CHAPTER IV

THE CONCEPT OF DESTINY IN GEORGE ELIOT'S
NOVELS OF THE MIDDLE PHASE:
ROMOLA * FELIX HOLT

The interregnum between the publication of Silas Marner in April 1862, and the appearance of Romola in July 1863, marks a significant transformation in the mood of the writer. The stress of feelings, described by her in 1876, as "melancholy thoughts about the destinies of (her) fellow creatures",¹ evident in her growing concern with this progeny of mixed impulses and error, force upon her the necessity of a more subtle and undisguised explication of the social and the moral purpose of her writings:²

....the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings, is that those who read them should be better able to imagine and to feel the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures. (GEL III, 111)

The transition is vividly brought home in the critical demarcation which divides her early novels 'as inspired by imagination working through memory' and the later ones as 'contrived laboriously by intellect'.³ Nevertheless, Romola

¹. GEL VI, 310.
the harbinger of the changed attitude, was greatly admired as a product of deep investigation and creative reconstruction of facts which impress the reader with the intellectual and ethical perspective of the "gifted writer".

Covering a span of six years, George Eliot's historical novel never stumbles but flows from one absorbing event to another. She is concerned not only with individual problems, but also with the social aspects of an age-old life pattern which she projects with subtlety and simplicity. There is a dual movement of the historical and the human, of the great current and of the little current, which merge together to produce the background for the personae whose struggles and hopes and fears have a perennial interest.

The titular aspect of her works, though superficially studied, reveals the distance she tried to maintain from any suggestion of pessimism or horrifying intimidation as underlying her novels. It is true that she lays an enormous weight on the far-reaching and irrevocable consequences of an action but this is only a means to another end:

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4. "There are noble things to be found in Remola, which will make the reader's heart burn within him. It will be scarcely possible to rise from the perusal without being penetrated by 'the joy of elevated thoughts', without feeling a desire to cease from a life of self-pleasing, and to embody in action that sense of obligation, of obedience to duty, which is, indeed, the crowning distinction that has been bestowed on man, the high gift in which all others culminate". D. Carroll (ed.) The Critical Heritage, p.197.

5. "It is a novel which could only have been the work of a gifted writer; it is the product of knowledge and wisdom and strenuous meditation". Joan Bennett, George Eliot: Her Mind and Art (London, 1974) p.140.
thematic concern of her writings is to inculcate the
notions of love, sympathetic understanding, and duty,
which are essential for the moral progress of mankind
towards its appointed Destiny of ultimate happiness.
Her notions of the imperative ethical requirements find
consummation in the final picture of the character which
embodies her purpose and whose verisimilitudes deserve a
closer scrutiny than the affairs of other characters who,
despite their engrossing appeal, remain philosophically
subservient to the title figure.

The picture of a healthy society and the intrinsic
values envisioned by George Eliot, are not merely an outcome
of her longing for an idealistic state, but are firmly
grounded in her altruistic philosophy of humanism. 6 Sundering
herself from the school believing in the dictum Live and
Let Live she had early identified herself with the Positivist
motto "Ordre et progress .... Vivre pour autrui" which can
best be summarised in the expression "Live for Others ".

6. For a more direct exposition of the view-point, see
Jowett's note on George Eliot: "She gives the
impression of great philosophical power. She wanted
to have an ethical system founded upon altruism; and
argued that there was no such thing as doing any
action because it was right or reasonable, but only
because it accorded with one's better feelings towards
others .... Her idea of existence seemed to be 'doing
good to others' .... Life was so complex, your own
path was so uncertain in places, that you could not
condemn others". Quoted in Gordon B. Haight, George Eliot:
A Biography. pp. 365-66
Her melioristic view of man's Destiny draws its nourishment primarily from the conception of an organism knit together by an intuitive desire to live for others. But, a realist to the core, she was not blind to the fact that human aspirations are often constrained by a variety of determinants which, despite the individual's good intentions, goad him on to actions that are predominantly selfish. The inability of the individual to rise above his self, puts him on the track of inconsolable dejection where he is wholly exposed to the "inexorable law of human souls" (218). Such philosophical precepts of George Eliot's fiction find a more categorial enunciation in Romola than in any of its predecessors. Allowing her "imagination to strive after as full a vision of the medium in which the character moves as of the character itself", George Eliot was fully satisfied with her presentation of the "great great facts" which "struggled to find a voice through me" (GEL IV, 97). The futility of consequential pressures and the fatality of egoistic-gratifications characterise the experiences of its dramatis personae with an hitherto unparalleled directness:

Our deeds are like children that are born to us; they live and act apart from our own will. Nay, children may be strangled but deeds never: they have an indestructible life both in and out of our consciousness. (Rom., 159-160)

Her deep-rooted trust in the efficacy of the act of confession as a sure means for dispelling the clouds of mental anguish and achieving moral serenity, illustrated in all her previous works, finds a straightforward utterance...
in the early pages of Romola:

Under every guilty secret, there is hidden a brood of guilty wishes, whose unwholesome infecting life is cherished by the darkness. The contaminating effect of deeds often lies less in the commission than in the consequent adjustment of our desires... the enlistment of self-interest on the side of falsity; as, on the other hand, the purifying influence of public confession springs from the fact, that by it the hope in lies is for ever swept away, and the soul recovers the noble attitude of simplicity. (Rom., 99)

It was primarily for the "sense of moral enlargement which the first fiction to conceive of the true nature of evil", its "artistic solution of a moral problem" and its "ethical teaching", that Romola fascinated the perspicacity of the Victorian mind. "Tito Melema", in Howell's words, "was not only a lesson, he was a revelation ... His life, in which so much that was good was mixed with so much that was bad, lighted up the whole domain of egotism with its glare." 8

Tito is a true representative of the class which lives only for itself. He views life from a particular angle which is consistently focussed on his own self. "What, looked at closely, was the end of all life", he argued, "but to extract the utmost sum of pleasure?" (113). His "irresistibly propitiating ... bright young smile", (25) his versatile scholarship and his keen intelligence, leave one in no doubt as to the ease with which he will be able to surmount all

8. Ibid.
hurdles and impediments that might choose to obstruct his progress⁹. The superficial charm of his face, "warm and bright as the summer morning" (40) is generally taken as a sign of a loveable nature, which deceives not only Nello, the barber, or the innocent Tessa who feels safe with Tito because he was "so beautiful - like the people going into Paradise: they are all good" (104); but also the fair, learned Romola who interprets his beauty as "part of the finished language by which goodness speaks" (189). George Eliot's repeated stresses on Tito's "unconquerable aversion to anything unpleasant" (108), and the "softness of his nature (which) required that all sorrow should be hidden away from him" (110), prepare the reader for the fall of her protagonist who cannot have the heart to embrace the purgatory salvation inherent in "the purifying influence of public confession" (99). Moreover, Piero di Cosimo's perception of the possible depths of his visage¹⁰ clearly indicates that Tito's destiny rests on his opting for the

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⁹. "I doubt not that this young man's presence is in accord with the tones of his voice, so that the door being once opened, he will be his own best advocate". (Rom., 69)

¹⁰. "A perfect traitor should have a face which vice can write no marks on — lips that will lie with a dimpled smile — eyes of such agate-like brightness and depth that no infamy can dull them — cheeks that will rise from a murder and not look haggard. I say not this young man is a traitor: I mean, he has a face that would make him the more perfect traitor if he had the heart of one, which is saying neither more nor less than that he has a beautiful face, informed with rich young blood, that will be nourished enough by good, and keep its colour without much help of virtue". (Rom., 40-41)
virtuous or the sinister, which hang in perfect balance as he enters the gates of Florence.

The memorable soliloquy which takes place after the sale of Baldassare's gems reveals not only the tightening claws of temptation but also serves the greater purpose of revealing the intricacy of his character. He is never willing to actively bring pain to others as there is no malice in his nature. But since his attention is basically centered on the possible profit and loss to his own person he inadvertently fails to take into account the pains that are nevertheless inflicted upon others. The dialogue between his self and the not-self exhibits the same faculties: his concern for others requiring him to "go in search of his benefactor" (97) dwindles before his concern for himself in the possibility of being again "a destitute wanderer, with no more gems to sell" (97).

George Eliot takes every precaution against the suggestion of any objective pressure in the choice of "his colour in the game" (99). Tito is young, learned and intelligent and certainly not a stranger to the realm of the softer sentiments. Had he exerted his potential towards the enlightenment of the crude-cultured Florentines, his talents could have produced a harmonious understanding in society. This obviously called for a strength of purpose wherein the individual could transcend his egoistic impulses, but Tito was, evidently, too engrossed in the fast growing circumference of the circle of which he himself was the permanent centre.
The ubiquity of Tito's "appetite for ordinary human joys" (116), acquires a phenomenal universality of the Dr. Faustus-like appeal because of its conspicuous identification with the weakness of the human flesh:

He had sold himself to evil, but at present life seemed so nearly the same to him that he was not conscious of the bond. (Rom., 116)

The side of evil once adopted, the moral degeneration is quick to take possession of his thoughts. His own susceptibility to the archaic and bestial instincts had condemned him to the perpetual fear of revelation and the claim of the past. As the much longed for death of Fra Luca spares Tito the trouble of fabricating "an ingenious lie" (113), he hurriedly undertakes to part with Baldassarre's ring in order to avoid future complexities. But the scythe-wielding nemesis retorts by making it the very cause of Baldassarre's arrival at Florence and putting a seal on the "final departure of moral youthfulness" (211). Even after the disownment of the foster father whom he had called a man to his face in the presence of a distinguished gathering, George Eliot points out to the "one resource (still) open to Tito. He might have turned back, sought Baldassarre again, confessed everything to him --- to Romola --- to all the world. But he never thought of that. The repentance which cuts off all moorings to evil, demands something more than selfish fear. He had no sense that there was strength and safety in truth; the only strength he trusted to lay in his ingenuity and his dissimulation. Now that the first shock,
which had called up the traitorous signs of fear, was well past, he hoped to be prepared for all emergencies by cool deceit -- and defensive armour" (218).

The apparently selfless interview with the foster father and his wish "to be a son to you" and "to make the rest of your life happy" (302), can do little to condone the guilt of self-capitulation as it is clearly just one of his attempts "to slip away from everything that was unpleasant" (566). The distracting complexity of the situation is quickly resolved by the omniscient author who explains that "it was not repentance ... confessing its hated sin in the eyes of men, that Tito was preparing for: it was a repentance that would make all things pleasant again, and keep all past unpleasant things secret" (299).

The basic scourge of a man's life, according to George Eliot, is the thirst for self-importance and it is this insatiable yearning which, by converting the nobler impulses into the narrower moulds of selfishness, leads to the ruination of the particular individual along with the many who are related to him. The universe being an organic whole where the smallest unit becomes a vital link in the larger framework, the ill-effects of one selfish act are seen in its far-reaching consequences. Tito not only stakes his own peace for the achievement of distinction in the social hierarchy, the adverse effects of his stratagem are felt by every person that is connected with him. Bardo dies in anguish, Bernardo Del Nero is hanged, Savonarola is
betrayed and Baldassarre is reduced to the lowest level of human consciousness, while Tito continues to soar high on the wings of his strategy. However, the "dreadful vitality of deeds" (160) begins to press upon him and the machinery of treason and conspiracy thus mobilised is quick to overtake him; he is soon caught in a whirlpool of currents that prove too strong for his scheming mind. The ironic vision of George Eliot is manifest in Tito's momentary escape from the clutches of the angry mob which thrusts him helplessly at the mercy of his one-time benefactor who, by Tito's own acts, had become oblivious to every human consideration — and Tito, who had been virtually the death of Baldassarre's existence, dies under the throttling pressure of the hands which had once picked him up from the streets and reared him to his glory.

The soft determinist that she was, George Eliot could never conceive of the human mind as being wholly free to pick and choose for itself as she fully visualized the coercion of the numerous forces which were irresistible to a weak volition. The decisions of Tito, who impresses one as an affable, opportunist, racketeer, are cogently depicted as primarily motivated by the economic and the social deterministic factors. Significantly, "the crisis of the first serious struggle his facile good-humoured nature had known" (95) arises only after he has become "master of full five hundred gold florins" (95). Further, "the joy that was due to him and was close to his lips"(114)
--- the promise of an affluent and distinguished life and the sanguine prospect of having Romola for a wife --- are equally responsible for the victory of the self over the not-self and his inability to subordinate his personal desires to the larger obligations.

George Eliot's consciousness of man's moral debasement finds an elaborate and concentrated portrayal in *Romola* as the evil tendencies of the human nature, and its inborn propensity to luxury and deception form the fundamental concern of the writer. The hitherto presented pictures of Hayslope, St. Oggs and Raveloe, in spite of the flagrancy of a romantic Arthur Donnithorne or a hesitant Godfrey Cass, impressed one with an over-all pervasion of pristine simplicity and goodness. *Romola* is different from others not only in the character of Tito whose story, in the words of Prof. George Levine, "is that of Arthur Donnithorne, worked out in more detail and carried to higher extreme of evil", but the entire world of 1492 as seen by George Eliot is a "world in which lust and obscenity, lying and treachery, oppression and murder were pleasant, useful, and when properly managed, not dangerous. And as a sort of fringe or adornment to the substantial delights of tyranny, avarice, and lasciviousness there was the patronage of polite learning and the fine arts, so that flattery could always be had in the choicest Latin to be commended at that time, and sublime

artists were at hand to paint the holy and the un-clean with impartial skill" (204). The blackness of the milieu, however, serves all the more to attract the meliorist whose benignant eye easily penetrates through the heinous darkness to detect the small handful whose puissant will has the strength to resist the golden snares and remain true to the ideals of sincere dutifulness.

Writing to Frederick Harrison on August 15, 1866, George Eliot gives a direct exposition to the artistic technique by which she so successfully imparts her desired "aesthetic teaching" without allowing it to lapse "anywhere from the picture to the diagram". "It is my way", she writes, "to urge the human sanctities through tragedy --- through pity and terror as well as admiration and delight". Significantly, the comment follows immediately after her reference to the "unspeakable pains in preparing to write Romola" and the necessity of "adopting the clothing of the past". We can thus safely assume that whereas the meteoric rise and fall of Tito's career seeks to "urge the human sanctities through pity and terror", the character of Romola aspires to the same end through "admiration and delight".

In his article, "Romola : A Victorian Quest for Values", Virgil A. Peterson points out that "During the course of the novel, the heroine experiences a sequence of philosophical positions. They can be roughly demarcated as follows: humanism while living with her father, hedonism

12. GEL IV, 300
while living with Tito, theology while living under the influence of Savonarola, and finally compassion unsupported by authority or ideology. Romola, as is evident from her very first appearance is a person quite distinct from the erratic and unsatisfied Maggie Tulliver. Her patient efforts in helping her blind father, place her far above the general current, where one can fully weigh the justness of Sara Henne!l's remark that in this character George Eliot had "created a goddess and not a woman. However, the genius of the novelist meets its own challenge when she undertakes the education of a person whose nobility commands our respect from the very outset.

The salubrious effects of family ties, conspicuously absent in Tito's nurture, are revealed in the noble loyalty which marshals Romola through the thick and thin of life. It is the impact of the environmental forces that endow her with a love for knowledge, sincere devotion and earnest resolution. The influence, nevertheless, is not free from a darker side and George Eliot, with genuine artistry, makes us see that the "seclusion from the interests of actual life" (240) which she had been subjected to due to her father's blindness and ideology, may well have given her

14. OEI IV, 104.
15. "I have been careful to keep thee aloof from the debasing influence of thy own sex, with their sparrow-like frivolity and their enslaving superstition, except, indeed, from that of our cousin Brigid who may well serve as a scarecrow and a warning". (Rom., 53)
"a ready apprehension, and even a wide glancing intelligence" (53) so far as the knowledge of classics was concerned, but of the outer world, the macrocosm, she was as ignorant and inexperienced as the blind scholar himself. It was therefore necessary that she must move beyond the circumscribed existence into the larger whole where these faculties may acquire the full substance of a richly cultivated personality.

Juxtaposed with the perception of Bernardo del Nero, Romola's infatuation with Tito comes decidedly as a proof of her lack of practical experience. Her decision to marry him also speaks of her inability to fathom the complexities of the human nature: she interprets his beauty as "part of the finished language by which goodness speaks" (189). Every decision, in George Eliot's view, is conditioned and governed by a number of external factors. Sequestered from the outside world, "there was only one masculine face, at once youthful and beautiful, the image of which remained deeply impressed on her mind: it was that of her brother, who long years ago had taken her on his knee, kissed her and never come back" (57). The nostalgic remembrance of the only brother thus becomes a powerful determinant by adding to the impact of Tito's 'bright face' and consequently restricts her impartial sense of judgment.

16. "It seemed like a wreath of spring, dropped suddenly in Romola's young but wintry life, which had inherited nothing but memories -- memories of a dead mother, of a lost brother, of a blind father's happier time -- memories of far-off light, love, and beauty, that lay embedded in dark mines of books..." (Rom., 57)
The most explicit account that George Eliot offers for that innate moral feeling which underlies her ethics occurs in her review-article — 'The Natural History of German Life'. She discusses the benefits which the artist confers when he awakens moral feeling in his audience as he is capable of surprising "even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment". The involvement of the self in any decision has therefore been held by George Eliot as the basis of calamity because it gives birth to a phantasmal vision which distorts the real image to fit in with one's wishful thinking. One incorrect decision leads to another, the repercussions of which can be felt far and wide. Having accomplished the desired union with Romola, Tito begins to concentrate on establishing himself in the socio-political affairs of the state. Consequently, Romola has to be untruthful to her father and her god-father, in order to defend the husband whose reality she was gradually beginning to see. Moreover, she is subjected to the pain of seeing her father forsaken for a second time, his growing restlessness for Tito and his unexpected death. The sale of the library which she held dearest to her heart as a vital link in the memory.

17. T. Pinney (ed.) The Essays of George Eliot, p. 270
of her dead father completes her dis-illusionment as to the true worth of her husband, causing the inherited pride and impetuosity to break out rashly in her firm resolve to leave Florence and all association with "that thing called pleasure which made men base— that dexterous contrivance for selfish ease, that shrinking from endurance and strain, when others were bowing beneath burdens too heavy for them, which now made one image with her husband" (312). Caught once in the tidal wave of emotional tumult, her myopic, self-centred vision of life comes to the surface:

She was going to solve the problem in a way that seemed to her very simple. Her mind had never yet bowed to any obligation apart from personal love and reverence; she had no keen sense of any other human relations, and all she had to obey now was the instinct to sever herself from the man she loved no longer. (Rom., 314)

This consciousness of an existence beyond 'personal love and reverence' and the sense of 'other human relations' is instilled into her by the spiritual exhortations of Savonarola. His irrefutable analysis of her egoistic selfishness and her wilful violation of the sacredness of the marital ties and other duties which suggested an "affinity between her own conduct and Tito's" (350) was enough to

18. "There was the same refinement of brow and nostril in both, counter-balanced by a full though firm mouth and powerful chin, which gave an expression of proud tenacity and latent impetuosity". (Rom., 46)

19. "There is hunger and misery in our streets, yet you say,..... 'I have my own sorrows; I will go away, if peradventure I can ease them'. The servants of God are struggling after a law of justice, peace, and charity, that the hundred thousand citizens among whom you were born may be governed rightfully; but you think no more of this than if you were a bird, that may spread its wings and fly whither it will in search of food to its liking". (Rom., 350-.51)
shake her young mind which returned home schooled in "a higher law than any she had yet obeyed" (353).

George Eliot's belief that man's Destiny lies in his own hands, in the few moments of decision which are determined by his own temperamental wickedness or virtuousness, is conveyed vividly in Romola's abandonment of the resolve which she had even begun to act upon. It was the austere upbringing of her father whose "laborious simple life, pure from vulgar corrupting ambitions" (239), had inculcated a love for everything that was good and exemplary. It is this high breeding of the soul that responds without inhibition to crush the initial waywardness. As evil begets evil so nobility begets nobility, and Romola, feeling "surrounded and possessed by the glow of .... passionate faith" (355), sinks down on her knees in a "low prayerful cry ...... father, I will be guided. Teach me ! I will go back"(355).

Freed from the hold of the blind father and the renegade husband, Romola now tries to model her life on the precepts of Fra Girolamo, the spiritual father, who had infused a new sense of duty and devotion into her declining spirits. Disappointed by this source of energy as well, Romola, for the first time in her life, is left to drift without guidance in the tumultuous ocean of life.

The "'Drifting Away' and the Village with the Plague", George Eliot wrote to Sara Henell, "belonged to my earliest vision of the story and were by deliberate forecast adopted as romantic and symbolical elements". 20

20. GRL IV, 104.
It is here that Romola undergoes the baptism into a new sensibility. The spontaneous unpremeditated immersion into the spectacle of unforeseen affliction equips her with an altogether different vision of life:

It was mere baseness in me to desire death. If everything else is doubtful, this suffering that I can help is certain; if the glory of the cross is an illusion, the sorrow is only the truer. While the strength is in my arm I will stretch it out to the fainting; while the light visits my eyes they shall seek the forsaken. (Rom., 545)

She had now attained that height of personality where she could distinctly judge her own part in the miseries of her life and the futility of her self-established moral standards. The halo of self-righteousness and the exaggerated view of self removed, Romola, like Adam Bede, could now feel the "compunction which is inseparable from a sympathetic nature keenly alive to the possible experience of others" (546). Her mind which had always revolted against inconsistencies projected the past in a new light which condemned her not only for ignoring the gratitude she owed to Savonarola, but also for leaving her husband to his fate instead of trying to be a comfort in his moments of misery.

Considered as a historical novel, the position of Romola in the hierarchy of English fiction is certainly a matter of dispute, but its greatness in depicting the passions and superstitions, religious practices and customs, and in doing full justice to the purpose of the novelist, can never be ignored. If Tito had wronged Baldassarre, so had he broken the trust of Romola, but while Baldassarre, by his own choice,
ends up as an embodiment of delirious vindictiveness, Romola, by her innate virtue, acquires the broad vision which can fully comprehend the wayward fellow-being with love and compassion. Our last view of Romola's 'placid' face looking after Tessa and her children, is most meaningful for its tranquil contentment and the malice-free voice which rings out with the author's philosophy of life:

It is only a poor sort of happiness that could ever come by caring very much about our own narrow pleasure. We can only have the highest happiness, such as goes along with being a great man, by having wide thoughts, and much feeling for the rest of the world as well as ourselves; and this sort of happiness often brings so much pain with it, that we can only tell it from pain by its being what we would choose before everything else, because our souls see it is good. There are so many things wrong and difficult in the world, that no man can be great — he can hardly keep himself from wickedness — unless he gives up thinking much about pleasure or rewards, and gets strength to endure what is hard and painful. (Rom., 565-56)

It is this enlarged moral sensibility of the Romola of the Epilogue that George Eliot draws up for the reader's emulation. Acts of kindness deserve laudation but when they become spontaneous and reflex, in other words, a part of nature, it is then that the sublime lesson of humanity is fully realized and the most perfect happiness achieved.

Having thoroughly explored the part played by self-indulging shortsightedness in the tragic drama of life — Savonarola proving no exception to the pressures of personal ambition and social forces — George Eliot's mission of stimulating the human mind to the exigency of pledging one's
self to the recognition of duty finds an eloquent enthusiast in the person of Felix Holt, the central figure of her fifth novel, published in 1866. Committed to the strict ideals of duty and human responsibility, and desiring "to be a demagogue of a new sort; an honest one, if possible, who will tell the people they are blind and foolish, and neither flatter them nor fatten on them" (270), Felix means to "stick to the class I belong to" (66), in order to secure happiness, individual and aggregate. He is characteristically clear-headed as to the way his duty lies. Self-confident and strong-willed, he is ready to withstand public censure rather than go against his own norms.

Felix Holt, who is "heir to nothing better than quack medicine" (52), illustrates George Eliot's conviction in the gradual onset of the broader sensibility which would, by the individual's own choice and free-will, supplant selfish calculation by an intuitive concern for the social organism. The necessity of educating the microcosm in order to improve the macrocosm which, in turn, would automatically produce a better crop of individuals, had as much relevance to the year 1866 as it had to the times of the Reform Bill of 1832. George Eliot, who saw man, on the one hand, as an important

21. "This world is not a very fine place for a good many of the people in it. But I've made up my mind it shan't be the worse for me, if I can help it. They may tell me I can't alter the world ... that there must be a certain number of sneaks and robbers in it, and if I don't lie and filch somebody else will. Well, then, somebody else shall, for I won't". (FH, 64)
agent in the evolution of society and on the other as conditioned by the social pressures of the age, depicts Felix as a Radical in his desire to introduce drastic changes in the lives of the working people. What he wants is not merely to procure for them a representation in the Parliament, in fact, the implementation of universal suffrage should wait till the class fulfilled the prerequisite to a power to discriminate between the 'right' and the 'wrong' -- a power impossible without the acquisition of honest, sober thought.

Striving for the attainment of a general upliftment, he felt the least confidence in political groups as they were motivated to concentrate on one issue of the vast complexity which makes up the totality of the system, and agitate for their own selfish ends. The result, invariably, was that the larger social good was lost in the battle for authority. 22 His mission of amelioration did not rest on the slogan to secure for the working class the prerogative to vote: he wanted "to go to some roots a good deal lower down than the franchise" (272). Consequently his visits to Sproxton, to Sugar Loaf in particular, were undertaken with a specific purpose aiming "to win the ear of the best fellows about him so as to induce them to meet him on a Saturday evening."

22. "While public opinion is what it is -- while men have no better beliefs about public duty, while corruption is not felt to be a damning disgrace -- while men are not ashamed in Parliament and out of it to make public questions which concern the welfare of millions a mere screen for their own petty private ends -- I say, no fresh scheme of voting will much mend our conditions". (FH., 302)
so that "they might be taught to spend their wages better" (136), preferably, in making arrangements for their children's education.

The uncompromising austerity of the self-imposed allegiance to the "order" he belongs to, equips him with an "impregnable will" (317) to choose between his desire and his duty. Unlike Rufus Lyon, whose determination to remain unmarried (in order to do full justice to his ministerial office) melts away at the sight of Annette Ledru, Felix Holt, though devoid of any biblical guidance, does not experience even a momentary impulse to deviate from his avowed path. The "unspeakable feelings" (234) for Esther Lyon are subjected to intense suppression because, to his mind, a woman can serve no purpose other than to "hinder men's lives from having any nobleness in them" (127). The inadequacy of external coercion (as opposed to the inner promptings of a man's reasoning), whether religious or social, in the inculcation of steadfast uprightness, is substantially illustrated in the reactions of Rufus Lyon and Felix Holt to emotions which are almost identical. Mr. Lyon, "stifled by the sense that there was something he preferred to complete obedience"(90), forsakes his post for Annette whom he 'loved better than

23. "I have my heritage — an order I belong to. I have the blood of a line of handcraftsmen in my veins, and I want to stand up for the lot of the handcraftsman as a good lot, in which a man may be better trained to all the best functions of his nature than if he belonged to the grinning set who have visiting cards, and are proud to be thought richer than their neighbours". (PH., 270)
duty" (91). Duty for Felix, is too sacred to be conquered by selfish inclination. Unable to see a reconciliation between his vocation and his desire, shaken by the doubt "whether the subtle measuring of forces will ever come to measuring the force there would be in one beautiful woman whose mind was as noble as her face was beautiful—who made a man's passion for her rush in one current with all the great aims of his life" (268), Felix renounces Esther's love even though it was "not an easy preference" (319). Similarly his renunciation of the "worldly good" is also the outcome of a rational contemplation:

It is just because I'm a very ambitious fellow, with very hungry passions, wanting a great deal to satisfy me, that I have chosen to give up what people call worldly good. At least that has been one determining reason....I'm determined never to go about making my face simpering or solemn, and telling professional lies for profit; or to get tangled in affairs where I must wink at dishonesty and pocket the proceeds, and justify that knavery as part of a system that I can't alter. If I once went into that sort of struggle for success, I should want to win—I should defend the wrong that I had once identified myself with. I should become everything that I see now beforehand to be detestable. (PH, 266-7)

His desire to "stick to the class I belong to" (66) and his rejection of the upper class which he feels is "more given to idle suffering than to beneficent activity" (265), his awareness that the condition of the lower class was deteriorating mainly because "the best heads among them forsake their born comrades" (66), and the determination to earn through honest labour and hard work and "try to make life
less bitter for a few within my reach\textsuperscript{24} (270) are all expressive of values which nourish his self-respect.

Thousands of men have wedded poverty because they expect to go to heaven for it, ... but I wed it because it enables me to do what I most want to do on earth. (FH., 270)

The values and the determination, seen in conjunction, further help to clarify George Eliot's belief in the qualities fundamentally related to her concept of Destiny. Felix Holt is a well-wisher of the lower classes but is singularly lacking in the softening traits which should accompany such a bent of mind. His brusque openness, uninhibited bluntness and extra-independent spirit are early pointed out by George Eliot who, using Rufus Lyon as her mouthpiece, warns against the implied absolutism of his ideology — "The temptations that most beset those who have great natural gifts, and are wise after the flesh, are pride and scorn, more particularly towards those weak things of the world which have been chosen

\textsuperscript{24} I wish here to acknowledge my indebtedness to K.K. Collins for providing George Eliot's revised version along with G.H. Lewes's original version of "The Moral Sense" (1879) as Appendix to "G.H. Lewes Revised, George Eliot and the Moral Sense" (Victorian Studies XXI, 1978). George Eliot's comment on the urgency of duty, running almost parallel to the declaration of Felix Holt, stands as a proof of the consistency of her views on the subject: "We see the moral education of our race proceeding in the more and more rational classification of actions as right or wrong, towards the final identification of the \textit{Mvine Will} with the highest ascertainable duty to mankind and in the continual elevation of public opinion towards the highest mark of Feeling informed by Knowledge". pp.489-90 —— author.
to confound the things which are mighty. The scornful nostril and the high head gather not the odours that lie on the track of truth" (68). Sympathetic sharing of experience may be seen as the key note of her philosophy and Felix Holt, despite his noble aspirations stands in need of the maturity where love and reverence grow from the habitual exercise of sympathy.

It was primarily through the agency of Rufus Lyon and the love of his daughter, that Felix is awakened to the nobility of compassionate tolerance. The minister's refined and delicate criticism comes as a sharp contrast to Felix's unbridled iconoclasm:

Pla, not with paradoxes. That caustic which you handle in order to scorch others, may happen to sear your own fingers and make them dead to the quality of things. 'Tis difficult enough to see our way and keep our torch steady in this dim labyrinth: to whirl the torch and dazzle the eyes of our fellow-seekers is poor daring, and may end in total darkness. You yourself are a lover of freedom, and a bold rebel against usurping authority. But the right to rebellion is the right to seek a higher rule, and not to wander in mere lawlessness. (FH., 157)

The greater claim to his education into a higher state rests with Esther whom Felix had, at the outset, identified with his settled conviction regarding the base triviality of the feminine mind.25 Not that Felix is wrong in discerning

25. "'My wife is nice, she must have her bread well buttered, and her feelings will be hurt if she is not thought genteel.' That is the lot Miss Esther is preparing for some man or other. I could grind my teeth at such self-satisfied minxes, who think they can tell everybody what is the correct thing, and the utmost stretch of their ideas will not place them on a level with the intelligent fleas. I should like to see if she could be made ashamed of herself". (FH., 77)
the "peacock" (75) in her but his belief that the entire female class is incapable of any generosity and can be no more than a curse to mankind bespeaks of his blindness to the larger possibilities of human nature. So deep-founded is the belief that he renounces the one love that he has known in life because he can visualise no congruity between the public and the private responsibilities. Even after having elicited Esther's readiness at "choosing hardship as a better lot" (271), Felix struggled "as a firm man struggles with a temptation, seeing beyond it and disbelieving its lying promise" (271). However, the divided sensibility in Felix Holt with regard to Esther's love and ultimate marriage marks the dwindling of his confidence in his own judgment.

Felix Holt's utopian faith in his own discretion is considerably checked as the fatal force of his self-deluding ego pushes him involuntarily right into the election-day disturbances. The bitter vexation at the unforseen turn of the tumultuous riot which represented him as the mob leader, responsible for the death of Tucker, is intensified by the realization that he had been a potential factor in the "day's fatalities in which the multitudinous small wickednesses of small selfish ends, really undirected towards any larger result, had issued in widely-shared mischief that might yet be hideous" (329). This failure of his well-

26. "He believed he had the power, and he was resolved to try, to carry the dangerous mass out of mischief till the military came to awe them—-". (FH., 325)
meaning strategy wherein he had sought to minimise injury and affliction shake him into an altogether new consciousness of "the perplexed condition of human things, whereby even right action seems to bring evil consequences" (361-62).

Assizes meet, and when, all hopes for his acquittal are lost — Felix's own defence proving no less damaging — Esther's bold testimony as to the soundness of his moral stature and the "great resolutions that came from his kind feeling towards others" (458), serves favourably to counteract the adverse effects of his speech. Moreover, the sight of Esther as she stood, "divested of all personal consideration whether of vanity or shyness" (457), opened Felix's eyes to a decidedly venerable dimension of her personality. He realizes, for the first time, that his own supposedly clear sight had held beams of confusion. The suspicious mind, however, needed a more authentic proof to rely upon and as this is provided by Esther's relinquishment of all claims to the Transoms property, he loses no time in making her the co-sharer of his hard lot.

Parallel to the history of Felix Holt's dedication to his duty, runs the tragic tale of Mrs. Transome's suffering, an example of the cosmic judgment of George Eliot's faith where every selfish act is to be accounted for by a retributive chain of uncontrollable consequences.

27. "His nature is very noble; he is tender-hearted; he could never have had any intention that was not brave and good." (FH, 458)
While Felix is made to pay for his "too confident self-reliance" (356) and the disposition "to rely too much on his own crude devices" (461), Mrs. Transome is destined to spend years of her life in palpitating expectations only to be disillusioned and disgraced in the end. Disappointed by her husband and her first-born, she contrives her second son to be fathered by Matthew Jermyn, a lawyer of suspicious origins, believed to be "an illegitimate son of somebody or other" (47), in the hope that the new-born would somehow compensate for the sorrows of her life. This selfish violation of the marital obligation claims its nemesis by reducing the pride of the woman in whom "through all her life there had vibrated the maiden need to have her hand kissed and be the object of chivalry" (119), who "had never in life asked for compassion --- had never thrown herself in faith on an unproffered love" (478) to a yearning "for the caressing pity" of Esther who, she felt, would have "no impulse to punish and to strike her whom fate had stricken" (478). The painful consciousness that she was herself the agent of her degradation is heightened by the

28. "For more than twenty years I have not had an hour's happiness ... I am old, and expect so little now -- a very little thing would seem great. Why should I be punished any more?" (FH., 479)

29. "She was far beyond fifty; and since her early gladness in this best loved boy, the harvests of her life had been scanty. Could it be now -- when her hair was grey, when sight had become one of the day's fatigues... she was going to reap an assured joy? -- to feel that the doubtful deeds of her life were justified by the result, since a kind Providence had sanctioned them? -- to be no longer tacitly pitied by her neighbours... but to have at her side a rich, clever, possibly a tender, son?" (FH., 14-15)
callous egotism and insensitivity of her son who is, not only physically but also temperamentally, his father's child.

The tragedy of Harold Transome's life becomes a "symbol of the part which is played in the general human lot by hereditary conditions". In fact, the 'elements' of the Transome episode are determined more or less by the same ideas as are given expression in The Spanish Gypsy. While Mrs. Transome deftly illustrates

"the dire strife
Of poor Humanity's afflicted will,
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny."

Harold's humiliation in society strikes him as a "result of foregoing hereditary conditions". Reminding one of Byron's Cain, Harold too is a victim of the ineluctable laws of cause and effect, wherein the sins of parents are visited upon the children; he has to face ignominy not for his own interference with the universal laws but because his mother had defied the "duty" which is defined as "faithfulness to the marriage tie".

for the first time the iron had entered into his soul, and he felt the pressure of our common lot, the yoke of that mighty resistless destiny laid upon us by the acts of other men as well as our own.

(PH., 471)

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30. Cross III, 32.
32. Cross III, 32.
33. ".....wherefore should I toil? .... because / My father could not keep his place in Eden?/ What had I done in this? — I was unborn. / I sought not to be born, nor love the State/ To which that birth has brought me". (CAIN, I. 1. 65-69) E.H. Coleridge (ed.) The Poetical Works of Lord Byron. London: Murray, 1900
34. Cross III, 37.
Nevertheless, Harold cannot be held altogether unimpeachable as it was basically his over-reaching confidence, sense of superiority and an irrepressible desire to punish that rendered him deaf to Mrs. Transome's entreaties and hastened to bring about Jermyn's catastrophic revelation. The recurring references to the facts of his birth, however, serve the determinist's purpose in mitigating the accusations brought against Harold by advocating that the hereditary bequest of selfish calculation and the environmental legacy of materialistic power could not have produced a nature otherwise. The analogy between the hero of Byron's Cain and Felix Holt's Harold Transome becomes all the more pregnant as it gives George Eliot an opportunity for presenting a live demonstration of her melioristic faith in the supremacy of compassionate understanding.\textsuperscript{35} Cain's inability to submit, love, pity or sympathies, condemns him to the perennial misery of isolated damnation whereas Harold, after a fit of hateful repugnance finds great calm in a submissive

\textsuperscript{35} "The utmost approach to well-being that can be made in such a case is through large resignation and acceptance of the inevitable, with as much effort to overcome any dis-advantage as good sense will show to be attended with a likelihood of success. Any one may say, that is the dictate of mere rational reflection. But calm can, in hardly any human organism, be attained by rational reflection. Happily we are not left to that. Love, pity constituting sympathy, and generous joy with regard to the lot of our fellow-men, comes in, — has been growing since the beginning, — enormously enhanced by wider visions of results, by an imagination actively interested in the lot of mankind generally; and these feelings become pity, — i.e., loving, willing submission, and heroic Prometheus effort towards high possibilities, which may result from our individual life". (CROSS III, 35-36)
resignation to the derision of fate when, touched by Esther's appeal he steps "softly to his mother's bedside" (481).

It is in the spiritual pilgrimage of Esther Lyon that George Eliot advances her pattern of the journey towards enlightenment or truth. With Esther, George Eliot's emphasis on the freedom of personal choice touches a higher plain than in any of her previous presentations. Brought face to face with the impact of hereditary factors which refuse to submit to environmental conditions, one of the first things we learn about her is that she is "so delicately framed that the smell of tallow is loathsome to her" (65). This incongruity with the "notion of ministers' daughters in general" is further strengthened by her "elastic walk, the tread of small feet, a long neck and a high crown of shining brown plaits with curls that floated backward — things, in short, that suggested a fine lady" (70). The recapitulation of Rufus Lyon's past history contributes greatly towards the comprehension of the indomitable sleek sensibility of Esther's high birth which makes her suffer from "a sense of irreconcilableness between the objects of her taste and the conditions of her lot" (79). The coercion of "native tendencies" (79) in her case, over-rules her circumstances of nurture, making her a stranger to the class she belongs

36. "...She is wretched. Oh, I think I would bear a great deal of unhappiness to save her from having any more.... there is nothing in all this place — nothing since ever I came here — I could care for so much as that you should sit down by her now, and that she should see you when she wakes". (FH, 480-81)
The self-conscious integrity that prided "herself for her fastidious taste" (80), and the "horror of appearing ridiculous even in the eyes of vulgar Trebians" (81), are marked by George Eliot as "the narrowness of a brain that conceives no needs differing from its own, and looks to no results beyond the bargains of today; that tugs with emphasis for every small purpose, and thinks it weakness to exercise the sublime power of resolved renunciation" (81).

With all the charm of her vivacity, she is a victim of vanity, superficiality and romantic ideas — the reading of Byron and Rene being part of her notion of the upper-class life. Governed by her sense of cultural refinement, Esther finds Felix "outrageously ill-bred" (129). "I think you boast a little too much of your truth-telling Mr. Holt.... That virtue is apt to be easy to people when they only wound others and not themselves. Telling the truth often means no more than taking a liberty" (130). The novel's very structure indicates that Felix and Esther must correct one another's viewpoints. Thus the signs of the ensuing conflict are clearly perceptible in her "acute consciousness that

37. "She was not contented with her life; she seemed to herself to be surrounded with ignoble, uninteresting conditions, from which there was no issue". (EH, 79)
she could not contradict what Felix said" (129). Moreover, in spite of her resolve not to "change for anything Felix said" (131), a decisive change is effected in her life and outlook, the clearest signs of which are visible in her almost "spontaneous tenderness" towards her father.

George Eliot is characteristically skilful in presenting Esther's gradual evolution by making us a witness to the inner struggle which communicates her emotional experience. Denounced by Felix for her incapacity to discern a broader vision - 

"I thought you had a more generous mind -- that you might be kindled to a better ambition. But I've set your vanity aflame -- nothing else" (130) --

Esther for the "first time in her life --- felt herself seriously shaken in her self-contentment" (131). The hard crust of "self-respect and self-satisfaction" (131) once broken, "she feels as if she should for ever more be haunted by self-criticism, and never do anything to satisfy those fancies on which she had simply piqued herself before without being dogged by inward questions" (131). Esther's honesty in giving recognition to the superiority of Felix's

38. "I want you to change...by asking your self whether life is not as solemn a thing as your father takes it to be--in which you may be either a blessing or a curse to many. You know you have never done that. You don't care to be better than a bird trimming its feathers, and pecking about after what pleases it. You are discontented with the world because you can't get just the small things that suit your pleasure, not because its a world where myriads of men and women are ground by wrong and misery, and tainted with pollution". (FE., 128-129)
moral and intellectual life and acknowledging that he "was an influence above her life rather than a part of it; some time or other, perhaps, he would be to her as if he belonged to the solemn admonishing skies, checking her self-satisfied pettiness with the suggestion of a wider life (362), her capacity to transcend her self and essay to subjugate her will to what "seems a hard lot; yet it is a great one" (270) would, one feels assured, eventually enable her to achieve the peace and happiness which is the Destiny of the noble souls.

The dilemma which had been faced by Eppie after the revelation of Godfrey Cass's parenthood in Silas Marner, is enacted with a greater depth in the life of Esther Lyon who had always lived like a lady although not brought up as one. Whereas Eppie cannot imagine any happiness without Silas, the only father she has known, and has a liking for "the working folk, and their houses, and their ways" (SM, 202),

39. "If it is eccentricity to be very much better than other men, he is certainly eccentric; and fanatical too, if it is fanatical to renounce all small selfish motives for the sake of a great and unselfish one. I never knew what nobleness of character really was before I knew Felix Holt" (EH, 423). Italics mine.

40. "The first religious experience of her life—the first self-questioning, the first voluntary subjection, the first longing to acquire the strength of greater motives and obey the more strenuous rule—had come to her through Felix Holt! (EH, 273)

41. "That must be the best life...where one bears and does every thing because of some great and strong feeling—so that this and that in one's circumstances don't signify". (EH, 261)
Esther has been satisfied neither with her father, nor with her circumstances. Therefore, while Eppie can go ahead with an outright rejection of Godfrey's offer, Esther has to reach the end of her spiritual odyssey before she can make her choice.

The sight of the "feeble-minded, timid, paralytic" Mr. Transome which certainly "had never been part of the furniture she had imagined for the delightful aristocratic dwelling in her Utopia" (385), and her growing conviction regarding the worthless inadequacy of material wealth and status in procuring mental tranquility, disillusion Esther as to the true worth of the state where everything seemed convenient: "this life at Transome Court was not the life of her day-dreams: there was dullness already in its ease, and in the absence of high demand---somehow or other by this elevation of fortune it seemed that the higher ambition which had begun to spring in her was forever nullified. All life seemed cheapened" (413).

The expansion of Esther's moral faculty is conveyed through her act of drawing up the blinds in order to come into closer contact with the external nature: "She wanted the largeness of the world to help her thought" (474), and the absence of any definite commitment from Felix concentrated her thoughts on "the dread that after all she might find herself on the stony road alone, and faint and be weary" (475). The analogy to Tito's momentous choice which could either "exalt habit into partnership with the soul's
highest needs" (474), or bury it in the quagmire of selfish ends is too glaring to be avoided. True to her pledge "to meet high demands" (475), Esther's "repugnance....to snatching anything from him (Harold) on the ground of an arbitrary claim" (475) aided by her anticipation of a possible unison with "the presence and love of Felix Holt" (475) gives her the courage to renounce the "silken bondage that arrested all motive, and was nothing better than a well-cushioned despair" (475).

Stirred by the sight of Mrs. Transome, "the disordered grey hair—the haggard face—the reddened eyelids under which the tears seemed to be coming again with pain" (479), the final decision is all the more accelerated by this heart piercing example of human isolation and spiritual alienation: "The dimly-suggested tragedy of this woman's life, the dreary waste of years empty of sweet trust and affection, afflicted her even to horror. It seemed to have come as a last vision to urge her towards the life where the draught of joy sprang from the unchanging fountains of reverence and devout love" (479).

Felix Holt (1866) evidently surpasses its predecessors in the direct communication of the writer's philosophical precepts. "Very slight words and deeds" according to George Eliot, "may have a sacramental efficacy, if we can cast our self-love behind us, in order to say or do them. And it has been well-believed through many ages that the beginning of compunction is the beginning of a new life;
that the mind which sees itself blameless may be called
dead in trespasses — in trespasses on the love of others,
in trespasses on their weakness, in trespasses on all those
great claims which are the image of our own need" (160-61).
Romola, too, had witnessed a great leap from the enchanting
recollections of childhood scenery, and had entertained
ennobling visions in the personality of the heroine; but
in Felix Holt the very notion of her Moral Sense becomes
personified in the character of the protagonist. Felix's
choice of his vocation marks the "progress beyond this
brute of the stick" and is executed from a "healthy impulse,
under the guidance of fact without the idea of an uplifted
rod". The moral sense dawns in him as "in the select members
of a given generation, to incorporate itself as protest and
resistance, as the renunciation of immediate sympathy for
the sake of a foreseen general good, as moral defiance of
material force, and every form of martyrdom". It is parti-
cularly in her deft analysis of Esther's character, of the
"dire struggle between discerned duty, or the altruistic
estimate of consequences, and the strong promptings of
egoistic desire" that George Eliot shifts the theory of human
evolution from a process of biological natural selection
to a spiritual growth which is to a great extent, man-

42. See text of George Eliot's revised version of George
Henry Lewis's article "The Moral Sense" presented by
K.K. Collins as appendix to "G.H. Lewes Revised: George
Eliot and the Moral Sense" (Victorian Studies XXI, 1978)
pp. 484-491. All subsequent quotations are from the same.
controlled. The new vistas opened by her melioritic message of the possibilities of a sublime Destiny for the human race seek not only to counteract the decadent view of Huxley who felt that man's animal instincts being indomitable, mankind would eventually be dragged into base vulgarity, but also succeed in dispelling the sense of powerlessness which oppressed the receptive minds of the nineteenth century.

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