

**UNSATISFACTORY ANSWERS:
DIALOGISM IN ELIOT'S LATER NOVELS**

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DIALOGISM IN GEORGE ELIOT'S LATER NOVELS**

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ABSTRACT

George Eliot's later novels are discussed with reference to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism. Although Bakhtin traces dialogism from comedy and carnival, Eliot's dialogism is rooted in tragedy. *Romola* is set during Florentine carnival and Savonarola's sacred parody of carnival. While Eliot and Bakhtin, following Goethe, both use carnival as an image of ambivalence, in contrast to Bakhtin, Eliot recognizes carnival's violence when it is not simply a metaphor. Deviations from a key intertext, Paquale Villari's *Life and Times of Girolamo Savonarola*, are critical to understanding the novel's ambivalence. *Felix Holt* and *The Spanish Gypsy* are studied in light of Eliot's discussion of tragedy, a genre that Eliot argues contains irreconcilable positions. Neither work arrives at an absolute pronouncement for dealing with social inequities. Although Felix has usually been seen as Eliot's mouthpiece, I argue that *Felix Holt* and the separately published address are dialogic and Eliot does not present any simplistic single correct course for English politics.

Bakhtin's discussion of the difference between epic and novel is a starting point for looking at Eliot's use of parodic heroes in *Middlemarch*, in which incessant parody provides multiple views on every action or word, and

large abstract truths cannot be found. Harriet Martineau is introduced as a model for Dorothea's possibilities, and the monologism of Martineau's work forms a contrast for *Middlemarch*. In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot's hero realizes his inability to believe in an epic stance, and the possibility of politics is challenged. Daniel is paralysed, unable to act because of his own consciousness of dialogism. The Zionism eventually embraced by Daniel is not endorsed absolutely but is subject to the various perspectives of the novel. The usual understanding of the concluding allusion to Milton's *Samson Agonistes* is challenged by examining Milton's depiction of the conflicting duties of family and nation.

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INTRODUCTION

Immediately following her death, an image of Victorian propriety was built up around George Eliot. The work of recent biographers and critics, however, destroys this icon so carefully created by John Cross, Eliot's husband for a few months at the end of her life. In her 1975 biography of Eliot, Rudy Redinger comments that Cross, in writing Eliot's first biography, "added to, rather than dispelled, the most obscuring elements of the George Eliot legend" (6). It is essential to note that Cross claims to have pruned each letter "of everything that I thought my wife would have wished to be omitted" (I vi). As a result, Eliot's friends did not recognize her. Mark Rutherford complained that Eliot's "entirely unconventional life" was not represented, and that she had been removed from the class "of the Insurgents, to one more genteel, but certainly not so interesting" (cited Redinger 18). Gladstone wittily remarked, "It is not a Life at all. It is a Reticence in three volumes" (cited Haight *Biography* xiv). Gordon Haight's publication of Eliot's letters and his 1968 biography opened up an

understanding of more of Eliot's life.¹ With a resurgence of interest in Eliot by feminist critics, Haight's biography has been followed by numerous attempts to understand the ambiguities of Eliot's life.²

This recasting of Eliot's life has gone hand in hand with a rereading of her novels. While feminist critics at first rejected Eliot for what they termed her betrayal of women, an argument based on the conventional and unsuccessful lives of her heroines, some more recent critics have insistently focussed on the radical nature and contradictions of Marian Evans's own life,

¹ The letters, however, remain incomplete, and we must expect to find extreme sample selection problems in them. For instance, Eliot literally took all her correspondence with Lewes to the grave with her (Redinger 17). Given the amount of cutting that Cross did even in those letters he printed, it is entirely possible that he simply destroyed complete letters in his possession. Furthermore, we know that some friends, such as Edith Simcox and Herbert Spencer, did not participate in, or contributed only selected letters to, Cross's project. Although Haight received copies of Barbara Bodichon's letters from her family, this correspondence is far from complete. Some letters are only partial as in one dated 30 March 1873 (*Letters* IX 87). A major new source of letters added by Haight was Eliot's correspondence with the Blackwoods. But it is crucial to remember that this was business correspondence, and we should not necessarily expect to find Eliot's personal opinions.

² Kristin Brady makes a well-deserved criticism of Haight's biography by exposing the phrenological basis for Haight's contention and theme throughout his biography, that Eliot needed "some one to lean upon" (16-17). This idea has continued even in such biographers as Redinger, and Brady's comment marks the way for a fresher evaluation of Eliot's life. Other recent biographies include Jennifer Uglow (1987), Rosemary Bodenheimer (1994), Frederick Karl (1995), and Rosemary Ashton (1996).

and have seen subversion of traditional female roles in her novels.³ This debate is not really new, but mirrors one that went on at the time of Eliot's death, and that is reflected in Simcox's tribute to Eliot published in *The Nineteenth Century* in 1881. Simcox was an intimate friend of Eliot's and a feminist involved in the labour movement. Objecting to those who began to characterize Eliot as conservative at the end of her life, particularly because her heroines, such as Dorothea, did not lead successful independent lives, she asks: "Was it possible for George Eliot, of all people in the world, to take a despairing view of the moral and intellectual capabilities of women, or to be out of sympathy with any phase of social aspiration or reform?" (796).⁴ Speaking as someone who knew Eliot well, she asserts that Eliot's assent to "the most 'advanced' opinions" on women was "unqualified and unhesitating" (797).⁵

³ Kate Millett asserted in 1972 that "'Living in sin', George Eliot lived the revolution as well perhaps, but she did not write of it....Dorothea's predicament in *Middlemarch* is an eloquent plea that a fine mind be allowed an occupation; but it goes no farther than petition. She marries Will Ladislaw and can expect no more of life than the discovery of a good companion whom she can serve as secretary" (196-97). More recent feminist criticism is discussed below.

⁴ Florence Nightingale was one of those critics of Dorothea, and, comparing her to the housing reformer Octavia Hill, asks, "Could not the heroine, the 'sweet sad enthusiast,' have been set to some such work as this?" (cited Showalter, "The Greening of Sister George" 306; *Fraser's Magazine*, [May 1873], 576)

⁵ It is worth noting that although this essay is referred to by
(continued...)

More recently, while some feminist critics have begun to repair Eliot's reputation, few have gone so far as Simcox. Gillian Beer, in *George Eliot*, is one of the strongest defenders of Eliot's support of the women's movement, and she repeatedly emphasizes Eliot's close ties to leading supporters of the feminist cause. She insists on the constraints Eliot faced because of her life with George Henry Lewes, and points to passages in letters and journals that show Eliot's sympathy with the women's cause. Kathleen Blake addresses the issue of Dorothea and contends that for Eliot to "show her heroine summoned to sweet ascent...would be to endanger realism" ("*Middlemarch* and the Woman Question" 69).

The rereading of Eliot's work is, however, not unproblematic. That voice in her novel which caused her to be read as the stalwart defender of nostalgia for a conservative rural and patriarchal Britain has not disappeared. While the inclusion of this conservative voice in her novels has caused some readers to spurn Eliot as anti-feminist or patriarchal, other critics have understood that this voice is not solitary. Many feminist critics, following Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, see Eliot as a writer compliant

⁵(...continued)

biographers (see Bodenheimer and Redinger), it is not widely quoted by critics, presumably because it is not reprinted in any collection. Similarly the *Saccharissa* essays, Eliot's only essays written under a female persona, but which are not reprinted in a collection, are infrequently discussed. (They are, however, reprinted with Kathleen McCormack's brief discussion of them.) Our reading of Eliot is still being strongly influenced by a type of censorship, or sample selection bias.

with patriarchy, having "internalized attitudes at once debilitating and degrading to her sex" (466). At the same time, because of the internal contradiction with her own aggressively pursued career, Eliot punishes her male characters: we see a struggle between "the narrator's reverence for gentle heroines...[and] the author's vengeful impulses" (499). Deirdre David, while attempting to situate her work within an historical patriarchy, similarly finds that Eliot is both a "resistant and complicit" part of patriarchy (*Intellectual Women* 179). Likewise, Kristin Brady sees in Eliot's work both a conventional plot and a "'gender plot' [that] works against the grain of the conventional narrative of romantic love or personal development, exposing its privileging of the masculine" (59). Patricia Lundberg argues that Eliot is a "proto-feminist who has written in *Middlemarch* a novel which preaches renunciation of self and submission to the concepts embodied in the nineteenth-century woman's lot on one level but who decries the injustice of that lot in the subsurface layers of meaning in the novel" (272).

The impression that results from these new readings, which recognize an ambivalence in Eliot's novels, is not of an uncomplicated demand for change in social structures, but rather as a complex interaction of voices and narratives which, when read together, do not endorse any single political or social agenda, but which through their presence point to the unsatisfactory nature of the *status quo*. Feminist criticism has recognized that Eliot's novels do not present a monologic response to life. However, this multi-

voiced dimension to her novels is not limited to women's concerns but spreads across the many facets of Eliot's interest in life. Instead of presenting any single truth as absolute, Eliot explores the many, and conflicting, dimensions of an issue by bringing different voices into interaction with each other and by exploring theoretical positions through her characters' lives. As David Carroll comments, "She saw her fictions as 'experiments in life' [*Letters* 25 January 1876; VI 216] and, as such, each experiment proceeds by the testing, juxtaposing, comparing, and contrasting of different ways of making sense of the world until coherence reaches its limit and breaks down into incoherence" (*George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations* 2).

On a scale much smaller than her novels, we see Eliot's play with voicing contradictory philosophical positions in one of her later, largely ignored poems, "A College Breakfast-Party" (1874). A modern uncertain Hamlet listens to his friends spout their different theories of life as they breakfast and drink wine. In this poem, Eliot exercises her knowledge of philosophy as the various breakfast guests attempt to give Hamlet direction. The priest urges him to follow the Church, arguing that it provides an absolute direction where all other sources have failed. The priest leaves: "Brief parting, brief regret — sincere, but quenched/In fumes of best Havannah, which consoles/ For lack of other certitude" (231). With the

exodus of the priest, the group is left with the nineteenth-century dilemma of how to find an absolute in the midst of a loss of faith.

The dialogue that follows explores different options. Rosencrantz is most nihilistic, denying the possibility of any absolute, and deconstructing any idea of good. "Have you proved/A Best Unique where all is relative,/ And where each change is loss as well as gain?" (241). In contrast, Guildenstern, although pessimistic about man's future, argues that meaning is created through man: "it means the tide/ Of needs reciprocal, toil, trust, and love --/ The surging multitude of human claims/ Which make 'a presence not to be put by'/ Above the horizon of the general soul" (246). From a more optimistic viewpoint, Laertes similarly argues, "Why, any superstition warm with love,/ Inspired with purpose, wild with energy/ That streams resistless through its ready frame,/ Has more of human truth within its life/ Than souls that look through colour into nought" (250). Osric initially lines himself up with Rosencrantz "Against all schemes, religious or profane,/ That flaunt a Good as pretext for a lash/ To flog us all who have the better taste,/ Into conformity..." (251). But, in contrast to Rosencrantz, he claims poetry as an ideal. Not caring what happens to the English pauper, what advances science makes, Osric lives only for poetry and contends that poetry has its own truth apart "from what Philistines call man's weal" (255).

None of the four positions finally dominates, and Hamlet is left to dream. Finally, in his sleep he has an enlightening vision, but its truth is

undermined by his refusal to tell it awake, afraid that the truth will evaporate. In the poem we see the intense dialogism that dominates Eliot's work: numerous viewpoints are expressed but none is given an absolute seal of approval by the author. Like the poem, Eliot's novels explore the various ideologies expressed by Hamlet's friends, including vacillation like Hamlet's, but the novels differ from this poem in that they make ideology incarnate, and the problems of the various viewpoints become apparent when they interact with life-situations.⁶ Furthermore, the incarnation of a philosophical perspective adds a whole other dimension to that position, since it is uniquely linked to an individual life. Once a character takes on an idea, that idea is subject both to the character's personality and to the varying circumstances surrounding his or her life.

Politics is an important aspect of the embodiment of ideas, and, in contrast to her earlier novels, Eliot's later ones, on which the thesis will focus, all have political settings: the days of Savonarola in Rome; the 1832 reform issue; the plight of the Gypsies during the Spanish Inquisition; and the place of Jews in nineteenth-century England.⁷ The women's issue is a

⁶ Eliot's uses the term *incarnate history* in "The Natural History of German Life" (Pinney 287) to describe Riehl's understanding of European society which Riehl believes should not be separated from its history. Just as Riehl argues that society is integrally attached to history, Eliot's novels explore ideas as they are bound up with life.

⁷ The political settings of Eliot's novels have sometimes been seen
(continued...)

hovering presence in all her novels, although Eliot does not focus on any particular political action. The discussion and interaction between characters and the commentary of the narrator all contribute to creating a picture of varied and contradictory viewpoints during these times. Through these novels, Eliot considers the possibility of arriving at an absolute voice and position for action. No single theoretical position is, however, in the end endorsed. But despite this lack of authorization, that voice expressing the needs of the under-class is always insistently present, interrupting the voice of the *status quo*, and not allowing it to control interpretation.

Mikhail Bakhtin's work on dialogism in the novel offers some insights which are useful for understanding Eliot's novels, and conversely, Eliot's novels open other perspectives on dialogism not explored by Bakhtin. A theorist of the novel, Bakhtin has been adopted by feminists because of his acknowledgement of multivoicedness and his examination of the interaction of multiple voices with a more powerful monologizing voice. He values the novel as a genre in which voices interact and enter into dialogue with each other. In a dialogic world, no word has a single meaning. Every word can

⁷(...continued)

to be simply settings and not integral to the novel. For instance, F.C. Thomson argues that the "politics, and even the role of Felix [Holt] himself, were probably afterthoughts" (576). Sally Shuttleworth effectively contends against Thomson's chronological reasons for this statement and his reading of the text: "The political issues in *Felix Holt* are not, however, merely the projection of private issues on a public scale; the private issues are themselves politically determined" (117).

be understood in the light of another different word: "A word, discourse, language or culture undergoes 'dialogization' when it becomes relativized, de-privileged, aware of competing definitions for the same things. Undialogized language is authoritative or absolute" (Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, "Glossary," *Dialogic Imagination* 427). This absolute, or monologic word, however, can never really exist, since it is surrounded by other languages.

In the sphere of the polyvocal novel, different life positions can be explored. Bakhtin is particularly interested in the idea of the incarnate word, and studies the novel as the place where theoretic positions enter into life. First and foremost the novel is interested in the individual as "a speaking human being" (*Dialogic Imagination* 332). Action is important in so far as it tests an individual's ideology: "The action and individual act of a character in a novel are essential in order to expose -- as well as to test -- his ideological position, his discourse" (*Dialogic Imagination* 334). Since the characters function in a dialogic world, their ideas are not absolute: "The crucial distinction between him [a novelistic hero] and the epic hero is to be found in the fact that the hero of a novel not only acts but talks, too, and his action has no shared meaning for the community, is not uncontested and takes place not in an uncontested epic world where all meanings are shared" (*Dialogic Imagination* 334). Characters in the novel represent different positions, and they can differ from the author.

Critics were quick to recognize the pertinence of Bakhtin's work to Eliot's novels. As early as 1980, when Bakhtin was first being translated into English, David Lodge commented on the applicability of Bakhtin to Eliot. He refers to Bakhtin as part of a counter-argument to Colin MacCabe's dismissal of Eliot's work as a classic realist text in his study *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*. Bakhtin is important for Lodge, because he recognizes the novel as polyphonic: "One of the essential peculiarities of prose fiction is the possibility it allows of using different types of discourse, with their distinct expressiveness intact, on the plane of a single work, without reduction to a single common denominator" (cited Lodge 226). Lodge uses Bakhtin in support of his argument that the author does not unambiguously control interpretation. Also dating from 1980, Peter Garrett's work on the nineteenth-century multiplot novel argues that the form of Eliot's novels is dialogic. While Bakhtin applies this term to discuss a "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses," Garrett proposes that "unresolved tensions between structural principles" may also be dialogic (9).

Lodge and Garrett have been followed by a number of other critics who recognize the dialogic nature of Eliot's work, and both explicitly and implicitly use Bakhtin's work on dialogism to elucidate Eliot's novels. Rosemary Clark-Beattie considers *Middlemarch* as a dialogic novel, but remains closer to Bakhtin's understanding of dialogism as referring to voices.

She finds two narratorial voices: the idealist and the voice of common sense, both of which sound against each other and against the voices of various characters. Beattie argues that this dialogic style is consciously employed by Eliot, and that through the privileging of certain voices the intentionality of the author dominates. Although all voices are subject to question, some voices are at a greater disadvantage. Beattie's work is based on Bakhtin's later essay "Discourse in the Novel." This contrasts with Bakhtin's earlier *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* that emphasizes the polyphony in Dostoevsky's novels, in which a character's voice cannot "serve as a vehicle for the author's own ideological position" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 7). In a more technical paper, Wendell V. Harris, also looking at "Discourse in the Novel," discusses Eliot's use of double-voicing and hybridization. With clear examples from her novels, Harris shows that this is a key element in Eliot's style.

Arguing from evidence in Eliot's letters, Marijke Rudnik-Smalbraak contends that dialogics is foundational to Eliot's life. She also discusses confession, a deep interaction between / and another, and the concept of incarnation, the embodiment of the word. Bakhtin discusses these concepts in relation to Dostoevsky, but Rudnik-Smalbraak argues that they are equally pertinent to Eliot's novels.

A number of feminist scholars have used Bakhtin to elucidate Eliot's work, particularly in their contestation of readings of Eliot as a writer of the

establishment. While Dorothea Barrett mentions Bakhtin only once in her study of Eliot's novels, her work is clearly influenced by him; she emphasizes the polyvocality and dialectic in *Middlemarch*, arguing that there is no single key or single-voiced closure to *Middlemarch*. She recognizes that the argument amongst critics about whether Eliot approves the search for a single primitive tissue, or a sole key to mythology, is critical to our interpretation of Eliot:

This controversy has the widest possible implications for the interpretation of George Eliot's work: the belief that George Eliot is in search of the one tissue, that the aim and tendency of all her fiction is to discover a single key to all mythologies is the foundation without which no conservative and anti-feminist interpretation of her work can stand. (142)⁸

Patricia Yaeger appeals to Bakhtin's concept of carnival play from a feminist vantage with reference to a number of nineteenth-century novelists and poets in her study of play in women's writing. Through festival play, dominant ideology can be challenged. Yaeger particularly considers *The Mill on the Floss*, and Eliot's use of a second language in Maggie's play with Latin to "to interrupt her text's primary language" (54). Yaeger argues that women value the novel because its "multivoicedness allows the interruption and interrogation of the dominant culture. The novel's polyvocality gives the

⁸ Most readers now suppose that Eliot is not in sympathy with the search for a single tissue. See for instance: Jan Gordon ("Origins, *Middlemarch*, Endings: George Eliot's Crisis of the Antecedent"), Beer (*Darwin's Plots*), and Alan Mintz.

writer an opportunity to interrupt the speech practices, the ordinary patriarchal assumptions of everyday life" (31).

None of the work on Bakhtin and Eliot, however, considers the contradiction between Eliot's work and Bakhtin's fundamental premise that the dialogic novel emerges from the comic tradition. Since Eliot's work is not primarily comic, and since, as we shall see, she finds the roots of the novel in tragedy, this is a crucial area for understanding Eliot's use of dialogism. Bakhtin's literary analysis spans great time periods, but he finds laughter at the heart of the dialogic novelistic tradition whether in the authorized subversion of ancient Greek Satyr plays, Rabelais, or Dostoevsky. While a work such as *Crime and Punishment* is far from Rabelais, Bakhtin argues that its roots lie, with Dostoevsky's other novels and stories, in the comic tradition, and he terms the laughter that he finds in it "reduced" (*Problems*

of Dostoevsky's *Poetics*, 165).⁹ Its carnival laughter is ultimately discernible in the position of the author:

This position excludes all one-sided or dogmatic seriousness and does not permit any single point of view, any single polar extreme of life or of thought, to be absolutized. All one-sided seriousness (of life and thought), all one-sided pathos is handed over to the heroes, but the author, who causes them all to collide in the "great dialogue" of the novel, leaves that dialogue open and puts no finalizing period at the end. (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 165)

Comedy or laughter, for Bakhtin, is crucial to the novel because it contests authority, but does not oppose it by creating an alternate authority. Instead, by setting up another voice, it takes away from that which claims to be the sole voice:

Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside

⁹ The Socratic dialogue is also a part of the tradition of carnival literature:

The carnivalistic base of the Socratic dialogue, despite its very complicated form and philosophical depth, is beyond any doubt. Folk-carnival 'debates' between life and death, darkness and light, winter and summer, etc., permeated with the pathos of change and the joyful relativity of all things, debates which did not permit thought to stop and congeal in one-sided seriousness or in a stupid fetish for definition or singleness of meaning – all this lay at the base of the original core of the genre. This distinguishes the Socratic dialogue from the purely rhetorical dialogue as well as from the tragic dialogue; but this carnivalistic base also brings Socratic dialogue close in several respects to the agons of ancient Attic comedy and to the mimes of Sophron.... "Socratic irony" is reduced carnival laughter. (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 132)

out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its center, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it. Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world... (*Dialogic Imagination* 23)

The parody of carnival upsets or "decrowns" the voice of authority.

In his study of Rabelais, Bakhtin emphasizes the bodily aspect of humour. Physical reality mocks seriousness: all human beings, even officials, have physical bodily functions. While more serious forms of literature, such as the epic, tend to operate on a more distant plane and to ignore our bodily humanity, carnivalized literature revels in it. In his work on Rabelais, Bakhtin argues that seriousness

oppressed, frightened, bound, lied, and wore the mask of hypocrisy. Seriousness was avaricious, committed to fasts. When its mask was dropped in the festive square and at the banquet table, another truth was heard in the form of laughter, foolishness, improprieties, curses, parodies, and travesties. All fears and lies were dispersed in the face of the material bodily festive principle. (*Rabelais and His World* 94)

Clearly Eliot's work is distinct from that of Rabelais. While there is humour and parody in Eliot's novels, it is not ribald, nor is it usually physical. Dostoevsky's reduced laughter would seem to have much more in common with Eliot's novels. Bakhtin prizes Dostoevsky, an almost exact contemporary of Eliot, for his presentation of multiple and conflicting ideas in his novels, and for his testing of ideological positions: "His manner of developing a thought is everywhere the same: he develops it dialogically, not in a dry logical dialogue but by juxtaposing whole, profoundly individualized

voices" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 93). Bakhtin's description of Dostoevsky's open endings, noted above, equally fits Eliot's novels. While earlier critics found a one-sided seriousness in Eliot's novels and saw the endings as closed, often with their formal epilogue which seems to wrap up all the loose ends, many recent critics have found that Eliot's novels are open-ended. For example, Barrett points in particular to the lack of closure in the novels. Brady comments on the subversive plot lines working throughout the novels alongside conservative plots. Carroll, in *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretation*, discusses Eliot's work within the context of the nineteenth-century hermeneutical crisis: the novels do not end in a settled truth, but rather interpretation is reached and then, again, fragments.

Like Dostoevsky's fiction, Eliot's novels explore ideological positions. But this possibility for exploration, Eliot argues in her essay on *Antigone* (1856), comes from classical tragedy with its clash of irreconcilable positions.¹⁰ It is not, as Bakhtin would have it, solely the result of "reduced laughter." Bakhtin links epic with monologia, frequently grouping tragedy with epic, and discerns in it a voice of single-minded seriousness.¹¹ By

¹⁰ Ian Adam points to the relevance of this essay: "as her early essay on 'The Antigone and its Moral' and many situations in the novels show, she was fascinated by characters who face contending ethical claims" ("The Ambivalence of *The Mill on the Floss*" 125).

¹¹ In *Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin identifies epic and tragedy as "pure genres" (127), and in *The Dialogic Imagination* he groups epic, tragedy
(continued...)

contrast, Eliot argues that tragedy occurs because there is no single voice of true authority. Her emphasis on the place of tragedy in novelistic prehistory, and particularly as a precursor to her novels, which are dialogic, is an important corrective to Bakhtin's valorization of carnival laughter and his insistence that laughter is the one aspect of humanity that has never been co-opted by authority. In her own theoretical interpretations of the novel, Eliot discovers the novel's origins in classical tragedy with its irresolvable contradictions between valid positions.

But while Eliot's work offers a corrective to Bakhtin's sweeping historical judgements, more importantly, her emphasis on tragedy has the effect of bringing disputation out of the limited world of carnival or of authorized subversion. Critics of Bakhtin's theory have pointed out that carnival occurs in a space which is authorized by power. Terry Eagleton terms carnival "a licensed affair" (*Walter Benjamin* 148). Bakhtin, in fact, recognizes the dual nature of carnival as authorized and subversive, but nevertheless he argues that laughter has never been used by authority.¹² In Eliot's work, speaking with an *other* voice can lead to death. The voice of

¹¹(...continued)
and lyric as genres possessing "a direct word" (61).

¹² See *Rabelais* 89; Linda Hutcheon commends Bakhtin for his recognition through carnival of parody's dual nature: "the paradox of its authorized transgression of norms" (*A Theory of Parody* 74).

the other is subject to the power of that authoritative voice which desires to speak singularly.

The tragic tradition suggests that speakers, not just words, are endangered. Eliot's work shows the irresolvable conflict of different voices, but these voices do not possess the freedom of carnival time. In fact, Eliot disputes whether a utopia such as Bakhtin's carnival exists. Can a time of play ever escape the realm of power structures? In the first chapter of my thesis, I consider *Romola* (1863), a novel set in the midst of fifteenth-century Florentine carnival. Eliot presents both carnival as a parody of serious authority, and, in Savonarola's bonfire, a serious parody of carnival itself. The novel contains multiple voices and any singular voice is parodied, but the novel also shows the physical dangers of carnival.

Feminists have adopted Bakhtin's work, seeing in it an explanation of how women can subvert the dominant voice through dialogue. Julia Kristeva highlighted the idea of carnival as rebellion in her introduction of Bakhtin to the West in her essay, "Word, Dialogue and Novel" (French 1969; trans. 1980): "the carnival challenges God, authority and social law; in so far as it is dialogical, it is rebellious" (49). Many feminists, however, who use some of Bakhtin's ideas remain critical of his work. Mary O'Connor, for example, notes a lack of "any conception of a gendered application" (244) by Bakhtin of his theory. Nevertheless, O'Connor argues that, "The kind of stereotyping that has bound women to passive, silent subject positions could

be replaced with a model of subjectivity that was neither fixed nor unified. Since, in this model, the subject is constituted by and through various discourses, and since meaning exists always 'among other meanings as a link in the chain of meaning' (N70-1, 146), Bakhtin's theory offers a possibility for agency and change" (249).¹³

Other critics have seen limitations in Bakhtin's work for women and minorities. Dale Bauer contends that a feminist dialogics both enables the critic's own voice to clash with the text and allows her to recognize the debate of voices within the text. But Bauer acknowledges that Bakhtin's weak point lies in the battle: "He does not work out the contradiction between the promise of utopia or community and the battle which always is waged for control" (5). Mary Pollock remarks,

As feminist readers have pointed out, Bakhtin's failure to insert gender into his elaboration of dialogue results in a weak link between utopian theory and actual practice. Not only are women excluded from his audience, the whole dynamics of dialogue as elaborated in Bakhtin's theory fails to protect weaker voices. Opening up of dialogue can be done by a dominant voice, but becomes problematic when the weaker voice allows the stronger one into its space. (238)

Similarly, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White comment sceptically on "the politics of carnival: its nostalgia; its uncritical populism (carnival often violently abuses and demonizes *weaker*, not stronger, social groups --

¹³ The reference in this quotation is to "From notes made in 1970-71" (*Speech Genres* 132-58).

women, ethnic and religious minorities, those who 'don't belong' -- in a process of *displaced abjection*); its failure to do away with the official dominant culture, its licensed complicity" (19).

Romola is set in the midst of carnival, a space that, Bakhtin argues, disrupts all the normal hierarchies of life, but Eliot shows that this disruption is not safe. Carnival, and its sacred parody, are important images for *Romola*, and the novel considers what absolutes are left in the midst of such festal ambivalence. In Eliot's world, carnival is a metaphor for life's ambivalence. This questioning of absolutes continues to surface throughout the novels. It is not a vague theoretical question, but in *Romola* it is focussed on individuals caught in the political system at various levels: the persecuted Jews, Romola and Tessa lacking in political and domestic power, the popular and reforming leader -- Savonarola, the aristocratic Bernardo, and Tito as a rising financier and politician. Through this novel Eliot is able to look at political turmoil at a safe distance. It sets the stage for how Eliot will deal with politics in her subsequent British novels. Rather than endorsing a particular position, she shows the ambivalence and inconsistencies in all positions, even those with which she seems more sympathetic.

Joseph Butwin points out that crowds fascinate Eliot throughout her writing and that behind her ideal pacified crowds, such as that led by Savonarola, "lies the fear that their counterpart, the popular mob, is

politically dangerous" (355). The recurrence of pacified crowds in Eliot's works, however, does not necessarily mean that Eliot approves them. Rather, it marks her interest both in crowds themselves, and in another aspect of her admirable crowds noted by Butwin: their "degeneration" (355). What we encounter in this inevitable degeneration is the triumph of carnival. Although a leader tries to impose his thought on the crowd and this seemingly leads to order, in the end this monologic control lies only on the surface. What Eliot asks is how to act when there is not a single right way for action admitted by all.

In *Felix Holt* (1866), the question becomes focussed on the world of British politics. Although Felix has usually been seen as Eliot's mouthpiece, I argue that this novel is actually dialogic and that Eliot does not present any simplistic single correct course for English politics. Bakhtin's work on the dialogic novel is helpful in re-evaluating the relation between Eliot and her hero in this novel. But, in contrast to the dialogism discussed by Bakhtin, the dialogism of both *Felix Holt* and *The Spanish Gypsy* (1868) is rooted in tragedy, which contains an interaction of conflicting valid positions. Neither of these novels arrives at an absolute statement about how to deal with social inequities. Silva's final wavering and Felix's retirement to a quiet town, however, make the question more urgent than ever.

Eliot, throughout her novels, illustrates the potential hazards involved with speaking. I pair *The Spanish Gypsy* and *Felix Holt*, in order to consider

Eliot's exploration of the dangers of speaking and the clash of convictions. Both *The Spanish Gypsy* and *Felix Holt* probe the conflict between personal needs and duty to the State. Important ideological stakes are at issue in these novels, but ideology is not left abstract. In *The Spanish Gypsy*, lives are lost for some while freedom is gained for others, through the decisions of various characters. While violent solutions to social inequity occur in *The Spanish Gypsy*, peaceful ones are pursued in *Felix Holt*. Neither novel, however, provides a satisfactory or sole answer to social inequities, since in the former many lives are lost in the violent struggle, while in the latter, little changes. Speaking and change are dangerous, but silence and inaction result in acquiescence.

Middlemarch (1872) moves from the violence of tragedy to a greater focus on human constraints that impede both speaking and change. Dorothea is constricted by society and cannot become the modern-day St. Theresa creating a great work. Rather than following St. Theresa, Dorothea merely thinks of doing great things, and by her submission to convention she eventually accomplishes little, despite the possibilities set up by the initial comparison. *Middlemarch* emphasizes the problem of ideology incarnate. As soon as an idea becomes entwined with human life, it is subject to those social constraints to which Dorothea, or Lydgate, succumbs.

The lack of a single authentic position is exacerbated in *Middlemarch* as the characters become bogged down by life and are unable to engage in

the heroic clash of ideas. None of the characters is equal to his or her destiny, and the present, while allowing possibilities for change, also inhibits any heroic clearly-defined action. Bakhtin's discussion of the difference between epic and novel is a starting point for looking at Eliot's use of what are essentially parodic heroes. The incessant parody in *Middlemarch* provides multiple views on every action or word, and large abstract truths cannot be found. Politics appears to be side-lined in *Middlemarch*, but what is at issue is the way in which ideals are muddled as soon as they are subject to embodiment in people, rather than in distant epic heroes.

Finally in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), Eliot's hero realizes his inability to believe in an epic stance, and the possibility of politics becomes an even more problematic challenge. Daniel is paralysed and unable to act because of a recognition of multiple perspectives. He cannot escape into a world of carnival where action does not matter. Instead, consequences insist on entering the carnival, or in this novel, gambling, world. Daniel does eventually engage in a single course, but the wider view of the novel suggests that it is not the only legitimate path, and, in fact, its legitimacy is questioned. It is only by taking an epic stance, a stance that functions under absolute conviction, that Daniel is able to navigate again in the world. Yet the novel as a whole undermines the singularity of his conviction, and epic becomes subject to novel and the conflicting values and perspectives of life.

Eliot's dialogic style is intimately connected with her approach to politics and life-questions more generally. Although her earlier novels are also dialogic, this thesis focuses on her later ones because of their political motivation. Each of her later novels is concerned with how to act in the world. Politics is an important aspect of this question, since the strife of different political factions is one facet of ideological embodiment. Clearly, Eliot's own political approach is crucial to understanding her novels. While none of the characters functions simplistically as Eliot's mouthpiece, the overall production and compilation of the novels is Eliot's own.

Charles Bray observed that in life, Eliot tried to see "all sides, and there are always many, clearly and without prejudice" (*Autobiography* 75, cited in Haight, *Letters* I 265-66 n. 6). John Cross, also commenting on her "many-sidedness," writes that it "makes it exceedingly difficult to ascertain, either from her books or from the closest personal intimacy, what her exact relation was to any existing religious creed or to any political party" (III 307). This attempt to see more than one side of an issue is played out in the dialogization of her novels, and sometimes causes critics, wanting to categorise her opinions, to feel great frustration. Eliot writes to Frederick Harrison that she shrinks "from decided 'deliverances' on momentous subjects, from the dread of coming to swear by my own 'deliverances' and sinking into an insistent echo of myself. That is a horrible destiny -- and one

cannot help seeing that many of the most powerful men fall into it" (*Letters* 15 Jan. 1870; V 76).

In contrast to the period when she wrote her novels, Eliot's youth was characterised by strong polar opinions, rather than an openness to diverse opinions. As a teenager, Eliot was a firm evangelical Christian, believing "that those are happiest who are not fermenting themselves by engaging in projects for earthly bliss, who are considering this life merely a pilgrimage, a scene calling for diligence and watchfulness, not for repose and amusement" (*Letters* 18 August 1838; I 6). This serious faith gave way to an opposite, but equally strong, anti-Christian declaration and dedication to radical politics. Eliot initially gave up church attendance, but resumed again for the sake of her relationship with her father. She translated Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesus* in 1846, a book of German Higher Criticism that had a huge impact on nineteenth-century Christian religion, and caused many intellectuals to lose their faith. With the passing of years, however, this position was modified yet again. While retaining a great suspicion of hypocrisy in the Church, Eliot became increasingly tolerant of "any faith in which human sorrow and human longing for purity have expressed themselves" (*Letters* 6 Dec. 1859; III 231). Her politics also seem to have changed again. She writes to her friend Francois D'Albert-Durade in 1878, "You remember me as much less of a conservative than I have now become.

I care as much or more for the interests of the people, but I believe less in the help they will get from democrats" (*Letters* 1 August 1878; VII 47).

This espousal of a more conservative position, however, does not make Eliot in any simplistic way "conservative." While her novels demonstrate a skepticism about the democratic process and about the genuineness of the radicals' concern for the labourer and artisan, they equally show the corruption and self-centeredness of the aristocracy. Eliot's early wish to be preserved from "sentimentalizing over a pampered old man [Louis Philippe] when the earth has its millions of unfed souls and bodies" (*Letters* 8 March 1848; I 254) never really disappears. The aristocracy in her novels are constantly juxtaposed to those in impoverished circumstances. However, Eliot's view of the radical politics, and its efficacy for changing society, alters. Her earliest friendships were with radicals, but she moves to view politicised radicals as prejudiced and concerned with their own interest, and rejects the Liberal Party as *the* political solution to England's inequities. William Myers, commenting on Eliot's rejection of political radicalism, emphasizes the time-frame of this decision, since "the political radicals of the period ... were, after all, to end up as Unionists in alliance with the Conservative party and proponents of the aggressively self-confident class ethos of Imperialism" (*The Teaching of George Eliot* 85).

Eliot first encountered radical ideas in the company of her Coventry friends, Charles and Cara Bray, and Sarah Hennell, under whose influence

she abandoned her evangelical faith and the social beliefs of her family. Like many radicals, Bray was a manufacturer. His house was the centre of radical politics in Coventry, and there Eliot met a wide assortment of people associated with various free-thinking and radical causes, including: "James Simpson, pioneer of elementary education; John Connolly, who worked for reform of insane asylums; the mesmerist Lafontaine; the socialist, Robert Owen and the philosopher, Emerson" (Uglow 31). Although many of these causes were forward-looking, some ideas in which Bray showed an interest were not. For instance, Bray became a strong believer in the pseudo-science of phrenology, which entails a racist and sexist outlook.

While Eliot formed a lasting bond with Sara Hennell and the Brays, a bond which replaced her family circle, she did eventually distance herself intellectually from this group. As Redinger notes, after Eliot's liaison with Lewes, Barbara Bodichon, the noted feminist activist, replaced Sara as Eliot's closest female friend (300). Eliot's intellectual disengagement from the Coventry circle is most easily seen in her rejection of phrenology, a position she shared with Lewes. She also disagreed with Bray on the issue of women's vocation. In response to Bray's pamphlet against women working in factories, Eliot points to other, more positive, experiences of women's factory work, and furthermore, emphatically asserts, "La carrière ouverte aux talen[t]s,' whether the talents be feminine or masculine, I am quite confident is a right maxim" (*Letters* 30 October 1857; II 396). Most

importantly for the purpose of this thesis, in her later work, Eliot begins to question whether radical politics is self-serving rather than genuinely interested in the welfare of the entire community. Essentially, the question she asks is whether radical politics is not simply serving the business class in the same way that Tory politics serves the aristocracy. Such criticism can hardly be classed as conservative or supportive of the wealthy.

In Eliot's last work, *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879), the critical essay writer satirizes the hypocrisy of "liberal advanced views." Although Theophrastus and Eliot are not identical, his satire is aimed at a hypocrisy that Eliot perceived:

At that time Mixtus thought himself a young man of socially reforming ideas, of religious principles and religious yearnings. It was within his prospects also to be rich, but he looked forward to a use of his riches chiefly for reforming and religious purposes. His opinions were of a strongly democratic stamp, except that even then, belonging to the class of employers, he was opposed to all demands in the employed that would restrict the expansiveness of trade. He was the most democratic in relation to the unreasonable privileges of the aristocracy and landed interest; and he had also a religious sense of brotherhood with the poor. (70)

Radicals were composed of members of the business class and frequently represented those interests which we would dub conservative today. In *Felix Holt*, Transome's motives in aligning himself with reform, although he comes from the upper class rather than the manufacturing sector, are similar to those of Mixtus. He does not, however, fool himself with a smug self-image of morally beneficial duties. Rather, he is curiously honest: more power is

to be had through the radicals, so he will leave the conservatives and join the reformers. Eliot's criticism of the radicals is not that of a Tory. Rather, it is the criticism of someone who feels that radicals are not sufficiently radical.¹⁴ Eliot is clearly not a violent revolutionary; even in her early letter most sympathetic to the revolution in France, she speaks of pensioning off "our decayed monarchs" (254) -- not decapitating them. Nevertheless, this does not signify that Eliot was content with the social and political system as it stood, and her novels explore means of change and their possible results.

A key problem that surfaces throughout Eliot's final novels is how to engage in meaningful action when there are drawbacks to the real-life realization of any theoretical position.¹⁵ Although Eliot has frequently been

¹⁴ Eliot's defence of Benjamin Disraeli has been adduced as further evidence of her conservatism. But this is a very simplistic interpretation of her position. What should we make of Simcox's surprise that Eliot defended Disraeli against his critics (*Letters* 26 December 1879; IX 282)? Eliot was upset by the virulent anti-Semitism advanced against the Prime Minister by the Liberals. In *Theophrastus Such*, Eliot's last work, Theophrastus queries the aims of the Liberals, who felt that the Jews "have a dangerous tendency to get the uppermost places not only in commerce but in political life" (148). Theophrastus comments "But it is rather too late for liberal pleaders to urge them [these views] in a merely vituperative sense. Do they propose as remedy for the impending danger of our healthier national influences getting overridden by Jewish predominance, that we should repeal our emancipatory laws?" (148). Unfortunately this was exactly the solution decided upon by at least one European nation in the next century. It is not hard to understand why Eliot criticised the Liberal party with whom she had associated herself from a young age.

¹⁵ Interestingly, Ian Adam also finds ambivalence in *The Mill on the Floss*. He suggests that these unresolvable questions "arise less because
(continued...)

seen as a writer who has withdrawn from politics, Eliot saw benefits and detriments to limiting action to either the personal or political sphere. Simcox comments on Eliot's dedication to reforms:

No one, however, could recognise with more generous fervour, more delighted admiration, any genuine unobtrusive devotion in either friends or strangers, whether it were spent in making life easier to individuals, or in mending the conditions among which the masses live and labour. In weighing the comparative charm of the two vocations, she held the balance even, estimating the pro's and con's, and making allowance for the opposing danger of narrowness and diffusion, the enlarged egotism of the family and the lukewarm sensibility that comes from dealing only with abstract masses. (797)

Far from being insensitive to the importance of political movements, Eliot, according to Simcox, recognized the dangers of being involved solely at the individual level, where it is easy to forget the broader scope of oppression. But she also recognized the "lukewarm sensibility" in larger political action, something we see translated into hypocrisy in Harold Transome in *Felix Holt*. This struggle between the personal and the public, and more generally between multiple perspectives, is problematized in her work.

Politics are central to Eliot's later novels, but she evades singular political solutions. Facing what is essentially a post-modern dilemma -- how to act in a world without a singular authority -- Eliot depicts multiple voices,

¹⁵(...continued)

one reader or another on either side of any question has exhibited shrewdness or obtuseness than because the author has so rendered her material as to make such incompatible readings possible" (122).

and explores possible outcomes by testing them in the lives of characters. Voices or actions in the novels question all positions -- even those with which Eliot might agree. Rather than simply accepting any position as absolute, she watches theories play themselves out in different ways "under the varying experiments of Time" (*Middlemarch* 25). Eliot's novels are dialogic, but the dialogism is not simply Bakhtin's dialogism. Different voices interact and the novels do not affirm a single position, but Eliot is aware of the dangers of carnival, for her dialogism finds its roots in tragedy.

THE OTHER SIDE OF CARNIVAL:

ROMOLA AND BAKHTIN

INTRODUCTION

Bakhtin popularized the idea of carnival as a signifier of joyful relativism -- a "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" (*Rabelais and His World* 10). Carnival is an ambivalent mode emphasizing the unfinalizability of life. By focussing on the communal body in which birth and death are intimately intertwined, Bakhtin's carnival is able to evade the fears of life and to celebrate the "cheerful death" of an individual (*Dialogic Imagination* 198). This approach has a disturbing element since, in real life, it is usually the least powerful who are subject to carnival danger and its "cheerful death." Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson argue that Bakhtin probably did not "seriously consider the philosophical -- and much less the political -- implication of carnival at its least 'reduced'" (470). I would suggest that Eliot in her historical novel *Romola* (1863), set

in fifteenth-century Florence, frames her story by carnival for reasons similar to those which motivate Bakhtin's interest in this parodic festival. Recent criticism of Eliot points to the indeterminacy in her work and her refusal to sanction a single unified interpretative model or truth.¹⁶ In contrast to Bakhtin, however, Eliot recognizes the threat posed by carnival when it is not simply a textual metaphor. People are killed, maimed and raped during festal fun and freedom. Bakhtin's discussion of carnival offers a point of approach to Eliot's novel, but his theory is in turn criticized by Eliot's less utopian view of carnival.

ELIOT, BAKHTIN, GOETHE AND CARNIVAL

Both Eliot and Bakhtin had read Goethe's description of Roman Carnival in *Italian Journey* (1786-88). While Eliot does not make any specific comments on this section, she read the work aloud with Lewes

¹⁶ J. Hillis Miller has frequently advanced this view. In *Ariadne's Thread*, for example, he comments that for Eliot "all interpretation of signs is likely to be false interpretation, the projection of presuppositions rather than objective reading" (72). Discussing Casaubon's and Lydgate's "will to truth" and Featherstone's and Bulstrode's "will to power" in *Middlemarch*, Gilbert and Gubar contend that through "these men, Eliot calls into question the possibility of such a stable origin, end, or identity, not only for these men and their projects, but also, by extension, for her own text as well" (510). Carroll similarly argues that "an essential feature of any comprehensive world-view in George Eliot's fiction is the inevitability of its self-deconstruction" (*George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations* 313).

(*George Eliot Journal* 30 Nov. 1854 - 8 Dec. 1854) and also refers to this collection of Goethe's letters in her commonplace book (McCobb 167-68). Goethe's influence on Eliot should not be underestimated, since her knowledge of German culture was remarkable. By the mid 1840s she had already read many of Goethe's important works (McCobb, 11-12). She also worked with Lewes as a "silent collaborator" (Haight, *George Eliot* 172-73) on his *Life of Goethe* (1855), revisions to which were made for a second edition in 1864, published in the year following *Romola*. It is reasonable to suppose that Eliot recalled Goethe's discussion of carnival when she began work on *Romola* while on her own two Italian journeys: in 1860, when the idea of *Romola* was conceived, and in 1861, when she returned to do research for the novel. Goethe was also very influential on Bakhtin, and amongst other things, Bakhtin greatly admired Goethe's recognition of the importance of popular forms.¹⁷ In his book on Rabelais, Bakhtin draws attention to Goethe's discussion of Roman Carnival, particularly his description of carnival's participatory nature, its abolition of differences between social orders, its tumult and revelling, and its public location in the Corso. Goethe observes horse racing, the masks and fancy dress, and the election and crowning of the carnival Kings. Praising Goethe's

¹⁷ Bakhtin refers to Goethe throughout his work. For instance, he discusses Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister as a Bildungsroman* in *The Dialogic Imagination* (392-93).

understanding of carnival's ambivalence, Bakhtin cites in particular his discussion of "the ambivalent curse that is also a confirmation, *sia ammazzato!*" (*Rabelais and His World* 251). During the fire festival, everyone merrily attempts to blow out each other's candles and wishes each other death, making fire a symbol of ambivalence.

While commending Goethe's recognition of carnival's "deep philosophical character" (*Rabelais and His World* 252), Bakhtin criticizes the transformation of carnival in Goethe's *Ash Wednesday Meditations* into an "individual subjective experience" (*Rabelais and His World* 252) opening the way for the Romantic treatment of the subject. Goethe concludes his discussion with his famous simile that "life taken as a whole, is like the Roman Carnival, unpredictable, unsatisfactory and problematic" (*Italian Journey* 469). Both Bakhtin and Eliot recognize the popular nature of carnival, and its contradictory and parodic orientation. But there is in Eliot's depiction of carnival a wariness similar to that which sounds in Goethe's simile. Realizing that the group party of carnival becomes problematic when its joyful relativity destroys the individual, Eliot insists on a meeting between the carnivalistic body of humanity and the individual human body.

Carnival, as Bakhtin describes it in his discussion of Rabelais, is a time of festivity in which the prevailing rules are suspended. It offers "a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations" (*Rabelais and His World* 6).

While it is attached to official church festivals, it is derived from pagan celebrations. Laughter enables the parody of sacred or political form, and renders carnival a time of freedom from authoritative structures and beliefs. Contact with life decrowns what we desire to crown or limit through hierarchical stasis: "Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed" (*Rabelais and His World* 10). Carnival laughter is festive, universal in scope, and ambivalent. It does not laugh from a position outside, but from within the body of humanity. All share in the world's *becoming* in carnival. This is a crucial difference between the modern satirist and carnival. While the satirist stands apart from or above the object of his mockery, the "people's ambivalent laughter, on the other hand, expresses the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it" (*Rabelais and His World* 12). For Bakhtin, carnival laughter is the people's way of triumphing over their terrors.

Bakhtin also discusses the transformation of carnival into literature, and the open-ended forms thereby created. From the mid-seventeenth century, carnivalized literature is no longer directly influenced by carnival itself, but by its own tradition (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 131). In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century carnivalized literature, Bakhtin argues, "laughter is as a rule considerably muffled — to the level of irony, humor, and other forms of reduced laughter" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*

165). While *Romola* does not share Rabelaisian humor, we shall see that it does engage in such reduced carnival laughter. This laughter does not simply occur in those scenes where Eliot has contrived to demonstrate the foolery of carnival humor, such as the mockery of the apothecary in the chapter entitled "A Florentine Joke." More fundamentally, the carnival laugh that we hear in *Romola* is that laugh which questions the certainty of "truth."

Bakhtin writes of carnival laughter that it

could grasp and comprehend a phenomenon in the process of change and transition, it could fix in a phenomenon both poles of its evolution in their uninterrupted and creative renewing changeability: in death birth is foreseen and in birth death, in victory defeat and in defeat victory, in crowning a decrowning. Carnival laughter does not permit a single one of these aspects of change to be absolutized or to congeal in one-sided seriousness. (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 164)

In *Romola*, Eliot submits congealed positions to the ravaging laughter of carnival. Religious, political and financial authorities are elevated and debased.

But while carnival laughter is liberating, for Eliot it can also be frightening if the individual is forgotten and annihilated in the carnival rush to destroy reifications of the absolute. Eliot's laughter is not the joyful laugh which Bakhtin celebrates. She cannot cheerfully say with Bakhtin that "The death of the individual is only one moment in the triumphant life of the people and of mankind, a moment indispensable for their renewal and

improvement" (*Rabelais and His World* 341).¹⁸ Carnival, in Eliot's work, intersects with the life of the individual, thereby making its dangers apparent. It may be tempting to dismiss Eliot's criticism of carnival as simply a bourgeois response to the low, popular, humor of carnival, but this is to minimize Eliot's critique and evade the questions she raises. Focussing on the transgressive powers of carnival, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue that bourgeois society since the Renaissance was at once disgusted by and desirous of the "low-other" (20), which formed its inverse and repressed double. Arguing that this "repression includes the gradual, relentless attack on the 'grotesque body' of carnival by the emergent middle and professional classes from the Renaissance onwards" (176), Stallybrass and White claim that carnival returns in bourgeois hysteria. Eliot's response, however, is not a hysteric reaction to repression, but should be read as an important social comment. She is, indeed, both fascinated by carnival's

¹⁸ While this chapter does not seek to understand why Bakhtin embraced carnival's obliteration of the individual, an important counter perspective to the idea of carnival as a manifestation of unconcern for the individual body is suggested by Mikhail Ryklin, who contends that it is the pain of real bodies which prompts their disappearance in Bakhtin's work. Ryklin argues that Bakhtin chose to align himself with the vitality of the folk body in response to the very real terror to the individual body resulting from Stalin's purges. Focussing on the folk provided a way, through distancing and infinite jubilation, to evade the reality of the individual tortured and terrorized body. This was a strategy for survival, but it also enabled a rationalization of the terror.

transgressive powers and fearful of its violence towards less powerful members of society, but the latter should not be lightly dismissed.

CARNIVAL AND THE MARKETPLACE

Eliot's images are carefully chosen -- the theme of carnival in *Romola* is not simply contextual. In *The Spanish Gypsy* (1868), Eliot uses the term *carnival* to signify doubleness and ambiguity. The Prior accuses Don Silva of engaging in

Verse-makers' talk! fit for a world of rhymes,
Where facts are feigned to tickle idle ears,
Where good and evil play at tournament
And end in amity -- a world of lies --
A carnival of words where every year
Stale falsehoods serve fresh men. Your honour safe?
What honour has a man with double bonds? (my emphasis *Spanish Gypsy* 81)

In *Romola* we do not simply see a carnival; we also hear a carnival of words and ideas. Given the historical theme of Savonarola and his famous bonfire of the vanities, carnival is a natural element in Eliot's novel, but she does not limit her use of carnival to this later part of her history. Instead, the novel opens in the marketplace, and festivals and carnivals permeate it. All is brought into the realm of carnival. The plot has traditionally been understood in terms of two contrasting worlds, whose symbols Felicia Bonaparte has identified as the triptych (Graeco-Roman/ Bacchic) and the

cross (Christian). Although the former is more readily and usually identified with the Saturnalia of carnival, Eliot draws the cross into the same world when she speaks of Savonarola's "sacred parody" of carnival (499).¹⁹ Savonarola's bonfire of the vanities does not leave the carnival in order to return to a secure origin, but rather remains in the carnivalistic realm of parody.

Eliot emphasizes both the "web of inconsistencies" (652) of human life and the importance of humanity as a collective body. The metaphor of the web, of course, becomes predominant in *Middlemarch* (1871), but it is enough to note here that this idea of a web, which strikes Romola at the end of the novel, suggests the connectedness of contradictions. Carnival is the feast of the people; carnival and the marketplace stand in marked contrast throughout the novel to the monologic authority of the serious governing class. Jan Gordon, discussing gossip in *Romola*, argues that it functions in the novel to subvert the privilege of authoritative written commentaries and to resist possession by diluting the source ("Affiliation as Dissemination" 155-89). The marketplace, full of unbounded sounds and sights, is opposed to the closed rooms of Romola's blind father. Bakhtin emphasizes the relation of the street and marketplace to carnival: the "marketplace was the center of all that is unofficial; it enjoyed a certain extraterritoriality in a world

¹⁹ All parenthetical references to Eliot are to *Romola* in this chapter unless otherwise noted.

of official order and official ideology, it always remained 'with the people'" (*Rabelais and His World* 153-54). By opening *Romola* with a scene in the streets, Eliot emphasizes the public nature of the novel: "To the ear of Dante, the same streets rang with the shout and clash of fierce battle between rival families; but in the fifteenth century, they were only noisy with the unhistorical quarrels and broad jests of wool-carders" (53). The young and handsome Tito is first discovered by Bratti the pedlar, a symbol of exchange in the marketplace who tries to trade information: Tito's identity for an introduction to "the prettiest damsel in the Mercato" (56). A bargain of and about words is struck and cancelled. This exchange of words, between men of widely differing classes, parodies the cries for exchange in the marketplace which, with its "loud roar of mingled dialects" (57), becomes the site in which the different life-positions of the novel's characters engage in an ongoing and unresolved exchange.

The market which Eliot describes at the beginning of the novel is striking because it occurs during Lent, traditionally a time of fasting and abstention from meat. It is still the place of vocal exchange and the place of the people, but it is a market in which the voices of women are strongest:

The proud corporation, or 'Art,' of butchers was in abeyance, and it was the great harvest-time of the market-gardeners, the cheesemongers, the vendors of macaroni, corn, eggs, milk, and dried-fruits: a change which was apt to make the women's voices predominant in the chorus. (57)

Like this Lenten market, Eliot's novel is written in a limited space in which a woman's voice predominates, but also interacts with other voices: the "Art" of patriarchal writers is in abeyance. Blood is not a necessary component of verbal exchange. While Lent usually has connotations of privation, this Lenten market is notably called *the great harvest-time*, transforming bloodless exchange into a celebration. The Lenten market, which appears briefly, is one without the blood of meat, but the carnival which Eliot is about to depict is, by contrast, very bloody.

Bratti comments that on this particular day "the Mercato is gone as mad as if the Holy Father had excommunicated us again" (59). In the midst of this extra confusion caused by the Magnifico's death, a notary, Ser Cionne, berates his lamenting fellow-citizens for their blindness, an image developed throughout the novel emphasizing the human dilemma of uncertain truth. He tells them that they elect magistrates who "play the chamberer and the philosopher by turns -- listen to bawdy songs at the Carnival and cry "Bellisimi!" -- and listen to sacred lauds and cry again 'Bellisimi!'" (61). Reflecting this attribute of the crowd, the novel brings the sacred and carnival into familiar contact so that they are mutually parodic -- crowning and decrowning each other.

The disputation of the marketplace contrasts with the privacy of Romola's home. It is only when Romola enters the marketplace herself that her life takes on the confusion of lived experience, with its multiplicity of

avenues and outcomes. Her house only has one rule -- that of her father. He is the sole commentator on the books contained by the walls of his study. Bardo's driving ambition is to maintain this authority and separation through a library bearing his name. As part of her daughterly duties, Romola assists her father by keeping the books on the shelves in exactly the same places they have occupied for years. When Bardo asks his persistent question regarding the correct placement of his books, in Romola's affirmative reply "a fine ear would have detected in her clear voice and distinct utterance, a faint suggestion of weariness struggling with habitual patience" (95). This faint double voicing, however, is quickly subsumed by a monologizing filial pity which bids her to submit lovingly to her father. The introduction of Tito, a voice from the world of the market, begins to break down this separation from the changing and discursive body of humanity. Recognizing that Tito "had with wonderful suddenness got within the barrier that lay between them and the alien world" (108), Romola is willing to be drawn into the world of carnival by him. This sphere of interacting voices is the space of the novel.

THE VIOLENCE OF CARNIVAL

The feast of San Giovanni is the first of Florence's great holidays to appear in Eliot's narrative. Bakhtin comments that while carnival was

eventually condensed into one festival, in earlier periods other feasts also had this popular air (*Rabelais and His World* 220). Florence's feast of its patron saint is such a festival, and is filled with so much gaiety, dancing and music "that this earth might have been mistaken for Paradise!" (133). But such a view, it becomes clear, is only a semblance, since outside of carnival time's hope and progress, hardship contradicts this festal joy. Eliot insists on the intersection of this individualized time with carnival. As Tito walks through the Festa in carefree enjoyment, the narrator comments that the throng "was now streaming out in all directions in pursuit of a new object. Such intervals of a Festa are precisely the moments when the vaguely active animal spirits of a crowd are likely to be the most petulant and most ready to sacrifice a stray individual to the greater happiness of the greater number" (153-54). It is at this point that Tito stumbles across Tessa, who is vulnerable both as a woman and as a peasant, being forcibly teased for the amusement of the crowd by a conjuror. Rescuing Tessa at this Festa, Tito asserts his authority as a well-dressed signor -- an authority which is clearly open to exploitation, or so at least the conjuror interprets this act: "Messere has doubtless better confetti at hand....come back to me when Messere can spare you" (155). Although the narrator stresses the group nature of carnival, Tito's authority is not weakened through carnival, but rather strengthened in its extra-official freedom.

At the next Feast, the Nativity of the Virgin, Tito joins with the crowd and enters into the carnival spirit. For Tito, this festival is a time away from the pressures of life: it "dulled that calculation of the future which had so new a dreariness for him" (192). Such a sensation reflects the holiday from the real world which Bakhtin celebrates in carnival. In this throng, the mixed noises and movement bring Tito into the carnival spirit of human joyful becoming where his personal anxieties are excluded. Tito encounters the same conjurer, who is this time engaging in ecclesiastical parody by offering marriages which are "dissolved by special bull beforehand at every man's own will and pleasure" (197). Tessa, whom Tito encounters at the Feast, in her childish ignorance is conned and believes herself to be married to Tito. Recognizing Tessa's vulnerability, the conjurer aids Tito in this humorous deception. Tito's intentions are ambivalent at this time, but the impact of carnival extends *beyond* carnival time and Tessa unwittingly becomes Tito's mistress.

Significantly, Romola's and Tito's betrothal happens on the last day of carnival, but it is a sombre and serious affair in contrast to Tito's "marriage" to Tessa. This event, however, introduces carnival into Romola's life. At the beginning of the betrothal chapter, the narrator comments that carnival is a time of fun for the boys and the striplings: "there were practical jokes of all sorts, from throwing comfits to throwing stones -- especially stones....the consequent maiming was various, and it was not always a

single person who was killed" (253). This comment foreshadows the deaths of Tito and Savonarola, with other members of his order, in the violent and, at this time, masculine world of politics. It also comprehends the injury inflicted on Tessa through carnival and suggests that Romola's marriage, inaugurated during carnival, will not be without its own violence.

Tito's betrothal present to Romola depicts her coronation. Looking at the triptych, she says, "I am Ariadne, and you [as Bacchus] are crowning me!" (260). The participation of Bacchus, a Saturnalian figure, directs us to read Romola's marriage as a *carnival crowning*. Discussing the tradition of the election of a carnival King, Bakhtin writes that such "Crowning already contains the idea of immanent decrowning: it is ambivalent from the very start" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 124). Romola has, in fact, been decrowned before she has ever been crowned -- Tessa and Romola become *decrowning doubles*. Bakhtin describes Panurge's fear of being cuckolded in terms of crowning/decrowning (*Rabelais and His World* 242-44). While Panurge fears that all women will cuckold their husbands, Eliot's work answers such prevalent misogyny by revealing its other side in Tito's lack of fidelity. Throughout the novel, it becomes more and more unclear which marriage is "real." The legal, childless and eventually loveless church marriage is juxtaposed with an illegitimate, fertile and amorous marriage;

each parodies and debases the other.²⁰ On the very day of Romola's betrothal, Tessa follows Tito and insists on her own marriage. Eventually, Romola decrowns herself ("Ariadne Discrowns Herself") when she realizes some of Tito's treachery. Her crowning is drawn into the carnival world by its carnival-time date, even though it attempts to escape from this parodic realm: the route the sombre betrothal procession must take "lay aloof from the loudest riot of the Carnival, if only they could return before any dances or shows began in the great piazza of Santa Croce" (262). But the small party does not manage to remain separate, for it meets a masqued procession featuring Winged Time, his scythe and hourglass. This "dismal fooling" and "ghastly mummery" appears as a parody of a gay carnival, and again warns of the more menacing side of carnival which it is impossible for the betrothal to escape.

Carnival returns in part three in a much more frightening form, its gaiety, jokes and laughter gone. Savonarola's sacred parody of carnival

²⁰ Nancy Paxton comments on Eliot's double-edged criticism: "In comparing Tessa's fertile union with Tito and Romola's childless marriage, Eliot critiques Comte's -- and Spencer's -- notion of a natural gender-defined division of labor in society, for she shows that the family cannot be seen as a 'moral institution' exempt from the legal, social, and economic forces that otherwise shape human culture....Tessa's role as Tito's 'second wife' exposes the underside of Florentine life, and by representing it, Eliot reveals the feminist sympathies that would later find expression when she and other middle-class women sided with the prostitutes during the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Act" (127).

threatens the merriment of the city. Yet this double parody has its own laughter and heightened ambivalence. Bakhtin notes that in carnival "various images (for example, carnival pairs of various sorts) parodied one another variously and from various points of view; it was like an entire system of crooked mirrors, elongating, diminishing, distorting in various directions and to various degrees" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 127). Savonarola's parodic carnival reflects itself back incessantly. Its "regenerated merriment" (499) takes the form of collecting *vanities* (jewellery, pornographic books, wigs, etc.) for the great bonfire, and the narrator comments: "The beardless inquisitors, organized into little regiments, doubtless took to their work very willingly. To coerce people by shame, or other spiritual pelting, into the giving up of things it will probably vex them to part with is a form of piety to which the boyish mind is most readily converted" (499). However, the old carnival enters into the new, and Savonarola has to tell the boys that there is too much shouting of *Viva Gesù*: "This constant uttering of sacred words brings them into contempt" (500). Savonarola's parody is parodied as the old carnival spirit asserts itself. Brady notes that the "masculine pleasure-principle" dominates the Christian incarnation of carnival as much as the pagan one (125).

The crowning/decrowning motif takes parallel journeys in Tito's and Savonarola's lives. As a Bacchus figure, Tito attains a great height of manipulative and self-serving power in the secular world, and Savonarola

attains a monarchical, extra-official role in the church. Tito is elevated by the crowd when he brings good news, "Carried above the shoulders of the people, on a bench apparently snatched up in the street" (328), and Savonarola is elevated above the congregation when he preaches. Their "crownings" both take place within the context of the invasion of Florence by King Charles, who, upon entering the city, looks "like a hastily modelled grotesque" (302). King Charles, "an equivocal guest" (274), is greeted with carnival-like ambivalence; behind the joyful banners, hidden in the walls, arms are refurbished, and stones are collected. But while King Charles leaves Florence safely, Tito and Savonarola are revealed to be caught in carnival and undergo the ritual decrowning and *sparagmos*.

Bonaparte identifies the "Masque of the Furies, called Riot" which descends upon Tito as a Bacchic rite (174). His doubleness catches up with him, and the crowd is inspired by the Captain of the Compagnacci to attack him and tear his clothes in the Bacchic ritual of *sparagmos*. Tito's escape from this mob does not possess a single meaning, for it is also his non-escape since the river brings him to death at the hands of Baldassarre, his adoptive father. The doubleness in Tito's life halts at this point. While Tito is afraid of little, Baldassarre's knife frightens him and he wears protective armour for many years: "The soul that bowed to no right, bowed to the great lord of mortals, Pain" (406). Although Tito never acknowledges any other truth, the one truth that finally arrests him is his own pain and death. For the

people, this death makes little difference, and is, if anything, a joyous occasion, but for Tito himself, his death is a tragedy.

A similar carnivalesque dismantling occurs to Savonarola. His serious claims to divine authority for his words are put to the test through the "comedy of the trial by fire" (604). Fire, as in Goethe, becomes associated with ambivalence. The first fire in *Romola* is the bonfire of the vanities -- "the crowning act of the new festivities" (498), but as we shall see, this fire is associated with Savonarola's decrowning. On this same day, the last of carnival, Savonarola attempts to secure his position in the wake of his excommunication by calling on God to confirm his authority. He cries, "'if my word cometh not from Thee, strike me in this moment with Thy thunder, and let the fires of Thy wrath enclose me'" (594). When sunshine bathes his face, as if in divine response, the carnival crowd recognizes Savonarola as their King, shouting, "'Behold the answer'" (595). But Savonarola's words contain his decrowning. As soon as he leaves the square, his authority crumbles, succumbing to "a confusion of voices in which certain strong discords and varying scales of laughter made it evident that, in the previous silence and universal kneeling, hostility and scorn had only submitted unwillingly to a momentary spell" (595). Out of Savonarola's own words comes the idea of the trial by fire.

Savonarola becomes the ultimate figure of ambivalence. Once he can no longer avoid this trial, the words of his prayer are "drowned by

argumentative voices within him that shaped their reasons more and more for an outward audience" (613). On the day of the trial, "the doubleness" (621) in his career is evident as he acts a part in which he cannot believe. While the crowd watches with a carnival-like anticipation of the spectacle, Savonarola debates theological points in an effort to forestall the flames, and the eucharistic signs of transcendent truth become playthings in the realm of life-saving. Eliot contradicts her main source, Pasquale Villari's *Life and Times of Savonarola*, in presenting Savonarola as a figure of ambivalence.²¹ Villari represents Savonarola as unwavering in his faith regarding the miracle which he expects from God; delay and prevarication emanate only from the challenging Minorite friars, who remain inside and communicate by messenger with Savonarola and his champion, Fra Domenico, who anxiously await the trial next to the frighteningly long pyre.

Eliot draws a parallel with Tito, whose philosophy of self is checked only by his fear of pain: Savonarola's belief in God is likewise limited by his own physicality, since his faith cannot cope with the prospect of his own human body entering fire (613). Emphasizing the importance of the body and its physicality to carnival's challenge of authority, Bakhtin comments that

²¹ Although Eliot read Pasquale Villari's *La Storia di Girolamo Savonarola* 2 vols. (Firenze, 1859-61), all my references are to Linda Villari's 1888 English translation. Gennaro A. Santangelo explores Villari's importance for Eliot, but while he stresses the similarities, Eliot's divergences from this source are noteworthy.

Rabelais "wants to return both a language and a meaning to the body, return it to the idealized quality it had in ancient times, and simultaneously return a reality, a materiality, to language and to meaning" (*Dialogic Imagination* 171). The body functions by bringing the world back to a physical level, moving it away from the theoretical: "No dogma, no authoritarianism, no narrow-minded seriousness can coexist with Rabelaisian images" (*Rabelais and His World* 3). Bakhtin's understanding of the body in carnival time, however, refers exclusively to the body as the community. He argues that Rabelais writes not of "the individual body, trapped in an irreversible life sequence... rather it is the impersonal body, the body of the human race as a whole, being born, living, dying the most varied deaths, being born again, an impersonal body that is manifested in its structure, and in all the processes of its life" (*Dialogic Imagination* 173).

Like Bakhtin, Eliot emphasizes the material aspect of human death, but this material aspect is not simply subsumed in the triumphant life of humanity. Instead, the individual body, *because* of its irreversible life sequence, stands as a question to all theoretical positions. Tito's and Savonarola's individual life positions are brought into conflict and carnivalized through their dialogue with the carnival crowd, but they are also tested against their own physicality. Bakhtin's work on carnival has rightly been accused of ignoring the individual, and of downplaying the violence of carnival. In contrast, Eliot not only emphasizes the individual degradation

of Tito and Savonarola, powerful men who have been crowned and decrowned, but she also foregrounds Tessa's fears, which flourish amidst carnival humor. In the context of the world of change and upheaval which characterized fifteenth-century Florence, Eliot does not forget the powerless who are suffering from starvation and the plague. The nameless poor are present as the object of Romola's ministrations and are focussed in Benedetto, the emblematic Jewish orphan baby whose parents are expelled from the city and subsequently die of the plague. While Benedetto does not appear in carnival time, this is because he has been excluded from the carnival through the exile of his parents. The danger to the Jews in the city streets is made clear in the first pages of the novel when Bratto tells Tito that it is fortunate he is not of yellow cloth (56). Carnival's "group" excludes and victimizes some individuals, and Benedetto makes known his personal suffering through his cry (642).

While Eliot's insistence on the individual in carnival may appear to undermine Bakhtin's use of carnival, I prefer to use her emphasis to draw out an important and often neglected aspect of Bakhtin's work. Morson and Emerson have highlighted a serious question -- what they consider a potential contradiction in Bakhtin: does the idea of a collective body undermine and contradict Bakhtin's other work on the importance of the individual utterance? Is the carnival an "*anti-chronotope*" (228)? Unlike Morson and Emerson, I would argue that a collective understanding of the

human body is not necessarily contradictory to an emphasis on the individual body if the collective body is simply understood as another chronotope, another non-exclusive way of viewing the world. While the idea of carnival is explored most fully in *Rabelais and His World*, it must be placed within the context of Bakhtin's essay on the *chronotope* (*Dialogic Imagination* 84-258). In his concluding remarks, which were written at a much later period in his life, Bakhtin clarifies his earlier work by saying that it is common for multiple chronotopes to exist in one work: "Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships" (*Dialogic Imagination* 252). Chronotopes are simply ways of concretizing representation (*Dialogic Imagination* 250) and ways of assigning value and meaning (*Dialogic Imagination* 257). Bakhtin, however, observes only a single chronotope in Rabelais's work. By bringing different chronotopes into dialogue with each other, Eliot's work represents what might be termed a *dialogization of chronotopes*. Eliot brings together the body of humanity and, for instance, Savonarola's individual body. Savonarola's death, as a singular event, is tragic. But as a member of humanity, Savonarola's life and death are carnivalized and become a part of the human search for meaning. While his life might end, humanity does not; new life emerges from the old. Both Tito's and Savonarola's deaths contribute in some sense to the creation of the new family viewed in the

upper room in the epilogue, and to its forward-looking stance as Lillo contemplates his future.

The ambivalence which associates itself with Savonarola becomes most evident during his arrest and torture, when he repeatedly confesses and retracts. While torture explains this inconsistency, Romola finds a deeper ambivalence or "doubleness" (665) in Savonarola's confessional statements. He is revealed "as a man who sought his own glory indeed, but sought it by labouring for the very highest end – the moral welfare of men" (664). Romola recognizes a "blending of ambition with belief in the supremacy of goodness" (664). Bakhtin comments that "The carnivalization of passion is evidenced first and foremost in its ambivalence: love is combined with hatred, avarice with selflessness, ambition with self-abasement, and so forth" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 159). Savonarola shares some characteristics with what Bakhtin identifies as the hero of a *Mennipea*, a carnivalized genre. He goes beyond the ordinary person, entering a world of extremes in which "Dreams, daydreams, insanity destroy the epic and tragic wholeness of a person and his fate: the possibilities of another person and another life are revealed in him, he loses his finalized quality and ceases to mean only one thing; he ceases to coincide with himself" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 116-17). Savonarola's visions, Eliot argues following Villari, enter into conflict with his humanitarian efforts. Through such moral-psychological experimentation,

Eliot explores, but finally denies, the possibility of an absolute finalized meaning in the person of Savonarola, whose life is about ultimate questions, but who is unable to provide a definitive answer. His stress on morality eventually becomes hopelessly confused with the immoral, for his apparently bloodless carnival is not bloodless. The carnivalization of his young troops' "Viva Gesù" is problematized in the narrator's reference to his boyish helpers as "young *inquisitors*" (499). This confusion is also reflected in his own politically expedient refusal to intercede for the life of Bernardo del Nero. Deciding it is better that a few men should die for the good of the whole, Savonarola ignores the right of appeal, which is such an important part of his platform, in order to further "the cause of God" (578).²² The "concretely sensuous plane of images and events" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 134) corrupts the singular word. Savonarola's theory is brought down to the real and visible death of Bernardo, and eventually to his own death.

²² It is worth noting here that Eliot again strays from Villari and adopts a more popular criticism of Savonarola which Villari disputes. In an attempt to keep Savonarola's actions pure, Villari argues that the right of appeal which became law is to a Greater Council, not to the limited court composed of legal experts for which Savonarola advocated (280). The appeal which Savonarola supported was to a group of impartial judges rather than to a large and easily manipulated crowd. Villari argues that Savonarola had no power to influence the later decision regarding the appeal (573).

LACK OF FINALIZATION

Savonarola's death takes on the ritualized decrowning of carnival when he is stripped of his clothes, hung on a parodic cross-like gibbet and burned. Romola is profoundly disturbed by Savonarola's "twofold retraction" (668) under torture: "'I said it [retracted his confession] that I might seem good; tear me no more, I will tell you the truth'" (668). She anticipates a "last decisive word" (669) at his death and looks forward to such an utterance "when he is lifted above the people" (669). This phrasing recalls Jesus's well known paradoxical pun: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said signifying what death he should die" (John 12: 32, 33). Both glory and a humiliating death are indicated in this lifting: Jesus is lifted on a cross in death and simultaneously lifted up to glory. Bakhtin refers to the mock crowning/decrowning and scourging of the King of the Jews (*Rabelais and His World* 198), but Eliot points to that carnival ambivalence in the cross itself which exceeds humorous play and the limited space of carnival. Savonarola's crowning/decrowning is simultaneous and does not offer that decisive univocal word for which Romola longs. She does not hear Savonarola speak any last words; instead, "The moment was past. Her face was covered again, and she only knew that Savonarola's voice had passed into eternal silence" (671). The only certainty which the narrator recognizes here is the finality of death for the individual.

It is significant that Eliot does not allow Savonarola a final word, since she again veers from the historical accounts, including Villari. History tells us that the bishop, in degrading Savonarola, said, "*Separo te ab Ecclesia militante atque triumphante*" -- "I cut you off from the Church militant and triumphant." Savonarola was *not* silent, but replied, "*Militante, non triumphante; hoc enim tuum non est*" -- "From the Church militant, but not the Church triumphant; that you cannot do" (756). Villari emphatically comments, "And these words were uttered in a tone that pierced to the souls of the bystanders, so that all who heard remembered them for ever" (756). Eliot does not simply forget Villari's report of Savonarola's remarkable final words; the narrator, in fact, alludes to them, but without giving voice to Savonarola's certainty of the transcendent: "He had been degraded, and cut off from the Church Militant" (670). The novel refuses Savonarola the finalization which only heaven can give, and his life and words remain in the human realm of the incomplete: no single word can erase the dialogism inherent in his life. History has emphasized the finalizing word of Savonarola, but Romola hears its lack. Throughout the novel, the ambivalence of Savonarola's life is reflected as a multitude of perspectives come into contact and dialogue with each other. This structure is similar to that which Bakhtin finds in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1865-66), in which, he argues, "All one-sided seriousness (of life and thought), all one-sided pathos is handed over to the heroes, but the author, who causes them

all to collide in the 'great dialogue' of the novel, leaves that dialogue open and puts no finalizing period at the end" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 165).

Final punctuation is also missing from *Romola*. Tito, Savonarola and Bardo each represent philosophically different life-positions brought into dialogue with each other. Each of these various self-aggrandizing positions -- a devotion to God (Savonarola), a devotion to ancient texts and memory (Bardo) and a devotion to pleasure and power (Tito) -- is analogous to hierarchical structures within nineteenth-century Britain: religious authority, the authority of learning and tradition, and that of economic and political power. *Romola* brings yet another voice into this exchange, although she is initially silenced by these men: Bardo denies her intelligence, Tito overrules her as her husband, and Savonarola bids her to submit to Tito and himself. By the end of the novel, the voices of Tito, Savonarola, Bardo, and even Bernardo, are all silenced by their deaths, but the dialogue continues and their positions are heard through *Romola's* interpretive voice. Rather than remaining passive, *Romola* recognizes the competition and contradiction among these voices and enters the dialogue. Exposing this contradiction, *Romola* realizes that even though the "law was sacred....rebellion might be sacred too" (552). Discussing the usefulness of Bakhtin's concept of dialogism for feminist theory, Dale Bauer argues that "women readers in the text assert their otherness not by surrendering, but

by forcing their language into the context/contest of the dominant language" (10). Romola, like those women discussed by Bauer, moves from a silent and sometimes resentful acquiescence in her father's house to a place of interaction with the dominant languages.

Romola speaks most clearly through the mock epic at the end of the novel. It may be tempting to understand the pious "Madonna Romola," a self-sacrificial female in a positivistic framework, as Eliot's finalizing word.²³ The legend can be read as idealizing Romola, as Eliot herself admits in a letter responding to Sara Hennell's comment that "Romola is pure idealism" (cited Haight *Letters IV* 103 n. 8). Eliot writes, "You are right in saying that Romola is ideal -- I feel it acutely in the reproof my own soul is constantly getting from the image it has made. My own books scourge me....The various *strands* of thought I had to work out forced me into a more ideal treatment of Romola than I had foreseen at the outset" (*Letters* 23 Aug. 1863; IV 103-04). There is an immense difference, however, between the Romola of epic and the Romola of Florence. Romola's name becomes legendary in the unnamed village where she acts, but she does not stay fixed in this unchanging spot; rather than remaining as a finalized legend, Romola returns with a voice and position to the life and dialogue of Florence and its "web of inconsistencies" (652). The idealized treatment of Romola

²³ See J. B. Bullen (425-35).

in the mock epic is important because it contrasts with Romola's incarnation in Florence. The possibility of sustaining an idealized position in life, the world of the novel, becomes an ever more pressing issue in Eliot's later novels.

Romola, as a *nouveau* epic figure, is situated at the apex of dialogue. Her legend questions Rome, both pagan and Christian. Carroll comments that Romola is "the daughter of a classical scholar, married to a pagan god, instructed by a prophet and mythologized as the Madonna Antigone" (*George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations* 197). Carroll suggests that this position makes Romola the "perfect interpreter of the direction European history is going to take" (*George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations* 197). This position at the apex of dialogue, however, is also used by Romola to contribute uniquely to the direction of history. We find in her a provocative thinker, for Romola rebels "without external law to appeal to" (552) within the realm of changing life. While Romola parodies other positions, she parodies them from her unique position as an outsider. Just as Eliot is frequently seen by recent critics as a passive author, merely voicing the opinions of men,²⁴ so also Romola is viewed in this way and the newness of her ideas

²⁴ Barrett corroborates this observation: "Bullen's analysis suffers from a common misconception of George Eliot's scholarship, which tends to see George Eliot as a passive mirror in which we can see reflected the ideologies of the men by whom she may have been influenced, in this case Comte" (75). Or see J. Hillis Miller, who terms Ludwig Feuerbach, Eliot's (continued...)

is not recognized -- even by herself. We hear the other characters' words in Romola's words because she struggles and interacts with them. By concentrating her attention solely on Lillo in the *Epilogue*, Romola is in danger of closing off her ideas and limiting them by placing them under the monologizing governance of her father and Savonarola. But Romola's action, in purposely befriending her husband's mistress, is the result of a remarkably new way of thinking. The relation which Romola has created with Tessa and her aunt suggests that bloodless Lenten Market in which women's voices prevail. Repudiating Tito's wealth, Romola establishes a friendship with Tessa which bypasses the usual patriarchal hierarchy of relationships.²⁵

Romola and Lillo, in conducting the conversation which occupies the epilogue, sit in a threshold space ("the space of the novel" [*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 170]) "at the wide door way that opened on to the loggia" which looked "all along the Borgo Pinti, and over the city gate towards Fiesole, and the solemn heights beyond it" (673, 672). This space

²⁴(...continued)
"master-source"! (75).

²⁵ Haight in *George Eliot's Originals and Contemporaries* discusses the adoption by Cara and Charles Bray, Eliot's close friends, of Charles's mistress's daughter (78-87). While Haight suggests analogies with Eppie in *Silas Marner*, the comparison and contrast with Romola's adoption of Tessa's children is also noteworthy. Romola adopts her husband's illegitimate children, but she does this without coercion from her now dead husband.

is contrary to the closed room in which we first encounter Romola. Lillo, with his youthful freedom, further opens up the monologism which Romola's altar dedicated to Savonarola attempts to impose. He recognizes the ambivalence symbolized by Piero, who brings flowers for Romola to lay on an altar dedicated to Savonarola and yet who also abuses Romola for thinking so highly of the *Frate*. This observation forces Romola to admit the contradictions within her harmonized and idealistic reverence for the dead Savonarola: "'There are many good people who did not love Fra Girolamo. Perhaps I should never have learned to love him if he had not helped me when I was in great need'" (676). Romola's last words in the novel indicate that her position is not simply that of the *Frate*; his word has touched her, but it does not govern her. Through the disillusionment which occurs in her disagreement with the *Frate* over Bernardo, Romola learns to dialogue with the *Frate*'s position, to take some of it and make it her own.

Yet, while Romola and Lillo sit in this outward-looking place, it is only Lillo's, not Ninna's, potential activity that is acknowledged. Even though she forms a new relation with Tessa, Romola is in danger of becoming a simple keeper of tradition: it is because her father is a scholar that Lillo can become one (674). Brady, who argues that a gender plot subverts the main plot, sees this ending, in which the values of the next generation do not accord with what Romola has learned, as significant: "Though Romola appears to be in a position of moral authority, she remains the conduit of language

rather than a user of it" (133). The gender plot remains "muted by a silent patriarchal voice" (135). Deirdre David sees this ending as an example of Eliot's employment of "strategies of containment [used] to evade or to deny an intolerable conflict between woman's mind and male authority" (*Intellectual Women* 194). Romola is now compliant with Savonarola and her intellect has been bent into benevolent teaching of her husband's son, thereby reconciling antagonistic ideologies. But despite this picture of compliance recognized by both Brady and David, in Romola's concentration on Lillo, we hear echoed Tessa's early complaint that Tito was not as interested in Ninna as he was in Lillo (505, 550). Although the fool of the novel, Tessa calls into question the monologizing patriarchal tradition. Bakhtin argues that the fool is brought into the novel because "by his very uncomprehending presence he makes strange the world of social conventionality" (*Dialogic Imagination* 404). Although having rebelled, Romola still stands in the shadow of social convention.

CONCLUSION

The *finale* of *Romola* can be said to be open-ended, for all "good" people do not share the same understanding, but this does not mean that we are left without direction. The intersection of the individual chronotopes with carnival places some limits on indeterminacy. Michael Bernstein argues that

in Bakhtin's work, "what emerges is the image of a carnivalization of values during which it is no longer a question of breaking down ossified hierarchies and stale judgements but rather of being denied *any* vantage point from which a value can be affirmed" (100). While such a playfulness is not harmful within the text, Bernstein points to the problems when carnival becomes involved in real violence. This argument parallels recent concerns and criticism regarding the political inefficacy of deconstruction.²⁶ Extra-carnivalistic power is sometimes only reinforced through the ambivalence of carnival. Eliot, however, by insisting on recognizing an individual chronotope in conjunction with a carnival that comprehends the common human physical condition, provides a point from which to observe values and judgements. The limiting needs of the individual do not provide a theoretical edifice, but they do suggest sites of interpretation. Death or suffering *imposed* on any human body questions hierarchies of power. The tiny Benedetto's cries challenge the religious and political systems which evicted the Jews from the city. While no single philosophic, religious, or political system is elevated over all others as a totalizing theoretical model for life in

²⁶ For example, Michael Ryan comments that "problems can arise when the method is confronted with actual political issues, like feminism. Indeed, by 'bracketing' or 'putting aside' political consequences, deconstruction can run the risk of becoming an aestheticism of contradiction. And this can lead to the excusing of questionable political positions on the grounds that the texts in which they occur are undecidable or indeterminate" (71).

Romola, the space of bloodless dialogue is valued. Eliot reminds us that death is a final word for the individual, if not for the community.

FELIX HOLT: INDEPENDENT SPOKESMAN OR ELIOT'S "MOUTHPIECE"?

INTRODUCTION

Of Eliot's novels, *Felix Holt the Radical* is the most difficult for those critics wanting to dislodge Eliot from the conservative camp that so quickly appropriated her work, since Felix himself is usually read as a mouthpiece revealing Eliot's political sympathies. Although it is a work lamented by her more liberal critics for the hero's conservative stance, I would suggest that we can see *Felix Holt* as a genuinely dialogic novel in which Eliot is exploring and testing, rather than simply endorsing, Felix's opinions. Felix's ideology is one with which Eliot may have partly sympathized, but the novel raises very serious questions about Felix's ideology of submission which critics have overlooked in their narrow focus on him as hero and authorial mouthpiece. The recent focus on the role of Mrs. Transome in the novel has begun to comprehend some of Eliot's subversion of the main plot, but the

questioning nature of the novel is much more widespread than the section devoted to Mrs. Transome.²⁷ The main (Felix) plot itself, I would argue, is not monologic. While working on *Felix Holt*, Eliot was influenced by Greek tragedy, a form she valued for its presentation of the irresolvable conflict between different life positions.²⁸ *Felix Holt* allows Eliot to explore the conflicting demands of the individual and the state; Felix's argument for conformity and submission to the state is contested by the lack of beneficial change for the individuals who most need it.

Eliot describes the mode of her work as tragic: "it is my way...to urge the human sanctities through tragedy -- through pity and terror as well as admiration and delights" (*Letters* 15 August 1866; IV 301). In particular, *The Spanish Gypsy*, which she began to write before *Felix Holt* and finished after it, was originally intended as a tragic verse-drama in which she would explore the conflict between the individual and the state, especially in the

²⁷ Terry Eagleton terms Mrs. Transome the "real but displaced centre" (*Criticism and Ideology* 117) of the novel. He argues that in her we see "the residual presence of an ineradicable 'personal' disillusionment which refuses to be totalised and absorbed by the novel's official progressivist ideology" (117). Eagleton's observation has been built upon by a number of feminist critics. Shuttleworth, Barrett, Beer and Brady, all discussed below, argue that Mrs. Transome undermines the *Felix Holt* narrative to some extent.

²⁸ See Fred Thomson for an outline of Eliot's reading and significant entries regarding tragedy in her notebook at this time.

choice made by Fedalma.²⁹ In *The Spanish Gypsy*, conflict and irreconcilable choices proliferate beyond this original central character. Thomson argues that *Felix Holt* was also begun primarily as a tragedy, and only in its later stages did the political element of the novel become important. Dividing the novel, he limits the tragic elements of the novel to

²⁹ In "Notes on the Spanish Gypsy and Tragedy in General," Eliot writes,

It occurred to me that here was a great dramatic motive of the same class as those used by the Greek dramatists, yet specifically differing from them. A young maiden, believing herself to be on the eve of the chief event of her life, -- marriage, -- about to share in the ordinary lot of womanhood, full of young hope, has suddenly announced to her that she is chosen to fulfil a great destiny, entailing a terribly different experience from that of young womanhood. She is chosen, not by any momentary arbitrariness, but as a result of foregoing hereditary conditions: she obeys. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." Here, I thought, is a subject grander than that of Iphigenia and it has never been used A good tragic subject must represent a possible, sufficiently probable, not a common action; and to be really tragic, it must represent irreparable collision between the individual and the general (in differing degrees of generality). It is the individual with whom we sympathize, and the general of which we recognise the irresistible power.... The collision of Greek tragedy is often that between hereditary, entailed Nemesis and the peculiar individual lot, awakening our sympathy, of the particular man or woman whom the Nemesis is shown to grasp with terrific force. Sometimes as in the Orestia, there is the clashing of two irreconcilable requirements, two duties, as we should say in these times. The murder of the father must be avenged by the murder of the mother, which must again be avenged. These two tragic relations of the individual and general, and of two irreconcilable "oughts," may be -- will be-- seen to be almost always combined. (Cross III, 30-32)

the Mrs. Transome section, but I would argue that the tragic mode, which emphasizes irreconcilable positions, is crucial to the whole novel.

In this chapter I will first consider *Felix Holt* as tragedy, which, according to Eliot, is about the convergence of equally valid but conflicting values. While Felix promulgates a conservative message under the guise of radicalism, the text contains other voices which question Felix's words. The novel's structure makes it impossible simply to identify a single voice as that of the author. This reading of *Felix Holt* is supported by *The Spanish Gypsy*, which also explores the conflicting positions found in the process and implementation of social change, but from a dramatically different perspective. The verse drama is a significant point of comparison for *Felix Holt* because it examines the violent solution that Felix abhors, and considers the victims on both sides as well as the power-mongers. *The Spanish Gypsy* does not indicate that Eliot favours the retention of the *status quo*, but rather shows the cost of change and the clash of various goods.

TRAGEDY AND THE DIALOGIC NOVEL

Bakhtin identifies Dostoevsky as the inventor of the *polyphonic novel*, a form which derived from Dostoevsky's habit of seeing all sides of a picture:

While others saw a single thought, he was able to find and feel out two thoughts, a bifurcation; where others saw a single quality, he discovered in it the presence of a second and

contradictory quality. Everything that seemed simple became, in his world, complex and multi-structured....But none of these contradictions and bifurcations ever became dialectical, they were never set in motion along a temporal path or in an evolving sequence: they were, rather, spread out in one plane, as standing alongside or opposite one another, as consonant by not merging or as hopelessly contradictory, as an eternal harmony of unmerged voices or as their unceasing and irreconcilable quarrel. (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 30)

Very early, Charles Bray observed a similar quality in Eliot: "She saw all sides, and there are always many, clearly and without prejudice" (*Autobiography* 75, cited in *Letters* I 265-66, n. 6). It is to be expected that this trait of Eliot's emerges in her novel writing as some type of polyphony.

The polyphonic novel, Bakhtin argues, does not recognize one character as the author's mouthpiece, nor does the author dominate with a voice of authority. Instead, the author develops situations to test the voices of the characters: "In no way, then, can a character's discourse be exhausted by the usual functions of characterization and plot development, nor does it serve as a vehicle for the author's own ideological position (as with Byron for instance)" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 7). Instead, Bakhtin argues that Dostoevsky (as the model of a polyphonic author) "seeks words and plot situations that provoke, tease, extort, dialogize" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 39).³⁰

³⁰ In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin recants slightly from this position, and argues that while a character may "be depicted who thinks and acts (and, of course, talks) in accord with the author's wishes" (*Dialogic Imagination* 334), this ideological position is always "demarcated vis-à-vis the heteroglossia surrounding it" (*Dialogic Imagination* 335).

Although Eliot's novels are not in all ways the same as Dostoevsky's "polyphonic novels," *Felix Holt*, and Eliot's later novels in general, readily lend themselves to being read as dialogic creations which recognize the irreconcilability of differing life values. In *Felix Holt*, Eliot designs a situation which explores Felix's ideology of submission, conformity and safety in the face of a desire for a more equitable sharing of the nation's goods.

Bakhtin focuses on the laughter of the comedic genres, which "demolishes fear and piety" (*Dialogic Imagination* 23), but Eliot's critics appropriated the terms dialogism and polyphony almost as soon as they were introduced into English, even though she is not known primarily as a comic author.³¹ Looking at ancient Greek literature, Bakhtin develops his understanding of the dialogic novel by contrasting it with the monologia of epic. Frequently he groups tragedy with epic. Eliot also looks toward the "classics" in order to understand the form of the novel, but rather than comedy, she values Greek tragedy for its recognition of irreconcilable positions. Although Bakhtin traces the roots of the polyphonic novel to the serio-comic challenge to monologic serious authority, and while he usually lumps tragedy in with the monologic and authoritative voice of the epic, in an unusual comment he concedes the existence of polyphony within tragedy:

In none of Dostoevsky's novels is there any evolution of a unified spirit; in fact there is no evolution, no growth in general,

³¹ See my comments in the introduction.

precisely to the degree that there is none in tragedy (in this sense the analogy between Dostoevsky's novels and tragedy is correct). Each novel presents an opposition, which is never cancelled out dialectically, of many consciousnesses, and they do not merge in the unity of evolving spirit, just as souls and spirits do not merge in *the formally polyphonic world of Dante*. (my italics *Dostoevsky's Poetics* 26)

This identification of the structure of the polyphonic novel with that of tragedy has been largely ignored because critics have followed Bakhtin's emphasis on the comic tradition, but it forms an important link to Eliot, in whose work there are also unresolvable oppositions.

In "The Antigone and Its Moral" (1856), an essay written ten years before *Felix Holt*, Eliot disputes those critics who understand *Antigone's* heroes monologically: "It is a very superficial criticism which interprets the character of Creon as that of a hypocritical tyrant, and regards Antigone as a blameless victim" (Pinney 264). In her review she writes, "The turning point of the tragedy is not, as it is stated to be in the argument prefixed to this edition, 'reverence for the dead and the importance of the sacred rites of burial', but the conflict between these and obedience to the State" (Pinney 262-63). Epic truth, for Eliot, is destroyed in the tragic conflict of life.

Eliot's understanding of *Antigone* is indebted to Hegel's recognition of dialectical action and collision within the play. Gerhard Joseph argues that while Eliot never refers to Hegel's work on *Antigone* explicitly, she uses Augustus Böckh's formulation of Hegel's ideas: the "antagonism between valid claims" (25). Joseph argues that while for Hegel "classical tragedy

dramatizes the clash of ethical substances, though in the most schematic fashion" (25), Eliot differs from him "in arguing that the play is less a clash of pure, speculatively determined ideas than a dramatization of the heroine's unique being pitted against the crush of flattening circumstances" (25). This assessment is only partially correct, for Eliot does recognize the difference of ideas, but these ideas are always incarnate, integrally linked to a character. Because of their incarnation, they differ from the abstract Hegelian dialectic that Bakhtin rejects in favour of dialogism.³²

Following Hegel, what Eliot finds most important about *Antigone* is that it contains no singular true word. There is no commonly held monolithic point of view, and she contends that this is something shared with life:

Reformers, martyrs, revolutionists, are never fighting against evil only; they are also placing themselves in opposition to a good -- to a valid principle which cannot be infringed without harm. Resist the payment of ship-money, you bring on civil war; preach against false doctrines, you disturb feeble minds and set them adrift on a sea of doubt; make a new road, and you annihilate vested interests; cultivate a new region of the earth, and you exterminate a race of men. (Pinney 246)

Eliot's approach to *Antigone* is novelistic and echoes Bakhtin's perception of "the relative nature of all that exists" (*Rabelais and His World* 34).

³² Bakhtin comments on the difference between dialogue and dialectics: "Take a dialogue and remove the voicés (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness -- and that's how you get dialectics" (*Speech Genres* 147).

Although Eliot is writing about that which is serious, she seems to find in *Antigone* something akin to the idea of the Rabelaisian grotesque ambivalent image in which "Negation and destruction (death of the old) are included as an essential phase, inseparable from affirmation, from the birth of something new" (*Rabelais and His World* 62). Eliot argues that it is Creon's and Antigone's "consciousness" (Pinney 245) of the validity of each other's principle which heightens their exasperation and defiance. While Eliot differs from Bakhtin in her understanding of the development of the novel, since she locates its origins in tragedy, she is in accord with him in her emphasis on the importance of recognizing multiple viewpoints and voices. Like the novelists and proto-novelists admired by Bakhtin, Eliot refutes the attempt to make a single view universal: "lofty words - μεγάλοι λόγοι -- are not becoming to mortals" (Pinney 246).

QUESTIONING FELIX AS ELIOT'S "MOUTHPIECE"

Felix Holt has generally been considered the most conservative of Eliot's novels since it is judged by the hero's lofty words -- what Harold Transome terms "impracticable notions of loftiness and purity" (275).³³ Felix is often identified with Eliot, and his conservative politics, which advocate

³³ All parenthetical references to Eliot are to *Felix Holt* in this chapter unless otherwise noted.

submission to authority, are seen as Eliot's own. For instance, Thomas Pinney asserts that "as a political thinker Felix is only a mouthpiece for his creator" (415), and Blake comments that we "can take Felix Holt as a spokesman for her [Eliot's] political views, more than is usually safe when it comes to fictional characters, since she uses his persona in a separate non-fictional political article for *Blackwood's* in 1868" ("*Middlemarch* and the Woman Question" 68). Eliot's own political position is frequently studied through Felix's Arnoldian rhetoric. But since, as we know from her essay on *Antigone*, Eliot considers "lofty words" unfit for mortals, we need to be suspicious of identifying Eliot and Felix.

Although *Felix Holt* is now seen as promoting a single, conservative Arnoldian viewpoint, when it was first published some read it quite differently. Eliot's Tory publisher, John Blackwood, delighted in it, claiming that its author's "politics are excellent and will attract all parties" (*Letters* 26 April 1866; IV 247). Frederic Harrison, a Positivist lawyer active on behalf of the lower classes, observed a similar phenomenon among *Felix Holt's* readers: "each party and school are determined to see their own side in it -- the religious people, the non-religious people, the various sections of religious people, the educated, the simple, the radicals, the Tories, the socialists, the intellectual reformers, the domestic circle, the critics, the metaphysicians, the artists, the Positivists, the squires are all quite convinced that it has been conceived from their own point of view" (*Letters*

19 July 1866; IV 285). But despite the initial assessment that *Felix Holt* would appeal to heterogeneous groups, it very quickly came to be seen as single voiced.

Following the novel's publication, critics recognized Felix's conservative bent and his less appealing characteristics. But rather than seeing the author as intelligently constructing a multifaceted character from whom she had some distance, that which Eliot feared from the moment she began writing novels occurred: *Felix Holt* was judged through Eliot's identity as a woman. While critics gloried in their own ability to recognize the faults in Felix's character because of their own masculine superiority, they attributed a single-voiced simplicity to Eliot because of her sex. For instance, E. S. Dallas in an unsigned review in *The Times* comments:

Womanlike, George Eliot has more affection for him [Felix] than men are ever likely to feel. Men may admire various points in his character -- as his honesty, his nobleness of aim, and his strength of purpose; but it is only women who are willing to put up with the arrogance and self-conceit of conscious rectitude. Felix means well and does well, but in his youthful zeal he has such a tendency to be didactic and indignant that we fear if we ever came to know him in the flesh we should vote him a confounded bore But women sometimes like the man who is arrogant in his goodness, who has all the zeal of a neophyte, who is somewhat of a solemn prig, and who declaims at them till they cry. Men are apt to see what is ridiculous or offensive in such a character; women, especially if the fellow is handsome, are fascinated by his energy, by his courage, and by that concentration which makes him utterly blind to the ridicule he incurs among men. So the concentrated enthusiast Felix Holt is the hero of George Eliot's book, and wins the heart of that lovely girl,

Esther Lyon. (Carroll, *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* 266-67)

This myth of Eliot's blindness towards her created character has entered deeply into the accepted criticism of the novel, but its original basis, as can be seen in Dallas's comment, was clearly sexist.

Many other early critics recognized that Felix is not the radical he purports to be, but a conservative in disguise. Joseph Jacobs in 1895 emphatically charged that "Felix Holt the Radical is rather Felix Holt the Conservative; he is not even a Tory-Democrat" (cited Pinney 415). If such doubleness is really present, it bears a troubling relation to Harold Transome's adoption of radicalism in order to retain the authority of his class. Does Eliot fall prey to the same hypocrisy which the novel reveals in Transome? Does she, like Transome, adopt a "radical" voice in the person of Felix in order to subvert the power of the radical position to demand real and substantial change to society? Such an interpretation seems to be undermined by Eliot's very awareness of Transome's hypocrisy and the novel's criticism of it. I will argue that the design of Eliot's novel allows Felix's words to be tested and that Eliot, through this design, points out the problems in Felix's position. Jacobs, in finding that Felix is a Conservative, discovered nothing that Eliot did not already know and place in the novel for the astute reader to observe.

Initial readers of *Middlemarch* similarly identified Dorothea with Eliot and were dismayed by the lack of opportunities which her creator gave her. Some recent feminist critics also criticise Eliot for not depicting successful women, as if this were an indication that Eliot thinks women should not have careers other than motherhood. Elaine Showalter, however, perceptively points to the question that Eliot raises, rather than to the solution which some of her readers see: "From the moment of the novel's publication, feminist readers felt passionately involved in Dorothea's fate, and the strength of their horror and anger at the novel's substitution of marriage for work is a measure of Eliot's power in posing the Woman Question" ("The Greening of Sister George" 306). In a similar way, when reading *Felix Holt*, we should also see Eliot as posing the reform question rather than answering it. The critical awareness that has been applied to *Middlemarch* should be brought to *Felix Holt*.

Even more strongly than they identify Dorothea with Eliot, critics identify the outspoken protagonist of *Felix Holt* with the author. This position has found support amongst the critics because of a separately published speech in *Blackwoods* written in the voice of the fictional Felix Holt. Without this separate article, the absolute identification of an author and her character would be seen as naive. Most critics today would exercise extreme caution in understanding Dorothea, or even Mary Garth, in *Middlemarch*, as a mouthpiece for Eliot's view of women's roles. But can the

Blackwood's article be so simply labelled non-fictional? In the following section, I suggest that while the article does not contain multiple voices from various characters, as does the novel, we do hear more than one argument through Eliot's use of hybridization.

DIALOGISM IN THE SEPARATELY PUBLISHED "ADDRESS"

Bakhtin defines hybridization as "a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance" (*Dialogic Imagination* 358). In a novel, the narrator brings together his or her own voice with that of a character in a deliberate hybridization. The two voices thereby enter into dialogue with each other. This is a technique which Eliot uses in her novels. In *Felix Holt* we readily recognize the gap between the narrator and Mrs. Transome, and we can identify instances of hybridization. When the narrator reports Mrs. Transome's understanding of the Tory position, we can hear the satire with which Mrs. Transome's words are overlaid. Mrs. Transome believed that truth and safety lay

in fact, in such a view of this world and the next as would preserve the existing arrangements of English society quite unshaken, keeping down the obtrusiveness of the vulgar and the discontent of the poor....but now Christianity went hand in hand with civilization, and the providential government of the world, though a little confused and entangled in foreign countries, in our favoured land was clearly seen to be carried forward on Tory and Church of England principles, sustained

by the succession of the House of Brunswick, and by sound
English divines. (105)

This narratorial description of Mrs. Transome's views is a good example of intentional novelistic hybridization. Mrs. Transome's argument is portrayed, but it is filtered through the words of the narrator, from which it is impossible to separate Mrs. Transome's words. At what points is there irony in these words, and what, in fact, would Mrs. Transome actually say if she had to put her thoughts into words? Wendell Harris, discussing Eliot's use of hybridization in *Middlemarch*, comments that the interest which arises out of this type of double-voicing is the uncertainty of attribution: what is the narrator's opinion and what belongs to the character (453)? This ambiguity stops either opinion from dominating.

In general, we do not expect to hear intentional hybridization in a direct speech, but *unintentional* hybridization frequently occurs when the speaker blends his or her voice with the words of another. By acknowledging and referencing an opponent's position, one makes that position audible and attention is drawn to it. The separately published speech given by Felix, while apparently single in intent, resounds against a discourse of discontent contained within Felix's own words. We not only hear Felix's dismissal of dissident arguments, we also hear the arguments themselves, and Felix's voice is not strong enough to suppress them. In fact, his arguments against some issues are so extreme that they lend

credence to the opposition. I would argue, however, that this is not simply unintentional hybridization; rather it reflects Eliot's deliberate strategy of hybridization. Felix's speech is not single-voiced, and it is important to remember that Felix is only a posited author. Bakhtin emphasizes that "All forms involving a narrator or a posited author signify to one degree or another by their presence the author's freedom from a unitary and singular language, a freedom connected with the relativity of literary and language systems" (*Dialogic Imagination* 314-15). Can we detect an element of satire in Felix's words, just as we can in the reported words of Mrs. Transome?

Interpreting the address and the novel is complicated because the idealized roles of fiction and non-fiction are transgressed by Eliot's creation of a separately published speech.³⁴ Most readers have tended to use this

³⁴ Eliot's only other pieces not written anonymously or under the voice of George Eliot, are by "Saccharissa." These letters are written in the voice of a woman, but it seems impossible to identify this voice with Eliot's. These letters by a "sweet" lady complaining about her financial situation were published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (May 13, 1865; April 3 1865). As with Felix Holt, it is hard to know how distant Saccharissa is from her creator, but it is crucial to note that Saccharissa clearly is not Eliot, nor is she someone with whom Eliot could completely sympathize. The choice of Saccharissa for a name suggests that Eliot thought of the voice as sickly sweet. The tone of these essays is that of a well-to-do matron complaining of her situation in life -- for instance, of the expense involved in publishing her husband's work. Such vanity publishing was despised by Eliot. Although some parts of the letters may harmonize with thoughts of Eliot's own, other parts seem in complete discord. These essays may be completely satirical, mocking the comfortable and meaningless life of the well-to-do matron; at the very least, we can say that the voice is not directly that of Marian Evans. Eliot's use of such a persona as Saccharissa is a warning of Eliot's awareness of the
(continued...)

breach of the separate worlds to read non-fiction back into the novel rather than to see the extension of fiction into the "real" world. It is, however, impossible to discount the fictional nature of the "Address," and Eliot clearly guides us to hear the double-voicing in Felix's words when Felix directs his listeners not to suspect him of cant (618). Eliot does indeed call the Felix of the "Address to Working Men" "my spokesman" (*Letters* 12 December 1867; IV 407), but this is not the same as a mouthpiece. If Eliot were to call a carpenter "my spokesman," as opposed to "my carpenter," there might be justification for understanding *spokesman* as *mouthpiece*, but Felix is quite literally a spokesman for a cause. Eliot writing to Blackwood, says, "I am very glad to have had the revise of the 'Address.' Mr. Lewes agrees with you that it will be well to leave out the words 'delivered to a meeting' -- the reason I put them was to give a less assuming attitude to my spokesman" (*Letters* 12 December 1867; IV 407). Eliot frequently speaks of her characters with such a proprietary tone. For instance, she writes in letters about "my pet characters -- Adam and Dinah" (*Letters* April 1 1858; VIII 201) or "my people on the banks of the Floss" (*Letters* 22 March 1860; III 279). The term "my spokesman" does not necessarily designate anything more than Felix's creator's ownership of her character.

³⁴(...continued)

distance between herself and those whose name she adopts in her writing.

Although Blackwood asked Eliot to write an introduction to the "Address," Eliot refused and suggested that Blackwood might prefer to write the introduction and a disclaimer:

I think it will be better for you to write a preliminary note washing your hands of any over-trenchant statements on the part of the well-meaning Radical. I much prefer that you should do so. Whatever you agree with will have the advantage of not coming from one who can be suspected of being a special pleader. (*Letters* 7 December 1867; IV 404)

No introduction was in the end provided by either Blackwood or Eliot, and Eliot avoids identifying herself strictly with Felix's position. Her words suggest that she sees some ambivalence in the "well-meaning" radical's position. Usually we say that someone is *well-meaning* when they mean well but do not quite do well. The *OED* defines *well-meaning* as "well intentioned (but ineffective or unwise)." Furthermore, what does Eliot imply by her reference to "any overtrenchant statements" when Felix apparently advocates compliance and slow quiet change? Surely the overtrenchant statements are those in which Felix points out the terrible abuses in the system even though advocating submission. There is another element in Felix's words missed by the noted Tory John Blackwood's simplistic reading, whose approval of this work is seen in his wish that "the poor fellows were capable of appreciating it. If they were we should be all right..." (*Letters* 6 December 1867; IV 402). It is only once we recognize the gap between the speaker and Eliot that the satire in this work becomes apparent. I would

suggest that Eliot is herself not fooled by the apparently submissive position of Felix Holt. When Felix protests, "You will not suspect me of wanting to preach any cant to you..." (618), it is likely that Eliot intends us to hear a second voice advocating such a suspicion.

Matthew Arnold in various publications and speeches makes similar arguments to those of Felix.³⁵ In "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1865), he contends, "*Force till right is ready*, and till right is ready, force, the existing order of things, is justified, is the legitimate ruler" (III 265-666). Frederick Harrison, Eliot's close friend, and the lawyer who advised her on the legal issues in *Felix Holt*, responds to Arnold by calling his arguments *cant*:

Perhaps the silliest cant of the day is the cant about culture. Culture is a desirable quality in a critic of new books, and sits well on a professor of 'belles lettres;' but as applied to politics it means simply a turn for small fault-finding, love of selfish ease, and indecision in action. The man of culture is in politics one of the poorest mortals alive. For simple pedantry, and want of good sense, no man is his equal. Any quantity of ingenious arguments, based on wholly fictitious premises, he will give you. No assumption is too unreal, no end is too unpractical for him. (276-77)

Harrison further argues that the "grand object of the 'constitutional' and 'culture' factions is to contrive a Bill which shall appear to create a great

³⁵ See for instance the Arminius letters, and "My Countrymen" (1866) published before *Felix Holt*, and *Culture and Anarchy* (1869; originally entitled *Authority and Anarchy*) published after *Felix Holt*, in which Harrison is featured as the enemy of culture.

many new votes, but really create no new influence..." (282). It is this accusation of "cant" to which Felix refers when he asks his listeners not to suspect him of being insincere. In some sense we might see Felix as a working-class manifestation of the Arnoldian culture position, asserting that until culture is wide enough spread, workers should not insist on their rights. In fact, numerous critics, for instance Peter Coveney and Michael Wolff, contend that Felix spouts Arnoldian rhetoric. I argue that Felix in the novel is a satirical manifestation of this position, for he exemplifies that "indecision in action" that Harrison finds in the man of culture in politics.

We know that Eliot, at least, partially approved Harrison's critiques of Arnold, since in a letter to Harrison written only two days before she agreed to write the "Address," Eliot compliments him on "Culture: a Dialogue," a satirical response to Arnold's work, in particular, "Culture and its Enemies" (*Cornhill* 16 July 1867). Eliot writes,

I suppose it is rather superfluous for me as one of the public, to thank you for your article in the Fortnightly. But "le superflu" in the matter of expression is "chose si nécessaire" to us women. It seems to me that you have said the serious things most needful to be said in a good humoured way, easy for everybody to read. I have not been able to find Matthew Arnold's article again, but I remember enough of it to appreciate the force of your criticism. Only in one point I am unable to see as you do. I don't know how far my impressions have been warped by reading German, but I have regarded the word 'culture' as a verbal equivalent for the highest mental result of past and present influences. Dictionary meanings are liable rapidly to fall short of usage. But I am not maintaining an opinion -- only stating an impression. (*Letters* 7 Nov 1867; IV 395)

Although Eliot disagrees with Harrison on the definition of culture, arguing that the dictionary does not comprehend the full meaning of the word, this does not undermine her general agreement with him, as U.C. Knoepfmacher argues (*Religious Humanism* 62).³⁶ There is no reason not to take Eliot's praise of Harrison's satirical essay at face value. Harrison does mock Arnold's use of the word *culture*, suggesting that what Arnold is really talking about is the dictionary meaning: "the amenities of education, the training of the taste -- belles lettres and aesthetics" (604), but the dispute in the essay is not simply about the meaning of the word, *culture*. The central issue Harrison is at odds with Arnold about is not the definition of culture, but rather the conservative stance that Arnold uses culture to defend. With Harrison's satirical criticism of Arnold fresh in her mind, Eliot agreed to write Felix's address, and I would suggest that it is written in somewhat the same vein as Harrison's article: it mocks the cant of culture, but does so in a form that Blackwood, an arch-conservative, would agree to

³⁶ Knoepfmacher interprets Eliot's letter as ironic: "She professed to 'appreciate' the 'force' of Harrison's criticism, but remarked that only 'in one point I am unable to see as you do'; this one point of divergence, she delicately implied, was nothing less than Harrison's entire argument" (*Religious Humanism* 62). Knoepfmacher, however, provides no reason why we should read this letter ironically. This reading is part of a larger argument, the purpose of which is to show a similarity of ideas between Eliot and Arnold (esp. 60-71).

publish.³⁷ In Felix Holt's speech we do not necessarily have Eliot's own opinions.

In both the novel and "The Address," Felix takes what is essentially an Arnoldian position, defending the current order in order to preserve culture. Felix in the address, however, does not simply mouth Arnold's position, but rather takes this position much further than Arnold ever does. At the beginning of the address, Felix defends an Arnoldian position to an extent that makes the position blatant through putting it "in an extreme way" (620), but by the end of the address Felix makes some striking statements that do not at all accord with Arnold's views.

While Felix makes his timorous arguments, it is hard not to hear a driving and insistent criticism of the social establishment underlying his words. The initial argument made by Felix is identical to that so readily recognized as satire in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, where, in the opening scene, Algernon languidly asks what is the good of the lower classes if they do not set an example to the upper classes. Felix similarly contends that a nation would be virtuous if the majority opposed

³⁷ Patricia Lundberg, writing on Eliot's feminism in *Middlemarch*, makes a comment that is equally applicable to Eliot's writings on class:

There were limits to what Evans could publish in Victorian England in 1871. Evans had to present social criticism in a way that was strong yet palatable to her audience. The crux is whether or not she presented a message which the majority of her contemporary reading audience could not discern because of existing social and moral blindness.... (280)

bad practices -- such as "the commercial lying and swindling, the poisonous adulteration of goods, the retail cheating and the political bribery which are carried on boldly in the midst of us" (610). In other words, the "artisans, and factory hands, and miners, and labourers of all sorts...[should] have shamed the other classes out of their share in the national vices" (610). While Felix professes his desire not to compliment the working people, his rationale undermines the authority of those currently in power: kings and authorities from the aristocratic and mercantile classes are frequently complimented and told that "under their wise and beneficent rule, happiness would certainly overflow the land. But the end has not always corresponded to that beginning" (610). The reason that the workers should not demand much is that the current rulers are bad, but ironically Felix attributes the sins of political unfairness and corruption in religion and trade to the workers. If the workers had been more "skilful, faithful, well-judging, industrious, sober" (610), then through shaming the other classes "We should have had better members of Parliament, better religious teachers, honester tradesmen, fewer foolish demagogues, less impudence in infamous and brutal men; and we should not have had among us the abomination of men calling themselves religious while living in splendour on ill-gotten gains" (610-11).

While, at one level, Felix's position is similar to an ethics of self-improvement that was prevalent in the period amongst both radicals and conservatives (see Shuttleworth 122-23), Felix goes much further than the

usual rhetoric. Working men are responsible for a lot more than their own vices. The difference between Felix's address and a nearly contemporary English Chartist circular is striking

Then there is the *time* wasted over the pint and the pipe -- time which ought to be devoted to *Self Culture* or the *Education of Children*...And though we admit that class legislation has inflicted upon us ills innumerable, and blighted the intellect and broken the hearts of whole generations of sons of toil, we cannot shut our eyes to the truth that no state of freedom can improve the man who is the slave of his own vices. ("English Chartist Circular" 1:9 [1861] cited Shuttleworth 122)

In no way does this circular blame the poor for the vices of the aristocracy or the middle class. Similarly, Felix's argument goes beyond any plea for self-culture made by Arnold. It also runs contrary to Eliot's contention elsewhere that poverty and miserable conditions are not conducive to breeding high morality.³⁸ In fact, later in this speech, Felix claims regarding

³⁸ Both *Felix Holt* and the "Address" are usually read through Eliot's much earlier essay, "The Natural History of German Life" (1856), in which Eliot explores Riehl's conservatism, which refutes "the miserable fallacy that high morality and refined sentiment can grow out of harsh social relations, ignorance, and want" (Pinney 272). The peasants are shown to be both stupid and selfish, not understanding the "universal rights of man" but only their own interests. The tone of this essay is condescending. Eliot does admit, however, that the peasant "does not complain of 'government' or 'society,' probably because he has good reason to complain of the burgo-master" (283). The review shows little awareness that self-interest is a universal condition and not simply a condition of poverty. In her essay on Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft (1855), Eliot makes a parallel argument about women by commenting that although many people assert women's moral equality with, or even superiority over, men, "They lose strength immediately by this false position. If it were true, then there would be a case in which slavery and ignorance nourished virtue, and so far we
(continued...)"

some of his fellow workers that "Parents' misery has made parents' wickedness" (623). Felix acknowledges the added difficulties the workers face. If anything, the materially privileged ought to set an example for the poor.

The opening words, blaming the poor for the corrupt state of the nation, set the tone of the whole speech. In telling the poor that they need to be careful how they use their new-found power, Felix holds up the current holders of power as an example of how not to govern: "we are justified in saying that many of the evils under which our country now suffers are the consequences of folly, ignorance, neglect, or self-seeking in those who, at different times have wielded the powers of rank, office, and money" (612-13). In emphasizing the need for all classes to work together for the betterment of society, he appeals to the working-class experience in trades-unions who know "that it is our interest to stand by each other, and that this being the common interest, no one of us will try to make a good bargain for himself

³⁸(...continued)

should have an argument for the continuance of bondage" (Pinney 205). Eliot makes a similar comment on Harriet Beecher Stowe's novels, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and *Dred* (1856), arguing that by not showing "the Nemesis lurking in the vices of the oppressed" Stowe in effect shows that "slavery has answered as moral discipline" (Pinney 327-28). These arguments clearly refute the argument of the "Address" that the poor should be an example to the rich.

without considering what will be good for his fellows" (614).³⁹ This is a principle of which those opposing the rights of the working class are evidently unaware. Furthermore, in an ironic and telling statement, the worst insult Felix can hurl at the lower class is that the Roughts "have the worst vices of the worst rich" (618). This echoes the argument of J.M. Capes in the fourth issue of the *Fortnightly Review*, which Lewes had recently started as editor. Capes in "The Just Demand of the Working Man" argues,

Show us that the vices, the crimes, the bigotries, the extravagancies of the age are all our own, and that peers, gentlemen, and shopkeepers are all pure, while we are vile; or else grant us that position in the rule of our common country which we ask, and which we will never rest until we obtain.
(568)

The content of Felix's speech thus responds to, and indirectly supports, Capes's "just demand."

Felix argues that the preservation of order is essential for the preservation of culture:

Now the security of this treasure demands, not only the preservation of order, but a certain patience on our part with many institutions and facts of various kinds, especially touching the accumulation of wealth, which from the light we stand in, we are more likely to discern the evil than the good of....Just as in the case of material wealth and its distribution we are obliged to take the selfishness and weaknesses of human nature into account, and however we insist that men might act better, are forced, unless we are fanatical simpletons, to consider how they are likely to act; so in this

³⁹ This same sentiment is commented on by R. H. Hutton in *Essays in Reform* (1867), cited in Eagleton (*Criticism and Ideology* 111).

matter of the wealth that is carried in men's minds, we have to reflect that the too absolute predominance of a class whose wants have been of a common sort, who are chiefly struggling to get better and more food, clothing, shelter, and bodily recreation, may lead to hasty measures for the sake of having things more fairly shared, which, even if they did not fail of their object, would at last debase the life of the nation. (621-22)

Ironically, the classes with more "refined needs" (622) must be treated with kid gloves by those who are struggling to survive. Those in need are exhorted to show greater openness than those who have had the advantages of culture. Felix continues,

You may truly say that this which I call the common estate of society has been anything but common to you; but the same may be said, by many of us, of the sunlight and the air, of the sky and the fields, of parks and holiday games. Nevertheless, that these blessings exist makes life worthier to us.... (622)

This analogy makes the idea of the shared benefit of an uncommon culture far more questionable.

To read Felix's address without seeing its doubleness is difficult; at the very least, we must admit that Eliot recognizes that Felix's words may be seen as hypocritical. As mentioned above, Felix argues that his reader should "not suspect him of cant," and he criticizes the "too common notion...[that] the preservation of order is the part of a selfish aristocracy and a selfish commercial class, because among these, in the nature of things, have been found the opponents of change" (620). Furthermore, Felix argues that his listeners need to be patient with "the accumulation of wealth" which

"we are more likely to discern the evil than the good of" (621), and again, the negative side of the argument is voiced. Through such hybridization, Eliot voices the possibility of another interpretation of Felix's words. In the very act of dismissing the validity of the other position, Felix not only voices it, but also introduces new information that argues against his supposed position.

At the end of the speech, Felix makes a few striking statements that go beyond his generally conservative position. In particular, Felix's analogy of a potato famine is noteworthy. He argues,

Men will go on planting potatoes, and nothing else but potatoes, till a potato-disease comes and forces them to find out the advantage of a varied crop. Selfishness, stupidity, sloth, persist in trying to adapt the world to their desires, till a time comes when the world manifests itself as too decidedly inconvenient to them. (625)

In the context of the surrounding paragraphs, this analogy suggests that those with power will continue to enjoy their wealth until they are forced to share it through some catastrophic event. It is only once the workers manifest themselves as "decidedly inconvenient" that a change takes place.⁴⁰ Contending that wisdom comes from outside and forces change, Felix argues that wisdom "wears now the form of wants and just demands in

⁴⁰ In her review of Thomas Keightley's book on Milton for the *Leader* in 1855, Eliot shows sufficient awareness of human self-interest to assert that there is "unreasonable prejudice" against people combining personal interest with a general argument: "If we waited for the impulse of abstract benevolence or justice, we fear that most reforms would be postponed to the Greek Kalends..." (Pinney 156).

a great multitude of British men" (626), and that "it is in virtue of this -- in virtue of this presence of wisdom on our side as a mighty fact, physical, and moral, which must enter into and shape the thoughts and actions of mankind -- that we working men have obtained the suffrage" (626). Felix's arguments about conveniently submitting to the rules and desires of those in power are once again undermined by his own words.

SUBVERSION IN THE NOVEL

Blackwood's request for the "Address," his response to it -- that he could consider himself a radical of Felix's ilk -- and his congratulations to Eliot on her excellent politics, indicates that he read the novel as a monologic tract and missed those places in which Felix and his ideas are questioned. The dialogization in Eliot's text is clearly of a sort that can be ignored by conservative readers. Although it is frequent for readers only to hear the voice that appeals to them, it is puzzling that Eliot's criticism of Felix is muted enough that Blackwood and many subsequent critics do not recognize it. When Eliot's recent publishing history is considered, it appears that there may have been some necessity for Eliot to tone down that voice which criticises Felix's submissiveness. *Felix Holt* was the first novel with which she returned to Blackwood, her original publisher, after deserting his firm in order to publish *Romola* with Smith at the *Cornhill Magazine* for seven

thousand pounds.⁴¹ Although *Romola* was Eliot's favourite novel, and arguably one of her most feminist, it was financially a disaster for the *Cornhill Magazine*.⁴² This commercial failure had strong implications for Eliot's future publishing, since Smith rejected *Felix Holt* based on his reading of its first chapters. The trouble that Eliot had working on *The Spanish Gypsy*, a novel which as we shall see below overtly challenges social norms, suggests that she was not without anxiety while working on *Felix Holt*.

Haight argues that after the publication of *Romola*, Eliot was financially independent, having earned a total of almost £16,000 for her novels. This success, however, was undermined by her concern over Lewes's ill health and her heavy domestic duties towards Lewes's first

⁴¹ Originally George Smith offered Eliot £10 000 for her manuscript, but when Eliot reduced the number of installments, the offer was reduced to £7 000, which was still a very large payment.

⁴² Eliot comments on her attachment to *Romola* in a letter to John Blackwood on January 30, 1877. It is worth noting her concern over misinterpretations of her opinions:

I think it must be nearly ten years since I read the book before, but there is no book of mine 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. It has made me often sob with a sort of painful joy as I have read the sentences which had faded from my memory. This helps one to bear false representations with patience, for I really don't love any gentleman who undertakes to state my opinions, well enough to desire that I should find myself all wrong in order to justify his statement. (*Letters* 30 January 1877; VI 335-36)

family. Haight contends that Eliot's refusal to publish *Romola* in a greater number of installments, which would have earned her considerably more money, shows her artistic integrity and invulnerability to financial matters (*Biography* 369-70). But, while Eliot may have shown artistic integrity in writing *Romola*, the stakes changed after its financial failure when she was no longer being courted by publishers. A letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, written after the publication of *Daniel Deronda*, suggests that Eliot recognized the financial temptation of moderating political views: "But I was happily independent in material things and felt no temptation to accommodate my writing to any standard except that of trying to do my best in what seemed to me most needful to be done..." (*Letters* 20 October 1876; VI 302). Although able to write forthrightly about the Jewish issue, Eliot was not always so secure, and she had been particularly vulnerable in her earlier novels because of her unconventional way of life. Fear of offending Blackwood, and not getting her novel published, was likely a very real problem for her. Lewes wrote a book on Physiology for schools in 1860, but Blackwood rejected it because there were too many opinions in it. Rosemary Ashton speculates that the opinions were "possibly of a kind bearing at least indirectly on religion" (*G.H. Lewes: A Life* 212). Ashton notes that the book never appeared. Later, Lewes had a similar experience with Blackwood, who was in the midst of printing the first volume of Lewes's *Problems of Life*

and *Mind* when Blackwood decided he objected to Lewes's unorthodox ideas and cancelled the contract (Ashton, *G.H. Lewes: A Life* 260).

Biographers, following John Cross, have stressed the financial aspect of Eliot's desertion of *Blackwood's*. But other motives were clearly involved in Eliot's move to another magazine. Cross provides only financial motives for Eliot's switch, but it would have been unwise to do otherwise, since after the abysmal experience with the *Cornhill Magazine*, Eliot returned to Blackwood, who remained her publisher to the end of her life. Clearly, it would have been detrimental to Eliot's estate if any serious criticism of Blackwood were to become public. Cross's biography was published by Blackwood, and Cross was therefore in no position to attribute Eliot's desertion of her first publisher to anything other than financial motives. Redinger's plausible interpretation of the fable, *Brother Jacob* (1864), suggests that Eliot's switch was due to more than this alleged desire for greater profit. Redinger contends that

Once the fable is detected, its purport is clear: those publishers and reviewers who encouraged the production and consumption of saccharine literature which catered only to the taste of the public would be attacked by Jacob, who has no real need for the pitchfork because an idiot is, according to long-lasting superstition an "innocent."....George Eliot had obviously been brooding over the expressed opinion, as in Dallas's review, that the *Mill* presented a more pessimistic vision of life than *Adam Bede*. Of more immediate concern to her was Blackwood's negative reaction to whatever she wrote that swerved from the popular conception of happiness and

society's favourable image of itself as the protector of civilization. (435)⁴³

Redinger argues that Blackwood never recognized the fable and therefore dismissed this story for its lack of light. While Eliot may have been prompted to switch publishers because of such disagreements with him, to what extent did she consider herself to be "sweeping" with Blackwood when she returned to him, just as the trades-union man in *Felix Holt* says, "'but if there's any fine carved gold-headed stick of an aristocrat will make a broom-stick of himself, I'll lose no time but I'll sweep with him'" (398)? Once Eliot returned to her original publisher, because of a lack of other opportunities, is it not likely that she would bury her questions deep enough to ensure that Blackwood would publish *Felix Holt*? Unfortunately, other readers of various political persuasions also failed to hear the dialogization of Felix's position.

Only in recent years has the novel's dialogization begun to be heard. The conservative reading of the novel, however, has taken such a strong hold in people's minds that Eliot's questioning of the politics of conformity is usually seen to be subconscious. *Felix Holt* continues to be regarded as an

⁴³ Redinger's argument that Eliot was frustrated with Blackwood is not purely speculative, but is supported by Eliot's journal entries. On October 9, 1857, Eliot wrote "I had meant to carry on the series, and especially I longed to tell the story of the 'Clerical Tutor,' but my annoyance at Blackwood's want of sympathy in the first part [of 'Janet'] determined me to close the series and republish them in two volumes" (cited Redinger 351). Eliot makes a similar comment on December 6, 1857 (*Letters* II 409).

aberration from Eliot's usually more forward-looking politics. Sally Shuttleworth's comments are particularly worth quoting:

In *Romola* she had questioned, through her representation of Savonarola, the idea that one class should hold exclusive property over knowledge and intellect, whilst the idea that women should be restricted to the sphere of feeling was firmly challenged by both *Maggie Tulliver* and *Romola*. Such division is possible, however, in *Felix Holt* for the crude conservatism of Felix's position is complemented by the stereotypical femininity of the novel's heroine. Departing from the pattern of her three preceding novels, George Eliot appears to be offering an endorsement of the conservative implications of organicism, rather than exploring its contradictions. (131-32)

In the next chapter, Shuttleworth goes on to argue that Eliot again looks at the complexities of the issue in *Middlemarch*. Shuttleworth, however, follows the traditional understanding of Felix as Eliot's ideal creation. For instance, she points to the use of phrenology in the novel, despite its dismissal by Lewes amongst others, as evidence of Eliot's commitment to a static understanding of society. But this is not necessarily a position endorsed by Eliot. It is Felix himself whose self-description calls upon phrenology; the narrator does not use such terms to describe him.

However, Shuttleworth does see an undermining of Felix's ideals in Mrs. Transome and suggests that Eliot's reservations are embodied in her. Mrs. Transome is unhappy in a world in which women must be silent and submit. While Esther does passively submit to Felix and accept her role in the women's sphere, Mrs. Transome stands as an unhappy warning against

the acceptance of such an ideology. Furthermore, Shuttleworth argues that Felix's "doctrine that sobriety, industry and faithfulness will bring the working class the power they desire is directly countered by Mrs. Transome's dismissive response to her inferiors" (141). Despite this recognition, Shuttleworth still sees Felix's position as intimately bound up with Eliot's, for she writes of the "simplistic political message of the novel" (137).

Finding in Eliot a conscious conservative and an unconscious subversive, Barrett argues that the Mrs. Transome narrative subverts the conscious conservative plot. This strong female character casts doubt on Felix's and Esther's relationship by representing "a heroine of far greater scope than Esther, who, because of her scope cannot be confined within the bounds of the traditional female role of faithful wife and loving mother" (112).⁴⁴ Barrett contends that Mrs. Transome's presence in the novel contradicts the argument that Esther "represents a complete reversal of George Eliot's ideas about women" (112). Furthermore, Barrett points to the prose of chapter 51, in which Esther and Felix embrace, suggesting that it is so poor that it can only be parodying itself. Esther's movement from reading, even if an author so disapproved of by Eliot as Byron, to stitching

⁴⁴ This argument is part of Barrett's larger one that Mrs. Transome is a reflection of Marian Evans, and that she reflects Evans's egoism. It is not, however, necessary to agree with this part of Barrett's analysis in order to appreciate the broader impact of her arguments about Mrs. Transome's role in the novel.

can only be seen as a negative change, given Eliot's many comments on the uselessness of needlework. Deirdre David similarly argues regarding Mrs. Transome that "From a conventionally powerless position, from the emotional, domestic life to which Eliot confines her, she radically subverts the male world of politics and the male world of patriarchal plotting" (*Intellectual Women* 200).

Brady also distinguishes between the Mrs. Transome narrative and the rest of the novel. She approaches *Felix Holt* in the same way that she does Eliot's other novels, finding a conservative main plot and a subversive gender plot. In this case, the Transome plot, especially Mrs. Transome's relation to Esther, conflicts with Esther's final submission to the patriarchal romance plot in her marriage to Felix. But Brady also notices that although *Felix Holt* "contains the most politically conservative of Eliot's plots" (136), this main plot is not only subverted on the gender level. She comments,

Moreover, in spite of Holt's freedom in the end to open a school and thus to work toward his aim of expanding the minds of the working class, the narrative offers no suggestion in its closure that any progress has been made toward solving the social problems of industrial England. There is thus a disturbing incongruity between, on the one hand, the narrator's account in the Introduction of a poverty so oppressive that it divides families and, on the other hand, the vague references in the novel's conclusion to a happy family life enjoyed by Esther and Felix in a condition of poverty they have chosen. (136)

Brady comments that the novel is made up of "a continual dialogue of conflicting plots, and the triumph of one over the others at the end never

successfully suppresses the stories that are made subordinate" (138). I would argue that these conflicting plots do not emerge from the subconscious, but rather that they are Eliot's means of exploring the issues raised in *Felix Holt*. While the conservative plot is apparently dominant, a necessary strategy for a novelist who desired publication with Blackwood's, this plot is persistently challenged.

TESTING FELIX

Felix Holt, the Radical, differs from the polyphonic Dostoevsky novels studied by Bakhtin in that we do not see Felix mulling over the positions of others in his mind, or considering his ideas in relation to those of the other characters. In the "Address" Felix places his ideas in relation to other political positions, and his position is thereby dialogized and not allowed to claim a position of truth. In the novel, however, his position is dialogized through the narrator's comments, and by its testing through events. Neither the narrator nor the structure simply endorses Felix's position.

While critics focus on Felix as the "conservative-radical," Transome also claims this role, for he is simply a Tory by another name. As Lingon says in his initial acceptance of Harold's move to radicalism, "If the mob can't be turned back, a man of family must try and head the mob, and save a few homes and hearths..." (111). This sentiment has curious

reverberations with the later events of the novel when Felix leads the mob, and it suggests that we need to be cautious about any simplistic reading of Felix's later actions and about interpreting Felix as Eliot's mouthpiece. The narrator, ironically hybridizing Lingon's thought process, comments, "it followed plainly enough that, in these hopeless times, nothing was left to men of sense and good family but to retard the national ruin by declaring themselves radical, and take the inevitable process of changing everything out of the hands of beggarly demagogues and purse-proud tradesmen" (110). The novel contains a self-aware criticism of those "radicals" who intend to use "reform" simply to aggrandize or further secure their own power and wealth. Since Felix is not himself wealthy, it is simplistic to label his words as pure cant, but they have the potential to be adopted by those in positions of authority and spoken as cant. The meaning of the words changes when they are ironized.

Felix is an ideologue arguing for the complexity of the situation which disables the poor from escaping their poverty: the vote will not be a panacea. In depicting Felix as an opponent of his father's elixir, Eliot appears to play on Carlyle's well-known comment on the vote in *Past and Present*: "Brothers, I am sorry that I have got no Morrison's Pill for curing the maladies of Society" (30). Eliot takes Carlyle's abstract and theoretical position and plays it out in the novel. Felix's rejection of his father's pills parallels his rejection of the vote: "My father was ignorant...He knew neither

the complication of the human system, nor the way in which the drugs counteract each other. Ignorance is not so damnable as humbug, but when it prescribes pills it may happen to do more harm" (142). Similarly, when responding to the trades-union speaker, Felix argues that "Ignorant power comes in the end to the same thing as wicked power; it makes misery" (399). He argues that voting cannot accomplish real change. The efficacy of Carlyle's position, that there must be inner change rather than political acts, is tested through the novel.

Testing this position however, is complicated, for it is thoroughly intertwined with Felix's own desire for power: he tells Mr. Lyon that he wants to be a "demagogue," although of "another sort" (145). This desire to be a "demagogue" is reiterated in a conversation with Esther (366). Deciding not to enter the realm of the middle class enables Felix to be a leader: he "will tell the people they are blind and foolish" (366), but will also teach them the value of their craft. His attitude is condescending. Felix feels that he is one of those called "to subject themselves to a harder discipline, and renounce things voluntarily which are lawful for others" (363). Although choosing to remain in his original class in order to achieve reform, he understands this as a heroic choice. In fact, it is a choice which, when he is speaking with Esther, he says he thinks only women such as St. Theresa or Elizabeth Fry would understand. Fashioning himself as a hero, Felix realizes that if he were to move up to the next class he could never achieve as much

distinction as he can where he now is; he would only be someone's lackey in a cravat, eligible for: "a ridiculously small prize -- perhaps for none at all -- perhaps for the sake of two parlours, a rank eligible for the churchwardenship, a discontented wife and several unhopeful children" (363). Remaining where he is allows Felix to stand out.

Felix's self-fashioning as a hero and leader is most clearly seen in the Treby riot, in which he attempts to take charge. But what emerges from this event is Felix committing the only murder (with the exception of Tommy Trounsem, who is accidentally trampled to death) of the whole event through his assumption of leadership. Additionally, Felix admits to himself that it is his leadership which turns the mob towards the manor. Although he intends to save the town from immediate harm, Felix's own leadership is not unambiguously non-violent. Felix's dealings with women are similarly undemocratic. His relation to Esther is one of domination, and it echoes Harold's relation to his concubine. Felix desires to control Esther: "'A Peacock!' thought Felix, 'I should like to come and scold her every day, and make her cry and cut her fine hair off'" (154). Barrett comments that this part of the story "bears a disconcerting resemblance to *The Taming of the Shrew*" (113). The power that Felix desires for himself is further evidence against seeing him as Eliot's ideal spokesman.

Entranced by his own voice, Felix is an orator, but his argument is challenged by the responses of his listeners. What reader is not made

suspicious when it is the Tories who applaud Felix when he counters the trades-unionist calling for support of the vote? The Tories' response to Felix's words suggests that his ideas are not really in the best interest of the poor and that they might be used to support another interest. The voice of the trades-unionist in the market is strikingly different from that of Felix. This trades-unionist, whose voice is "high and not strong" (395), does not cut the same figure as Felix. He has "the pallid complexion" (395) of a man who works by the furnaces and his shirt is "grimy" (395). By contrast, Felix's well-washed face and his sonorous voice are arresting. Such physical characteristics are not usually an indication of approval from Eliot. David Craig comments that the "association of 'clear' eyes with moral loftiness is of course sentimental pot-boiler's stock-in-trade" (136). Although critics usually take these physical characteristics as signs of Eliot's approval, there is perhaps an element of satire in the narrator's voice, and such comments should not be treated as singly spoken monologic statements.

The accolades for Felix's appearance become even more extreme: "Felix Holt's face had the look of the 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'" (398). To what extent is the narrator voicing Felix's own perceptions of self at this point? Given Felix's self-understanding as a St. Theresa figure and his haughtiness, we can understand the epigraph to

Chapter Thirty from *Coriolanus* as ironic: "His nature is too noble for the world" (390).⁴⁵ By contrast, the trades-union man is a man involved with the world, an "habitual preacher or lecturer" (395) who, after his speech, "walked away rapidly, like a man whose leisure was exhausted, and who must go about his business" (398). It is noteworthy that "the contrast of voice was still stronger than that of appearance" (399). The main difference is that Felix's voice draws listeners from other groups, and in particular he draws the Tories, a group in which the trades-union man was not interested.

The voice of the union man is important, because he is not drunk, and his argument is logical and sensible. This stands in marked contrast to Felix's perception of the lower class and their relation to Trinculo. The Union man asks that working-class men should be able to monitor whether the thinking men are really doing their job and concerning themselves with the needs of the whole body politic. His voice is not overlaid with the hypocrisy of Transome. The narrator makes no comment on this speaker's points, which simply demand that the upper class do their work and govern for the good of all. The speaker argues that universal suffrage will contribute to effecting this change. While critics have contended that the "typical working

⁴⁵ Shuttleworth argues that the epigraph cannot be ironic because the "literal meaning of 'too noble for the world' is reflected in the human face divine' of Felix (Ch. 31, II, 87). George Eliot's characterisation contains none of Shakespeare's subtle questioning of the nature of Coriolanus' nobility" (132). But the epigraph becomes more clearly ironic if we understand Eliot to stand at some distance from Felix.

men in *Felix Holt* are crude, brutal, and stupid" (Kettle 109), the union man stands as a criticism of Felix's arguments, for he is both a worker in an unpleasant and hard job, and he offers a rational political approach by requesting that *all* members of society consider and contribute to the whole; this should not just be the responsibility of the working class. The union man responds to the fable, originally told by Plutarch and retold in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, about the belly. While the patricians in the original fable justify their full belly, the union man retells the story with a very different view: "I say, we are the belly that feels the pinches, and we'll set these aristocrats, these great people who call themselves our brains, to work at some way of satisfying us a bit better" (396). The importance of rewriting the fables of those who hold power and monopolize discourse is evident. Eliot's novel does not focus on the voice of the union man, but his perspective and his voice are heard.

Since Felix is opposed to such an obviously self-serving radical as Harold, the contrast has caused critics to adopt Felix as Eliot's ideal of the perfect radical, despite the fact that Eliot professes to depict real, rather than idealized, people. But, although not a self-serving schemer, Felix is guided both by lofty illusions and by an overly pompous sense of self-righteousness. His assessment of social inequity becomes suspect, for at the end of the novel Felix guides Esther to sacrifice herself for the sake of the rich. In making her decision about the Transome estates, she finds that it "is more

and more difficult to me to see how I can make up my mind to disturb these people at all" (504). While the Transomes have no right to their good fortune -- neither moral nor legal -- the motto of non-disturbance becomes central to Felix's and Esther's outlook. But as much as Felix and Esther argue for the *status quo*, the larger picture challenges them. Little orphan Job, whose name recalls the problem of innocent suffering, is brought by Mrs. Holt to intrude on the serenity of Transome Court. Does the Biblical Job deserve suffering, as his wealthy friends suggest, or is he just as righteous as they are? Esther glosses the difference between Job's life and that of the rich little boy he meets by commenting that the children have enjoyed the visit: "I saw little Job actually laughing. I think I never saw him do more than smile before" (545). The narrator, however, notes another, and more sinister, aspect of the relation between the small children: young Harold resists Job's departure since he "had seemed an invaluable addition to the menagerie of tamed creatures" (546).

FELIX HOLT AND THE SPANISH GYPSY READ AS POLYPHONY

Any understanding of *Felix Holt* as a simple piece of monologic politics is challenged by Eliot's little read, tragic verse novel, *The Spanish Gypsy*, which clearly follows the principle of tragic conflict that Eliot sees in *Antigone*. Set during the Spanish Inquisition, it was begun before *Felix Holt*,

but only completed after the English novel was written. Because of its setting, which is more geographically and temporally distant, Eliot is able to probe in a less emotionally involved context the same issues explored in *Felix Holt* -- the benefits of cultural continuity as opposed to those of a greater sharing in wealth and power. The Gypsies' response to their oppression differs strikingly from Felix's gradualist approach. But, just as the difficulties in Felix's position are revealed, so also are those in Zarca's and Silva's rebellious acts. Eliot tests abstract positions by concretizing them.

In her depiction of the Gypsies, Eliot is very controversial, but because of the novel's foreign setting, she is able to explore issues of culture, power and morality. As we have seen, Eliot does not believe that poverty and degradation provide an ideal environment for the growth of morality. The pictures created in Eliot's later novels, however, contest a simplistic equation of poverty, and lack of education, with self-interest: virtue and vice are found in all classes. In particular, *The Spanish Gypsy* demonstrates this idea clearly. Without idealizing poverty as a breeding ground for high morality, it counters both the snobbish prejudice that the poor are inherently bad and the Arnoldian belief that culture itself makes people good. This novel contrasts two different social groups, one whose membership includes cultivated, educated men, and another, whose members have all suffered the degradations of dire poverty and enslavement. But, whereas the wealthy and well-educated inquisitor

delights in his power and in torturing his victims, the leader of the Gypsy tribe, Zarca, shows a much greater understanding of the "rights of man." Zarca understands his own rights and needs as a human being. He recognizes that their acquisition may harm innocent individuals who are caught in the struggle, but nevertheless dedicates himself to claiming freedom for himself and his people. Zarca manifests great human sympathy in this struggle. Although putting the inquisitor to death, Zarca refuses to burn him, but rather makes it a sign of his mercy to hang the torturer speedily.

The setting of *The Spanish Gypsy* allows for a demystification of the issues of power. Gypsies and Jews, living in extreme oppression and continual fear for their lives, clearly suffer prejudice because of their race, and this bigotry is easier to identify than home-grown, seemingly innocuous, class prejudice. The narrator in *Felix Holt*, however, points out that Esther recognizes the prejudice against the lower class in England as being in effect no different from racial prejudice: "She had a native capability for discerning that the sense of ranks and degrees has its repulsions corresponding to the repulsions dependent on difference of race and colour" (522-23). Similarly, the oppressive authority of the Church is more clearly recognizable in the Spanish Inquisition than in the person of the apparently harmless Reverend Lingon. The wealth and power of the Transome family do not match those of the Ducal Silva, but they still enable Mrs. Transome

to feel that she can treat her tenants with disrespect. The cultural differences enable the English reader to see the harm *writ large* in prejudice and power.

In discussing the polyphonic novel and Dostoevsky, Bakhtin argues that "what he [Dostoevsky as the author] seeks above all are words *for the hero*, maximally full of meaning and seemingly independent of the author, words that express not the hero's character (or his typicality) and not his position under given real-life circumstances, but rather his ultimate semantic (ideological) position in the world, his point of view on the world; *for the author and as the author*, Dostoevsky seeks words and plot situations that provoke, extort, dialogize" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 39). In *The Spanish Gypsy*, Eliot tests Zarca's and Silva's ideological positions in the most extreme circumstance. Zarca, believing in his right to freedom, must kill innocent people along with his oppressors in order to free his nation, while Silva must allow his own people to be slaughtered in order to prove that love conquers all, including national boundaries. In contrast to Dostoevsky's ideologues, such as Raskolnikov, who transfers ideas from his reading on power to the actual murder of the old woman, Zarca and Silva develop their ideas in relation to the demands of their life situations. Their positions do not begin as abstract theory, but rather emerge as differing solutions to real problems. Felix, by contrast, is much more of an ideologue bringing his Arnoldian or Carlylean ideas to a life situation.

Despite the clear injustice of the Spanish Inquisition, Eliot does not present a simple didactic model, since even the fight for freedom necessitates the death of innocent people. Zarca's own "hellish hunger" makes his choice easy. He can mock Silva's more advantaged plight:

You only are the reasonable man;
 You have a heart, I none. Fedalma's good
 Is what you see, you care for; while I seek
 No good, nought even my own, urged on by nought
 But hellish hunger, which still must be fed
 Though in the feeding I suffer throes. (*The Spanish Gypsy* 291)

Zarca recognizes that "reason" can construct anything, and he abhors hypocrisy, "a band, cloaking with Spanish law/ Their brutal rapine" (*The Spanish Gypsy* 285). He does not respond to *reason* but to physical needs. Unlike modern deconstructors, Zarca does not deconstruct reason through a recognition of *aporia*, but by insisting on the basic physical demands which deconstruct reasoned notions of good. It is impossible for the Gypsies to acknowledge the Spanish designated "good" when it includes the Gypsies' physical oppression. Zarca works for his people's freedom and refuses to cast his glance sideward. By contrast, Silva must face both sides, and his position is dialogized. He finds it impossible to be faithful both to the Spanish *and* to the Gypsies. Even though the Spanish Inquisition is something that Silva identifies as hellish, he cannot condone the Gypsies' murder of the Spanish. When he first attaches himself to the Gypsies, Silva begins to regret the culture he has left, and he is brought to an impossible

point where he is tortured by "his many voiced self" (*The Spanish Gypsy* 311). Eliot depicts that dialogism which goes on within an individual speaker when conflicting ideologies present themselves.

Silva's romantic ideal, that love can overcome difference, is put to the test and fails through the act of one moment. The difficulties and imperfections of any single political action become manifest. Recognizing the gap between the inquisitors and the religion they claim, Silva unsuccessfully attempts to divest himself of the divisive customs and beliefs of his people: "The Glorious Mother and her pitying Son/ Are not inquisitors, else their heaven were hell./ Perhaps they hate their cruel worshippers,/ And let them feed on lies. I'll rather trust/ They love you and have sent me to defend you" (*The Spanish Gypsy* 302). Despite such reasoning and his claim that he can act for the better and "elect my deeds, and be the liege/ Not of my birth, but of that good alone/ I have discerned and chosen" (*The Spanish Gypsy* 299), Silva eventually proves unable to abandon his traditions. Although espousing the beliefs of a constructivist, calling on thought to "dissolve all prejudice/ Of man's long heritage, and yield him up/ A crude fused world to fashion as he would" (*The Spanish Gypsy* 312), Silva cannot escape the original language he has learned, and he is caught debating with that tradition which sustained "him even when he idly played/ With rules, beliefs, charges and ceremonies/ As arbitrary fooling" (*The Spanish Gypsy* 314).

Eliot, as author, designs a situation which tests Silva's ideology to the utmost; Silva does not simply have to abandon his people and customs; rather he must destroy them, since the Gypsies' freedom comes at a cost. Failing drastically, Silva attempts at the last to save, not an "innocent" Spaniard, but the most guilty of all -- his uncle, the inquisitor who would have murdered Silva's beloved. Even though Silva is able to see the evil in the inquisitor, he is momentarily unable to leave his culture completely. Does *The Spanish Gypsy* provide that monologic answer that Bernard Semmel detects in *Daniel Deronda*, which, he argues, stresses nationalism over a common humanity? Does Eliot suggest that Silva should not have abandoned the Spanish and the inquisitors? Eliot does not provide a simple answer.⁴⁶ The novel presents a picture which suggests the difficulty of engaging in change. Eliot recognizes what Fedalma terms "sad difference" (*The Spanish Gypsy* 277); Fedalma nostalgically observes the young Gypsy Hinda, for whom "good, right, and law are all summed up /In what is possible....She knows no struggles, sees no double path:/ her fate is freedom, for her will is one/ With her own people's law" (*The Spanish Gypsy* 277-78). Zarca recognizes this possible doubleness, for "each blow we strike at guilt/ Hurts innocence with its shock" (*The Spanish Gypsy* 325), but

⁴⁶ From Eliot's life, it is hard to believe that she supports such an ideology of inheritance. She, herself, chooses to reject her past for the sake of love and ideals. While regretting the rift with her family, she does not leave Lewes to return to them.

by placing nation first he finds, or even creates, a unifying law which he insists is the law for his people. In order to achieve political change, he ignores doubleness.

Felix Holt and *The Spanish Gypsy* should be viewed as companion pieces not only because of their dates, but also, more importantly, because through their parallel structures Eliot explores two different ideological approaches to social injustice. They share a similar triangular structure, but the roles and ideologies of the characters shift. In both novels a woman is caught between two men, one offering fortune and security, the other poverty and righteous struggle. Each woman chooses the under-class, to which one is attached by birth, and the other by culture.⁴⁷ Zarca and Felix, both members of the under-class, argue for opposite strategies. While the Gypsy chieftain leads his troops to the violent destruction of the Spanish oppressors, the British worker advocates slow change to an oppressive system through education. Although Harold and Silva are both members of the upper-class who take on the cause of the under-class, Harold consciously uses the cause of the people's freedom for his own self-aggrandizement, while Silva recognizes the injustice of the Inquisition and attempts completely to give up his power. Although he is claiming a role of unambiguous purpose, Felix's ideas are problematised for the reader just as

⁴⁷ The same pattern is also followed in *Silas Marner*, in which Eppie stays with the much poorer Silas rather than returning to her natural father.

Silva's decision is revealed to be fraught with contradictions. Felix is in danger of betraying his class by encouraging its members to become pawns of their rulers, while Silva participates in the destruction of his own family and friends. Although Silva's decision is weighed down with almost unresolvable tension, Felix does not even recognize his own self-contradiction.

The eruption of violence in a challenge to oppressive authority structures is the threat lying behind both novels. At what point is such violence justifiable? And can it serve a good purpose? The question raised in *Romola* remains: "the problem where the sacredness of obedience ended, and where the sacredness of rebellion began" (553).⁴⁸ Felix, in his defence at court, argues that it is "blasphemy to say that a man ought not to fight against authority: there is no great religion and no great freedom that has not

⁴⁸ This is a question which clearly troubles Eliot outside the novel. In a letter to Harriet Taylor, Eliot refuses to subscribe to the Mazzini fund because its application is not "defined and guaranteed by his own word" (*Letters* 1 August 1865; IV 199). Eliot is fearful that the money may be used to promote conspiracy, and she comments on conspiracy:

Now, though I believe there are cases in which conspiracy may be a sacred, necessary struggle against organized wrong, there are also cases in which it is hopeless, and can produce nothing but misery; or needless, because it is not the best means attainable of reaching the desired end; or unjustifiable, because it resorts to acts which are more unsocial in their character than the very wrong they are directed to extinguish. (*Letters* 1 August 1865; IV 200)

Eliot's answer is not a single prescription for all situations; she does not condemn all cases of conspiracy, but rather insists on the need to evaluate each situation on its own.

done it, in the beginning" (565). Yet the election of a radical is not for Felix such a good cause. Zarca holds that his people's freedom is worth fighting for. Silva, because of his love for Fedalma, deplores the oppression of the Gypsies which results in fractures among humanity, yet he cannot condone the slaughter of their oppressors. Neither novel clearly answers the question of how freedom can best be achieved, but their structures allow for a number of voices to be tested and to be heard against other voices. In situations where there is no voice to contest a claim, we believe a single voice when it tells us that it is good and true. But each of Silva's, Zarca's and Felix's voices interact with other voices; they are tested and their truth is questioned. Eliot, however, does not set up a simplistic binary system in which there is a good subversive voice and a bad authoritative voice. Instead, Eliot follows the tragic model she finds in *Antigone* where neither Creon nor Antigone possesses the complete truth.

Events, or non-events, at the end of each novel raise questions about Silva's ultimate repentance for betraying his past and Felix's cautious radicalism. Silva fails because he cannot bear the cost necessary to achieve greater justice which includes the violent defeat of the oppressors, who are his people. There are multiple perspectives on every action. In the *Antigone* essay, Eliot writes,

Wherever the strength of a man's intellect, or moral sense, or affection brings him into opposition with the rules which society has sanctioned, *there* is renewed the conflict between

Antigone and Creon; such a man must not only dare to be right, he must also dare to be wrong -- to shake faith, to wound friendship, perhaps, to hem in his own powers. (Pinney 265)

Redistribution of wealth, and the destruction of prejudice and oppression, have their cost, and it is a cost Silva is not in the end willing to pay. As Eliot tells the story, it is impossible for the Gypsies to leave for Africa unless they help the Moors in their attack on the Spanish city, and, of course, the battle cannot be won without casualties.

Felix's failure is less violent, but no less decisive. We are told ironically in the last line of the novel that Felix's son acquires more knowledge than his father, but not much more money. This one sentence raises serious questions about Felix's position. Although the sentence can be seen as valorizing and reiterating Felix's attachment to knowledge over wealth, it also shows that Felix's position has not materially improved the lot of his class. In the novel, Felix supports education for working-class sons, and in the separately published speech, he argues that such industry will be rewarded by society. Felix's son, however, reaps no financial benefit from this greater education: the redistribution of wealth does not occur. If the poor do not get richer through their increased productivity, the rich must be benefiting. Given Eliot's and Lewes's serious attention to the financial aspects of Eliot's publishing contracts, it is reasonable to suppose that Eliot understood the importance of financial success. But the picture at the end of the novel suggests that Felix becomes a pawn of the rulers by

encouraging the workers to contribute more to society but not to demand a return for themselves. Society does not change through such passive cooperation.

Eliot's work, by placing the individual's needs in contrast to those of the group, insists on the doubleness which it is sometimes necessary or convenient to forget. Her depiction of Fedalma suggests the layers of marginalization within any group constructed as "the group," or "the nation," and for whose benefit its members are asked to sacrifice themselves. Fedalma, who describes herself as an "unslain sacrifice" (*The Spanish Gypsy* 159), comments to Silva that Zarca suffocates: "You could not breathe the air my father breathes:/ His presence is subjection" (*The Spanish Gypsy* 301). Zarca may offer Fedalma a political role, but she remains his captive. Although Zarca is oppressed because of his race, he does not recognize or sympathize with gender issues. The issue of different margins for oppression becomes even more pointed in *Daniel Deronda*, where Mirah and the Alcharisi are oppressed both as women and as Jews, whereas Mordecai and Gwendolen suffer prejudice only on one front.

Eliot depicts race, class and gender as issues on the power axis and in her novels explores their intersection. In 1977 Barbara Smith took to task black male critics and white feminist critics for not being interested in authors who are oppressed because of both their race and gender:

When Black women's books are dealt with at all, it is usually in the context of Black literature, which largely ignores the implications of sexual politics. When white women look at Black women's works they are of course ill-equipped to deal with the subtleties of racial politics. (170)

Eliot is prescient in her recognition that we frequently focus on a single issue, and members of oppressed groups have sometimes not recognized broader issues of oppression.

By allowing the presentation of various centres, and sometimes conflicting ones, Eliot removes power from any single group which attempts to set itself up as absolute. Real people get hurt by any ideology. The polyphonic novel allows multiple perspectives, but a form which emphasises the validity of multiple positions is potentially politically stifling and, therefore, conservative by default. Catherine Gallagher argues that, in her novels, Eliot exposes the arbitrariness of any system in order to preserve the current order: "Once all misguided naturalist or transcendental attempts to ground a legitimate social order are abandoned, the order that exists can be preserved only by owning its arbitrariness" (*Industrial Reformation* 263). But Gallagher does not acknowledge Eliot's insistent presentation of the voice of the under-class. Through the voices of Jews and Gypsies, women, and members of the working class, the injustice in society becomes so apparent that it cannot be ignored. Multiple voices do not invalidate political movements, but their presence yields yet more challenges to the powerful or would-be powerful. Zarca's move for freedom is not invalidated, but the

comprehensiveness of his ideology, which does not allow his daughter freedom, is questioned. In her own day, Eliot's challenge to the political radicals is not a conservative reaction, but an interrogation of the sufficiency of their radicalism.

Eliot's novels show that an equality in dialogue does not naturally occur, but that a space must be made for it. The upper class do not want to listen to Felix; the Spanish do not communicate with the Gypsies; and the men dictate to the women. Those in authority make speaking space dangerous for those who want to contest their words. In *The Spanish Gypsy*, the Jews are afraid of speaking and so submerge themselves in the dominant language. The innkeeper, Lorenzo, following his father, converts and crosses "himself asleep for fear of spies" (*The Spanish Gypsy* 13). But while his language and even his name change, he wishes inquisitors easy death and "thought it sin/ To feast on days when Israel's children mourned" (*The Spanish Gypsy* 13). His fear of the inquisitor reflects the danger in transgressing against the dominant culture and its discourse. When Fedalma speaks through her dance she puts herself at risk, for she breaks out of the conventions of Spanish womanhood by her immodesty and independence. Patricia Yaeger calls our attention to the importance of play in women's writing as a space in which dominant ideology can be challenged. But when Fedalma "plays" the consequences are very dangerous. When she dances on the streets, the inquisitor plans her death.

The only safe play is seen in Juan, who traverses all walks playing his guitar. His play as an artist is soothing and kind, but it is inefficacious. He communicates love, and voices sorrow "lending brief lyric voice/ To grief and sadness" (*The Spanish Gypsy* 16). But Juan is not part of the scheming world: rather there is in his speech "A touch of graceful wildness, as of things/ Not trained or tamed for uses of the world" (*The Spanish Gypsy* 15). Juan resembles Byron, to whom Esther initially clings, but whom she eventually rejects along with a lifestyle "where poetry was only literature" (547). This judgement reflects Carlyle's well known dictum "Close thy *Byron*; open thy *Goethe*" (*Sartor Resartus* 198). Eliot's art is uncomfortable. It cannot be relegated to the shelf of "literature," for it insists on introducing the problems and various voices of life. Some voices may be muted because of Eliot's own fear of speaking, but if we are prepared to hear them they are there.

FUTURE WORK

After completing *Felix Holt*, Eliot received a letter from Harrison, suggesting that she write a Positivist novel. While Comte feared the imaginative work of artists entering into the political arena, he reserved a historic function for novelists. He also envisioned the creation of a new epic by a future Italian poet which would function for the end of the age the way

Dante's did for the beginning. This poem, he suggested should be entitled "Humanity," and it would show "in succession all the phases of the preparatory life of the race, up to the advance of the final state" (cited in Semmel 58).⁴⁹ Harrison recognized that *Felix Holt* was not an orthodox Comteian production (in fact, as noted above, he writes that people of all persuasions claim that it is written from their perspective), and wanted Eliot to write a much more dogmatic work in order to complete Comte's ambition: "Comte designed to close his life by the work of moulding the normal state into an ideal in a great comprehensive poem – a task which he would never have accomplished and did not begin. But some one will some day. In the meantime the idealization of certain normal relations is eminently the task of all art" (*Letters* 19 July 1866; IV 286). Harrison even sketched out some locations and scenarios for such a novel.

Eliot delayed answering Harrison's letter, but this month-long procrastination produced an important statement about her conception of the novel: "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

⁴⁹ It is worth noting that for Comte, "virtually all women and members of the working class were bound by their physiological constitution to an inferiority in intellect, character, and physical strength" (Semmel 57). Semmel argues that disagreement with this idea was one important reason for both John Stuart Mills's and Lewes's public separation from Comte, whom they had first championed (57).

becomes the most offensive of all teaching" (*Letters* 15 August, 1866; IV 300). Eliot's next novel, like *Felix Holt*, was not the epic which Comte or Harrison envisioned; instead, she produced *Middlemarch* — a domestic epic in which system, authority and epic are shown to be entangled in the imperfections of life.

CONCLUSION

Reading Eliot's novels as dialogic prevents a simplistic equation of her with her characters or narrator. The conservatism expressed by Felix does not reflect Eliot's political perspective; there is no more reason to take Felix as her absolute spokesman than any of her characters. Felix may, possibly, sometimes express opinions with which Eliot agrees, but his position is also subject to question. Eliot's novels can best be seen as projects of exploration in which various ideological positions are made incarnate. A picture, not a diagram or a dictum, is thereby created. Bakhtin finds this type of truth in the Socratic dialogue in which "Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 110). Likewise, none of Eliot's characters speak an absolute truth, but as they act and interact, truths are explored.

**"EPIC AND NOVEL": MIDDLEMARCH
AND THE PLAY OF PARODY**

INTRODUCTION

Felix Holt and *The Spanish Gypsy* both raise questions about the political arena, but they do not provide definitive singular answers, for their protagonists do not act effectually. Similarly, *Middlemarch* is about a town's would-be St. Therasas who fail in their endeavours because they lack the singularity of St. Theresa's conviction. Eliot brings to the fore the dilemma of ambivalence so central to much post-modern thought. Through multiple comparisons and parody, Eliot shows the relative nature of the different characters' pursuits. But in this novel indeterminacy is caused as much by the vagaries of life as by the lack of an absolute theoretical truth. None of the characters are able to possess an absolute dedication to an idea in order really to test it. Significant political events and potential scientific advancements, although framing the narrative, become nothing more than

a backdrop, because the characters get bogged down in life. Unlike the great tragedies so admired by Eliot, ideas do not clash in *Middlemarch* because everyone fades into mediocrity. Dorothea and Lydgate both possess the vision to rebel, but they are side-tracked. Rather than a grand epic, Eliot produces a "home epic" (890) that functions in the inconclusive and non-heroic present, and that parodies epic heroism.⁵⁰ Answers on any grand or theoretical scale are dismantled in the novel. The high sights of would-be Theresas are destroyed because the inhabitants of *Middlemarch* act in a world where theoretical ideals are muddled with life.⁵¹

A number of critics look at *Middlemarch* as a "home epic" and ask what this oxymoron means. Marotta Kenny argues that we are led to think about characters' actions in terms that are non-novelistic. But she finds that in *Middlemarch* "renunciation of action is the only outlet for conscious ambition" (408). Active heroism is not available to nineteenth-century

⁵⁰ All parenthetical references to Eliot are to *Middlemarch* in this chapter unless otherwise noted.

⁵¹ As anti-heroes, Eliot's characters resemble Goethe's. In "The Morality of *Wilhelm Meister*" (1855), Eliot defends Goethe's presentation of human characters:

Everywhere he brings us into the presence of living, generous humanity -- mixed and erring, and self-deluding, but saved from utter corruption by the salt of some noble impulse, some disinterested effort, some beam of good nature, even though grotesque or homely.... The large tolerance of Goethe which is markedly exhibited in *Wilhelm Meister*, is precisely that to which we point as the element of moral superiority. (Pinney 146-47)

characters since nothing original is left for them to do. Renunciation of ambition ironically becomes their form of epic achievement. Such an argument, however, involves a complete undermining of our understanding of epic. The problem of origins in *Middlemarch* cannot simply be attributed to the characters' late appearance in time. Rather, Eliot deconstructs the notion of epic heroism in any encounter with life. Victorian views are subject to deconstruction simply because the nineteenth century is the living world of this novel. Carroll contends that *Middlemarch* is about bringing "some of the major myths or models of life, active at the beginning of the Victorian period, into alignment with the actual conditions of nineteenth-century society" (*George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations* 272). These intersections of theory and life cause crises of interpretation to occur.

Nowhere does the novel reach an epic untouchable truth. This conscious writing of a novelistic epic stands in a complementary relationship to Bakhtin's essay, "Epic and Novel." While *Middlemarch* is set in the past, the narrator does not look back to its happenings as complete or finished events. Rather, the narrator provides a second time-frame, and the novel is written with an eye to the contemporary debate over the second Reform Act and the position of women. This double time-frame is similar to the proto-novelistic serio-comic genres in which Bakhtin observes that "Even where the past or myth serves as the subject of representation...there is no epic distance, and contemporary reality provides the point of view" (*Dialogic*

Imagination 23). Eliot's novel resembles a world of mirrors, endlessly engaging in external and internal reflection. Its characters become truly dialogic through an incessant allusive/parodic dialogization with living and dead people, literary characters and each other.

Bakhtin argues that factual sources and historical events are unimportant for the epic, which is located in an unreachable past. What is important to it as a genre is

its reliance on impersonal and sacrosanct tradition, on a commonly held evaluation and point of view -- which excludes any possibility of another approach -- and which therefore displays a profound piety toward the subject described and toward the language used to describe it, the language of tradition. (*Dialogic Imagination* 16-17)

Ironically, though *Middlemarch* is set in a period of change, marked by the coming of the railway and reform, several of the characters seek an originary truth through scientific inquiry. However, the novel contests "sacrosanct tradition" and any modern truth that would establish itself upon an epic pedestal, and their search is not successful. They are often hindered by human fallibility -- the human living present -- such as lack of education or diligence, pecuniary problems, or even sexual temptation. We can, therefore, see Mr. Brooke functioning not as an isolated bungler, but as a caricature of all the characters in *Middlemarch*.⁵² The inability of the

⁵² Alexander Welsh comments that Mr. Brooke with "his 'documents' (chap. 2) and 'love of knowledge. and going into everything' (chap.5)... is (continued...)"

Middlemarch cast to locate originary truths becomes reflective of the wider inability to reach a singular epic truth.⁵³ In Eliot's next novel, *Daniel Deronda*, a character faces the question of how to act in a world filled with ambivalence. *Middlemarch* sets the stage for *Daniel Deronda* by bringing all heroism into life and showing it to be modified by life's contingencies. The characters themselves, however, do not exhibit the self-awareness that Daniel does about the relativity of truth. Instead, readers must themselves discover the multi-dimensionality of truth and perception.

Eliot, working in the world of novel, which as Bakhtin comments "begins by presuming a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world" (*Dialogic Imagination* 367), does not claim a single truth in order to refute falsely constructed and frequently hypocritical authoritative truths. Bakhtin writes, "Truth is restored by reducing the lie to an absurdity, but truth itself does not seek words" (*Dialogic Imagination* 309). Instead, the "incorporated languages and socio-ideological belief systems, while of course utilized to refract the author's intentions, are unmasked and destroyed as something false, hypocritical, greedy, limited, narrowly rationalistic, inadequate to reality" (*Dialogic Imagination* 312). Eliot employs

⁵²(...continued)

like a caricature of Casaubon and Lydgate" (229). Welsh further argues that Brooke also resembles Dorothea, Farebrother and Bulstrode.

⁵³ See my comments in the introduction on Barrett's discussion of the search for origins.

parody, rather than an alternate authority, to destroy authority. In constructing her "home epic," Eliot sets her characters up against epic works or characters who claim an absolute truth. The words and actions of characters echo those of other characters, other literary figures -- both authors and characters -- and contemporary figures in the "real" world. Most importantly, they incorporate heroic ideal types in the ridiculousness and imperfection of life.

Eliot's novels are all characterized by their use of allusion, but none are as dense as *Middlemarch*. Gillian Beer draws attention to the intertextuality and internal comparison in *Middlemarch* and the way in which it serves to complicate truth: "The multiplying of narratives and the manifold comparisons and divergences of human lots take us beyond dualism or the 'hierarchised opposition', as Cixous calls it, of the 'two term system, related to the couple man/woman'" (*George Eliot* 196).⁵⁴ Similarly, Knoepfelmacher points to *Middlemarch*'s wealth of allusions, arguing that "By fusing history and fiction, the prosaic and the poetic, the factual and the mythological, George Eliot blurs through the superiority of her own 'sugared invention' the fixities which her main characters adopt. Words, vocables, 'the old phrases'.... can carry meanings that defy empirical classification..." ("Fusing Fact and Myth" 50).

⁵⁴ Beer is citing "Sorties" (91).

Claudia Moscovici, exploring the use and misuse of allusion by the narrator and the novel's characters, argues that Eliot "reveals the manner in which her characters tend to misread each other by means of false or inappropriate associations with prominent cultural figures or stereotypes, critiquing not so much the use of allusion by and large but the (mis)use of allusion to project cultural, and particularly gender-based, stereotypes" (514). Many of the allusions are inappropriate as Moscovici argues, but it is this very inappropriateness that makes them parodic. Casaubon, whose work will never have any significance, is compared by Dorothea to Locke, Bossuet and Milton. Because he lacks their ability, the faults in Casaubon's chauvinistic position become blatant. Through such parodic allusion, Eliot brings multiple perspectives into discourse with each other. Barbara Hardy argues that the parallels between characters within the novel suggest possible alternative destinies (*Novels of George Eliot* 135-38). However, we can also see intertextual and extratextual allusions similarly.

While allusion is not necessarily parodic, many of Eliot's allusions have this dimension, and they can be considered as such in a broadly defined sense. Eliot does not simply allude to a literary work in order to recreate an atmosphere; rather, her allusions invoke dialogism and difference. Linda Hutcheon defines parody as "a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text" (*A Theory of Parody* 6). Allusion, by contrast, she comments

is "'a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts' [Ben-Porat 1976, 107], but it does so mainly through correspondence -- not difference as is the case with parody" (*A Theory of Parody* 43). Ironic allusion, Hutcheon allows, is closer to parody, although it operates in a "less constricted" form. Eliot's allusions are frequently ironic, and these invite the reader to see her characters as parodic. When Eliot uses allusion or quotation, it is not simply repetitive, but rather marks difference. For instance, Dorothea is a reworking of Theresa; but within the Victorian context, she is a Theresa without a guiding light.

This chapter will explore Eliot's use of parody and allusion, both intertextual and intratextual, to subvert epic heroism and grand theory. Dorothea is introduced by way of Theresa, and as the other characters appear, none of them stand absolute but all enter into the endless interconnections of life. I will focus mainly on Dorothea because so many characters and ideas intersect with her life so that, although the book begins with her, she is gradually placed in an increasingly large world and is no longer clearly the heroine. Through Dorothea, we can see how Eliot uses parody both to diminish characters within the text, and to question grand theories and literary classics beyond the novel. I begin with Theresa since she comprises the initial comparison for Dorothea.

THERESA

Like the epic heroes in the dramas admired by Eliot, Theresa has a singular purpose, and the narrator tells us that the grown-up Theresa "found her epos" (25).⁵⁵ Theresa is not a figure of epic stasis, but in the tradition of Antigone, she is a figure of rebellion, writing and working under serious threat of the Inquisition. Although her dissension is not acknowledged by most critics of *Middlemarch*, the prelude recognizes that Theresa is herself a figure of reform, not stasis. Barrett is among the few who emphasize this rebellious aspect of the Saint: "Theresa was chosen because she was passionate and dynamic: a reformer, a writer, an erotically charged woman, she expressed, in every aspect of her life, the energy and desire that obsesses George Eliot throughout the canon..." (129).⁵⁶ Theresa was a reformer, motivated by contact with others, by dialogism or "the rapturous consciousness of life beyond self" (25). Her writing, particularly her autobiography, *The Life of Saint Theresa*, was known by Eliot during the

⁵⁵ See my discussion of Eliot's admiration of classical tragedy in the previous chapter.

⁵⁶ Hilary Fraser argues that it is important to recognize other aspects of Theresa than her epic life as reformer of religious communities. She points to two further aspects of St. Theresa: "Her earnest desire for martyrdom and her ardent capacity for love" (401).

period in which she wrote *Middlemarch*⁵⁷. A reading of *The Life* reveals that Theresa is not a submissive angel working within the confines of society's prescriptive female roles. Although turned back from martyrdom as a child, Theresa is not deterred in later life from pursuing her own path when she runs away from home to become a nun against her father's wishes. Theresa is not a broad social reformer, but she is concerned with the order's abandonment of its initial vows of poverty.

Theresa may have worked within a coherent religious faith, but by spurning "romances of chivalry and the social conquests of a brilliant girl" (25) she rejected the coherent social faith that prescribed marriage and submission for women, and obedience to their fathers. "Feminine incompetence" (26) was as much a part of medieval Spain's description of women as of nineteenth-century England's cultural understanding. In a comment, particularly consonant with the imagery of *Middlemarch*, Bartolome de Medina declared during Theresa's canonization proceeding that she and her nuns would be better off "in their convents praying and spinning" (cited Weber 36). Like Eliot, Theresa desired to publish her work

⁵⁷ Lewes records in his diary, "At one shop [in Spain] where Polly asked for the *Vida de Santa Teresa* the old woman insisted on showing her a photograph even after she was told that a *book* was wanted" (*Letters* IV 341 n. 5). See also a letter from Eliot instructing William Blackwood to tell a correspondent "that the original Life of St. Teresa is probably in Germany (as it is here, but with difficulty) to be procured at the second hand book shops" (*Letters* 2 March 1880; VII 253).

anonymously because of prejudice against her sex (*Life* 76). The descriptions of Theresa at the time of her canonization sound curiously like those being applied to Eliot by Herbert Spencer, for example, suggesting the possibility that Eliot recognized a kinship. Theresa was a "manly soul" and a "virile woman" (Weber 17). Spencer similarly comments on Eliot's physique that there is "perhaps a trace of that masculinity characterizing her intellect" (*Autobiography*, I, 395; cited in Haight *Biography* 116). Theresa, the *Virgen y Doctora* depicted with a golden pen, is an icon for subversion of masculine authorship: she is *masculine*, yet not a man. In her life, Theresa challenged conventional women's roles, and in her writing she sought an enlargement of women's sphere, albeit through spiritual means. Significantly, her authority was based on direct visions from God, the only authority available to a woman of her era who wished to contest masculine temporal power.⁵⁸

In the prelude, Eliot introduces Saint Theresa as an epic figure, and she becomes a model against which the novel's characters are measured. For the most part, Theresa stands apart from the world of the novel and is

⁵⁸ Alison Weber's recent study of St. Theresa points to the ironic strategy in her writing: "Teresa concedes to women's weakness, timidity, powerlessness, and intellectual inferiority but uses the concessions ironically to defend, respectively, the legitimacy of her own spiritual favours, her disobedience of *letrados*, her administrative initiative, her right to 'teach' in the Pauline sense, and her immediate access to the Scriptures" (39). It seems likely, that given her own use of irony, Eliot would have recognized the similar rhetorical strategy in Theresa's work.

not subject to life's ambivalence. Yet while the narrator can look back nostalgically to the times that produced such an epic character, even the epic quality of Theresa's life is not left intact. Her contact with the novel seems to draw her into the world of inconvenient life, and what we hear about is an incident when she is constrained and unable to achieve her goal. As a young girl Theresa attempts to enter into the world of epic by going to seek martyrdom in the country of the Moors, for her heart is "already beating to a national idea" (25). The epic world that Theresa desires to enter is similar to the concept of epic described by Bakhtin, which is characterized by a growth out of national tradition rather than out of personal experience (*Dialogic Imagination* 13). It is "a zone outside any possible contact with the present in all its openendedness" (*Dialogic Imagination* 19). But Theresa's attempt at entering the national idea through martyrdom is foiled by contact with present reality. She and her brother are stopped from entering the epic past by the present: "domestic reality met them in the shape of uncles and turned them back from their great resolve" (25). The narrator brings her into the world of the novel and mutable history, "the varying experiments of Time" (25).

In the finale, Eliot links Antigone with Theresa: "A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual life, any more than a new Antigone will spend her heroic piety in daring all for the sake of a brother's burial" (896). The choice of Antigone as a heroic epic figure is

significant because she, like Theresa, challenges male authority by appealing to a higher authority. While Ismene argues, "we are women; it is not for us/ To fight against men; our rulers are stronger than we,/ And we must obey in this" (*Antigone* 59-61), Antigone appeals to "the unwritten unalterable laws/ Of God and heaven" (*Antigone* 453-54) which justify her defiance of authority. Both Antigone and Theresa spurn the coherent social faith that is the essence of patriarchal epic, but they do so by pointing to a secure epic-type origin unavailable to the novel's reforming women. They have an unshakeable faith in their own rightness, which gives them an epic-type quality that the struggling novelistic characters find hard to achieve.

FAILING TO CONTEST AUTHORITY

As a later-born Theresa, and initially a parody of this model from the past, Dorothea is a "foundress of nothing" (26). For the most part, Dorothea is circumscribed by the same social ideology defied by Theresa, which holds there is "one level of feminine incompetence as strict as the ability to count three and no more..." (26). Because Dorothea has no unshakeable faith to which she can appeal, she cannot counter this ideology. Like the child-Theresa, Dorothea is bound by society. Through various allusions in Chapter Three Eliot introduces Milton's Eve as yet another figure of female rebellion with whom Dorothea is compared. As an epic, *Paradise Lost*

attempts to supply an untouchable truth of masculine superiority.⁵⁹ But Milton's Eve, unlike Theresa and Antigone, rebels without any external truth to which she can appeal. Dorothea's own submission gives a different perspective on Eve than Milton's narration about Eve does.

Milton's Eve is England's best known female epic figure, and Eliot first alludes to her in the epigraph to chapter three:

Say goddess, what ensued, when Raphaël,
The affable archangel...

Eve

The story heard attentive, and was filled
With admiration, and deep muse, to hear
Of things so high and strange. (46)

Eliot dialogizes Milton's text through its incorporation as an epigraph. We hear Milton's voice saying that Eve heard "Of things so high and strange" and transfer this authority-laden comment to Dorothea, who listens attentively to Casaubon. But, because of the quotation's situation at the beginning of a chapter that suggests the excessive haste of Dorothea's admiration of Casaubon, we also question whether the story that holds Eve rapt deserves admiration. Bakhtin notes that "the speech of another, once

⁵⁹ Although Eliot clearly mocks Raphael's message of male superiority, a message which runs throughout *Paradise Lost*, Eliot admired other aspects of Milton's work, for at the end of her life, Milton was one of the authors she frequently read aloud (Cross III, 303). In her 1855 review in the *Leader* of Thomas Keightly's book on Milton, Eliot clearly supports Milton's plea for divorce (Pinney 154-57). This is a position that resonates with the predicament of both Dorothea and Casaubon's marriage as well as that of Lydgate and Rosamond.

enclosed in a context, is -- no matter how accurately transmitted -- always subject to certain semantic changes" (*Dialogic Imagination* 340). Even though Milton's text appears as an epigraph, distinct from the narrative part of the novel, it is brought into the novel's context and is itself questioned. Once Eve is removed from the garden setting, her ardent admiration becomes ambiguous.

Gilbert and Gubar suggest that a passage in which Dorothea considers the problems of education and architecture is in its expression of a will to be as *Gods* "almost like a direct prose translation of Eve's musings in Book 9 of *Paradise Lost*" (216). They quote the following passage:

'I should learn everything then [married to Casaubon],' she said to herself....'It would be my duty to study that I might help him the better in his great works. There would be nothing trivial about our lives. Everyday things with us would mean the greatest things....I should learn to see the truth by the same light as great men have seen it by....I should see how it was possible to lead a grand life here -- now -- in England.' (216-17)

While the parody is far from direct, Gilbert and Gubar do point to the similarity between Dorothea's and Eve's desire to learn from authority figures. This parodic rendition also prompts us to wonder if Dorothea, like Eve, will come to doubt the wisdom of the Archangel. The narrator casts doubts on Casaubon's/ Milton's authority by commenting that even Milton "looking for his portrait in a spoon, must submit to have the facial angle of a bumpkin" (110). This image is an excellent metaphor for satiric parody:

Milton is faithfully reproduced, but in Eliot's speculum he is transformed. Here Eliot comes close to the humorous grotesque and emphasis on the body that Bakhtin celebrates as a means of undermining the seriousness of authority. How can Milton's authority be taken seriously when his common bodily humanity is envisioned?⁶⁰ Ultimately, even Milton is only human.

Dorothea does come to doubt Casaubon's authority, but the basis of her skepticism does not have a transcendent origin. Instead it is a gradually acquired and shifting knowledge. This contrasts with her original desire: "She did not want to deck herself with knowledge -- to wear it loose from the nerves and blood that fed her action; and if she had written a book she must have done it as Saint Theresa did, under the command of an authority that constrained her conscience" (112). Eliot's narrative suggests that learning cannot replace God as a transcendent origin. Knowledge is always shifting: Casaubon's research is outdated and he will never discover the "Key to all Mythologies." But while linguistic deficits are the immediate cause of Casaubon's inability to discover this key, the emphasis on diverse perspectives in *Middlemarch* leaves the reader little reason to assume that a single narrative exists.

⁶⁰ See Bakhtin's discussion of Rabelaisian bodily images: "No dogma, no authoritarianism, no narrow-minded seriousness can coexist with Rabelaisian images" (*Rabelais and His World* 3); "Not only parody in its narrow sense but all the other forms of grotesque realism degrade, bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh" (*Rabelais and His World* 20).

The enlightened wisdom that Dorothea initially expects to derive from Casaubon is supposed to have a transcendent authority, but eventually she acquires a quite different, more Eve-like, knowledge. Will whispers to her of Casaubon's inability, and her observations corroborate Will's testimony. Milton's Eve rebels against authority, but unlike Theresa and Antigone she appeals to no point external to her own reason. Eve's decision to eat the fruit is informed by her desire for knowledge and wisdom. She listens to the serpent, and her own perception informs her that the snake is not dead (*Paradise Lost* Book IX). Dorothea's and Eve's rebellions are similar, for neither appeals to God for justification. Like Milton's Eve, Dorothea disobeys the archangel's prohibition (Casaubon's will). But while Milton's censure of Eve takes on an authoritative voice, the multiple censorious comments on Dorothea's actions appear ridiculous once they are expressed in the words of everyday life and human opinions. Sir James's hyperbolic statement about Will -- "It would have been better if I had called him out and shot him a year ago" (874) -- and the reaction of Mrs. Cadwallader and Celia, when they express their horror at Dorothea's second marriage, bring Dorothea's action into the realm of life rather than epic. The context alters the reader's apprehension of these events.

Dorothea's rebellion, however, is limited, for, in the end, it is only second hand, and relies heavily on Will's judgement. While Dorothea, by seeking something higher, rebels against the typical form of womanhood

society expects her to espouse, ultimately she is trapped by societal norms. Though parodic double-voicing is able to make these norms ridiculous, they do not disappear. In *Paradise Lost*, although Eve rebels, she does not escape censure: Eve, according to Milton, lacks the intelligence that Satan exhibits in his rebellion.⁶¹ Dorothea follows Eve's pattern, and although she is not castigated for a natural stupidity, she succumbs to the role of less intelligent being created for her by epic. The force of social conventions constrains Dorothea so that she does not attain a good education,⁶² and she is largely ineffectual because she lacks the knowledge which would enable her to make her own comparisons and judgements. Dorothea does not go beyond Eve, for she continues to base her judgement on the criticism of others and learns very little herself.

Once Dorothea realizes that German is essential to Casaubon's work she sighs, "How I wish I had learned German when I was at Lausanne! There were plenty of German teachers. But now I can be of no use" (240-41). While, as Will points out, Casaubon's inability to read German is clearly a damning comment on his work, Dorothea's decision not to avail herself of

⁶¹ Gilbert and Gubar note the many parallels between Eve's and Satan's rebellions (195-201).

⁶² That society was partly to blame for Dorothea's failure was clearer in the first edition, in which Eliot is more explicit. The "conditions of an imperfect social state" include "modes of education which make a woman's knowledge another name for motley ignorance." See Jerome Beaty's comparison of the two endings ("A Study of the Proof" 59-62).

a readily available opportunity to learn German is also unimpressive, particularly since she has rejected the usual occupations of a young lady (50-51). Dorothea's commitment to her own education is at best sporadic. When she first meets Casaubon, she takes some "learned" books out of her uncle's library to read "many things hastily" (56). Apparently, Dorothea does learn some Latin and Greek while helping Casaubon, but after his death she does not pursue her own studies diligently. We never hear of her work after Casaubon's death, except for once when she wants to distract herself, and studies the map of Asia Minor because a "map was a fine thing to study when you were disposed to think of something else, being made up of names that would turn into a chime if you went back upon them" (864). Far removed from the intellectual St. Theresa, Dorothea is constrained by the role society has created for her, a position inscribed in Milton's epic poem.

UNFULFILLED POSSIBILITIES

Eliot's novel engages parodically with a number of authors external to her text. Just as Dorothea's antecedents are numerous, so also are Casaubon's, including, for instance, the renowned renaissance scholar, Isaac Casaubon, and his son Meric.⁶³ Will has been variously compared to

⁶³ See Knoepfelmacher's discussion of Casaubon's name and
(continued...)

William Wordsworth, Friedrich Schlegel and Percy Bysshe Shelley.⁶⁴

These comparisons are important because they reflect upon the multiple possibilities that a character's life might take, and they allow Eliot to enter into an indirect dialogue with other authors as their ideas or individual characteristics are taken and parodied in the creation of new characters. Through the creation of characters who simultaneously resemble and differ from literary figures, Eliot can enter into a type of debate. Margaret Homans discusses Eliot's simultaneous desire to respect Wordsworth and to subvert him. She argues that in novels such as *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot creates a brother-sister situation, in which the brother rejects the world of imagination: "Defending herself from one powerful male authority by inventing (or trusting) another, Eliot finds a way to be at once original and deferential" (138).

⁶³(...continued)

antecedents ("Fusing Fact and Myth" 51-58).

⁶⁴ Knoepfmacher notes the coincidence of names between Will and Dorothea, and William and Dorothy Wordsworth ("Genre and the Integration of Gender" 101). Roland Duerksen, points to two direct comparisons between Shelley and Will in the text, and argues that Will's politics are similar to Shelley's. In a more tenuous argument, K.M. Newton suggests that Dorothea and Friedrich Schlegel are prototypes for Dorothea and Will ("Historical Prototypes" 403-08). Nonliterary figures are also suggested as antecedents for Will. Richard Ellmann is particularly interested in biographical antecedents and suggests that Will is a figure of Johnny Cross (*Golden Codgers* 73-80). Semmel argues that Will resembles the young radical Disraeli (98).

Like Homans, I would argue that Eliot has an ambivalent relationship with her romantic male predecessors, but I would suggest that while her female characters may appear submissive, Eliot herself has a relationship which, though admiring, is not deferential. Homans notes Eliot's alteration of Wordsworth's ideal childhood vision: "Eliot's most autobiographical characters pass through what appear to be Wordsworthian childhoods, not to become *romantic poets*, but to find that their *ideal childhood visions* are thwarted by circumstances or by social needs" (126). This is not, as Homans seems to imply, a sign of Eliot's fear of disagreeing with her male predecessors, but a sign of her independence when she confronts their theory which ignores the concerns of growing girl-children. Eliot engages Milton, Goethe and Wordsworth, but these authors do not take on a transcendent or overwhelming status. By incorporating their voices into the novel Eliot is able to debate with them. For instance, Eliot criticises Will's and Casaubon's sexism, and this questioning becomes part of a larger

debate.⁶⁵ Eliot's many allusions do not reflect a submissive admiration, but rather engender discussion and even disputation.

Beer particularly notes the "sub-text of debate" found in *Middlemarch* when it is read with a consciousness of its intertextuality "where the writing of others within the Victorian women's movement is confidently (and confidingly) alluded to within the narrative" (*George Eliot* 51). Dorothea is not only dialogized through comparison with ancient women such as Theresa and Antigone, or through her relationship with male characters who echo literary figures, but she is also situated in the contemporary world. Critics have found in Dorothea references to Dorothy Wordsworth, Barbara Bodichon and Bessie Parkes, amongst other contemporary women. The parodic relationship between the would-be cottage-builder, Dorothea, and the famous political economist, Harriet Martineau, further extends the

⁶⁵ Gilbert and Gubar's claim that "Will is Eliot's radically anti-patriarchal attempt to create an image of masculinity attractive to women" (528-29) is unconvincing. When Dorothea says that she is sure she could never write a poem, Will, in a masculine tradition, tells her, "'You *are* a poem'" (256). The narrator ironically comments on the "originality" (256) of the sentiment. Likewise, when Dorothea attempts to persuade her uncle of the necessity for improvement in the farmhouses, for which he has responsibility, "Will's admiration was accompanied with a chilling sense of remoteness. A man is seldom ashamed of feeling that he cannot love a woman so well when he sees a certain greatness in her: nature having intended greatness for men" (424). Barrett traces the narrator's growing irony toward Will and its increasing sharpness as his relation with Dorothea becomes clearer. (136-42). Blake similarly contends "Will combines his own limitations with certain assumptions about the limitations of women, so that his resemblance to Mr. Brooke, Sir James, Lydgate, and Casaubon sometimes becomes uncomfortable" (67).

dialogic parody which surrounds Dorothea. This relationship has not been explored, but it is an excellent example of the shifting meanings and questioning of ideas suggested through intertextual dialogism. In this parodic relationship, Martineau is both exemplary and subject to question, and in this respect, this parody applies both conservative and destructive impulses of parody.⁶⁶

The portrait of Dorothea as a modern would-be Saint Theresa has striking similarities to Martineau's autobiography (1877), in which Martineau writes that as a young girl she indulged in many *vain-glorious dreams*: "All manner of deaths at the stake and on the scaffold, I went through in imagination, in the low sense in which St. Theresa craved martyrdom" (45). While the autobiography was published after *Middlemarch*, it was written earlier, and Eliot commented upon its publication that she had heard many of its anecdotes from Martineau: "Many of the most interesting little stories in it about herself and others she had told me (and Mr. Atkinson) when I was staying with her, almost in the very same words" (*Letters* 20 March 1877; VI 354).

Eliot develops a number of parallels between Dorothea and Martineau. Like Eliot's other parodies/allusions, the parallels between

⁶⁶ Hutcheon argues that "Parody is normative in its identification with the Other, but it is contesting in its Oedipal need to distinguish itself from the prior Other" (*A Theory of Parody* 77).

Dorothea and Martineau are not absolute, but they have both suggestive and unsettling power. Commenting on the suggestion that Dorothea may reflect Eliot's close friends, Parkes and Bodichon, Beer argues that neither of these women was a model for Dorothea, but rather that they perhaps "provided models of Dorothea's possibilities, and measures of her curtailment" (*George Eliot* 165). Beer's approach to these intertextual models is also appropriate for understanding the relationship between Martineau and Dorothea. Martineau was clearly involved with numerous reforms in her lifetime, but it was cottages, reminiscent of Dorothea, with which she was concerned when Eliot visited her for three days in Edinburgh in October 1852. Eliot writes in a letter to the Brays of Martineau's Building Society, and mentions that "we have all been trudging about looking at cottages..." (*Letters* 21 October 1852; II 62). Dorothea's would-be involvement in cottage-building recalls this practical interest. Her plans, however, do not meet the same serious interest that Martineau's did. Celia terms her plans a "fad" (60), while Sir James, with very different motives from those of a building society, acts upon them as a lover. Dorothea's early sanctimoniousness resembles Martineau's descriptions of her younger years: "an abominable spiritual rigidity and a truly respectable force of conscience mingled together, so as to procure for me the no less curiously mingled ridicule and respect of my family" (*Autobiography* 96).

Martineau published her best-selling *Illustrations of Political Economy* during the period of debate over the first Reform Bill when England was taken by the fear of cholera, and in her autobiography, Martineau attributes to these two national upsets her desire to write this famous series of booklets. The same period forms the background for *Middlemarch*. While Eliot makes no clear allusion to Martineau, there is an implicit one, given Martineau's wide recognition, in Mr. Brooke's comment that "'Young ladies don't understand political economy, you know'" (39). Brooke's comment sets up both a comparison and contrast between Dorothea and Martineau.

Although there are parallels between Dorothea and Martineau that establish the parodic possibilities, the differences are also significant. The similarities are important in that they establish a basis for contrast: Martineau shows the unrealized possibilities for Dorothea. Martineau was "successful" as a political economist in a way that Dorothea is not. In contrast to Dorothea, Martineau resembles the narrator in her ready linguistic and literary knowledge. She would not so easily be baffled by a learned cleric's lack of interest in political economy, since she would have enough knowledge to identify Casaubon's lack of interest for what it is. Whereas it is not Dorothea but Will who becomes the journalist, Martineau herself undertook such an occupation. When in the finale, people wonder what Dorothea might have become other than a wife and mother, the image of Martineau offers a silent suggestion. Because Martineau developed a

strong "faith" in political economy, she was able to be purposeful like St. Theresa.

Eliot's motivation in this parody, however, appears not to be singular. While Dorothea is silently judged for her inaction, and the attitudes of those surrounding her are implicitly condemned by Martineau's hovering presence, Eliot takes Martineau's work seriously enough also to parody her ideas. Martineau was an exponent of Adam Smith's *laissez-faire*, what was essentially a very conservative position. Although Martineau's achievements as a female journalist were admirable, this does not mean that Eliot agreed with Martineau's economics, which were very one-sided. Significantly, one of Martineau's tales in the series *Illustrations of Political Economy* is entitled "Brooke and Brooke Farm." As Haight notes, "names are never negligible in George Eliot's novels..." (*George Eliot's Originals and Contemporaries* 28), and this overlap should not be seen as merely felicitous chance. In this didactic tale set in the town of Brooke, Martineau sets out to teach the benefits and principles of unregulated capitalism: although it might appear unjust to the cottagers that the common is being enclosed, benefits gained by the wealthy landowner capitalist actually accrue to the hard working cottager also. In case the reader does not understand the tale, Martineau explicitly lays out what has been learned at the end of the tale in a "Summary of Principles."

The basic tenets of reform that Martineau espouses are quite harsh, and today would be labelled as ultra-conservative. Speaking of a cottager with a shed and cottage in terrible conditions, and children fed on nothing more than potatoes, the young narrator of Brooke Farm learns from her parents that "We hoped to improve their condition, without either lending or giving them money; and they were industrious and tolerably prudent, and we ourselves much interested for them" (III, 38). The rationale behind this statement is explained in the "Summary of Principles" in another tale of the same series, "Cousin Marshall," in which Martineau argues that, with the exception of the relief of sudden accidents and rare infirmities, "all arbitrary distribution of the necessities of life is injurious to society, whether in the form of private almsgiving, public charitable institutions, or of a legal-pauper system" (VIII, 130).⁶⁷ Eliot's Mr. Brooke is also a follower of Adam Smith, to whom he refers in his election speech, and he refuses financial aid to his tenants. The Dagley family, which Brooke visits, is living in deplorable conditions.

⁶⁷ Eliot parodies such an attitude in her *Saccharissa* essays, when she writes as a middle-class matron complaining about the difficulty of making ends meet, what with the money her husband must pay to his publisher, and the parties they must give and her dress which "is not much of a pleasure." *Saccharissa's* consolation and means of saving money for these personal necessities rests on advice she has been given: "and as for giving anything away -- the most helpful explanation I ever heard of from political economy is, that charity does harm" (*Modern Housekeeping* 880).

The hypocrisy in the worst of the reform position is revealed in the discrepancy between Brooke's words and his actions; by contrast, Sir James's paternalistic Toryism appears far more palatable to the reader sympathetic to the plight of the poor. But the paternalism of Sir James's attitude is also problematic: "I do think one is bound to do the best for one's land and tenants, especially in these hard times" (416). In commenting on this "nuisance," Sir James objectifies the tenants in his identification of them with the land. But while Sir James's paternalism is not questioned with regard to the cottagers by the other characters, his parallel paternalism toward women is made ridiculous when we hear Dorothea's contradictory voice, and this criticism reflects on his attitude to the cottagers. Sir James's attitude towards Dorothea suggests that he would not have taken even Martineau seriously, simply because of her sex. The intersecting web that Eliot creates is constantly shifting. There is both bad and good in Dorothea's simple good-heartedness which does not reach to Martineau's understanding of political economy.

Martineau's tales themselves, with their monologic morality, stand in contrast to *Middlemarch*. While Eliot's novel insists on life's dialogic complexity, Martineau's tales leave no room for debate. Each tale is followed by a set of the principles learned in it. Eliot's novels force us to reject such a singular vision as abstract idealization which lacks the universal truth it claims. Neither the reform nor the conservative position is

seen as uniquely good. Martineau, in contrast to Dorothea, really does resemble St. Theresa, for she is able to replace an external faith in God by a faith in political economy. Eliot, however, does not let this faith stand as absolute.

REFORMING THE EPIC

Both Theresa and Eliot are involved with reform: Theresa reforms a religious order, while Eliot reforms the epic. Both objects of reform claim a divine or untouchable status. While Theresa questions authority by an appeal to a higher authority, Eliot must question it from the experience of life. Eliot's characters are parodic heroes. They yearn for an epic life, but they have "perhaps only a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity" (25). Bakhtin comments that "One of the basic internal themes of the novel is precisely the theme of the inadequacy of a hero's fate and situation to the hero himself" (*Dialogic Imagination* 37). Eliot's epigraphs could have provided the inspiration for Bakhtin's statement:

Oh, sir, the loftiest hopes on earth
 Draw lots with meaner hopes: heroic breasts,
 Breathing bad air, run risk of pestilence;
 Or, lacking lime-juice when they cross the Line,
 May languish with the scurvy. (ch 18)

Let the high Muse chant loves Olympian:

We are but mortals, and must sing of man. (ch 27)

Little Theresa faced such a discrepancy, and it is the problem faced by all the characters in the book who have grand ambitions. This is particularly true of Dorothea, who has illusions about the epic life. Her grand ideas find no outlet, and she is not sufficiently dedicated to the cottages to make them anything more than what Celia aptly and condescendingly terms *plans* and *notions*. Dorothea yearns after social justice and knowledge, but she lacks both opportunity and dedication. As we have already seen, Dorothea does not dedicate herself to acquiring knowledge, and she allows ignorance and timidity to stand in the way of her social conscience. A lack of knowledge causes her to defer to "authoritative" opinions. For instance, although Dorothea would usually exhibit an interest in the fate of a sheep stealer threatened with hanging, she makes excuses for Casaubon's lack of interest (62). More particularly, her own lack of knowledge allows her to be swayed even on the subject of cottages: "how could she be confident that one-roomed cottages were not for the glory of God, when men who knew the classics appeared to conciliate indifference to the cottages with zeal for the glory?" (88). Although she takes up an interest in cottages again once she learns that Casaubon's knowledge is not universal, she gives up her plans to found a village as a school of industry because Sir James and her uncle persuade her that "the risk would be too great" (822).

Eliot demonstrates that it is both the lack of external opportunity and self-made lack of opportunity which thwart her heroes. Bakhtin observes that in the novel "A crucial tension develops between the external and the internal man, and as a result the subjectivity of the individual becomes an object of experimentation and representation -- and first of all on the humorous familiarizing plane" (*Dialogic Imagination* 37). We see this clearly with Dorothea. While she takes herself seriously, the narrator presents her as an odd mixture of genuine social concern and puritan self-abnegation with "a strong assumption of superiority" (35). Celia provides us another, familiar, view of her sister that enables us to see her as a "Dodo" (42) and that reveals Dorothea's lack of complete honesty about herself. While Dorothea at first refuses to keep any of her mother's jewels since they are too worldly, she reverses her resolve when her eye is caught by a diamond and emerald ring and bracelet set. As she tries them on, the narrator comments that all "the while her thought was trying to justify her delight in the colours by merging them in her mystic religious joy" (36). Celia notes that "Dorothea is not always consistent" (37). Her familiarly demeaning nickname for Dorothea first appears in Chapter Two, when Dorothea expresses her admiration of Casaubon to Celia, whose clearer sight, even if shallower, regarding Casaubon's sallow complexion and personality is evident to the reader. Dorothea's high-mindedness is gently laughed at by the narrator and by Celia, revealing the ironic gap in Dorothea's

subjectivity.⁶⁸ But, while Dorothea may be a Dodo, Celia is the ignorant *Kitty* that society creates women to be. Bakhtin argues that "Stupidity (incomprehension) in the novel is always polemical: it interacts dialogically with an intelligence (a lofty pseudo intelligence) with which it polemicizes and whose mask it tears away" (*Dialogic Imagination* 403). Kitty's comment that Dorothea "is not always consistent" destroys her sister's lofty pretensions. But in turn, Dorothea's "stupidity" about social conventions reveals their arbitrary nature.

Other characters in the novel suffer a similar fate. The multiple voices that characterize the genre and comment on lofty pretensions do not allow any of the characters a unified subjectivity. Many of the characters are in search of absolute truth, and in the process envisage themselves in a heroic role. Casaubon happily sees himself as Thomas Aquinas when Naumann proposes he model for his painting. But Casaubon's pretensions are undermined by Naumann's perspective, and his duping of Casaubon. More seriously, we come to understand the fraudulent nature of Casaubon's work as Dorothea's knowledge and perspective grow. Celia's initial vision, that Casaubon is a person who was correctly summed up by Sir James as "a

⁶⁸ Wendell Harris observes the Bakhtinian "double voicing" that the narrator uses: "part of the richness of Eliot's narration, the interest which readers find in the narrative voice itself, comes from its being so frequently a blend of voices in ambiguous proportions, the ambiguity arising not out of an event or character or even ultimately authorial intent, but out of attribution" (453).

dried bookworm" (45), is apparently confirmed. Dorothea gradually comes to share this view as she begins to doubt the vitality of Casaubon's work and as she experiences disappointment in marriage. Like Casaubon, who is seeking the secure origin of myth, the other characters seeking truth are revealed through an increasingly broad perspective to be to some degree fraudulent: Lydgate sees himself as a medical reformer, a dedicated researcher searching for the origin of all tissue; Fred understands himself through the myth of a gentleman, unfit to work; and Bulstrode presents himself as a religious reformer. The ambitions of each of these characters are revealed to varying degrees as pretensions. They are, after all, only human and do not live up to the heroic expectations that they impose upon themselves or that others expect of them.

UNSTABLE PARODY

Critics have frequently noticed Eliot's use of paired or even multiple characters who mirror each other.⁶⁹ I would suggest that we can view this technique as a form of parody. Before any characters can take on a singular

⁶⁹ For an extensive discussion of the numerous parallels and echoes see Hardy (*Novels of George Eliot* 93-108). Carroll discusses the unity in *Middlemarch* achieved through analogy ("Unity through Analogy"). Jan Gordon's discussion of origins also offers a discussion of various parallels ("Origins, *Middlemarch*, Endings").

transcendent or heroic status, they are parodied. Such *preemptive parody*, rather than transgressing authority, hinders through contradiction and satirical comparison the creation of normative values. Bakhtin notes a similar use of paired characters in Dostoevsky's work and suggests that this reflects his urge "to see everything as coexisting, to perceive and show all things side by side and simultaneous....out of every contradiction within a single person Dostoevsky tries to create two persons, in order to dramatize the contradiction and develop it extensively" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 28). Bakhtin also notes what he terms "parodying doubles" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 127) in Dostoevsky's novels: "almost every one of the leading heroes of his novels has several doubles who parody him in various ways....In each of them (that is, in each of the doubles) the hero dies (that is, is negated) in order to be renewed (that is, in order to be purified and to rise above himself)" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 127-28).

Eliot's parody, however, is much more ambivalent than that which Bakhtin finds in Dostoevsky, for it is not always clear who is parodying whom. The novel does not simply set up an epic norm, which is parodied, but rather raises questions about all positions. Theresa, Antigone and Eve are epic figures who are variously parodied by Dorothea, Rosamond and Mary. The latter three, however, also reflect and parody each other, not allowing any of them to become the author's absolute spokesperson.

Although the prelude begins by implying Miss Brooke's preeminence within the novel, this initial status becomes less clear as the novel progresses.⁷⁰ Robert Liddell goes so far as to term the prelude a "mistake" because "it suggests that Dorothea is the most important character in Middlemarch, when at most she has primacy among several equals..." (139). But Eliot's correction of her initial placement of the prelude after the Miss Brooke section title page to become a more general introduction suggests that the placement, not the prelude itself, was the mistake, and that Eliot did not see Dorothea as *the* central hero.⁷¹ Hardy comments that the "related stories of *Middlemarch* make a structural equivalent of the novel without heroes" (*The Novels of George Eliot* 93). Carroll argues that the "persistent decentering of the narrative of *Middlemarch*" (*George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations* 234) denies the possibility of transcendence. Amongst the critics, there is an unresolved debate about which of these three women is really the heroine of the novel.⁷² The young Letty Garth, with all her self-

⁷⁰ While some of the change in focus throughout the course of the novel can be attributed to the merging of two narratives, "Miss Brooke" and "Middlemarch," Eliot ultimately did control this fusion. See Jerome Beaty (*Middlemarch from Notebook to Novel* 3-42) for a discussion of the novel's compositional history.

⁷¹ In Eliot's manuscript and the first edition, the prelude is placed after the "Miss Brooke" section title page. In the Cheap Edition of 1874 Eliot moved it to its current position (Carroll, "Introduction" lxxxi).

⁷² Henry James calls Dorothea the heroine but regrets that she must share so much space with other female characters: "Dorothea was (continued...)"

confidence which is being steadily trained into submission, stands as an exemplary comment on them all.

It is unnecessary to reiterate the many internal parallels created by Eliot throughout the novel, since they have already been widely discussed, but a few are worth noting. There are inter-gender parodies such as that between Dorothea and Lydgate in their idealism and self-delusion. Some of the most important inter-male parodies concern the search for origins. Casaubon, Lydgate and Farebrother are all engaged in research. Brooke's interest in general knowledge acts as a parody of their more serious work, and he is himself parodied by the effigy made of him at the hustings (547-49). Seeking an ur-truth, Casaubon looks for the key to all mythologies, and Lydgate seeks for a primary tissue. Jan Gordon argues that "Farebrother's collection is almost a parody of the research into Origins that characterizes the would-be discoverers in *Middlemarch*. The curator of specimens rather than fragments, he alone recognizes that his fascination with what he calls 'natural history' is private insofar as it is likely to reveal much more about himself than about any lineage in the animal kingdom" ("Origins,

⁷²(...continued)

altogether too superb a heroine to be wasted; yet she plays a narrower part than the imagination of the reader demands" (*George Eliot's Originals* cited Haight 58). Haight argues that Mary Garth is the real heroine of *Middlemarch* because of her intelligence, courage and self-sacrifice (*George Eliot's Originals* 58-67). Gilbert and Gubar follow Mary Ellmann's suggestion that Rosamond is the "daemonic center" of *Middlemarch* (520).

Middlemarch, Endings" 136). Equally, however, Casaubon's and Lydgate's fame-oriented research might be seen as parodic of Farebrother's work. Bulstrode's claim to an originary religious truth also echos these truth claims. On another note, Will, Brooke and Fred all reflect each other in their various dilettantisms.

The hard-working, and quite undistractable, Caleb Garth is perhaps the most successful researcher, since he engages in practical farming experiments without looking for any all-encompassing scientific laws. Alan Mintz comments,

His contribution is utterly local; no scheme for scientific crop management will live after him -- although Fred's 'Cultivation of Green Crops and the Economy of Cattle Feeding' will be praised at agricultural meetings -- and certainly no medical discoveries or utopian colonies. In his fulfilment of the ideal of stewardship, Caleb exemplifies, like Dorothea's redemptive acts, the 'unhistoric' side of vocation, and as such, stands as a judgment of the other workers of Middlemarch" (140)

However, unlike his fellow researchers, the hardworking Caleb is so absorbed in his work that he neglects self and family. By foregoing any greater social impact and by not standing up for himself and his family, Caleb to some extent resembles Felix Holt, who in the end does very little to make the world a more equitable place.

Caleb is frequently described by critics as an idealized figure, and the negative aspects of his ideology of "business" are ignored. Nevertheless, they are present. Caleb has happily absorbed the language and perspective

of the upper class. As Timothy Cooper says "'But yo're for the big folks, Muster Garth, yo are'" (604). Caleb bids the labourers not to protest violently against the railway, for "'The cattle may have a heavy load, but it won't help 'em to throw it over into the roadside pit when it's partly their own fodder'" (605). Such a statement stands in contrast to the attitude of Timothy, who is described by the narrator as "having as little of the feudal spirit, and believing as little, as if he had not been totally unacquainted with the Age of Reason and the Rights of Man" (605). More importantly, Caleb's comment parallels Mrs. Cadwallader's observation regarding the repair of cottages: "'Oh, stinginess may be abused like other virtues: it will not do to keep one's own pigs lean'" (417). Rather than recognizing the rights of man, Caleb, although apparently sympathetic to the poor, has subscribed to an ideology that describes them as animals.

None of the characters attains a normative status, since the parody is mutual. Through parodying itself and the world, *Middlemarch* remains flexible. Its multiple parallels not only emphasize the plurality of ways of understanding, approaching or resolving a life issue, but they also demand that each character, and his or her life position, be understood through all the other characters and figures recalled as *parodic doubles*. Peter Garrett insists that the whole of *Middlemarch* is involved in this dialogic interplay: "To isolate and interpret any particular pattern, however, removes us from the actual complexity of the narrative, which, as it expands into full

multiplicity, increases the number of possible comparisons until each moment becomes a nexus of intersecting analogies" (144).

Bakhtin, more generally, comments, "The development of the novel is a function of the deepening of dialogic essence, its increased scope and greater precision. Fewer and fewer neutral, hard elements ('rock bottom truths') remain that are not drawn into dialogue. Dialogue moves into the deepest molecular and, ultimately, subatomic levels" (*Dialogic Imagination* 300). According to Bakhtin, however, this dialogism does not devolve into a meaningless relativism, since while dialogic meaning is not based on the consciousness of an absolute authority or unity beyond self, it is created in the consciousness of other consciousnesses. Bakhtin writes of Dostoevsky's carnivalistic approach to the novel, which emphasizes polyphony, that it helps him to "overcome gnoseological as well as ethical solipsism. A single person, remaining alone with himself, cannot make ends meet even in the deepest and most intimate spheres of his own spiritual life, he cannot manage without *another* consciousness. One person can never find complete fullness in himself alone" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 177). Eliot leads us to consider the image of the pier-glass as a metaphor for recognizing the illusion of a life which organizes interpretation solely on the selective light of a single perspective, whether an exterior authority or the self. While a lighted candle may make multitudinous scratches appear to be going in concentric circles, 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..." (297). Our interpretation of the novel should not simply accept the single perspective of any particular character, or even of the narrator, but must take account of all the competing, complementary and parodic voices.

The result of Eliot's parody is what the narrator might term an *inconvenient indefiniteness*. None of the characters achieves a perfect, immutable status, for they are in the process of change as is our evaluation of them when we learn more from them and other characters. In effect, the characters and their ideas are tested through the comparison of various permutations. Beer comments that "*Middlemarch* creates an experimental situation by its use of structural analogy and by its 'provisional framing', which draws the focus ever more sharply, shifting and refocusing where necessary, testing situations through diverse consciousnesses, repudiating the subjectivity of the single point of view" (*Darwin's Plots* 165). When we finish reading the novel, we cannot identify a single heroic consciousness, nor is there a single character who speaks an exclusive truth.

Bakhtin argues that the "absence of internal conclusiveness and exhaustiveness creates a sharp increase in demands for an *external* and *formal* completedness and exhaustiveness, especially in regard to plot-line" (*Dialogic Imagination* 31). Eliot's plot in *Middlemarch* is surely one of the most complex of any novel in existence. Bakhtin says that in the epic world

the "impulse to continue (what will happen next?) and the impulse to end (how will it end?)" do not exist (*Dialogic Imagination* 32). The epic world is complete in itself and any individual part contains the whole. Eliot copies a similar observation from Carlyle's *French Revolution* in her notebook: "Homer's epos, it has been remarked is like a bas-relief sculpture [frieze]; it does not conclude, but merely ceases" (Pratt and Neufeldt 46; Eliot's parenthesis). In the finale, Eliot suggests that the portion of a life shown in the novel, while it may be "typical, is not the sample of an even web" (890). She imputes to her readers the desire to know what happens. At the same time, the end which the novel supplies is not a final or finished end, for as Eliot writes, "Every limit is a beginning as well as an ending" (890).⁷³

AUTHOR AND NARRATOR

Bakhtin contends that the new position of the author is "one of the most important results of surmounting epic (hierarchical) distance" (*Dialogic Imagination* 28). The author enters into the plane of the characters and does not possess the voice of authority. While the author in *Middlemarch* is not immediately present, the narrator appears to be omnipresent, intrusively

⁷³ Here Eliot anticipates Bakhtin's comment that in the carnival world "all endings are merely new beginnings" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 165).

commenting on everything. But this intrusion does not become authoritative, since the satirical double-voicing which characterizes the narrator stops his/her voice from monologically controlling the novel. When one examines the running commentary on the events of the story, it is not always clear when the voice of the narrator begins and ends. Furthermore, as Hillis Miller demonstrates in "Optic and Semiotic," the analogy of the pier glass applies to the narrator as much as to the characters. The narrator is subject to the "incoherent, heterogenous, 'unreadable,' or nonsynthesizable quality of the text of *Middlemarch* [which] jeopardizes the narrator's effort of totalization"

(144). David Lodge argues that

it is precisely because the narrator's discourse is never entirely unambiguous, predictable, and in total interpretative control of the other discourses in *Middlemarch* that the novel survives, continues to be read and re-read, without ever being finally closed or exhausted.....[Eliot] was well aware of the indeterminacy that lurks in all efforts at human communication, and frequently reminded her readers of the fact in the very act of apparently denying it through the use of an intrusive 'omniscient' authorial voice. (236)

For instance, the comparison to Fielding in chapter fifteen, Lodge argues, is clear evidence of Eliot's ironic self-consciousness (234). Significantly, this self-comparison, where the narrator's digression parodies the "great historian" (170), places the narrator in the same world of parody of which the other characters are a part.

In *Middlemarch*, not only is the narrator brought into the realm of parody, but Marian Evans is also brought into the plane of the characters by

becoming a parodic double herself. Although this parody would not have been widely recognized, it is an extension of the way Eliot writes and thinks, seeing characters in terms of parallels and alternative destinies. The parallels noted above between her and Theresa not only suggest comparisons between them, but also bring Evans into the multiple world of the novel. Through Theresa, Dorothea is compared to Evans. Mary Garth is peculiarly suggestive of Evans, and her presence implies an alternative destiny for Evans. Although Evans herself moved away from her earliest identity as *Mary*, becoming Marian from the spring of 1851, occasionally Marianne, and eventually George in her writing, Mary Garth appears to be a parodic namesake of *Mary Anne Evans*. Both Marys possess a satiric wit (140), which amongst other places Evans displays in the creation of her narrator, and neither is recognized as physically beautiful. Like Mary Garth, Evans spent a long period of time nursing an elderly male invalid relative. Evans valued the time that she spent looking after her father in his illness, suggesting that these days "will ever be the happiest days of life to me" (*Letters* May 1849; I 283-84), but she was also actively engaged in controversial intellectual pursuits at this time. Mary Garth, by contrast, employs her time sewing and simply accepts the *status quo*. Like Evans, she is fond of reading and enjoys Sir Walter Scott (346), but she exhibits none of the assertive spirit exhibited by the narrator, and her life is that conventional one rejected by her Nuneaton original. As the name given to

Evans by Sara Hennell suggests, "Polly," a pun on Pollian/ Apollyon, the Angel of Destruction in Revelation (Haight, *Life* 79), possessed the ambition and vision which Mary Garth lacks. In Mary Garth we see Eliot's alternative destiny.

Like Theresa and Eliot, Mary does not await a "sacred poet," but rather she writes her own book, which is attributed to masculine authorship. Haight points to the similarity between this confusion and the incredulity of Marian Evans's Coventry friends over the authorship of *Adam Bede* (George Eliot's *Originals* 66). Mary has the potential to parody epic and the tradition of male superiority, but instead she re-inscribes it in *Stories of Great Men, taken from Plutarch*. While Mary rewrites these stories, there is no indication that she introduces a feminist conscience to the narratives: it is a book for her boys, not for girls; and Mary "was not discontented that she brought forth men-children only" (891). Mary's younger sister, the rebellious Letty, whom Blake terms "the novel's staunchest feminist" ("*Middlemarch* and the Woman Question" 52), stands as a criticism of Mary's acquiescent and accommodating reading. Although Letty wants the story about Cincinnatus to be narrated "straight on" (277), she subverts its authority by behaving in a way which, as Mrs. Garth puts it, would have made Cincinnatus "sorry to see his daughter behave" (278). Letty insists on her superiority to Ben and is not afraid of interrupting him.

Eliot, like Letty, interrupts male narrators such as Milton, and the novel, as a genre, is adaptable to this purpose. The novel, according to Bakhtin, is designed for such interruptions. He comments that in the novel the author enters into dialogic relations with heroes because they are on the same plane (*Dialogic Imagination* 27). Hardy observes this authorial position in *Middlemarch*: "we feel the pressure of an enormous number of human beings, similar and dissimilar, modifying the doctrines of the novelist, as well as contributing to them" (*Novels of George Eliot* 143). Eliot, however, not only engages with her heroes, but, because her heroes parody major cultural figures, she enters into dialogic relations with a wider literary world. In writing her novels, Eliot does not write as Theresa did with a single word; instead she brings many words into dialogue with each other and into conflict with life. Like Theresa, Eliot does create a major work, but the work does not purport to contain a single truth.

CONCLUSION

Life in the novel is never finished but always subject to continued ironic play. Eliot uses this indefiniteness to explore present possibilities and to "decrown" (Bakhtin) the hierarchies of the past. Although Eliot, like the young Letty, argues "much from books" (891), culture is denied a transcendent status. Letty does not yet question literary authority, but she

will eventually discover that books reflect the prejudice which Ben and her mother reiterate. Literary knowledge, interpretation, argument and skepticism -- these are Eliot's prerequisites for reform, and they are also the key ingredients in a novel engaging in dialogic parody. Eliot's characters do not succeed as epic figures, but instead they are replete in that contradiction which abounds in life and the novel. This is frustrating for anyone desiring a utopian presentation of feminist or other achievement, for Eliot does not present a single authoritative word.

In her final novel, *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot faces the relativist dilemma, and explores how this lack of direction can inhibit action. In *Middlemarch* we see a dual problem, since a character like Dorothea has little knowledge, either absolute or relative. While Dorothea is inhibited from meaningful action because she lacks knowledge and education, she is also constrained by the futile Victorian desire for a single authoritative light. In *Middlemarch* the possibility seems to exist that truth could be found if insufficient education, social inhibitions or other impediments were removed, but because life gets in the way, we never see if this is possible. Theory and life interact for all the characters, making even the search for unitary truth impossible. In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot depicts the stagnation a recognition of the "truth" in multiple voices can bring. In the first part of the novel, Daniel recognizes multiplicity and does not even attempt to overcome impediments in the search for truth: the multiplicity which characterizes the novel, instead

of being a creative force, suggests the possibility of a stasis just as inhibiting as an authoritative imposition of a singular truth.

GAMBLING UNCERTAINTY IN *DANIEL DERONDA*

INTRODUCTION

Gambling is a key metaphor and image in *Daniel Deronda*, and significantly it has much in common with carnival, the framing device and motivation in *Romola*. In his discussion of Dostoevsky's *The Gambler*, Bakhtin stresses that "Gambling (with dice, cards, roulette, etc.) is by nature carnivalistic" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 171). It is an image of ambivalence, and its sudden rises and falls parallel carnival crownings and decrownings. Just as in carnival life and death are simultaneous, and crowning also signals decrowning, so in gambling winning also signals losing. Like carnival, it is an occasion in which ordinary rules are suspended and in which all attain an equal footing subject to the turns of luck. But, whereas Bakhtin only sees gambling as an event "outside the norms and order of ordinary life" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 171), Eliot draws parallels between gambling and ordinary life. When gambling is extended beyond its own special time, its

problems become apparent, and Eliot uses it as an image to emphasize that one person's gain is another's loss. In contrast to Bakhtin's description of Dostoevsky's carnivalization -- where he observes "*life taken out of life*" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 172) Eliot brings carnivalization into the larger world, as the novel moves outward from the casino. The losses suffered by characters do not remain in the limited space of carnival time but move into what Bakhtin would term "biological time" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 172). In the carnival world of gambling, Bakhtin notes that "the *stake* is similar to a *crisis*: a person feels himself on *the threshold*" (171). In *Daniel Deronda*, however, the novel does not remain in this threshold position -- the consequences become important. As in *Romola*, where Eliot recalls the individual who is suffering in the midst of the joyous freedom of carnival, so in *Daniel Deronda*, the voice of the gambling loser is always calling out to the winner. But *Daniel Deronda* problematizes the question of how to listen to multiple voices and yet act.

This insistence on hearing a multiplicity of voices stems from Eliot's vision of tragedy and its portrayal of an "antagonism of valid principles" (Pinney 264). As we have seen in previous chapters, Eliot's Hegelian understanding of *Antigone* insists that no character is completely right, but that, paradoxically, both Antigone and Creon follow just, but opposed, principles. No ideology represents absolute truth, for in life all positions are tempered by counterfactuals. In *Daniel Deronda*, this type of weighting has

the potential to inhibit action. A question raised by the novel is whether any type of action can escape the carnival world of gain and loss. In fact, this problem initially stops Daniel from actively participating in life: how can action escape the negativity of gambling, and what distinguishes ethical action from gambling? While the novel itself never endorses any single position as truth, Daniel eventually follows Mordecai's Zionist vision and adopts it as his personal truth. This enables him to act, but Zionism does not become a universal truth; in fact, while it is an absolute truth for Mordecai, its very nature does not allow it to attain universal adherence. Although Daniel embraces an epic position, the novel remains dialogic.

In this novel, Eliot moves beyond the dialogic novel as discussed by Bakhtin, since her hero recognizes life's dialogism and is paralysed by this consciousness. Bakhtin admires Dostoevsky's heroes, who are involved with other consciousnesses, with placing their ideas against another's: "What Dostoevsky's characters say constitutes an arena of never-ending struggle with others' words, in all realms of life and creative ideological activity" (*Dialogic Imagination* 349). Daniel, however, has himself no internally persuasive discourse, and he is unable at the beginning of the novel to become an ideologue who can contend with other positions. Instead, he is overwhelmed by a dialogic consciousness. In her creation of Daniel, Eliot faces a postmodern dilemma. Barbara Johnson acknowledges the potential deficits of an extreme relativism in her discussion of

deconstruction; although an adherent of deconstruction herself, she argues that popular rhetoric which affirms deconstruction's alignment with socially radical issues is simplistic:

Whereas critics in the public media are attacking deconstruction for its subversive politics, politically radical critics of deconstruction *within* the academy have long attacked it for its quietistic, apolitical neutrality, its inaptitude to lead to political intervention, its privileging of analysis over action. (28)

It is exactly these problems, which can attend an extreme relativism, that Eliot struggles with in *Daniel Deronda*.

THE CASINO

Opening with the image of a casino, the novel begins "*in medias res*" because, as the epigraph tells us, no point is fixed as absolute in either science or poetry: "...Poetry has always been understood to start in the middle; but on reflection it appears that her proceeding is not very different from his [Science's]; since Science, too, reckons backwards as well as forwards, divides his unit into billions, and with his clock-finger at Nought really sets off in *medias res*" (35).⁷⁴ Similarly in gambling, neither the winner nor the loser is constant. But this picture of speedy change based on

⁷⁴ All parenthetical references to Eliot are to *Daniel Deronda* in this chapter unless otherwise noted.

fortuitous gain and loss is not optimistic in Eliot's world view, and the gaming table is not joyous. Even though Eliot describes a luxurious casino for the wealthy, the one child in the room is "melancholy" (36). The dismal picture recalls Eliot's own description of the casinos in Homburg:

The sight of the dull faces bending round the gaming tables, the raking-up of the money, and the flinging of the coins towards the winners by the hard-faced croupiers, the hateful, hideous women staring at the board like stupid monomaniacs -- all this seems to me the most abject presentation of mortals grasping after something called a good that can be seen on the face of this little earth. Burglary is heroic compared with it. (*Letters* 25 Sept. 1872; V 312)

Casinos are similar to burglary, since the purpose of each is gain from another person's loss, but burglary requires some concerted human effort, while gambling deadens mind and body. Action may be risky, but in contrast to gambling it involves exertion and work. For this reason Gwendolen Harleth decides to gamble and marry Grandcourt rather than work at a stage career, but this choice is also dangerous. Although Gwendolen's gambling losses are relatively insignificant in the casino, a much larger loss looms when she decides to gamble with her life through marriage. In the figure of Lapidoth, whose tale haunts much of the novel, the absolute negativity of gambling is seen, for he reaches the point where he is willing to sell his daughter. When he materialises in the final scenes, he is unwilling to pursue the more arduous task of redemption and reconciliation. The narrator comments on him, "Among the things we may

gamble away in a lazy selfish life is the capacity for ruth, compunction, or any unselfish regret..." (811).

The casino, according to Bakhtin (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 171), and as described by Eliot, is a place which brings people from different backgrounds together. Eliot comments: "Livonian and Spanish, Graeco-Italian and miscellaneous German, English aristocratic and English plebeian. Here certainly was a striking admission of human equality" (36). Describing the variety of people, the narrator remarks on the uniqueness of this social mixture: "where else would her ladyship have graciously consented to sit by that dry-lipped feminine figure prematurely old, withered after short bloom like her artificial flowers, holding a shabby velvet reticule before her, and occasionally putting in her mouth the point with which she pricked her card?" (36). This scene resembles carnival, where people of differing social backgrounds mix in the celebrations. Bakhtin notes that "People from various (hierarchical) positions in life, once crowded around the roulette table, are made equal by the rules of the game and in the face of fortune, chance" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 171). Despite such diversity "there was a certain uniform negativeness of expression which had the effect of a mask -- as if they had all eaten of some root that for the time compelled the brains of each to the same narrow monotony of action" (37). Despair, rather than the optimism associated with carnival, dominates. The image of gambling is a peculiarly negative one, and yet in *Daniel Deronda* gambling becomes

a metaphor for life in which ideological positions have both pros and cons. When all gainful action is thought of in terms of a correlated loss, a despairing nihilism and stagnation may result.

DANIEL AND STASIS

Egoism is a part of gambling, but it is also a necessary part of all action. During the first half of the novel, Daniel is afraid of asserting his ego at the expense of others, and he refuses to take a position because it might hurt someone else. In Daniel, sympathy appears to negate egoism, but Elizabeth Ermarth argues that for Eliot the idea of sympathy does not imply giving up the self. Pointing to Dinah, Maggie, Dorothea, and Daniel, she comments, "Altruism is bootless without ego, just like egoism without a sense of the other" (*Realism and Consensus* 233). Egoism is explored in conjunction with the possibility of action throughout the novel. At Leubronn, Daniel does not engage in play, but only observes the participants from what Gwendolen senses is intended to be an elevated position. While this refusal to play apparently involves a conscious moral superiority, it also reflects Daniel's attitude towards life more generally, in which he refuses to involve himself because of his unusually large sympathy.

Initially, the narrator introduces Daniel's sympathy positively. At school, Daniel is passive because he is troubled by the idea of winning at

the expense of others: "how could a fellow push his way properly when he objected to swop for his own advantage, knocked under by choice when he was within an inch of victory, and, unlike the great Clive, would rather be the calf than the butcher?" (218). This early sympathy, however, does not prompt Daniel to become a strong advocate of the under-class in society, but instead leads to inaction. Daniel is unable to choose a career because he sees all sides of every issue: each good has its obverse side. An intense awareness of absolute relativity destroys his potential: "His early-wakened sensibility and reflectiveness had developed into a many-sided sympathy, which threatened to hinder any persistent course of action....A too reflective and diffusive sympathy was in danger of paralysing in him that indignation against wrong and that selectness of fellowship which are the conditions of moral force" (412-13). Daniel's sympathy for the poor was checked by his "fear of falling into an unreasoning narrow hatred" (413), and as a result "he apologized for the heirs of privilege" (413). Through a type of cognitive dissonance, Daniel supports the *status quo*, which happens to be of benefit to him and his supposed family. This does not stop him from revealing his sympathy for the oppressed in dinner conversations with those of his own class, but his sympathy is checked at this level.

Daniel's initial attitude resembles Felix Holt's final one, where Felix does not heartily support the position of the poor because he sees the potential harm in the upheaval of society. This is not dissimilar to the

position which Gallagher understands Eliot to take, when she argues that Eliot disarms social criticism by showing the arbitrariness and artificiality of the social order in order to defend culture (*Industrial Reformation* 263). Daniel recognizes the arbitrariness of the social order, yet he does not want to upset it. But a character's viewpoint does not necessarily reflect that of the author; in this case it simply shows Eliot's awareness of the problems inherent in any absolute ideological form and in the converse rejection of all ideology.

By default, Daniel is left in the position of a malingerer, hanging around in the company of his uncle and supposed father, the punningly named, Sir Hugo Mallinger. Spending his time helping his uncle on various personal matters, entertaining his aunt and cousins, half-heartedly reading law, and socializing, Daniel is unable to commit himself to any career or cause. The narrator comments ironically on his spending the past year in a phase of indecision: "Not that he was in a sentimental stage; but he was in another sort of contemplative mood perhaps more common in the young men of our day -- that of questioning whether it were worth while to take part in the battle of the world: I mean, of course, the young men in whom the unproductive labour of questioning is sustained by three or five per cent on capital which somebody else has battled for" (225). Daniel closes his eyes to the knowledge that he is living off the production of others, who by working have committed themselves to a course of action.

It is such an attitude which Mordecai condemns during a meeting of "The Philosophers" at *The Hand and Banner*. "Shall man, whose soul is set in the royalty of discernment and resolve, deny his rank and say, I am an onlooker, ask no choice or purpose of me. That is the blasphemy of this time" (598). Through his epic vision, which he introduces at the club, Mordecai provides Daniel with a way beyond the stasis of gambling. Unlike the aristocrats with whom Daniel usually associates, this working-man's club has an interest in life beyond immediate social pleasures, and its members enjoy debating ideas. Their opinions go back and forth in a dialogue, and none of the men dominate the conversation until Mordecai begins his solemn pronouncements. Although "usually he was at once indulged and contradicted" (588), Mordecai's speech attempts to silence the dialogue of the club. Despite the contradictions, Mordecai manages to impose his agenda on the group to the extent that they decide to have a Jewish night. Mordecai's language takes on a voice which precludes difference, and he speaks in the authoritative language of the prophets: "Woe to the men who see no place for resistance in this generation" (585). When Gideon attempts to question this monologic ideology, Mordecai, refusing to see another perspective, looks only at the positive side of his position. Echoing Eliot's comments elsewhere that poverty or slavery does not breed good morality, Gideon responds to Mordecai's desire that the Jews should remember their heritage by saying that "It isn't all gratitude and harmless

glory. Our people have inherited a good deal of hatred" (597).⁷⁵ But, Mordecai, as an epic prophet, argues that he will focus only on the positive: "I cherish nothing for the Jewish nation, I seek nothing for them, but the good which promises good to all the nations" (597). His words eventually stop the discussion since "the tone of phlegmatic discussion [was] made unseasonable by Mordecai's high-pitched solemnity. It was as if they had come together to hear the blowing of the *shophar*, and had nothing to do now but to disperse" (599).⁷⁶ The *shophar* is the ancient ram's horn used in the service for the Day of Atonement; signifying a call to repentance and the coming of the Messiah, it is a symbol of absolute truth.

⁷⁵ See for instance Eliot's review of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, cited above, in which Eliot argues that "If the negroes are really so very good, slavery has answered as moral discipline" (Pinney 327). Instead, Eliot sees "the Nemesis lurking in the vices of the oppressed" (Pinney 327-28). As I argue in the previous chapter, however, Eliot's *The Spanish Gypsy* suggests a possibility which she does not acknowledge in this review, for she shows positive qualities such as mercy growing in poverty and slavery.

⁷⁶ Mordecai's vision does allow for disagreement within the Jewish community, that is for heresy, but it is monologic in its call for adherence to Judaism and separation from the Gentiles. All other difference is subsumed under this call. Mordecai wants to unite the Jews despite heresy, but there is one choice he wants all Jews to make: to live as Jews. Although Mordecai's Zionism is monologic in its orientation, Eliot does not present all her Jewish characters with an identical vision. In her introduction to Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* notebooks, Jane Irwin comments that "Contention is a very common topic of the Berg Notebooks extracts" (xxxiv). She notes that "Jewish sectarianism is not dramatized in *Daniel Deronda*. Instead the discussion in the Hand and Banner is presented as a reasoned communication of various opinions" (xxxiv). Irwin contrasts this debate with sectarian Christian disputes in Eliot's other works.

Daniel takes upon himself Mordecai's dialogue-halting vision, and it is this monologic clarity of purpose which gives him a vocation. Through a commitment to an ideological position with a belief that does not allow for the recognition of another side, he loses his timidity: "But such caution appeared contemptible to him just now, when he for the first time saw in a complete picture and felt as a reality the lives that burn themselves out in solitary enthusiasm" (605). Moving into this burning life, Daniel leaves the uncertainty and doubleness which characterise the novel as a genre. He takes on a role similar to that of Saint Theresa and Antigone, which none of the *Middlemarch* characters are able to do. Daniel can refer to an origin to support his mission. Alexander Welsh identifies the Zionism embraced by Daniel as ideology, the answer provided by modern society for its "discontinuity of experience and knowledge" (315).

Harold Fisch sees Daniel as an epic, visionary character whom Eliot attempts to bring together with *Biedermeier* -- the little vanities of everyday life. In *Middlemarch*, he suggests, Eliot attempts something similar with the St. Theresa figure, but is unsuccessful because Dorothea becomes too immersed in the *Biedermeier* world. This is not, however, due to Eliot's lack of artistic achievement; rather, her point in *Middlemarch* is to show the merging of epic with the distractions of everyday life. Daniel, however, moves towards an absolute separation from the world of *Biedermeier*, and this has caused critics from the first to divide the book into two sections: the

Daniel/Jewish part and the Gwendolen/English part. The latter part immediately found greatest favour and continues to be preferred by readers and critics.⁷⁷ Some critics, such as Fisch (351), attribute this preference to a modern lack of enthusiasm for epic.

The rejection of the Daniel section, however, must be attributed to more than the difference between novel and epic, since epic is only introduced with Mordecai and it does not initially dominate this section. Much of the initial unfavourable reaction to the Daniel part is clearly attributable to its interest in the Jews. While some contemporary critics do not specifically mention their antipathy towards Judaism in their dismissal of this section, others are more blatant. For instance, the reviewer in the Catholic *Tablet* finds "Daniel's acceptance of Judaism as a religion ... revolting" (4 November 1876, cited in Baker, *George Eliot and Judaism* 3). Lewes clearly saw the critical rejection of the Daniel section as, at least, in part derived from prejudice. In a letter to Edward Dowden he complains of a reader saying, "I never *did* like the Jews and I never shall." Lewes comments, "We only see what interests us, and we have only insight in

⁷⁷ Leavis is one of the most striking exponents of this position in that he argues that the Daniel portion of the novel could be completely eliminated: "there *is* nothing to do but cut it away..." (122). In a later article, "George Eliot's Zionist Novel" (*Commentary* 30, 1960), Leavis recants somewhat on this position (cited Knoepfelmacher *Religious Humanism* 117). Other critics, such as Carroll ("The Unity of *Daniel Deronda*") and Hardy (*Novels of George Eliot* 108-14) have rightly disputed Leavis's proposed excision and point to the profound unity of the novel.

proportion to our sympathy. Now both these fundamental principles are forgotten by critics who ask, 'Who can be expected to feel interest in the Jews?' -- 'Who can believe in such a prig as Deronda?' -- Mordecai is a shadow,' etc..." (*Letters* February 1877; VI 336-37). Certainly, a large part of Eliot's purpose in writing about the Jews is to overcome this prejudice. To Harriet Beecher Stowe she writes that because of the usual attitude of Christians to Jews, "I therefore felt urged to treat Jews with such sympathy and understanding as my nature and knowledge could attain to" (*Letters* 29 Oct. 1876; VI 301).⁷⁸

Eliot's interest in the Jews and her desire to portray them sympathetically does not really address why Eliot decided to use Judaism, or more specifically, Zionism, as the epic goal of the novel. It is worth noting that not all the Jews are epic characters, nor are they all presented positively. Some modern critics even question the novel's purported Jewish sympathy. According to Deborah Heller, the critical commonplace that *Daniel Deronda* idealises the Jews is an oversimplification. Susan Meyer goes further, claiming the novel "is rife with anti-semitism" (745). The extremity of these readings, particularly that by Meyer, does not fully take into account the context in which Eliot's novel was written and received,

⁷⁸ See William Baker (*George Eliot and Judaism*) for a thorough study of Eliot's engagement with Judaism. It is worth noting that Eliot's study of Judaism is informed by her friend Emmanuel Deutsch, who lived with her and Lewes during his final illness from cancer.

exemplified by its initial rejection from the Gentile population and welcome by the Jewish one, as evidenced in David Kaufmann's *George Eliot and Judaism* (1878) and in the appreciative letters Eliot received from contemporary rabbis.⁷⁹ But, it is true that many of the Jewish characters represent simple, and frequently negative, stereotypes, and Heller and Meyer raise a valuable question about the extent of Jewish favouritism. Why, then, does Eliot deliberately choose Jews – Daniel, once he claims his Jewish heritage, and Mordecai -- as her epic figures?

Although during her life Eliot moved from an antagonism to religion to an appreciation of the sympathy it can give people, she satirizes most forms of Christianity, frequently depicting hypocrisy in those who profit from the church. In the more sympathetic Church of England clergy, such as Farebrother in *Middlemarch*, what Eliot portrays is, in fact, brotherhood, not a visionary faith. In Tryan of "Janet's Repentance," rather than doctrinaire vision, we see human sympathy. Although continuing to reject "dogmatic Christianity," Eliot writes, "I have no longer any antagonism towards any faith in which human sorrow and human longing for purity have expressed themselves; on the contrary, I have a sympathy with it that predominates over all argumentative tendencies" (*Letters* 6 Dec. 1859; III 231).

⁷⁹ See, for instance, Eliot's comments in her journal (*Letters* 15 Dec. 1876; VI, 316) and in a letter to Abraham Benisch (*Letters* 16 Dec. 1876; VI, 316-317).

Judaism, in particular Zionism, allows Eliot to give Daniel an unshakeable focus. In contrast to the Church of England clergy, both hypocritical and sympathetic, Daniel and Mordecai are reminiscent of Savonarola in *Romola* and Dinah in *Adam Bede*, since they have a strong faith which gives them a sense of unambivalent purpose. What Mordecai and Daniel possess goes beyond either geniality or sympathy. It is both a religious and a nationalistic vision of truth. Deirdre David contends that "Eliot's myth of the Jews in *Daniel Deronda* may be seen to represent the displacement of novel into epic and ...[that] Deronda becomes an epic hero rather than a novelistic one" (*Fictions of Resolution* 140). She argues that the Jews in the novel "struggle with no fracture of self and substance, no imperative to dominate experience and to recreate a lost order which is the mark of so much novelistic experience" (*Fictions of Resolution* 142). Although conceding that the Jews in the novel have contemporary and social concerns, David argues that it is the eternal and apolitical, that is the epic, aspect of them that Eliot offers readers as an alternative to English Philistinism.

But even though Daniel acknowledges Mordecai's vision as truth, it is not one which Eliot validates absolutely. Various characters are given the opportunity to voice their opposition, and the more negative side of Daniel's commitment is shown. Bakhtin notes that in "the epic there is one unitary and singular belief system. In the novel there are many such systems, with

the hero generally acting within his *own system*" (*Dialogic Imagination* 334). The dialogism of the novel absorbs Daniel's epic vision into its discussion. While the English aristocracy is both nationalistic/racist and sexist, this problem continues to follow Daniel in his epic vision. Furthermore, it is an exclusive vision. Gwendolen, with whom he has developed much more than a casual friendship, is left out of his epic world, as are Sir Hugo and his other English friends. But as Eliot argues in her *Antigone* essay, all decisions for action involve loss as well as gain: "Reformers, martyrs, revolutionists, are never fighting against evil only; they are also placing themselves in opposition to a good -- to a valid principle which cannot be infringed without harm" (Pinney 264). Daniel cannot support an oppressed people by continuing to live amongst the indifferent and wealthy English. But by rejecting the English, he also rejects the friends who brought him up. More significantly, Daniel ignores the intellectual arguments against his new vision. He rejects the assimilationist arguments of members of "The Philosophers," his mother and Klesmer. Yet, in making this decision to work for his people, Daniel is freed from the position of bystander in life. Daniel brings life out of the gambling sphere by responding to a particular epic vision which takes his action beyond egocentricity, but he does not bring it into a world of singular truth. The novel shows that Daniel's epic conviction does not erase the other side of epic. As in *Antigone*, where although Antigone and Creon each have unwavering conviction, the complexities of

life remain, so also in *Daniel Deronda* they are present: epic is situated within the contradictions of the novel.⁸⁰

ACTING PASSIVELY WITH GWENDOLEN

Daniel's relationship with Gwendolen is the area in which his changing understanding of life is most clearly seen. In his first encounters with Gwendolen, Daniel takes on the role of critic and judge, and his role is later shifted to that of confessor. These roles are the passive ones of the observer, but they still influence Gwendolen. The key change does not come until the end of the novel, when Daniel adopts a more pro-active role and takes responsibility for his actions and the way their relationship develops. All Daniel's relations with Gwendolen are tinged with an initially

⁸⁰ Patrick Brantlinger recognizes contradictions in Daniel's vision of separateness:

A further obvious irony for her [Eliot] is to find in the history of that exclusive 'race' elements of a visionary universality that might unify all races and nations in a world-community --- or in other words, the elements of a global nationalism transcending nationalisms: 'For the divine Unity embraces as its consequence the ultimate unity of mankind,'" Mordecai tells Mirah;"See, then -- the nation which has been scoffed at for its separateness, has given a binding theory to the human race"' (683). That this position is finally incoherent adds to rather than diminishes its pathos: Eliot underscores the great difficulty of making facts square with ideals, or the real with the visionary. And Daniel's embracing of Mordecai's idealism merely makes him also a romantic idealist; there is no guarantee of success. (270)

unspoken and later illicit, although still unspoken, sexuality. Some critics minimize Daniel's responsibility for Gwendolen's attraction to him. Hardy, for example, points to the "slowly growing irony" (*Novels of George Eliot* 150), arguing that Daniel decides not to pursue Gwendolen and that the reader is privy to this information: "The misinterpretation of Daniel's interest in Gwendolen runs like a thread through the book, sometimes there as a piece of comic ignorance on the part of Sir Hugo or Hans, sometimes making the further ironies of Mirah's and Grandcourt's jealousy" (*Novels of George Eliot* 150). By contrast, E.S. Shaffer argues that Daniel's action has not been misunderstood by Gwendolen, and that he has significant responsibility for his developing relationship with Gwendolen. Attributing Daniel's reticence about his true relationship with Gwendolen to hypocrisy, she suggests that Daniel clothes a sexual relationship in discussions of "theology."⁸¹ Shaffer is perceptive in not seeing Daniel as a perfect character in contrast to a sinful Gwendolen, but this latent sexuality, which similarly inhabits Daniel's relationship with Mirah, also represents Daniel's unacted potential and is not simply hypocrisy. While Daniel never intends

⁸¹ Gillian Beer also sees Daniel in a negative light emphasizing Sir Hugo's identification of him with Richardson's Lovelace (409): "We might more readily have associated Daniel Deronda with Sir Charles Grandison, the good hero, but there is wisdom in the work's suggestion that he first succours and then violates Gwendolen by abandoning her" (*George Eliot* 226).

to act on his feelings for Gwendolen, the relationship which develops eventually causes loss for Gwendolen once Daniel becomes a man of action.

Gwendolen is initially attracted to Daniel because he is unlike other men. Significantly, however, he resembles Grandcourt in that he appears "bored" (42). Carroll notes their similarity: "The two men are essentially passive -- Grandcourt inert, Deronda unrealised..." (*George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations* 276). Boredom is also a quality which Gwendolen claims for herself, but its nature differs strikingly from Daniel's boredom. Although Gwendolen finds gambling "is a refuge from dulness" (464), Daniel is ostensibly bored because he dislikes gambling. This parallel among Daniel and Grandcourt and Gwendolen, is important, however, for even though we see a fundamental difference in their outlooks, an effective lack of interest in the wider world is caused both by Grandcourt's and Gwendolen's egoism, and by Daniel's lack of it and consequent relativism.

While Grandcourt and Gwendolen pursue their own interests, including amorous conquests, and Gwendolen does pursue Daniel as the novel progresses, Daniel's hesitancy stops him from even doing this much. Although after Gwendolen's gambling loss, Daniel redeems her necklace, he does so with what is apparently only a superficial anonymity since it takes Gwendolen little time to figure out the identity of her benefactor. His pursuit of Gwendolen is marked by ambivalence throughout the novel. This redemption of the necklace, however, is important symbolically, since it

represents the crowning/decrowning which Gwendolen undergoes at the end of her first important gamble. Like gambling itself, the return of the necklace symbolizes both gain and loss. While at the material level, Gwendolen is enriched by the return of her necklace, she is simultaneously humiliated and chastised, unable to wear the pride she possessed even when losing her money. Daniel's criticism becomes intensely associated with the necklace.

The crowning/decrowning which Gwendolen undergoes in Leubronn is replayed on her wedding night, and forms a basis for discussion between her and Daniel. Grandcourt's diamonds, representing the wealth and power Gwendolen has attained, are supposed to crown her marriage. Instead, they symbolize its destruction. Crowned by the diamonds, Gwendolen is decrowned by Lydia. Although Gwendolen's financial gain has been Lydia's loss, the forsaken woman triumphs by humiliating and terrifying Gwendolen with her curse. These two crownings/decrownings become pivotal images with strong ties to gambling. Lydia's and Gwendolen's relationship is that of loser and winner, and Gwendolen understands her decision to marry Grandcourt as akin to gambling. By accepting Grandcourt's offer of marriage, Gwendolen ensures that Lydia's children will forever remain illegitimate. Gwendolen can rejoice in her good fortune only by ignoring the devastation her gain brings to Lydia.

In a conventional romance, the claims of a fallen woman never compete with the happy marriage of the legitimate bride. But Eliot makes the

loss of the illegitimate wife a focus of this novel. As in *Romola*, the wife and mistress decrown each other. Lydia, who has run off with Grandcourt and left behind her young son, differs strikingly from Tessa, and she is far from the innocence of the simple milkmaid. Yet this fact does not enter Gwendolen's mind and cause her to dismiss Lydia's claims. Instead, Gwendolen understands Lydia on the simple basis of her having been wronged by Grandcourt. Eliot, however, by including Lydia's abandonment of her first child, adds a level of complexity and ambiguity to Lydia's claims. Where Gwendolen sees the wronged woman, aristocratic males, such as Grandcourt or Mr. Gascoigne, see an unentitled woman. Mr. Gascoigne originally overlooks Grandcourt's youthful "unfortunate experiments in folly" (177) since he has not bankrupted himself, even though he has "ruined" a woman: "Whatever Grandcourt had done, he had not ruined himself; and it is well known that in gambling, for example, whether of the business or holiday sort, a man who has the strength of mind to leave off when he has only ruined others, is a reformed character" (125). Although this masculine position clearly subscribes to a double-standard, Lydia's claim for her children does become more questionable in light of her own treatment of her first child. Grandcourt and Gwendolen through their separate gaming endeavours contribute to Lydia's destruction, yet it is important to note that in Eliot's moral economy, there is no simple equation of Lydia with good. Once the hypocrisies are uncovered, a mixed picture is revealed.

A series of conversations between Gwendolen and Daniel develops the association between gambling and Gwendolen's second crowning/decrowning. As Gwendolen comes to understand something of Daniel's supposed illegitimate background, he becomes for her a symbol of gambling loss in the face of her gain through Grandcourt. In the course of their discussions at Diplow, Daniel explains his rejection of gambling: "'There are enough inevitable turns of fortune which force us to see that our gain is another's loss: -- that is one of the ugly aspects of life. One would like to reduce it as much as one could, not get amusement out of exaggerating it'" (383). Daniel does not allow winning to remain in the realm of happy chance. By acting deliberately and deciding to participate in games of fortune, Gwendolen puts herself in the position where she may have to profit from another's loss.

This "little sermon" (384) takes on a wider meaning for Gwendolen than Daniel intended, and in their subsequent meetings, the see-saw of gain and loss is further explored. Daniel absolves those who gain at another's expense without intentionality, but in response to Gwendolen's query, "if they injure you and could have helped it?" (465), claims he would prefer his place to theirs. Gwendolen later admits to Daniel that her actions in life have had even more detrimental results than gambling: "'You wanted me not to do that -- not to make my gain out of another's loss in that way -- and I have done a great deal worse'" (500). Her full confession only comes after

Grandcourt's death, when she can speak freely with Daniel (764) and does so in the hope of being forgiven and entering into a permanent relationship with him.

Throughout Daniel's and Gwendolen's conversations, Gwendolen becomes increasingly aware of her responsibility in action. However, her desire for change is caught up in the pleasure she derives from Daniel's company and in her abhorrence of Grandcourt. It is hard to differentiate her remorse from her attraction to Daniel, since the two are always intertwined in the narrative. But while Gwendolen is pushed towards the principle of self-abnegation, her teacher, Daniel, moves in the opposite direction, becoming increasingly desirous of having a more active participation in life. Once he adopts Mordecai's vision, Daniel accepts the tradition of his grandfather and ignores all other claims on him. Because of this commitment, Daniel makes decisions that have a sometimes negative impact on other people, and the person who suffers most obviously from his decision to embrace Mordecai's vision is Gwendolen.

Although Gwendolen initiates many of their conversations, and the narrator scrupulously exonerates Daniel from responsibility in each of his encounters with her, Daniel has not been without an, at least, flirtatious interest in Gwendolen. Initially attracted by her beauty at Leubronn, he is unable to resist her advances despite his uncle's warning not to flirt with her, since Sir Hugo desires to keep Grandcourt happy in order to facilitate the

purchase of Diplow. When Daniel agrees to go to Diplow as an emissary of his uncle, the narrator finds two reasons for his eagerness to see Gwendolen: "there was something beyond his habitual compassionate fervour – something due to the fascination of her womanhood" (370). While the narrator points out that this attraction is harmless since Daniel will never speak it, this assessment is as naïve as Daniel's failure to acknowledge that he is already in the world of gain and loss "sustained by three or five per cent on capital which somebody else has battled for" (225).

Gwendolen, although appealing to Daniel as a confessor, also responds to him sexually. Her reaction to hearing that Daniel is coming to Diplow is physical: "Gwendolen felt as if her heart were making a sudden gambol, and her fingers, which tried to keep a firm hold on her work, got cold" (374). But this physical response is not limited to Gwendolen. Daniel has an equal pleasure in talking with her, and also blushes about the necklace. Daniel's eyes, the narrator tells us, are of a type which get many men in trouble: "they were of a dark yet mild intensity, which seemed to express a special interest in every one on whom he fixed them, and might easily help to bring on him those claims which ardently sympathetic people are often creating in the minds of those who need help" (377). Yet, despite the narrator's defence of Daniel at this point, we also learn that Daniel "did not dislike" Gwendolen's plunge into mutual understanding and that he continues to find her attractive. Daniel is, at least, partially responsible for

the confidence which grows between himself and Gwendolen. In London, Daniel continues to respond to Gwendolen, even though conscious that he is sometimes transgressing propriety. Their flirtation becomes so obvious that not only does Gwendolen's husband become discontented enough to take his wife on a solitary cruise, but also Hans remarks on it. Finally in Genoa, Daniel makes a commitment to Gwendolen which he will not fulfill: "It could never be my impulse to forsake you" (765). But even at this point Daniel has a "painful consciousness that to her ear his words might carry a promise which one day would seem unfulfilled: he was making an indefinite promise to an indefinite hope" (765).

Once Daniel decides to engage in life, he actively enters the world of gain and loss, and by choosing Mirah hurts Gwendolen. As the narrator remarks, "She was the victim of his happiness" (877). Daniel elects to remain in Gwendolen's life for longer than he needs to, ostensibly because "to withdraw himself from any appeal of hers would be to consign her to a dangerous loneliness," but he pursues this course of action even though he knows "all present strengthening of their bond would make [the coming wrench] the harder" (842). If Daniel had chosen to remain a bystander, a man who could not marry (a possibility implied by Gwendolen's rather puzzling question "'But *can* you marry?'" [877]), he would not have felt culpable. Instead, by choosing to dedicate his life to the reunification of the Jews in Israel, Daniel actively takes a position and feels responsibility for the

consequences. But rather than considering all the possible consequences of his actions and remaining a passive observer, Daniel sets out to act. He tells Mordecai, "Failure will not be ignoble, but it would be ignoble for me not to try" (820).

CONTESTING IDEOLOGY

Daniel's decision to "try" not only involves his potential failure, but also impacts on the personal life of others such as Gwendolen, or his adoptive father, who will miss his company. In choosing his course of action, however, Daniel must ignore much more than these voices of personal loss. He also ignores ideological objections, among which his mother's criticisms of Judaism's patriarchal culture are especially striking. Daniel's rejection of her ideas and claims for independence is not, however, simply the result of an abstract consideration of ideological principles, for it is in many ways a response to his mother's own rejection of him. Life and ideology are here inseparable, and it is impossible to sort out their complex intertwining. As Bakhtin comments, the novel is structured not in a world of absolutes, "but in the zone of direct contact with inconclusive present-day reality" (*Epic and Novel* 39). Like Lydia, Alcharisi abandons her young child in order to pursue her own dreams. Neither mother fits into the Victorian image of the good mother, and within the context of a paternalistic society their desires appear

unnatural. Alcharisi, however, founds this abandonment on the principle of women's wasted potential, asserting that she had "a rightful claim to be something more than a mere daughter and mother" (728). Her rejection of Judaism is much more than a selfish impulse, since she has talents to contribute to the world. While there is a similar loss for the child of each woman, Alcharisi balances this loss through her artistic contribution to the world. Nevertheless, his mother's successful career in no way diminished Daniel's loss. Again, there are echoes of the Antigone/Creon debate in the conflict between personal and public good. Eliot does not see the more modern possibility of a dual career.

Alcharisi rejects her father's narrow Judaism because it only understands her as a gateway to a son and not as an independent person. While Daniel claims to sympathize with her, Alcharisi perceptively recognizes that Daniel can never understand her female perspective. Brady comments that "Daniel's repeated interruptions of Alcharisi's account of her life with questions about the father who had oppressed her imply that he has not fully grasped her problematic position with the Jewish patriarchal structure" (187). In claiming his father's and Mordecai's vision, Daniel begins to close his eyes to the troubles of others. He takes on the role of the egoist and consciously chooses a path which will have ramifications for other people. Just as Alcharisi acted with a purpose in rejecting her father,

so Daniel acts with a purpose in dismissing his mother's assimilationist and feminist perspectives.

Once Daniel fully adopts his father's religious heritage, he continues the tradition in which women are intermediaries, and his relationship with Mordecai becomes more central than his attachment to Mirah.⁸² Mordecai's transference of his vision to Daniel ignores Mirah. Brady compares the relationship between Mordecai and Daniel to other pairs in Eliot's novels in which one character seeks to extend his influence over another after death (Savonarola and Romola, Casaubon and Dorothea, and Zarca and Fedalma). But since Daniel is a fellow male, Mordecai's effect is different: "rather than repressing his own desire, like the women under such paternal influences -- [Daniel] guarantees for himself the two rewards of the male *Bildungsroman*: marriage and vocation" (181). Brady notes, however, the important contrast between this relationship and that of Daniel and Mirah, which only results in Mirah's suppression. Moreover, the relationship between Mordecai and Mirah, which becomes a model for Daniel and Mirah, is strongly patriarchal. When Mirah challenges Mordecai's interpretation of the tale about the Jewish maiden who sacrificed herself because of her love

⁸² Although Daniel's adoption of his father's faith has a caveat -- "But I will not say that I shall profess to believe exactly as my fathers have believed" (792) -- Daniel justifies this condition by pointing to his father's tradition: "Our fathers themselves changed the horizon of their belief and learned of other races" (792). His justification for change does not separate him from his father's belief, but is a part of it.

for the Gentile king, Mordecai insists that Mirah's words are not her own, and that her own would be self-sacrificial in the tradition of Jewish women. Mirah does not again voice her disagreement with Mordecai's judgement, but submits to it passively. Such a model of Jewish women is what Alcharisi objected to. Daniel, however, in taking up Mordecai's vision, ignores this criticism. As in *The Spanish Gypsy*, in which Fedalma has gender concerns which Zarca does not share despite his oppression, there are various margins. While Daniel, like Zarca, may act for his people, he ignores female subjugation. Conversely, Alcharisi acts as a woman and as a performer, but she rejects the marginal position of an oppressed people.

This embeddedness of sexism is also seen in Cohen's condescension towards the women of his family and in his explanation of a traditional Jewish prayer: "A man is bound to thank God, as we do every Sabbath, that he was not made a woman; but a woman has to thank God that He has made her according to His will. And we all know what He has made her -- a child-bearing, tender-hearted thing is the woman of our people" (636-37).

Women's oppression, however, is not limited to Judaism, but pervades society as a whole. Hans's sisters are used to taking second place because, as Kate complains, "girls' doings are always priced low" (545). Sir Hugo's estates are entailed away from his daughters. Most strikingly, Gwendolen's marriage to Grandcourt bears disturbing similarities to Lapidoth's plot to pimp his daughter to the count. Gwendolen's family's

change in fortune is due to loss from a respectable type of gambling -- "great speculations" in mines (274), and her marriage is driven by an attempt to recoup these losses.⁸³ Although there may be vestiges of altruism in Gwendolen's uncle's vocal support of this marriage, they are hardly more than traces. Grandcourt belongs to a class to which Gascoigne desperately aspires, and a family connection would help draw him out of the trades background which he assiduously hides. Furthermore, Gwendolen's marriage relieves him of seeing his in-laws live in poverty, an important factor since he too has lost money in gambling stocks and cannot afford them much help. The benefit to Gascoigne in marrying his niece to Grandcourt is not as large as that the desperate Lapidoth would have acquired from marrying Mirah to the count; nevertheless, it is not inconsequential, and it is significant that he is willing to sell his niece for vanity. Catherine Gallagher comments on this English marriage marketplace: "Henleigh Grandcourt seeks Gwendolen as a *wife* and not a mistress, but the novel purposely collapses this distinction, reverses the terms by a series of exchanges, and proves that a wife can be a prostitute, both in her own eyes and in those of her husband" ("George Eliot and *Daniel Deronda*" 51). Daniel's adoption of Mordecai's vision does not place him in

⁸³ In her notebooks Eliot makes reference to a similar large collapse in 1866: "Commercial Panic. May. Overend and Gurney" (Irwin 353).

a more sexist tradition than the society he is leaving, but his mother brings his attention to the issue and it is a margin which Daniel decides to ignore.⁸⁴

The other key ideological objection which Daniel ignores in his adoption of Mordecai's vision is the assimilationist position. This is partly represented by his mother, but it is voiced apart from feminist concerns, and less emotionally since it is not tied up with Daniel's own childhood abandonment, by both Klesmer and members of the Philosopher's Club. It is noteworthy that it is in the face of Jews who reject Mordecai's vision because they want to assimilate that Daniel first feels the power of conviction. The working-class men at the Philosophers' Club are clearly differentiated from Cohen, who is tolerant of, but uninterested in, learning. While Cohen may fall into the Jewish pawnbroker stereotype, the men at the Club exhibit an interest in a world much larger than money. Part of their embrace of this larger world, however, includes a rejection of the strict

⁸⁴ Katherine Bailey Linehan recognizes the complexity of Eliot's political understanding of the intersection of "political and sexual colonialism" (333). She notes that Eliot gives "a double status for women of the Establishment class in that they share a subjugation with the colonials from whose exploitation they profit" (332). But because Linehan simplistically understands Mordecai as Eliot's ideal character, she finds that Eliot approves sexist behaviour within the Jewish community as representing "the possibility of a *benevolent* system of patriarchy, racialism, and nationalism not motivated by a politically entrenched ethos of conquest and therefore not centrally tending to promote social oppression" (335). Male authority, Linehan argues, is only present as loving protectiveness in order to promote racial bonding. This explanation, however, does not fully account for the many incidents of Jewish sexism depicted by Eliot.

religious and separationist practices observed by Cohen. Both the "genial and rational" (593) Gideon and the more emotional Pash speak against Mordecai. Gideon wants to get rid of the "useless rites and literal fulfilment of the prophecies" and contends that once this is done, Judaism "is the simplest of all religions, and makes no barrier, but a union, between us and the rest of the world" (593). Pash puts the argument much more bluntly and cynically. "I don't see why our rubbish is to be held sacred any more than the rubbish of Brahmanism or Bouddhism" (594).

Although Daniel wonders at Mordecai's perseverance in talking with such an unbelieving group, and dismisses their arguments himself, the positions of Gideon and Pash are backed up by the admirable Klesmer. Klesmer and Catherine Arrowpoint fade completely away by the end of the novel, but their story forms an important counterpoint to Daniel's. Their marriage is one between Jew and Christian, and they are drawn together by a mutual love of music. Art in this case is stronger than national or racial divisions. Catherine informs her condescending suitor, Mr. Bult, that "Herr Klesmer has cosmopolitan ideas....He looks forward to a fusion of races" (284). Klesmer and Catherine must battle against the separationist ideas of her English and aspiring parents. Catherine's mother objects, "'Every one will say that you must have made the offer to a man who has been paid to come to the house -- who is nobody knows what -- a gypsy, a Jew, a mere bubble of the earth'" (289). Mrs. Arrowpoint's most serious argument lies in

her exhortation to Catherine to follow "duty" (289): "A woman in your position has serious duties. Where duty and inclination clash, she must follow duty" (289). This argument does not substantially differ from that which Zarca makes to Fedalma in *The Spanish Gypsy*. It is also not dissimilar to the motivations of Mirah and Daniel, although in their case, duty and inclination largely agree.

The moral difference between Zarca's and Mrs. Arrowpoint's ideas lies only in their relative social positions. While Zarca needs all the help he can muster for his tribe for their very survival, Mrs. Arrowpoint is defending her wealth and social standing. Daniel throws in his lot with the Jews because of his inheritance, but unbending allegiance to racial or national groups is not clearly portrayed as good in this novel. When Daniel marries Mirah, and subscribes to Mordecai's view of race, he chooses to ignore the assimilationist voice. Both Klesmer's and Mordecai's positions have merit, but they are in absolute and unresolvable conflict with each other. Daniel's grandfather's apparent compromise -- "separateness with communication" (792) -- does not at all meet Klesmer's position.

Since Daniel's final position is usually understood as coinciding with the author's, critics have tended to ignore Klesmer's contradictory voice and have understood the novel as embracing nationalism and race.⁸⁵ From its

⁸⁵ Such an assertion is usually supported by a reference to
(continued...)

first publication, the novel has been seen as supportive not only of Judaism, but also of Zionism. In this century, critics have explored the more sinister side of nationalism, and the imperialism and racism to which it often leads. William Myers points to the ironic situation that this "earnestly Zionist work urges the view that the growth points of human history are inherited, unconscious racial impulses, and that these lead naturally to what is, in effect, a kind of *Führerprinzip*" ("Politics and Personality" 123).⁸⁶ But it is only a reading of the novel which seeks to impose a monologic structure upon it which can ignore the plethora of other voices. By showing Mrs. Arrowpoint with her imperialist/racist ideology, as well as Mordecai with his

⁸⁵(...continued)

Theophrastus Such and an unwarranted assumption that this work represents the authorial voice absolutely. See for instance Katherine Linehan's argument which she supports with the following footnote: "Though the *Theophrastus Such* essays are rendered in the voice of a male Theophrastian student of character, the two essays in the collection with which this paper will be concerned so clearly represent the opinions and language of the writing persona George Eliot whom we conventionally make synonymous with the woman Marian Evans Lewes that I take the minor liberty of referring the statements in these essays directly to George Eliot" (344n).

⁸⁶ Deirdre David is not so generous about Eliot's purported Zionism: "She [Eliot] explicitly channels the dispersed energies of the Jews into Deronda's project to put an end to the diaspora. This channelling has a disguised gratification for those people for whom the Jews are an inconvenience in a thickening crowd: the Jews will not proliferate and prosper on English soil" (*Fictions of Resolution* 160).

nationalistic/racial vision, Eliot points to the double-sidedness of these issues.⁸⁷

THE ENDING

While Daniel escapes his original static dilemma caused by the anxiety about the attendance of good and bad results upon every action, the novel shows that the dilemma does not cease to exist. Hearing the voices of one margin, Daniel locates that position as his place for deliberate action. It is a site of interpretation, but as the voices in the novel show it is not the only one. Even as he engages and supports the return to Palestine, other voices of the novel question the values of nationalism and patriarchy. The ending of *Daniel Deronda* stands in contrast to those of Eliot's other novels, since there is no neat epilogue. Hardy comments that it "has an open ending, in very marked contrast to the closed conclusions of death and marriage in the earlier books..." (*Novels of George Eliot* 153). We are not

⁸⁷ Linehan, in discussing *Daniel Deronda*, makes a distinction between race consciousness and racism, and nationalism and imperialism (335). Although I disagree with her main thesis (see footnote 84), the distinctions she makes with these terms draws attention to the indeterminate divisions between these concepts. This ambiguity is a part of Eliot's picture in *Daniel Deronda*, and although I term Mordecai's view "nationalistic/racial" and Mrs. Arrowpoint's attitude, "imperialist/racist," the point is that these terms do intersect, and any attempt at separating them is somewhat arbitrary.

told how Daniel and Mirah fare in the East, nor do we find out what happens to Gwendolen. Some amount of closure is afforded by the letter Gwendolen sends on Daniel's wedding day, since she reverses Lydia's act of vengeance. However, she does so by taking on herself the full responsibility for her relationship with Daniel. Through this absolution, which does not force Daniel to face the loss he has caused, Gwendolen appears to submit to Daniel's epic vision. Arguing that Daniel's rejection saves her, Barrett points out that Daniel accomplishes by the end of the novel through gentleness what Grandcourt was unable to do through sadism: "her complacency has vanished, but so too has her strength, her monumentality" (173).⁸⁸ Yet even the possibility of rebellion exists within Gwendolen's submission. Although devastated, Gwendolen tells her mother that she will survive. Here her fate diverges from that of a character such as Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*, who does not survive the pressures of patriarchy. In contrast to Dorothea, whose own personality and ability are

⁸⁸ Eileen Sypher similarly argues that Deronda and Grandcourt have parallel roles:

Deronda represents the more benevolent face of ideology (women belong under a man, but men must not openly rule them – women should know how to act appropriately on their own in their assigned place, and they can be somewhat exceptional – though in a narrow, domestic sphere, such as Mirah's drawing rooms). Grandcourt, on the other hand, Deronda's foil and his double, the decoy to siphon off any anxieties the reader feels about Deronda, shows his malevolent face. (511)

subsumed by Will, Gwendolen will survive on her own, not neatly summed up as "a wife and mother" (*Middlemarch* 894). Beer comments that at the end of the novel, in Gwendolen, "we are left with the dangerous power of the uncharted future" (*George Eliot* 223).

Ezra's death concludes the novel, and its sombre recounting again seems to sound like the *shophar*, giving Daniel his mission and silencing the dialogue. The concluding epigraph is from one of the final choruses in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*:

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast; no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise, or blame; nothing but well and fair,
And what may quiet us in a death so noble. (883)

This epigraph is appropriate not only because it bespeaks Mordecai's peace in his death, but also because Samson was a great hero who died fighting the Philistines, the worldly enemies of Judaism. Samson, like Mordecai's chosen, Daniel, is beguiled by a Philistine serpent woman. Dalila is described as a "poisonous bosom snake" (*Samson Agonistes* 763) and a serpent (*Samson Agonistes* 997), and she possesses "adder's wisdom" (*Samson Agonistes* 936). Similar imagery attends Gwendolen in the opening of the novel: "she has got herself up as a sort of serpent now, all green and silver, and winds her neck about a little more than usual" (40). In his death Samson destroys the Philistines by killing them, pulling their temple down on top of them. Mordecai also crushes Gwendolen and the

other Philistines by keeping Daniel away from her. His vision apparently dominates the last words of the book.

But although the final quotation from *Samson Agonistes* confirms Mordecai's vision, at another level the allusion dialogizes the end of the novel. It is noteworthy that *Samson Agonistes*, like *Daniel Deronda* and *The Spanish Gypsy*, explores the conflict between personal attachments and national duties. Dalila defends herself to Samson by maintaining she was persuaded to betray him against her inclination by the concept of duty:

...at length that grounded maxim
 So rife and celebrated in the mouths
 Or wisest men; that to the public good
 Private respects must yield; with grave authority
 Took full possession of me and prevailed;
 Virtue, as I thought, truth, duty so enjoining. (*Samson Agonistes* 865-70)

While the original Biblical story in Judges simply attributes Delilah's betrayal to money, Milton's tragedy includes Dalila's insistence that her action was due to national duty. Not only are there two issues competing for Dalila's allegiance, her marriage bond and national duty, but also her action has different meanings depending upon one's perspective. Dalila further argues that though her name may be spurned in Dan and Judah, amongst her own people she "shall be named among the famousest/ Of women, sung at solemn festivals" (*Samson Agonistes* 982-83), who chose to save her country above "the faith of wedlock-bands" (*Samson Agonistes* 986). While the choice of the final epigraph suggests the triumph of Mordecai's position,

it also recalls the complexity and double-sidedness of all devotion to a national cause.

Edward Said, taking Mordecai's vision as Eliot's own voice, argues that the inhabitants of the East, particularly Palestinians, "are irrelevant both to the Zionists in *Daniel Deronda* and to the English characters" (20). Significantly, Milton's drama, to which Eliot alludes, does bring up an alternative Eastern perspective to the Jewish one. Said's observation, however, accurately represents the position which Zionism holds in the novel for Mordecai and Daniel. Functioning as an epic vision, it ignores the contradictions of life. What may be good for Jews immigrating to Israel clearly possesses other ramifications for those dispossessed by the returning diaspora. Because of her Eurocentric perspective and the European setting of the novel, which does not follow Daniel Eastward, Eliot does not explore the contradictory experience of the Palestinians. We can speculate that had the novel gone with Daniel to Palestine, the inclusion of the multiple perspectives of the contemporary East would have contributed to her depiction of the conflict between different nationalisms and their contradictory goals and truths.

CONCLUSION

Daniel Deronda does not resolve the problem of how to act in a world in which action appears very much like gambling. Refusing to act, however, means to endorse the *status quo* and never to attempt helping those voices speaking their oppression. In effect, it entails supporting those who, like Grandcourt, happily ruin others, through both business and pleasure. Carnival and gambling suggest the possibility of overturning the norm, but they also provide that extra-legal space in which some people lose, and a few lose everything. Daniel eventually distinguishes his action from gambling in his own eyes by attaching it to an epic vision, but in the wider frame of the novel such a vision is as arbitrary as gambling. His action can only be separated from gambling by its outward direction, for Daniel's motivation for action becomes something larger than himself, and in this way he becomes like Romola, who finds purpose in responding to the cry of the young Benedetto. But unlike Romola on her fantasy-like journey along the coast, Daniel is never able to enter the world of pure epic, and his action remains tainted by life. Although he takes an epic or monologic perspective, the world of the novel is present to question his actions and beliefs.

CONCLUSION

The key difference between *Daniel Deronda* and the novels that precede it lies in Daniel's own awareness of multiplicity. Unlike the ideologues so admired by Bakhtin in Dostoevsky's novels, Daniel is initially hindered from becoming an ideologue with a singular outlook because of his relativism. In *Daniel Deronda*, the reader does not simply see and hear different viewpoints; rather Daniel, like the author, is himself intensely conscious of this dialogism. Whereas *Felix Holt* and *The Spanish Gypsy* seem to devolve from the perspective of an ideologue to a broader picture that questions any position as ideal, in *Daniel Deronda* the novel moves from indeterminacy to Daniel's assumption of an epic position, which is, however, all the while itself subject to criticism.

Eliot's final five novels all approach the possibility of action in a dialogic world. If carnival becomes a metaphor for life and its celebration of multiple perspectives becomes a part of the world, how then can people feel confident in the course they choose? For Romola, her course is never

certain except when she escapes the dialogism of Florence's carnival and embarks on her journey which brings her into the world of epic and legend. In Florence, no answer is given to the problem of where the sacredness of obedience ends and the sacredness of rebellion begins. The different voices in Florence continue to interact with each other as the city chooses its future. The epic scene in *Romola* is unique because Eliot allows it to stand alone, buried in the midst of the novel but separate from it. In her subsequent novels, characters take epic positions, but these positions are never allowed to be idealized or sanctified. Instead, the dialogism of the novel acts on epic, and other characters and events question its truth.

Felix and Silva, in *Felix Holt* and *The Spanish Gypsy*, both adhere to an ideological position, but other voices and various circumstances lead the reader to see that their "truth" is not the only one. Where Felix urges obedience, Silva joins rebellion, but neither course is without its casualties. And, of course, it is difficult to assess the theoretical merits of either position since the implementation of ideology is necessarily bound up in personality. Silva's love or sentimentality, first for his fiancée, and later for his people, and Felix's sense of self-importance, confuse any authoritative evaluation of their positions. The problems inherent in incarnate ideology are, however, nowhere as apparent as in *Middlemarch*, in which none of the characters are able to even approximate their goal. Parodic doubling does not allow any single voice to be left with authority. But the distraction by life does not allow

truth to be tested. Incarnate ideology never reaches the purity of high theoretical planes.

Both Zarca in *The Spanish Gypsy* and Mordecai in *Daniel Deronda* provide models of ideologues who carry through their plans without wavering. Each recognizes the sectarian nature of his vision, but they pursue it as if it were the only course. Zarca, in particular, comments on the suffering others must endure because he seeks to free his people. Daniel provides a model of someone torn between multiple paths who elects, and grows into, an ideology. In *Daniel*, the necessity of pursuing a course, even if not the right one, becomes of paramount importance. The Zionism pursued by Daniel does not make everyone happy, nor is Daniel without his failings.

Eliot's dialogic approach to life and her recognition of so many differing perspectives has the potential to be nihilistic and to encourage a passivity in the face of multiple worlds. This problem is clearly recognized by Eliot, and this is why it is a dilemma which Daniel faces. Such a paralysis can be devastating to the possibility of social change. The dialogism in Eliot's novels, however, insistently presents the voice of an under-class. The voices of Jews, Gypsies, women, labourers and tenant farmers all make important statements in her books and stop the voice of the male aristocracy from dominating the realm of truth. While the existence of these voices does not in itself effect change, their unsettling power is important.

Unlike what would be the case in a dogmatic tract, none of the representatives of the under-class are made into perfect heroes. Each potential hero not only has personal failings, which only history and an idealized view could erase, but frequently their truth founders on various margins. For instance, Zarca, Mordecai, and Savonarola, although contesting the ruling class, all fail in their support of women's independence. Their vision, while pursuing a greater freedom for some people, has patriarchal premises. Similarly, none of the women become true feminist heroes. Dorothea's disappointing end is widely acknowledged. While Romola is upset about women's status, she continues to contribute to their abjection by excluding Tito's daughter from education. The Alcharisi has the potential to become a strong role model, but she draws back from her career at the moment that she fears a rival will outshine her. Her pride and need to be best both cause her to give up that for which she fought so hard. Furthermore, her position is complicated by Eliot's emphasis on Daniel's lack of a mother. The labourers and tenant farmers of Middlemarch have just cause for their complaints, but Eliot does not portray them as sentimentalized heroes. Rather they contribute to their own poverty through drunkenness.⁸⁹ Felix escapes drunkenness, but his sense of self-importance

⁸⁹ See "The Natural History of German Life" and Eliot's early insistence on the importance of painting true pictures of peasant life (Pinney 266-99).

and his servitude to the rich undermine his position. None of Eliot's characters has a monopoly on truth; instead the narrative questions each of their perspectives.

The final effect of Eliot's novels is unsatisfactory for readers looking for absolutes. Despite the apparently well-rounded and tight epilogues of the novels prior to *Daniel Deronda*, the presence of characters who sometimes seem to represent Eliot's ideals, and the frequently obtrusive, and sometimes pontificating, voice of the narrator, Eliot's novels do not provide a single answer. Bakhtin's theory of a dialogic world, in which no discourse is absolute, provides a useful starting point for understanding Eliot's novels. But, as we have seen, Eliot moves beyond a recognition of multiple words to asking how action is affected. As long as the hero has an internally persuasive discourse, then this discourse can be tested both through discussion with others and through actions. If, however, the hero is conscious of multiplicity, action can be paralysed. In the end, Eliot's novels do not provide a definitive answer to the dilemma of relativism. For Eliot, relativism is not an abstract question, but it is an incarnate fact. She sees competing rights and duties in her characters and also observes that no theoretical position is ever embodied absolutely.

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