A Study of George Eliot

—A Child, An Angel, and A Buddha

in a Western Form——

Hideo Takano

(I) Unconscious Centre and Poise of the Earth

It seemed a long while—she did not know how long—before she heard Celia saying. ‘That will do, nurse; he will be quiet on my lap now. You can go to lunch, and let Garratt stay in the next room.’ ‘What I think, Dodo,’ Celia went on, observing nothing more than that Dorothea was leaning back in her chair, and likely to be passive, ‘is that Mr Casaubon was spiteful. I never did like him, and James never did. I think the corners of his mouth were dreadfully spiteful. And now he has behaved in this way, I am sure religion does not require you to make yourself uncomfortable about him. If he has been taken away, that is a mercy, and you ought to be grateful. We should not grieve, should we, baby?’ said Celia confidentially to that unconscious centre and poise of the world, who had the most remarkable fists all complete even to the nails, and hair enough, really, when you took his cap off, to make—you didn’t know what: — in short, he was Bouddha Buddha in a Western form.¹ (Italics are mine)

“That unconscious centre and poise of the earth” is so powerful that everything in the world seems to be melt away in the presence of the baby. This scene is quite important in George Eliot’s greatest novel, Middlemarch. The heart and mind of the heroine, Dorothea are now greatly changing. She has recognized the most moving change in her which will open her bright future with her lover in the severe world. Dorothea’s change can be quite compared with
Silas' in *Silas Marner* in terms of the development of their revival in time of a baby's appearance. In a sense the Baby will materialize the most influential metamorphosis of Silas. His life begins to be turned round on an axis of the baby named Eppie. The baby's scene is so silently or movingly described like in *Middlemarch* that the reader will muse and feel unspeakably striking.

Eliot is truly right about the dynamic description of "that unconscious centre and poise of the earth" in the sense that we can feel something like it in William Wordsworth's poem, *My heart leaps up when I behold.* Eliot succeeds in depicting our moving heart at a baby. There's nobody who doesn't feel so striking at it. This emotional feeling is a kind of timeless and spaceless thing about which we don't need any words to express. The worlds both inside and outside us will merge into one perfect unity. This is the world from which many words will come out one after another in the course of recognizing unconsciousness and consciousness. As Wordsworth says in the poem, "My heart leaps up when I behold a rainbow in the sky: /...The Child is Father of the Man; /...I could wish my days to be/Bound each to each by natural piety.", the baby is what we feel "by natural piety." Wordsworth's influence upon George Eliot is so conspicuous. His deep love for children is excellently expressed in his poems. He is good at finding his literary world in the very common, tiny things or living creatures. A baby inspires us with such a splendid emotion as seeing a rainbow in the sky. Silas Marner's heart becomes pure through the warm touch with the baby especially in heart and mind.

Why does George Eliot make such an interesting expression about the baby? She can look at the world from a cultural point of view. The constantly-described views cut into in a cultural point make her novels so universal. She tries hard to pursue a novel beyond place and time. Truth underneath her novels isn't always based upon Western culture. Her interests are quite so various but she isn't so encyclopedic as James Joyce.

(II) Fallen Angel

As far as the words, Baby and Child are concerned, there seems
to be almost no distinct difference between them in Eliot's novels. Children are mainly written as a symbol of rebirth, regeneration or revival like an angel.

In the book of *Silas Marner* the word Angel comes out five times. Its first example is "If there is an angel who records the sorrows of men as well as their sins, he knows how many and deep are the sorrows that spring from false ideas for which no man is culpable." Silas lost his trust in God and human love in Lantern Yard. This god proved to be a god of lies. Silas fell into deep despair. He will leave it for Raveloe. The shift of his living place is so meaningful for his newly fresh start of life. Past and Present are cleared up by it. Silas has to live a solitary, wretched life because of his weak defenceless character. His most powerful resistance is quite negative, for he only moves to Raveloe, hating his past life. The characters like Silas are often written in Eliot's novels. They are easily scrutinized to reveal the substance of the reality. The constant relationship between Silas and his society is the very theme to seize him as he is. "Many sorrows" signify his various feelings of sorrow, which aren't so well understood in the real society. The complicated society is depicted like a spider web. Silas seems to be caught in the severe society like an insect in the spider web. An angel doesn't come out and stretch out its hand to help him. An angel may record his joys and sorrows but there is no angel that helps him. This signifies its substance in the reality. Eliot may know some limit of christian angel's role in the real world. She tries hard to reconsider the wonderful image of the angels shining in the Christian society in order to seize the reality, even though she doesn't believe in it.

Anothe example with the word Angel is the scene where Dolly comes to see Silas with her son, Aaron. She tells him to sing a Christmas Carol for Silas. After listening to his song she says, "There's no other music equal to the Chistian music—Hark the erol angils sing." Silas' reaction is that "The Christmas Carol, with its hammer-like rhythm, had fallen on his ears as "strange music, quite unlike a hymn, and could have none of the effect Dolly contemplated." Dolly believes in God and goes to church. She urges Silas to go to church. She also thinks her son's carol will help him to attend the
mass. The word, Angel appears in the title of the hymn. Aaron's hymn doesn't sound nice for him, because of his iron-like heart and mind created by cold coins. Aaron's father is "a large jocose-looking man, an excellent wheel-wright," so it's quite natural that the Christmas Carol is sung in the hammer-like rhythm. But the society of Raveloe is quite different from his birthplace of Lantern Yard in terms of warm human touch with Silas. The bell sounds merrily in Raveloe. In this sense Raveloe has enough conditions to have him revive from the dark shell-like life. The hearty sound of Aaron's hymn or the bell will surely help to unwind his distorted heart and mind some day. His life is also beginning to change through Dolly's kind-hearted character. Human beings should live a justifiable life even though they are left alone. It is not an angel but Aaron that really sings the hymn, having unconsciously sweet influence upon him, though an angel is thought closely connected with him in terms of bright image. In addition he will get married to Eppie and continue to lighten his future later on. Angels are written as a background in Eliot's novels. They can't be the factor to revive him from his poor state. Mr. Dolly Winthrop of a jocose-looking man, his wife and his son, Aaron have something like unspeakably peaceful mood in their relationship with Silas, who seems to be shrouded by the angelic family. George Eliot puts much emphases on the world full of kind people even though there are some wicked ones like Dunstan Cass in it. She never depicts it partially. Her attitude toward depicting the world begins with the total look at what it is. She hates looking at the reality cut open with blind eyes.

The other scene of angels is as follows:

"Anybody'ud think the angels in heaven couldn't be prettier," said Dolly, rubbing the gold curls and kissing them.

The symbol of a pretty thing is no doubt an angel. But Eppie is prettier than an angel. Her hair is so prettily blond that Dolly can't help saying so. Human child is in fact prettier than an angel. It is the child that is far more important for Silas. In addition, here we are reminded of gold coins relating to Eppie's golden hair. Gold
coins can not open his human eyes, and on the contrary, drives him into the narrow, darker-eyed isolation apart from the warm-hearted relationship with the villagers. The bright shining gold coins make Silas inhuman like an insect-like existence. They used to be his sole joy like wine, but the joy was not what he wanted from the bottom of his heart. Eppie is more than what he wishes for. Her existence for him is his life.

In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction: a hand is put into theirs, which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and the hand may be a little child's."

After all it is human hands that help Silas.
An interesting description about an angel can be seen in Romola, a historical novel with a greatest Italian reformer of Christianity. The book is closely related to Silas Marner, which was rather speedily written up just before it.

This was the tangled web that Romola had in her mind as she sat weary in the darkness. No radiant angel came across the gloom with a clear message for her. In those times, as now, there were human beings who never saw angels or heard perfectly clear messages. Such truth as came to them was brought confusedly in the voices and deeds of men not at all like the seraphs of unfailing wing and piercing vision—men who believed falsities as well as truths, and did the wrong as well as the right. The helping hands stretched out to them were the hands of men who stumbled and often saw dimly, so that these beings unvisited by angels had no other choice than to grasp that stumbling guidance along the path of reliance and action which is the path of life, or else to pause in loneliness and disbelief, which is no path, but the arrest of inaction and death."
Romola falls into the despair with her husband’s wicked conducts of putting away her beloved father’s books. She needs the hands of angels but her scientific way of thinking won’t accept them. Her justice is what she will have to live by at last. In this sense she is similar to Dorothea in *Middlemarch*. They are both childish at first, but they become wise enough to live a free, peaceful life through various painful experiences. “The helping hands stretched out to them were the hands of men who stumbled and often saw dimly,”—this sentence signifies the fact that the helpers themselves are stubblers in life. Human beings are, as a whole, stubblers at first, so they should make every effort to live a less stumbling life. Romola chooses to get the stumbling guidance of Savonarola but in vain after all. Then through painful struggles she chooses “to pause in loneliness and disbelief, which is no path but the arrest of inaction and death.” At night she has her life hang on a boat in the sea, but the next morning warm sunshine saves her life. It is natural power that saves her.

He called upon me to flee: I took the sacred vows and I fled—fled to lands where danger and scorn and want bore me continually, like angels, to repose on the bosom of God. I have lived the life of a hermit, I have ministered to pilgrims; but my task has been short: the veil has worn very thin that divides me from my everlasting rest. I came back to Florence that—”

Romola visits her sick brother. The brother devotes his life to Christianity, renouncing his father, who wished that he should have been a scholar, and whose attempt was vain, getting himself into a blind father. So she had to support the father. Her brother’s angels are the very angels in Christianity. They are living in him. This is the scene that her brother is going to die soon. He is a purely faithful monk of Savonarola’s sect of Christianity. He believes in God perfectly. But she doesn’t agree with him, for he fled from the father. The law of affections with her father is more important for her. She can not approve of her brother. The importance of the only one person is strongly emphasized here. After all, angels don’t
echo in her heart and mind.

She was too happy to go to sleep—too happy to think that Tito would wake up, and that then he would leave her, and she must go home. It takes very little water to make a perfect pool for a tiny fish, where it will find its world and paradise all in one, and never have a presentiment of the dry bank. The fretted summer shade, and stillness, and the gentle breathing of some loved life near—it would be paradise to us all, if eager thought, the strong angel with the implacable brow, had not long since closed the gates. 19

"Very little water to make a perfect pool for a tiny fish,"—this phrase is an entirely important expression to illustrate the mysteries in the world. This is a clue to understanding Eliot's universal way of thinking. In short our paradise could be built up by our own way of thinking or our imagination. Here the word "Paradise" shrinks itself to the existence of the only one word in a dictionary in terms of how we should think of it in our own free way: "the fretted summer shade and stillness and the gentle breathing of some loved life near—it would be paradise to us all,"—this sentence presents George Eliot's true conception of paradise apart from Christianity. Romola's husband of a Greek scholar, Tito and his secret wife, Tessa are making their own paradise. Tito dislikes Christianity. He is a pleasure-seeking epicurian under the influence of Greek gods. "...if eager thought, the strong angel with the implacable blow had not long since closed the gates,"—this sentence presents various kinds of angels; Satan is the worst one. Their human love, after all, wouldn't falter even if the angels could interfere with them at this moment. "Its world and paradise all in one" is as powerful as crushing down the conventional image of paradise in Christianity. It proves that there is another religion, another one-for-all, another all-for-one in the world: one means God, and all, people.

Now there's an interesting example of an angel in Jude the Obscure by Thomas Hardy. "'Well, it was significant,' said Sue. 'There's
more for us to think about in that one little hungry heart than in all the stars of the sky.'”¹¹ Thomas Hardy is successful in seeking the cruelty: “Cruelty is the law pervading all nature and society; and we can't get out of it if we would!”¹² On this basic form, Arabella’s son murders Jude and Sue’s children. This may be one of the cruelest scenes about children in English literature. The child, little Time always pessimistically looks at the reality, being quite different from Eppie. The image of angels relating to the child in Christianity should seriously be cut into by the existence of little Time. Angel-like image of Eppie is perfectly smashed down by the son of Arabella who divorced herself from Jude. Under the heavy pressure of the Victorian severity caused by Christianity the characters are full of painful agonies against the strict morality of the then society. “A small slow voice rose from the shade of the fireside, as if out of the earth: ‘If I was you, mother, I wouldn’t marry father?’ It came from little Time, and they started, for they had forgotten him.”¹³ “All the stars in the sky” and “the earth” are used as negatively as bringing the most wretched fortune to Jude and Sue. We wonder why the child murders the children. Jude, Sue, Arabella and their children are all crushed down characters written under the then gloomy fate prevailing in the end of the Victorian Era. It’s Hardy’s “Immanent Will” in the universe that plays a whimsical role in life so freely in spite of human will or wish. This doesn’t always bring us into the conclusion that the image of the child is positive in leading to the bright future like in George Eliot’s novels. “Don’t speak of her I say! She’s a fool! —and she’s an angel too, poor dear!”¹⁴ Jude can’t seize Sue’s heart and mind but he loves her heartily. There’s something to prevent Sue from living with him for ever. We can say the child’s murder is one of the most distinct reasons for it. In this sense the existence of the child is an uncountably big obstacle for Jude’s life with Sue. Arabella’s son is just like a fallen angel. But still Jude keeps holding on to the favourable image of an angel in Sue, and his image of it will shine for ever in his heart, even though Sue leaves him. There are good and bad angels in the world. It is written in the Bible that children can go to Heaven. Then their angelic image is totally destroyed by
little Time. Even though the crush is significant, Hardy's "Immanent Will" may be melt away before Eliot's expression of "that unconscious centre and poise of the earth," in terms of the unconsciously smiling face of the baby which seems to tell us everything for the world peace like Buddha.

(III) Peace

Society is a wide nursery of plants, where the hundreds decompose to nourish the future ten, after giving collateral benefits to their contemporaries destined for a fairer garden. An awful thought! one so heavy that if our souls could once sustain its whole weight, or rather if its whole weight were once to drop on them, they would break and burst their tenements. How long will this continue? The cry of the martyrs heard by St. John finds an echo in every heart that, like Solomon's, groans under "the outrage and oppression with which earth is filled." Events are now so momentous, and the elements of society in so chemically critical a state, that a drop seems enough to change its whole form.¹⁵

This was the letter written by George Eliot when she was twenty-one years old. She was terribly anxious about the society of the Victorian Era where there were new waves of thoughts going out to and coming from abroad one after another. It was in this age that the people's way of thinking or living was greatly changing like day by day. This social situation where many people died in order to save one person was what George Eliot should seriously think much of. Young Eliot's furious attention to the society could be seen in looking at a tiny thing; "one so heavy." The society around her was full of "the outrage and oppression." These problems were driving Eliot into the entirely deep thought to know how to make her dream come true by making the society better. But she had nothing to do but to look at it without any practical actions. The Victorian Era was the most energetic time for English people as the most powerful nation in the world. Then England was called "World Factory." "The cry of the martyrs heard by St. John finds an echo in every heart," —
this sentence emphasises the existence of “an echo in every heart.” “Events are now so momentous, and the element of society in so chemically critical a state, that a drop seems enough to change its whole form,” —this sentence presents how valuable one drop is made to change the whole form of the society. “A drop,” “an echo,” “a fairer garden,” “an awful thought,” or “one so heavy” is as powerful or valuable as “Society,” “the future,” “Earth,” or “its whole form,”: the one-for-all or all-for-one form.

In the story of *Romola*, Romola’s godfather is forced into ceasing to exist. Even though she asks Savonarola to stop it, it is in vain. Savonarola will be nothing when he thinks light of the very existence of the only one person. Whatever splendid sermons Savonarola may preach, he will be nothing if he misses the importance of the one person.

We may see Eliot’s literary current in some later-born novelists, who are similar to her in terms of the universal way of thinking; the importance of “a drop,” a tiny, but large thing in the society.


James Joyce is an excellent observer who can distinctly clear up the difference of images between Buddha and Christ. Various kinds of thinkings are needed in our modern society. Joyce is to help us with a nice lesson of how to look at the images of Buddha and Christ. “Taking it easy with hand under his cheek” represents how peaceful the image of Buddha is when we compare it with the image of Christ, Ecco Home. The contrast between peaceful Buddha and painful Christ is so interesting in appealing to human beings in the form of their images. Joyce puts emphasis upon the cultural diversity. We can’t live on peacefully well if we only stick to one religion without understanding other ones.

George Eliot used to be an editor of *Westmister Review*, so she needed a lot of information about intercultural viewpoints. That’s why
her novels can be cut into from a cultural angle. Her coinhabitant, George Henry Lewes was a famous philosopher in England though he was Jewish. There's no doubt that she got some information about Buddhism from him. By the way Joyce's literature does sound encyclopedic. Like him George Eliot is flexible in catching up with the violently speedy waves of the new age. And also like him she is a universal writer in English literature. Eliot's description of the baby is thought its best expression and yet it is in or beyond a cultural viewpoint.

As far as *Heart of Darkness* is concerned, the image of Buddha is quite important for its literature. The hero, Marlow begins with his story as follows:

'Mind.' he began again, lifting one arm from the elbow, the palm of the hand outwards, so that, with his legs folded before him, he had the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower—'Mind,' none of us would feel exactly like this...

And at the end of the book he has finished his story as follows:

Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha. Nobody moved for a time. 'We have lost the first of the ebb,' said the Director suddenly. I raised my head. The offering was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness.

This book focuses on the peace-giving pose of Marlow with the palm of the hand outwards, which is the sign of Buddha having peace or bless pour on the world out of the palm. It also concentrates on the darkest sight of human heart and mind of the Western cultivated people in the place of Africa. The exact description of the wretched black people is equal to that of Silas in terms of the enthusiastic attitude of the author toward illustrating, with warm
sympathy, their state of life. It is linked to the hellish state of the westerners in heart and mind. River Thames is poetically or mysteriously depicted as a biggest symbol of the westerners’ heart of darkness. Conrad tells us about some clues to solving the problems of the world referring directly to the Oriental way of thinking. It is quite clear that “the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes,” and “the pose of a meditating Buddha” are the main theme for World Peace in Heart of Darkness. He depicts Buddha as a central figure in his story, while George Eliot doesn’t. But her Buddha is as meaningful as Conrad’s. The peaceful baby represents that everything is to start from it and yet the thought of emptiness may be concerned in it. She wants to have us come back to it when we are in the total loss or despair. Her writing form is based upon it in depicting the deepest, darkest part of our heart and mind. The form may be one of the greatest discoveries in English literature that she finds in the baby’s face instead of an angel’s.

The reality of her baby is as significant as that of the Cave in A Passage to India by E. M. Forster.

Professor Godbole had never mentioned an echo; it never impressed him, perhaps. There are some exquisite echoes in India; there is the whisper round the dome at Bijapur; there are the long, solid sentences that voyage through the air at Mandu, and return unbroken to their creator. The echo in a Marabar cave is not like these, it is entirely devoid of distinction. Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof.¹⁰

The monotonous sound of the Cave tells us the importance of the existence of the universal in our society. Truth or lie will become the same sound in it. It can be likened to the womb from which human beings come out into this earth.

The book ends as follows:

‘Why can’t we be friends now?’ said the other, holding him affectionately. ‘It’s what I want. It’s what you want.’
But the horses didn’t want it—they swerved apart; the earth didn’t want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single-file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn’t want it, they said in their hundred voices, ‘No, not yet,’ and the sky said, ‘No, not there.’

The muslim hero can be depicted up on the cultural level different from that of the Anglo-English. Their culturally different relationship is the main theme of the book. This is the reality which E. M. Forster insists on in the book. But his final conclusion hidden in it is that we will be able to welcome a peaceful communication some day. He tells it to us with the monotonous sound of World Peace in the cave. We will listen to it even in the society mixed with various cultures. The Cave is as important as Marlow’s “pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower” in Heart of Darkness, “Buddha their god lying on his side in the museum. Taking it easy with hand under his cheek” in Ulysses, and “Bouddha in a Western form” in Middlemarch.

We can say that George Eliot tries hard to establish her literary world, which can’t be defined by any special religion. It is her writing that is a part of her religion. Moreover her writing form is also a part of her religion. It has its power to get us into thinking much of the world in a balanced way, so her sentences often include the well-balanced descriptions. It is as powerful as driving us into the balanced way of thinking. In addition it helps us in time of trouble.

I remember how, at Cambridge, I walked with her once in the Fellows’ Garden of Trinity, on an evening of rainy May; and she, stirred somewhat beyond her wont, and taking as her text the three words which have been used so often as the inspiring trumpet-calls of men,—the words God, Immortality, Duty—pronounced, with the terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable the second, and yet how peremptory and
absolute the third. Never perhaps, have sterner accents affirmed the sovereignty of impersonal and unrecompensing Law.²¹)

Duty represents the most realistic word for George Eliot in all the words including God and immortality. It is to seek for Peace as a Duty of a faithful writer that George Eliot finds the universal literature in a Child, an Angel, and a Buddha in a Western form: the beyond-one-for-all form.²²)

Notes
4) Ibid., p. 90.
5) Ibid., p. 90.
6) Ibid., p. 123.
7) Ibid., p. 132.
9) Ibid., p. 154.
10) Ibid., p. 108.
12) Ibid., p. 389.
13) Ibid., p. 344.
14) Ibid., p. 456.
18) Ibid., p. 113.
20) Ibid., p. 316.