A Study of Light and Dark in *Romola* by George Eliot

—— Their Contrasting Descriptions and Images ——

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George Eliot has a hard time in writing *Romola* because it is a story developed in the Italian Medieval period. She goes to Italy for the exact detailed materials. (1) Contrasting descriptions and images of light and dark are effectively used in *Romola* where there are a lot of scenes with bright sunshine and shadow. Professor Barbara Hardy finds some importance in George Eliot's scenic method:

GEORGE ELIOT's scenic method is as varied as her other means of presenting character and developing action. The scene can serve the double purpose of narrative and theme, often providing a visual resting-place which may cover a subterranean movement of the action. Her scenes are of course not all scenes of crisis, though it is the status of the scene as symbol which I am concerned with here. In most of the novels there are a large number of domestic scenes which are not even essential to the development of plot, but which familiarize us with character before character is set in tragic action. They are there also, as in all successful novels, to give the essential illusion that the action is rooted in normal space and time. The one novel which has very few of these 'free' scenes is *Romola*, and the result is the disastrous absence of normality. In *Romola* George Eliot attempts various laboured naturalistic scenes of Florentine life, like the episode of the practical joke played on the doctor, which she explained was there for accuracy of background and not for comic relief. There are no private scenes in *Romola* which are not scenes of crisis. (2)

George Eliot's scenic method is unique in terms of the contrasting descriptions and images of light and dark with the various combinations of light and dark in a physical and spiritual sense. (3) They are necessary for the exact illumination of the characters' delicate mind. (4) Through the characters, Romola, Bardo, Tito, Cosimo, Savonarola and Baldassarre in *Romola*, readers will see that light changes into dark, dark changes into light according to their mind's eye, for God is light for those who believe in it but God is dark for those who do not. (5)

(1)

Regarding George Eliot's contrasting descriptions of light and dark, there are basically three
distinguished types in a physical and spiritual sense.

The first type lies in the contrasting descriptions of light and dark in a physical sense.

‘The Florentine men are so—so; they make but a sorry show at this distance with their patch of sallow flesh-tint above the black garments; but those banners with their velvet, and satin, and minever, and brocade, and their endless play of delicate light and shadow! — Va! your human talk and doings are a tame jest; the only passionate life is in form and colour.’ (6)

“Their endless play of delicate light and shadow” implies physical light and dark. Their contrasting description gives birth to beauty. This world is full of beauty in light and dark. We cannot see the objects distinctly without dark. (The word of dark used in the text includes the meanings of darkness or shadow.)

But presently the light burst forth with sudden strength, and shadows were thrown across the road. It seemed that the sun was going to chase away the greyness. (p. 322)

Some exciting tension is delineated through the power of light in a physical sense. One would miss it if one were not a careful observer. A Wordsworthian observation of nature is noticed in “the light burst forth with sudden strength”.

In Romola there are often scenes of moonlight, which is sometimes suitable for Baldassarre’s depressed feelings:

Tito had his hand on the door and was pulling it: it dragged against the ground as such old doors often do, and Baldassarre, startled out of his dreamlike state, rose from his sitting posture in vague amazement, not knowing where he was. He had not yet risen to his feet, and was still kneeling on one knee, when the door came wide open and he saw, dark against the moonlight, with the rays falling on one bright mass of curls and one rounded olive cheek, the image of his reverie—not shadowy—close and real like water at the lips after the thirsty dream of it. (p. 201)

This is a dramatic scene in which Baldassarre tries his revenge against Tito. Baldassarre happens to meet him: “He saw, dark against the moonlight, with the rays falling on one bright mass of curls and one rounded olive cheek, the image of his reverie...”. The contrasting description of light and dark is very effective to visualize the scene clearly. Baldassarre’s inner heart is felt in it in a contrasting way as well.

In a chapel on the left hand of the nave, wreathed with silver lamps, was seen
unveiled the miraculous fresco of the Annunciation, which, in Tito's oblique view of it from the right-hand side of the nave, seemed dark with the excess of light around it. The whole area of the great church was filled with peasant-women, some kneeling, some standing; the coarse bronzed skins, and the dingy clothing of the rougher dwellers on the mountains, contrasting with the softer-lined faces and white or red head-draperies of the well-to-do dwellers in the valley, who were scattered in irregular groups. (p. 143)

This is an interesting scene of the strangely reflected light which prevents Tito from seeing the painting of "the miraculous fresco of the Annunciation." Too much light makes it hard to see the objects. Light is sometimes thought to have its opposite effect of dark: in short light is a kind of curtain. (7) Light and dark change the image of objects as skilfully as a magician does.

The second type is of the contrasting descriptions of physical light and spiritual dark.

Near one of those arched openings, close to the door by which he had entered the loggia, Tito awaited her, with a sickening sense of the sunlight that slanted before him and mingled itself with the ruin of his hopes. (p. 173)

"A sickening sense of the sunlight that slanted before him and mingled itself with the ruin of his hope" is the exact expression of Tito's painful heart. "The slanting sunlight" represents the coming end of Tito and Romola's love: "the ruin of his hopes" is stressed by the sunlight. Tito's spiritual dark is contrasted by the physical light.

The third type is of the contrasting descriptions of spiritual or symbolic light and dark.

The faces just met, and the dark curls mingled for an instant with the rippling gold. Quick as lightning after that, Tito set his foot on a projecting ledge of the book-shelves and reached down the needful volumes. They were both contented to be silent and separate, for that first blissful experience of mutual consciousness was all the more exquisite for being unperturbed by immediate sensation. (p. 119)

Tito has dark curled hair and Romola blond hair. The dark curls may be symbolized as spiritual dark because of Tito's wickedness which is revealed later in the story. The rippling gold may be symbolized as spiritual light. The contrasting description is quite effective when we consider their sad relationship developed later in a contrasting way.

It was a strange moment. Baldassarre had moved round the table till he was opposite Tito, and as the hum ceased there might be seen for an instant Baldassarre's fierce dark eyes bent on Tito's bright smiling unconsciousness, while the low notes of triumph dropped from his lips into the silence. (p. 341)
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This above quoted scene demonstrates that all the other people present are too ignorant to justify Baldassarre's assertion. They are all blind about Tito's wickedness. Baldassarre's spiritual dark of agony is stressed by his dark eyes and on the contrary, Tito's spiritual light is represented by his bright smiling unconsciousness. Their contrasting state of mind is clearly described. In addition Tito's wicked light is dark for Baldassarre, and Baldassarre's wretched dark is light for Tito.

Well! a little patience, and in another year, or perhaps in half a year, he might turn his back on these hard, eager Florentines, with their futile quarrels and sinking fortunes. His brilliant success at Florence had had some ugly flaws in it: he had fallen in love with the wrong woman, and Baladassarre had come back under incalculable circumstances. But as Tito galloped with a loose rein towards Siena, he saw a future before him in which he would no longer be haunted by those mistakes. He had much money safe out of Florence already; he was in the fresh ripeness of eight-and-twenty; he was conscious of well-tried skill. Could he not strip himself of the past, as of rehearsal clothing, and throw away the old bundle, to robe himself for the real scene? p. 64)

"His brilliant success at Florence had had some ugly flaws in it."—this sentence represents the contrasting light and dark in Tito: "his brilliant success" is symbolized as light and "some ugly flaws" as dark. Tito's life is revealed in the contrasting description of spiritual light and dark.

And now in this morning light, when the assurance came again that the fine fibres of association were active still, and that his recovered self had not departed, all his gladness was but the hope of vengeance. (p. 407)

"All his gladness was but the hope of vengeance."—this sentence is the exact expression regarding hope as light and vengeance as dark. Baldassarre has nothing but vengeance in making Tito full of agony. His image of light in dark is as faulty as to kill Tito in the end. Baldassarre's own way of thinking becomes clear in the contrasting description of light and dark.

This is one of the most important passages in the novel:

'You remember, my children, three days ago I besought you, when I should hold this Sacrament in my hand in the face of you all, to pray fervently to the Most High that if this work of mine does not come from Him, He will send a fire and consume me, that I may vanish into the eternal darkness away from His light which I have hidden with my falsity. Again I beseech you to make that prayer, and to make it now.'

It was a breathless moment: perhaps no man really prayed, if some in a spirit of devout obedience made the effort to pray. Every consciousness was chiefly possessed by the sense that Savonarola was praying, in a voice not loud, but distinctly audible in the wide stillness. (p. 495)
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This is George Eliot’s real assertion about her life in the above passage. “The eternal darkness away from His light” drives Savonarola into his final fate of death. He is but a great idealist. The light is his own dreaming light. He is too much obsessed with it. The light is dark in the end, for he dies without finding the true light of God. George Eliot wants to assert it to criticize her Christian society in England. Great Savonarola’s real figure is revealed by the dramatic description of light and dark in connection with God.

(II)

George Eliot’s common law husband is a distinguished philosopher, so she knows much about the philosophers’ world. Philosophers look for the truth underlying the world. They are symbolized as light but George Eliot knows that there are many philosophers in the world who are symbolized as dark because their light is not true light.

‘Not I Messer Greco; a philosopher is the last sort of animal I should choose to resemble. I find it enough to live, without spinning lies to account for life. Fowls cackle, asses bray, women chatter, and philosophers spin false reasons—that’s the effect the sight of the world brings out of them. Well, I am an animal that paints instead of cackling, or braying, or spinning lies. And now, I think, our business is done; you’ll keep to your side of the bargain about the Œdipus and Antigone? (pp. 185-186)

Through Piero di Cosimo George Eliot wants to describe the philosophers’ poor real life. Cosimo is a strange painter in *Romola*, as in *Middlemarch* there also appears an artist as Dorothea’s lover. They are the closest characters to our modern people. They live with free will. Bardo, Tito, Baldassarre and Savonarola are all philosophers. Cosimo dislikes philosophers because of their spinning lies. He is an important character in *Romola* who is to look through Tito’s wicked character though a blind philosopher of Romola’s father, Bardo does not.

‘I call this as good a bit of portrait as I ever did,’ he said, looking at it as he advanced. ‘Yours is a face that expresses fear well, because it’s naturally a bright one. I noticed it the first time I saw you. The rest of the picture is hardly sketched; but I’ve painted you in thoroughly.’ (p. 185)

Cosimo predicts Tito’s future, indirectly in the perfect contrasting image of light and dark. “Yours is a face that expresses fear well, because it’s naturally a bright one.” —— this sentence represents Cosimo’s artistic spirit of expressing human inner wicked feelings hidden over the bright face in a perfect contrast of physical light and spiritual dark. (8) Fear is symbolized as dark. In short Cosimo wants to express the perfect contrast of appearance and mind in his paintings. He plays an important role as a predictor in *Romola*. In the beginning of the story there appears his predictive picture:
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The sketch Nello pointed to represented three masks—one a drunken laughing Satyr, another sorrowing Magdalen, and the third, which lay between them, the rigid, cold face of a Stoic: the masks rested obliquely on the lap of a little child, whose cherub features rose above them with something of the supernal promise in the gaze which painters had by that time learned to give to the Divine Infant. (p. 33)

A drunken laughing Satyr is regarded as Tito, a sorrowing Magdalen as Romola, the rigid cold face of a Stoic as Savonarola's. Their future figures are clearly sketched by Cosimo. He is full of confidence in his way of living and with a deep insight into life.

"Ay, Nello," said the painter, speaking with abrupt pauses; "and if thy tongue can leave off its everlasting chirping long enough for thy understanding to consider the matter, thou mayst see that thou hast just shown the reason why the face of Messere will suit my traitor. 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 food, and keep its colour without much help of virtue. (pp. 40-41)

"A perfect traitor should have a face which vice can write no marks on."—this sentence implies the idea that the most unexpected persons carry out the most unexpected things. This will give the biggest shock to others. The brighter the appearance is, the darker the mind is. The perfect contrasting image of light and dark is well described through Cosimo and Tito.

"It is good," sing the old Eumenides, in Æschylus, 'that fear should sit as the guardian of the soul, forcing it into wisdom—good that men should carry a threatening shadow in their hearts under the full sunshine; else, how should they learn to revere the right?" That guardianship may become needless; but only when all outward law has become needless—only when duty and love have united in one stream and made a common force. (p. 114)

George Eliot puts much emphases on the important role of fear in human mind. Fear may be represented as "a threatening shadow in their heart under full sunshine." Shadow is clearly stressed by sunshine as wickedness is judged by justice. It is a fine contrasting image of light and dark.

Yet fear was a strong element in Tito's nature—the fear of what he believed or saw was likely to rob him of pleasure: and he had a definite fear that Fra Luca
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might be the means of driving him from Florence. (p. 115)

Tito is destined to suffer from fear as a perfect traitor. It is connected with his past. He wants to forget or escape from it.

It was true that it had been taken from Baldassarre’s finger and put on his own as soon as his young hand had grown to the needful size; but there was really no valid good to anybody in those superstitious scruples about inanimate objects. The ring had helped towards the recognition of him. Tito had begun to dislike recognition, which was a claim from the past. This foreigner’s offer, if he would really give a good price, was an opportunity for getting rid of the ring without the trouble of seeking a purchaser. (p. 193)

Tito thinks that his ring is symbolized as fear or dark. He wants light. “He felt as if a serpent had begun to coil round his limbs.” (p. 217) —— this sentence reminds us of the idea that a serpent is symbolized as fear or dark. Then Tito begins to wear armour for Baldassarre’s revenge. He tries to escape from his past by selling the ring and defends himself with the armour. The ring and the armour are a good contrast because the former is symbolized as dark and the latter as light for Tito.

Tito attempts hard to put out Romola’s unfavourable fancy by way of using the word “light.” This is a very important point in thinking of light and dark in Romola. In other words, it is clear evidence for the fact that George Eliot has a deep vision into the existence of light and dark in relation to love.

‘Nay, Romola, you will look only at the images of our happiness now. I have locked all sadness away from you.’

‘But it is still there—it is only hidden,’ said Romola, in a low tone, hardly conscious that she spoke.

‘See, they are all gone now!’ said Tito. ‘You will forget this ghastly mummercy when we are in the light, and can see each other’s eyes. My Ariadne must never look backward now—only forward to Easter, when she will triumph with her Care-dispeller.’ (p. 199)

“You will forget this ghastly mummercy when we are in the light.” —— this sentence is the exact expression for Tito’s attempt. Tito notices the power of light for Romola’s spiritual dark as the author does.

Tito also uses a little shrine to wipe her fancy away, for he manages to have Romola put her brother’s crucifix into it. Romola follows his advice because of love. The shrine is thought to be light. Tito’s use of the shrine means that Romola’s brother’s crucifix is fear or dark for him. Tito knows about his own wickedness so well, but Romola does not, for she loves Tito so well that she seems to be blind. Tito is right or light for her as long as she loves him so well. But later he will be dark, perfectly dark for her, because of her perfect loss of love for him. The ring, shrine, and
armour are effectively used to make a perfect contrasting image of light and dark through the love between Romola, Tito and Baldassarre.

By the word “light” Tito speaks to Romola as follows:

"Moreover, it is not my will that Messer Bernardo should advance the money, even if the project were not an utterly wild one. And I beg you to consider, before you take any step or utter any word on the subject, what will be the consequences of your placing yourself in opposition to me, and trying to exhibit your husband in the odious light which your own distempered feelings cast over him. What object will you serve by injuring me with Messer Bernardo? The event is irrevocable. the library is sold, and you are my wife." (p. 283)

"The odious light" is an expression of Tito's wickedness. He tries hard to spin his web of love, but Romola is not so ignorant as Tessa. Tito is sensitive to the expression of light. He is also afraid of the light of justice. He uses the image of light for his sake to continue to escape from it again. His own wicked image of dark is shown in* the odious light."

Baldassarre is Tito's foster father. He used to set his great affections upon Tito. He is betrayed by Tito and has nothing left to do but to seek his revenge on him.

"I was ill. I can't tell how long—it was a blank. I remember nothing, only at last I was sitting in the sun among the stones, and everything else was darkness. And slowly, and by degrees, I felt something besides that: a longing for something—I did not know what—that never came. And when I was in the ship on the waters I began to know what I longed for: it was for the Boy to come back—it was to find all my thoughts again, for I was locked away outside them all. And I am outside now. I feel nothing but a wall and darkness." (p. 437)

Baldassarre becomes dizzy. "I feel nothing but a wall and darkness." —— this sentence implies Baldassarre's despairing heart caused by losing love for Tito. Tito used to be his great hope, or light for him. "Only at last I was sitting in the sun among the stones and everything else was darkness." —— this sentence represents Baldassarre's lifeless dark state of mind stressed by the image of the sun.

Baldassarre living, and in Florence, was a living revenge, which would no more rest than a winding serpent would rest until it had crushed its prey. It was not in the nature of that man to let an injury pass unavenged: his love and his hatred were of that passionate fervour which subjugates all the rest of the being, and makes a man sacrifice himself to his passion as if it were a deity to be worshipped with selfdestruction. (p. 217)
Baldassarre's recognition is that Tito is a person who does not deserve his love but hatred. His passionate harted drives him to become a perfect revenger. As the power of love changes dark into light, the power of losing love changes light into dark. Love and its loss are the key point for the contrasting images of light and dark in Romola.

It might be so; he tried to keep his grasp on that hope. For, since the day when he had first walked feebly from his couch of straw, and had felt a new darkness within him under the sunlight, his mind had undergone changes, partly gradual and persistent, partly sudden and fleeting. As he had recovered his strength of body, he had recovered his self-command and the energy of his will; he had recovered the memory of all that part of his life which was closely entwrought with his emotions; and he had felt more and more constantly and painfully the uneasy sense of lost knowledge. (p. 261)

"A new darkness within him under the sunlight" is a perfect description of Baldassarre's inner dark heart and the outer world of sunshine. In contrast with Tito's positive use of the word 'light,' Baldassarre cannot manipulate it and falls into the deep dark or his sole light of revenge. Without it he would be a living corpse. His fierce spirit of revenge makes him strong.

"...Curses on him! I wish I may see him lie with those red lips white and dry as ashes, and when he looks for pity I wish he may see my face rejoicing in his pain. It is all a lie—this world is a lie—there is no goodness but in hate. Fool! not one drop of love came with all your striving: life has not given you one drop. But there are deep draughts in this world for hatred and revenge. I have memory left for that, and there is strength in my arm—there is strength in my will—and if I can do nothing but kill him—" (pp. 264-265)

Baldassarre seems to be a mass of hatred and revenge. Tito's influence is so great that everything in the world seems to him moving around his revenge. "This world is a lie——there is no goodness but in hate. Fool!"—this passage represents his perfectly mistaken conception of the world, which is responsive to the perfect contrasting description of light and dark. As the stronger light is, the darker shadow is, so the stronger the feeling of losing love is, the darker revenge is. Love and revenge are in the same contrast for him as light and dark.

He was tempted, and bought the cheapest Greek book he could see. He carried it home and sat on his heap of straw, looking at the characters by the light of the small window; but no inward light arose on them. Soon the evening darkness came; but it made little difference to Baldassarre. His strained eyes seemed still to see the white pages with the unintelligible black marks upon them. (p. 268)
Baldassarre cannot read the book then, though he is a philosopher. He seems as if he were an unlettered person. His absent mind is stressed by the sentence—"no inward light arose on them." His case is very serious. "The light of the small window" is in good contrast with "no inward light" and "the evening darkness," just as "the white pages" are with "the unintelligible black marks." It is recognizable that Baldassarre is dark to the light of words.

"I saved you—I nurtured you—I loved you. You forsook me—you robbed me—you denied me. What can you give me? You have made the world bitterness to me; but there is on draught of sweetness left—that you shall know agony." (p. 302)

Baldassarre's measure of value is perfectly out of balance in terms of humanity. The agony is dark for Tito but is light for him.

His fierce purpose had become as stealthy as a serpent's, which depends for its prey on one dart of the fang. Justice was weak and unfriended; and he could not hear again the voice that pealed the promise of vengeance in the Duomo; he had been there again and again, but that voice, too, had apparently been stifled by cunning strong-armed wickedness. (pp. 415-416)

"Justice was weak and unfriended."—this sentence tells us that he does forget the universal law of dynamism in the world. His conception of justice is as wrong as to extinguish anybody like Tito. His violent impulse to kill Tito may be natural but to put it into practice is another thing. He should have known much better. Eventually Baldassarre makes his dream come true in the scene where he happens to see Tito lying almost dead on the river bank. The contrasting description of light and dark is quite helpful in analyzing his relationship with Tito and his inner state of mind symbolically.

Romola is so ignorant of world affairs that she makes Tito's acquaintance with very great excitement:

The faces just met, and the dark curls mingled for an instant with the rippling gold. Quick as lightning after that, Tito set his foot on a projecting ledge of the book-shelves and reached down the needful volumes. They were both contented to be silent and separate, for that first blissful experience of mutual consciousness was all the more exquisite for being unperturbed by immediate sensation. (p. 119)

The existence of Tito is light for Romola but will be dark later. There is another way of thinking about the image of light and dark in terms of their relationship: when it is recalled later, Tito's dark curls were symbolized as spiritual dark and Romola's rippling gold hair, as spiritual light. The mingling image of light and dark is attached to their mingling hair.
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But her mind was roused to resistance of impressions that, from being obvious phantoms, seemed to be getting solid in the daylight. As a strong body struggles against fumes with the more violence when they begin to be stifling, a strong soul struggles against phantasies with all the more alarmed energy when they threaten to govern in the place of thought. (p. 317)

As Hamlet suffers from his father's ghost, Romola is suffering from her brother's story of her future tragic failure in marriage. Hamlet is thought to drive readers into the world of science starting with mysticism. Its plot is from dark to light. It is the same to Romola. The contrasting image of dark and light in the plot is also helpful to make much effect in describing the characters' human relationship. *Romola* is especially a strongly symbolized novel in this sense.

Fra Girolamo moved towards the door, and called in a lay Brother who was waiting outside. Then he went up to Romola and said in a tone of gentle command, 'Rise, my daughter, and be comforted. Our brother is with the blessed. He has left you the crucifix, in remembrance of the heavenly warning—that it may be a beacon to you in the darkness.' (p. 158)

Romola's brother leaves a crucifix for her when he dies. She relies on Savonarola because she believes in his words and faith. "A beacon" is a light for her in darkness. It is a perfect contrasting description of light and dark.

She paused. There was still something else to be stript away from her, belonging to that past on which she was going to turn her back for ever. She put her thumb and her forefinger to her betrothal ring; but they rested there, without drawing it off. Romola's mind had been rushing with an impetuous current towards this act, for which she was preparing: the act of quitting a husband who had disappointed all her trust, the act of breaking an outward tie that no longer represented the inward bond of love. (p. 313)

The word "light" which Tito tries hard to say to Romola for return of her love turns out to be dark. As for the ring, its sign of love turns out to be that of hatred. This is the same course to Tito's ring with Baldassarre's memory in it. Past is sometimes symbolized as dark like the ring for Romola and Tito. Human beings instinctively want to move toward light leaving out dark. As Baldassarre's loss of love for Tito leads him into revenge, Romola's leads her to Savonarola for the blessing of God. She has accepted his sermon as a beacon or light in darkness. When she knows that Savonarola is to have her Godfather killed in the fire, she loses her faith in him.

'Forgive me, father; it is pain to me to have spoken those words—yet I cannot help speaking. I am little and feeble compared with you; you brought me light and
strength. But I submitted because I felt the proffered strength—because I saw the light. Now I cannot see it. Father, you yourself declare that there comes a moment when the soul must have no guide but the voice within it, to tell whether the consecrated thing has sacred virtue. And therefore I must speak.' (p. 477)

Romola can no longer find light in Savonarola. Savonarola's beacon turns out to be dark for her. It is an utterly great shock to Romola because of the loss of the last reliance she has expected. She falls into a helpless and hopeless world of darkness. (10)

She drew the cowl over her head again and covered her face, choosing darkness rather than the light of the stars, which seemed to her like the hard light of eyes that looked at her without seeing her. Presently she felt that she was in the grave, but not resting there: she was touching the hands of the beloved dead beside her, and trying to wake them. (p. 491)

She lies down on the boat in despair at night. "Choosing darkness rather than the light of the stars, which seemed to her like the hard light of eyes" gives us the idea that she turns against the world of her human relationship: Tito, Baldassarre, Savonarola and her image of God made by him. (11) Then she knows "the indifferent life outside the self". (12) and gets out of the despair the next morning to find her new life through darkness with the help of the power of the warm morning sunshine. Romola saves herself through the power of nature full of physical light and dark.

(III)

Why does Romola's father appear as a blind scholar?

'And in one thing you are happier than your favourite Petrarca, father,' said Romola, affectionately humouring the old man's disposition to dilate in this way: 'for he used to look at his copy of Homer and think sadly that the Greek was a dead letter to him: so far, he had the inward blindness that you feel is worse than your outward blindness.' (p. 49)

Through Romola George Eliot writes much about the contrasting world of inward blindness and outward blindness. There are a lot of people in the world who forget to seek for or mistake the truth like Tito, Baldassarre and Savonarola, though they can see the world. Homer and Milton are both blind but write great poems with permanent light. Romola's father does not succeed in his life of studies. His poor life is well expressed when he is blind enough to miss Tito's wicked mind. It is true that inward blindness about human way of living is much worse than the outward blindness. With Bardo, G.Eliot asserts it clearly: it dose not matter if he is visually blind or not.

The images of ring, shrine, crucifix, armour, serpent, past, beacon, justice, faith, poetic heroes and heroines, Tito, Baldassarre, Romola, Bardo, Savonarola, revenge, truth, morality, betrayal, love.....
and God are all changeable like English weather by light or dark according to the state of mind. In Romola, George Eliot puts the images in order and describes the delicate relationship between the outward tie of appearance and the inward tie of mind in a perfectly contrasting way by the use of words. Tito is a perfect traitor. His final aim is pleasure. Baldassarre is a perfect revenger. His is revenge. Savonarola is a perfect dreamer. His is dream. Inward blindness of inward tie of mind drives them to mistake the truth or light for false or dark. Their way of thinking about or looking at the world is mainly based upon their final aim. Romola is a perfect moralist. Her final aim in life is happiness. Whenever the characters come to a crucial stage of life, their judgment or their real figures are clearly represented through the perfect contrasting descriptions or images of light and dark. Like Piero di Cosimo, George Eliot is obsessed with them and she delineates the utterly complicated world as it is and to enlarge her literary world. In this sense she is nearly a perfect manipulator of light and dark, and writes Romola with permanent light like blind Homer and Milton.

Notes


The turning-point of her career was her attempt in Romola (1863) to write a historical novel of the Italian Renaissance. All that learning could offer in preparation for the novel George Eliot possessed, but the spirit of that period of strangely conflicting values is absent, and Romola herself appears as some graceful nineteenth-century Pre-Raphaelite who has wandered by mistake into Renaissance Italy. (my emphasis)


Just as metaphors and characters seem inseparable in Timon of Athens, for instance, where the images of gold and sex get body from the real gold and real harlots, and the properties and characters are given a symbolic status by their relation with the metaphors, so in George Eliot the scenic method is inseparable from the habit of metaphor. The interplay between scene and image fixes a symbolic frame around the scene and gives visual intensity to the imagery.


More than a week ago I received the news that poor Chrissey had lost one of her pretty little girls of fever; that the other little one—they were the only two she had at home with her—was also dangerously ill, and Chrissey herself and her servant apparently attacked by typhus too. The thought of her in this state is a

Having, in examination-papers and undergraduate essays, come much too often on the proposition that 'George Eliot is the first modern novelist', I finally tracked it down to Loas David Cecil's *Early Victorian Novelists*. In so far as it is possible to extract anything clear and coherent from the variety of things that Loas David Cecil says by way of explaining the phrase, it is this: that George Eliot, being concerned, not to offer 'primarily an entertainment', but to explore a significant theme—a theme significant in its bearing on the 'serious problems and preoccupations of mature life' (p. 291)—breaks with 'those fundamental conventions both of form and matter within which the English novel up till then had been constructed' (p. 288)


But the men seated among the branching tapers and the flashing cups could know nothing of the pale fierce face that watched them from without. *The light can be a curtain as well as the darkness* (my emphasis)


To no element in a picture did George Eliot apply the criterion of truthfulness more carefully than to expression. She agreed with G. H. Lewes that "a well-painted face, with a noble expression, is the highest reach of art, as the human soul is the highest thing we know." To her nineteenth-century eye, expression was the gateway to the soul, the mind, the passions, the sentiments, *transmitting the invisible life through a visible language of facial and corporal signs*. According to Ruskin, "the expression of the thoughts of the persons represented will always be the first thing considered by the painter who worthily enters that highest school of art." Expression was certainly the first thing considered by George Eliot in most pictures of human figures. It was her point of imaginative entry into such paintings; if it failed, so, usually, did her sympathy for the paintings as a whole. But if expression succeeded, it could redeem many flaws, as we may see in her account of Titian’s *The Assumption of the Virgin* (fig. 2) (my emphasis)

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had tried in her ears with such longing in the bright sunshine on the 30th of July! She had no longing to put them in her ears now.


*George Eliot is not a novelist of the overnight conversion.* The crises should rather be regarded as stages in a process of gradual change. They usually reach a culmination towards the novels’ close: in Adam’s adjustment to the facts of the betrayal by Arthur and Hetty, or in Dorothea’s conquest of her jealousy in her effort to save Lydgate’s marriage. (my emphasis)


Romola’s attitude to Savonarola may here be recalled: it is George Eliot’s own attitude to dogmatic religion. In so far as he stands for the prophetic will and insight, for the determination to bring Florence back to God, and to die if need be in the attempt, Savonarola is grand and heroic in her eyes; such absolute devotion to the highest aims and standards awes and humbles her; She forgets his superstitious beliefs and sees only the saint; she returns to Tito at his command. But when Savonarola refuses to speak the word that will save her godfather’s life, all is changed:

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

“‘And that is true!’ said Savonarola, with flashing eyes, Romola’s voice had seemed to him in that moment the voice of his enemies.

“The cause of party is the cause of God’s Kingdom.”

“‘I do not believe it!’ said Romola, her whole frame shaken with passionate repugnance. “God’s Kingdom is something wider—else, let me stand outside it with the beings that I love.”’

In her grief and rage at finding him insensible to human appeal, she loses all that admiration which had made her hitherto ‘unmindful of his aberrations, and attentive only to the grand curve of his orbit’.


In *Romola* the images of light return, though not the common objects. Romola’s disenchanting illumination is something more dramatic than the cold light of morning, as we might expect from the novel which contains almost nothing of George Eliot’s characteristic understatement of event and character. Like
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Arnold's Empedocles, Romola looks at the stars. She loses her dream, the dream of human fellowship and service, and she shrinks from 'the light of the stars, which seemed to her like the hard light of eyes that looked at her without seeing her' (ch. lxvi). Like the common daylight in the other books the significance of the light is that it forces her to see the indifferent life outside the self.

Here too the image is repeated, and the repetition emphasizes a coincidence of character. Similar light falls on Savonarola, the parallel and the contrast to Romola. When he asks for a sign from Heaven there is a sudden stream of sunlight which lights his face and satisfies the crowd. The effect is a temporary one:

But when the Frate had disappeared, and the sunlight seemed no longer to have anything special in its illumination, but was spreading itself impartially over all things clean and unclean, there began, along with the general movement of the crowd, a confusion of voices. (ch. lxvii)


And the fullest example of such a whole is the highest example of Form: in other words, the relation of multiplex interdependent parts to a whole which is itself in the most varied & therefore the fullest relation to other wholes. Thus, the human organism comprises things as diverse as the finger-nails & tooth-ache, as the nervous stimulus of muscle manifested in a shout, & the discernment of a red spot on a field of snow; but all its different elements or parts of experience are bound together in a more necessary wholeness or more inseparable group of common conditions than can be found in any other existence known to us. The highest Form, then, is the highest organism, that is to say, the most varied group of relations bound together in a wholeness which again has the most varied relations with all other phenomena. (my emphasis)