasis on the function of politically and practically charged subjective agency brought up by the interdependence between the self and the other. The subjective agency of the political self is a hybrid of identities
amalgamated into a unity of the self and the other. What is important is the political engagement of the hybridized subject attempting to call into question the ideological condition of reality which causes the other’s (or the self’s) scene of sympathy. Moving beyond the realm of the self’s emotional reaction to or its fanciful illusion of the other’s suffering adumbrated by the eighteenth-century notion of sympathy, Eliot invites us to probe into the ways in which the self articulates the unconscious internalization of its hybridized identity and conscious awareness of the necessity of exercising its sympathetic politics simultaneously aiming to subvert the established systems of ideology and purporting to ameliorate society through its immediate humanistic response to the needy people.

In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, “No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and its consequences,” Hume says, “than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own” (316). Accordingly, sympathy is a process of “an evident conversion of an idea into an impression” (320) in the relationship between the self and the other:

The lively idea of any object always approaches its impression; and ’tis certain we may feel sickness and pain from the mere force of imagination, and make amalady real by often thinking of it. But this is most remarkable in the opinions and affections; and ’tis there principally that a lively idea is converted into an impression. Our affections depend more upon ourselves, and the internal operations of the mind, than any other impressions; for which reason they arise more naturally from the imagination, and from every lively idea we form of them. This is the nature and cause of sympathy. (319)
In order to perceive fully the power of sympathy, Hume remarks, the relationship between the self and the other must be characterized at once by resemblance (the idea that the other shares peculiar similarity with the self, such as manners, character, country, or language) and by contiguity (physical proximity between the self and the other). Thus the Humean sympathy describes the relation of cause (the idea of other’s suffering and sorrow) and effect (the impression of the other’s passions on the self) through which the impression becomes the enlivened sentiment to the self: the enlivened sentiment enables the self to sympathize with the other. In accordance with Hume’s idea of sympathy, Adam Smith notes in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that:

> Pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever…. The compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation, and, what perhaps is impossible, was at the same time able to regard it with his present reason and judgment. (10, 12)

What is interesting in Smith’s definition of sympathy is the importance of considering the situation which causes the scene of other’s suffering, and one’s (spectator’s) consideration of the sympathetic situation arises from one’s own imaginative ability to transform oneself to a “fair and impartial spectator” who can identify oneself with the other by imagining the same situation within oneself: “We endeavour to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it. If, upon placing ourselves in his situation, we thoroughly enter into all the passions and motives which influenced it, we approve it, by sympathy with the
approbation of this supposed equitable judge” (110). David Marshall contends in *The Figure of Theater* that Smith’s idea of sympathy can be coterminous with the spectacle of theatricality regarding the divided and multiple performance of the self on the stage as well as its double role of spectator and actor:

> We are actors not just because we appear before spectators played by ourselves, but also because we personate ourselves in different parts, persons, and characters. The self is theatricalized in its relation to others and in its self-conscious relation to itself; but it also enters the theater … in which the self personates two different persons who try to play each other’s part, change positions, and identify with each other. (175-76)

Unlike Hume’s conception of sympathy, Smith’s formulation of sympathy can be characterized as the meta-configuration of the self in its transformation to the multiple identities occasioned by the ability of self-reflection. However, the Smithian sympathy and Marshall’s interpretation of it expose their limits of regarding other’s scene of sympathy simply as a means of invoking the exercise of the self’s meta-configurative internalization, without any substantial reaction or response to the other.

As Catherine Gallagher notes in *Nobody’s Story*, the dynamics of the Humean sympathy can be criticized for its tendency to “produce selfishness” or “to aggrandize the self and its properties” because it ultimately appropriates other’s passions with reference to the feeling of the self (170). In examining the difference between the fictional character and the actual person regarding the operation of the reader’s sympathy, Gallagher contends that fiction can serve as a means for stimulating sympathy because:

> it is easier to identify with nobody’s story and share nobody’s sentiments than to identify with anybody else’s story and share anybody else’s sentiments. But, paradoxically, we
can always claim to be expanding our capacity for sympathy by reading fiction because, after all, if we can sympathize with nobody, then we can sympathize with anybody. Or so it would seem, but such sympathy remains on that level of abstraction where anybody is “nobody in particular” (the very definition of a novel character). Nobody was eligible to be the universally preferred anybody because nobody, unlike somebody, was never anybody else. (172)

Gallagher examines in the reading experience of the novel “the question of the effects of sympathy” what Marshall highlights in the context of theatricality, that is, “the question of what happens when readers of novels, beholders of paintings, audiences in the theater, or people in the world are faced with the spectacle of an accident, suffering, or danger” (Surprising Effects 1). Gallagher’s reading of the fictional “nobody” as “anybody” can open the possibility of producing a variety of the reader’s interpretations of the fictional character because the fictional “nobody” does not mean non-existence, but it means non-fixed entity, or a floating signifier, which can be open to the reader’s acts of interpretations. Consistent with Gallagher’s notion of the fictional nobody, Eliot’s fictional character can be “anybody” who is always open to change depending on the reader’s hermeneutic tasks. However, Gallagher’s attempt to see the fictional entity as “nobody” who becomes an object for the reader’s sympathy still ironically perpetuates the Humean and Smithian proposition that one can sympathize with the other only by using one’s imagination in the mind. Although Hume, Smith, Marshall, and Gallagher emphasize the imaginative and self-reflective aspects of sympathy in the dynamics of the self-and-the other relationship regarding the scene of the other’s suffering, they do not investigate the practical and political implications of sympathy. Unlike them, Eliot moves beyond the scope of self-reflective imagination and delineates in her fiction the authenticity of sympathy—the active, voluntary,
political, and practical agency of the subject for the other—which must be essential to sustaining the cohesion of the human relationship in the social community.

The Humean and Smithian ideas of sympathy commonly emphasize the dynamics of the self’s emotive and imaginative response to the other’s scenes of sympathy. But they do not consider the active agency of the subject which brings the emotive response into practice for the betterment of the other’s life. The limits of the eighteenth-century philosophical investigation of sympathy lie in its configurations of sympathy only as the workings of the inner sensation, imagination, and consciousness with a disproportionate emphasis on the subject’s or the spectator’s gaze at the other. The appropriation of the subject’s gaze contingent on the conditions of the other is not actually reciprocal and dialogic but dominant and ego-centric. In the realist tradition, as Peter Brooks has pointed out, vision is a prerequisite for the knowledge and representation of objects, but the “vision is typically a male prerogative” (88). Brooks’ argument mainly focuses on the optical legitimization of male objectification of a woman’s body based on sexual difference, but his contention can be also applied to the relationship between the self and the other regarding the sympathetic situation. Without practicality, the conventional idea of sympathy would risk legitimizing the spectator’s arbitrary appropriation of rendering the suffering other reducible to an object, thereby simply highlighting the spectator’s imaginative power.

Some critics argue that the Victorian scenes of sympathy provoke the middle classes to recognize the contingency and instability of their social status when they identify themselves with social outcasts such as beggars and fallen women who emerge as “projections of a fear of falling embedded within the structure of Victorian middle-class identity” (Jaffe 19). Daniel Cottom also contends that Eliot’s concern with “a democratic consciousness of human nature” as
the essence of her aesthetic creativity reflects the exclusivity of the middle-class ideology of art derived from its desire to be differentiated from the lower classes’ demand for the political democratization through enfranchisement (Social Figures 120). When the critics try to delve into Eliot’s middle-class anxiety over plummeting to the level of the lower-class consciousness and its conditions of social and political life, however, they overlook the political consciousness of resistance imbedded in her narrative which, instead of being subservient to the dominant discourses of the upper-middle classes in order to solidify the hierarchy of social classes, overthrows the discourses of knowledge and power employed by the dominant groups of society. Her narrative of sympathy is not designed to allege the self-evidence and transparency of the reason of the Enlightenment, but it aims to uncover the underlying logic of self-contradiction and totalitarian ideology of the dominant groups and classes that does not serve to preserve the domestic and public securities but actually appropriates and controls the powerless other. As Horkheimer and Adorno argue, reason of the Enlightenment is another word for totalitarian and colonial desire for unity, coherence, and conformity: “Enlightenment is totalitarian” (4). Rather than acknowledging the heterogeneous values and diverse preferences and tastes of the other, the coherent self of Enlightenment reason tries to achieve its own purpose by employing “moral discourse” which is essentially, as Alasdair MacIntyre points out, “the attempt of one will to align the attitudes, feelings, preference and choices of another with its own” (24). Thus, by the moral instrumentalism of the self, the other is already always registered as a means to serve for achieving the self’s own satisfaction. The strain of egoism inherent in moral discourse is what Eliot’s narrative divulges from the characters of religion, culture, and morality. Eliot presents sympathy as a means of negotiating with and further moving beyond the totalitarian reason of Enlightenment.
The events that inflict physical and psychological pains, sufferings, and agonies on the characters and later retrospectively haunt the characters in the form of traumatic symptoms initially take place in the social context of patriarchy infused with the dominant discourses of ideologies that do not allow the existence of heterogeneity, diversity, and otherness. The patriarchal condition of society legitimizes the Enlightenment’s program to “rule over disenchanted nature” (Horkheimer and Adorno 2). The program subsumes women and the social, religious, and artistic non-conformists under the category of nature, so that they are envisaged as the other to be cultivated and domesticated by the masters of power and knowledge. Eliot’s dramatization of the scenes of sympathy rests on her critique of those ideological discourses prevalent in Victorian England.

Eliot does not presuppose the existence of spectator as an onlooker who gazes at and emotionally responds to the situations of the other. The scenes of the other, such as suffering, sorrow, and agony that the other experiences, serve as a mise en scène or the haunting specter of the repressed in the self so that the self experiences its own scenes of sympathy by the projection of the other’s scenes of sympathy onto the screen of its own scenes of the past. The overlapping scenes of the past of the self and the other on the present can function as a sublimation of the past for the present and for the future. The historicity of sympathy blurs the demarcation of the boundary between the self and the other. It enables both the self and the other to transform themselves to the practical agencies in the on-going process of ascertaining the interdependent and dialogic relationship between them whereby they constitute a communal bond of fellow feeling.

When sympathy forms solidarity between the self and the other by enabling them to share each other’s experience of suffering, the function of sympathy can be rephrased in such a way
that it serves to re-historicize the traumas of the self and the other. History can be regarded as, in Cathy Caruth words, “the way we are implicated in each other’s traumas” (Unclaimed 24).

Rather than assuming that the self is placed in the position of the more informed, knowledgeable, and authoritative subject than the other, sympathy orchestrates the interconnectedness of the self and the other by revealing that the self is also a sufferer bearing a traumatic symptom like the other. The dynamic scene of sympathy thus renders the self and the other equal in communicating with each other about their own traumatic symptoms. The characters who express their sympathies for other sufferers, in Eliot’s fiction, do not belong to a social group of the privileged, controlling, and authoritative, but they are also the bearers of human sufferings whose narratives were not revealed on the level of consciousness until they listen to and sympathize with the sorrowful voices of the others. The enactment of sympathy in intersecting, interconnecting, or unraveling the repressed traumas of the self and the other is the initial but major step toward accomplishing a harmonic unity of the self and the other in Eliot’s writings.

The purpose of this study is to examine in Eliot’s novels a political implication of sympathy that underscores the importance of the practical agency of the subject, prompted by the dynamics of dialogic communication between the self and the other on the grounds that the enactment of sympathy is a secularized practice of “love” within and beyond the ideological realm of social structure. Chapter 1 shows that Eliot’s idea of sympathy is firmly based on a realistic mode of understanding the details of ordinary life. Eliot’s adherence to a realistic description of life does not simply present what life is around us, but it also aims to uncover the voice of the other which is suppressed in the social system of signification articulated by the underlying logic of domination and subordination. Eliot’s portrayal of three different ministers’ lives aims to present how religion is commonly and inseparably intertwined with ordinary life:
religious life is fundamentally secular. Here secularity means that religion is not based on the
doctrine of transcendence and abstraction but on love of life—more specifically, love of both the
self and the other. To understand the secularized religious life depicted in *Scenes of Clerical Life*,
it is necessary to examine Eliot’s indebtedness to Ludwig Feuerbach’s idea of Christianity. Eliot
confessed to Sara Sophia Hennell Feuerbach’s influence on her in 1854, during the time when
she was translating his *Wesen des Christentums* into English: “With the ideas of Feuerbach I
everywhere agree” (*Letters* 2: 153). In *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach puts forward the
idea of Christianity in terms of secularity, humanity, and anthropomorphism: “God is the human
being”; “God is the highest subjectivity of man abstracted from himself”; “God is self-
consciousness posited as an object, as a being” (247, 31, 81). The image of God in the self-
consciousness of the subject does not imply that the subject has the unlimited capability to
imagine the absolute and transcendental Being in its consciousness which testifies to the
solipsistic desire for achieving the unlimited power of the self, but it reflects the consciousness of
the other or the consciousness skeptical of egoism. In other words, through the achievement of
self-consciousness as God, the self becomes aware of the limits of itself, and it begins to enlarge
its vision toward its relationship with the other in society.

According to Feuerbach, God comes out of the human feeling of lack or a want. Since the
individual self is “defective, imperfect, weak, needy,” the self seeks to achieve perfection
through “the self-consciousness of the individuality,” that is, “God” which is equivalent to
“love” (*Essence* 156). That human beings constitute the interdependent relationship between the
self and the other is, as Wartofsky has pointed out, “species knowledge” which enables the self
to recognize the existence of the other in society: “The other must be really other and not merely
the otherness of the I” (207). When Eliot defines sympathy as a bond of union achieved by
fellow-feeling, she implicates the Feuerbachian idea of the self-consciousness of the subject regarding the mutual relationship between the I and the Thou in society which is epitomized in the idea of God: “what man is in need of, whether this be a definite and therefore conscious, or an unconscious need,—that is God. Thus the disconsolate feeling of a void, of loneliness, needed a God in whom there is society, a union of beings fervently loving each other” (Essence 73).  

In “The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton,” Eliot illuminates how a female character, Milly Barton, plays a role in reconciling and negotiating with the conflict between her ordinary and flawed husband, Amos Barton, and her neighbors in the community that antagonizes the bumbling minister. The significance of the death of a woman in Victorian domesticity does not simply lie in producing the effect of sentimentality on the reader, but it aims to subvert the stereotypical idea of Victorian femininity characterized by care-giving, silence, and passivity. On the one hand, Eliot seems to conform to the Victorian ideology of feminine duty in the domestic area through Milly who actually appears to be a silenced, passive, obedient, reproducing, and care-giving mother and wife. On the other hand, the novelist challenges the notion of the domestic femininity by highlighting the active role of Milly’s feminine agency in arousing sympathy through her Christ-like sacrifice—death—which transforms the supervising, antagonistic, and censorious consciousness of the community against her husband to the sympathetic, reconciliatory, and harmonious consciousness of the community toward him.  

In “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story,” Eliot investigates the subversive power of the other against the ontological desire of the self to reduce the other to the realm of familiarity and sameness maintained by the discourse of appropriation and domination. Eliot’s concern with the existence of the other irreducible to the imperialistic ego of the self can be examined in light of Emmanuel
Levinas’s ethics of the Other as the presence of strangeness and skepticism resistant to the ontological dogmatism of the transcendental self: “The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics” (Totality 43). The unintelligibility of the other is essential for recognizing that the other is not an object of the knowledge the self can easily master, but an independent alterity which bears witness to the unknown truth of its life as a struggle against the self’s authoritative attempt to reduce the other to an object of its comprehensibility. Caterina expresses the voice of the other that runs counter to Sir Christopher’s aristocratic ambition. Cheverel Manor, Sir Christopher’s Gothic mansion, serves as a locus in which the otherness of Caterina undermines the aristocratic stability supported by his self-perpetuating plans to demonstrate his mastery over the others. Caterina’s otherness is the spectral uncanny to de-familiarize the familiarity of the architectural construct of the Gothic mansion emblematic of the aristocratic identity of Sir Christopher. As Julian Wolfreys has argued in Victorian Hauntings, the act of haunting is “the destabilization of the domestic scene, as that place where we apparently confirm our identity, our sense of being, where we feel most at home with ourselves” (5). On the other hand, the subversive power of Caterina’s otherness paves the way for exercising a harmonious union between the self and the other, as exemplified in her confession to Gilfil about her guilt consciousness of her vengeful emotions toward Wybrow. What is important in the story, however, is that Gilfil’s self-confession about his antipathy to Wybrow connects the minster with the alienated and agonized Caterina, revealing that the practice of love in Christianity does not lie in the hierarchical and monolithic relationship between the transcendental God and human being, but in the secular and reciprocal
relationship between human entities aware of their own flaws and limits conditioned in the quotidian life.

The third story of Scenes of Clerical Life, “Janet’s Repentance,” sheds light on Eliot’s concern with the enactment of sympathy in connecting the self and the other through the unraveling of the known reality and the unknown truth suppressed in the mind of the sufferer. Janet’s sorrow arises from the harsh reality in Victorian domesticity involving the patriarchal husband’s violence along with the issue of drinking. The agonized voice of Janet represents the cries of Victorian women resonating from their life restricted in the domain of household. Janet’s confession to Tryan about her life of agony and her addiction to alcohol is a story of trauma which attests to the oscillation between a crisis of death and her ongoing experience of life as a survivor. The reciprocity of the sympathetic communication between Janet and Tryan corroborates the capability of the female confessor’s traumatic narrative to connect the two people by invoking from the Evangelical minister a kind of uncanny repetition of another traumatic scene of his past which bears resemblance to the confessor’s narrative of guilt and suffering. The encounter between Janet and Tryan does not simply indicate that a devout Evangelical minister guides a dejected, afflicted, and guilty woman to a life of regeneration, but it also illuminates a bond between the two human beings with sympathy triggered by the narratives of each other’s past, “the story of the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another” (Caruth 8).

Eliot’s idea of sympathy can be comprehended in light of the theoretical notion of performativity which resists the normalization coerced by social, political, and religious inscriptive discourses. Performativity endorses an “in-between” quality to the agency which enables the subject to experience a transitional process of liminality, a shift from its subordinated
life under established norms through its challenging and skeptical attempt to depart the restrictive systems of society to its active re-engagement in the community as a voluntary response to the other’s urgent need. Chapter 2 examines Eliot’s historical dramatization of sympathy in *Romola* in light of the heroine’s resistance to the ideological formulae conceptualized by politics, religion, and conventional morality. *Romola* presents the enactment of sympathy in a mode of an affective consciousness which defies the fixation of subjectivity, although the subject is not completely independent of the influences of those outward forces. Sympathy is not a categorical imperative of morality sustained by established norms, abstract knowledge, and theological doctrines. Sympathy explores the expansion of a communal bond between the self and the other on the premise that the subject must recognize the social responsibility of demonstrating its active, voluntary, practical, and secularized response to its neighbor’s call for help.

The constitution of the self as a subjective agent is firmly based on the self’s inductive realization that the experiment in life is a process of making choices under and against the supervision of the symbolic systems and their ideological discourses. Sympathy is an effort to understand the existence of the other as a self-defined specificity (or specified individual self). In Eliot’s novels, “a politics of sympathy” or “a culture of sympathy” is a vocational effort to communicate with the other by moving beyond the egoism of self and by challenging the normative, teleological, and restrictive forces which try to homogenize the polyphonic diversity of others. When Franco Moretti examines the idea of vocation in the context of the literary tradition of *Bildungsroman* in Eliot’s novels, he disregards her concern with the characters’ immediate and specific experiences of life; Moretti simply conceives of life as being in contradistinction to vocation which he characterizes as “depersonalized, objective, and hostile to
'personal experience’” (218). Unlike Moretti’s contention that “the success of vocation always demands the sacrifice of ‘life’” (219-20), Eliot postulates life as a contextual condition crucial for individuals to enact their subjective agency infused with a feeling of sympathy for the other. Life is the basic condition of the character’s Bildungsroman, the process of discovering the identity of self or finding the vocation that enables the self to realize its subjectivity.\(^6\)

Chapter 3 investigates how sympathy functions as subverting the discourses of morality and instrumental reason in Felix Holt, the Radical. As Edward W. Said has pointed out in Orientalism, authority is a hegemonic power of a certain truth claim, intending to normalize and homogenize the diversity of others by legitimizing its ideological claim: “There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces” (19-20). In Felix Holt, the hegemonic authority exercises its dominant power over the working-class’ habits and female aesthetic taste in order to discipline them under the categorical and preemptive imperative of morality sustained by the Enlightenment reason.

Felix Holt is a novel of a feminine resistance to the male desires for categorizing woman as a morally inferior object and as a value of economic exchange. The novel presents Esther Lyon as a sympathetic agent of hybridity that combines her natural aesthetic taste with her acquired moral taste. A hybrid of the tastes denotes Esther’s renewed feminine subjectivity which empowers her to invest her libido in both the domestic and public spheres. Eliot endorses Esther by revealing that the female subject is not only able to adjust herself to the moral, economic, political, and sexual discourses of patriarchy, but also is able to resist them for the fulfillment of her libidinal desires and for the enlargement of her sympathy for others.
CHAPTER 1

GEORGE ELIOT’S SECULAR CRITICISM: SCENES OF CLERICAL LIFE

A. Sympathizing Community: “The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton”

“The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton,” the first story of the novellas that comprise Scenes of Clerical Life, embodies Eliot’s doctrine of sympathy by a vivid description of the protagonist’s interconnection with the people of Shepperton society in the context of religious opinion and moral standard in provincial England. It is notable that George Eliot avoided portraying a sensational character who might appeal to the reading public in her contemporary book marketplace. In Chapter 5 of “Amos Barton,” the narrator tells the reader that her story is different from that found in the newspaper which may be “full of striking situations, thrilling incidents, and eloquent writing.” Instead, the narrator emphasizes the importance of “pathos” and “glorious possibilities” in insignificant commonplace people, and attempts to highlight “unspoken sorrows” (42) of at least “eighty out of a hundred of adult male fellow-Britons” (41). In her “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” which Eliot had written eleven days before she began to write “Amos Barton” on September 23, 1856, Eliot defies the novels written by few women writers who have imperfect knowledge of real life: “we are constantly struck with the want of verisimilitude in their representations of the high society in which they seem to live; but then they betray no closer acquaintance with any other form of life” (Essays 304).

The Reverend Amos Barton is the first dramatic character who embodies Eliot’s idea of commonality and verisimilitude. The narrator of “Amos Barton” tells the reader that Barton is not an ideal or exceptional character, but a common, even “utterly uninteresting character”: Barton is “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” (41). Unlike lady novelists who are blind to the life of the working classes, are unacquainted with the life of ordinary people, and thus are likely to produce improbable characters, George Eliot faithfully depicts the life of commonplace people in local English communities. Although some critics may denounce Eliot’s authorial commentary on the qualities of novels in “Amos Barton” as an expression of “self-righteousness” as well as a kind of “gratuitously insulting” attitude toward her own readers, the adverse criticism overlooks the unique qualities of the story, such as realistic description of details and dialogic situation, accomplished by the novelist’s handling of ordinary subject matters on the basis of her own early experience in local community. Eliot’s portrayal of characters and settings is truly based on her efforts to avoid what George Henry Lewes terms “Falsism,” as an antithesis of Realism, which misrepresents the forms and details of ordinary life: “when the conversation of parlour and drawing-room is a succession of philosophical remarks, expressed with great clearness and logic, an attempt is made to idealize, but the result is simple falsification and bad art” (87). Eliot’s attack on the silly novels by lady novelists is, therefore, in accordance with Lewes’s denunciation of the unrealistic falsification of ordinary life. As clearly demonstrated in “Looking Backward” in Impressions of Theophrastus Such, Eliot keenly observed Midland scenery—“every hovel and every sheepfold, every railed bridge or fallen tree-trunk”—and tried to present it not as “a mere speck in the midst of unmeasured vastness,” but as “a piece of our social history in pictorial writing” (25).

One may argue that Eliot began to write a realistic and imaginative narrative in line with a literary convention of Victorian realism that, as Stephen Prickett notes, “the narrative should seem to be about real persons in a real place” (4). Eliot’s attachment to regional settings and the
past, however, indicates that the novelist seized on the experiences and observations of her youth not only for transmuting her experiences imaginatively but also for uncovering social consciousness or moral overtones of the regional spirit. The transformation of her early experiences of village life into a dramatic depiction of a provincial society means that the novelist attempts to lay bare the underlying designs of moral and social consciousness from the social fabrics of a local community. Eliot’s concern with commonality in her regional fiction is not exclusively limited to the social microcosm of ordinary people, but it also expands its spectrum enough to represent the social macrocosm of the majority of British people, (not necessarily “male” adults). By focusing on the regional life of insignificant commonplace people who are “neither extraordinarily silly, nor extraordinarily wicked, nor extraordinarily wise” (42), Eliot frames the comprehensive and wide spectrum of British social life which cannot be simplified by the binary logic of moral standards, the absolute “good” and the absolute “evil.”

Blurring the religious, moral, and social boundaries demarcated by the values of transparency, self-sufficiency, and self-complacency which had been prevalent in her contemporary sensational novels, Eliot emphasizes the gradually progressive development of human relationships accomplished by ordinary people who are obscure, self-contradictory, and questionable within the religiously and socially transitional framework. The community’s opinion of an utterly insignificant protagonist like Barton is gradually modified by domestic events which lead to arousing pity from the townspeople.

In referring to the “Doctrine of Development” as a geometrical expansion toward the complex and mature entity, Eliot underscored the significance of understanding others in human relationships, not swayed by judgmental bias. She wrote to Sara Sophia Hennell in August 1860:
Surely it is a part of human piety we should all cultivate, not to form conclusions, on slight and dubious evidence, as to other people’s ‘tone of mind,’ or to regard particular mistakes as a proof of general moral incapacity to understand us. I suppose such a tendency to large conclusions about others is part of the original sin we are all born with, for I have continually to check it in myself. (*Letters* 3: 338)

Thus what Eliot means by the law of development is human moral progress made by a wide range of experience with an emphasis on sympathy for individual mistakes, sufferings, and joys. She wrote to Charles Bray on November 15, 1857 that she was convinced of moral progress “measured by the degree in which we sympathize with individual suffering and individual joy” (*Letters* 2: 403). One of her contemporary critics, an unsigned reviewer in *Saturday Review*, highly praised Eliot’s careful study of familiar, ordinary, commonplace, domestic, homely types of characters in that it both expresses her “disregard of conventions” and “disregard of circulating-library principles” and wins the reader’s deepest sympathy (*Critical Heritage* 68).

Eliot’s introduction of ordinary characters in her fiction aims to achieve what is called “a community of feeling” which nurtures the reader’s capacities for sympathetic responses to them (*Graver* 11). Although she engaged herself in the Victorian aesthetic of sympathy which had been familiar to her contemporary readers, Eliot sought to modify the community of feeling, which had already been accustomed to conventional responses to reading materials full of the falsification of reality, to critical and realistic approaches to the stories depicting sufferings, sorrows, and joys of ordinary people. Therefore, the novelist’s commitment to community of feeling does not simply favor the reader’s habit of reading sensational stories, but it aims to redefine the meaning of community of feeling by presenting the dramatic picture of ordinary fellows’ lives, based on her keen observation of their actual lives. The narrator of “Amos
Barton” makes it clear that his narrative purpose is to evoke human sympathy with common sufferings:

For not having a fertile imagination, as you [the reader] perceive, and being unable to invent thrilling incidents for your amusement, my only merit must lie in the faithfulness with which I represent to you the humble experience of an ordinary fellow-mortal. I wish to stir your sympathy with commonplace troubles—to win your tears for real sorrow: sorrow such as may live next door to you—such as walks neither in rags nor in velvet, but in very ordinary decent apparel. (56)

Thus Eliot portrays Barton not as an inherently wicked fellow who falls into a sin but as an apparently unstable, flawed, and pitiable human being who makes a blunder. By arousing the reader’s sympathy for the downfall of a commonplace character, Eliot modifies the traditional concept of tragedy as proclaimed by Aristotle in his Poetics. Unlike heroes in Greek tragedies who hold noble standing in society, contain tragic flaws, and undergo extreme reversal of their destiny, characters in Eliot’s novels do not have distinctly innate errors and flaws that would predetermine their life. Their faults, as in the case of Barton, are “middling” and not to be superlative in anything (45). In discovering tragic elements in an ordinary fellow’s life, Eliot actually serves as a beacon for Arthur Miller’s redefinition of Aristotelian view of tragedy: “the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were” (143).

Eliot’s refusal to show an inclination to be excessive in her depiction of characters arises from her shrewd knowledge of the actual condition of human existence. Furthermore, her realistic perspective of life underscores the idea that life is heterogeneous, complex, mediocre, obscure, tenuous, and mutable. Thus in depicting Barton as a metonymy of “mongrel ungainly dogs,” Eliot emphasizes the importance of hybrid elements of life as well as incompatible,
conflicting, and problematic qualities of the character himself in her story. Presumably, her effort
to describe obscurity and mediocrity is made not only to achieve a realistic purpose but also to
fulfill, as John Holloway points out, a “didactic purpose” (111). Holloway’s labeling of George
Eliot as a novelist moralistic enough to obtain a panegyric of Victorian sage, however, ignores
her faithful attempt to depict the realities of life which place the characters in precarious,
topping, and contingent situations. In her essay “Worldliness and Other Worldliness: the Poet
Young,” Eliot regards Edward Young’s poetry as “ostentatious renunciation of worldly
schemes,” and she also criticizes the poet’s ignorance of the uncertain, unstable, complex,
fallible, and secular aspects of life as well as his insincerity, his bombastic absurdity, his
grandiloquence as a moral and religious teacher (Essays 349). Thus the moral, or more
specifically, the sympathetic effect that her novel draws does not arise from her intention to
inculcate a kind of didacticism, but it is a consequence of her dramatization of characters situated
in the hybridized condition of life. By illuminating “the secularization of the clergy” dramatized
in “Amos Barton,” Eliot thus invites the reader to see “their sorrows and struggles as men, rather
than as religious professionals” (Mintz 142).

By introducing in Chapter One the opinions of the well-to-do inhabitants of Shepperton
in terms of the problems presented by Barton as curate of the town, the narrator provides the
reader with the information about the realities of Barton and his situation in relation to the
characters’ in the story. When some guests in Mrs. Patten’s house at Cross Farm dissect Barton’s
service in Shepperton, they argue together on the basis of their own personalities and interests.
For example, Mr. Pilgrim, a doctor from the market town, dislikes Barton because the pastor had
called in a new doctor in Shepperton, and because Barton, as a dabbler in drugs, cured a patient
of Mr. Pilgrim’s. On the other hand, Mrs. Hackit is quite sympathetic to Mr. Barton because she understands the domestic situation which the pastor and his wife have to manage:

I like Mr. Barton. I think he’s a good sort o’ man, for all he’s not overburthen’d i’ th’ upper story; and his wife’s as nice a lady-like woman as I’d wish to see. How nice she keeps her children! and little enough money to do’t with; and a delicate creatur’—six children, and another a-coming. I don’t know how they make both ends meet, I’m sure, now her aunt has left ’em. But I sent ’em a cheese and a sack o’ potatoes last week; that’s something towards filling the little mouths. (14)

By locating her characters in the context of dramatic situation which maximizes the effective strength of every argument, George Eliot invites the reader to appreciate their “perspicuity and blindness in turn” (Holloway 145). The novelist also draws the reader’s attention to the narrowness and self-indulgence of the main protagonists, not as their incurable sin but as their feeble weaknesses. After introducing the general but somewhat conflicting opinions of Barton, the narrator in Chapter Two acutely points out that human beings are entrapped in the illusion of self-absorption, as exemplified in the case of Barton:

Thank heaven, then, that a little illusion is left to us, to enable us to be useful and agreeable—that we don’t know exactly what our friends think of us—that the world is not made of looking-glass, to show us just the figure we are making, and just what is going on behind our backs! By the help of dear friendly illusion, we are able to dream that we are charming—and our faces wear a becoming air of self-possession; we are able to dream that other men admire our talents—and our benignity is undisturbed; we are able to dream that we are doing much good—and we do a little. (17)
Besides his nonchalant insensitivity to other people’s criticism, Barton has no ability to use flexible imagination and to give influential sermons to his parishioners. His bungling and feeble relationship with them validates the reliability of the narrator’s opinion of the pastor that “though Amos thought himself strong, he did not feel himself strong” (24). He was unable to catch sight of the insulting and damaging intention embedded in public and private exhortation to him. Barton’s service to poor people in the workhouse (the College) and his response to Mrs. Brick’s empty snuff box exemplify his lack of flexibility and generosity. When Barton gives admonition to her about the uselessness of earthly snuff as well as the need for heavenly mercy, she expresses her unpleasant feeling to the pastor by shutting the lid of her snuff box. Not only does the emptiness of the snuff box represent Barton’s “deficiency of small tact as well as of small cash” (27), but it can also function as a metonymy of the pastor’s lack of genuine affection for his parishioners:

Mrs Brick’s eyes twinkled with the visionary hope that the parson might be intending to replenish her box, at least mediately, through the present of a small copper.

“Ah, well! you’ll soon be going where there is no more snuff. You’ll be in need of then. You must remember that you may have to seek for mercy and not find it, just as you’re seeking for snuff."

At the first sentence of this admonition, the twinkle subsided from Mrs Brick’s eyes. The lid of her box went “click!” and her heart was shut up at the same moment. (27-28)

Another incident at the workhouse reveals Barton’s tactless and disciplinary attitude toward his parishioners. When Mr. Spratt brings Master Fodge, a small and unruly seven-year-old boy, to the pastor, Barton warns the boy of the punishment of God: “Then what a silly boy
you are to be naughty. If you were not naughty, you wouldn’t be beaten. But if you are naughty, 
God will be angry, as well as Mr Spratt; and God can burn you for ever. That will be worse than 
being beaten” (28). Barton’s rigid intolerance is based on his theological dogma of fear of God’s 
punishment. As Eliot criticizes in her essay on Edward Young, the theological warning of “fear 
of a criminal bar in heaven,” or fear of “disagreeable consequences from the criminal laws of 
another world” is only “one form of egoism” which is void of genuine enthusiasm for the joys 
and sorrows of fellow human beings (Essays 374). Thus Barton’s moralizing inculcation of fear 
of consequence is not a genuine practice of the teachings of Christ but a manifestation of egoism 
which cannot attain the higher development of sympathy. As these episodes indicate, the pastor’s 
rigid and myopic vision of his parishioners’ lives forbids him to communicate empathetically 
with them.

Unlike Edward Young’s adulatory praise for theological advocates who express their 
aversion to mortal joys and sorrows, Eliot emphasizes the importance of elements of virtue for 
fellow human beings (“untheological minds”) when she declares it is crucial to have “a delicate 
sense of our neighbor’s rights, an active participation in the joys and sorrows of our fellow-men, 
a magnanimous acceptance of privation or suffering for ourselves when it is the condition of 
good to others” (Essays 375). Although Barton is not like Young, whom Eliot deems as a person 
of “vulgar pomp, crawling adulation, and hard selfishness, presented under the guise of piety” 
(Essays 367-77), he lends too much credence to suspicions regarding his ambition for a future 
life, otherworldliness, and immortality. For Eliot, the idea of moral progress must be firmly 
based on the extension and intensification of sympathy for the secular life of common people. 
Failing to give comfort to his ordinary parishioners simply by apostrophizing the 
otherworldliness of his religious teachings, Barton, as U. C. Knoepflmacher points out, “ignores
the preciousness of his own present by devoting his energies to abstract theological hairsplitting” (41). His rigid uprightness and egoistic self-righteousness in religious opinions lead him to feel it is unnecessary to communicate with merely ordinary minds: “Now, the Rev. Amos Barton was one of those men who have a decided will and opinion of their own; he held himself bolt upright, and had no self-distrust. He would march very determinedly along the road he thought best; but then it was wonderfully easy to convince him which was the best road” (30).

Besides Barton’s dearth of feeling, Eliot shows the reader how people in the Milby community are encrusted with parochial narrowness, farfetched suspicions, and provincial bigotry. By juxtaposing Barton’s moral blemishes with the local society’s limited view of their fellow human beings, Eliot sheds light on a jarring conflict between personal ego entrapped in one’s own self-loftiness and the group consciousness of a provincial society dominated by exclusiveness and nonchalance. The Milby community’s negative attitude toward Caroline Bridmain (or the Countess Czerlaski) and Barton especially highlights its judgmental slander and aloof on them. When the Countess Czerlaski has stayed with the Bartons at Shepperton Vicarage for six months since her brother suddenly departed from Camp Villa with her maid Alice whom he wanted to marry, people in the Milby society have blackened the reputation of Barton concerning a scandal related to the priest with the Countess. He becomes a subject of conversation among his clerical brethren during the dinner in the Clerical Meeting at Milby Vicarage. Mr. Fellows and Mr. Ely not only denigrate Barton as “the greatest gull in existence” with “some cunning secret,—some philtre or other to make himself charming in the eyes of a fair lady” who “seemed to have made a conquest of him at the very outset,” but also they are likely to distort the matter with their own arbitrary whims, judgment, and prejudice: “have you heard the
last story about Barton? Nisbett was telling me the other day that he dines alone with the Countess at six, while Mrs Barton is in the kitchen acting as cook” (54).

Unlike dyspeptic, magisterial, rigorous, and judgmental clergymen in the Clerical Meeting, the Reverend Martin Cleves is a sensible person who is not swayed by biased opinion. He runs counter to his colleagues’ arbitrary version of the matter of Mr. Barton’s dining with the Countess at six: “depend upon it, that is a corrupt version. The original text is, that they all dined together with *six*—meaning six children—and that Mrs. Barton is an excellent cook” (54). In portraying Cleves as a beloved, generous, truthful priest, Eliot makes a stark contrast not only between Barton’s self-indulgent egoism and Cleves’ exemplary accomplishments in his parish, but also between other curates’ arrogant, pedantic, and fault-finding temperaments and Cleves’ free-spoken and good-natured qualities:

Mr Cleves has the wonderful art of preaching sermons which the wheelwright and the blacksmith can understand; not because he talks condescending twaddle, but because he can call a spade a spade, and knows how to disencumber ideas of their wordy frippery. Look at him more attentively, and you will see that his face is a very interesting one—that there is a great deal of humour and feeling playing in his grey eyes, and about the corners of his roughly cut mouth:—a man, you observe, who has most likely sprung from the harder-working section of the middle class, and has hereditary sympathies with the chequered life of the people. (53)

Thus Cleves serves both as a foil to flawed characters blind to their errors and shortcomings, and as an ideal character embodying Eliot’s concept of sympathy identified with, as Bernard Semmel puts it, “national inheritance” which emphasizes “the sharing of one’s national past with others belonging to the national community” (13). Cleves’s hardworking middle-class background
enables him to communicate effectively with the working class people since he is able to deliver “a sort of conversational lecture on useful practical matters, telling them stories, or reading some select passages from an agreeable book, and commenting on them” (53). Cleves resembles Adam Bede because the clergyman, like the hard-working character, has “hard common-sense” which leads him not to be subject to doctrinal religion (Adam Bede 48). Furthermore, he prefigures Mr. Irvine, the mentor of Adam Bede, in that he is a man of “a sufficiently subtle moral fibre to have an unwearying tenderness for obscure and monotonous suffering” (64). Cleves is a significant character in two respects: from the narrator’s perspective, he is a reliable, shrewd, and sound person. On the other hand, the narrator’s emphasis on the desirability of Cleves concerning his sympathetic nature is in accordance with that of George Eliot in terms of her vision of art as the enlargement of human sympathy. Instead of proselytizing people by arid doctrines of theology, Martin Cleves is willing to enact through the humanism of Christianity what is called “the Feuerbachian idea of the sanctity of human” (Ashton, George Eliot 168). Rather than adhering to Christian faith which Feuerbach denounces for its dogmatic, arrogant, imperative, exclusive, and intolerant nature, Cleves appears to be an agent of the Feuerbachian idea of love which emphasizes the unity of human beings through the performance of good works not for the glory of God but for the sake of human being: “Love is the universal law of intelligence and Nature” and “the realisation of the unity of the species through the medium of moral sentiment” (Feuerbach 266). When Barton’s wife dies, Cleves buries her, gives “life-recovering warmth to the poor benumbed heart of the stricken man” by silently grasping Amos’s hand (66), and offers Amos a substantial help by “collecting thirty pounds among his richer clerical brethren, and, adding ten pounds himself” (68).
Eliot’s sense of secularity is distinct in the type of the narrator who takes up a position inside the community of the story. In addition to presenting a reliable character, like Cleves, who can enact his or her sympathy for other people, Eliot gives the narrator the privilege of the authorial voice of her novel by which sympathy is endorsed as the basis of morality. Instead of straightforwardly moralizing to the reader, Eliot makes the narrative become more dramatic and authentic by presenting the narrator with what J. Hillis Miller calls “immanent omniscience.” Unlike the theological, transcendent, and omniscient narrator, Eliot’s narrator can “move to the other side of the mirror,” “enter into the role of the personage who tells the story,” and “move within the community” (Form 64). The first-person narrator of Scenes of Clerical Life bears resemblance to the narrator of Adam Bede, who demonstrates that although the mirror is defective, he feels “as much bound to tell you [the reader], as precisely as I [the narrator] can, what reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath” (165). By serving as a story-teller who can guarantee the immediacy of his experiencing the matters in the communities, the narrator claims the validity of his narration and provides the reader with an opportunity to experience the same immediacy as he does. Some critics argue that Eliot fails to evoke sympathy because “the morally superior narrator” of Scenes of Clerical Life attempts to “distance himself from [the community’s] small-mindedness by appealing to a conspiratorial bond with the reader,” and, by so doing, that the narrator tries to “appeal to the logic of division and run exactly counter to the sympathetic tenderness they ostensibly serve” (Nestor 36). By inviting the reader to appreciate how the community’s attitude toward the character, like Barton, becomes transformed into a reconciliatory and sympathetic mode, the narrator, however, simultaneously subverts his own divisive position and tunes to the author’s concern with the enactment of sympathy.
Eliot’s depiction of Milly Barton, the wife of Barton, highlights the achievement of the novelist’s purpose of arousing the reader’s sympathy for fellow human beings. The Countess’ residence at Shepperton Vicarage does not only create a scandal between her and Barton, but it also worsens financial difficulty for the Bartons. Despite the excruciating double agonies, Milly remains a silent, gentle, lovely caregiver for her husband as well as for her children. Being acquainted with the outside world, or public domain, only through her husband, she conceives of a woman’s world as the domestic domain “within the four walls of her own home” (58). The figure of Milly, as the embodiment of the Victorian ideal of an angel in the house, reinforces John Ruskin’s idea of women. The predominant image of a loving and gentle Madonna in Eliot’s fiction actually begins with the existence of Milly in “Amos Barton.” And later it continues to be fleshed out in Dinah Morris whose life-long service and sympathetic behavior for the poor, sick, and mourning people are exemplary (Adam Bede 108).

Eliot’s characterization of Milly is significant because the female character at once is described as ideal womanhood and acts as the catalyst which leads Amos Barton to recognize the secular conditions of ordinary existence. Although she may be regarded as a woman of “the stereotyped literary forms” who shows “patterns of conflict and resolution which transcend the mundane ‘male’ existence” (Uglow 85), Milly also serves as a negotiator who not only makes her husband recognize the value of secularity but also awakens the parishioners in Milby society to express their sympathy to Barton. It is ironic that the death of a silent, care-giving, and gentle female character of Victorian domesticity brings about the reconciliation between a personal fallibility of Barton and parochial consciousness of the community. What Eliot tries to illuminate is not an irredeemable isolation of a female character in a domestic zone buffered from problematic characters in the bustling and conflicting public domain, but the role of a female
character as a linchpin mediating the two irreconcilable worlds. Milly thus may be seen as the uncategorized truthful existence in the realm of the real, the space of the in-between, or the inside/outside beyond the two agonistic worlds—the imaginary world of self-absorbing Barton and the symbolic world of supervising and punishing community.

The death of Milly Barton serves as a medium through which Amos Barton is pitied by the people who come to provide him with substantial help: “There were men and women standing in that churchyard who had bandied vulgar jests about their pastor, and who had lightly charged him with sin; but now, when they saw him following the coffin, pale and haggard, he was consecrated anew by his great sorrow, and they looked at him with respectful pity” (67). Eliot’s emphasis on the necessity of widening our sympathies toward fellow humans can be associated with, as Rosemary Ashton has suggested, Spinoza’s notion of emotion as “a confused idea” which illuminates the relationship between the self-contradictory nature of human emotion toward other people and the dramatized version of the revelation of those ambivalent feelings: “when someone I hate (hatred being on irrational passion) is in distress, I am both pleased, because I hate him, and sorry, because he is of my species, is like me, and I can imagine his feelings” (German Idea 158). However, the important thing is not that Eliot simply portrays the innate contradiction of human beings in terms of their emotional ambiguity, but that she sheds light on the whole process in which the Spinozian dubious human emotions unravel their self-contradictory ambiguity, undergoing a gradual shift from an antagonistic emotive turmoil to the reconciliatory tranquility. Paradoxically, the ungraspable nature of Milly fulfils, as Thomas A. Noble puts it, “a firm grasp on reality” (115). The nature of Milly Barton, although silenced, limited, and suppressed in the domestic realm, functions as an mysteriously incomprehensible, appealing, reconciliatory, and unknotting power in the denouement in the story. Milly—the
idealized, adorable, and gentle woman seemingly fitting into the category of the stereotyped female characters of Victorian novels—ends up as a sublime figure who resolves the conflict between the individual who is blind to his own absurdity and fatuousness, and local society which is inflexible and rigid. The idealized woman figure, as the sublime object of ideology constructed in Victorian domesticity, subverts her own implication by means of her own sacrifice, “death” which seems to make her transmuted into a truly sublime being. Milly’s death corroborates the Feuerbachian idea of the intertwining relationship between love and death: “Love would not be complete if death did not exist” (Thoughts on Death 125). By engendering the effect of softening the rigidity and inflexibility of the community’s opinion of Barton, Milly’s death affirms “the ultimate sacrifice of reconciliation, the ultimate verification of love” (125). Sacrifice is a mystery behind the veil which uncovers the true nature of sublimity over the ideological version of woman as a sublime object in a male-dominated society. Milly’s death in childbirth delineates a dynamic praxis of sacrifice, death, love, and sympathy which implies the contribution of female sexuality to social and cultural creativity. As Catherine Gallagher points out, Milly’s death which brings about the sympathetic reconciliation and solidarity between her husband and his congregation serves as a “fatal passibility,” “the giving over of the self to a change wrought by others” (181), so that she becomes “a female Christ” (180) whose suffering can fashion a social union and a culture of sympathy.

Some critics denounce the fatal illness and deathbed scene of Milly as a kind of inappropriate sentimentalism because Eliot disproportionately confuses matter-of-fact reality with lofty ideals as exemplified in her erroneous aggrandizement of Milly’s common domestic life for the purpose of creating sympathy. However, the contention that the pathos of Milly’s death does not ring true due to its unconvincing way of drawing tears by means of tear-
provocative adjectives loaded with “sentimental self-indulgence” (Bennett 93) overlooks Eliot’s efforts to depict the actual realities of human life, especially the realistic picture of the deathbed of Milly. Fredric Jameson’s argument that the sentimental and the melodramatic, as shown in Dickensian sentimentality, may be adopted as distinct narrative strategies, “the carrot and the stick of nineteenth-century middle-class moralizing about the lower classes” (186) seems acute in detecting the underlying ideology of morality embedded in social structures, more specifically related to the whole process of social consumption of reading materials as well as book production for the middle-class reading public. Nevertheless, Jameson’s ideological interpretation of nineteenth-century novels, focusing on Dickens’s narrative paradigm, should not be oversimplified in conceptualizing other Victorian novelists’ fiction. Also, the suggestion that Milly’s death, although “not grossly sentimental,” is “literary” because of Eliot’s indebtedness of the scene to other works of literature (Roberts 55), seems dubious and simplistic. For Eliot, a careful study of ordinary situations corroborates the reader’s interest in domestic and homely patterns, and, furthermore, her depiction of them without exaggeration brings about the reader’s “candid and inclusive appreciation of life and character” displayed in her stories (Critical Heritage 66). The purpose of the novelist’s realistic presentation of life may sound moralistic because the voice of the novelist explicitly underscores the creation of the reader’s sympathy for the sorrows and joys of common people’s lives. But it is not intended to have an abstractedly moralizing, fervently sermonizing effect on the reading public’s understanding of mundane life. Nor is it to emphasize the dichotomized Manichean values of morality only for the tastes of the reading public.10 The attempt to apply Jameson’s perusal over the narrative strategies pervading in Victorian novels to Eliot’s method of writing fiction may run the risk of relinquishing the sensibility and differentiation of her commitment to the conventions of the
Victorian publishing environment. If Victorian sentimentality upholds “the vision of ideal,” Eliot’s fiction runs counter to the ideal by underscoring the claim that “we cannot maintain metaphysical or religious ideas,” “that all human nature is flawed,” and “that literature should not falsify life by depicting ideal characters and happy endings” (Kaplan 6).

Unlike Dickens’s mechanical, flat delineation of characters who “are all good-natured, and seem to act as they do because they cannot act otherwise,” Eliot’s complex portrayal of the mutability of characters in her novels, as revealed in the shift of the parishioners’ attitude toward Barton from antagonistic grudge to sympathetic union with him, verifies Walter E. Houghton’s examination of the difference between true sympathy in Eliot’s novels and simple good nature in Dickens’ fiction: “Benevolence need not, however, degenerate into sentimentality. It does not do so, or very slightly, in the work of George Eliot, the other major Victorian besides Dickens who made its promotion a central aim of fiction” (Houghton 278). The attacks on Eliot for her sentimental treatment of a female character’s death miss the counter-force of a woman character in the scene that simultaneously holds the ideal image of woman in Victorian domestic domain and subverts the undercurrent ideology of the angel of the hearth. Thus it is important to keep in mind that Milly can be another hybrid character who would hardly be demarcated by the yardsticks of conceptualizing her either as a conventionally sentimental figure or an ideologically subordinated female. Although she is not evidently flawed, as is her husband, Milly ultimately lays bare her mysterious and self-contradictory power that negates the ideas of coherent, transparent, and homogeneous self. Her inscrutability and incommensurability are highlighted by the arousal of sympathy which is essential to the understanding of George Eliot’s narratives in which characters undergo a certain transitional shift from personal or communal blindness to
their own errors, mistakes, and follies to the recognitions of the need for sympathy for other fellow human beings as well as of their own shortcomings.

B. Pulse of the Other: “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story”

Maintaining her concerns with the gradual change of people’s attitudes toward the main protagonist from apathy and calumny to pity and affection as well as with homely realistic detail, George Eliot also expresses in the next story “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story” both her interest in sympathetic power of love for a suffering human being and her strong regard for being true to the facts of actual life. Unlike her depiction of a pastor as a flawed or narrow-minded character in “The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton,” Eliot introduces in the second story of *Scenes of Clerical Life* a respectable priest, Mr. Maynard Gilfil, who is knowledgeable both of “the details of parish affairs” and of practical matters such as “the breed of cows and horses” and “the buying and selling of stocks” (80). While Barton was a target of Shepperton parishioners’ gossips and obloquy (or denunciation) of his tactless and bungling behavior before the death of his wife occurred, Gilfil had been eulogized by parishioners in the same community who, even after thirty years of his death, still recollected his thoughtfulness and geniality. The narrator, who sees Dame Fripp showing her sign of grief for the death of Gilfil, gives a congenial recollection of the vicar’s considerate and affectionate attitude toward his parishioner. In seeing Dame Fripp letting her pig lie with its head in her lap, Gilfil finds that she really cares for the pig, and later he ordered David to give her some bacon:

“Why, Mistress Fripp,” said the Vicar, “I didn’t know you had such a fine pig. You will have some rare flitches at Christmas!”

“Eh, God forbid! My son gev him me two ’ear ago, an’ he’s been company to me iver sin’. I couldn’t find i’ my heart to part wi’m, if I niver knowed the taste o’ bacon-fat
again."

"Why, he’ll eat his head off, and yours too. How can you go on keeping a pig, and making nothing by him?"

"O, he picks a bit up hisself, wi’ rootin’, and I dooant mind doin’ wi’out to gi’ him summat. A bit o’ coompany’s meat an’ drink too, an’ he follers me about, an’ grunts when I spake to’m, just like a Christian."

Mr. Gilfil laughed, and I am obliged to admit that he said good-bye to Dame Fripp without asking her why she had not been to church, or making the slightest effort for her spiritual edification. But the next day he ordered his man David to take her a great piece of bacon, with a message, saying, the parson wanted to make sure that Mrs Fripp would know the taste of bacon-fat again. So, when Mr Gilfil died, Dame Fripp manifested her gratitude and reverence in the simple dingy fashion I have mentioned.

(76-77)

Besides his generous and humane nature, Eliot particularly draws on the Smilean doctrine of self-help emphasized in the sermons of the Evangelical priest. Instead of delivering his parishioners a doctrinal, spiritual, and polemical sermon, Gilfil adopts the concise thesis that "those who do wrong will find it the worse for them, and those who do well find it the better for them" with an particular emphasis on the virtues of well-doing such as “honesty, truthfulness, charity, industry, and other common virtues, lying quite on the surface of life” (81). Skeptically negating Barton’s sermons, the Shepperton parishioners, however, positively affirmed Gilfil’s preaching; the basic difference between the two priests’ approach to religion lies in the fact that Gilfil, unlike Barton who adhered to the theological, “did not dispense the pure Gospel, or any strictures on his doctrine and mode of delivery” (81).
In reminding her “refined lady readers” of her readiness to tell the romantic or melodramatic “details of Mr Gilfil’s love-story” (82), Eliot seems to make, as Neil Roberts misinterprets it, “a formal contribution to a melodramatic genre” (56). What Roberts misses in the voice of Eliot, however, is the self-contradictory nature of the novelist’s narrative strategy to subvert its own narrative genre, so called “melodrama” by disclosing its counter-melodramatic elements of the story. In foregrounding Gilfil’s affectionate and sympathetic virtues in his contacts with his parishioners, Eliot undermines in the story the ontological, essential, self-sufficient qualities of melodramatic genre; although critics attack Eliot for the imitation of her contemporary literary fashion—melodrama—to which she professedly expressed her abhorrence, the novelist actually capitalizes on the sympathetic or moralistic pattern crisscrossed in the fabric of literary melodrama. Although the whole trajectory of Gill’s romantic fervor for Caterina seemingly suffices to the literary conditions of melodrama, the presence of a counter-idea inextricably interwoven with the outspoken thought of melodrama resists in submerging itself into the comprehensively encompassing category of melodrama. Here, Eliot’s on-going concern with the enlargement of human sympathy for fellow neighbors can functions as a counter-argument which exists as a dynamic pulse inside the narrative. However, when she uses her own authorial voice in terms of metonymical allusion to value the spectacle of sympathy for a love-stricken fellow over the excess of emotions occasioned by the melodramatic scenario, Eliot makes the counter-argument, in a metonymical way, transfigured into the over-thought of her narrative:

Alas, alas! We poor mortals are often little better than wood-ashes—there is small sign of the sap, and the leafy freshness, and the bursting buds that were once there; but wherever we see wood-ashes, we know that all that early fullness of life must have been. I, at least,
hardly ever look at a bent old man, or a wizened old woman, but I see also, with my mind’s eye, that Past of which they are the shrunken remnant, and the unfinished romance of rosy cheeks and bright eyes seems sometimes of feeble interest and significance, compared with that drama of hope and love which has long ago reached its catastrophe, and left the poor soul, like a dim and dusty stage, with all its sweet garden-scenes and fair perspectives overturned and thrust out of sight. (82-83)

Caterina’s indulgent infatuation with Captain Anthony Wybrow, who is weak both in his physical condition and in his action for love, makes her bound with ambivalent feelings of love, anger, and jealousy, and apathetic to Gilfil’s “sympathy which she suspected to be mingled with criticism” (94-95). The prophetic and sympathetic vision of Gilfil can tell the stark contrast between Wybrow, exquisitely dignified “like an Olympian god” and Italian girl, Caterina, plainly treated “like a gypsy changeling” (99). Before the sagacious insight of Gilfil, also as chaplain in Cheverel Manor, comes into fruition, the unfolding of the story seems to be melodramatic only concerning the tragic consequence of Caterina’s passionate but fearful love for Wybrow as well as Gilfil’s ardent love for her. Although some critics argue that the novelist, unsuccessfully imitating her literary predecessors, described the places in the story “more like those romances set in grand house on which Marian [George Eliot] had been so wittily severe in her essays” (Ashton, George Eliot 176), what they fail to see, however, is that Eliot’s portrayal of Cheverel Manor built in and decorated with Gothic style is an emblem of Sir Christopher Cheverel’s ambition and illusion which are blind to, or juxtaposed with, Caterina’s anguish in real life. Thus Cheverel Manor, Gothic setting, which seems to have resemblance to that in romance, actually serves as a backdrop both against the dramatic development of the conflicts between main protagonists in the main plot of the story and, furthermore, against the reinforcement of the
creation of sympathetic feeling for Caterina whose original background is deeply associated with Gothic elements.

In drawing on the ironic disjunction between Sir Christopher’s strong enthusiasm for Gothic architecture and Caterina’s ardent fixation on her own gothic nature, George Eliot adroitly reveals the irreconcilable contradiction of Gothic nature in two different entities. Driven by his desire for transforming his plain brick family mansion into a Gothic manor-house, Sir Christopher visited Italy with his wife, Lady Cheverel, in order to examine the details of Gothic Cathedral. Although the narrator praises Sir Christopher’s “sublime spirit which distinguishes art from luxury, and worships beauty apart from self-indulgence,” he remarks about his neighbors’ adverse criticism of Sir Christopher’s rigidity and inflexibility: “As for Sir Christopher, he was perfectly indifferent to criticism. ‘An obstinate, crotchety man,’ said his neighbours” (110). Cheverel Manor is not only a product of his architectural enthusiasm for systematization, orderliness, and sublime beauty, but also a manifestation of aristocratic authority which necessitated his wife’s submission, though willingly enacted, to his desire; as the fox-hunting neighbors’ wives pityingly said, Lady Cheverel at once “had to live in no more than three rooms” and “must be distracted with noises, and have her constitution undermined by unhealthy smells” (109-10). While the external elements of Cheverel Manor reflect the mental tendencies of Sir Christopher’s ambitious vision of system and beauty based on his rigorous and inflexible will, inside the Gothic building exists Caterina, whose innate temperaments are not harmonious with those of the builder: “Unlike the building, however, Caterina’s development was the result of no systematic or careful appliances. She grew up very much like the primroses, which the gardener is not sorry to see within his enclosure, but takes no pains to cultivate” (110).
Instead of representing the designer’s aesthetic purpose of purity and self-evidence, Cheverel Mansion turns out to be a hybridized, idiosyncratic, heterogeneous, monstrous artifact in nature. Actually, the ontological design of Sir Christopher is undermined by an incongruity and self-contradiction of its own. Caterina’s vindictiveness and strong defiance against discipline frustrate Sir Christopher’s high aim of building up an ideal Gothic mansion. When deciding to choose Caterina as their protégée after the death of her father, Sarti, who was famous for his penmanship as well as for a tenor in opera before he had lost his voice, Sir Christopher and Lady Cheverel were dominated by the ideological motivations of English aristocracy and philanthropic purpose rooted in Christian superiority claiming Puritan ascendancy over other religions, as well as by the utilitarian purpose to regard her as the child “to be ultimately useful” (104). Even when he decided to select Gilfil as chaplain in his house, Sir Christopher enjoys self-gratifying plans and prospects in terms of the usefulness of the chaplain and the future settlement through his marriage with Caterina. His strong wish to see Wybrow married to Miss Assher is also based on his blind pursuit of security and comfort in Cheverel Manor. Sir Christopher’s unifying master plot to perpetuate the stability of the Gothic mansion is undermined by the object of desire he wanted to control, which would otherwise have contributed to the fulfillment of his British aristocratic ideology. The sublime beauty of Cheverel Mansion contains the mundane ugliness and monstrosity which fiercely palpitate in the bosom of Caterina. The heroine is a marginalized figure, or a “traumatic kernel,”\(^\text{13}\) that latently threatens and ultimately destabilizes her master’s sublime ideology. The master’s centralizing attempt to annihilate the basic antagonism between his ambition and Caterina’s nature can be considered what Slavoj Žižek calls “totalitarian temptation” (Sublime Object 5). Sir Christopher’s certainty of the independent truth about his aristocratic projects dissolves his own ontological self-sameness just as shown in the Hegelian
relationship between lord and bondsman. Sir Christopher’s desire for inculcating and taking advantage of Caterina is analogous to the colonizer’s desire for enlightening and appropriating the colonized. His enlightenment project for the alien girl derives from his xenophobic anxiety over the possible ruin of the accomplishment of English aristocratic beauty. Caterina’s idiosyncratic, self-surviving, self-invigorating, terrifyingly defiant elements shatter into pieces the illusive mirror of English aristocratic self-complacency.

The theatrical mobility and emotion of Caterina—her complex feelings of mad passion, wickedness, loss, helplessness, and even her pathetic fallacy prompting her to identify her sorrow with the dreary moonlight or the shivering grass—seem to represent, as Jennifer Uglow puts it, “the passion of Gothic melodrama” against the backdrop of Cheverel Manor as a symbol aristocratic rigidity (87). However, more importantly, Eliot directs our attention to the juxtaposing clash between male aristocratic figures’ self-serving causes and a female character’s bold challenge against them rather than to the melodramatic unfolding of her passion. Besides Sir Christopher’s romanticizing plot of all the matters in Cheverel Manor, Captain Wybrow is a man of duplicity who willfully ignores Caterina with “the coolest contempt for her feelings, the basest sacrifice of all the consideration and tenderness he owed her to the ease of his position with Miss Assher” (149). Just as the Euripidean tragic plot suggests in Medea the conflict between the authoritative collusion of Creon and Jason and the vindictiveness of foreign female Medea, so does the story reveal the struggle between Wybrow’s gratuitous cruelty subservient to Sir Christopher’s self-absorbing ambition and Caterina’s vengeful passion. Wybrow, providing himself with a self-justifying excuse for abandoning his affection for Caterina, meditates on the priority of his subjugated accountability to Sir Christopher: “If I had been in a different position, I would certainly have married her myself; but that was out of the question with my
responsibilities to Sir Christopher. I think a little persuasion from my uncle would bring her to accept Gilfil; I know she would never be able to oppose my uncle’s wishes” (138-39). The sudden death of Wybrow in the Rookery is actually caused by the aggravation of the chronic disease in his heart. Eliot adroitly makes a parallel between the destabilization of Sir Christopher’s sublime project of Cheverel Manor occasioned by the antagonistic impulse of Caterina inside the building and the death of Wybrow caused by the weakness in his own body. Since the lethal power of his own heart disease arises from the severity of his motivation to fulfill aristocratic stability of his life in Cheverel Manor through his marriage of Miss Assher for the expense of his dubious affection for Caterina. Again, Eliot illuminates the presence of the “other” force undermining the desire for the fulfillment of self-gratification, which is similar to the case of Caterina as the defiant other in Cheverel Manor threatening Sir Christopher’s aristocratic ideals. Eliot’s use of analogy of “the pulse of anguish in the breast of the tiniest bird” is appropriate for highlighting Caterina’s vitality of otherness and her threat to the system of the aristocratic totalizing domination (126). As Neil Hertz points out, the image of pulse is associated with a double-edged, ambivalent meaning of life and threat:

*Pulse*—as well as its cognates, *pulsing, pulsation, impulse, compulsion, repulsion*—turns up at telling moments in Eliot’s fiction, and does some of the same work as the word *seed*. Each refers to a small, replicable unit of vitality, and as such is a sign of life. But *seed* and *pulse* are both equivocal, because they open up on a wide range of traditional associations that are either comforting or threatening and are available for any number of further inflections. (13; emphasis in orig.)

Although some critics vitiate Eliot’s depiction of the scene in which Caterina goes out to murder faithless Captain Wybrow and finds him lying dead in the wood as merely “contrived dramatic
(or melodramatic) excitement written in the style of crude melodrama” (Bennett 98), they fail to
detect the process of subversion made by the subordinated other—Caterina as a foreign woman,
protégée, and abandoned lover—which was dominated by the aristocratic ideologies of the
concomitant authorities in Sir Christopher and Wyborw.

When Eliot uses the word “dagger” in Chapter 13 where Caterina selects a knife from the
collection of armor in the gallery at Cheverel Manor, it can function as a metonymy for both a
lethal weapon for fulfilling her intention to stab Wybrow and a rebellious and subversive power
to undermine the self-gratifying ambitions of the aristocrat. Thus, when John Blackwood raised
an objection of Eliot’s idea of allowing Caterina to use the weapon because he thought that the
“dear little heroine would be more sure of universal sympathy if she only dreamed or felt as if
she could stab the cur to the heart,” the publisher serves to perpetuate the Victorian male
configuration of woman characterized in consistency in her character and full of self-illusion
controlled by her own weak self-determination. In her reply to John Blackwood, Eliot expressed
her strong regard for being true to the facts of actual life, asserting that “it would be the death of
my story to substitute a dream for the real scene. Dreams usually play an important part in
fiction, but rarely, I think, in actual life” (Letters 2: 309).

Unlike Blackwood’s anxiety over the true realization of the suppressed feeling of
Caterina in the story, Eliot’s concern is ultimately with the power of sympathy as the means
through which the female protagonist undergoes the shift of feelings from unleashing passion for
vengeance through remorse, to comfort and solace. The enlargement of sympathy cannot be
achieved by the suppression of the other, the surreptitious but dismantling impulse against the
dominant narrative of the privileged aristocratic authority; on the contrary, it can be made by the
act of understanding and embracing the otherness of the underprivileged. George Eliot creates
Gilfil as a person of true benevolence whose sympathy is made possible through, as Thomas A. Noble notes, “an imaginative extension of self” (63). In Chapter 19, where Caterina confesses to Gilfil her intention of killing Wybrow with the dagger, he is keen to demonstrate the partiality of human judgment of fellow neighbors:

[W]e mean to do wicked things that we never could do, just as we mean to do good or clever things that we never could do. Our thoughts are often worse than we are, just as they are often better than we are. And God sees us as we are altogether, not in separate feelings or actions, as our fellow-men see us. We are always doing each other injustice, and thinking better or worse of each other than we deserve, because we only hear and see separate words and actions. We don’t see each other’s whole nature. (179)

Gilfil’s insight into human weaknesses and “all our secret sins” (179) can function as the true implication of George Eliot’s sagacious response to John Blackwood’s biased view of the story as too provocative and incoherent in terms of the female protagonist’s audacious rebellion against the male aristocrat. Furthermore, in mentioning that human relations require the basis of “the deep emotional sympathy of affection” (180), Gilfil plays a significant role in conveying the main purport of Eliot’s criticism in her essay of Edward Young’s aversion to mortal joys and worldly emotions. For Eliot, the disinclination of theological advocates toward secular emotions is compared to “theological ink.” While comparing the aversion of Young and theological advocates to mortal joys to this “theological ink,” George Eliot conceives of pure mortality to “fresh water”:

We can imagine that the proprietors of a patent water-supply have a dread of common springs; but, for our own part, we think there cannot be too great a security against a lack of fresh water or of pure mortality. To us it is a matter of unmixed rejoicing that this
latter necessary of healthful life is independent of theological ink, and that its evolution is ensured in the interaction of human souls as certainly as the evolution of science or of art, with which, indeed, it is but a twin ray, melting into them with undefinable limits. (375-76)

Gilfil’s sympathetic attitude toward Caterina does not arise from his morally impeccable superiority over her remorseful guilt consciousness; rather, he embraces her with true understanding of human weaknesses and follies in that he confesses to her that he is not immune from committing secret sins: “I am more sinful than you, Tina; I have often had very bad feelings towards Wybrow; and if he had provoked me as he did you, I should perhaps have done something more wicked” (179). While Sir Christopher and Wybrow made the utmost efforts to validate the supremacy of self and to achieve self-justifying purposes by the name of legislative power of reason, Gilfil is sensitive not only to the fragility of the self but also to broadening the scope of sympathetic feeling to the understanding of other people’s joys and sorrows. Gilfil practices what Emmanuel Levinas calls the idea of “the new ontology” as an attempt to “be engaged, merged with what we think, launched—the dramatic event of being-in-the-world” (3).

Neither does the encounter of Gilfil with Caterina establish the sovereign authority of the self over the other, nor does it attempt to encapsulate the other within the sphere of understanding and knowledge driven by the need to reduce the other to the object of comprehensibility. The strangeness and unfamiliarity arising from the existence of Caterina outside the self of Gilfil ironically offers him familiarity and a feeling of exhilaration what Levinas calls “jouissance”:

Unaware of the challenge of the Other, the self finds itself in an alien environment, surrounded by objects which comply with or oppose its needs, but it is not in exile; on the contrary, it feels entirely at home. The strangeness of the world is its charm, a cause of
happiness. *Jouissance* names the process by which the subject makes itself at home in an environment where otherness is not a threat to be overcome, but a pleasure to be experienced. (Davis 43)

Caternia' narrative is transmuted into Gilfil’s so that it can be served as food, a source of energy for life—the extension of life through the enactment of sympathy in relation of the self and the other.

Gilfil is the practitioner of the Feuerbachian idea of love in the sense that he plays a middling, reconciliatory role in negotiating with the binary oppositions between reason and feeling, culture and nature, and self and other: “Love is the middle term, the substantial bond, the principle of reconciliation between the perfect and the imperfect, the sinless and sinful being, the universal and the individual, the divine and the human” (*Essence* 48). For Eliot, love is not the idea of absolute virtue immune from drawbacks and vices. Instead of drawing on the absolute goodness or virtue from the character, George Eliot highlights the relative, complementary, reconciliatory movements of emotions and feelings in the relationships between the characters, revealing the impossibility of dichotomizing attributes of human nature. As is shown in the case of Barton and Milly, the novelist is interested in Milly’s “sublime capacity of loving” which is initially made possible only by the existence of Barton as the object for sympathy: “Mrs Barton’s nature would never have grown half so angelic if she had married the man you [the reader] would perhaps have had in your eye for her—a man with sufficient income and abundant personal éclat” (20). This is also true in the case of Caterina and Gilfil. The recuperative effect of the clergyman’s sympathy for her cannot be illuminated without the secret sin committed by Caterina as the mirror which reflects his counterpart.
Eliot compares the circuitous, repetitive, and dynamic exchange of sympathies occurring between two characters to the regenerative and awakening power evoked by the exchange of their musical performance of harpsichord. The two characters’ musical performance, serving both as an outlet to vent their emotional turbulence and as a medium through which they can understand each other with sympathy, reflects what Beryl Gray calls Eliot’s treatment of “the ideas of yearning, fulfillment and sympathy” (13).14 Just as Eliot shared affectionate companionship with George Henry Lewes by means of music, so do Gilfil and Caterina experience the rich concords of “music that stirs all one’s devout emotions blends everything into harmony,—makes one feel part of one whole, which one loves all alike, losing the sense of a separate self” (Haight 1968, 256).

Although Eliot seems to make the story hastily end by the death of Caterina a few months after her marriage to Gilfil, the novelists astutely produces the reverberations of sorrow, joy, sympathy, and finally the recollection of those multiple emotions in the existence of “the dear old Vicar” who is compared to “a noble tree” which has “the main trunk of the same brave, faithful, tender nature that had poured out the finest, freshest forces of its life-current in a first and only love—the love of Tina” (186-87).15 Eliot’s skepticism about the binary opposition of values thus originates in her recognition of the presence of the other which exists as the other side of the mirror in our selves. From the recognition, as Eliot believes, we can achieve the enlargement of human sympathy for fellow neighbors.

C. A Dynamic of Confessional Sympathy: “Janet’s Repentance”

To redefine the meaning of sympathy in terms of the dynamics of the self and the other, of suffering and confession, of sacrifice and redemption, Eliot illuminates the mingling coexistence of contradictory natures, the conflicts of human desires and interests, in the
advanced Milby community in the last novella of *Scenes of Clerical Life*. In commenting on the industrial advancement, material proliferation, refined culture, moral enlightenment, and the enlargement in scale of church in Milby society, the narrator, one of the town’s residents, ironically criticizes the gentlemen’s and ladies’ “virtuous excess of stupidity” (196). In contrast to the highly moral standard in the old times at Milby, the narrator goes on to point out the avarice and corruption of the curates in Milby, as in the case of Old Mr Crewe, without any denunciation of the parishioners. He adds that there has been moral laxity and religious indifference prevalent in Milby: “The parishioners saw no reason at all why it should be desirable to venerate the parson or any one else: they were much more comfortable to look down a little on their fellow-creatures” (201).

The social transformation exemplified both in the shift of chapels into mercantile business as ribbon-shops or in the rise and fall of doctor’s fame in the day-book, indicates a direct parallelism between social mechanization and dehumanization. The Darwinian logic of survival of the fittest has wielded its dominant power over the advanced Milby society. The materialistic idea of cash nexus controls the basic attitude of Mr. Pilgrim toward his patients; although he seems to express his latent tenderness and pity for the suffering patients, Mr. Pilgrim begins to change his positive view of his patients when they become convalescent because they can no longer be a source for his material profit. For Mr. Pilgrim, patients become objects for material gain. The reason why Mr. Pilgrim expresses his hostility to Mr. Jerome is that the old rich gentleman is not his customer but Pratt’s.

More importantly, Eliot directs the reader’s attention from the moral blemishes of avarice, egoism, and vanity to “the salt of goodness” such as sympathy and neighborly kindness (205). If “Mr. Gilfil’s Love-Story” draws its attention from the generous and kind gestures of the
characters to the deceptive and beguiled nature lying beneath them, the focus of her narrative trajectory in the third story of *Scenes of Clerical Life* moves from the collective consciousness of moral deterioration and religious indifference to the virtues—“some purity, gentleness, and unselfishness”—pulsating beneath “a dismal mixture of griping worldliness, vanity, ostrich feathers, and the fumes of brandy” (205). Instead of drawing a clear demarcation between the elder generations and the narrator’s contemporary generations in terms of the change of moral landscape, Eliot tries to emphasize the importance of the middle point or common ground shared by the two different generations, just as she did in “How We Come to Give Ourselves False Testimonials, and Believe in Them” through the voice of Theophrastus Such:

> Let us praise the sober harmonies they give to our landscape, helping to unite us pleasantly with the elder generations who tilled the soil for us before we were born, and paid heavier and heavier taxes, with much grumbling, but without that deepest root of corruption—the self-indulgent despair which cuts down and consumes and never plants.

(26)

The sober harmonies which Eliot believes had descended over the generations, in the case of “Janet’s Repentance,” are tantamount to the true spirit of Evangelicalism which is expected to destroy “all the splendour of the ostrich feathers” (206) such as hypocrisy, pomposity, arrogance, and selfishness. In paying particular attention to the paradoxical aspect of the still-living presence of religious fervor in the heart of materialistic wealth and progress, George Eliot attempts to see a nuanced meaning of religious humanism against the collusion of materialism and religion. It is true that Milby society is divided into two groups—The Tryanites and Anti-Tryanites—in terms of their religious difference. It is for the sake of their positioning driven by antipathy and retribution toward the other that they are liable to disrupt their familial or social
relationships. For example, Mr. Budd and Mr. Tomlinson, members of Anti-Tryanites, express their strong antagonism against their workers’ preference for Tryanites, such as going to the curate’s Sunday evening lecture.

Eliot, on the other hand, uncovers the self-contradictory aspect of religious sectarianism in Milby where mercantilism is prevalent and influential in the aggrandizement of self-interest; when the dogmatic sectarianism is faced with the utilitarian (or material) value of convenience, its religious fervor and rigidity are outwitted by “the persuasive power of convenience” (253). Mr. Dunn, although he was a Tryanite, succeeded in maintaining the highest popularity of his drapery even among the people of Anti-Tryanites because “His drapery was the best in Milby; the comfortable use and wont of procuring satisfactory articles at a moment’s notice proved too strong for Anti-Tryanite zeal” (253).

The novelist foregrounds the opposition of two zealous parties—the Tryanites who mainly consist of the lower class people and ladies, and anti-Tryanites who are made up of the upper-middle class people known to represent the intellectual, moral, and economical aspects of Milby. The realm of anti-Tryanites centers on the bar of the Red Lion at Milby where lawyer Robert Dempster’s “loud, rasping, oratorical tone, struggling against chronic huskiness” (191), is dominant for the purpose of taking legal actions to defeat Tryan who “preaches without book” (194). On the contrary, the sphere of Tryanites, especially ladies, is Mrs. Linnet’s parlour where “the only sound likely to disturb the serenity of the feminine party assembled there, was the occasional buzz of intrusive wasps, apparently mistaking each lady’s head for a sugar-basin” (207). It is through the euphonious and harmonious dialogue of the female Tryanites that the narrator introduces Tryan as “a clergyman who unites all that is great and admirable in intellect with the highest spiritual gifts” (212).
Edgar Tryan is an antitype of the Victorian stereotypical idea of Evangelical curator. Instead of becoming “a sleek bimanous animal in white neckcloth” (216) subservient to the ideal model of refinement enough to be adored by ladies or to the prototype of public usefulness, Tryan subverts the mystified image of the curate stratified by Victorian bourgeois’ self-gratifying ideology. Bourgeois anti-Tryanites harshly attack Tryan because the curator runs counter to the religious and civic authority established by anti-Tryanites, especially Dempster. Since he demystifies the typical image of curator in Milby, Tryan appears to be a hybridized and incongruous figure in terms of his social relationships with people and his religious doctrine:

It was a great anomaly to the Milby mind that a canting evangelical parson, who would take tea with tradespeople, and make friends of vulgar women like the Linnets, should have so much the air of a gentleman, and be so little like the splay-footed Mr Stickney of Salem, to whom he approximated so closely in doctrine. (217)

The evangelical teachings of Tryan inspire some of female Tryanites, the two Miss Linnets, who are similar to the ideal type of Victorian women John Ruskin delineates in “Of Queens’ Gardens”: “When a man is happy enough to win the affections of a sweet girl, who can soothe his cares with crochet, and respond to all his most cherished ideas with beaded urn-rugs and chair-covers in German wool, he has, at least, a guarantee of domestic comfort, whatever trials may await him out of doors” (209). Miss Pratt, “the one blue-stocking of Milby” (210), also believes that Tryan’s teachings has enabled her to open her eyes to “the full importance of that cardinal doctrine of the Reformation” as well as to realize the importance of “the great doctrine of justification by faith” (212). Under the influence of Evangelicalism brought up by Tryan, the ladies not only realize the importance of “something to love” and “something to reverence,” but they are also willing to practice moral loveliness such as “visiting the poor,” “striving after a
standard of purity and goodness” instead of indulging themselves in “the costumes of the heroines in the circulating library” (256).

Eliot’s idea of true Evangelicalism highlights the realization of sympathy through a dynamic interaction between self and the other. Rather than emphasizing religious authority’s sermonizing inculcation of doctrine and morality to people, Eliot lends credence to religious figures recognizing their own weaknesses and errors which will lead them to understand other people’s follies and sufferings with pity. In “Janet’s Repentance,” Tyran typifies Eliot’s dramatic portrayal of achieving the true spirit of Evangelicalism. In drawing on the importance of subordination and self-mastery through subduing callous, solipsistic, and selfish desires, George Eliot recapitulates her idea of true heroes who are not only able to discipline themselves by struggling with their own sins and sorrows but also able to sympathize with other people’s sufferings and agonies. Unlike false heroes who are attracted to “dry barren theory, blank prejudice, vague hearsay” (257), true heroes are likely to have their “natural heritage of love and conscience which they drew in with their mother’s milk” (256). When she attacks Dr. John Cumming, the minister of the Scottish National Church, in her essay “Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming” which was published in *Westminster Review* in 1855, Eliot denounces Dr. Cumming’s theological doctrine of the subjugation of human beings only for the glory of God: Dr. Cumming’s theory of Christianity is that “actions are good or evil according as they are prompted or not prompted by an exclusive reference to the ‘glory of God’” (*Essays* 186). In stark contrast to the Poet Young, who eulogizes other-worldliness at the expense of secularity, and unlike the Evangelical priest Dr. Cumming, who seeks to provoke Christians to feel anxiety for the glory of God, Tryan is depicted as a humanistic priest who can listen to other fellow
human beings’ sorrows and agonies, “the heart-pulses that are beating under the mere clothes of circumstance and opinion” (257).

In the sense that he does not simply advocate doctrines and disciplines of religion which would otherwise have made him overlook the practices of love for his neighbors, Tryan has acuity of knowledge, or “hard common-sense” shared by Adam Bede who expresses his “disinclination to doctrinal religion” (Adam Bede 48). Unlike enthusiastic Evangelicals who are likely to force their doctrines on other people and to play upon emotions in order to perpetuate populist evangelicalism, Tryan embodies Eliot’s idea of truth of feeling, the expression of sympathy for fellow human beings which arises from the experience of one’s own suffering.

As regards his laborious works, “three sermons on Sunday, a night-school for young men on Tuesday, a cottage-lecture on Thursday, addresses to school-teachers, and catechizing of school-children, with pastoral visits, multiplying as his influence extended beyond his own district of Paddiford Common” (257-58), Tryan can be comparable to Dinah Morris who dedicates her life to sympathetic behavior toward and service to the poor, the sick, and the mourning, with “the subtlest perception of the mode in which they could best be touched, and softened into willingness to receive words of spiritual consolation or warning” (Adam Bede 108). Believing that work “gives you a grip hold o’ things outside your own lot” (109), Adam Bede advocates the Victorian optimistic view of welfare, or self-promotion in social and economic terms, especially Samuel Smiles’ doctrine of self-help. On the other hand, Tryan, mentioning that “there are many duties … which stand before taking care of our own lives” (261), prefigures the characters of self-renunciation in Eliot’s later novels, such as Dinah and Romola who are willing to devote their lives to the comforts and satisfaction of the needy people. Thus what Eliot means by duty does not indicate a prerequisite for the upgrading of one’s own social and economic status, but it
implies what Myers calls “the tender word[s] which offered the blessedness of self-forgetting
fellowship as the guerdon won by the mourner’s pain” (268). Instead of demarcating the distinct
line between the ethic of moral earnestness and that of enthusiasm in terms of Victorian
intellectuals’ ethical creed, one must draw on, in the case of Eliot’s works of art, the overlapping
area where, as Houghton points out, the two seemingly contrasting ethical values “could
perfectly well be combined” (Houghton 264). The mid-Victorian cult of enthusiasm highly
values the vitality of noble emotion and sensibility in contrast with that of earnestness which
highlights both a life of duty and the control of the passions. However, the characters of Eliot’s
novels are not depicted as an alternative to either one of the two values; instead, they undergo the
transformation of recognizing the importance of enthusiasm from their own errors and sufferings
through the realization of the need for duty to the practice of noble emotions as the manifestation
of altruism.

The merging of enthusiasm and duty is also exemplified in Tryan’s study where the
secularity of Gothic barbarism and the rigor of English Protestantism are blended together. In
particular, Tryan’s portrait of an Anglican bishop painted by Johann Friedrich Overbeck\(^{19}\)
signifies the clergyman’s eclectic characters represented by the hybridization of religious piety
and Gothic secularity. The narrator invites the reader to take a look at Tryan’s study:

where the general air of comfort is rescued from a secular character by strong
ecclesiastical suggestions in the shape of the furniture, the pattern of the carpet, and the
prints on the wall; where, if a nap is taken, it is in an easy-chair with a Gothic back, and
the very feet rest on a warm and velvety simulation of church windows; where the pure
art of rigorous English Protestantism smiles above the mantel-piece in the portrait of an
eminent bishop, or a refined Anglican taste is indicated by a German print from
Overbeck; where the walls are lined with choice divinity in sombre binding, and the light is softened by a screen of boughs with a grey church in the background. (259)

Far from being dependent on religious self-indulgence and sermonizing inculcation, “the self-satisfied unction of the teacher, quoting, or exhorting, or expounding, for the benefit of the hearer” (265), Tryan is able to understand other people’s sufferings sincerely because he had already experienced his own “deeply-felt troubles” (265). Instead of alienating him from other people by disguising him as an inviolable and impeccable figure, the private secret of Tryan’s troubles enables him to give support and consolation to them. When she goes to Sally Martin’s house in order to bring a pudding for the invalid and listens to Tryan’s solace to Sally and to his self-confession of his own physical weakness, Janet experiences a kind of de-familiarization, “the entire absence of self-consciousness which belongs to a new and vivid impression” (265), since she was surprised at the new recognition of the yawning gap between what she had expected to hear from him and what she really heard from him. Following her realization of the clergyman’s sincerity and physical precariousness, the moment of epiphany is revealed in the exchange of glances between Janet and Tryan: “There is a power in the direct glance of a sincere and loving human soul, which will do more to dissipate prejudice and kindle charity than the most elaborate argument” (265).

George Eliot’s suggestion of the capacity to feel sympathy for the suffering of others does not mean that one must feel sympathy, as an onlooker, by simply looking pitiably at other’s sorrows, but it does mean that one has to project his or her own experience of woes onto others’ struggles with them. Therefore, Eliot believes that one must have a heart that “has learned pity through suffering” rather than the “doctrine of compensation” that allows one to generate “short and easy methods of obtaining complacency in the presence of pain” (301). Eliot’s anti-
Utilitarian idea is based on her critical scrutiny of the limits of rational complacency since she recognizes that the faculty of human reasoning and arithmetical considerations, ignoring the genuine language of the heart, does put too much of a premium on the quantitative view of human anguish which cares only for abstractions and which tends to render merely schematic the real conditions of human misery. By using a biblical allusion, Eliot expresses her antipathy to Utilitarian doctrine of compensation: “for angels too the misery of one casts so tremendous a shadow as to eclipse the bliss of ninety-nine” (302).

Janet’s conviction that Tryan does not have an odious self-complacency thus arises from her recognition that he is not a type of person who capitalizes on his own ability to theorize and sermonize other people’s agonies. Instead, she comes to understand that he is one of her fellow human beings who had undergone a lacerating self-mortification. When Janet tells Tryan both how cruel her husband Dempster has become to her and how addicted she has become to drinking, the clergyman confesses to her that ten years ago he was so wretched in his sin and suffered agony from his consciousness of it. It is both through his abandonment of a seventeen-year-old girl, Lucy, who was lower in her social standing than in his, and through his incidental discovery of her poisoned dead body, that Tryan had experienced the sense of guilt and helplessness. However, as his anonymous friend to whom he confessed his sorrows pointed out, Tryan’s self-mortifying guilty consciousness paves the way for his “coming to Christ and partaking of His salvation” (290). Moreover, his self-consciousness allows him to pursue a divine and sympathetic action to rescue other weak and falling souls.

The narrative plot of human suffering and salvation, as exemplified in the cases of Tryan and Janet, clarifies George Eliot’s ardent belief in the religious humanism Feuerbach delineates in *The Essence of Christianity*. The fundamental basis of love Tryan practices is a bond of
secularity and spirituality in that the self-consciousness of one’s own guilt and spiritual regeneration cannot be achieved without the experience of worldliness—including, among other things, the mundane experience of suffering. For both Feuerbach and Eliot, love is not the idealistic and transcendental notion irrespective of the earthly conditions of human beings. Love is a mediating force that entails a process of shift from the human experience of materiality through self-consciousness of consequence of secularity to the projection of the self’s recognition of imperfection onto the case of the other. Feuerbach demonstrates that God is not the idea of transcendence and immateriality, but, rather, is a unity of secularity and spirituality: “Love is God himself, and apart from it there is not God. Love makes man God and God man” (Essence 48). As Feuerbach demonstrates in “The Contradiction of Faith and Love” (Essence), the proposition of “God is love” implies the exclusiveness of the Christian faith because faith, in the religious sentiment, places God in the position of the absolute measure by which human beings are recognized and judged. For Feuerbach, however, the subject “God” is simply “the darkness in which faith shrouds itself” as opposed to the predicate “love” as “the light, which first illuminates the intrinsically dark subject” (264). Feuerbach’s affirmation of love is based on his denunciation of Christian faith since the doctrine of faith is “the doctrine of duty toward God” (260). Thus the indecipherability of God can only be decipherable in the signifier of love, and the true grasp of love can also be made possible by the dialogic performance between the self and the other: the Feuerbachian religion of humanism highlights the anthropological practice of love in transforming the abstract idea of God into the secularized realm of the relationship between the self and the other.

By emphasizing the role of sympathy as a means of connecting the self with the other, Eliot further develops the theoretical basis of the Feuerbachian idea of love or his religion of
humanism to the level of historical imagination in which the past of the self is intertwined with
the present of the other. Eliot illuminates the notion of sympathy as equivalent to the
Feuerbachian idea of love in light of religious humanism. She demonstrates that sympathy can be
enlarged through a regeneration of our own past experience of suffering which may be expressed
in a form of confession: “it is because sympathy is but a living again through our own past in a
new form, that confession often prompts a response of confession” (288). What Eliot
underscores here is that the prompting of sympathy is not an outcome of a unilateral and
constative relationship between self and the other, but a consequence of a dialogic and
performative relationship between the two. Furthermore, it can be enlarged through a
proliferation of the interlocutory connectedness between the self-consciously modified self and
the suffering other.

Eliot and Hegel may share the common ground insofar as history is a process of the
development in the relationship between the self and the other. Instead of regarding history as a
record of “the workings of Spirit as Intelligence or Will” in order to attain the absolute
knowledge or the Universal Idea (Dodd 124), Eliot, however, depicts the self and its
consciousness as open to change and modification in its relation to the other without setting up
the eschatological purpose of history. Eliot’s dramatic presentation of the self-conscious as the
primal motivation of sympathy does not support Hegel’s theological-teleological idea that “what
was intended by eternal wisdom, is actually accomplished in the domain of existent, active
Spirit, as well as in that of mere nature. Our mode of treating the subject is, in this aspect, a
Theodicea—a justification of the ways of God” (qtd. in Dodd 123). Eliot’s concern is with the
secular relationship between the self and the other which enables them to obtain self-knowledge
of its own follies and errors, such as egoism. The Hegelian Spirit is substituted for sympathy in
Eliot’s fiction. The narrative history of sympathy is an on-going process of embracing the other. The novelist does not see religion as the innately and absolutely good and authoritative power to expunge the balefully mundane evil; rather than dichotomizing and antagonizing the relationship between good and evil, or other-worldliness and worldliness, Eliot considers religious humanism to be the performance of human sympathy of the self who had adumbrated his or her own earthly experience. Therefore, what is important in religious humanism is not an idealized figure such as the Madonna-like Milly in “Amos Barton,” but, as E. S. Shaffer notes, “the very stuff out of which the idea of a madonna arises,” “the very stuff of repentance in the perfectly ordinary sense of having done too little for someone in life,” (242) or the historical circumstances in which Divine pity can operate: “The tale of the Divine pity was never yet believed from lips that were not felt to be moved by human pity” (288).

The way in which Eliot’s idea of sympathy in “Janet’s Repentance” is realized in the suffering female character through Tryan is equivalent to the Freudian idea of “return of the repressed.” Sigmund Freud defines this return not only as the indestructibility of the repressed material (the contents of the unconscious), but also as the tendency of the repressed “to re-emerge into consciousness” by means of “devious routes” or “derivative of the unconscious” (Laplanche 398). The clergyman’s repressed agony in terms of his abandonment of Lucy has been typologically fleshed out in a manner in which Janet is suffering from her husband’s brutality and her alcoholism. The narrative of Tryan’s relationship with Lucy had been repressed before Janet’s confession of her troubles and sorrows was made. Tryan thinks of himself as a fellow sinner who also needs the comfort and help Janet seeks to attain: “in speaking to me you are speaking to a fellow-sinner who has needed just the comfort and help you are needing” (286). Here sympathy serves as a catalyst in precipitating two different, distanced, isolated
entities or human beings to recognize resemblance, approximation, and familiarity through an awareness of the existence of their repressed agonies and sorrows. The vital force of binding the specific conditions of Tryan’s story together with those of Janet’s confession is the mysterious “influence of one true loving human soul on another” (293). Sympathy is a mystery beneath the real, and “a living again through our own past in a new form” (288). As the opening scene of “Janet’s Repentance” in the bar of Red Lion at Milby suggests, Robert Dempster intoxicates himself both with alcohol, “his third glass of brandy-and-water” and with rhetoric, “power of voice and power of intellect” (191), whereas Tryan, as the scene in his interview with Janet indicates, maintains the sober state of mind with the faculty of self-reflection which enables him to understand the agony of “the other,” Janet. The mysterious power of Tryan’s confessional and consolatory words on Janet is compared to the imagery of the life-giving and vibrating process of nature: “Not calculable by algebra, not deducible by logic, but mysterious, effectual, mighty as the hidden process by which the tiny seed is quickened, and burst forth into tall stem and broad leaf, and glowing tasselled flower” (293). The underlying logic of the paradoxical concomitant of individual particularity and common similarity in human relationship lies in deep human sympathy of the self toward the other.

The basic difference between Janet’s agony and Tryan’s, however, is that she had to endure the wretchedness that Victorian women may commonly suffer from as a female condition in society. Even when Dempster had tormented her by tyrannical violence, Janet could not help but bear out his brutal cruelty to the end, not only because she existed to him as “the perpetual presence of a woman he can call his own,” but also because she recognized that a married woman has no name, no privilege, and “the blank that lay for her outside her married home” (268). Janet, pushed by her husband out of his house on the stony street in her night-dress one
windy midnight, delineates a dark, hidden side of Victorian women’s married life; unlike the Victorian metaphor of home as “a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods” or “a shade as of the rock in a weary land, and light as of the Pharos in the stormy sea” (Ruskin, *Works* 18: 122), her husband’s house in Orchard Street is a locus of Janet’s “long years of misery” which is dominated by Dempster’s “drunken rage” and his “huge crushing force, armed with savage will” (274). Janet’s illusion of marriage as a passage to “the inner sanctuary of woman’s life” is shattered by her realization of herself as a “poor bruised woman, seeking through weary years the one refuge of despair, oblivion” (275).

Unlike John Blackwood’s reservations about Eliot’s harsh portrayal of Milby society and characters, the novelist’s depiction of the plight of a woman under the brutality of her intoxicated husband is based on the thesis that cases like Janet’s happened quite commonly in Victorian domesticity. In a response to Blackwood’s adverse criticism on “Janet’s Repentance”—“I am right in advising you to soften your picture as much as you can,” and “Your sketches this time are all written in the harsher Thackerayan view of human nature” (*Letters* 2: 344)—Eliot wrote to him on June 11, 1857 that she creates her fiction both with a strong belief in the truthful depiction of individual and society and with her keen observation of the limits and imperfections of human life in Victorian society:22 “The real town was more vicious than my Milby; the real Dempster was far more disgusting than mine; the real Janet alas! Had a far sadder end than mine” (*Letters* 2: 347).

The passivity and taciturnity of Dempster’s mother, old Mrs. Dempster, is an example of trauma characterized by the condition of Victorian women repressed in society as well as in domesticity. Since she was also a victim of her husband’s carelessness, old Mrs. Dempster developed an illusion of self-absorptive attachment to her son: “My child will repay me all
when it grows up” (235). Old Mrs. Dempster’s emotional immoderation has disruptive and precarious nature enough to produce an insidious and violent effect in Robert Dempster, as W. Buchan had pointed out, a “relaxing effeminacy” which transgresses his own moral fiber. The excess of Old Mrs. Dempster’s maternal love for her son is demonized into a destructive force which not only sabotages the sacredness of the domestic hearth through Dempster’s cruel insanity but also sterilizes the household of the Dempsters—“Janet had no children” (267).

Besides the ideological implication of maternal excess as a destructive force of undermining the concord and order of Victorian domesticity, the narrator’s comments on the ambivalence of feelings—“rather sad, and yet pretty”—with regard to the mother-and-the son relationship can support Eliot’s inclination to avoid the dichotomization of the absolute good and the absolute evil in characters; it is hard to judge that Dempster is this evil since he retains “the deep-down fibrous roots of human love and goodness,” especially in his relationship with his mother, although his tenderness for his mother has gradually become “callous in worldliness, fevered by sensuality, enslaved by chance impulses” (237). Thus, some critics’ contentions that Eliot’s treatment of Mrs. Dempster regarding her affectionate, even doting, attachment to her son is a “fatal,” “unconvincing” or “surprising paradox” (Oldfield 10-11), seems to ignore both the novelist’s reluctance to polarize good and evil and her attempt to see the multiple, even contradictory, aspects of a human being as revealed in the case of Dempster who does simultaneously express his sadistic nature and remain as a darling and caring son. By using a metaphor of a horticultural organism, Eliot illuminates the vulnerability of Dempster’s tenderness and goodness, “a nucleus of healthy life in an organ,” to moral deterioration, “disease” (237), or the existence of rupture which ruins the fecundity of the kernel. It is appropriate to use the shell-kernel figure for the understanding of Dempster’s contradictory
nature; Dempster’s kernel—voice of reason, morality, and affection—is insusceptible and untouchable because it is also hardened by his outward presence of brutality, sensuality, and intoxication. There exists in Dempster the asymmetrical intervention between two spaces—kernel and shell, tenderness and hardness, violence (Dempster as a wife-beating husband) and reason (Dempster as a lawyer). Although Eliot presents a sign of Dempster’s “innocent past” (237) through his relationship with his mother, the novelist highlights, to borrow Jacques Derrida’s phrase, the “inaccessibility of an unpresentable kernel” by locating the sympathetic and tender nature of Mr. Dempster under the surface of his irrationality and brutality toward Janet (Psyche 1: 138). Whereas Tryan succeeds in fleshing out life-giving force of his kernel by expanding his sympathy, based on the self-scrutinizing reflection of his own sinful past, for Janet, Demster fails to approximate the distance between his innocent kernel and sinful shell because his moral debauchery, especially his frequent intoxication, blocks the operation of his reason and tolerance toward the other.

In the case of Janet’s intoxication, alcohol is presented both as a temporary cure for her agony and as a poisonous substance to her mind. In her interview with Tryan, Janet admits that she has drunk alcohol in order to be oblivious to her husband’s cruelty: “I hated wine and spirits because Robert drank them so; but one day when I was very wretched, and the wine was standing on the table, I suddenly…. I can hardly remember how I came to do it…. I poured some wine into a large glass and drank it. It blunted my feelings, and made me more indifferent” (286). For Janet, who had been suffering from her husband’s attack on her body and on her mind, alcohol can “relieve” her “psychological and physiological strain” (Harrison 41). Although “spirits” is a poisonous object of Janet’s hatred for Dempster’s intemperance and for an inducement to his violence, the word can be read as a pun to indicate that drink is actually a
medicinal substance to Janet because it enables her to summon spirits of survival, “the long-accustomed stimulant” (300), or endurance to live a wretched life “so much worse than other women have to bear” (286). Janet is confronted with the double burdens: she has to rely on the “spirits” as alcohol in order to bear the burdens of patriarchal domination, physical and psychological, imposed upon women in Victorian domesticity, but she also needs to resist the addictive spirits of alcohol which are likely to ruin her mental and physical conditions. Unlike Dempster’s absence of guilty feelings about alcohol, however, Janet reveals a self-reflective syndrome in alcoholism;25 she expresses strong guilty consciousness about drinking and recognizes the irresistible temptation of the demonic existence which haunts and disturbs her tranquility and temperance: “It seemed as if there was a demon in me always making me rush to do what I longed not to do” (286); “I feel sure that demon will be always urging me to satisfy the craving that comes upon me” (287).

Tryan’s evangelical exorcism performed on the suffering Janet aims to make her renounce the egoism of self and to obviate the possibility of Dempster-like hubris based on the presumptive supremacy of his own reason. As indicated in the first scene of this novella, Dempster tries to provide himself with the deity of intellectual reason by the name of God: “as long as my Maker grants me power of voice and power of intellect, I will take every legal means to resist the introduction of demoralizing, methodistical doctrine into this parish” It is ironic that the clarity, purity, and morality of voice of reason is adulterated by his intoxication, “mixing his third glass of brandy-and-water” (191), in the boozy atmosphere of the Red Lion at Milby. By using a double-edged metaphor of drink as a means of counter-argument against Dempster’s denunciation of Tryan’s Evangelicalism, Eliot draws on the true spirit of Evangelical Christianity aligned with the spirit of humanism—the capitulation of one’s own suffering through the
suffering of the other, the need for self-abnegation, and the redemptive life for others guided by the power of sympathy. Tryan’s consolatory words produce healing and redemptive effect on Janet who confessed her despair and agony to the Evangelical minister: “‘I know, dear Mrs. Dempster, I know it is hard—the hardest thing of all, perhaps—to flesh and blood. But carry that difficulty to Christ along with all your other sins and weaknesses, and ask Him to pour into you a spirit of submission. He enters into your struggles; He has drunk the cup of our suffering to the dregs’” (292). Tryan is a Wordsworthian evangelist who has “an apotheosized faculty of mind, which has resolved his own crisis and assisted other men to resolve theirs” (Abrams 139).26 Furthermore, Mr. Tryan embodies an image of Christ with “the self-renouncing faith” which motivates him to efface himself in the elliptical sign of death after the life for the other: “‘Let me only live to see this work confirmed, and then …’” (293).

Dempster’s blind faith of his own will and intellect based on arithmetical calculation devoid of sympathy for fellow human beings drives him to an uncontrollable fury and to unrestraint. If Joseph Conrad’s indictment of the rational, civilized Europeans’ lack of restraint in _Heart of Darkness_—the stark contrast between the insatiable desire of the European colonizers for ivory and the carnivores’ restraints of hunger—can be a target against the unrestraint of the imperialistic desire for economic gain of materials, Eliot, in a similar way, presents the subversion of the relationship between the master and the subject, between domination and subjection, by highlighting the lack of self-restraint in controlling one’s own emotion as exemplified in the case of Dempster’s violent treatment of his man Dawes. Dempster’s violent temper is unleashed by his insobriety which numbs the sense of “that dastardly kind of self-restraint which enabled him to control his temper where it suited his own convenience to do so” (284). When Dawes came fifteen minutes late when bringing Dempster’s
gig, the lawyer loses his temper and curses Dawes. Aggravated when Dawes calls Dempster “a lyin’, bletherin’ drunkard” [a lying blithering drunkard] in response, Dempster gives Dawes cut across his face with his whip. Dawes’s voice is the discourse of the other which cannot be dominated and controlled by the discourse of the master Dempster. The cut on the face is symbolic, breaking up the bond of master and servant. Without the help of his servant, Dempster undermines his own position of master and erases his self-proclaimed identity of reason and intellect, enthralled by the other side of his own identity, a ferocious bestiality. Rupturing the solid bond of the master and the subject which upholds both his social identity and his ideals of the Utilitarian convenience, Dempster makes a precarious point with a rage of irrationality, throwing “the reins on the horse’s back” and “driving out without his man.” As a dialogue between Mr. Luke Byles and Mr. Budd suggests, the consequence of Dempster’s unguided animalism is death: “What a fool he is to drive that two-wheeled thing! he’ll get pitched on his head one of these days” (285).

Eliot’s description of the dying Dempster’s delirium tremens dominated by the images of bestiality shows that he is subject to the delusional hallucinations. Dempster is arrested by the feminized and animalistic images of a ghost which appears to be a blend of black serpents, a hare, maggots, black lice, and toads. A feminized phantom, in particular, whose “hair is all serpents” is a return of the repressed “other,” or a Medusa-like specter (307). Here the other means at once the emergence of a hideous, subversive, and self-contradictory existence lying beneath the mask of Dempster’s egotistic reason and the threat of a recalcitrant, vindictive, and suppressed being to the male domination of Dempster as a means of ventriloquism. The spectrality of the other is the Heideggerian fear of other as a haunting sensation within oneself. In Being and Time, Heidegger emphasizes the inseparable connectedness of the self with the
other: “Only so far as one’s own Dasein has the essential structure of Being-with, is it Dasein-with as encounterable for Others” (157). The togetherness of the subject with the other in human existence can explain that the subject’s fear of the other arises from the nature of self-reflexivity; the subject fears the essential existence of the other within the subject. In Dempster’s case, paradoxically, the power of law—“I’ve got the law on my side” (308)—is not only his desperate affirmation of a law of domination ruled by the self-evident reason, but also the inexorable law of consequence to indict his amoral and Utilitarian ideas for their failure to reflect a real knowledge of people and for their lack of sympathy. Dempster’s voice in his dying bed is the voice of the phantasm which is revealed as “occupying a liminal space, as well as moving between two supposedly distinct realms, inside/outside, while being impossible to assign to either” (Wolfreys 21).27 Previouisly failing to bridge the gap between the shell of his egocentric reason and the kernel of his feeling of affection which existed in his relationship with his mother, Dempster ultimately hovers around the abode of a Dantesque limbo as a consequence of his failure to channel the passage from the self-aggrandizement to the enlargement of sympathy for the other.

Eliot’s adoption of the image of Medusa vindicates her defiance against the extremes of patriarchal domination as exemplified in Dempster’s cruel treatment of his wife Janet. Although Janet was a victimized object of Dempster’s voyeuristic violence, a spectral image of Medusa becomes a doppelganger of Janet that plays a vindictive role in vitiating the ideology of male domination. In real life, Eliot defies “the sexist assumptions underlying Spencer’s theory about women’s biological inferiority” (Paxton 19). In a letter to Herbert Spencer in July 1852, Eliot self-consciously and playfully mocked Spencer’s theory of evolution—that all progress is made
from the homogeneity to the heterogeneity—by using a repulsive image of Medusa for the self-
description of her own appearance which was quite far from conventional beauty:

I fancy I should soon be on an equality, in point of sensibility, with the star-fish and sea-
egg—perhaps you will wickedly say, I certainly want little of being a Medusa. I have had
a loathing for books…. You see I am sinking fast towards ‘homogeneity,’ and my brain
will soon be a mere pulp unless you come to arrest the downward process. (Letters 8: 51)

In *The Lifted Veil*, Eliot portrays Bertha Grant as the prolonged satanic image of a
cunning, inimical, and poisonous serpent in Latimer’s prevision: “Bertha, my wife—with cruel
eyes, with green jewels and green leaves on her white ball-dress; every hateful thought within
her present to me…. I saw the great emerald brooch on her bosom, a studded serpent with
diamond eyes” (19). However, Eliot does not perpetuate Janet simply as the anthropomorphic
images of vengeful, pitiless, and destructive woman; instead, she begins to embody the spirit of
humanism by demonstrating the process of a Feuerbachian transformation of Christian theodicy
into a religion of anthropological humanism as she decides to take care of her deadly wounded
husband: “As we bend over the sick-bed, all the forces of our nature rush towards the channels of
pity, of patience, and of love, and sweep down the miserable choking drift of our quarrels, our
debates, our would-be wisdom, and our clamorous selfish desires” (310). Here the flood image
represents the mysterious power of sympathy which resolves the conflicts of relationship
between the self and the other occasioned by a variety of egocentric interests and desires. In *The
Mill on the Floss*, the flood ending can be read as a symbolic mode in which the self of Maggie
Tulliver is reunited and reconciled with others, Tom Tulliver and Maggie’s parents: “brother and
sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted: living through again in one supreme
moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields
together” (459). Similarly, a metaphoric flood of Janet’s willingness to care for her dying husband also holds a key to the understanding of the other’s suffering. Janet’s act of forgiving her dying husband serves as a remedy against the irreversibility of what has been done, and it is the expression of love in the relationship between the self and the other or in “the human condition of plurality” (Arendt 237).

Janet is not simply an idealized Madonna-like figure but a fragile human being who feels fear, desolation, and uneasiness in a continual struggle with the temptation of drinking. Eliot does not embody the totality of a dialectical synthesis between polar opposites—Dempster’s rigidity leading to helplessness and Tryan’s submission leading to trust and security—with Janet’s soul which is regenerated and absorbed in the dialectic (Carroll, “Janet’s” 347-48). Janet seems to transform herself from an angel of destruction as Nemesis to her husband in his hallucination, then, to an angel of renunciation as the altruistic and self-abnegating Madonna under the influence of her religious male mentor. However, Janet is not a woman of passivity and receptivity who is reducible to the valorized image of a woman of submission under the guidance of a highly virtuous male figure. Janet’s confession speech is an actively motivated stimulus which urges the Evangelical priest Tryan to express his consolatory and encouraging sympathy for her whereby she prompts herself to lead her life for other people. Her speech act of confession is the basis of and the potential for the enlargement of sympathy for fellow human beings: “The act of confiding in human sympathy, the consciousness that a fellow-being was listening to her with patient pity, prepared her soul for that stronger leap by which faith grasps the idea of the divine sympathy” (321).

Janet’s second confession to Tryan about her lasting affliction with “the feeling of desolateness and undefined fear,” “an impetuous desire,” and “the paroxysm of temptations”
(318-20) suggests that she relies on a rhetoric of confession as a means to escape from an aporia between her desire for bodily pleasure and her moral injunction to resist it. Her confession produces an unexpected, unpredicted, de-familiarized effect in the interlocutor. Janet’s thirst for alcohol described through the metaphors of “force of strong fumes” (319) and “cold heavy mists” (320) ends up being dissipated by her confession. As an unexpected consequence of her speech act, she experiences an epiphany of spiritual baptism on her way home, alone after her meeting with him:

Infinite Love was caring for her. She felt like a little child whose hand is firmly grasped by its father, as its frail limbs make their way over the rough ground; if it should stumble, the father will not let it go. That walk in the dewy starlight remained for ever in Janet’s memory as one of those baptismal epochs, when the soul, dipped in the sacred waters of joy and peace, rises from them with new energies, with more unalterable longings. (322)

Janet’s confession is a sort of shibboleth, a secret formula of untranslatability which is veiled beneath the text. The narrator’s vague comment keeps the reader uninformed about the specific remarks of her confession: “poor Janet poured forth her sad tale of temptation and despondency” (321). Janet’s confession can be also read as a symbolic speech act of a child’s incomprehensible utterance in learning its mother tongue, as suggested in the analogical description of Janet as a little child walking with its father. The untranslatability of Janet’s rhetoric of confession paves the way for the redemption from her tantalizing appetite for bodily pleasure and makes her relish the language of Holy Spirits instead of alcoholic ones. The mystery of Janet’s confession about her strong thirst for alcohol functions as a self-exposure of shame which needs to be hidden and elliptical in the narrator’s intervention of a vague summary, and paradoxically it also serves as a self-exuberating power of pride which enables her to
recognize a secret code of her spiritual rebirth entailed by confession. The secrecy of shibboleth in Ludwig Feuerbach’s dyadic proposition—“Love makes man God and God man”—is decoded by Janet’s performance of sympathy for others “in the presence of unseen witnesses—of the Divine love that had rescued her, of the human love that waited for its eternal repose until it has seen her endure to the end” (334).

The closing scene of the last story in *Scenes of Clerical Life*—Janet’s walking with the son of her adopted daughter—reminds the reader of end of the first story, “The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton,” in which Barton and his daughter Patty visit the grave of his wife Milly. The scenario of Patty with her father appears to be a reminder of the dead Milly, a symbolic figure of self-sacrifice who prompted the Milby society to transmute from a provincial community of gossip to a community of sympathy in its power to embrace Barton. In the same vein, Janet becomes a “memorial of Edgar Tryan.” What is the agency that bears witness to the consummation of Christian or Feuerbachian love?: “it is Janet Dempster, rescued from self-despair, strengthened with divine hopes, and now looking back on years of purity and helpful labour” (334). Tryan’s death of consumption cannot be simply read as the consequence of “the extremity of his self-denial” or the result of his “obsessive adherence to a Spartan way of life” (Colón 294). Rather, his death corroborates a symbolic mode of a redemptive story in which Janet becomes a resurrected alter ego of the dead Tryan. Janet represents a Carlylean image of a Phoenix which embodies the hope of redemption and life, “a new heavenborn young one” that “will rise out of her ashes” of suffering (*Sartor Resartus* 175). Becoming the hybridized self whose narrative of history contains a blending of the secular and religious elements, Janet can achieve the Feuerbachian idea of “the Passion of Humanity” by having “the power of sacrificing self for the good of others” (*Essence* 60-61). Thus “Janet’s Repentance” orchestrates the
dynamic of confessions shared between Janet and Tryan which highlights the regenerative power of sympathy through the process of recognizing the limits of the self as well as the sufferings of the other.
CHAPTER 2

A PURSUIT OF LIMINALITY AND THE PRACTICE OF SYMPATHY: ROMOLA

Romola is exceptional among Eliot’s novels regarding its subject matter. The novelist’s realistic representation of English Midlands life had characterized her novels before she wrote Romola. Unlike her earlier works—Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede, and The Mill on the Floss, Eliot employed the late fifteenth-century Florentine Renaissance as the novel’s major setting. Encouraged by George Henry Lewes to “probably do something in historical romance rather different in character from what has been done before,” Eliot created an Italian story on “Savonarola’s career and martyrdom” (Letters 3: 339). The composition of Romola was Eliot’s most arduous work, marking a significant transition in her life: “I began it a young woman,—I finished it an old woman” (George Eliot’s Life 2: 352). Eliot expressed her strong preference above all of her works for Romola: “there is no book of mine,” she told, “about which I more thoroughly feel that I could swear by every sentence as having been written with my best blood, such as it is, and with the most ardent care for veracity of which my nature is capable” (Letters 6: 335-36).

Nevertheless, Eliot’s endeavor to write a historical novel based on her extensive research on fifteenth-century Florence,¹ as Henry James pointed out, failed to receive praise from the critics who had denounced it as a mannered product of the author’s erudition occasioned by her habits of reflection and research: “It is overladen with learning, it smells of the lamp, it tastes just perceptively of pedantry” (55).² However, the incisive voices of contemporary critics, mostly directed toward Eliot’s display of erudition and her scholarly treatment of the setting of Romola, overlooked the significance imbedded in the author’s new enterprise of historical romance derived from rewriting history in a fictional form, with a particular emphasis on the complex and
conflicting relationships among characters situated in the upheavals of society, politics, and religion. While she depicted in her earlier novels the microcosmic, simple, and straightforward pictures of village lives, Eliot dramatizes in *Romola* her examination of the sophisticated, complex, and cohesive relationships of characters with her recognition of how social, political, and religious changes had come about in the fifteenth-century Italian Renaissance period. In an attempt to recuperate the past in a fictional form, Eliot feels it necessary to exercise what she calls “veracious imagination” or “Historic Imagination.” What she means by veracious imagination is “the working out in detail of the various steps by which a political or social change was reached, using all extant evidence and supplying deficiencies by careful analogical creation” (*Essays and Leaves* 371). Her scrupulous and meticulous research of fifteenth-century Florence is thus accompanied by her freely using her imagination. When Richard Holt Hutton had commented on the unsuitability of the setting—late fifteenth-century Florence—for a transfusion of religious terms and symbols into secular conclusions, Eliot articulated the importance of employing her artistic ability to weave the historical details of the past into a fabric of her imagination:

> It is the habit of my imagination to strive after as full a vision of the medium in which a character moves as of the character itself. The psychological causes which prompted me to give such details of Florentine life and history as I have given, are precisely the same as those which determined me in giving the details of English village life. (*Letters* 4: 97)

In her review essay on the third volume of *Modern Painters*, Eliot also praises John Ruskin’s idea of the poetical power as supported by imaginative invention and historical accuracy:

> “imaginative art includes the historical faculties, which simply represent observed facts, but renders these faculties subservient to a poetic purpose” (*Selected Essays* 372). Therefore, Eliot’s
Romola is a narrative production of the novelist’s imaginative maneuvering of the past, the late fifteenth-century Florence, or what Roland Barthes terms “a process of demonstration” (157), which allows us to think of Romola as a narrative produced by the novelist’s imaginative and discursive demonstration of the historical details, and which also invites us to re-interpret Eliot’s idea of sympathy in light of both resistance to dominant discourses and the practical engagement in life.³

In Romola, Eliot draws on the way in which sympathy is enacted by Romola, the heroine of the novel, who encounters various kinds of conflicts—cultural, political, and religious—in her relationships with other characters of authority. Influenced by various systems of beliefs—especially, paganism and Christianity—represented by Bardo, Tito, Dino, and Savonarola, Romola comes to establish her own idea of sympathy on the basis of her efforts to move beyond the masculine systems of representation. My contention is that Eliot’s Romola illuminates the heroine’s struggle to affirm her own subjectivity with the help of sympathy which enables her to resist the dominant ideologies of patriarchal society. ⁴ What I mean by subjectivity is a subject that can practice its agency to resist the discursive categories of ideological and repressive structures and systems, although the subject cannot be completely free from the influences of the social, political, and religious systems and institutions. The establishment of subjectivity for Romola is characterized by a process of Romola’s submission, disillusionment, rebellion, and the re-orientation of the purpose of her life. The climax of the novel will be Romola’s flight from the boundaries of marriage, law, and church, and it can be seen as her attempt to situate herself in a space of “threshold” which allows her to be “betwixt and between” or to “elude or slip through” the network of classifying and categorizing discourses (Turner, Ritual Process 95). The heroine’s liminality serves as a passage through which she can recognize what her task would be after
resisting the coercive rules and norms of society. Romola’s struggles with the dominant discourses of social and religious norms lead her to a new configuration of sympathy as a force of rebellion and an urgent need to act for others. Romola’s agency of sympathy resists the normative rules of the established authority. She is not simply an epitome of the dialectical culmination in the conflict between paganism and Christianity. Romola may be seen as an ideal and romantic heroine, or as Sara Sophia Hennell wrote in a letter to Eliot, even “a goddess and not a woman” who estranges herself from the influences of the outside (Letters 4: n. 8. 103-4). However, one cannot determine to say that Romola is a “fable” which is concerned with symbolic actions and which focuses heavily on moral and intellectual thought. Instead, one should examine how she tries to find her own identity and role in society, both being affected by other outer forces and moving beyond the binding restraints of desires and interests. Although she seems to be recognized as a purely idealized character in terms of her altruistic and selfless attitude toward the people in the plague-stricken village, one must highlight the whole process of the heroine’s building up her own self or subjectivity.

The emphasis on the development of the heroine’s self-recognition and self-knowledge can allow us to understand Romola as a story of Bildungsroman. Also, if one highlights the shift of Romola’s roles from being a dutiful daughter in her relationship with her father Bardo, through being a follower of Savonarola’s teaching to being an independent woman in her relationships with the people in the plague-stricken village and with Tessa and her children, one may say that the novel is a dramatization of the Comtean idea of religious humanism since the heroine’s progression does not only represent the transformation of herself from daughter (the image of Antigone) through sister/wife (the image of nun) to the Virgin (the image of mother), but it can be also regarded as the Comtean idea of evolution of the individual into moral
consciousness. With regard to a particular genre of historical romance, one may think of romance as sort of “the neutral territory” in which the actual, or historical, and the imaginary may be intersected, but our attention must be paid to the ways in which the fictional form of the novel as a special province of neutrality is highlighted by the process of the heroine’s metamorphosis through and beyond the conflicts of ideologies imposed by mostly male figures.

What is important, however, is to see her life as a lived experience which cannot be valorized in terms of the idealized and transcendent modes of philosophy. In her ongoing struggles with the binding and restrictive forces of the outward authority and in her awareness of human foibles and weakness in her relationship with patriarchal characters, Romola learns how to live an independent life and how to enact her sympathy for others without following the categorical imperatives of goodness guided by abstract and theological ideas.

The proem of the novel implicates Eliot’s typological attempt to shed light on the confusion of nineteenth-century England through the lens of fifteenth-century Florence. Just as the society of Renaissance Italy was undergoing “the unrest of a new growth,” so mid-Victorian England can be characterized as what Dodds calls “an age of paradox” (xv), since both skepticism about the cataclysmic change in society, politics, religion, and industry and a new hope for the future are simultaneously clashed, as Matthew Arnold’s historical allusion suggests in his poem, “Dover Beach”: “And we are here as on a darkling plain/ Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,/ Where ignorant armies clash by night” (175). By calling our attention to the particularities of a historical setting, Eliot invites us to explore the universality of human history, “the broad sameness of the human lot.” In Romola, a challenge to religious belief is embodied in the characters of Bardo and Tito, whereas a devout reliance on religion is represented by the characters of Dino and Savonarola. Then, how does Romola, the heroine of
the novel, identify herself in the dynamic struggles of opposing forces? Surrounded by the systems of beliefs of both classical paganism embodied by Bardo and Tito and ascetic Christianity represented by Dino and Savonarola, Romola is forced to choose her ways of life guided by each authority of the opposites. Indeed, she appears as the object of desire which each of the antinomies strives to appropriate. It is true that Romola, not immune from the influences of the authoritative figures, fluctuates about how to make her own decision at the crisis of her life on the crossroads of masculine systems of representation. However, she does not absolutely comply with the demands of the powers. The question that the novel has raised is how she assumes her own independence and expresses her subjectivity against the domination of male authority.

The first authoritative figure looming over Romola’s life is her father Bardo de’ Bardi. Bardo conceives of Romola as simply a daughter of womanly virtues, intellectually insufficient to contribute to his scholarship of the past. In chapter 5, entitled “The Blind Scholar and His Daughter,” Romola first appears beside her blind father, reading for him in his library. Although Romola has received classical education under the guide of her father, and she has served as her father’s amanuensis, Bardo has complained about the absence of “the sharp edge of a young mind” (52) for the completion of his classical scholarship, since his son Dino deserted him for pilgrimages. Living with her blind father, Romola bears the double burdens: she is trapped into the world of her father’s exclusiveness, single-mindedness, and classical dogma, and she is also not free from her father’s misogynistic view. When Bardo tells Romola that he has lived with the great dead and that he has regarded the living as “mere specters” (51), he alienates himself from the outside world in order to achieve his scholarly mission of editing classical texts. His solipsistic quest for the origin of classical antiquity and his desire for the revelation of his name
to the world of Florence resemble Edward Casaubon’s interpretive ambition to search for the origin in his *Key to All Mythologies* which shows that “all the mythical systems or erratic mythical fragments in the world were corruptions of a tradition originally revealed” (*Middlemarch* 23).

The atmosphere of Bardo’s library represents the aridity and lifelessness of his obsessive desire for the monumental achievement in his classical scholarship:

Here and there, on separate stands in front of the shelves, were placed a beautiful feminine torso; a headless statue, with an uplifted muscular arm wielding a bladeless sword; rounded, dimpled, infantine limbs severed from the trunk, inviting the lips to kiss the cold marble; some well-preserved Roman busts; and two or three vases from Magna Graecia. A large table in the centre was covered with antique bronze lamps and small vessels in dark pottery. The colour of these objects was chiefly pale or sombre. (47)

Just as his physical blindness does not make him see the beauty of his daughter Romola as the “only spot of bright colour in the room” (48), Bardo’s mental blindness, caused by self-imposed, unilateral, and obsessive desire for antiquarian knowledge, forbids him to appreciate the scholarly devotedness of his dutiful daughter. Bardo’s world of blindness is that of specters, “shadows dispossessed of true feeling and intelligence” (51). Bardo’s egotistical scholarship is also guided by his misogynistic prejudice against “the wandering, vagrant propensity of the feminine mind” (51). Agonized by the absence of his son Dino who has forsaken him to join the Dominican friars, Bardo simply sees his daughter as a compensatory being for Dino, firmly believing that without help of a male assistant, his grand project cannot be fulfilled. Romola actually prefigures the dilemma Victorian women suffered from in terms of their social status. Recognizing both that unmarried women, being labeled as “redundant” and selfless, are alienated...
and barred from society, and that marriage can provide women with the opportunity to realize the nature of female duty, love, and sacrifice, Victorian women adopted marriage as an opportunity to highlight their essential moral role in family life. Instead of resisting her father’s androcentric view of women as an obstacle to his classical scholarship because of “the debasing influence of thy own sex, with their sparrow-like frivolity and their enslaving superstition,” Romola recognizes herself as a proxy who cannot fully contribute to her father’s classical scholarship until her marriage to “some great scholar” who “will not mind about a dowry,” “will like to come and live with you,” and “will be to you in place of my brother” (54). In expressing her eagerness to become “as learned as Cassandra Fedele” and her wish to be “as useful to you as if I had been a boy” (54), Romola assumes a submissive and dutiful attitude toward her father, not expressing “her proud resistance to his misogyny.” It is true that she “had been inwardly very rebellious” (247), but she appears to be quite submissive, obedient, and dutiful in her scholarly service to him. Although she is given a better opportunity to be learned than any other female characters in Eliot’s novels, Romola still has to confront the limitations occasioned by the patriarchal view of women’s education which belittles her strong appetite for knowledge, just as exemplified in the case of Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* where the heroine’s desire for learning is crushed by her father’s male-dominated, insensible remarks against her reading books such as Daniel Defoe’s *History of the Devil*, Aesop’s *Fables*, and John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*: “shut up the book, the let’s hear no more o’ such talk. It is as I thought—the child ’ull learn more mischief nor good wi’ the books. Go, go and see after your mother” (*The Mill on the Floss* 17).

Bardo’s male chauvinism is aligned with Auguste Comte’s assumption of male superiority in his positivist philosophy. Bardo indeed embodies the Comtean theory of male
superiority which is corroborated by the hierarchy of the sexes on the basis of anatomy and physiology. In his correspondence to John Stuart Mill in July, 1843, Comte suggested that “the female sex constitutes a sort of state of radical childhood, which makes it essentially inferior to the corresponding [male] organic type” (Haac 180). In conceiving of his lifelong desire for achieving monumental scholarship as masculine, self-assertive, and organically unifying, and by commenting on the unsuitability of female engagement in classical scholarship, Bardo essentially debases his daughter’s faithful collection and transcription of texts. With respect to her contribution to her father’s project, Romola thus seems to be introduced as being selfless or what Margaret Homans calls “bearing the word of women’s exclusion from and silencing within literature” (201). In the case of her relationship with her father, Romola is excluded and silenced as a non-existence within Bardo’s discourses of male superiority embedded in his classical scholarship.

Motivated by his insatiable desire to pursue the origins of classical antiquity, Bardo’s stringent attachment to his son Dino, who has deserted him for his pilgrimage, does not only makes him ignorant of the vitality and selfless devotion of his daughter, but it also hinders him from being aware of Tito Melema’s duplicity. Without the knowledge of Tito’s abandonment of his adoptive father, Baldassare Calvo, the blind scholar is glad to ask Tito to become an aid to his scholarship when he hears from Tito that Baldassare rescued seven-year-old Tito from poverty, raised him with his knowledge and experience, and made him an accomplished scholar. While he was traveling in Greece to discover the inscriptions and traces of ancient civilization, Baldassare was lost on his way to Delos and later returned to Florence as a prisoner of the French king, Charles VIII. Just as Bardo’s ambition to establish his fame with a help of his son has been frustrated by Dino’s involvement with ascetic Christianity, so Baldassare’s plan to fulfill the
classical rebirth has been thwarted by Tito’s hedonistic attachment to worldly pleasures; instead of rescuing his father from slavery, Tito chooses to enjoy “soft airs of promised love and prosperity” (97), simply believing that “he is dead” (100; emphasis in orig.). Thus the irony is that Bardo’s desire for the succession of patriarchal heritage through his collaborative scholarship with Tito is actually undermined by Tito’s past that has already recorded him as a traitor cutting the patriarchal and familial ties between himself and his adoptive father Baldassarre.

Tito Melema’s first impression of Romola actually strengthens the Comtean ideal of woman. When he first sees Romola, Tito is struck by the ethereal image of the devoted daughter. Revealing Tito’s feeling of loving awe and nobleness from Romola, Eliot, instead of stratifying the stereotypical image of womanhood, is likely to highlight the encounter between the power of knowledge and the indefinable force associated with the “loving awe in the presence of noble womanhood, which is perhaps something like the worship paid of old to a great Nature-Goddess, who was not all-knowing, but whose life and power were something deeper and more primordial than knowledge” (94-95). Rather than creating an ideal and romantic heroine who can make the fabular elements of the novel enriched (Levine, “Romola as Fable” 85), Eliot invites the reader to examine how the dominant power in conjunction with knowledge is to be undermined by the object that the supposedly superior power is eager to subjugate. Although the body of Romola now appears to be an object that gratifies Tito’s male voyeuristic desire for the mystery of a woman’s body, the primordial and inscrutable power of womanhood inherent in Romola will be exercised in a more determined, independent, and active way later in her career.

Tito’s perception of Romola as an embodiment of loving awe ironically leads him to have his first colloquy with himself and to struggle with his own guilty consciousness with regard to
his irresponsible act of abandoning Baldassarre; Romola’s conspicuous features of lovely womanhood do not simply give Tito the impression that she is tantamount to Nature-Goddess, but they also cause him, on the one hand, to demonstrate his desires to secure love and comforts and, on the other hand, to recognize the “inward shame” (100) in his attempt to assume that his father is dead and his search for his father is hopeless. The sense that “Romola was something very much above him,” not in the aspect of intellect but with reference to loveliness, innocence, and simplicity, stimulates his desire to achieve his own ambitions and pleasures through love which “formed one web with all his worldly hopes” and “was identified with his larger self” (154). Thus Tito can be seen as an embodiment of egoism that attempts to appropriate a woman of nobleness to satisfy his own happiness and pleasure.

Rather than being portrayed as the most evil persona among the characters of Eliot’s novels, Tito appears not only to be callous and cold-blooded in his relationships with others for shielding himself against the possible threats or dangers of his own self-interest but also to be afflicted with a guilt of abandoning his moral responsibility to his father for the betterment of his future. Although Tito seems to be devoid of sympathetic impulses, his inward shame, as “a reflex of that outward law which the great heart of mankind makes for every individual man” (100-1) counterbalances his determined evasion of moral responsibility. As she does throughout her other novels, Eliot in Romola consistently highlights the existence of fear, or the “awe of the Divine Nemesis” (118) in human beings’ consciousness of their wrong-doings. Romola actually becomes a voice of the Divine Nemesis against the anomalous dissimulations of Tito. Romola’s rebuke against her brother Dino for his forsaking her and his father to seek religious mysticism can be exactly applied to Tito’s deeds to his father Baldassarre: “[I]t would cost you less to be forgiving; though, if you had seen your father forsaken by one to whom he had given his chief
hopes—forsaken when his need was becoming greatest—even you, Tito, would find it hard to forgive” (136). In her essay, “The Influence of Rationalism,” Eliot asserts that the moral development of human beings relies on “the slow subduing of fear by the gradual growth of intelligence” and that it is essential to have “a motive by the presence of impulses less animally selfish” in order to control fear and to transcend fear for the sake of the Divine Nemesis, that is, “higher faculties which we call awe,” or “invisible Power” (*Essays* 403). Trapped in his myopic and optimistic vision of the future and driven by his pleasure-seeking impulses, Tito however fails to recognize that he can be free from fear only by the intelligibility of the inexorable law of consequence occasioned by his deceit and wrong-doing.

Afflicted with anxiety over the possibility of the revelation of his falsity concerning his benefactor, Tito seeks to secure himself in the realm of dream and unreality, immune from moral judgment. Tito’s strong desire to stay temporarily with Tessa reflects his attempt to exonerate himself with a person who only adores and nestles against him without exacting demands or being suspicious. While Romola emerges as a moral voice which makes Tito concerned about “the worst consequences of his former dissimulation” (138), Tessa is recognized as a “creature who was without moral judgments that could condemn him” (148). Just as Hetty Sorrel blindly trusts Captain Arthur Donnithorne in *Adam Bede*, so Tessa is ignorant of Tito’s beguilement which forms a delusion in her through his mock marriage with her. Tito’s avowal of mock marriage can be seen, in Auerbach’s use of William Blake’s words, as a marriage of heaven and hell not only because it is a manifestation of his wish to remain outside the world of corruption, sin, and punishment but also because it is merely a cunning gesture devoid of genuineness and seriousness and a way for Tito, who is “half enjoying the comedy,” to evade the realities of a mundane world (152). Indeed, Tito is split between his suffering from a guilty conscious and his
pursuing deceit and pleasure. Although half of his self has led him to stay temporarily in the
imagined, innocent, and guilt-free world of Tessa, the other half of Tito’s self prompts him to go
to Romola and to have a solid relationship with her, for his attachment to Romola is intertwined
with the achievement of his worldly hopes, ambitions, and pleasures which may be regarded as
the purposes of “his larger self” (154). Driven by his own desire for worldly success, Tito thinks
of Tessa’s future sorrow and grievance merely as an ignoble, “far-off cry of some little suffering
animal” (200). Perceiving that Romola is naïve enough to believe that Tito’s physical beauty and
words reflect his moral goodness, Tito urges Romola to tell her father, Bardo, and her godfather,
Bernardo del Nero, not to delay their marriage.

While Romola believes in the inseparable association of physical beauty and moral
integrity, some other characters in the novel express their skepticism about the exact
correspondence between the beauty of the outside and the morality of the inside. Romola’s
brother Dino, called Fra Luca, her godfather Bernardo del Nero, and the painter Piero di Cosimo
have keen senses of detecting the duplicity of Tito. On his death bed, Dino begins to tell Romola
about the vision he had three times. The existence of the Great Tempter and men of bronze and
marble as demons in his dream represent Tito who tries to take advantage of Romola through his
marriage to her: “I believe it is a revelation meant for thee—to warn thee against marriage as a
temptation of the enemy—it calls upon thee to dedicate thyself” (162). Endowed with the
prophetic nature of an apparition from an invisible world, Dino is an embodiment of
immaterialized spectrality which attempts to lead Romola to the sanitized realm, immune from
the influences of “worldly ambitions and fleshly lusts” as “the substance of the poetry and
history” (158). Dino’s denunciation of poetry and history can be aligned with the Platonic claim
of expunging the poets from the Republic. Dino’s prevision of the demonic figure can be read as
a perceptive warning of Romola both against Tito’s temptation and the corruption occasioned by hedonistic philosophy and paganism prevalent in Florence, but it is merely a prophetic, authoritative, and self-justifying wisdom “apart from the human sympathies which are the very life and substance of our wisdom” (164). Just as George Eliot advocates Sir Charles Lyell’s geological principle of uniformity in natural processes as opposed to the conception of catastrophic changes and Robert William Mackay’s belief in the crucial function of intellect in religion, so the novelist tries to shed light on the gradual, uniform processes of character and action which are not made by prophetic and dogmatic vision but by the connection of “the theory of practice and duty” (Essays 32). Although Dino’s dream turns out to be valid through the correspondence between the prophetic vision and the event that followed it, his vision is devoid of what Caroline Levine calls “an empirical causal model that affirms the force of moral agency” (159). The dying Fra Luca’s anguish cannot be understood without Romola’s conflicts between her attraction to Tito and her fear of the prophetic warnings given by her brother. After witnessing her brother’s death, Romola is eager to see hope and gladness from Tito, who ironically has an irresistible feeling, or “something lower,” for Romola (179). A clash between Tito’s lust for flesh and Romola’s desire for hope and consolation from Tito leads to a question about whether or not the reconciliation between religious mysticism embodied in anguish in the dying Fra Luca and pleasure-seeking paganism presented by the strength and beauty of Tito is made possible. Here Romola appears to be equivocal in demonstrating her position and judgment of the conflicts of the opposites. Being in a dilemma of how to reconcile the clashing deities, Romola feels “a sudden uneasy dizziness and want of something to grasp” (183).

Piero di Cosimo has a keen perception to detect the hints of dissimulation and deception in Tito’s appearance when he asks him to become a model for Sinon, the deceiver and betrayer
of Troy: “A perfect traitor should have a face which vice can write no marks on—lips that will lie with a dimpled smile—eyes of such agate-like brightness and depth that no infamy can dull them—cheeks that will rise from a murder and not look haggard” (42). Piero’s aesthetic observation and perceptive intuition represent the Ruskinian conception of the penetrative imagination. According to Ruskin, the penetrative imagination is “the highest intellectual power” which enables us to “see the heart and inner nature, and makes them felt, but is often obscure, mysterious, and interrupted, in its giving of outer detail” (Works 4:251, 253). In examining Tito, Piero thus does not relies on his fancy which only “sees the outside, and is able to give a portrait of the outside, clear, brilliant, and full of detail” (Works 4:253), but he uses the faculty of imagination which pierces the veil of Tito’s physiognomy to reveal his insidious and treacherous nature. Also, when Tito asks Piero di Cosimo to make a miniature device based on the story of Ovid’s Metamorphosis, the artist conceives of Tito as a terrified figure like an image of ghost. Like Dino’s prophetic vision of Tito as the Great Tempter, Piero’s impression of Tito as a terrified or frightened ghost cannot be completely proven to be valid until his ingenuity and dissimulation are laid bare.

Tito’s fear of Baldassarre’s vengeance shows both that he has a traitorous nature and that he is suffering from a guilty conscious. Tito invents a fabrication in order to dissociate himself from his ties with Baldassarre on the grounds that the existence of his adoptive father would be an obstacle to his life of worldly pleasure. By pretending to recognize Baldassarre as a lunatic, Tito reveals his character of deception: “Some madman, surely” (222). Instead of falling back on repentance and truth, Tito relies on his own ingenuity, dissimulation, cool deceit, and even defensive armor. Actually, Tito is aware of his disgrace which triggers him into devising deceits and into buying armor to protect his body. From the standpoint of the “inexorable law of human
souls” (224), Tito characterizes immorality induced by his pragmatic drive to exploit people and circumstances on behalf of his hedonistic pleasure and safety. Eliot’s idea of the inexorable law of human souls implies that our reiterated decision-making concerning moral issues determines our temperament and character. She does not only invite us to look at how Tito becomes a cunningly immoral character, but she also allows us to see the operation of the Divine Nemesis, occasioned by Tito’s insidious soul: Tito’s fear and anxiety of punishment upon his own guilt and his gradual downfall. As Eliot points out in her essay, “The Progress of Intellect,” the master key to divine revelation—“the recognition of the presence of undeviating law in the material and moral world—of that invariability of sequence” (Essays 31)—can be applicable to the case of Tito’s suffering from fear of the possible attack from Baldassarre in that Tito comes to recognize the law of vengeance and punishment embodied in Baldassarre in the world of morality.

Therefore, when Baldassarre is possessed in the Duomo Church by Savonarola’s sermon on God’s judgment of corruption, wickedness, and tyranny in Italy, the foster father of Tito enjoys exultant delight by justifying the priest’s proclamation for the imminence of his vengeance to Tito: “The day of vengeance is at hand!” (228). Tito fears the existence of Baldassarre and his attack on him. But Tito’s fear of Baldassarre also presupposes what Heidegger calls “Dasein fears about”: “[A]s Being-in-the-world, Dasein is in every case concernful Being-alongside. Proximally and for the most part, Dasein is in terms of what it is concerned with. When this is endangered, Being-alongside is threatened. Fear discloses Dasein predominantly in a privative way” (180-81). In effect, Tito cares about his own life: “a man’s animal care for his own skin” (118).

Tito’s armor, a metonymic embodiment of his fear, can function as a medium through which Romola experiences some kind of disillusionment regarding his genuineness. By feeling
iron armor under Tito’s tunic, Romola perceives an existence of “some malignant fiend” that has transformed a sensitive Tito into “a hard shell” (255). Although Romola has an idea that Tito is a kind, good-tempered, and sweet person, she has become disappointed in her married life with Tito because he enjoys the worldly pleasures and luxuries of society as opposed to her wish to live a simple life. As David Rosen has pointed out in *The Changing Fictions of Masculinity*, male armoring represents male efforts to relieve anxiety over the vulnerability of masculine world of duty to the intrusion of ties of blood and erotic passion. As exemplified in Beowulf’s armoring to protect the world of Heorot against Grendel’s invasion, “men’s place in this world appears so insecure, so tied to how they perform and what they produce, so limited as to whom they can disclose, that they find it better to stay bound up, armored, and aggressively ready to use their passion against all intruders” (11). In the case of Tito’s armoring, on the one hand, he maintains his masculinity by armor against Baldassarre’s violent passion arising from ties of blood. On the other hand, Tito’s armoring signifies a loss of his masculinity because his motivation for protecting himself with armor, unlike Beowulf’s, stems from his egoistic desire for maximizing his hedonistic pleasure without regard to his scholarly and communal duties.

Tito’s armor also serves to undermine his assurance of the privileges of a husband protected by the law of marriage; the armor turns out to be a proof of his unfaithfulness in his married life with Romola. Tessa, ignorant of Romola’s status as Tito’s legal wife, informs her of his possession of the armor: “I know Messer San Michele takes care of him, for he gave him a beautiful coat, all made of little chains; and if he puts that on, nobody can kill him” (470). Although Tito has kept secret from Romola the fact that he has two children—Lillo and Ninna—with Tessa after his mock-marriage with her, Romola ascertains that her marriage can be void, considering the prior occurrence of the mock marriage to her marriage with Tito.
Romola’s disappointment with her husband’s selfish pursuit of pleasures produces an effect of dramatic irony in that Romola’s wish that her life with Tito, after the death of her father, would be more perfect turns out to be a presumptuous and groundless illusion. If the early part of *Romola* presents Romola’s dutiful devotion to her father Bardo for his “monotonous exacting demands” (247), the middle stage of the novel seems to perpetuate her nature of silence, endurance, and self-suppression, especially in her relationships with male figures, by suggesting that the heroine devotes herself to Tito with female love and worship. However, Eliot’s portrayal of Romola is not designed to corroborate the stereotypical image of women in the late fifteenth-century Italian Renaissance which can be also similar to that of women in the mid-Victorian period regarding their submission to patriarchal norms and their obligation to domesticity; instead, the novelist is more interested in illuminating a struggle of opposites in her mind: submission versus rebellion. Although Romola had fulfilled her father’s tedious, exacting demands patiently, she was inwardly rebellious against her father: “Even she, whose sympathy with her father had made all the passion and religion of her young years, had not always been patient, had been inwardly very rebellious” (247). The difficulty of categorizing Romola in simplified terms arises not only from the fact that the heroine is a character of patience and rebellion but also from the fact that she is a person of principle and obligation; Romola feels, after her father’s death, both freedom from a burden of her father’s demands and atonement for her feeling of exemption or for rebellious emotion against her father. Having the sense that she did not devote herself to her father Bardo, Romola determines to compensate for her lack of devotion to her father by preserving his library as well as by keeping a portrait of her blind father. Her adherence to a sacramental obligation for fulfilling her father’s wish about his library and her attachment for her father through a portrait of the image of Oedipus painted by Piero di
Cosimo are not the consequences of her sentimental affection for beloved objects, but the practice of love driven by the forces of heart.\textsuperscript{16} When Piero conceives of Bardo and Romola as the models for his painting, “a picture of Œdipus and Antigone at Colonos” (190), the artist appreciates, as Felicia Bonaparte notes, “Romola’s pagan sense of fidelity” as “the foundation of her Christian sympathy” (\textit{Triptych} 75). Rather than following the moral obligation and principle of duty ordained by social norms, Romola tries to enact her inward rule of love, “perfect loyalty of heart,” motivated by “the force of compunction as well as affection to the duties of memory” (259).

In stark contrast to Romola’s ambition for fulfilling her father’s work, Tito expresses his wishes for abandoning Bardo’s library and for leaving Florence. While Romola is guided by the law of heart, Tito is controlled by the principle of reason for maximizing utilitarian efficacy and self-interest. Considering his wife’s devotion to her dead father’s wishes futile and full of “brain-wrought fantasies,” Tito does not only denigrate her trust of and her bond with her father, but he also claims the superiority of his project over her wish by saying that he aims to accomplish “substantial good” (289). Tito’s shallow readiness to sell Bardo’s books and antiques at the price of three thousand florins makes Romola experience a disillusionment of her idea of Tito. Instead of remaining as a person who can help Romola secure her father’s library, Tito emerges as “a treacherous man” (291) who is prone to propitiate his nearest people without sympathetic regard for them and who is eager to win a game of life in which he can take advantage of skills and chances. Romola’s recognition of Tito’s treachery moves her from the stage of a little child who “sits in stillness among the sunny flowers” (323) to the stage of a woman of strong will who assumes “cold immobility” (322) but is ready to act by strong affection. Transcending the misguided delirium of joy from the Lacanian mirror stage in which a child looks at itself as a
unified and stable subject, Romola is afflicted with sorrow from her delusion of her young years when she had been regarded as “a piece of property” by Tito (Homans 202). Romola’s emotional responses to the image of Ariadne on the Tabernacle—bitterness, repulsion, pity, and mockery—are also the expression arising from the agonizing recognition of her own self as being fragmented, unstable, and fragile. Romola’s gesture of hanging round her neck the crucifix from the tabernacle is a ritualistic act of both mourning and joy in that she simultaneously expresses her grief from the existence of her past self of illusion (a self of _méconnaissance_) and enjoys her feeling of freedom from “the long shadow of herself that was not to be escaped” to “the sudden presence of the impalpable golden glory” (334).

Romola, after her experience of disillusionment, becomes divided both in her doubt of marriage as a symbolic bond of love and in her fear of her resistance to social norms. Romola is no longer a simplistic noble woman; as the title of chapter 36, “Ariadne Discrowns Herself,” indicates, she is a newly transformed Ariadne who resists the idealization of herself as a Nature-Goddess. If her betrothal ring is an outward symbol of a tie between Romola and Tito, Romola’s act of taking off her ring is not only her strong impulse against Tito’s betrayal but also her announcement of herself as a woman of outwardly “petrified coldness” and yet of the inwardly determined boldness to leave Tito. The oxymoronic implication of her wedding-clothes—“the shroud of her dead happiness” (323), along with her taking off her betrothal ring, her act of quitting Tito—corroborates the process of Romola’s self-annihilation of her own external identity; abandoning the outward symbols of marriage, she expresses her strong denial of the inexorable external identity of a married woman and her duty constructed by the outward tie of marriage. Romola’s disguise with a grey serge dress which makes her look like her dead brother
Dino suggests her proleptic approval of Dino’s prophetic idea and warning of Tito, in chapter 15, through his dream vision in which Tito appears to be the Great Tempter.

At this juncture, Romola has been situated between the stumbling guidance of male figures and her own resistance to theories and external obligations. Although mostly in her novels she adopts her favorite metaphor of web as a network of inevitability in which a self is entangled by his or her own deceit, indulgence, or scheme, George Eliot, in a different way, takes advantage of the image of a woman trapped in a tangled web to describe a complex fluctuation of her consciousness between her need for reliance and action guided by the hands of authority and her determination to live in loneliness and disbelief arrested by her own skeptical self. The novelist highlights the dilemma in which Romola has to make a decision between two claims: her refusal to bow to “any obligation apart from personal love and reverence” (326) unlike Florentine women who have never disguised themselves and departed from their husbands, and her submission to an arresting voice of authority which forbids her to question her debts, “the debt of a Florentine woman; the debt of a wife” (361).

Romola’s strong determination to fulfill her own individual will is frustrated by the scolding, dominant gaze of the priest. The arresting voice of sacred duty, marital obligation, and social ties is the male voice of Savonarola. Savonarola reprimands Romola for her breaking a pledge of marriage, but his judgment of Romola lacks a genuine understanding of the context in which Romola has undergone the conflicts in her familiar relationships with Bardo, Dino, and Tito. Although he appears to be enough of a visionary companion to make Romola feel a strong bond of human fellowship with his gaze, Savonarola serves as a theologically-oriented doctrinaire guide to Romola without a full knowledge of the reasons why she decided to flee from Florence. When she first resists his reproach for her departure by saying that nobody can
know her agony but herself, Savonarola’s words, “[M]y mind has been so far illuminated concerning you, that I know enough. You are not happy in your married life” (362), simplify the complexities of Romola’s hardships as a woman in the social and domestic spheres. Indeed, the dictatorial voice and male-dominated gaze make Romola submit to Savonarola’s divinely ordained law. In a society where patriarchal ideals and Christian doctrines judge women’s behaviors, Romola’s pursuit of independence is considered an aberration of the male and religious norms. Romola’s appellation of Savonarola—“My father” (362) and “Father, I will be guided, Teach me! I will go back” (367)—does not simply indicate the priestly status of the Dominican Frate, but it also suggests that she acknowledges her submission to the authority of the Frate. When scornfully comparing her to “a bird” and “a willful wanderer,” Savonarola forces her to stay within the boundaries of the domestic and the community where she should become “the humblest Florentine woman who stretches forth her hands with her own people.” Thus, Savonarola looms, as a symbolic father, over Romola by limiting the area of Romola’s act of duty into her birthplace, Florence: “you, a Florentine woman, should live for Florence” (363).

Savonarola urging Romola to obey the divine laws of social ties and duties does not represent the true meaning of divine revelation that George Eliot emphasizes in her essay, “The Progress of the Intellect.” Eliot asserts that the key to divine revelation does not lie in the exclusive and pre-eminent vision of any person, one period, or one nation, but it arises from the co-extensiveness of “the history of human development” and from the progress of “perpetually unfolding itself to our widened experience and investigation” (Essays 30-31). Thus what Savonarola forces the heroine to do is the dogmatic, narrow-minded, and languid appealing to the sacredness of domestic, social, and religious obligations which ignores the gradual process and cultivation of character and action. Savonarola’s rhetorical coercion based on Christian
morality does not prompt Romola to the active sacrifice of self for others, but it entails the passive sacrifice of self for them.

Romola’s daunting but clandestine gesture to disguise herself in monk’s clothes in her flight from Florence is a parodying subversion to moral and religious categories which conceptualize her body as a “surface of inscription” (Grosz 196). Romola’s desire to be independent of, and unaffected by, socially inscriptive values ironically lies crouching behind the surface of a sign of moral and religious observance, a monk’s grey serge dress. But her libidinal desire for freedom is frustrated by Savonarola’s discursive normalization guided by a religious category which incorporates signs, symbols, and any physical attributes such as clothes into the correlated and unifying code of the interior motive of the individual. As Michel Foucault points out, normalization facilitates the exercise of power to increase utility through the process of excluding heterogeneity: “In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another” (Discipline and Punish 184). Savonarola tries to estimate Romola’s value of utility as to the extent to which she sacrifices herself for the Florentine community, and he also believes that her self-abnegating altruism will be subservient to the fulfillment of his transcendent vision.

The failure of Romola’s first attempt to leave Florence in pursuit of her independence is the result of the intervention and infiltration of Savonarola’s discursive knowledge supported by the powers of social and religious obligation into the heroine’s consciousness of self-reliance. Romola becomes treated as a form of what Foucault calls “docile bodies,” imprisoned by the normative and coercive power of Savonarola’s disciplinary discourse: “Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in
economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body” (*Discipline and Punish* 138). Savonarola’s gaze signifies the patriarchal constraints of binding the heroine into the frames of domesticity and moral conventions. Although it appears to Romola to be “a gaze in which simple human fellowship expressed itself as a strongly-felt bond,” the seeing eye of Savonarola is actually an index of dominant authority which suppresses any skeptical questioning and interrogation—to borrow Lyotard’s term of postmodern critique—“a discourse of legitimation,” or a kind of grand narrative nullifying a “sensitivity to differences” and “the incommensurable” (xxiii, xxv). By making it “impossible again to question his authority to speak to her,” Savonarola’s religious disciplines of duty and sacrifice neutralize Romola’s agonizing voice demanding independence (361).

Romola’s initial resolution to go to Cassandra Fedele at Venice to ask her how an instructed woman can support herself in a lonely life—Romola’s desire to become an independent intellectual woman—is hampered by Savonarola’s moralizing and announciating remarks. As Diana Robin’s study of Cassandra Fedele’s epistolary writing suggests, Cassandra Fedele adopted a mode of self-erasure, or a strategy of “privative” “ef-facement” by choosing either the attributes of femininity, chastity, self-shrinkage or the ambiguity of her gender with regard to the style in her letters (193, 198). With the same ambition that Cassandra Fedele had in her pursuit of becoming a humanist writer, Romola is eager to learn from Fedele how to manage a life of a female intellectual in the late fifteenth century. Romola’s desire for autonomy and her intellectual ambition can be also discovered in the case of Maggie Tulliver, the heroine of Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, who has a desire for self-governance and intelligence, but
Maggie’s ambition, as in the case of Romola’s, is obstructed by the restraints of male figures such as Mr. Stellign and her brother Tom Tulliver.

Without the true knowledge of her individual and specific situation, Savonarola calibrates Romola’s attempt to leave Florence with the scale of his normative judgment from the Christian frame of mind. He ascribes Romola’s departure to her scorn for the poor and suffering and to her quest for ease and self-indulgence. Although he advocates the necessity of charity to the poor and suffering in Florence, Savonarola forces her to follow the principle of charity, a kind of *a priori* discourse in the context of Christianity. His claim on the necessity of duty, self-abnegation, and charity is the inevitable, indisputable, and incontestable presupposition that Romola should silently adopt and obey what Žižek calls “another name for Lacanian ‘big Other,’” “the ultimate guarantee of Truth” (114) or “the enigmatic Master-Signifier” (115). In other words, the obligation of duty and charity in the milieu of Christianity serves as a binding force of grouping together the members of the community who are actually ignorant of what it really means, although each of them presupposes that others may know its meaning.

From the Positivist’s point of view, however, Savonarola cannot be necessarily perceived as a de-contextualized and abstract moralizing character. In the novel, he actually plays an important role in becoming both an antithetical type of the heroine’s ambition for self-independence and a harbinger of a religion of humanity disseminating the necessity of self-resignation for the poor and suffering people. Considering Comte to be an advocate who assigns women to the areas of feeling, moral and physical sensibilities which are contrasted with the male faculties of understanding and reason, Savonarola’s authoritative inculcation of Romola about the necessity of altruism and self-abnegation classifies woman as being appropriate for carrying out the moral and affective side of the Comtean Religion of Humanity:
The social mission of woman in the positive system follows as a natural consequence from the qualities peculiar to her nature…. Morally, therefore, and apart from all material considerations, she merits always our loving veneration, as the purest and simplest impersonation of humanity, who can never be adequately represented in any masculine form. But these qualities do not involve the possession of political power. (Comte 373)

But Savonarola’s Comtean teaching of woman’s sacrifice for and devotion to the community implicates, as Barrett points out, “a tension between the positive aspects of joining the community and the negative implications of relinquishing independence, with its attendant negative feminist implications” (79).

The problem is that Savonarola’s knowledge of humanity is not balanced because his judgment is based on masculine understanding of the outside world. Savonarola’s masculine discourse on the necessity of charity for the suffering hampers and frustrates Romola’s initial, voluntary willingness to learn from Cassandra Fedele how to live an intellectual life in the late fifteenth century when the male discourses of the public world prohibited the female discourse from being openly expressed, as revealed in the Venetian nun Arcangela Tarabotti’s testimony: when “women are seen with pen in hand, they are met immediately with shrieks commanding a return to that life of pain which their writing had interrupted, a life devoted to the women’s work of needle and distaff” (qtd. in Ferguson, Quilligan, and Vickers xv). Savonarola himself is not free from a function of the representational system of knowledge which is not concerned with the individual and specific condition of Romola’s life.

Savonarola’s mentorship may play a role in guiding Romola to be prompted by “the inspiration of her deepest feelings” through her womanly labors for the poor and the sick whom she would otherwise have considered to be irksome (388). It is true that her earlier apathy to the
attitude of self-renunciation toward the other is shifted, under the influence of Savonarola’s teaching, to her later enthusiastic dedication to and her tender involvement in the betterment of the other people in the Florence of 1496 when the society was suffering from pestilence and famine as well as politico-religious turmoil. The Dominican Frate’s indignation against the corruption of the Church and the oppression of the States and his advocacy of the fulfillment of a universal regeneration serve to affirm her motivation of self-denial for the welfare of her fellow citizens. In this regard, Savonarola’s aspiration for freedom from the oppression of Church or despots can be lauded, in Villari’s words, as “the spirit of an innovator” and “the prophet of the new civilization” (2: 418). A ceremony known as the Pyramid of Vanities or the Burning of Vanities initiated by Savonarola exemplifies the Frate’s desire for purifying pagan elements in the secular world. The emblematic ceremony of burning objects such as “copies of Ovid, Boccaccio, Petrarca, Pulci, and other books of a vain or impure sort” and “all the implements of feminine vanity—rouge-pots, false hair, mirrors, perfumes, powders, and transparent veils intended to provoke inquisitive glances” (423), however, is an act of violence to justify the totalizing economy of a religious system which does not allow any possibility of difference and idiosyncrasy in the framework of its eschatological grand narrative. The shortcomings of Savonarola’s mentorship lie not only in the misguided and “enthusiastic application of his teachings by overzealous followers” but also in the extremes of his rhetoric with its “increasingly militant character” (Colón 112). Thus Romola’s action of helping Tessa escape from the threat by the Procession of Children who tried to have her necklace and belt taken off is a challenge to the restrictions imposed by the institution of the church whose codified and prescriptive discourses attempt to nullify the inarticulate feeling of sympathy. The bonfire of the Pyramid of Vanities can function as “a milestone, not only in Romola’s growing independence, but also in
her growing moral perception” which enables her to perceive the limits of Savonarola’s narrative of Risorgimento or “Savonarola’s own Pyramid of Vanities” (Bonaparte, Triptych 210, 211).

Savonarola’s sermon replete with “all dogmas and prophecies, when they came in the vehicle of his ardent faith and believing utterances,” however, fastens on the primacy of the direct and immediate impact of authorial power on the listener (390). The domination of the subject over the other by way of dogmatic, totalitarian, and mesmerizing utterances is what the tradition of Western thought has aimed to achieve and perpetuate. In Plato’s Phaedrus,23 the preference of Socrates for speech over writing implies the supremacy of the transparency and self-sameness of the ontological subject that obliterates the aberration, eccentricity, and monstrosity of the other through the maximization of the living presence of the speaker through utterance which enables the allegedly self-evident subject to have immediate proximity with the spirit. Thus Savonarola’s attempt to profuse his dogmatic vision through charismatic utterances, his identification of himself with a harbinger of God’s words—“he spoke with God” (Machiavelli 24. n4)—corroborates the direct immediacy of the authorial voice to logos or the world of God whereby he tries to situate himself within the heritage of Western thinking, what Derrida terms “logocentrism which is also phonocentrism” (Of Grammatology 11).

The nature of violence embedded in Savonarola’s verbalized sermon can be implied in his reliance on secular armed forces led by the French King whom Savonarola regards as “the instrument elected by God” “to purify the earth from iniquity” (213). The Dominican friar’s sermon emphasizes the advent of God’s scourge on the socially, politically, and religiously corrupted Florence and the importance of liberty and purity of government in Florence for a universal regeneration, which will be realized as a way of the coming of the French soldiers led by Charles VIII. By using “the Catholic persecution narrative” with a particular emphasis placed
on the “rhetoric of persecution, punishment and purification” (Moran 164, 165), Savonarola
enfolds a self-contradictory logic with regard to the inclusion of the body politic of destruction in
his discourse of altruism. Another violent nature of his sermon can be indentified in
Baldassarre’s affirmation of his revenge against Tito. Although Savonarola’s sermon in the
Duomo inspires Romola to trust his nature as being greater than hers, it nevertheless serves to
provoke Baldassarre to justify the promise of vengeance with the idea that the betraying son
must be punished by the betrayed father. Savonarola’s Christian fervor for justice is concomitant
with Baldassarre’s pagan motive for justice, and they “mirror the private and the public versions
of same point” (Bonaparte, Triptych 225). The pagan prophetess Camilla Rucellai’s testimony of
her implicit acknowledgement with Savonarola regarding the punishment of Romola’s godfather
Bernardo del Nero subverts the Frate’s renowned orthodox virtues of the purity and self-
sameness of his identity; the Dominican Frate clandestinely sanctions the validity of the pagan
prophetess’s supernatural vision in order to justify the ideological claims of his politico-religious
party. In this regard, Christianity and paganism do not appear to be mutually exclusive.
Romola’s gradual awareness of Savonarola’s duplicity arises from the idea that human beings
cannot be immune from power relations and political partisanship. Observing that Savonarola’s
private denunciation of Camilla’s pagan vision of Bernardo del Nero’s destiny contradicts his
public reticence of the matter, Romola realizes that Savonarola does not only inwardly agree to
Camilla’s pagan prophecy, but he does also have an anxiety over the negative consequence of
political vitiation imposed upon him by both members of his Dominican party and the outside
detractors unless he advocates the punishment of Romola’s Medicean godfather. Savonarola’s
grand, transcendent, and unitary truth claim is implicitly or explicitly expressed in the
mechanism of power, what Foucault calls “the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the
sphere” (*History of Sexuality* 92) of fifteenth-century Florentine politics entangled with “the violence of the few,” “party strifes,” and “private ill-will” (495).

Eliot’s idea of sympathy does not require Romola simply to embrace other characters’ follies and weaknesses and to sacrifice herself to satisfy others’ desires. Romola’s growth to be independent and her enlargement of vision to appreciate fully the real meaning of sympathy can be achieved through her resistance to and rebellion against the discourses of domination and appropriation. Recognizing human duplicity rooted in egoism, Romola comes to have repugnance both against Tito’s secret plot to destroy Savonarola for his own safety and against Savonarola’s involvement in petty party politics which is apparently in contradiction with his grand religious doctrine emphasizing the importance of purity. Within the context of political and cultural estrangement and turmoil in which Savonarola is opposed to Lorenzo de’ Medici who patronizes classicism as opposed to Savonarola’s Roman Catholic church, Tito is only interested in his own security and money, as indicated in his collusion with Dolfo Spini: “Whichever party came uppermost, he was secure of favour and money. That is an indecorously naked statement; the fact, clothed as Tito habitually clothed it, was that his acute mind, discerning the equal hollowness of all parties, took the only rational course in making them subservient to his own interest” (403). In a response to Romola’s concern about the safety of Savonarola, Tito reproaches her for her interference in political affairs. Tito’s consideration of Romola to be unreasonable not to share in the knowledge of his political affairs suggests that although he appears to be soft, bland, and beseeching on the surface of his disposition, Tito really expresses “the husband’s determination to mastery” (415) and demonstrates his “masculine effectiveness of intellect and purpose” (417). Thus Tito is entrapped in a mechanism of male discourse excluding women from the public territory and relegating them to the private
domain, as did Bardo who was dissatisfied with his daughter’s contribution, as a female surrogate of his brother, to his scholarship.

Savonarola’s refusal to accept Romola’s pleading to him concerning her godfather’s safety, freedom, and legal right to appeal to the Great Council jeopardizes both her relationship with the friar and her strong belief in his religious aspiration for purity and simplicity. Savonarola’s fanatic declaration of the identification of politics with religion—“The cause of my party is the cause of God’s Kingdom” (499)—provokes Romola to rebel against a system of ideologies which control and determine the individual’s thought and behavior. The politics of rebellion is a key to understanding Eliot’s idea of sympathy. Afflicted with the conflict between submission to the religious authority and rebellion against it, Eliot, like her fictional heroine, declared her reliance on the freedom of her conscience grounded on the idea of sympathy rather than on the transcendent abstractions of religious doctrine:

When the soul is just liberated from the wretched giant’s bed of dogmas on which it has been racked and stretched ever since it began to think there is a feeling of exultation and strong hope…. Speculative truth begins to appear but a shadow of individual minds, agreement between intellects seem unattainable, and we turn to the truth of feeling as the only universal bond of union. We find that the intellectual errors which we once fancied were a mere incrustation have grown into the living body and that we cannot in the majority of causes, wrench them away without destroying vitality. (Letters 1: 162; emphasis in orig.)

Romola’s earlier obedience from the scenes of her intellectual service to her father and of her return to Florence after Savonarola’s admonition seemed to reveal both a female character’s passivity and her submission to paternal authority. However, rather than remaining as the
invisible Madonna, an abstract iconic figure of religion, Romola appears to be a woman of practice, believing that “some immediate beneficent action,” or action of justice, is required to ameliorate the life of the Florentines. Her declaration—“The law was sacred. Yes, but rebellion might be sacred too” (474)—is a manifesto of the independence of her judgment, indicating that she will no longer rely on male figures’ authority as the guide for her actions. Romola’s decision to break the marriage vows rests on the ethical claim that the individual must defy the stifling predominance of the outward authorities over inward justice. In referring to Romola as a woman who “will have surpassed all the heroines of the Greek drama,” Tito identifies her with the character of the heroine in Sophocles’ Antigone (489). If she was a type of selfless Antigone who was obedient to her blind father Bardo, Romola has transformed herself into a new type of Antigone, a defiant woman who challenges her husband’s deception and egoism.

Romola relies on her firm belief in the primacy of sympathy over any institutionalized authority right before the execution of Bernardo del Nero: “Romola was feeling the full force of that sympathy with the individual lot that is continually opposing itself to the formulae by which actions and parties are judged” (504). The recalcitrant and rebellious nature of sympathy does not characterize “a failure of sympathy with the community” (Sadoff 97), but it allows the reader to rethink “the counterbalancing viewpoint” of sympathy (Ermarth 112) with regard to its belligerent, uncompromising nature against dominant and restrictive ideologies. The transformation of Savonarola’s theological and supernatural doctrines into egoistic ambition for the sake of his own political expediency invalidates his mentorship for Romola: “In the bitterness of her disappointment she said that his striving after the renovation of the Church and the world was a striving after a mere name which told no more than the title of a book: a name that had
come to mean practically the measures that would strengthen his own position in Florence” (508).

In discovering her husband’s felicitous calculus and her spiritual mentor’s zealous propaganda, both of which are deeply seated in egoism, Romola claims the validity of her subjectivity with reference to a subversion of dominant discourses represented by Tito’s utilitarian empiricism and Savonarola’s monotheistic fanaticism. By expressing her determined voices to both Tito and Savonarola, Romola subverts the stereotypical notion of gender roles or the privilege accorded to male voice over female voice in a binary pair. By appropriating the authoritative voices of male figures that she resists, Romola simultaneously refuses and assimilates the male authority in her voices. Her resistant remarks to Tito, “Our union is a pretence—as if a perpetual lie could be a sacred marriage” and “I desire to quit you” (489), demonstrate the reversal of authoritative position which also occurs in her attempt to speak up against Savonarola: “Father, you yourself declare that there comes a moment when the soul must have no guide but the voice within it, to tell whether the consecrated thing has sacred virtue. And therefore I must speak” (497). By declaring the necessity of the sacred duty of rebellion against the self-deception of authority, Romola becomes “manly” in her rhetorical deployment, whereas Tito and Savonarola become “unmanned.”

In her essay, “The Antigone and Its Moral,” Eliot notes that the Greek tragedy illuminates a “balance of principles” or an “antagonism between valid claims” because Antigone and Creon are to blame for transgressing each other (Essays 264). Rather than expressing her preference for one claim over another claim, Eliot concludes the essay by insisting upon the importance of the polemicist’s ethical attitude toward the problematic issue: “Perhaps the best moral we can draw is that to which the Chorus points—that our protest for the right should be seasoned with
moderation and reverence” (Essays 265). However, her emphasis on moderation and reverence implies that, in the case of the conflict between Romola and Savonarola, the Dominican Frate’s extreme zeal for the political institutionalization of his Church is based on his religious hubris and desire for power. What is to be moderated is the extremity of Savonarola’s ambition to codify his religious doctrine, and what is revered is the individual moral justice which the Frate ignores for the sake of his principle of the common weal.

Romola’s new recognition of human duality and egoism leads her to challenge the outward authority, but it also brings her to the feelings of loneliness and aimlessness, for she realizes that she has no person to care for her as opposed to her care for many people. An awareness of the limitations of marriage, law, the State, authority, and religion is a consequence of “the extreme conflict of interpretations” with reference to the clash between the outward law and the inner moral justice (Carroll 189). But the ambivalent sensation of freedom and loneliness prompts her to move beyond the conflict of interpretations, and it guides her to the primordial condition of prehistory immune from the rhetorical domination and violence of language.

Romola’s resistance to a fixation on a certain dominant ideology is well exemplified in her drifting away scene. Romola’s second attempt to flee Florence entails her longing for “repose in mere sensation which she had sometimes dreamed of in the sultry afternoons of her early girlhood, when she had fancied herself floating naiad-like in the waters” (509). Her lying on the small boat, gliding over the water, is an act of revolt against the phono-logocentric authority undertaken in the name of any universal and totalizing telos. The revolt is mingled with her wish for death. Recognizing that she has been confined and beguiled by the patriarchal strictures of the authoritative father figures or the law of father, she launches an escape from the domination of a symbolic system represented by her father, her brother, her husband, and her spiritual
mentor. Romola’s second, or repetitive, attempt to flee from Florence reflects her desire for returning to the unknown primordial state of being beyond the symbolic system of law and language. She experiences a transformation from her attachment to the world, “Eros,” into her wish for death, “Thanatos”: “She read no message of love for her in that far-off symbolic writing of the heavens, and with a great sob she wished that she might be gliding into death” (511). 

The symbolically ritual ceremony of Romola’s drifting away is her effort to recapture a lost moment which gave her pleasure when she read a story of Gostanza in Boccaccio’s *Decamerone*. Romola is unable to recuperate fully her memory of a primordial oneness between her and her mother; she feels “orphaned” (511). As she first appears with her father in the novel, the absence of her mother is apparent, and Romola’s relationship with her mother is unknown. Her unconscious desire for the unity of herself with the mysterious mother, or “the pre-disillusionment stage of an infant’s life” ironically presents Romola’s inability to go back to the stage of pre-disillusionment without her experience of the disillusionment of the world dominated by the symbolic system of language and law (Corner 82).

Drifting away in a boat, Romola expresses her libido of freedom and experiences a rupture from the male libidinal economy of prohibition and domination exemplified in the stifling absolutism of father figures. Romola’s regressive shift from the contingent actuality to the dreamlike unconsciousness symbolically appears to achieve the historical discontinuity by running counter to the constraints of dogmatic interpretations that claimed the unified sovereignty and uninterrupted continuity of male visions represented by Savonarola’s linear and teleological view of history. Luce Irigaray’s idea of *jouissance* as the political engagement of women against and beyond the patriarchal governance of history is appropriate for understanding Romola’s transgression of the restrictive economy of male discourses: “[W]oman generates
through her *jouissance* … a passage or a bridge between what is most earthly and most celestial…. Women’s dissatisfaction … no doubt stems from this perpetual deferment of a *jouissance* which is theirs, where they might find themselves, or find themselves anew” (190). Thus Romola’s retreat into the realm of floating water reflects her attempt to find female *jouissance* which can help her to defy the governing economics of patriarchal authority and to find her own regenerated self. However, Eliot does not present Romola’s escapism triggered by her wish for death as an ideal solution for resolving the tension between her claim for moral justice and other male figures’ claims for social order tinged with egoistic dogmatism.

The question that Eliot has posed after the heroine’s drifting away is how Romola can represent the meaning of moderation and reverence, the key points of Eliot’s understanding of Antigone, yet still maintain her resistance to discursive coercion. It cannot be doubted that Romola had been affected by Savonarola’s teaching of the necessity of charity and benevolence as a Christian duty and altruistic behavior. However, it is also true that she recognizes the pitfalls of the Frate’s inspiration expressed in a discursive form of his rigid dogmatism and his will to power. Overwhelmed by the feeling of doubt and uncertainty, how can Romola achieve a middle ground or reconcile the dilemma between individual ethics and socio-theological injunction? What can serve to empower Romola to live through life regardless of her skepticism about established authority? The nature of fluidity characterized in Romola’s floating locates her, to use Victor Turner’s terms, in the moment of “anti-structure,” “liminality,” or “communitas.” Performativity, the key feature of the above terms, underscores, on the one hand, the openness, playfulness, non-conformity bereft of obligation imposed by the normative rules of society and religion, and, on the other hand, the preparation for the empowerment of change and transformation which will be enacted in the structure of society and in human relationships. Thus
the moment of liminality ambiguously embraces both rebellion against the established authority (discontinuity) and the readiness, somewhat mingled with the emotions of fear and trembling caused by the uncertainty of the future, to confront the events in the circumscribed structure of society (continuity). The ideas of anti-structure, liminality, and communitas focus on:

- the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate group such as a family, lineage, clan, tribe, nation, etc., or of affiliation with some pervasive social category such as a class, caste, sex or age-division.… [T]here has to be an interfacial region or, to change the metaphor, an interval, however brief, of margin or limen, when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance. (Turner, From Ritual 44)

The scene of Romola’s drifting away serves as a turning point, or a moment of liminality, highlighting the reconfiguration of sympathy in terms of her new conception unaffected by the moral imperatives forcefully imposed by outward law. Romola’s boat is described not as a deathbed but as “the gently lulling cradle of a new life” (559). If her floating is a manifestation of her challenge to the authority of the signification of symbolic language dominated by the patriarchal system, Romola’s sympathy for others, after she drifts away, illuminates her willingness to help others in the society from which she had left. In order to achieve this goal, Romola needs to confront the realities of the actual world by her own will prompted by sympathy.
Romola’s arrival in the valley and her witness of the death and desolation of the abandoned Jews portray the initiation of her renewed self as the voluntary and active agent of sympathy without recourse to authority from the outside. When she seeks to find help, carrying a little child in her arms, Romola follows her inward promptings of sympathy for the urgent need of other people. She enacts the practical implication of “the sympathetic impulses that need no law, but rush to the deed of fidelity and pity as inevitably as the brute mother shields her young from the attack of the hereditary enemy” (101). The sudden appearance of a little child that needs help is a frequent motif of Eliot’s fiction with regard to her emphasis on the power of sympathy. In *Silas Marner*, though afflicted with his loss of gold, Silas experiences a new sensation of sympathy, “old quivering of tenderness—old impressions of awe at the presentiment of some Power presiding over his life” when he encounters the sudden presence of a little child, later named Eppie, in his cottage (*Silas Marner* 111). He feels something mysterious and unknown in the transformation from his avidity for gold to his care for the child: “Thought and feeling were so confused within him, that if he had tried to give them utterance, he could only have said that the child was come instead of the gold—that the gold had turned into the child” (*Silas Marner* 122). The practicality of sympathy, or the corporeality in the mysterious feeling of a union produced by the contact of the self with the other, is Eliot’s “teaching that proceeds inductively from experienced realities rather than deductively from abstract principles” (Hodgson 19). Eliot highlights both the element of mysticism and the practical dimension in the power of sympathy, that is, “the delighted bathing of the soul in emotions which overpass the outlines of definite thought” (*Letters* 6: 89).

Romola’s experience of helping the suffering people in the valley recuperates her sympathy for fellow human beings. But there exists the main difference between her previous
philanthropic behavior toward the poor after her first return to Florence guided by Savonarola’s instruction, and her second return to Florence after her dedication to helping people in the valley preceded by the scene of her drifting away. Although she was called the Visible Madonna for her tremendous efforts to devote herself to the labors for the Florentine populace who was suffering from hunger and pestilence, Romola was disappointed by the complicated, strict, and coercive bonds of marriage, the State, and religious discipleship in Florence. In contrast, after her sojourn to and her temporary stay in the plague-stricken village, she is confident that she can live by the new knowledge of ethics guided by the spontaneous, voluntary, and active promptings of sympathy for others: “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” (567). Despite the peoples’ mystifying eulogy of her with iconic names such as “the Holy Mother” (562), “the Holy Mother with the Babe” (563), and “the Blessed Lady” (566), Romola seeks to find “something that she was bound specially to care for” rather than the glorifying exaltation of her heroic deeds (572). It is, as Mintz notes, work that can serve as a medium through which one can realize one’s self-knowledge: “Works are not only therapeutic or socially useful means of self-objectification, but ways in which the spirit becomes known to itself, ways in which the ‘inarticulate Self-consciousness’ which dwells dimly within us can be rendered ‘articulate and decisively discernible’” (27). That is, Romola’s vocational praxis—Romola as a reformer of life—accelerated by her mysterious and inarticulate feeling of sympathy for others enables her to achieve the true knowledge of her identity.

Unlike the currents of the river playing a symbolically constructive role in guiding Romola to a little child for whom she was able to practice the impulse of sympathy, the currents of the river into which Tito jumps to escape the furious and armed mob lead him to destruction
by bringing the treacherous adopted son to the abandoned foster father, Baldassarre, who is consumed by the need to persecute Tito. Baldassarre and Tito mirror one another with reference to the dynamic of the inseparability of two emotions—revenge and fear. His desire for revenge, “a dark deity in the inmost cell,” haunts Tito who has been bound by “the undying habit of fear” (340, 551). Tito and Baldassarre are united not only by their familial relationship between father and son but also by their egotistical orientations commonly inherent in Tito’s pursuit of pleasures and in Baldassarre’s narcissistic self-gratification through his devotion to vengeance. By demonstrating the “surrender of self-control” based on his “pursuit of external regard,” a desire for shaping his flattering, condescending image of himself from others, Tito joins the world of isolation and surrender represented by his father’s law of vengeance (Kucich 191). By strangling the barely conscious Tito to death, Baldassarre culminates his irrational and aggressive desire for revenge, but he is also to die because, by completing his end, he loses the purposes of, or reasons for, his life: his libidinal desires both for being recognized as a father and for becoming the persecutor of treachery. The death of Tito thus means the disappearance of Baldassarre.

The limits of Savonarola’s asceticism derive from his desire for self-prominence lying screened behind his noble cause for humanity, just as the destruction of Baldassarre and Tito is ultimately ascribed to the pursuits of their sadistic and egoistic pleasures. The inseparable co-existence of altruism and egoism has strongly marked Savonarola’s religious and political career. He is divided by an irreconcilable gap between “a purpose which is not selfish” and “the innate need to dominate” (539). Although his extreme commitment to the transcendent vision of Christianity seems to characterize him as an “idealist by his blindness to the claims of the real” (Guth 121), Savonarola is actually quite sensitive to his secular desires for self-exaltation and for the perpetuation of his authority in the name of the common good: he is “an immensely
clever Frate, mixing with his absurd superstitions or fabrications very remarkable notions about
government” (539). His contemplation of the Trial by Fire also testifies to his “keen perception
of outward facts” and to his “vigorous practical judgment of men and things” (531) which
counterbalance his dogmatic belief in prophetic visions and divine inspiration; he contradicts his
belief in the operation of divinity by negating the probability of miracles, for example, “of being
carried unhurt through the fire” (530). Savonarola’s trial and execution carried out by the
Catholic Church due to his disobedience to the Pope and to the Italian States, exposes the Frate’s
inconsistency; on the one hand, he is blinded by his masochistic pleasure for torture because he
has a fantasy for martyrdom: “Savonarola thought or spoke of himself as a martyr. The idea of
martyrdom had been to him a passion dividing the dream of the future with the triumph of
 beholding his work achieved” (581). On the other hand, Savonarola cannot hold on to his noble
faith because he cannot endure the pain of torture. The poignant reality of pain on Savonarola’s
body imposed by physical cruelty sabotages the transcendent abstraction of his rhetorical
discourse on justice. His inability to remain aloof from the direct sense of bodily pain contradicts
his lifelong disdain for the world of materiality and secularity in the name of the sacredness and
purity of the Christian spirit. His masochistic pleasure from torture in pursuit of the glory of
martyrdom is simply imaginary, but what is real is the presence of pain that makes him not only
forsake his claims of truth but also deny his prophetic vision, retract his denial, and then retract
his previous retraction.30

Romola’s scrutiny of the printed materials and the recorded statements of Savonarola’s
confessions is her scholarly effort to “approach, not grasp, the truth” of Savonarola involved in
his excommunication (Nardo 82). Aware of the possibilities for misinterpretation and distortion
of the Frate’s claims to prophetic vision, Romola concludes that although he sought to achieve
personal prominence and self-glorification, Savonarola had a genuine motive for “the moral welfare of men” (578). Romola’s hermeneutic interpretation of Savonarola’s life and motive is based on her practice of sympathy not only because she has critically examined the limits of his coercive and self-exalting rhetoric but also because she embraces him as a weak, fallible human being who had agonizingly suffered from his downfall occasioned by the exposure of his inconsistency and self-contradiction. Eliot’s use of a metaphor for pier-glass in *Middlemarch* highlights the self-absorbing, self-justifying, and solipsistic view of the world induced by egoism:

> 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—of Miss Vincy, for example. (258)

The candle-flame metaphor suggests that our views of the world are the reflexes of our desires, wishes, anxieties, and ideologies. Furthermore, the analogy invites us not only to ruminate on our own limitations regarding egoism (the necessity of self-knowledge), but also to understand our neighbors as weak and fallible fellow human beings like us (the necessity of sympathy in our relationships with others). The double necessities of the internalization and externalization of our thoughts are an attempt to challenge the imperialistic desire for perpetuating the sovereignty of the self over the other. Thus the death of male figures—Bardo, Dino, Bernardo, Tito,
Baldassarre, and Savonarola—in the narrative does not simply suggest that *Romola* orchestrates a scenario of “anti-Oedipus,” “the daughter’s desire to ‘kill’ the father who has distanced her from her mother” (Carpenter, “The Trouble with Romola” 120). The disappearance of patriarchal figures indeed provides Romola with a freedom to use her regenerated subjectivity as an alternative to the limits of male discourses which claimed their own exclusive, narcissistic validity over other options and possibilities; especially, Bardo’s male chauvinistic classical scholarship, Dino’s extreme asceticism, Tito’s hedonistic paganism, Baldassarre’s irrational obsession with revenge, and Savonarola’s dogmatic fanaticism are the grandiose assertion of egoism articulated by the rhetoric of patriarchal authority.

In the Epilogue of the novel, set eleven years after the execution of Savonarola, Romola takes up the role of a mentor, a kind of “Eliot’s valorized professional” for one of Tessa’s children, Nillo (Colón 102). What is important, however, is that Romola’s mentorship is quite different from that of her male mentors who forced her to follow their ideological, normative systems of beliefs characterized by a mixture of egocentrism, phonocentrism, and logocentrism. Her teaching of how to obtain great happiness sheds light on the idea of sympathy with a special attention to the widening of our vision toward the other as well as to our own interests: “We can only have the highest happiness, such as goes along with being a great man, by having wide thoughts, and much feeling for the rest of the world, as well as ourselves” (587). Acknowledging the tendency of egoism in human beings, Eliot asserts the importance of investing the libidinal desire for self-interest with what she considered to be the essence of charity, “*Caritas*, the highest love or fellowship, which I am happy to believe that no philosophy will expel from the world” (*Letters* 4: 72). Romola’s service in the domestic zone where Brigida, Tessa, Lillo, and Ninna live together does not necessarily signify her belief that “civic politics are somehow
incompatible with the practice of a nondogmatic mentorship” (Colón 119). Nor does it suggest “the final overthrow of the elitism of which Savonarola accused Romola” (Barrett 98).

Romola’s enactment of sympathy starts with people around her, just as Dorothea does in Middlemarch. Dorothea’s “unheroic acts” at the end of Middlemarch echo Romola’s sympathetic attention to the marginalized people, especially Tessa and Tito’s illegitimate children: “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” (Middlemarch 825). Donating Tito’s property to the state, offering Tessa’s family material support equivalent to the value of her father’s library, and acting as a mentor to Nillo, Romola corroborates Eliot’s belief in the potential for the enlargement of our sympathy for the neighbors around us toward the larger community. Romola’s use of her father’s library for supporting Tessa and her children signifies the transformation and circulation of bibliographic materials in her father’s library into both cultural and economic capital. This transformation implies a vitality of knowledge because, however extensive and profound its scope and depth was, Bardo’s classical scholarship was confined to the limited and dark space of his library in which it is tantamount to the death of knowledge. By being used for the life of Tessa’s family, however, Bardo’s library becomes re-invented from simply a piece of property into a substantiated medium of genuine feeling through which Romola can revitalize her capacity to extend her sympathy for people around her.

Earlier in the novel, Romola was a living, vital being in her father’s library. In effect, Romola destabilized the distinctive demarcation of gender role when she performed a double duty both as a caring daughter for her blind father and as an intellectual amanuensis—in particular, a scholarly position exclusively occupied by the male—instead of her brother. She now revivifies her image of life in an attempt to transform the library and books of knowledge
into a means for her enactment of sympathy. Bardo’s egoistic ambition to be famous for his scholarly labor—“men should own themselves debtors to the Bardi library in Florence…. Nevertheless, my name will be remembered, and men will honour me” (57)—ironically turns out to be true not because his scholarly achievements are appreciated but because his daughter, a target of his male chauvinism, serves as a living model for the knowledge of morality so that the genealogy of the Bardi family, in spite of the absence of a male descendent, continues with Romola and with Tessa’s children supported by the economic capital of the library and reared by Romola’s education. By so doing, Romola assumes the substantial and authoritative—not dictatorial—role of father. Romola’s performativity of subverting gender roles highlights her renewed self’s practice of sympathy.

Her act of discontinuity from history and society, as manifested in the scene of her drifting away, serves as a preparation for continuity of history. Romola’s care for Tito’s illegitimate children is a concrete manifestation of her awareness of historical continuity. Eliot clearly expresses this in “Historic Guidance” in her Notebook: “The widening of sensibility through the love of children, even the care for a son in its lowest form of transferred egoism is a stage on the way to a care for posterity in general—a sentiment which has flashed out grandly in earlier periods of our history, stimulating a devoted public spirit in aged men” (Pinney 372). Thus sympathy is not just an emotive response to the other’s suffering but also is the practice of love for the people around through the action of the subject who is aware of his or her limits but is ready to challenge the coercive powers and episteme of the established norms and institutions. As Eliot notes in “The Natural History of German Life,” the spirit of sympathy is also embedded in the main task of art in the sense that art is “a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot” (Essays 271). In this
regard, Eliot’s heroine Romola becomes an ideal artist whom Piero presumably adores. When Nillo is curious about why Piero gives Romola flowers, although he dislikes her care for Savonarola’s altar, the reason is that he eulogizes Romola’s spirit of sympathy which is analogous to the artist’s vision and accords with his artistic tendency to resist homogeneity and conformity: “He [Piero] abuses you for dressing the altar, and thinking so much of Fra Girolamo, and yet he brings you the flowers” (588). Piero is an artist of the eclectic nature who can, as Winnifrith points out, pay “a tribute to the need in art and in life to include everything, and not to exclude … anything that is not congenial to a particular philosophy” (178). He recognizes that Romola embodies the incarnate history through her practice of sympathy for others.
CHAPTER 3

The LIMITS OF CULTURAL SELF-FASHIONING AND THE SUBVERSIVE ENACTMENT OF SYMPATHY AS A HYBRID OF TASTES: *FELIX HOLT, THE RADICAL*

*Felix Holt, the Radical* marks George Eliot’s return to the world of her earlier realistic portrayal of the Midlands landscapes of the 1830s in England after her travel to the epic history of the late fifteenth-century Florence in *Romola*. Set in the Reform Bill of 1832 in England, *Felix Holt* draws the reader’s attention to the political issue of the working-class people with regard to the extension of their franchise reform. Considering the year the novel was written and published, one can argue that “Eliot is using the problems of 1832 to highlight solutions for the 1860s” (Cunningham 178).1 Regarding *Felix Holt* as a political novel dealing with the issue of the working-class participation in the mid-Victorian politics, critics have debated whether Felix Holt represents the voice of the working classes. Most of them agree that Felix is simply a mouthpiece of the conservative Eliot. Raymond Williams, one of those adverse critics of *Felix Holt*, argues that Eliot’s appraisal of the working-class movements is negative because the novelist considers them foolish and inadequate, and even urges people to dissociate themselves from the popular movements.2 Williams contends that *Felix Holt* implicates Eliot’s fear of the masses’ “constant tendency to blind disorder” (105) and that her fear actually reflects “the fear of a sympathetic, reformist-minded member of the middle classes at being drawn into any kind of mob violence” (104).

Eliot, however, does not simply ask us to focus our attention on the political reform of the working class in mid-Victorian England. She invites us to see how the political issue is intricately intertwined with private life. Eliot’s strong statement about the impact of the public life on the private life can be regarded as a brief summary of the significance of the novel: “there
is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life” (45). The determination of the private life by the public life demonstrates the importance of understanding the individual and human relationships in the context of social, economic, and political changes. The regional setting of Treby Magna transforms the setting from a local market-town to a more complex mining and manufacturing town which belongs to the economic system of the nation. As the novel’s introduction shows, the political and industrial changes of North Loamshire are quite evident to the eyes of a traveler on the stage coach. The life of a rural region distinguished by a pastoral scene is contrasted with a manufacturing town’s “scene of riots and trades-union meetings” (8). The industrial and political upheavals in the town could affect the people’s social, political, and even religious consciousness. Mr. Sampson’s remarks about the negative impacts of the introduction of the railway system on the country environment and the death of Mr. Huskinsson by train indicate his nostalgia for the pastoral scenes of life in the past as well as his anxiety over the threat of the newly introduced transportation system to his occupation of coachman.³ Charles Dickens employs a motif of train in Dombey and Son quite ambivalently by delineating it both as an emblem of industrial mechanization and as a means of justice because it serves to punish Carker the manager for his baseness: Carker “saw the red eyes, bleared and dim, in the daylight, close upon him—was beaten down, caught up, and whirled away upon a jagged mill, that spun him round and round, and struck him limb from limb, and licked his stream of life up with its fiery heat, and cast his mutilated fragments in the air” (875). On the other hand, Eliot’s use of the imagery of train in the introduction to Felix Holt is negatively introduced in that the railway system substitutes the de-humanized scenes of mechanized and industrial society for the pastoral and elegiac scenes of country.
The noisy bustle of the life in the manufacturing town contains “pain that is quite noiseless” and “human agonies” that “are often a mere whisper in the roar of hurrying existence” (11). At this juncture, *Felix Holt* is not limited to the genre of political or industrial novel⁴; what must be also highlighted is the need for heightening the acute sensitivity of detecting the individual agony and suffering. The tragic life of the individual, although hardly recognizable under the scenes of all kinds of progresses in society, needs to be heeded by the sympathetic sensibility. It is Esther who can appreciate the significance of the narrator’s comment on the downfall of hopes, suffering, and the inheritance of tragedy in life which would be palpitating noiselessly in human hearts. The significance of the unknown and secrets tragedy of human life is mentioned at the end of the introduction to *Felix Holt*:

[T]here is seldom any wrong-doing which does not carry along with it some downfall of blindly-climbing hopes, some hard entail of suffering, some quickly-satiated desire that survives, with the life in death of old paralytic vice, to see itself cursed by its woeful progeny—some tragic mark of kinship in the one brief life to the far-stretching life that went before, and to the life that is to come after, such as has raised the pity and terror of men ever since they began to discern between will and destiny. But these things are often unknown to the world; for there is much pain that is quite noiseless; and vibrations that make human agonies are often a mere whisper in the roar of hurrying existence. (11)

Eliot’s question is how one can make the unknown agonies which are suppressed in the human hearts revealed and touched. The title of the novel, *Felix Holt, the Radical*, gives the reader the impression that it draws attention to Felix who is a radical in a local manufacturing town of England in the 1830s. However strongly suggestive of political nuance the title of the novel may be, *Felix Holt* has double plots: one of them is political with reference to the setting of the First
Reform Bill of 1832, and the other one is ethical with Eliot’s emphasis on the role of sympathy in achieving social cohesion as a counterforce of the political disintegration. Although many critics have argued that Felix Holt is a representative of Eliot’s social, political, and moral views, I would like to show that Esther embodies Eliot’s concern with the significance of sympathy as the subversive force to undermine the dominant and patriarchal discourses of socio-political and economic powers. Eliot envisions a new idea of culture, or a culture of sympathy, which cannot be controlled either by Felix’s autocratic positioning to subsume the other under the category of the uncivilized entity or by Harold’s pragmatic calculation to require the other as a means to achieve his own end. Instead of Felix who appears to be a rigid public moralist, Esther embodies Eliot’s notion of a culture of sympathy. A culture of sympathy constitutes a hybrid of tastes which resists the homogeneity of Felix’s idea of cultivating the mind and which challenges Harold’s deceptive reason to transform the other into an instrumental object. Taste is, as Pierre Bourdieu argues in *Distinction*, “the practical operator of the transmutation of things into distinct and distinctive signs” through which a certain class condition is symbolically signified (174). Instead of having one specific symbolic signification of class position, however, Esther employs multiple tastes which ultimately assist her in resisting the ideological forces of patriarchy (or male tastes) to appropriate her for the achievement of their own purposes. Felix is a stock character who always relentlessly insists on and tries to perpetuate the reform of the spirit, whereas Esther develops and exhibits her multiple and heterogeneous characters and tastes in her relationships with her stepfather, Felix, Harold, and Mrs. Transome and in the course of the revelation of her identity and inheritance. The narrative of *Felix Holt* illuminates the operation of sympathy through Esther who has the ability to defy the ideologies of gender and political economy.
Many critics have pointed out that Felix characterizes failure with regard to his political action because his political slogan remains ineffectual for his lack of practice. Rather than being a total failure, in effect, Felix is a flawed character who is blind to self-contradiction in his philosophy of morality. Although he confidently proclaims himself as a radical in politics on the behalf of the working classes, he lacks the agency of his political engagement; his rhetorical volubility is not effectively realized in his concrete actions, and he demonstrates a duplicity of his attitude toward the working class, a contradictory clash between his rhetoric of politics and his idea of the class. Felix, noble and sincere as he may be in his morality, exposes the limits of his idea of reform—the reform of culture in the working classes—because, using his exclusive, inflexible, and egocentric judgment, he refuses to embrace the diverse modes of life.

Felix Holt appears to be a person of honor and honesty. In his meeting with Rufus Lyon, a Dissenting minister at Treby Magna, Felix expresses his ambitions about changing the world because he regards the world as “not a fine place for a good many of the people in it” (56). It is not quite clear about what he means by “a good many of the people,” with reference to the nature of “good” and in terms of the social ranks of those good people, but Rufus’s impression of Felix can clarifies the ambiguity of the word “good” in Felix’s remarks as equivalent of “honest and true” in moral implication: “I discern in him a love for whatsoever things are honest and true, which I would fain believe to be an earnest of further endowment with the wisdom that is from on high….I feel a great enlargement in this young man’s presence” (65). Felix’s moral rectitude is revealed in his refusal to inherit his dead father’s occupation and his determination to prohibit his mother from selling quack medicine which had been the main source of his family income since his father’s practice as a quack doctor: “I know that the Cathartic Pills are a drastic compound which may be as bad as poison to half the people who swallow them; that the Elixir is
an absurd farrago of a dozen incompatible things; and that the Cancer Cure might as well be bottled ditch-water” (55). Felix’s moral conscience is significant in two aspects: one is that his decision to become a watchmaker⁶ instead of working as a quack doctor is an attempt to sever himself from the past, his father. Instead, he aspires to become an independent man with the spirit of self-help. The other is, in broad terms, that he represents a symbolic voice of the call for the spiritual regeneration of Victorian England suffering from the moral deterioration, disorder, and injustice, in particular, in the social and political conditions of the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832. As David Carroll notes, the characters in Felix Holt can act as “a response to these conditions out of which it emerges and upon which it re-acts in the creation of a world-view” (George Eliot and the Conflict 208). For Victorian intellectuals, the imagery of medicine suggests the analogous relationship between human body and politics of the State. In the chapter entitled “Morrison’s Pill” in Past and Present, Thomas Carlyle contends that instead of seeking for an imaginary medicine for curing the troubles of English industrial society, people should change their ways of life and cultivate their souls of discernment:

I am sorry I have got no Morrison’s Pill for curing the maladies of Society. It were infinitely handier if we had a Morrison’s Pill, Act of Parliament or remedial measure, which men could swallow, one good time, and then go on in their old courses, cleared from all miseries and mischiefs! Unluckily we have none such.... There will no ‘thing’ be done that will cure you. There will a radical universal alteration of your regimen and way of life take place; there will a most agonizing divorce between you and your chimeras, luxuries and falsities, take place.... We are governed, very infallibly, by the ‘sham-hero,’—whose name is Quack, whose work and governance is Plausibility, and also is Falsity and Fatuity.... Thou there, the thing for thee to do is, if possible, to cease
to be a hollow sounding-shell of hearsays, egoisms, purblind dilettantisms; and become, were it on the infinitely small scale, a faithful discerning soul. (26-28)⁷

Carlyle’s emphasis on “a radical universal alteration of your regimen and way of life” and on the need for “a faithful discerning soul” even “on the infinitely small scale” seems to be concomitant with Eliot’s concern with the gradual melioration in the matters of the social and political reforms rather than a cataclysmic change of the social and political systems. However, for Carlyle, the word “radical” means that the call for a reform of the mind or the heart is the urgent and ultimate radicalism for the property-owning and upper classes rather than for the working and lower classes. As Philip Rosenberg points out, Carlyle’s idea of a reform of human spirit actually arose from his disagreement with the Chartists who believed that social reform could be achieved through the democratization of political systems, although he and the Chartists fundamentally conceded to the idea that a reform of social systems in England would be necessary for avoiding such a violence as occurred in the French Revolution (135). While the democratic Chartists aimed to achieve the extension of the franchise which would be expected to rule out the favoritism of the parliament for the landed and manufacturing classes, Carlyle was skeptical about the voting rights of the working classes because he believed that democracy was another name for a political system of the economic principles of laissez-faire; Carlyle, in other words, recognized the democratic parliament would not work on behalf of the working classes. This implication of Felix’s Radicalism accords with Carlylean skepticism about the universal suffrage. Unlike Lyon’s assumption that Felix’s proclamation of radicalism represents “Root-and-branch man,” the demand for the abolition of episcopacy (226), what he aims to do in his radicalism is, Felix says, moral reform nuanced with Carlyle’s idea of a reform of human spirit: “I want to go to some roots a good deal lower down than the franchise” (226).
Carlyle proposed an activist maxim that “Doubt of any sort cannot be removed except by Action” (*Sartor Resartus* 145). But the problem was that the Carlylean action was so vague that he could not suggest any specific guide to the people except for his moral exhortation. Carlyle’s exhortation for the ruling classes to revolutionize their moral sensibilities, however, reflects his “failure to have anything more substantial to offer” regarding action (Rosenberg 141). Thus Carlyle’s call for the moral reform can serve as a warning for the ruling classes to fear the possibility that the working classes might turn into a violent mob: “unless the higher orders figure out some method of mending their ways, the proletariat will do it for them, ‘and in a fashion that will please nobody’” (143). Commenting on the ambivalence of a situation in which doubt and despondency coexist with hope engendered by the Reform Bill of 1832, the narrator of *Felix Holt* assumes the Carlylean voice of anxiety over the possibility of the working-class populace becoming violent “monsters” despite a high expectation of the political reform which is expected to change the world:

Crying abuses—‘bloated paupers,’ ‘bloated pluralists,’ and other corruptions hindering men from being wise and happy—had to be fought against and slain. Such a time is a time of hope. Afterwards, when the corpses of those monsters have been held up to the public wonder and abhorrence, and wisdom and happiness do not follow, but rather a more abundant breeding of the foolish and unhappy, comes a time of doubt and despondency. But in the great Reform-year Hope was mighty: the prospect of Reform had even served the voters instead of drink; and in one place, at least, there had been a ‘dry election.’ (157-58)

The narrator’s remarks about the proliferation of the ignorant and dissatisfied working-class populace can support, as Williams notes, Felix Holt’s “petty cynicism of a mind that has lost,
albeit only temporarily, its capacity for human respect” (107). However, Felix’s misanthropy is not directed toward the entire species of human beings but toward specifically the working-classes who have lost a sense of moral rectitude and the politicians who have tried to take advantage of those working people to achieve their own political purposes. To Harold Transome, who argues that Felix lacks a sense of tolerance, Felix demonstrates that political candidates and the working-class voters should take into account “not whether we can do away with all the nuisances in the world, but with a particular nuisance under our noses” (161). Accordingly, Felix seems to be a kind of “speculative misanthrope” whom Percival Stockdale categorizes in *An Essay on Misanthropy* (1783) as a type of the benevolent misanthrope: a speculative misanthrope “is as acute, and severe in his observations, as he is gentle, and placid in is conduct,” but he rages “against the selfishness, malignity, and barbarity of mankind” (qtd. in Lane 7-8). Considering his desire to become a radical and his vision for the working-classes, Felix can, indeed, come across as a benevolent misanthrope who holds on to the moral uprightness and who hates political swindlers and demagogues. As he elaborates his vision to the working-classes at the Sugar Loaf, Mr. Chubb’s public ale house, Felix emphasizes the importance of education for the working-class children in Sproxton: Felix hopes “to move these men [the working men in Sproxton] to save something from their drink and pay a schoolmaster for their boys” (114). Demonstrating that the political reform must be preceded by the moral reform through educating the lower-class children, Felix urges the working-class people in the Sugar Loaf to recognize that “Till they can show there’s something they love better than swilling themselves with ale, extension of the suffrage can never mean anything for them but extension of boozing” (114).

Felix’s emphasis on the necessity of sobriety functions as a prerequisite to the political empowerment of the working classes. His claim on the abstinence as a way of reshaping society

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is also resonant with the temperance movement of the 1830s which flourished among “sociopolitical radicals who preached a belligerent form of ‘self-help’” (Fahey 789). Felix’s enthusiasm for education along with his claim on the anti-spirits can remind the reader of Joseph Livesey, a self-made Preston cheese merchant with a work-class background as a handloom weaver, who made an effort to curb the extension of boozing through the education of the working-class people. Establishing “the local mechanics’ institution” and “a mutual improvement society in his cockpit” (Harrison 118), Livesey also articulated his rationale for promoting his temperance reform through publishing monthly the *Moral Reformer* and by delivering his *Malt Lecture* to the public: “the greatness of a country consists not so much in its population, its wealth, or even in its general intelligence, as in its virtue” (qtd. in Harrison 121); “*Religious principle and moral character are wanting;* these are the true base of every improvement” (qtd. in Tholfsen 70-71; emphasis in orig.).

Political maneuvering to take advantage of the lower-classes’ drinking habits is explicit in the election campaign engineered by Harold’s agents in Sproxton. The Sugar Loaf scene portrays a clash between Felix’s moral aspiration and a political campaign exploiting the lower-class people who indulge in their appetites for alcohol. The Sugar Loaf is a symbolically represented locus in which different types of ideologies and consciousnesses in the mid-Victorian England collide with each other. When John Johnson, Harold’s election agent from London, treats the working folks by buying ale, Felix regards him as one of the “scoundrels who turn the best hopes of men into by-words for cant and dishonesty” (160). Felix’s strong commitment to fostering the moral consciousness to the lower classes is now disrupted by Johnson who appears to be a kind of a toady assuming an obsequious attitude toward them only for Harold’s electioneering campaign. Mr. Chubb, landlord of the Sugar Loaf, forms a politico-
materialistic collusion with the agent by providing his ale house as a political arena for the
electioneering campaign. Mr. Chubb insinuates his materialistically-oriented frame of mind
when he conceives of a radical as “a new and agreeable kind of lick-spittle who fawned on the
poor instead of on the rich” and who “was likely to send customers to a ‘public’” (116). Thus the
public ale house becomes a miniature of Victorian society in which the moral, political, and
economic consciousnesses are encountered or sometimes constitute complicity for maximizing
each interest. The Sugar Loaf even facilitates Felix’s moral inculcation toward the lower-class
workers because he can readily maintain contact with them in the ale house. Their gullibility and
waywardness are revealed in their capricious attitudes toward Felix; they usually express their
sympathy and preference for Felix because he is “one of themselves, only much more knowing”
and “a working man who had seen many distant parts, but who must be very poor, since he never
drank more than a pint or so” (120). However, they treat Felix’s moral intervention as an
irritating nuisance to the boozy atmosphere stimulated by Johnson’s service to them. The
working-classes become an instrument for contributing to the ideologies of moralists, politicians,
and the bourgeoisie. For the bourgeois, the working class becomes, as Jürgen Habermas notes,
“consuming subjects,” the growing need for economic goods of which can be a major source for
the bourgeois income (113). For the public moralist with the political consciousness of stability,
the working class must be educated in “order for education to reduce the threat posed by
unassimilated groups” that “must be imagined as otherwise than a threat—whether potential or
vitiating” (Shuman 61).

Felix’s strong emphasis on the value of individual judgment reflects his stubborn and
inflexible disobedience. When Nuttwood, the grocer, is complaining to Lyon about the obstinate
demeanor of the choir members, Felix disagrees with him by arguing that everybody has his or
her own tune so that one cannot deny private judgment of the melody. Rufus’s claim of the importance of an organic harmony, however, runs counter to Felix’s value of individualistic uniqueness:

You yourself are a lover of freedom, and a bold rebel against usurping authority. But the right to rebellion is the right to seek a higher rule, and not to wander in mere lawlessness.… And even as in music, where all obey and concur to one end, so that each has the joy of contributing to a whole whereby he is ravished and lifted up into the courts of heaven. (131)

Rufus’s concern with a harmonious unity represents Eliot’s appreciation of music in light of the idea of an organic whole. In her 1855 essay, “Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar,” Eliot points out that an opera must be “no mosaic of melodies stuck together with no other method than is supplied by accidental contrast, no mere succession of ill-prepared crises, but an organic whole, which grows up like a palm, its earliest portion containing the germ and prevision of all the rest” (Essays 102). In her portrayal of a harmonic union of Gilfil and Catrina in “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story,” Eliot suggests that music, the exchange of their musical performance of harpsichord, can function as a medium by which the two people share their sympathies with each other. In the novella, Eliot upholds the validity of the Feuerbachian idea of music as a vehicle for conveying the feeling of love: “Music is the language of feeling” (Essence 3-4) which brings into effect the interpersonal experience of “the power of love” (4). Also, in Daniel Deronda, the composer Klesmer, after listening to Gwendolen’s song, proposes the standards of music with the implication of cultural and moral values which necessitate the enlargement of self for creating the effect of universality:
You sing in tune, and you have a pretty fair organ. But you produce your notes badly; and that music which you sing is beneath you. It is a form of melody which expresses a puerile state of culture—a dandling, canting, see-saw kind of stuff—the passion and thought of people without any breadth of horizon. There is a sort of self-satisfied folly about every phrase of such melody: no cries of deep, mysterious passion—no conflict—no sense of the universal. It makes men small as they listen to it. Sing now something larger. And I shall see. (42-43)

Klesmer’s view of music cannot be dissociated with the enlargement of aesthetic sympathy toward the humanity. Adopting music as a means of underscoring the significance of an organic harmony in the relationship among parts for the whole, Eliot expands the implication of the Spencerian idea of organic evolutionism to the levels of society and politics in *Felix Holt*. Published at John Blackwood’s suggestion that she “could do a first rate address to the Working Men on their new responsibilities” (*Letters* 4:395), Eliot’s 1868 essay, “Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt,” also presents the notion of social organism endorsed by the voice of Felix Holt in the novel which actually resonates with Rufus’s idea of an organic unity as exemplified in the anecdote of the church choir. Felix’s embracing the social organism in the analogy of the State to the human body thus registers his maturation engendered by Rufus’s teaching about the importance of a harmonic unity among members of a social structure: “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” (*Essays* 420). The critics’ argument that Felix’s demonstration of social organism is a mouthpiece of Eliot can be restated in a way that Felix is a palimpsest of Rufus who can be better identified with the voice of Eliot from the social and political perspective.9
Rufus’s self-conscious projection of himself against the “danger of absorption within the narrow bounds of self” “towards action which had a wider bearing” indicates his effort to engage himself in the ministerial vocation for humanity, in particular, “the welfare of England at large,” by internalizing the Feuerbachian idea of God (149). By relinquishing his egoistic self, Rufus practices the “logic of the projecting process” in which he reflects “the perfect exemplification of human nature,” that is, “God,” in contrast with himself as an inferior, unworthy, and flawed object of the projected image (Harvey, Feuerbach 108). Rufus’s self-knowledge of his own weakness arises from his attempt to reinterpret the past in the frame of the “the wider relations of things” or the betterment of the public (150). His past is characterized by a conflict between his ministerial duty as a pastor of an Independent Congregation and his individual affection for a vagrant French Catholic woman. Despite his acknowledgement of the difference in religion between them as well as his awareness of social and religious duty, Rufus could not deny his love for Esther’s mother, Annette Ledru. Rather than following the strict rules and doctrine of his Christian religion, Rufus decided to confess his feeling for her. The dynamic of confessional sympathy working between Janet and Tryan in “Janet’s Repentance” also holds true in Felix Holt of the case of Annette and Rufus, with a particular emphasis placed on the reciprocity of sympathy: Rufus’s “thorough renunciation” and “tenderness” (80) for Annette stirred in her the “vivid consciousness and sympathy” during his illness (79). Rufus’s self-sacrifice for Annette and Esther enacts what Cohen terms “a profession of renunciation” (133); he genuinely carries out the Christian virtues of self-sacrifice and self-renunciation by devoting himself to caring for them in the domestic so that he achieves the true meaning of his ecclesiastical vocation not in the institutionalized and rule-governed Church, but more significantly, in the household instead. The reciprocal unfolding of sympathy is not disinherited, but it still remains vibrant, after Annette’s
death, in Esther’s attempt to embrace her step-father’s narrative of “a confession—as revelation to this beloved child of his own miserable weakness and error”: sympathy between the self and the other is evident when Esther simultaneously experiences the enlargement of herself by “a vision of passion and struggle, of delight and renunciation” occasioned by Rufus’s confession, and comes to recognize him as “the object of a new sympathy” (216). Here, the boundary between the subject and object of sympathy becomes blurred, and they constitute an organic whole which could pave the way for the possibility of enfolding their sympathy for others.

Both Felix and Rufus advocate the idea of a larger self who can go beyond the limits of egoism for the pursuit of self-sacrifice for others. The main differences between them, however, lie in the extent to which one can enact the ideal in the actual life, and in the question of whether or not one can struggle with a conflict between one’s public duty and one’s private desire in the process of enlarging the self. The practicality of sympathy and the experience of conflict can be essential in Rufus’s ecclesiastical duty of self-renunciation concretely carried out in domesticity. In contrast, Felix’s ideal of his working-class vocation is much more rhetorically expressed than practically demonstrated except for his decision not to inherit his father’s legacy of quack medicine and later for his intention to lead the violent mob out of the town. Even the two exceptional cases do not orchestrate certain aspects of conflicts in the inner self of Felix Holt, however. The manifestation of Felix’s sympathy for others, unlike Rufus’s sympathy only for Annette and Esther, is far from being confessional, mutually-oriented, dialogic, and self-reflective. Felix is, as Terry Eagleton points out, “an urban version of Adam Bede” in the post-industrial “urban context which can only enforce its effective displacement, transplanting a marooned, moralising Adam Bed to the town” (Criticism 116). Although both Adam and Felix fail to speak for the working-class political interest, the pre-industrial carpenter is at least
different from the post-industrial watch-maker because, from the standpoint of self-reflexivity, Adam is able to ruminate on the weaknesses of his character—in particular, his inability to “master my own will and temper, and go right against my own pride” (*Adam Bede* 188).

Felix’s rigid and inflexible self-assertion is exemplified in his rebuke against Esther’s aesthetic tastes. When Esther expresses her preference for Byron’s poems, Felix regards the poet as a “misanthropic debauchee” and fulminates against Esther’s “roundabout euphuisms” (62, 63). He expresses his repugnance for her favorite gentlemen of “the Byronic-bilious style” and “gentlemen like [her] Rénés” on the grounds that they live in the world of melancholia, idle suffering, and the infinite (intangible, unreal, and abstract) rather than of the finite (mundane, real, and concrete) (221). In light of the Carlylean moral earnestness, Felix sets his idea of “the finest fellow of all” against Esther’s Byronic gentlemen by arguing that his fellow would be “the man who had the most powers and the fewest selfish wants” and also would help the needed people in the miserable world (221). Felix’s aspiration for becoming such a fellow is so strong that he identifies himself with the sanctified and conceptualized humanitarian in his imaginary which wipes out the demarcation between the ideal and the actual: “I do choose to withdraw myself from the push and the scramble for money and position,” he says, and “I care for the people who live now and will not be living when the long-run comes. As it is, I prefer going shares with the unlucky” (221, 222). Felix’s rhetoric of the virtuous human is self-contradictory because when he argues that the finest fellow is concerned with the concrete, actual, and worldly life, Felix construes the notion of such a human being in an abstract, unreal, and imaginary way: Felix’s self-fashioning of “the finest fellow of all” in his social and moral discourse fails to be specifically realized in the real world.
Felix’s flaw arises from his absolute prioritization of the abstract ideal without consideration of diversity, unpredictability, and specificity of human activity, and from his coercive rhetoric of standardizing aesthetic, social, and political phenomena with a vision of his professional model. Felix’s denunciation of Esther’s reading of Chateaubriand’s book exemplifies another self-contradiction inherent in his rhetoric of a morally perfect self. When he criticizes Esther for her aesthetic sensibilities, calling them “idle fancy and selfish inclination for shirking [her father’s] teaching and giving [her] soul up to trifles” (108), he categorizes her tastes and refinement as simply “a littleness that shrank from severe truth” of the world in which “myriads of men and women are ground by wrong and misery, and tainted with pollution” (109). Felix’s edifying rationale for a larger self epitomizes the problem of valorizing his grandiose self of altruism as superior and legitimized by submerging Esther’s petty, worldly sensibilities under his own abstract sublimity. Felix’s self-glorifying ambition for altruistic vocation is even subservient to forming his distorted and male-dominated view of women by conceiving of them as inimical to the male professional achievement due to their triviality and cumbersomeness. He warns Esther not of becoming a hindrance to the male social reformer’s “manly” work:

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. (109)
Felix’s misogynistic attack on women’s pettiness and their status as a threat to men’s public vocation is typical in the Victorian idea of reducing women to the anomalies that must be under surveillance and checked by the higher systems of rules and authorities. Felix’s self-denying ambition to devote himself to the requisite working-classes admonishes Esther that the female inclination for trivialities such as her aesthetic tastes must be subordinated to the high drama of male professional vision aiming to widen its horizon for the public weal. Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of the dominant ideology of taste as a solidification of the class distinction can be adopted to explain, in a modified way, the case of the sexual politics exemplified in Felix’s denunciation of Esther’s aesthetic tastes. Bourdieu argues that although the dominant class regards the taste of high culture as open to anybody in any class, upper-class people exclusively appropriate the pleasures of the high culture, taking advantage of their cultural and material background which enables them to enjoy the aesthetic objects. The discourse of upper-class high culture contains a self-deception because, ironically, appreciating the taste that transcends money actually costs money (Distinction 227-28). Bourdieu’s contention that “tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance (‘sick-making’) of the tastes of others” debunks the myth of the dominant class ideology of taste by revealing that it humiliates the dominated by their economic privilege over the other (56). The material advantage of the upper class humiliates the dominated so effectively that the economically unprivileged “are induced to accept the very standards by which they are dismissed as inferior” (Garson 28). Bourdieu’s examination of the material, economic condition as a prerequisite for the appreciation of aesthetic artifacts, on the one hand, is employed by Felix when he criticizes Esther’s elitism and her aristocratic tastes on the grounds that she is invested in the luxuries and fancy, ignorant of the “severe truth” of the outside world as well as of her identity as a daughter of a
nonconformist church minister (109). On the other hand, Felix, as an advocate of morality and a social reformer, takes up the dominant discourse of the upper-middle classes’ tastes of morality by excluding the aesthetic tastes of women and denouncing the working class for a lack of moral taste.

Felix establishes another hierarchy of sexual inequality in his politics of morality by degrading women as inferior and anomalous in his attempt to equalize the aesthetic taste with an index of the morally deteriorated state of mind. Felix’s Bourdieuan critique of aesthetic elitism ironically challenges the nature of patriarchal, moral elitism deeply ingrained in his own discourse when it poses a threat to women behind its polarization of male nobleness/female triviality, moral taste/aesthetic taste, male altruism/female egoism. Felix’s consciousness of his own moral superiority over women’s bad taste and petty desires is corroborated by his male-dominated discourse of ethics, just as the upper-class consciousness of their superiority over other classes is supported by their economically dominant discourse of aesthetic taste. Like Savonarola in Romola who emerges as an authoritative guide to Romola by urging her to sacrifice herself to the Florentine people, Felix assumes the position of a male mentor for Esther whom he deems to be living an inferior, vulgar, and materialistic existence. He embodies the law of an ethical imperative, or the Law of Father, which is transcendent, patriarchal, and dominant: “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” (108). In addition to putting a premium on the moral strictness of the Hebraic culture, Felix transfers cultural values to the division of gender roles that patriarchy endorses instead of seeking to harmonize the values of morality and aesthetic beauty.
Esther’s response to Felix’s misogynistic admonition ambivalently combines humiliation and pleasure, suggesting that she tries to sublimate a loss of her libidinal desire for worldly fashions for an expectation of a romantic pleasure. Though humiliated by his caustic language, Esther nevertheless feels herself “shaken in her self-contentment,” with the assumption that Felix, infatuated with her, wants her to change because “she was worth more pains than the women of whom he took no notice” (110). When she conceives of Felix’s harsh admonition as a reflex of his romantic desire for her, Esther internalizes the aggressive Felix as a love object or the benevolent father-figure on whom she can rely; the internalization of the supervising and controlling figure from the external control reflects Esther’s effort to deflect her anxiety over the loss of a father-figure or the disappearance of the object of love in a more positive way. By imprisoning herself in the imagination of romantic love, she utilizes the internalizing mechanism as a means of warding off her fear of helplessness or loss of love. Esther’s romantic imprisonment suggests that she substitutes the charismatic image of Felix for her desire for material ornaments. By demonstrating his unifying vision of moral integrity, consistence, and inflexibility corroborated by his physiological characteristics, Felix successfully produces his aura, an authentic, unique image of himself, which mesmerizes and fascinates Esther who configures him as the object of her love.12 When he tells Esther that most women, unless they are “Saint Theresas or Elizabeth Frys,” are likely to think of his social vision as madness, Felix implicitly discharges the inscrutability of his own aura which etherealizes him into a sublime object of politics and sexuality by way of religiously honorable nominator. The invocation of awe and mystery through the references of religion and philanthropy characterizes Felix’s self-abstraction and ambiguity about his identity. The twenty-six-year-old Felix’s physical
characteristics are portrayed as attractive, arresting, and charismatic when he delivers an
impromptu speech to the Duffield audience on nomination day:

Felix Holt’s face had the look of habitual meditative abstraction from objects of mere
personal vanity or desire, which is the peculiar stamp of culture, and makes a very
roughly-cut face worthy to be called ‘the human face divine.’ Even lions and dogs know
a distinction between men’s glances; and doubtless those Duffield men, in the
expectation with which they looked up at Felix, were unconsciously influenced by the
grandeur of his full yet firm mouth, and the calm clearness of his grey eyes, which were
somehow unlike what they were accustomed to see along with an old brown velveteen
coat, and an absence of chin-propping. When he began to speak, the contrast of voice was
still stronger than that of appearance. (248-49)

Although it can be arguable whether or not Felix’s physical characteristics serve as the
metaphoric representation of an authoritative “voice” of the novel, he is depicted as a character
of self-sameness, transparency, and homogeneity, displaying the correspondence between his
physicality and his moral spirituality. Felix tries to expand his individual correspondence
between physiognomy and personality to the level of the state politic on the assumption that the
cultivation of the human mind must precede the physical systems of politics. By comparing “the
water or steam” to the “the nature of things,” Felix demonstrates that the operation of the state
politic (the engine) relies on the movement of the nature of human mind (the steam-water): “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” (250). When examining the perception of resistance, Herbert Spencer
proposes in *The Principles of Psychology* the correspondence between bodily movement and
mental activity, arguing that the perception of muscular tension “consists in the establishment of a relation between the muscular sensation itself and that state of consciousness which we call will” (242-43). Eliot’s portrayal of Adam Bede has already exemplified this unity of physiological traits and psychological states revealed in the correspondence between the strong fibers of his arms and his moral fibers. In *Felix Holt*, the hero’s arresting voice also conveys the cadence of morality as exemplified in his appearance to the audience on nomination day. However, the unifying correspondence between body and mind render Felix dogmatic, inflexible, and autonomous, ignoring the resistant, recalcitrant, and heterogeneous existence of the other outside that he cannot control by homogenizing the world.¹⁴

Felix’s utopian vision of transforming the public by way of creating the perfect citizen for the ideal condition of the state rests on his optimistic view of progress in society which is ironically triggered by his dystopian diagnosis of the reality of the working classes and, moreover, accelerated by his dissatisfaction with the status quo of society. Although he equates himself with other working people by proclaiming that “I’m a workingman myself” (249), Felix contradicts himself through his contempt for the working-class by comparing them to animalistic and irrational existence. When Rufus says that it is necessary to “free men from the stifled life of political nullity, and bring them into what Milton calls ‘the liberal air,’” Felix expresses his cynical, misanthropic, and scornful opinion of the working classes: “But while Caliban is Caliban, though you multiply him by a million, he’ll worship every Trinculo that carries a bottle. I forget, though—you don’t read Shakespeare, Mr. Lyon” (226).¹⁵ Dichotomizing himself and his working-class fellows by moral standards, Felix idealizes himself as “a demagogue of a new sort; an honest one” who can tell them that “they are blind and foolish” (224). Just as Matthew Arnold divides the classes in the racially-charged terms, such as “Barbarians” (the aristocracy) or
the “raw and half-developed” Populace that is equivalent to savagery (the working class) (143), Felix, referring to the working class as “Caliban,” is not free from the moral consciousness of the Enlightenment laden with, as Robert J. C. Young points out, the “anthropological account of culture which had adapted historical difference into the differences between European and non-European societies” (59). Thus his discourse of the moral reform rests on the premises of self-denial, self-contradiction, or self-alienation from his proclaimed identity of the working class.

Moreover, the differentiation of the “best” self of culture from the “savage” other of non-culture is accompanied by the colonial desire to wield its affirmative nationalist power over the colonized. Felix’s inculcation of the working-classes with an emphasis placed on the moral citizenship stems from the affiliation between the idea of culture and the Victorian tacit assumption of the working-classes as the anthropologically inferior savage. As Edward Said argues, the Arnoldian notion of culture exemplifies the case of “affiliation,” a hegemonic association between the idea and the state power, “an active identification between culture and the state” (World 174).16 Furthermore, the discourse of culture serves as “a deterrent to rampant disorder” which ultimately aims to legitimize and rationalize the suppression of the working class in the domestic politics as well as “the subordination and victimization of the native” abroad (Said, Culture 130, 131). Although his method of moral reform sounds vague and undefined, Felix is prompted by a good intention to help the working-classes change their frames of mind for the betterment of their life. His discourse of the Arnoldian culture, however, is controlled by the underlying logic of a power relation: the domination and the subordination. By affiliating himself with the ideological discourse of the dominant social group’s moral taste, Felix, consciously or unconsciously, demonstrates a duplicity and contradiction implicit in his political identity as a working-class radical.
Felix’s concern with cultivating human nature accords with Matthew Arnold’s idea of culture as “a study of perfection,” or the force of “the moral and social passion for doing good” (Culture and Anarchy 91; emphasis in orig.). To highlight the significance of cultivating human nature as the crux of the state politic, Felix articulates Arnold’s aspiration for human perfection as “a harmonious expansion of all the powers which make the beauty and worth of human nature” (94). By setting the idea of culture as the basis of the state politic against “animality,” Arnold endows culture with “an authority” and “a firm State-power” in the nation as well as in the individual (135). For Arnold, culture aims to embody the ideal of the best self, the perfection of human nature—“sweetness and light”—in the state politic (112). When the state is composed of the collective unity of the individuals into the best self, the cultured individual, it incarnates a culture of humanity. Insofar as culture aims to transform the individual member of the state into a “best” self, culture is, as Terry Eagleton points out, “a kind of ethical pedagogy which will fit us for political citizenship by liberating the ideal or collective self buried within each of us, a self which finds supreme representation in the universal realm of the state” (Idea 7). To characterize the nature of the best self, Arnold uses the words, “united, impersonal, at harmony” (134). He firmly believes that the impersonalized and harmonious entity in the whole unit of society can be an antidote to the anarchy of society. Claiming that “culture suggests the idea of the State,” Arnold tries to establish the culture of the best self or the idealized collective self (135). Central to the function of criticism is the angst of political practice and engagement implicated in Arnold’s idea of culture; for Arnold, criticism, like culture, is involved with an activity of the mind immune from the world of practice. Arnold contends in “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” that the objective of criticism is “to try to know the best that is known and thought in the world” (268), and that the rule of criticism is “disinterestedness” which
is to follow “a free play of the mind” by “keeping aloof from what is called ‘the practical view of things,’” by “steadily refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas” (270).

Felix’s idea of the Arnoldian culture takes ascendency over Esther’s “native tendencies towards luxury, fastidiousness, and scorn of mock gentility” by conceiving of them as a combination of the Barbarians’ attachment to the outward beauty and the Philistine’s desire for pursuing materialistic enjoyment (110). According to Arnold, the Barbarians are the shallow people of the aristocratic class who try to gratify their appetite for the external beauty, fashion, and manners: the culture of the Barbarians is “an exterior culture mainly” and consists “principally in outward gifts and graces, in looks, manners, accomplishments, prowess” (141). Furthermore, the Philistines are the vulgar people of the middle class who seek to gain material wealth, “the people who believe most that our greatness and welfare are proved by our being very rich, and who most give their lives and thoughts to becoming rich” (Culture and Anarchy 97). In his ambitious attempt to “to withdraw [himself] from the push and the scramble for money and position” (221), however, Felix can be understood as one of the Arnoldian aliens who seeks to achieve the human perfection beyond the boundary of his class ideology: “persons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by a general humane spirit, by the love of human perfection” (Culture and Anarchy 146). From his radical, or the Arnoldian alien, point of view, Felix regards Esther’s taste for luxury and aristocratic sensibilities as a mixture of the staunch individualism of the Barbarians and the vulgarity of the Philistines. By setting her worldly sensibilities against his virtuous ideal of the social good, Felix provokes Esther to feel a sense of guilt, or conscience what Sigmund Freud terms “social anxiety.” Freud argues in Civilization and Its Discontents that:
The tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego that is subjected to it, is called by us the sense of guilt; it expresses itself as a need for punishment. Civilization, therefore, obtains mastery over the individual’s dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city. (84)

By condemning Esther’s aristocratic pretensions in the position of the mastering super-ego, Felix’s severe, intolerant, and authoritative voice of social justice keeps heightening the sense of discipline and punishment in her conscience. Just as the Freudian concept of civilization is “a necessary course of development from the family to humanity as a whole,” entailing “an increase of the sense of guilt” in the individual (96), so does Felix’s idea of culture threaten Esther to diminish her appetite for aesthetic sensibilities and fashion, and to erase her individual self for the benefit of the public. Recognizing that her worldly taste and aesthetic sensibilities are inferior and antagonistic to Felix’s discourse of moral seriousness, Esther exposes herself to the surveillance of the conscience, or a feeling of guilt, which makes her feel “haunted by self-criticism” and “dogged by inward questions” (110). Felix’s rhetoric of morality forces Esther to transform her identity from the aesthetic to the ethical subject. Felix desires what Simon Critchley calls “the demand of the good” which becomes “the fundamental principle of the subject’s articulation” (20). In addition to crushing Esther’s aestheticism, Felix’s moral diatribe against her attachment to materiality demonstrates its power to constitute her ethical subjectivity by which she may suffer from a guilty conscience when she sets her aesthetic subjectivity against the standards of the best self. The purpose of Felix’s moral injunction thus is to make Esther ashamed of her transgression, or her failure, of the demand of the good.
Rather than advocating the political praxis and active engagement in political reform, Felix adheres to the reform of the mind, and his didactic detour to politics is in line with Edmund Burke’s legacy of focusing on the world of ideas which Arnold tries to settle in the political and intellectual climates of England when he feared the violent mob of the Hyde Park Riots of 1866. Indeed, Felix shares with Arnold the same kind of anxiety over the violence instigated by the mob in political movement. The riot of the election day of North Loamshire represents the frustration of Felix’s confident attempt to achieve and realize his vision of morality amid the Arnoldian Populace. His moral optimism sustained by the harmonic unity of the body and the mind is encountered in the chaotic forces of the rabble which destabilize Felix’s desire for normalizing and subordinating them under the power of the Enlightenment. The mob, with their bombarding turnips and potatoes and their ransacking weapons and missiles from the hardware shop, is a rather extremely represented but harsh and challenging reality of the world which hampers Felix’s utopian project of reforming the mind of the masses. Intolerant of “a savage roar” of the mob and the “reckless disorder,” Felix assumes the attitude of a mob-leader who intends to safeguard the town by leading the rabble out to the north side (265). Felix’s appearance as a mock leader of the mob dramatically suggests his centralized power to drive away the threatening existence of the social outcasts from the center to the periphery. The centripetal ambition to marginalize the violent “other” by using centrifugal force is coterminous with the cunning ruse implicit in the enlightenment of culture by suppressing the dangerous other under the name of historical progress. When he tries to subsume the politics of the working class under the province of ethics by emphasizing the need for the making of well-tamed and educated citizens, Felix employs the colonialist’s discourse of legitimizing the subjugation of the colonized as well as, in Eagleton’s terms, “the rhetoric of the civics class”: “Those who proclaim
the need for a period of ethical incubation to prepare men and women for political citizenship include those who deny colonial peoples the right to self-government until they are ‘civilized’ enough to exercise it responsibly” (Idea 7).

Felix’s killing of the constable Tucker indicates that the hero’s repugnance against violence in his moral consciousness is subverted by the violent power of his physicality which had been suppressed but always ready to be used. The unity between the mind and the body with reference to Felix’s morality is ironically perpetuated in another correspondence between his perception of his own physical power and the strength of his body in terms of the potentiality of physical violence: “Felix had a terrible arm: he knew that he was dangerous; and he avoided the conditions that might cause him exasperation, as he would have avoided intoxicating drinks if he had been in danger of intemperance” (243). Earlier, Felix’s moral earnestness to exert its influence over Esther was accompanied by his nature of violence when he expressed his desire for cutting off her locks: “I should like to come and scold her every day, and make her cry and cut her fine hair off” (65). That Felix is “potentially violent toward everyone” (Bode 778) turns out to be true in his murdering Tucker although it occurred accidentally when the constable mistook Felix’s efforts to rescue Spratt from the mob for an attempt to execute him.

Felix’s trial highlights the function of sympathy, or fellow-feeling, in moving beyond the limits of enlightenment culture which Felix advocates due to his uncompromising and somewhat egoistic pride of moral consciousness. From the legal point of view, Felix cannot escape from the fact that he has murdered the constable. Although his willingness to reform society was strong, and his motive to re-direct the rioting mob was innocent, Felix was not able to rescue himself from consequences of the incident before the law. He encounters a dilemma occasioned by a disjuncture between intention and consequence; his moral consciousness tending to simplify the
status quo and human matters in society by the dominant ideology of the enlightened citizenship is undermined by the incongruity between his idealization of the rule of nature and the harsh reality or contingency of the order of things. He is frustrated by the occasion leading to unpleasant, unexpected, and contingent consequences: “the multitudinous small wickednesses of small selfish ends, really undirected towards any larger result, had issued in widely-shared mischief that might yet be hideous” (270).

The Treby Magna courtroom scene of Felix Holt additionally endorses Esther’s sympathy for the patriarchal hero who once denigrated her for her trivial feminine sensibilities. Esther’s testimony to Felix’s honesty registers the effectiveness of female power engineered by fellow-feelings over the rigorous and strict formulas of the patriarchy. One may argue that Esther’s reverential testimony for Felix serves as an index of her abandoning her own female independence, embracing instead “the patriarchal role of Felix’s submissive instrument” (Harsh 164), but the trial scene highlights that Esther’s feminine aesthetic sensibilities subvert Felix’s rigid masculine rhetoric of a culture of ideas. By helping to rescue Felix by her “trivial” feminine aestheticism and materialism he had denunciated as antithetical to his noble vocation of patriarchy, Esther establishes the authenticity of her aesthetic values that destabilizes the narrow-mindedness and aggressiveness of Felix’s masculine and disinterested intellect. Blending her aesthetic tastes with her ethical tastes motivated by a feeling of sympathy, Esther embodies what Cohen calls a sort of “aesthetic-ethic hybridization” which defies the clear-cut and hierarchical demarcation of the classes and the gender-roles (148). Being charged of manslaughter and sentenced to a four-year-imprisonment, however, Felix is ironically exonerated by the feminine and ornamental beauty of Esther that he once compared to a “peacock” and tried to wipe out from his desire by cutting off her fine hair (65). Esther’s beauty and her sympathy for Felix
trigger Sir Maximus Debarry’s effort with his brother the Rector Mr. Lingon to pardon the
imprisoned hero:

Confound it! what’s the use of mewing him up for four years? Example? Nonsense. Will
there be a man knocked down the less for it? That girl made me cry. Depend upon it,
whether she’s going to marry Transome or not, she’s been fond of Holt—in her poverty,
you know. She’s modest, brave, beautiful woman. I’d ride a steeplechase, old as I am, to
gratify her feelings. Hang it! the fellow’s a good fellow if she thinks so. And he threw out
a fine sneer, I thought, at the Radical candidate. Depend upon it, he’s a good fellow at
bottom. (379)

Esther’s beauty saves him from the legal mechanisms that squelched his purity of
intention in the riot. John Morley notes in The Saturday Review that the relationship between
Felix and Esther is “a curious and subtle affinity between the teacher and the proselyte” because
he “elevates Esther to a height as lofty as his own by the subtle force of his own character” and
“preaches the doctrine of self-denial from the social point of view” (723). The problem of self-
deception, however, lies in Felix’s lofty principle of self-denial because his moral doctrine
ultimately aims to uplift the self by homogenizing the otherness of Esther’s femininity and the
working-class animality that hampers the unity of words and deeds. Felix’s moral superiority
arises from his relentless insistence on the correspondence of the mind and the body: “his life
was like his words” (351), but his murdering the constable in the riot of the rabble uncovers the
irreconcilable division between his words (motives) and his action (consequences). The
incommensurability between his a priori moral judgment and his practical judgment in action is
bound to be punished before the legally constituted authority because he himself breaks the law
of coherence and self-sameness that he had advocated as moral good. Felix’s myth of the law of
the essential unity is disrupted by the arbitrariness and contingency of reality that he had to suppress and control.

Esther’s appeal to feeling in the trial scene appears to be, as Philip Fisher argues, the best example of “the sentimental melodrama of the surprise witness” or “an exercise in legal and political fairy tales that well deserves Cinderella as its presiding figure” (153-54), but the trial scene demonstrates more emphatically Esther’s engagement in the arena of the public dominated by the patriarchal rule of justice and reason. The impingement of Esther’s private, emotional, and aesthetic sensibilities upon the public, rational, and legal judgment registers her attempt to resolve the problems of the division of the sexes (male publicity/female domesticity) as well as the bifurcation of tastes (moral taste/aesthetic taste). Through Esther’s voluntary action to serve as a witness for Felix, Eliot highlights the dynamics implied by the configuration of sympathy that challenge the stereotypical notion of the division of labor corresponding to the difference of the sexes. The narrator describes the significance of Esther’s determination to speak for Felix regarding his sincerity, uprightness, and genuine consideration for others at the end of the trial: “When a woman feels purely and nobly, that ardour of hers which breaks through formulas too rigorously urged on men by daily practical needs, makes one of her most precious influences” (375). Esther’s impulse of sympathy to act, which is nurtured by her aesthetic sensibilities, is analogous to a Romantic idea of intensity of feeling. The narrator goes on to mention that female sympathy is not confined to the domain of emotion, but it is concretely manifested through practice: “Some of that ardour which has flashed out and illuminated all poetry and history was burning to-day in the bosom of sweet Esther Lyon. In this, at least, her woman’s lot was perfect…. Her feelings were growing into a necessity for action, rather than a resolve to act” (375).21 Eliot’s concern with aesthetic strain dramatized in Esther’s character is the novelist’s
resistance to molding the narrative of her novel into a frame of theory or philosophy. In a letter to Frederic Harrison, a Positivist lawyer who asked her to write a Positivist novel, Eliot insisted upon the importance of aesthetic quality of narrative as a medium of representing the complexity of life rather than the dramatization of theoretical or philosophical didacticism: “I think aesthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching because it deals with life in its highest complexity. But if it ceases to be purely aesthetic—if it lapses anywhere from the picture to the diagram—it becomes the most offensive of all teaching” (Letters 4: 300).

The woman’s lot for Esther is realized in her use of feeling, specifically committed to the enlargement of sympathy for rescuing Felix from legal punishment as well as, earlier in the novel, for understanding her stepfather Rufus, who has confessed to her a story of his relationship with her mother. The scope of the Victorian woman’s lot in securing the domestic realm by her feeling which serves as a buffer against the harsh reality of the outside world appears to have a larger implication, as is revealed in the impact of Esther’s feeling on the public domain. Furthermore, Esther’s lot contains a historical implication when it requires her to encounter the emergence of the past to the present; her individual lot is faced with a drastic change when the secret of the past is uncovered in terms of her inheritance of the Transome estate. The sudden change of her social status as an heiress of the estate brings about her dilemma of choice which also determines the future of her life. Her choice is not only associated with the narrative of romance regarding whom Esther will select for her marriage partner, Harold or Felix, but also is deeply bound up with a set of values entailing the question of which value she will prioritize, either pragmatic materiality or ethical morality. The issue of Esther’s inheritance involving the question of her choices is aligned with historical continuity in that her legal claim of the Transome Court is validated by her blood lineage of the Bycliffe who has the authentic privilege
of the estate, and the current question of whether or not she claims her legal lineage on the land will determine her future and the significance of her past. But the more important question regarding her choice is that historical continuity also depends upon her decision; if she chooses not to inherit the estate, her blood and legal lineage will be ruptured. If she chooses to live in a pragmatic life in Transome Court, this will bring about another rupture of her moral lineage in connection with Rufus and Felix. Thus Esther’s “choice of histories” explains her crucial role in determining both continuity and its discontinuity intertwined with her consciousness of a set of value systems (Bodenheimer 226).22

Besides her understanding of Rufus’s past and her support of Felix in the trial scene, Esther’s enactment of sympathy for others is also dramatized in her temporary stay in Transome Court after the announcement of her legal lineage of the estate. The change of her social status from a daughter of the Dissenting minister in Malthouse Yard to an aristocratic heiress to Transome Court entails another shift from her desire for “her little private Utopia” in the imaginary to the recognition of the reality, that is, a disillusionment of her fantasy of a luxurious and comfortable life through her lived experience (304). The disenchantment of Esther’s fantastic vision of life takes place in Transome Court, her legally claimed property, where she witnesses the undercurrents of tragedy in the Transome family’s story epitomized in Mrs. Transome’s life. When the coachman Mr. Sampson and the narrator allude in the Introduction to the existence of tragedy suppressed in the Durfeys in Transome Court (in particular, in the heart of Mrs. Transome), the narrative envisages the modifying and transformational dynamics of the individual life against the backdrop of the social, economic, and political change of the 1830s. Additionally, the story also orchestrates Esther’s enlargement of sympathy for Mrs. Transome who, however different her woman’s lot may be, enables Esther to make a voluntary decision to
have recourse to ethical value rather than to economic value. Thus the role of Mrs. Transome is crucial as a foil to Esther concerning how differently they express their drives of power, sex, and economy.

Mrs. Transome in Transome Court is depicted as a paradox. She appears to be a woman of power with “high-born imperious air” which might make her “an object of hatred and reviling by a revolutionary mob” (27), and she has been trapped in the world of desire for expanding her narrow-minded and power-oriented ego which outwardly demonstrates “every little sign of power” “in the exertion of her will about smaller things” (28). On the other hand, Mrs. Transome, as a “clever sinner,” inwardly shrinks from the haunting dread of her secrets of her illicit affair with Matthew Jermyn and her son Harold Transome’s paternity (17). A history of Transome Court is a drama of egoists that Mrs. Transome, Matthew Jermyn, and Harold delineate in their efforts to achieve the utmost enjoyment of their own advantages. If society, from Felix’s viewpoint, is muddled by “drunken motiveless disorder, or any wanton harm” (370), a life in Transome Court, from Esther’s perspective, is befuddled by “a life of middling delights, overhung with the languorous haziness of motiveless ease” (357-58).

Harold, another self-proclaimed radical in the story, emerges as a destructive and anarchic force; he politically aims to “obliterate tradition” under the pretext of change after he has returned from Smyrna to Treby Magna of England for the news that he will become an heir due to the death of his imbecilic older brother Durfey. Harold’s belligerence is apparent in his attitude toward the lawyer Jermyn who actually is his natural father. Jermyn’s mismanagement of the Transome estate, his dubious application of the family funds, and his burdening the estate with annuities and mortgages to about three thousand pounds per year become “the rotten timbers” and “abuses” that Harold is eager to root out in the domestic terrain (39). To the typical
configuration of the Victorian home as a haven in a turbulent and spiritless world, Transome Court is an anomaly, or a displaced zone fitting for “Gothic melodrama” in that the landscape of Transome Court is crisscrossed with the conflicts of desires and secrets—sexual, economic, and political—which try to find their outlets for appropriating and dominating each other. Mrs. Transome’s adulterous sexual drive and her aristocratic desire for sustaining genealogical power through her son’s pragmatic sense of wealth is halted by Jermyn’s materialistic calculation of “turning [Mrs. Transome’s] love into a good bargain” (337).

The subordination of the members of the family in Transome Court to a spectacle of the power relations dismantles the boundary between the scenes of peace and security in the Victorian household and those of competition and insecurity in Victorian commercial marketplaces. The bleakness of the Transome family dominated by power struggles and economic interests can instantiate what Jeff Nunokawa calls “a ubiquitous insecurity” of Victorian domesticity under the threat of the “pervasive condition of commodification” (5). The grim reality of the marketplace controlled by the circulation of capital makes inroads into the domestic realm so much so that the ideal role of woman conceived of as the Angel of the House and the notion of the household as a sweet home become invalidated and destabilized. Rather than preserve the abstract virtues of honor, dignity, and scruple imbedded in the House of Transome Court as an emblem of aristocratic pride, Harold relies on his pragmatic sense of capitalizing on his relationships with people by making them the instruments of his purpose; after obtaining in exchange of a thousand-pound bribe to Philip Debarry’s courier Christian the information about the identity of Esther as the true heir of the Transome estate, Harold conceives of the possibility of his marriage with Esther as a means of protecting his name and the land. Harold’s preference for non-European woman rests on his racist and imperialist assumption that
European woman is “the thinking being” as opposed to non-European woman as “a slow-witted large-eyed woman, silent and affectionate, with a load of black hair weighing much more heavily than her brains” (292). Unlike his first marriage to a Greek woman, Harold prioritizes the possible economic gains over his racially oriented preference of women.

Harold’s pragmatic reason uninformed by morality induces him to treat Esther as a means to his end of securing social and economic comforts. Esther’s awareness of Victorian gender ideology that her lot is determined “by the love she accepts” (342) paradoxically functions as a subversion of that ideology by defeating Harold’s male desire for perpetuating his social, political, and economic securities through fetishizing Esther as a valuable capital and territorializing her like the Angel in the House. Esther constitutes a contradiction of female subjectivity, to use Teresa de Lauretis’s terms in *Technologies of Gender*, both “inside and outside the ideology of gender” (114). De Lauretis argues that feminism is “a critical reading of culture, a political interpretation of the social text and of the social subject, and a rewriting of our culture’s ‘master narratives’” (113). According to de Lauretis, feminism conceptualizes the female subject as both woman and women: “woman” is the female subject trapped inside the frame of the ideology of gender which tries to perpetuate the fixed and eternal image of woman, whereas “women” is another female subject that is de-territorialized from the rectangle of the ideology. In Esther’s case, she is implicitly constrained by the Victorian ideology of marriage when she acknowledges that it determines her woman’s lot. On the other hand, she re-locates her female subject as ‘women’ outside the social stereotypes of marriage by playing an active role in choosing her marriage partner. Instead of assuming the passive position of accepting love from Harold, Esther demonstrates the political resistance of her female subjectivity to Harold’s egoistic sense of class superiority over Felix which is grounded on the assumptions that “Felix
was a watchmaker, that his home and dress were of a certain quality,” and that “Felix Holt was not the sort of man a woman would be likely to be in love with when she was wooed by Harold Transome” (380). Although she has been simultaneously treated as a morally inferior object by Felix and as a materially fetishized object by Harold, Esther asserts the primacy of herself as a female subject over the two males by subverting the moralistic and materialistic ideologies of patriarchy.

Just Felix’s trial suggests Esther’s re-affirmation as the female subject of aesthetic taste against Felix’s moral purism, so does her choice of Felix over Harold highlight her attempt to define herself as another female subject of moral taste who runs counter to Harold’s economic concerns.24 The uncanny of Esther’s moral aura—“the sign of a dangerous judgment”—dazzles and baffles Harold’s imperialist’s desire for appropriating and dominating her:

There was something about Esther that he did not altogether understand. She was clearly a woman that could be governed; she was too charming for him to fear that she would ever be obstinate or interfering. Yet there was a lightning that shot out of her now and then, which seemed the sign of a dangerous judgment; as if she inwardly saw something more admirable than Harold Transome. (342)

Esther is the female subject who can be at once controllable and uncontrollable just as she can be situated both inside and outside the ideological constraints of gender. Esther’s deployment of a double discourse of aesthetic and moral tastes characterizes her female subjectivity. Her double discourse of the tastes is charged with a similarly double political consciousness which defies both a public moralist’s attempt to enlighten her on the assumption that she is a morally inferior object and a pragmatic egoist’s attempt to win her favor on the grounds that she is an economically valuable object. Esther displays the consanguinity between the political
consciousness of aesthetic beauty against moral absolutism and another political consciousness of morality against economic utility. In considering the formation of marriage plot, Eliot directs the narrative attention to moral and aesthetic values rather than to economic values involved in the female characters’ choices of their marriage partners.

In *Daniel Deronda*, similarly, the heiress Catherine Arrowpoint esteems the aesthetic and cosmopolitan ideas embodied in an impoverished musician Herr Klesmer when she decides to marry him. Despite her parents’ opposition of her marriage with him, she trusts to the companionship a kind of sympathetic bond of union she can make with Klesmer: “the systole and diastole of blissful companionship” (222) “with full sympathy in taste, and admirable qualities on both sides; especially where the one is in the position of teacher and the other is delightedly conscious of receptive ability which also gives the teacher delight” (220). Debunking the myth of the hierarchy of social classes to which her parents adhere, Catherine chooses her fidelity to the aesthetic and sympathetic values of exchange between her and Klesmer rather than to the mercenary values of exchange between the heiress and the English aristocrat: “He is of a caste to which I look up—a caste above mine” (225). The aesthetic companionship between Catherine and Klesmer is identical to the morally and spiritually oriented partnership that Esther expects and valorizes in her relationship with Felix over the life of wealth: “A supreme love, a motive that gives a sublime rhythm to a woman’s life, and exalts habit into partnership with the soul’s highest needs” (389).

In effect, Esther’s choice of Felix over Harold in *Felix Holt* and Catherine’s choice of Klesmer against her parents’ insistence upon class and economy in *Daniel Deronda* mark female supremacy of moral and aesthetic values of their marriage partners. Eliot’s portrayal of love and marriage highlights the ways in which the characters’ tastes dynamically struggle with a
system of values in what Deleuze and Guattari call, in *Anti-Oedipus*, “the social investments of the libido” (352). Rather than conceptualize desire in terms of a void or lack of an object, Deleuze and Guattari conceive of it as an unbound and unconscious energy that can be invested for social production, contending “that the social field is immediately invested by desire, that it is historically determined product of desire, and that libido has no need of any mediation or sublimation, any psychic operation, any transformation, in order to invade and invest the productive forces and the relations of production” (29). Indeed, Eliot’s portrayals of the marriage plot in her novels underscore the investment of female characters’ romantic, aesthetic, and moral desires instead of the valorization of social class or economic condition.

Although the flows of the characters’ libidos in their choice of lovers in Eliot’s work are directed against the dominant ideologies of gender, class, and political economy, Esther in *Felix Holt* does not completely exclude the value of economic capital even when she resigns the claims to the Transome estate. When she tells Felix that her decision to leave Transome Court is based on moral deliberation, Esther also demonstrates the acumen of her economic judgment by securing a modest amount of her inheritance for Felix’s mother and for her father Rufus:

I think even of two pounds a-week: one needn’t live up to the splendour of all that, you know; we might live as simply as you liked: there would be money to spare, and you could do wonders, and be obliged to work too, only not if sickness came. And then I think of a little income for your mother, enough for her to live as she has been used to live; and a little income for my father, to save him from being dependent when he is no longer able to preach. (397)

Esther’s choice of Felix does not simply foreground the superiority of Felix’s morality over her aesthetic temperament; rather, their partnership rests on a complementary relationship, or what
Alison Booth calls “the strange balance of power in the ideology of influence” (156), highlighting a composite of moral, aesthetic, and economic tastes. Moreover, the hybrid aspects of their relationship subverts the clear-cut division between Felix as the teacher and Esther as his proselyte: “You [Felix] think you are to do everything. You don’t know how clever I am. I mean to go on teaching a great many things” (397).

In addition to the reason for her to choose Felix for her partner, Esther’s libidinal desire for affection in the familiar setting—in particular, her demand for love between mother and daughter—serves as another reason for her to relinquish her legal right to the Transome estate. Against the social expectations of the heiress’ claims to her economic benefits, Esther’s libido for the circulation of affection between mother and daughter is enacted in *Felix Holt* when she expresses her sympathy for Mrs. Transome who “had never yet in her life asked for compassion—had never thrown herself in faith on an unproffered love” (392). Esther’s dim memory of her infantile attachment to her mother Annette provokes her not only to conceive of Mrs. Transome as a substitution for her dead mother—“I shall seem to have a mother again. Do let me.” (394)—but also to revive the primal scene of the mother-daughter relationship through her enactment of sympathy for the dejected female gentry, Mrs. Transome: “A passionate desire to soothe this suffering woman came over her. She clung round her again, and kissed her poor quivering lips and eyelids, and laid her young check against the pale and haggard one” (393).26

It is true that *Felix Holt* presents Mrs. Transome as a tragic character who cannot escape from the hereditary determinism of the Nemesis, a kind of the inexorable law of consequences,27 but the novel provides another scenario which orchestrates the awakening of Mrs. Transome from self-destruction precipitated by her aristocratic hubris aligned with her moral deterioration. Esther’s sympathy for Mrs. Transome is honed by her acute aesthetic sensitivity and keen vision
of woman’s lot, as the narrator of *Middlemarch* observes, that enable her to hear the “roar which lies on the other side of silence” “like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat” (189). Mrs. Transome has confined herself within the realm of female consciousness driven by her proud, sexual, and anarchic desires. By sympathizing with Mrs. Transome, Esther transforms her role from a daughter who desired to have maternal affection into a symbolic mother who can offer maternal solace to Mrs. Transome. Esther’s sympathy for Mrs. Transome arises from her ability to understand, through her experience of decision-making and her observation of the dejected lady in Transome Court, how woman’s lot would be determined in male-dominated society. As Bonnie Zimmerman argues, Eliot seemingly portrays an interrelation between childless women and their cursed life: “Women who step beyond the social and biological limitations of womankind, who desire to transcend the ordinary ‘lot of woman’ by any means no matter how admirable, who defy sexual standards, who rebel rather than submit: these women are visited with the curse of sterility” (“Mother’s History” 83). But Zimmerman’s contention that rebellious women, in particular, are cursed to be sterile, simplifies Eliot’s narrative plot regarding the complexities of female characters’ rebellious agency in challenging the patriarchal system of society. Without considering the subversive power implicated in Esther’s enactment of sympathy, it would be a hasty generalization to say that the traditional and stereotypical model of dutiful women in the domestic sphere is blessed with fertility in opposition to defiant women as cursed with barrenness.

In *Felix Holt*, Esther is the central character who embodies the significance of imaginative sympathy. As Eliot points out in “Notes on ‘The Spanish Gypsy,’” the imaginative sympathy is equivalent to “piety—i.e., loving, willing submission, and heroic Promethean effort towards high possibilities, which may result from our individual life” (3:47). Esther spells out the
significance of imaginative sympathy in her attempts to establish her moral and aesthetic
subjectivities. Esther’s subjectivity imbued with the moral consciousness allows her to monitor
herself with self-reflexivity, to defy the materially oriented and banal life, and to frustrate the
cunning ruse of reason treating her as an instrumental means of an end. On the other hand, she
has the aesthetic imagination of appreciating diversity of life and of transcending the limits of
Enlightenment reason which homogenizes otherness and unifies the world with conformity.
When Mrs. Transome expresses her enmity against men by saying that they are “selfish and cruel”
and that they only seek for “their own pleasure and their own pride,” Esther’s response to Mrs.
Transome—“‘Not all,’ said Esther” (393)31—succinctly epitomizes her optimistic and
sympathetic confidence in resisting the hegemonic powers of appropriation and domination after
she figures out the double meaning of woman’s lot both inside and outside the Victorian
ideology of gender.
CONCLUSION

Eliot’s novels crystallize the significance of sympathy in human relationships. Indeed, sympathy is an interdependent, dialogic, and practical mode of communication between the self and the other in their approaches to the scenes of each other’s grief. Eliot’s idea of sympathy focuses on the necessity of practice, moving beyond the traditional configuration of sympathy limited to the domain of feeling and emotion concerning the other’s suffering. The practical implication of sympathy is crucial to establish subjectivity because, although subjects cannot fully perform their autonomy within the ideological systems of society, they can build up their ethical subjectivity by putting their emotive sympathy into action for helping the suffering other.

In “Neighbors and Other Monsters,” Slavoj Žižek argues that the symbolic Order of ideological interpellations serves as an essential ground for establishing the interconnectedness between the subject and the other: “there is no intersubjectivity (no symmetrical, shared, relation between humans) without the impersonal symbolic Order” (144). In conceiving of the symbolic systems of social structure as a prerequisite and mediating condition under which the self and the neighboring other can form solidarity, Žižek notes that the symbolic Order is “the domain of justice and universal laws” that urges the subject to exercise its ethical responsibility for the neighbor (145). Žižek reads social norms, justice, and law as pacifying mediators between the subject and the other, pre-existing ethics or ontological grounds of human relationships. Žižek’s view of ethical-social systems is well suited to our reading of Eliot’s fiction where the characters perform their ethical responsibilities to help the “neighbors” in society. Unlike Žižek, however, Eliot postulates the symbolic Order of ethical injunction as the antagonistic or restraining powers of social ideologies against which subjects must struggle in order to establish their own voluntary subjectivity.
Or the characters act by their own willing and independent decisions to help others instead of simply following the imperative ethical orders of the outer authoritative figures such as religious and moral patriarchs. Žižek’s Lacanian interpretation of the symbolic Order regards the subject’s responsibility for the other as an involuntary and unconditioned duty of the self to the other as a crucial point of separating itself from its egoistical orientation, whereas Eliot describes the subject’s response to the urgent cry of the other as a voluntary ethical behavior toward the other. Thus, she emphasizes the process of the subject’s positioning itself inside and outside social structure. In the end, Eliot presents the characters’ paradoxical strategy of disengaging from and re-engaging in the boundary of society where individuals must obey the universal law of morality. Eliot’s emphasis on the subject’s skepticism about the ideologies of symbolic systems, as in the case of Romola, signifies that the subject does not deny its ethical responsibility for others, but would not submit to the voice of male authority, self-reflectively conscious of both its own conflicts with the authority and the limits of its subjective autonomy within a patriarchal society. Indeed, the subject’s reflection on its own condition of life paves the way for enlarging its sympathy for its neighbor, not simply administered by the necessity of the universalizing duty, but also—and, indeed,—prompted by a feeling of the communal bond of humanity.

In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler contends that subjectivity cannot be constituted without the other addressing the demands on the subject. The subject’s ethical responsibility for the other is the basic condition of constituting the subject’s connectedness with and its vulnerability to the other. Butler’s notion of subjectivity as an existential mode of being addressed by the other’s grief accords with Eliot’s view of sympathetic subjectivity which requires characters to demonstrate their ethical engagements in helping the suffering others as a mode of their affective
and practical interconnectedness with others: “what binds us morally has to do with how we are addressed by others in ways that we cannot avert or avoid; this impingement by the other’s address constitutes us first and foremost against our will or, perhaps put more appropriately, prior to the formation of our will” (130).¹ In illuminating the importance of the interdependence between the self and the other regarding the formation of subjectivity in ethics, Butler further questions the notion of the autonomous subject on the premise that human beings are vulnerable to the structure of norms and power relations: “we [human beings] are social; we are comported toward a ‘you’; we are outside ourselves, constituted in cultural norms and a field of power that condition us fundamentally” (45). In recognizing that our bodies are the site of human vulnerability to social, economic, political, and cultural powers, Butler underscores the importance of collective responsibility between you and me: “my very formation implicates the other in me,” and “my own foreignness to myself, is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others” (46).

Butler’s collective responsibility in the human condition of vulnerability entails the question: how can we practice communal responsibility between the self and the other? In Eliot’s dramatization of the ethical relationship between characters, the compassionate subjects and the sympathized others—Milly, Caterina, Gilfil, Tryan, Janet, Romola, Rufus, and Esther—do not divert their attentions from others’ needs. Although they retreat from the harsh reality of patriarchal violence, religious dogmas, restrictive legal codes, universalizing morality, and instrumental reason, the characters are willing to engage in the turbulent contingencies of everyday life where sorrowful others ask for help. In the sense that their ethical actions are performed in response to others’ demands or on the basis of the necessity of duty, Eliot’s characters inhabit involuntary and passive subjectivities. However, Eliot’s characters do tend to
resist the imperative categories of duty imposed by the universalizing law of morality. Rather than simply following the ethical necessity of the universal law, they develop keen sensibilities and imagination which enable them to truly attend to the agonizing voices of others’ sufferings. Those imaginative sensibilities stem from the characters’ own inductive experiences of life in such a way that they internalize their agonies and sufferings and then transform them, amplifying their fellow-feelings for others.

By using their penetrative imagination to detect the suffering of others, Eliot’s characters defy blind obedience to the necessity of moral obligation imposed by authority figures. In effect, the other’s scene of sympathy is expressed as narrative. It is important to note that the other’s confessional narrative of suffering haunts the subject who bears the brunt of its own trauma of suffering: “all forms of narrative are spectral to some extent” (Wolfreys 2). In “Janet’s Repentance,” which highlights a confessional communication between Janet and Tryan, Eliot declares the significance of enlarging sympathy through a dialogic communication of the confessions between the self and the other which revivifies their own past experiences of sufferings:

Janet’s anguish was not strange to Mr Tryan. He had never been in the presence of a sorrow and a self-despair that had sent so strong a thrill through all the recesses of his saddest experience; and it is because sympathy is but a living again through our own past in a new form, that confession often prompts a response of confession. (288)

For Eliot, the realistic imagination signifies the function of keen sensibilities which helps us to look at our own flaws through the lens of others’. When she uses the candle-flame metaphor in Middlemarch, Eliot points out the limits of our views of the world since they are distorted by our own egoistic desires and interests. In chapter 17 of Adam Bede, Eliot sheds light
on the importance of sympathy for our ordinary neighbors on the grounds that the observing and narrating subject also has the limits of representation. The narrator of *Adam Bede* is consciously self-reflective regarding her own story-telling when she claims that her narrative has both strength and weaknesses; the narrative is based on faithful representation of our actual life, but it can be still affected by her own self-justifying candle-flame which arranges the reflected mirror-images of things based on her own optical illusion and selection:

[M]y strongest effort is to avoid any such arbitrary picture, and to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. 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. (164-65)

Eliot proposes that the objective of art must “give the loving pains of a life to the faithful representing of commonplace things” (168). Eliot’s oxymoronic phrase of “loving pains of a life” implies her challenge to the abstract, transcendent, and theological notion of aesthetics, and it epitomizes secularized beauty from our earthly life where the self and the other are struggling with their own tragedies. Inspired by the realistic representation of life in Dutch paintings, Eliot ascertains that sympathy can be evoked from “faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence” (*Adam Bede* 166). In “Worldliness and Other-Worldliness,” Eliot contends that the poet Edward Young commits a “pedagogic fallacy” by subsuming all natural phenomena under the abstract moralizing didacticism. Eliot deplores the poet’s lack of any “continuous melody inspired by the spontaneous flow of thought or feeling” (*Essays* 380).

The realistic imagination must be based on the faithful representation of our secular experience of life which is replete with the commonplace, the flawed, and the ugly. It further
investigates the hidden workings of the mundane life which not only lay bare the undercurrents of ideologies and power relations, but also direct our attention to the unheard sounds of the suffering other. The politics of sympathy is firmly based on the ethics of life between the self and the other in that the ugliness of my neighbor mirrors my own monstrosity. In *The Critique of Judgement*, Immanuel Kant proposes that the sublime beauty of nature compels human beings to search for moral vocation in their consciousness which can transcend the overwhelming power of the beauty of nature:

> [T]here is our admiration of nature which in her beautiful products displays herself as art, not as mere matter of chance, but, as it were, designedly, according to a law-directed arrangement, and as finality apart from any end. As we never meet with such an end outside ourselves, we naturally look for it in ourselves, and, in fact, in that which constitutes the ultimate end of our existence—the moral side of our being. (160-61)

Unlike the Kantian idea of the moral consciousness arising from our awe and fear of the sublime beauty of nature, Eliot draws our attention to secularized beauty, or as the term “loving pains of a life” suggests, which stems from our direct contact with our suffering neighbors. For Eliot, human imperfection and flaws are beautiful because they bind the self and the other in community together with sympathy. When the narrator of *Adam Bede* articulates the ethical implication of sympathy, it underscores the subject’s commitment to a life and its interaction with its neighbor: “It is more needful that I should have a fibre of sympathy connecting me with that vulgar citizen who weighs out my sugar in a vilely-assorted cravat and waistcoat, than with the handomest rascal in red scarf and green feathers” (*Adam Bede* 168).

Although the ugliness and monstrosity of our ordinary fellow human beings are far from the Kantian sublime beauty of nature that can inspire artists and lead them to ruminate on the
moral duty of their vocation, Eliot contends that her duty is to represent the commonplace life as a site of the subject’s ethical commitment to the other’s suffering, and as a locus of a dialogic communication between the subject and the other regarding their own sorrows. In Eliot’s poem titled “Self and Life,” the personified speaker Life articulates Eliot’s vision of enlarging sympathy for others when it says to Self that:

all my anguish and thy discontent

Was growth of mine, the elemental strife

Towards feeling manifold with vision blent

To wider thought. (43-46, 190)

The poem ends with Self’s recognition that “Life is justified by love” (191). For Eliot, love is a dialogic and practical communication between the self and the other. Her writing dramatizes a politics of sympathy, or a practice of “love” in the secularized condition of human relationships.
NOTES

Notes to the Introduction: Historicizing Sympathy

1 For a consideration of Eliot’s historical narrative, see McCaw; see Graver for a discussion of the relation of Eliot’s idea of sympathy to the idea of social community; for a study of Eliot’s use of nineteenth-century organic theory of science, see Shuttleworth; for a consideration of the relation between Eliot’s writing and her political consciousness in light of her middle-class ideology, see Cottom; for the examination of Eliot’s approach to religion and the Comtean religion of humanity, see Paris, Bonaparte, Knoepflmacher (Religious Humanism), and Hodgson; see Dodd for a philosophical approach of Eliot’s life; see Michael Davis for a consideration of Eliot’s attitude toward psychology; see da Sousa Correa for a discussion of Eliot’s use of musical allusion.

2 The recent critics of George Eliot have been interested in examining the alterity in her fiction. J. Hillis Miller is the most ardent critic of the alterity who scrutinizes the ways in which Victorian novelists dramatize the otherness in their fiction. Miller’s examination of the alterity focuses heavily on the post-structuralist’s reading of the relationship between the self and the other in terms of the limits inherent in the sign system of language: “The other is encountered as a text to be read, almost inevitably to be misread. Middlemarch is full of notations of this situation. If words can be taken as paradigmatic of other signs, misreading our neighbors is so universal an event in Middlemarch that one could justly say that for George Eliot our relation to the other person is a linguistic predicament” (Others 68). Although he adopts the idea of alterity as a textual object misinterpreted by the self, Miller does not examine how sympathy serves as an alternative to going beyond, to a certain extent, the limits of misreading enacted by the self in its desire to comprehend fully the signs of the other. Pauline Nestor is another George Eliot critic
who investigates Eliot’s ethical inquiry into the other, but Nestor fails to see the complex
exercise of sympathy which enables the self and the other to perform their active agencies to
sympathize with each other; in this dynamics of sympathy, the subject, like the other, contains its
story of suffering. Nestor seems to regard Eliot’s portrayal of the exercise of sympathy in *Scenes
of Clerical Life* as the limits of the Humean idea of sympathy, that is, the division between the
sympathizing subject and the exterior suffering object: “[I]n *Scenes of Clerical Life* appropriative
impulse of empathy appears to offer some prospects of amplifying or extending subjectivity”
(*George Eliot* 11). David Parker’s view of sympathy in Eliot’s fiction is perceptive in that he
examines Eliot’s idea of sympathy in light of the interconnectedness between the self and the
other, that is a “mode of intersubjective understanding that in some sense transcends the
radically individualistic self/other binarism” (81). However, Parker only focuses on the abstract
notion of sympathy in terms of relation of the self to the other by playing down the political and
practical agency of the subject who employs sympathy as a mode of resistance to the established
authority. See Docherty for a theoretical approach to the ethical relation to alterity; Docherty
argues that “postmodern philosophy of love” is essential to revaluing “the relation between the
critical subject and its objects as such,” and that the project is to aim at “a revival of the issue of
ethics” (12). Although he does not examine Eliot’s novels, Docherty articulates the critical
engagement of postmodern theory into the issue of alterity. See also Jonathan Culler for a
discussion of the importance of alterity in literary criticism; Culler conceives of literary theory as
a discursive attempt to illuminate the other as a subversive power against the normalization of
reason: “theory is the discourse that seeks the opening of the subject to the nonidentical, to
alterity, the other, the indeterminate, or some other site or event beyond instrumental reason”
(39).
Felski’s emphasis on the potential of the subjective agency for challenging ideologies within the structures of the social systems is indebted to Anthony Giddens’ conception of social structure not merely as a barrier to individual action but also as a context crucial for the individual to produce their actions. See Giddens (Central Problems 49-95 and “Action” 159-74) for a study of the relationship between human agency and social structure.

Eliot’s idea of sympathy has an ambivalent quality because it highlights a communality of the self and the other, simultaneously acknowledging that alterity must be recognized in human relationship. In this regard, Eliot’s conception of sympathy resembles Charles Darwin’s anti-essentialist’s project of formulating generic categorization on the grounds that species are extraordinarily various and polymorphous. See Beer (Darwin’s Plot 73-96) for a discussion of Darwin’s evolutionary theory in light of analogical and metaphorical narrative.

For a distinction between other and Other in Levinas’s philosophy, see Colin Davis: “[The other] may be incorporated into the Same whereas [the Other] never can be; the former confirms totality, the latter reveals infinity. The other may initially appear alien to the empirical self, but it does not fundamentally challenge its supremacy; the Other is utterly resistant to the transcendental Ego and cannot be assimilated to the world the Ego creates for itself” (43). For a discussion of “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story,” I would like to examine the otherness of Caterina in light of the Levinasian big “Other.”

Moretti’s use of the word, “life,” as an antagonistic notion of vocation is problematic because such terms as “egoism,” “dogmas,” or “narrow-mindedness” in Eliot’s lexicon suggest an antithesis of the idea of vocation.
Notes to Chapter 1: George Eliot’s Secular Criticism: *Scenes of Clerical Life*

1 In her journal entry on December 6, 1857, “How I Came to Write Fiction,” Eliot wrote that “September 1856 made a new era in my life, for it was then I began to write fiction” (*The Journals* 289).

2 Neil Roberts argues that Eliot belittles the Victorian reader’s already acquired competence to enjoy the type of story she launches in the publishing marketplace: “The readers of ‘Amos Barton’ had for some years had the opportunity of reading *David Copperfield*, *Vanity Fair*, *Villette*, and *North and South*, all of which could make some claim to the qualities which George Eliot is commending; and the readers were surely more likely to have one of those works as their tacit standard of fiction, than *The Enigma* or *Rank and Beauty*. One feels that George Eliot is still working off her irritation at the silly novels by lady novelists, and gratuitously insulting her own readers in the process” (54).

3 See Haight (212) and Handley (4, 70) for a discussion of Eliot’s rendering of her childhood experiences into fiction.

4 Claude T. Bissell, Henry Auster, and Bernard Semmel seem to be in line with Holloway’s emphasis on the community’s opinion of the main characters in Eliot’s novels, even though Semmel broadens the concept of community into the notion of national inheritance not only as “emblematic of family affections and obligations, a tie binding parents and children” but also as “the inheritance of the nation’s culture and historical traditions” (6).

5 It may be understandable that Barton cannot afford to fill up Mrs. Brick’s snuff box because he is also suffering from financial troubles. But the point in the episode is not that he is a poor pastor who was not acting as paid chaplain of the Union before the operation of the New Poor
Law, but that he is insensitive to his parishioner’s need for the sake of his narrow-minded adherence to religious creed.

6 See Norton and Nestor for a discussion of Eliot’s problematic narrator of *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Norton, however, points out although the narrator of “Amos Barton” “is unable to represent Eliot’s concerns as an author” (218), the narrator of “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story” shares Eliot’s vision of sympathy in the Epilogue “without falling into a cold and distanced aesthetic sensibility” (225).

7 See Kate Millett (88-108) for a discussion of Ruskin’s account of Victorian sexual myth and Mill’s account of the principle of perfect equality for women.

8 See also Atkins, Dodd (249-52), Lynn, and Gatens for the discussion of the relation of Spinoza’s philosophy to Eliot.

9 Essentialist assumptions point out that this absurd argument by U. C. Knoepflmacher nonetheless is revealing: She is guilty of the same disproportion between occasion and thought, expression and subject, matter-of-factness and loftiness of purpose. Her aggrandizement of the ‘four walls’ of ‘loving woman’s world’ is almost akin to Wordsworth’s tendency to compose blank verse about the chattering teeth of Harry Gill. (57)

10 Barbara Hardy argues that although George Eliot does not inject her own sympathy into her characters as Charles Dickens did, she is likely to proselytize on behalf of her characters by choosing to place her sympathetic plea outside them. Hardy calls Eliot’s direct voice of ordinary tones as the author’s favorite methods of “thematic intensification” (17-18).

11 See Harvey (109-10) and Knoepflmacher (60) for a discussion of Eliot’s complicated use of flashback. Barton serves his duties in 1834 or 1835, while the first chapter of “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story” begins with the death of Gilfil in 1826 or 1827: “When old Mr Gilfil died, thirty years
ago” (75). The second chapter of the story goes back to “the evening of the 21st of June 1788” (86).

12 Neil Roberts (56) and Rosemary Ashton (George Eliot 176) argue that Eliot fails to overcome the limits of her contemporary melodramatic genre; rather, probably unwittingly, she imitates artificial dramatization of scenes, which can be found in conventional melodramas in the Victorian period, for the purpose of creating sorrow and pity. In Roberts’ case, he focuses more on Caterina’s decision to kill Captain Wybrow and her discovery of his dead body.

13 In Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe develop the idea of an original trauma as an impossible kernel which resists symbolic totalization. They develop the notion of antagonism in relation to “the presence of the ‘Other’” (125).

14 See Delia da Sousa Correa for a discussion of Eliot’s employment of musical communication as the operation of sympathy: Eliot portrays the “musically induced telepathic melding of distinctions between individuals, and between individuals and their material environment” (188).

15 In a letter to George Henry Lewes on April 30, 1857, John Blackwood ventured a criticism on George Eliot’s arguably abrupt conclusion of “Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story”:

If George Eliot is not with you I suppose you will send this to him. Tell him what I say, and you may mention also that I have some fear that he huddles up the conclusion of his stories too much, but I hardly see how the wind up of Gilfil’s sad story could have been more effective or affecting. I hope the successor to Gilfil is well advanced. (Letters 2: 323). In a reply to John Blackwood on May 1, 1857, Eliot mentioned that some of the rapidity of the conclusions in her stories (“The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton” and “Mr. Gilfil’s Love-Story”) arises from “the very nature of a conclusion…. But the story never presented itself to me as possible to be protracted after Milly’s death. The drama ends there”
(Letters 2: 324). However, Eliot added an Epilogue to the chapter 21 of “Mr. Gilfil’s Love-Story,” because she tried to “soften the ending of the story with a picture of Mr. Gilfil in his cheerful old age” (Letters 2: 324, n7), and to show Gilfil’s “commanding the respect of his parishioners which had been remarked upon in the opening paragraph” (Letters 2: 326, n2).

16 In criticizing Dr. Cumming, Eliot seems to concede to Thackeray’s comments on the Evangelical priest. In a letter to his mother, Mrs. Carmichael-Smyth, on 22 April 1855, Thackeray remarked about Dr. Cumming: “Take Cumming whom you like. I think him a bigot, a blasphemer; that the world would be horrible if he & his could have his way—so he on his side must have the same abhorrence of ours” (Letters and Private Papers 3: 439).

17 In a letter to Sara Sophia Hennell on November 18, 1870, George Eliot, after attending an Evangelical priest’s lecture with George Henry Lewes, criticized the populism and superficiality of Calvinistic Christianity:

   We had plenty of anecdotes, but they were all poor and pointless—Tract Society anecdotes of the feeblest kind. It was the most superficial, Grocer’s-back-parlour view of Calvinistic Christianity; and I was shocked to find how low the mental pitch of our society must be, judged by the standard of this man’s celebrity. (Letters 5: 121)

18 For a detailed study of George Eliot’s consideration of the Evangelicals, see Donald C. Masters (505-12): by defining the term “Evangelicals” as “the Methodists and the Anglican Evangelicals” in order to examine George Eliot’s two different attitudes toward them, Masters not only illuminates the novelist’s sympathetic treatment of them as revealed in the cases of Edgar Tryan, Seth Bede, Dinah Morris, and Rufus Lyon, but also sheds light on her criticism of the degree of the Evangelicals’ emphasis on ideas and doctrines as opposed to genuine feeling.

19 See Witemeyer (79-84) for Eliot’s interest in Overbeck’s paintings.
20 In an Introductory essay of the 1957 edition of *The Essence of Christianity*, Karl Barth insists upon the importance of Feuerbach’s attempt to understand Christianity in light of anthropology: “In Feuerbach’s program—the transformation and dissolution of theology into anthropology—one may detect not only the idea that there must be inevitably an end to theology, but also the idea that he always wished to transform theology and make it into anthropology” (xiv-xv).

21 With regard to Jacques Lacan’s formulaic definition of the Unconscious—“the Unconscious is structured like a language”—through his reading of Freud’s writing, Barbara Johnson sees Lacan’s reading of Freudian Unconscious as “a system of articulation through which repressed ideas return in displaced form” (41).

22 Janet Dempster can be regarded as a literary presentation of Nancy Wallington who became the wife of J.W. Buchanan both as the Nuneaton lawyer and leader of the opposition to an Evangelical curate John Edmund Jones. Gordon S. Haight points out that the “Buchanans appear as the Dempsters in all the ‘keys’ to the originals of ‘Janet’s Repentance’ circulated in Warwickshire after its publication in 1857” (9-10).

23 Buchan’s contention is that the excess of maternal emotion can demolish the moral nature of the nation (qtd. in Shuttleworth 43).

24 Brian Harrison examines the complexity of people’s drinking habits and their social and political attitudes toward drink in England between 1815 and 1872.

25 In drawing on two typical syndromes in alcoholism, Type 1 which is related to high “reward dependence” and Type 2 which is associated with low “reward dependence,” J. W. Bennett demonstrates that Janet Dempster can be regarded as a Type 1 alcoholic, whereas Robert Dempster can be recognized as a Type 2 alcoholic:
One important contemporary model identifies two polar syndromes in alcoholism. Type 1 is associated with high ‘reward dependence’ and ‘harm avoidance’ and with low ‘novelty seeking.’ Such people are eager to help others, sentimental, shy, and loyal. Age of onset is usually after twenty-five, fighting and arrests while drinking are rare, and guilt feelings about drinking are common. Women alcoholics are predominantly of this type. Type 2 represents the other extreme: low ‘reward dependence’ and ‘harm avoidance’ and high ‘novelty seeking.’ Such alcoholics are tough-minded, confident, uninhibited, impulsive, excitable. Onset is early; fighting, accidents, and arrests are common; and guilt about alcohol dependence is infrequent. Both Type 1 and Type 2 alcoholism are found among males. (60)

26 Drawing on the redemptive power of William Wordsworth’s poems on various intellectuals and literary figures, such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Stuart Mill, M. H. Abrams argues that William Wordsworth is “an evangelist of nature and mind” who arouses the reader from depression, despair, crisis, and loss and helped the reader rely on “the prototype of the mind’s religious colloquy with nature” (135, 140).

27 Julian Wolfreys examines Victorian literary works in light of the notion of spectrality that was theoretically conceptualized by Sigmund Freud, Martin Heidegger, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, and Hélène Cixous.

28 David Carroll’s attempt to see a certain dialectical reconciliation of opposites (two male characters’ desires and ambitions) in a heroine’s regenerated soul has the drawback of reducing a female character to a receptive, passive, and allegorized battleground for two male powers. Actually, what prompted Tryan to confess his past sin or remorse of his past deed is Janet’s
confession of her suffering and her habitual drinking. Here we can see another reciprocal influence which enables Janet and Tryan to be redefined and regenerated.

29 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar assert that Eliot’s female characters in her novels represent their moral superiority through their self-abasement to the male figures who suppress them (498).

30 Examining Paul de Man’s speech-act theory, J. Hillis Miller notes that a speech act is “never what is intended or what is predicted beforehand. You aim at a bear and some innocent bird falls out of the sky” (Speech Acts 144).

31 I borrowed this term from Jacques Derrida’s discussion of the formula, Tout autre est tout autre, “Every other (one) is every (bit) an other.”

32 Eliot’s indebtedness to Carlyle is obvious. After reading Carlyle’s Sartor Resartus in 1841, Eliot expressed in her letter to Martha Jackson her fascination with and admiration for Carlyle’s writing: “Have you, dear Patty, read any of T. Carlyle’s books? He is a grand favourite of mine, and I venture to recommend to you his ‘Sartor Resartus.’… His soul is a shrine of the brightest and purest philanthropy, kindled by the live coal of gratitude and devotion to the Author of all things” (Letters 1: 122-23). She also recognized the great influence of Carlyle’s writings on Victorian intellectuals: “there is hardly a superior or active mind of this generation that has not been modified by Carlyle’s writings; there has hardly been an English book written for the last ten or twelve years that would not have been different if Carlyle had not lived” (Essays 213-14).

Notes to Chapter 2: A Pursuit of Liminality and the Practice of Sympathy: Romola

1 See Haight for Eliot’s research in Florence: “Marian copied into her Notebook information about the Florence of Savonarola’s day—costume, language, etymologies of names, descriptions
of fairs and ceremonies, jesters, barbers, matchmakers, street lighting, bonfires, games, the making and marketing of woollen cloth” (345).

2 Criticism of Romola before 1970 had been in line with Henry James’s incisive commentary on George Eliot’s pedantry on her writing of Romola. See Bennett (140); Hardy; Thale (71); Auster (55).

3 Roland Barthes argues that the Text is “demonstrated” as “the movement of discourse” or “an activity of production” (157). Eliot’s dramatization of Italian history is a textual production of discursive activity which challenges the classified division of genres. Thus Romola is Eliot’s interdisciplinary text which facilitates an “overcrossing” or a “dissemination” of plural meaning regarding history, politics, religion, and art (159).

4 See Felski for an understanding of subjectivity both as the socially constructed and an agent for social modification (51-85). See de Lauretis for a consideration of subjectivity as “an ongoing construction” in the process of its active engagement in social and discursive structures (159). See Gagnier for the categories of subjectivity (8-14).

5 See David Carroll for a discussion of the novel as a dialectical synthesis of two conflicts (George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations 167-200).

6 By attending both to Barbara Hardy’s contention that Romola’s failure comes from the diagram of action, the mode of fable, and the imaginative and symbolic representations of two forces (impersonal confrontation of Romola and Savonarola), and to Eliot’s letter to Sara Hennell concerning her description of Romola as “pure idealism,” George Levine contends that Romola is a work of curious uncertainty in terms of its hovering between novel and fable (“Romola as Fable” 82-83).
In focusing on Romola’s development of her selfhood, Mary Gosselink De Jong argues that the novel is a *Bildungsroman*, but she contends that the question about whether the novel is a feminist *Bildungsroman* depends on “the reader’s definition of feminism” (85).

See Bonaparte (*Triptych* 205-7); see Bullen for a reading of Romola as a representation of the Comtean structure of history: the development of history through three stages—the first stage of polytheism, the second stage of monotheism, and the third stage of positivism, or the Religion of Humanity (425-35); and Wright for a discussion of the novel in agreement with Bullen’s argument (189-90). Mary Wilson Carpenter, in accordance with the Comtean reading of the novel, claims that *Romola* is a novel of “protofeminism” in that Eliot highlights the heroine’s protest against patriarchal authority (*George Eliot and the Landscape of Time* 63); see William Myers for the relevance of the Comtean idea of historical development and positive philosophy to the analysis of *Romola* (56-64).

In following Vico’s idea of mythology as history in literary form, Felicia Bonaparte interprets the term “historical romance” in the light of the relation of the English realistic novel to the offspring of empiricism which advocates the values of the individual and the particular at the expense of those of the eternal and the transcendent (religion or allegory or romance) which must be later replaced by symbolism or mythology. Bonaparte goes on to argue that Eliot’s historical romance, similar to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s attempt to explore the neutral zone between the actual and the imaginary, is concerned with examining the philosophical context of the literal in the symbolic narrative (18-19). See also *Letters* 2: 52 and 2: 311, n. 5.

See Bonaparte (*Triptych* 238), Shuttleworth (96-97), and Beer (*George Eliot* 114-15) for opposition to the claim that *Romola* is a novel of anachronism.
11 In her study of the construction of biological sexuality, sexual differences, sexual relations in mid-Victorian England, Mary Poovey runs counter to the mid-Victorian liberal manufacturer W. R. Greg’s assertion that women “who remain unmarried constitute the problem to be solved, the evil and anomaly to be cured” (qtd. in Poovey 2).

12 In focusing on Romola’s ambivalence over her father—her submission to him and her resistance to his misogyny, Nancy Paxton asserts that Romola remains divided against herself, but Paxton does not provide ample evidence of how Romola challenges her father’s view of women (125-26).

13 See Auerbach (63-108), especially chapter 3, titled “Angels and Demons: Woman’s Marriage of Heaven and Hell.”

14 By directly quoting Robert William Mackay’s remarks from *The Progress of the Intellect*, Eliot advocates the idea that religion must combine an exercise of the heart and feelings with the guide of intellectual practice in order to avoid a blind pursuit of dogmas, a languidness of judgment, the ignorance of the connection between duty and practice, and the over-excitement of the sentiments.

15 In highlighting Romola’s resistance to the authoritative voices of prophecy revealed in Dino’s dream, Caroline Levine argues that although a plotted narrative seems to be powerful and self-justifying, a skeptical reader can claim an arbitrary connection between interpretive possibilities and narrative development, rejecting the causal patterns presupposed by the truth-value of the narrative. However, Levine is not interested in the idea of sympathy as an essence of Romola’s moral agency but, rather, in the interconnectedness of novelistic suspense and Romola’s free will based on her individual moral responsibility. See Levine (“The Prophetic Fallacy” 159-60).
Alexander Welsh insists upon the importance of Romola’s strong wish to save her father’s library as some sort of atonement for her joy at his death. However, Welsh does not consider Romola’s devotion to humanity on the basis of sympathy as revealed in her later decision to use her father’s library for the support of Tessa and her children (179).

See Lacan (1-7) for the concept of the mirror stage.

Margaret Homans argues that Tito’s view of Bardo’s library and Romola as properties, as revealed in chapter 32, can mark the situation in which Romola is transformed from a selfless transmitter of male words into the beautiful object of male voyeurism. Although Homans’ acute analysis of the appropriation of female body for the fulfillment of male vision is relevant to Tito’s treacherous domination of the library and his enforcement of Romola to follow his order, what Homans misreads, however, is that Romola, at this point after the death of her father, is expressing her strong willingness to achieve her duty for and trust of her father beyond the identification of her body as a passive object of male voyeurism or fetish.

In theorizing the body, Elizabeth Grosz argues that the body can be conceived of as a surface on which social, political, institutional, and discursive powers are inscribed. Although Grosz does not mention specifically “religious” inscription on the body, Savonarola’s admonition to Romola can be read as a morally inscriptive discourse on the basis of religious doctrine.

Diana Robin argues that Cassandra Fedele’s persona in her epistolary writing can be considered to be “privative” by means of her rhetoric of self-effacement which was not the case in the male humanist’s autobiography in the fifteenth century in Italy: “Likewise, to the end that her power—verbal, intellectual, and dialectical—should not appear menacing or lacking in decorum, Fedele uses the privative force of diminutives to represent her own lack, her own insufficiency—of talent, mind, learning, and work” (193).
Andrew Thompson notes that although Savonarola is described as a great moralizing and civilizing agent in *Romola*, George Eliot seems to play down the significance of Savonarola’s role in the novel by making his influence recognized in abstract moral terms: “Savonarola’s actual achievements, including the establishment of a Republic in fifteenth-century Florence, seem lacking in substance in *Romola* and his vision remains strangely blurred and unfocused” (75).

The critics’ and historians’ views of both fictionalized Girolamo Savonarola and historical Savonarola vary. In advocating Villari’s praise for the Dominican Frate’s efforts to reform Christianity and Catholicism, Andrew Thompson disagrees with Eliot’s portrayal of the Frate (75). Vincent Cronin argues that Savonarola’s repugnance against luxury and sumptuousness arises from his idea that simplicity is a condition of purity of morals (239). Lauro Martines points out that Savonarola’s prophetic and purely religious-oriented claims, although he was a non-Florentine outsider, had an explosive and revivifying impact on the Florentines (294). Although he praised Savonarola’s accomplishment of his ideas to the Florentines, Machiavelli comments on the Dominican friar’s failure to invent a “mode for holding firm those who had believed nor for making unbelievers believe” (24). Jacob Burckhardt contends that Savonarola failed to communicate with the mundane world and suppressed the actual conditions of the Florentine populace’s life, as exemplified in his recourse to “the agency of a tyrannical police” for the Burning of Vanities: “He did not shrink from the most vexatious interferences with the much-prized freedom of Italian private life, using the espionages of servants on their masters as a means of carrying out his moral reforms” (295). Nestor declares that Savonarola “is guilty of misusing his rhetorical power” (101).
Socrates tells Phaedrus that “written words … go on telling you just the same thing forever,” and that “black fluid we call ink … can’t either speak in their [written words’] own defense or present the truth adequately” (Plato 521, 522).

Eliot’s skepticism about the institutional religion alienated her relationship with her father. According to Robert Evan’s journal, Mary Ann Evans began to stop going to church on January 2, 1842: “Went to Trinity Church in the forenoon. Miss Lewis went with me. Mary Ann did not go” (Letters 1: 124); “Mr. Evans, after a fruitless outburst of parental authority, lapsed into stony silence, refusing to discuss the question of religion with his disobedient child” (Haight 40).

Dianne F. Sadoff contends that Romola’s sympathy with her godfather suggests the heroine’s failure to develop her sympathy for the community as Eliot’s narrative ideal, and that Romola’s inability to do so reflects Eliot’s defense mechanism of deferred action, that is, her repressed and traumatic desire for her father, Robert Evans. But Sadoff overlooks Romola’s challenge to the dogmatic absolutism inherent in Savonarola’s discourse of altruism.

Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth argues that the narrators of Eliot’s novels prompt the reader to use the counterbalancing consideration of a qualifying comment, “on the other hand” which defies a single, unitary interpretation of her works.

Examining Antigone’s and Creon’s rhetorical claims, Judith Butler argues that Antigone appropriates Creon’s rhetoric of agency and, therefore, disturbs their positions within gender: “Although Hegel claims that her deed is opposed to Creon’s, the two acts mirror rather than oppose one another, suggesting that if the one represents kinship and the other the state, they can perform this representation only by each becoming implicated in the idiom of the other. In speaking to him, she becomes manly; in being spoken to, he is unmanned, and so neither
maintains their position within gender and the disturbance of kinship appears to destabilize gender through the play” (10).


29 Guth’s Schillerian reading of Savonarola lacks a close examination of the friar’s interest both in secular matters, including his reformation of Florence and Catholic Church and his political involvement, and in his practical and rational frame of mind.

30 See Carroll’s “George Eliot Martyrologist: The Case of Savonarola” for a discussion of the reconfiguration of martyrdom in terms of Savonarola’s final recognition both of the limits of his religious beliefs and of the sincerity of his religious motive: “Whereas the traditional martyr dies for his religious beliefs, Savonarola becomes a martyr by witnessing agonizingly their inevitable destruction, only holding on desperately to the purity of motive which energized them in the first place” (119).

Notes to Chapter 3: The Limits of Cultural Self-Fashioning and the Subversive Enactment of Sympathy as a Hybrid of Tastes: *Felix Holt, the Radical*

1 According to her Journal, Eliot began to write *Felix Holt* on March 29, 1865: “I have begun a Novel” (124; emphasis in orig.).

2 In advocating Williams’ criticism, Neil Roberts also contends that “Felix is not a working-man at all, and that his experience is irrelevant to the medium in which he is placed” (129). Jerome Thale agrees with the idea that Felix is “the author’s mouthpiece for her own views” (94). Arnold Kettle is not exceptional in criticizing Eliot and her hero Felix in that Eliot, like Matthew Arnold, demonstrates “the tendency of the writers of the 1860s” “to look at life more and more from the point of view of the modern middle-class intellectual with his own peculiar mixture of
high-mindedness and blindness, social conscience and irresponsibility, realism and idealism, his contradictory support and fear of democracy, his contempt for privilege and wish for privilege” (114). Neil McCaw also argues that Felix’s message impregnated with Carlylean voice is “deeply conservative” because the character’s proposition that the need for the educated citizenship must precede social and political change is in accordance with Carlyle’s conservatism (79).

3 The 1830s was the period of a railway boom because “the years between 1825 and 1835 fifty-four Railway Acts permitting railway building were passed, resulting by the end of 1838 in 500 miles of track, but it was in 1836 and 1837, when forty-four companies concerned with 1,498 miles of track were sanctioned” (Briggs 210).

4 In “The Genesis of Felix Holt,” Fred C. Thomson argues that Felix Holt is not a political novel because Eliot highlights the tragic plot of the Greek drama, the clash between the individual and the general, exemplified in “the tragic plight of Mrs. Transome and Harold” (577).

5 For a discussion of Felix as an ineffectual politician, see Raymond Williams, Arnold Kettle, Neil Roberts, Terry Eagleton (Criticism), and Lenore Wisney Horowitz.

6 See Goodway for a study of the working-class trades (153-225). The trade of watchmaking was renowned in “Clerkenwell and its environs” in 1830s: “it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that nearly the whole prosperity and industry of the district are dependent on the making of clocks and watches” (qtd. in Goodway 209-10).

7 See Bruce Haley (75-83) for a consideration of Carlyle’s “holistic, physio-ethical vision” (75) and his use of physiological metaphor for organic unity between members of society and the state.
For the impact of Spencer’s theory of organic evolution on Eliot’s ideas of the relation between the individual and society and of musical harmony, see W. F. T. Myers and da Sousa Correa: “Felix Holt can be read as a novel about evolving correspondence in the Spencerian sense,” illustrating “the processes by which both individuals and a whole society are slowly and painfully coming into wider, more complex, ultimately more human contact with the world at large” (Myers 8); “Spencer’s close connections with Eliot makes his work [“Development Hypothesis”] extremely important for the reading of her comments on musical development” (da Sousa Correa 15).

Jennifer Uglow contends that the true radical is Rufus Lyon because his ideal of freedom is “not individualistic but communal and is identified with harmony” (185).

Norman Vance points out that Rufus is the central figure in the novel in that his fidelity to “the eternal principle of moral order” (114), or “the underlying Law of human sympathy” (120), is crucial in maintain social stability. Instead of examining the dynamics of the conflict Rufus enters into between his ecclesiastical vocation and his domestic affection, Robin Sheets criticizes Rufus as a flawed and problematic character who dogmatically submerges everything in theological exegesis: “His earnest but inflexible approach to narrative could be as disconcerting to a novelist as the constant duplicity of Johnson and Jermyn. Whether Lyon’s vision represents Puritan eschatology or the secular millenarianism of Comte and Spencer, it involves one plot, one law, one fixed and final ending” (156).

The anti-Byronic sentiment can be discovered in Carlyle’s writing and in his life: “Close thy Byron; open thy Goethe” (Sartor Resartus 143); Carlyle’s friendship with John Wilson had been alienated because Carlyle could not tolerate Wilson’s Byronic anarchic emotions and his
heterodox moral conduct, whereas Carlyle became attached to Francis Jeffrey because he shared a common vision of “orthodox social stability” with Carlyle (Kaplan, *Thomas Carlyle* 135).

12 Walter Benjamin argues that mechanical reproduction of art brings about the decay of aura because the masses ardently express their “bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction” (223).

13 Hilda Hollis contends that Felix’s physical appearance and his arresting voice are not an index of Eliot’s approval but “an element of satire in the narrator’s voice” (166) because the dialogic pattern of the narrative, as exemplified in the juxtaposition of the trades-union man’s public speech with Felix’s, does not allow Felix to dominate the narrative so that the novel can also draw the reader’s attention to the other voice: “Eliot’s novel does not focus on the voice of the trades-union man, but his perspective and his voice are heard, and the novel is thereby dialogized” (167). On the contrary, Colene Bentley argues that Felix’s visibility is a dominant factor in the narrative because his influencing power on the public mainly arises from “how he appears” rather than “what he says” (281), and because his physical characteristics even play a significant role in making “Esther’s life-altering decision of whether or not to remain at Transome Court” “while Felix is out of sight” (282).

14 In “The Failure of Realism,” Catherine Gallagher points out that through her portrayal of Felix as a “cultured” character of “picture-writing” and “didactic simplicity,” not concerned with the subtleties and complexities of life, Eliot represents him not only as “a casual abstraction” but also as “an attack on conventional reading” or a denial of inductive or metonymic realism (380, 382).
15 Sally Shuttleworth notes that Eliot dramatizes Caliban’s sexual threat to Miranda as “Mrs Transome’s sexual transgressions” and Caliban’s political threat to Prospero’s ruling as “the sensuality of the mob” which brings about a “widespread political disorder” (George Eliot 119).

16 Focusing on the way in which Arnold’s idea of culture is affiliated with the state politic, Said defines the notion of affiliation as an “implicit network of peculiarly cultural associations between forms, statements, and other aesthetic elaborations on the one hand and, on the other, institutions, agencies, classes, and amorphous social forces” (World 174).

17 For a consideration of Felix Holt in light of the Arnoldian notion of culture, see Knoepflmacher (Religious Humanism 60-71), Kettle (113), Cunningham (179-82), Gallagher (Industrial Reformation 233-37), and Bentley (275-76).

18 According to Eagleton, Samuel Taylor Coleridge in The Idea of the Constitution (1829) demonstrates the necessity of cultivating the individuals for the purpose of political citizenship (7). Coleridge says that:

But civilization is itself but a mixed good, if not far more a corrupting influence, the hectic of disease, not the bloom of health, and a nation so distinguished more fitly to be called a varnished than a polished people; where this civilization is not grounded in cultivation, in the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterise our humanity. We must be men in order to be citizens. (173)

19 See Trilling (245-47) for a discussion of the Hyde Park Riots, a collision between a crowd of the Reform League and the police on July 22, 1866.

20 For a consideration of Esther as an aesthetic professional whose tastes overturns Felix’s male discourse of intellect, see Bode (780), Cohen (148-49), and Starr (66).
In examining Esther’s commitment to feeling in light of Eliot’s emphasis on the ideal of an organic society, K. M. Newton argues that “Esther Lyon develops from being someone with an attachment of egotistic Romanticism to being a Romantic who ascribes the greatest importance to feeling” (76), and that the romantic feeling “must reject rebellion and pure impulse and socially direct its energies” for “the ideal of the organic society” (78). By simply ascribing the growth of her feeling to the influences of Felix and Rufus, however, Newton does not attend to Esther’s active role in overturning the patriarchal stratification of the labor of the sexes.

Rosemarie Bodenheimer argues that “character” in *Felix Holt* “makes its own history out of its sense of a larger vision of time” (227). But Bodenheimer subsumes Esther under the influences of the two male figures, Rufus and Felix, and she does not mention Esther’s independent aesthetic sensibilities which serve to cultivate her feeling of sympathy.

In *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations*, David Carroll claims that Harold’s discovery of the secret of his birth and of his real father highlights “an act of sacrilege against a system of values which the parent apparently lives by, which determines the life of the child” and that the discovery of his destiny determined by the act of his parents’ sacrilege makes the story of Harold “Gothic melodrama” (210).

Rita Bode argues that Esther chooses Felix over Harold mainly “because, in contrast to Harold, he shows himself susceptible to her control” (770). However, my argument is that Esther’s choice of Felix over Harold does not aim to control Felix but to frustrate Harold’s materialistic orientations that only conceptualizes her as an object of economic value.

Catherine’s aesthetic judgment in opposition to her parents’ economic discourse exemplifies what John Guillory in *Cultural Capital* calls “the incommensurability of aesthetic and economic values” (317).
Mary Ann O’Farrell argues in “Provoking George Eliot” that the dynamic of compassion and passion invested in the relationship between Mrs. Transome and Esther is replete with the erotic nuance as implicated in the words, such as “fitfulness,” “restlessness,” “pacing,” “enclasped in silence,” “rising,” “vibrating,” and “tremor” (150-51).

Fred C. Thomson notes in “Felix Holt as Classic Tragedy” that the novel, like the Greek drama, illuminates the working of Nemesis which serves as “a severe but ultimately compassionate moral determinism” (51) and which also functions as a linchpin of connecting past, present, and future in the narrative plot of tragedy, as exemplified in the circumstances of Mrs. Transome’s adultery with Jermyn: “[T]he plot and outcome of the action hinge upon events outside the boundaries of the story itself. This antecedent history is available to any reader alert to the scattered clues and able to arrange them in a chronological pattern” (56). See also Felicia Bonaparte (Will, xix-xx) for a detailed discussion of Eliot’s use of destiny in the context of the Greek idea of nemesis.

David Deirdre argues that Mrs. Transome represents Eliot’s employment of “the strategy of containment” in that the female character, though imprisoned within the private and domestic sphere, “subverts the male world of politics and the male world of patriarchal plotting” by frustrating Jermyn’s and Harold’s public ambitions (199, 200).

In “Felix Holt and the True Power of Womanhood,” Zimmerman sees Esther as a powerless heroine who succumbs to Felix’s ideal of duty: “She [George Eliot] could not allow Esther Lyon an independent life, although Esther can have the Transome inheritance with or without marriage” (449).

E. S. Dallas notes in his unsigned review of Felix Holt in The Times that the novel is Esther’s story than Felix’s: “we suppose that if a man, instead of a woman, had written the novel he
would have been more proud of Esther than of Felix, and would have named the story after her.
In point of fact, it is her story that the novel is chiefly engaged with, and Felix Holt is less interesting in himself than as being interesting to her” (Critical Heritage 267).

31 In “Toward a Political Theology of the Neighbor,” Kenneth Reinhard argues that a discursive formulation of the “not-all” is “a radically open set” or “a supplement” to binary opposition characterizing the neighbor as the friend and enemy (13).

Notes to Conclusion

1 Butler’s idea of the other’s mourning as a mode of affective self-dispossession or self-undoing resembles Levinas’s notion of the neighbor as “other” or “face” (Otherwise 91) that makes an ethical demand on the subject:

   The neighbor concerns me before all assumption, all commitment consented to or refused. I am bound to him, him who is, however, the first one on the scene, not signaled, unparalleled; I am bound to him before any liaison contracted. He orders me before being recognized. Here there is a relation of kinship outside of all biology, “against all logic.” It is not because the neighbor would be recognized as belonging to the same genus as me that he concerns me. He is precisely other. The community with him begins in my obligation to him. The neighbor is a brother. A fraternity that cannot be abrogated, an unimpeachable assignation, proximity is an impossibility to move away without the torsion of a complex, without “alienation” or fault. (Otherwise 87)

2 K. K. Collins argues that although George Eliot agrees with Immanuel Kant’s emphasis on a good will as a foundation of moral value, she dramatizes the importance of individualistic free choice motivated by the personal consciousness of morality: “Unlike Kant, however, George Eliot insists that it is not always easy to see where one’s duty lies. The inner life is irretrievably
inward and secret, resisting sure analysis; its most revealing conditions and qualities are aspectual” (483).

3 See Miller (Ethics 70) for a discussion of Eliot’s anti-Kantian aesthetics.
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