Transformation of Rage
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Pathological Narcissism in
Romola

Literary critics of *Romola*, whatever their persuasion, agree that the novel represents a turning point in George Eliot's career. *Romola* is a very different kind of novel from *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Silas Marner*, each of which takes place in provincial England during the generation before its creation. By contrast, *Romola* is set in medieval Italy. Eliot began her research for her historical novel during her stay with Lewes in Florence in 1860, after the completion of *The Mill on the Floss*. Although the writing of *Silas Marner* interrupted her plans for *Romola*, she returned to Florence to do research in April 1861—for “thirty-four days of precious time spent there” (GE Journal, qtd. in Haight, *Biography* 348). Upon her return to England she settled into “prolonged study [of medieval history, literature and art] for the background of the novel” (349). She began to write in October, but almost gave up in despair in November. Beginning again in January 1862, she finally completed the novel in June 1863; it was published in parts, in the *Cornhill Magazine*, beginning in July 1862 and ending in August 1863, and as a three-volume book in July 1863, by Smith, Elder and Company.

Eliot's interest in writing a novel about Savonarola's life in medieval Florence should be seen in the context of mid-Victorian enthusiasm for historical fiction, and in particular, for the medieval period. In *The Victorian Historical Novel*, Andrew Sanders attributes this enthusiasm to the pervasive influence on nineteenth-century literature of Sir Walter Scott's Waverley novels; he also makes the point that Scott's influence on the nineteenth century was actually based more on his development of the novel into a “morally and socially serious” literary form (5) than on his interest in history. In a chapter on *Romola*, Sanders stresses Eliot's
particularly “profound and pervasive debt to Scott.” As her biographers attest, she began reading Scott at age seven, and as an adult, when she was living with her aging father, read aloud Scott’s novels to him at night. Sanders asserts that Eliot’s appreciation of the Waverley novels “was a vital shaping influence on the nature, form and intent of her own fiction” (168). Scott’s influence can be felt in her portrayal of the provincial communities of her early novels, “and in the way in which all of her novels consider the relationship between a particular place and a particular time. Both novelists were fascinated by a sense of human community and by the links between the responsive individual and the society around him” (169).

Eliot experienced much anxiety over the accuracy of her use of details of the period. Critics and biographers often mention her conscientious labor over the research, and her difficulties, for fear of insufficient knowledge, in getting started on the writing. In addition, she herself often mentioned in letters to friends before and during the writing of the book her recurring depressions and illnesses, as well as Lewes’s frequent and sometimes severe illnesses. Yet she felt later that writing the book had transformed her. She told John Cross toward the end of her life that “she could put her finger on it as marking a well-defined transition in her life. ‘I began it a young woman, — I finished it an old woman,’” she said. She also told her editor, John Blackwood, in 1877, that “there is no book of mine about which I more thoroughly feel that I could swear by every sentence as having been written with my best blood, such as it is, and with the most ardent care for veracity of which my nature is capable” (Haight, Biography 362).

Critics have appreciated the novel’s complexity. Henry James saw Romola as the “most important” of Eliot’s novels—“not the most entertaining nor the most readable, but the one in which the largest things are attempted and grasped” (Haight, Century 52). Many modern critics, too, like Jerome Thale, recognize in Romola an attempt to develop a new kind of novel with more “weight” and “depth” than her early fiction (Novels 75). George Levine sees the novel as anticipating her last work, Daniel Deronda, by virtue of its movement in the direction of a more complex vision than exists in her earlier novels (81). Felicia Bonaparte’s book-length study of the novel, The Triptych and the Cross: The Central Myths of George Eliot’s Poetic Imagination, confirms Eliot’s own statement that “there is scarcely a phrase, an incident, an allusion that did not
gathering its value to me from its supposed subservience to my main artistic purpose” (Letters 4:97). Bonaparte concludes herself that Romola is “a symbolic narrative in which every character, every event, every detail—every word, in fact—is an image in an intricate symbolic pattern” (10). Sanders, assessing the novel’s value as historical fiction, calls it “one of the major monuments... in its period, ... a masterpiece integral to the entire cultural achievement of the nineteenth century” (196).

The story of Romola begins in 1492 in Florence, toward the end of the life of Savonarola, a Roman Catholic friar (1452–98) who became famous as a religious reformer. Concerned early in his life with the humanistic paganism that he perceived as corrupting every aspect of life in Italy, including religion, he finally renounced the world to enter the Dominican order. He became a lecturer in the convent of San Marco, where he gained a reputation for his learning and asceticism. Nine years after becoming a friar, he experienced a sudden revelation which inspired him to begin his prophetic sermons. During Lent in 1485 and 1486, he put forward his well-known propositions that the Church needed reforming, and that it would be scourged, and then renewed. Popular enthusiasm for his preaching increased when his prophecy that the Medici rule would be overthrown by the invasion of Charles VIII of France proved true. By that time, according to Donald Weinstein’s account of the period (1494–98), Savonarola dominated the Florentine scene. He succeeded in establishing a democratic government which he hoped might initiate the reform of Italy and of the Church (274–77). Unfortunately for him, however, his sudden rise to power provoked opposition in the form of a political party, the Arrabati, which formed an alliance with foreign powers, including the pope. In 1495 the pope took the step of forbidding Savonarola, who was critical of the corrupt clergy, to preach. Although Savonarola continued preaching, his popularity waned, as Florence began to experience economic difficulties. He was excommunicated in 1497 for disobeying the pope’s order, and was eventually tried and condemned by an ecclesiastical court, which then turned him over to the civil authorities for punishment. He was hanged and his body burned in 1498.

Historical interpretations of Savonarola have varied greatly; in the nineteenth century, he was admired by some historians as a prophet and vilified by others as a self-deluded fantasist (Weinstein 4, 5). Although
Eliot shares Pasquale Villari’s interpretation [Life and Times of Girolamo Savonarola 1859, 1861], which accepts “the liberal and moral tendencies in the Frate’s program,” yet “rejects the vestiges of medievalism which encumbered effective political and moral action” (Santangelo 119), her reading of history was extensive, and it would be a mistake to point to one source as defining her perspective on Savonarola’s life. Her analysis of him as a charismatic preacher whose visions and oratory were fueled by his anger at the corruption he perceived in society, and whose influence over others derived from an “innate need to dominate” (621), seems to be entirely her own, based on her reading of the sources, including Savonarola’s own writings.

Eliot’s conception of her historical novel was influenced by Bulwer Lytton’s Rienzi, a Victorian novel about a medieval Roman patriot who became tyrannical after he gained political power. According to Hugh Wittemeyer, Eliot shared with Bulwer, who was “the foremost theorist and one of the foremost practitioners of the genre,” the mid-Victorian emphasis on factual accuracy in historical fiction—a departure from Scott’s practice of “violating known chronology and inventing fictitious incidents” for dramatic purposes (Studies 62). At the same time, she shared Bulwer’s belief that the “inner history” of a person, “when it is unknown, may be imagined or invented in keeping with the traditional license of romance” (63). Unlike Bulwer, however, Eliot does not make her historical figure the title character of her story. By making a fictitious character, Romola, the protagonist, and showing how that individual’s life is affected by historical events, Eliot thus “reverts to [the practice of] Scott in his Waverley novels” (68). Moreover, Eliot’s account of her character is more complex than Bulwer’s; she brought to historical romance her “vision of society as a complex structure or tissue of interdependent elements, dynamically changing through time under the influence of multiple and interacting causes, and gradually ameliorating the lives of its individual members” (70).

Eliot’s portrayal of the growth of a young woman into adulthood in the context of the political events of fifteenth-century Florence has much in common with her English novels; Romola shares traits with Dinah and Maggie, and with Dorothea, the heroine of Eliot’s later novel, Middlemarch. Romola is “a tall maiden of seventeen or eighteen” (93), the daughter of an obsessive blind scholar, Bardo. Her father has pro-
vided her with an education, with the result that she is able to be a substantial help to him in his work of organizing and preserving his library. She patiently endures his ongoing demands, which have intensified with old age; nonetheless, the two have a loving, if ambivalent, relationship. Unfortunately, Romola soon marries an opportunist, a Greek newcomer to Florence, the handsome and charming Tito, who has posed as a scholar willing to help her father. Tito proves to be Eliot's greatest villain. Not only does he betray his stepfather, his father-in-law, and his wife Romola during the course of the story, but he also becomes a spy and counterspy for each of the warring political factions; in the process he helps to bring about the execution of Romola's godfather, Bernardo, as well as that of Savonarola.

Romola first meets Savonarola on a visit to see her brother Dino, who is also a friar, before her marriage. Later, when she tries to run away from her husband after she learns he has sold her father's library for his own gain, Savonarola convinces her of her duty as a wife to return. As the story progresses, however, not only does Romola's personal life become intolerable, but she becomes disenchanted with Savonarola because of his refusal to help prevent the execution of her godfather: Bernardo, although innocent of intrigue, is associated with the opposing political party. In despair, Romola runs away from Florence. By the time she returns, she has recovered from her anger at Tito and Savonarola, both of whom have died violent deaths in the meantime, and she is transformed by her creator into a saintly figure, a veritable Madonna, caring for the sick and dying in the plague-stricken city, and finally even willingly taking responsibility for the care of her husband's mistress, Tessa, and her two children.

Eliot's excessive idealization of Romola has been criticized by Victorians and moderns alike. One contemporary critic, Dorothea Barrett, refers to the ending of the novel as "embarrassing," because of the author's attempt to suppress "the dark side" of her heroine (88–91). Yet Romola's dark side is suggested by "the extraordinary violence with which images of the father are treated [in the novel]," as Gillian Beer expresses it (121). Emery, seeing Romola and Tito as "opposing aspects of one psyche" (85), suggests that Tito acts out Romola's hostility toward fathers (103). My own psychoanalytic interpretation will extend such discussions of Eliot's portrayal of aggression in Romola, first by
examining Tito’s characterization from the perspective of Otto F. Kernberg’s study of pathological narcissism. Previous critical views of Tito have ranged from those like Levine, who finds him uninteresting (91), and Thale, who sees the characters in Romola as less well developed than those in other novels (Novels 82), to critics like Ashton, Bonaparte, and Barbara Hardy, who see in Tito’s characterization a “fine piece of psychological analysis” (Ashton, GE 54; see also Bonaparte, Will 181; Hardy, Novels 74). My application of Kernberg’s ideas to a study of Tito will, I believe, demonstrate to a much greater extent than has been done before the depth of psychological insight that Eliot achieved in her portrayal of him. I will then discuss more briefly the characterizations of Baldassarre, Savonarola, Tessa, and Romola, also in the light of Kernberg’s theory, to show not only the “essential unity” (Emery 85) of Tito and Romola, but also the interconnections among all the major characters, who together form a psychological unity: in so doing, I will point to the source of the author’s excessive idealization of Romola. Finally, I will show how the characterizations and other aspects of the novel, including the improbable ending, are related to the past and current events in Eliot’s life at the time of writing.

The term “narcissism” as originally used by psychoanalysts and currently used popularly has a pejorative connotation that is unfortunate in light of the current thinking of both object relations theorists and self-psychologists. Whereas early Freudians thought of narcissism as the concentration of the libido on the self at the expense of object love, contemporary psychoanalytic theorists see healthy self-love and healthy object love as closely related. Kernberg, making a distinction between normal and pathological narcissism, describes normal narcissism as “the libidinal investment of the self.” He explains that in a healthy person, “when there is an increase of narcissistic investment, there is a parallel increase in the capacity to love and to give, to experience and express gratitude, to have concern for others, and for an increase in sexual love, sublimation, and creativity” (320). Attempting to avoid either the overuse or too general use of the term, Kernberg limits his definition of pathological narcissism to a group of patients in whom “the main problem appears to be the disturbance of their self-regard in connection with specific disturbances in their object relationships” (17). Pathological narcissism,
as he defines it, is characterized by the simultaneous development of pathological forms of self-love and pathological forms of object love (230). Whereas the normal self-structure consists of multiple, integrated (good and bad) self-images, Kernberg's "narcissistic personality" has a pathological self-structure, in which the self-concept is a confusion of realistic and idealized self-images, merged with an idealized object image; at the same time, unacceptable self-images are "repressed and projected onto external objects" (231-32).

Kernberg emphasizes a particular set of traits that characterizes the adult narcissistic personality. One is a surface adaptation that "masks . . . the absence of deep object relationships . . . [as well as the] severe pathology of their internalized object relationships" (146). Underneath the surface adaptation and "relatively good social functioning" (229), however, the narcissistic personality experiences a sense of inner emptiness (217, 220, 237) that accompanies an observable quality of shallowness in relationships, achievements, and convictions. The sense of inner emptiness also results in a feeling of boredom when tributes from others are not forthcoming. Thus activities are performed for the sake of outside rewards rather than for the sake of an inner sense of satisfaction. The narcissistic personality is also deficient in the capacity for genuine feelings of sadness (229) or guilt (307)—an incapacity which enables the narcissist to exploit others without remorse (228). Indeed, Kernberg stresses the narcissistic personality's need to manipulate and/or control others, a trait which, as Richard D. Chessick observes, may only appear when the person attains a position of power (8). More than any other trait, however, Kernberg emphasizes the central importance of the narcissistic personality's basic dread of attack and destruction (234)—a dread which is actually a projection of his own envy and rage arises from his fantasy that his aggression will destroy his needed love object (287-88). All the traits of the narcissistic personality are interrelated and reflect, in Kernberg's words, "the serious deterioration of all internalized object relationships" which the narcissistic personality attempts to replace with his or her pathological grandiose self. Narcissistic personalities have not succeeded in internalizing and integrating good and bad parent images; nor have they succeeded in completing the process of super-ego integration, because "the pathological fusion between ideal self, ideal object, and actual self images prevents such integration of
the superego” (232). The felt sense of emptiness, then, reflects the reality of the narcissistic person’s lack of essential internal self-structures.

In Romola, Eliot portrays Tito as possessing the qualities that Kernberg describes. Through his “distinct self-conscious adaptation of a part in life” (279), he finds it easy to become a success in Florence. Yet he is deficient both in genuine accomplishments, either as a scholar or a political leader, and in genuine feelings—of appreciation, attachment, love, guilt, or sorrow. Tito’s exploitativeness follows from his incapacity for such feelings; he relates to others only to satisfy his own needs. In his view, the purpose of life is “to extract the utmost sum of pleasure” (167).

In order to live the carefree life that he desires, Tito must deny or put off any unpleasantness. He is unable to be honest with his mistress Tessa about his marriage to Romola because “it would have been brutal to leave her, and Tito’s nature was all gentleness” (156). He cannot bear expressions of sadness: “It was enough for Tito if [Tessa] did not cry while he was present. The softness of his nature required that all sorrow should be hidden away from him” (162). Nor can he bear any open expression of anger. Romola notices early in their relationship that “nothing makes [Tito] angry” (189); but she soon learns that his seeming lack of anger is not a positive trait. When she confronts him with her knowledge of the sale of her father’s library, Tito is, typically, “not angry; he only felt the moment was eminently unpleasant,” although at the same time, his underlying aggression is evident in his determination to display his “masculine predominance” (356). Later on, his feeling toward Romola, as she confronts him about the plot against Savonarola, turns to “that cold dislike which is the anger of unimpassioned beings” (482). He withdraws from his relationship with her because, as Eliot puts it, “From all relations that were not easy and agreeable, we know that Tito shrunk” (495). Avoiding painful situations of all kinds, he is not present at Bernardo’s execution despite having participated indirectly in the plot to kill him, because “he had a native repugnance to death and pain” (582).

At the same time that Eliot portrays Tito’s incapacity for authentic feelings, she emphasizes, more than any other trait, his paralyzing sense of dread—a dread that originates in his fear of his stepfather Baldassarre’s revenge for his abandonment of him after their shipwreck. Like Kernberg’s narcissistic personality projecting his aggression onto others
and feeling only paranoid fear in himself, Tito does not think of committing murder himself: "All other possibilities passed through his mind, even to his own flight from Florence; but he never thought of any scheme for removing his enemy. His dread generated no active malignity, and he would still have been glad not to give pain to any mortal" (288). Yet the strength of his fear, which seems out of proportion to the danger as it would be perceived by others, surprises him: "Why should he, a young man, be afraid of an old one? a young man with armour on, of an old man without a weapon" (377). Slowly he comes to associate his fear of Baldassarre with his dread of Romola's judgment, after she learns he has betrayed his stepfather and begins to see into the depths of his capacity for duplicity. Tito becomes aware that "a crisis was come in his married life. The husband's determination to mastery, which lay deep below all blandness and beseechingness, had risen permanently to the surface now, and seemed to alter his face" (489-90). The gradual "hardening of cheeks and mouth" (600) is reminiscent of the change in Hetty's face as she approaches her trial and banishment in *Adam Bede*.

In order to appreciate the "fine piece of psychological analysis" in Eliot's characterization of Tito, it is necessary to understand her use of the technique of literary pictorialism. In *George Eliot and the Visual Arts*, Witemeyer explains that Eliot learned from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* how to use "ecphrasis, or the verbal imitation of works of visual art, as a technique of psychological revelation and prophecy. . . . In *Romola* and her later novels, she regularly juxtaposes her characters with morally significant art works located inside the story" (55-56). In the scene when the artist Piero di Cosimo enters Nello's barber shop, where Tito has come shortly after his arrival in Florence, he makes the abrupt remark, after briefly fixing his eye on Tito, that he would like to use his face for "a picture of Sinon deceiving old Priam" (87)—a reference to the story of the betrayal of the Trojan king by the young Greek son of Sisyphus. In contrast to Nello, who assesses Tito on the basis of his surface beauty, Piero, with his "direct" and "comprehensive" artist's vision and his commitment to "truthful representation," sees "the complexity of things" almost immediately, as William J. Sullivan observes in his essay on Eliot's characterization of the artist (393-94). Piero answers Nello's protest by saying that Tito makes the "perfect traitor," with his "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." (87). His remarks occur just before Cennini, another patron of the shop, notices Tito’s ring—the gift from his stepfather which, as Joseph Weisenfarth explains in his essay on antique gems, was intended to symbolize the bond between them (58). Thus Piero’s perception that Tito has the face of a traitor is linked ironically with the fact of his possession of the ring. As Witemeyer notes, Piero’s “intuition is prophetic: Tito will betray virtually every major character in the novel” (Visual 56).

The difference between Tito’s distorted self-image and Piero’s visionary perception of him is conveyed pictorially throughout the novel. After Tito sells his father’s ring, he goes to Piero’s residence to request a portrait of himself and Romola in a mythological scene. He asks for a “miniature device . . . painted on a wooden case . . . in the form of a triptych” with a scene of “the triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne.” He explains that he wants the subject treated “in a new way,” that is, with Bacchus seated in a ship with “the fair-haired Ariadne with him, made immortal with her golden crown—that is not in Ovid’s story” (244). Thus Tito expresses his grandiose self-concept in the form of a description of a portrait of himself and Romola as god and princess in a Greek myth.

The scene on the ship that Tito wants depicted occurs in Ovid’s poem, “Pentheus and Bacchus” (73–80), in which Bacchus, as the son of Zeus, has triumphed over the pirates who tried to kidnap him, and turned them into wild animals; he is seated in the ship amidst symbols of luxuriance. By asking for Ariadne to be placed with him in the painting, however, Tito includes elements of another mythological story of Bacchus, in which he rescues Ariadne, the princess of Crete, on the island of Naxos after she had been abandoned by Theseus, the Athenian prince whose life she had saved. By putting together the two stories, Tito thus rearranges the images of himself, his bride, and his missing stepfather in such a way that he presents himself in the painting as the rescuer of someone who has been abandoned. The portrait he requests, then, consists of an “all good” unrealistic self-image which denies the failure of his real self to rescue his stepfather, whose existence is not acknowledged. Instead, Tito is presented as the triumphant son of a Greek god.

Eliot’s pervasive allusions to the mythological Bacchus, about whom she did considerable research (Bonaparte, Triptych 63–64), convey Tito’s
psychological situation. Two elements in the Bacchic tradition seem especially pertinent in this regard. The first is the account of Bacchus's origin. According to Edith Hamilton's summary of the stories of Bacchus (54–62), the only god whose parents were not both divine, he was the son of Zeus and the Theban princess Semele, who had died before he was born; Zeus had hidden the child in his side until he was ready for birth. Thus he had never known his mother. According to the story, Bacchus longed for her so much that he defied the power of death to rescue her from the underworld and took her to Olympus, where, as the mother of a god, she was deemed fit to live with the immortals. I would suggest that when Tito refers to making Ariadne "immortal with her golden crown," he is merging yet another image in the portrait of himself and Romola—the image of his missing mother, whom he had never known, and whom he, like Bacchus, had turned into a goddess. Tito's distorted self-concept thus includes his identification of himself with the triumphant son of Zeus, united with the princess Ariadne, who represents both wife and "immortal," or eternally longed-for, mother, each of whom he has rescued from abandonment. Viewed in this light, Eliot's nineteenth-century pictorial characterization of Tito is a striking illustration of Kernberg's twentieth-century idea that the narcissistic personality's self-concept is a fusion of "ideal self, ideal object, and actual self images as a defense against an intolerable reality in the interpersonal realm" (231).

The second point to be made is that the worship of Bacchus contained two paradoxical ideas: of "freedom and ecstatic joy" and of "savage brutality" (Hamilton 57); "As the god of wine he was both man's benefactor and man's destroyer" (60). The two sides of Tito's nature are thus expressed in the idea of a portrait of him as Bacchus—with his pleasure-loving magnanimity, along with his savage aggression hidden underneath the surface. In keeping with Kernberg's theory of pathological narcissism, Tito's aggression, projected onto others, takes the form of a paranoid fear. Piero, the keenly observant artist, has already noticed this fear in Tito. He has sketched an image of him that contrasts sharply with Tito's self-image as the carefree Bacchus. "I must take the fright out of it for Bacchus," he says. "Yours is a face which expresses fear well," Piero adds, as he shows him the sketch. When Tito looks at it, "He saw himself with his right hand uplifted, holding a wine-cup, in the attitude of triumphant joy, but with his face turned away from the cup with an
expression of such intense fear in the dilated eyes and pallid lips, that he felt a cold stream through his veins, as if he were being thrown into sympathy with his imaged self" (247).

Despite this shock to his “usual easy self-command,” Tito proceeds with his plan to have the portrait made. When he gives it to Romola on the day of their betrothal, he puts away the crucifix that Savonarola had given her at the time of her brother’s death (216–17) and locks it in her cabinet, replacing it with the painting of Bacchus and Ariadne, to be used as a “shrine” instead (259–60). Bonaparte interprets in detail the meaning of Tito’s action in her chapter, “Bacchus and Ariadne Betrothed” (86–109). She explains that “just as the hollow triptych is a visual translation of Bernardo del Nero’s description of Tito, so the juxtaposition of the two images—of the crucifix locked inside the triptych—is a visual translation of one of the chief moral metaphors in the book” (94). In Kernberg’s terms, Tito’s inner emptiness is coupled with an incapacity to tolerate mournful feelings. Thus he attempts to “lock away all sadness” (263).

It is the artist Piero who also discerns the source of Tito’s fear. In a crowded scene on the piazza, he sees Baldassarre, one of a group of prisoners, clutch Tito’s arm (283). Piero, the only person in the crowd who could see Tito’s face, takes note of his look of terror. His perception is later expressed by his addition of Baldassarre to his sketch of Tito in his studio. When Romola comes to see him about a portrait to be made of herself and her father, she notices the sketch and begins to wonder about the connection between Tito and Baldassarre, but she is afraid to ask Tito about it. At this point, as Sanders observes, “[Romola] acknowledges the gulf that now divides her from her husband and his secrets” (183).

Eliot’s use of Bacchic imagery in her portrayal of both Tito and Baldassarre, whose amnesia and mania are elements of the Bacchic ritual (Bonaparte 157–58), conveys the idea that the two characters are inextricably bound together, although Tito attempts to escape his stepfather’s hold on him. He tells Romola’s father Bardo that he was raised in Italy by a stepfather who was an accomplished scholar and who was recently lost at sea (107). He remembers well how Baldassarre had “rescued a little boy from a life of beggary, filth, and cruel wrong, had reared him tenderly, and been to him a father.” Tito now feels, however, that
"Baldassarre was exacting, and had got stranger as he got older: he was constantly scrutinising Tito’s mind to see whether it answered to his own exaggerated expectations" (148–49). Baldassarre appears in the scene with the group of prisoners in the piazza, where Piero di Cosimo notices him clutch Tito’s sleeve. Afterward, “Inside the Duomo,” Baldassarre suffers a severe emotional reaction to the encounter with Tito: “Images from the past kept urging themselves upon him like delirious visions strangely blended with thirst and anguish. No distinct thought for the future could shape itself in the midst of that fiery passion: the nearest approach to such thought was the bitter sense of enfeebled powers, and a vague determination to universal distrust and suspicion” (290). It is in this frame of mind that Baldassarre suddenly hears Savonarola say in his sermon, “The day of vengeance is at hand” (291), and becomes swept up in the passion of the Frate’s oratory. Responding to Savonarola’s emphasis on punishment for wrongdoers, he identifies his personal anger with the preacher’s religious and political message. He is moved “by the idea of perpetual vengeance” to a “fierce exultant delight” (295).

With his unrelenting desire for revenge and his incapacity to forgive, Baldassarre becomes the novel’s incarnation of narcissistic rage. Chessick asserts that human aggression in its most dangerous form arises out of narcissistic rage (136); accompanied by feelings of humiliation, it may arise in an acute episode or with chronic unforgiving relentlessness (179). Eliot elucidates the complex causes, involving both present and past circumstances, that lie behind Baldassarre’s rage in chapter 30, “The Avenger’s Secret,” which occurs after his escape from captivity. One is his reaction to the effects of old age. Baldassarre stops to look at his reflection in a pool and contemplates himself, with “the intense purpose in his eyes” (335). He had lost his previously acquired knowledge (apparently through a stroke), except for brief flashes when his memory seems to return. “What he dreaded of all things now was, that any one should think him a foolish, helpless old man. No one must know that half his memory was gone” (336). In the face of the humiliating loss of his intellectual powers, Baldassarre is like the typical narcissistic personality who cannot come to terms with aging (Chessick 8).

The losses of aging are felt the more keenly because they accompany the loss of Tito. Through Baldassarre’s ruminations, however, we learn his real reason for originally rescuing Tito: “I was a loving fool—I worshipped a woman once, and believed she could care for me; and then
I took a helpless child and fostered him; and I watched him as he grew, to see if he would care for me only a little. . . . I have strained to crush out of this hard life one drop of unselfish love. . . . I thought, this boy will surely love me a little: because I give my life to him and strive that he shall know no sorrow” (338). Thus he is like the parents of Kernberg’s narcissistic patients who seem to give their children everything, but whose interest in them actually extends only to the gratification of their own needs. When Baldassarre does not get the appreciation that he expects, his “primary need and hope” becomes “to see a slow revenge under the same sky and on the same earth where he himself had been forsaken and had fainted with despair” (339).

Finally, Baldassarre reveals what is perhaps the ultimate source of his rage in an action that repeats the pattern of Tito’s sale of his ring: he decides to sell the one memory he has of his mother’s love, a tiny sapphire amulet which he finds inside the “breve” she has left him. Then he uses the money to buy a dagger so that he can murder Tito (340–41). Bonaparte explains that “like all the gems in the book, the sapphire has a symbolic significance. Often called the ‘holy sapphire,’ it is held to have the power to confirm the soul in its good works and to prevent wicked thoughts. . . . when Baldassarre sells the sapphire to buy the dagger, he too, like Tito, exchanges the protection of Christ for a Bacchic weapon” (156). The fact that the amulet is a gift from his mother, however, is also significant, especially when juxtaposed with Tito’s sale of his stepfather’s gift. One psychoanalytic interpretation suggested by the narrative sequence in “The Avenger’s Secret” is that Baldassarre has transferred the hostility originally felt toward the lost mother (perceived as abandoning), first onto the woman who rejects him, and then onto his adopted son Tito, whom he also sees as abandoning him. Thus, seen in the light of Kernberg’s theory, Baldassarre perpetuates his cycle of projecting his own aggression onto the unintegrated image of the lost, or “bad” parent. Even when Tito, desperately afraid for his own life, finally asks his forgiveness, Baldassarre is too caught up in his desire for revenge to be able to relent: “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 one draught of sweetness left—that you shall know agony” (379). Baldassarre confuses his nurturing of Tito with his own desperate need for a “draught of sweetness.” When Tito abandons him, he is left alone with his own need;
his rage at his loss is all that is left to nurture him, and he nurtures it in
return. “I am not alone in the world; I shall never be alone, for my
revenge is with me,” he says before he looks again at his image in the
pool “till he identified it with that self from which his revenge seemed to
be a thing apart” (338). When he finally kills Tito in chapter 67, “Waiting
by the River,” he is still so determined that “justice” be done to the
abandoner, that he is not able to let go of the dead body. He wants “to
die with his hold on this body, and follow the traitor to hell that he
might clutch him there” (639). Thus Tito and Baldassarre remain bound
together even after death.

Baldassarre is the only character in Romola who expresses rage openly;
the other major characters, like so many of the characters in Eliot’s
fiction, express aggression indirectly. Just as Tito projects his rage onto
Baldassarre and feels only an acute sense of dread within himself, so
Savonarola projects visions of doom, although never for himself, but
always for others—for Church and state officials who are perceived as
corrupt. His “burning indignation at the sight of wrong” and his “fervent
belief” that an “Unseen Justice” would “put an end to the wrong” (272)
fuel his sermons. He possesses a charismatic power over the crowds who
listen to his sermons and provide him with adulation.

Chessick’s observation that the need to control others may only ap-
pear when a narcissistic personality is in a position of power (8) is
illustrated in the portrayal of Savonarola. Eliot shows how Savonarola,
who begins by being so concerned with the corruption of those in
power, becomes corrupted by power himself. His need for control fi-
nally causes him to contradict the Christian message he had originally
espoused. Noting the egoism that links Tito and Savonarola, Bonaparte
observes that “as Tito is the chief agent in the disclosure of the Medicean
plot against Savonarola’s party, so Savonarola is the chief voice that
sanctions the execution of the Mediceans—or the chief silence, rather.

... It is that ‘neutrality’ so wholly inappropriate in a spokesman for
Christ, and so ironically reminiscent of Tito’s moral skepticism, that
makes it difficult for us now to distinguish in Savonarola’s actions be-
tween the Bacchic and the Christian visions” (219).

In Kernberg’s terms, Savonarola displays the inflated self-concept,
the need for adulation, and the sense of his right to control others
that characterize a narcissistic personality. In a discussion of group psychology, Chessick describes the unshakable self-confidence and the voicing of opinions with absolute certainty that characterize an individual suitable for group idealization. Referring to Kohut's descriptions of the charismatic individual who identifies with his grandiose self and the messianic individual who identifies with his idealized parent imago, he notes that a group crisis (such as the one caused by the political changes in Florence in Savonarola's day) can create the temporary need for a charismatic leader to mobilize a group during the difficult time (148-49).

Savonarola's temporary influence over Romola reflects the rise and fall of his political power over Florence. It begins immediately after the death of her brother when she accepts Dino's crucifix from him (214). Later, when she attempts to run away from Florence for the first time, Savonarola asserts his authority over her, as he has over the people of Florence, by urging her to return to Tito on the grounds of her duty as a wife (435). When Romola comes to him to plead for the life of her godfather Bernardo, however, he takes a passive course, arguing that others are in charge of the decision to execute him. He rationalizes that his ends justify any sacrifice required of others: "The death of five men—were they less guilty than these—is a light matter weighed against the withstanding of the vicious tyrannies which stifle the life of Italy, and foster the corruption of the Church; a light matter weighed against the furthering of God's kingdom upon earth, the end for which I live and am willing myself to die" (577-78). Savonarola's unwillingness to help Bernardo jolts Romola to reality. As she comes out from under his spell, she sees "all the repulsive and inconsistent details in his teaching with a painful lucidity which exaggerated their proportions." She understands that his concern for Church reform had come to be equated with "the measures that would strengthen his own position in Florence" (587). Romola's reaction reflects Savonarola's waning influence on the people of Florence. Eliot interweaves the story of his downfall with Romola's offstage resolution of her conflicts and her assertion of her own power as the spiritual leader and head of a family at the end of the novel. Romola succeeds in throwing off the power of the controlling father figure in a way that Savonarola, who himself rebelled against his society's controlling authority figures, ultimately failed to do. In the "Epilogue,"
however, Romola is reconciled to Savonarola’s role as temporary father in her life. She recognizes that he had helped her when she “was in great need” (676).

Tessa is linked to Tito throughout the novel, until after his death, when she becomes part of Romola’s family. As a character, she seems to be so lacking in an inner sense of self that it is possible to discuss her only in relation to other characters. The emphasis in her opening scene, when Tito notices her asleep in the crowd in the piazza, is on her childlike qualities and her need for protection, which in this case is quickly provided by her mother, Monna Ghita (68–72). The fact that both Tito and Tessa are each discovered sleeping alone in their opening scenes links them together and foreshadows the dreamlike quality of their relationship. Tessa’s next scene occurs just after Tito’s ruminations about his stepfather, when Tito sees her in the crowd during a “festa” (153) and rescues her from harassment by a “conjuror” (155). In this scene, the dynamics of their relationship are developed. Tito, apparently in reaction to the uncomfortable reality of his failure to rescue his stepfather, responds to Tessa’s own childlike need for rescue. It soon becomes clear from what she says to him that, although Tessa seems to lack an inner sense of self, her inner world is populated with unloving object representations, to use Kernberg’s terms. Tessa explains that she has lost her mother in the crowd, that she fears both parents, and that she fears her stepfather will beat her (156). Moreover, she tells Tito that her mother scolds her, loves her younger sister better, and thinks Tessa is lazy. She concludes her litany of complaints by stressing that even those outside her family are cruel to her: “Nobody speaks kindly to me. . . . And the men in the Mercato laugh at me and make fun of me” (158). Tessa’s situation, underlined by her loss of her mother in the crowd and her fear of her stepfather’s punishments, mirrors Tito’s. She feels alienated from her family, and by extension, from her society, which is perceived as treating her cruelly.

Tito sees Tessa from a distance from time to time in the city (144, 201, 255–57), but he seeks her out only in reaction to his great fear, first of his stepfather, and later, of Romola. His fear that Romola will learn his secret from Dino, the only person who knows his stepfather has been taken into slavery, provokes his “irresistible desire to go up to her and get her pretty trusting looks and prattle” (201). He reflects that “when
all the rest had turned their backs upon him, it would be pleasant to have
this little creature adoring him and nestling against him" (203). He yields
to the temptation to subject her to a fake marriage ceremony by the same
conjuror who had earlier harassed her. Like Arthur with Hetty, Tito
acts out his rescue fantasy (as suggested by the Bacchus portrait) in the
relationship with Tessa, who in turn acts out her fantasy of attachment
to a figure who seems to provide her missing self-esteem. As the story
progresses, although Tito finds Tessa’s presence comforting, he realizes
he does not love her (371). He visits her rarely, and spends as little
money on her as possible, even after they have children. He is aware that
he had first felt “a real hunger for Tessa’s ignorant lovingness and belief
in him . . . on the day when he had first seen Baldassarre, and had
bought the armor [to protect himself from him].” He remembers how
“he had felt an unconquerable shrinking from an immediate encounter
with Romola,” who, he knows, will disapprove, if she learns of his
failure to rescue his stepfather (371). For Tito, the emotionally shallow
relationship with Tessa, which he initiates simultaneously with his plans
to marry Romola, provides protection against “the arousal of fears of
attack by the object becoming important to [him]” (Kernberg 37). Tito’s
relationship with Tessa enacts the defensive situation of a narcissistic
personality, who confuses the fear of the parent image with a potential
new love object. His “ideal concept of himself” as rescuer of the childlike
Tessa is “a fantasy construction which protects him from . . . dreaded
relationships with all other people [because people are perceived as dan-
gerous].” At the same time, as Kernberg notes, this ideal self-concept
also contains “a hopeless yearning and love for an ideal mother who
would come to his rescue” (257).

Just as Tito is portrayed as bound to his father even in death, so Romola
is initially portrayed as bound to hers, although Bardo dies early in the
story. She is introduced with him in chapter 5, “The Blind Scholar and
his Daughter,” in the setting of his library and possessions, which in-
clude “a headless statue, with an uplifted muscular arm wielding a blade-
less sword; rounded, dimpled, infantine limbs severed from the trunk”
(93). Sanders notes that “the broken statues arranged around the room
match the two figures and provide a powerful image of the lifelessness of
Bardo’s philosophy” (191). It could also be said that the “pale and
sombre” look of the surroundings, along with the broken statues and
Bardo’s “moneyless” state (93, 92), convey the picture of a powerless old man, effectively castrated.

Romola has been motherless since infancy, although she has been cared for by her mother’s cousin, Monna Brigida. Her subsequent close attachment to her father comes at the cost of his control over her life. As he ages, he makes increasing demands on her time and energy for the completion of his scholarly work. Their closeness is based on their shared sense of loss: “[Her] young but wintry life . . . had inherited nothing but memories—memories of a dead mother, of a lost brother, of a blind father’s happier time.” In chapter 18, “The Portrait,” the artist Piero tells Tito he wants Romola to pose with Bardo for a painting of Oedipus and Antigone at Colinos. As in the case of Tito and Baldassarre, Piero perceives and depicts pictorially the psychological dynamic underlying the parent-child relationship. The message of the portrait is that Romola and Bardo are exiled together, the father’s sense of castration shared by the daughter.

Bardo longs for his son Dino, who has left home to become a friar. Romola struggles to be a good enough scholar to replace her brother, yet she is made to feel inadequate simply because she is a female. Even her father’s praise reveals his dissatisfaction with her, when he says that “even in learning thou art not, according to thy measure contemptible. Something perhaps were to be wished in thy capacity of attention and memory, not incompatible even with the feminine mind. But . . . thou hast a ready apprehension, and even a wide-glancing intelligence. And thou hast a man’s nobility of soul: thou hast never fretted me with thy petty desires as thy mother did” (100).

Romola’s own longing for her brother is described in the context of her first meeting with Tito, which suggests that Tito is a replacement for him: “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 again: a fair face, with sunny hair, like her own” (105). Bardo’s longing for a son to help him with his work accounts for his susceptibility to Tito; Romola, sharing her father’s longing for Dino, is equally susceptible. When she tells Bardo that she wants to marry Tito, she makes her motivation clear when she adds, “that we may both be your children and never part” (181). Tito’s betrothal gift, the triptych of Bacchus and Ariadne, also suggests that he intends to be a
replacement for Dino, whose crucifix he locks away, to help Romola forget her brother’s ominous deathbed vision of her forthcoming marriage.

Just as Tito replaces Dino, so Savonarola replaces her father. Romola initially subjects herself to his authority, as she had done with her father. The story of Romola’s growth to womanhood, then, is the story of her simultaneous separation of herself from her brother (represented by Tito) and her liberation of herself from her father’s authority (represented by Savonarola). Yet, as I have suggested earlier, Eliot’s portrayal of the change in Romola is not convincing.

Among recent critics, Graver, Ashton, and Bonaparte account for the improbable ending of Romola in terms of Eliot’s less than successful attempt to combine historical realism with symbolic elements (139, 54, 240). Eliot herself seems to confirm this view in a letter she wrote in response to Sara Hennell’s lavish praise of Romola, whom she had described as a “goddess . . . not a woman”: “You are right in saying that Romola is ideal—I feel it acutely in the reproof my own soul is constantly getting from the image it has made. My own books scourge me. I value very much your assurance that you are ‘satisfied.’ The various strands of thought I had to work out forced me into a more ideal treatment of Romola than I had foreseen at the outset—though the ‘Drifting away’ and the Village with the Plague belonged to my earliest vision of the story and were by deliberate forecast adopted as romantic and symbolic elements” (Letters 4:104).

Contemporary critics have increasingly pointed to the author’s own conflicts as the ultimate source of the novel’s unconvincing resolution. Carole Robinson sees in the novel a Victorian existentialist outlook that its author could not acknowledge; in her view, Romola embodies a “despair beyond what her author intended for her” (30). Robinson sees a “repetitive plot pattern of commitment and disillusion, decision and indecision” that “may be attributed to the novelist’s dissatisfaction with the solutions she proposes for the heroine” (31). Susan M. Greenstein’s feminist essay also describes “hesitations, denials, and magically achieved resolutions of hidden conflicts,” in this case, “about women and work” (489). Such criticisms, added to the observations mentioned earlier regarding the images of violence that subvert the author’s message of visionary altruism, echo the critical assessments of the endings of Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss.
The failed resolution of Romola is comparable to that of Adam Bede in that it is related to the author’s excessive idealization of the heroine; the reader is expected in each case to idealize a character whose aggression is not acknowledged by the author. Contrary to the author’s intention, both Dinah and Romola are actually portrayed as remaining passive in critical circumstances, while other characters act out the hostile feelings they deny. When Baldassarre tells Romola about Tito’s infidelity, he tries to take advantage of her anger by persuading her to help him murder Tito. Although she does not agree to help him, she does not try to dissuade him from committing the murder. Instead, she “chose not to answer,” reasoning that she “would win time for his excitement to allay itself” (533). Soon after, instead of warning Tito of Baldassarre’s intention, she refrains from doing so, rationalizing first that Tito would not listen to her anyway, and second, that there was more danger of Tito hurting Baldassarre than of Baldassarre finding the strength to murder him (540). In the end, in neither novel is the reader persuaded by the author’s attempt to convince her audience of the internal change in the protagonist. This is so in part because the protagonist’s new life is made possible only by the misfortune of the opposing character: in Adam’s and Dinah’s case, Hetty’s banishment, and in Romola’s, Tito’s death.

The ending of Romola can also be compared to that of The Mill on the Floss. After Savonarola’s refusal to help save Bernardo, Romola becomes disillusioned and flees Florence in despair. Wishing for death, she recalls Boccaccio’s story of “that fair Gostanzo,” who committed suicide by getting into a boat and pushing off to sea (588). Romola finds a boat for herself and, lying down inside it, lets it drift down the river toward the sea. The river scene in Romola contains elements of the two river scenes in The Mill on the Floss: the first, when Maggie, unaware of the hostility that motivates her, passively allows herself to be abducted by Stephen; the second, when Maggie, unable to resolve her conflicts, finally drowns in the flood. By letting herself drift down the river in the boat, Romola, like Maggie, temporarily “free[s] herself from the burden of choice” (590). While she is away, however, Savonarola is arrested and Tito is murdered. She has not acted on her anger at Tito; nor has she been forced to resolve her conflict about whether or not she is obligated to remain married given the circumstances of Tito’s ongoing betrayals. In both novels, passivity remains the solution for hostility and/or inner conflict.
Unlike Kohut, Kernberg stresses that it is essential for narcissistic personalities to confront their rage, which Kernberg regards as central to the psychopathology (228). This is because narcissistic personalities have a tendency to project their own aggression onto others; before cure is possible, they must come to see that the aggression is coming from within themselves. Interestingly, it is Eliot’s failure to confront the aggression in her character Romola that results in the novel’s greatest flaw, and that causes the reader’s disbelief in her growth. It is Romola’s “all good,” split-off quality, in contrast to Tito’s villainy, Baldassarre’s rage, Savonarola’s corruption, and Tessa’s weakness, that the reader cannot accept, because Eliot has not integrated the “all bad” side of human nature into her personality. Romola, the character who longs for her “dead mother, [her] lost brother, and [her] blind father’s happier time,” herself becomes the idealized, longed-for mother of narcissistic pathology.

Emery writes that when Romola flees Florence in the boat, she runs away “from an intolerable inner tension which now can be relieved only by a further regression” to a “passive oral-receptive mode” in which “she is longing for parents, and dreams of seeking the beloved dead in the tomb” (97-98). I would argue in addition that Eliot’s own reaction to her father’s death is reenacted in her heroine’s situation in Romola, a novel which was researched and written during the time (1861-63) that marked the tenth anniversary of the period following her move to London from the Midlands. The period 1851-53 was a time when she had suffered frequent depressions and, judging from her shifting attachments to men, a time spent searching for a replacement for her father. Eliot’s words—“What shall I be without my Father? It will seem as if a part of my moral nature were gone. I had a horrid vision of myself last night becoming earthly sensual and devilish for want of that purifying restraining influence” (Letters 1:284)—foreshadow her involvement with Chapman in 1851. The friendship with Herbert Spencer developed in 1851-52; the affair with Lewes the summer of 1853 (Taylor 125).

Eliot’s reaction to her father’s death is embedded not only in her heroine’s idealization of her father figure Savonarola, but in her inevitable disillusionment with him. When Romola loses faith in him, the narrative asserts that her “best support” had “slipped away from her. The vision of any great purpose . . . was utterly eclipsed for her now by
the sense of a confusion in human things which made all effort a mere 
dragging at tangled threads" (586). Wishing for death, she gets into 
the boat and flees Florence by passively floating down the river. The scene 
is also associated with Romola's decision to break her marriage vows: "The 
bonds of all strong affection were snapped. In her marriage, the highest 
bond of all, she had ceased to see the mystic union which is its own 
guarantee of indissolubleness, had ceased even to see the obligation of a 
voluntary pledge: had she not proved that the things to which she had 
pledged herself were impossible?" (586). Bonaparte mentions that "in 
her readings Eliot was often concerned with discussions of the indissolu-
bility of marriage" (240). It seems likely in light of Eliot's social ostraci-
zation that she still felt some lingering discomfort over her role in the 
Leweses' permanent separation, which had been formally arranged after 
Eliot and Lewes had eloped to the continent and returned to England 
(Haight, *Biography* 163, 179); any such feelings would no doubt be 
intensified by Lewes's recent failure to find a way to obtain a divorce 
abroad. Such discomfort is reflected in Romola's deliberations over the 
sacredness of her marriage vows: "She was thrown back again on the 
conflict between the demands of an outward law, which she recognised 
as widely-ramifying obligation, and the demands of inner moral facts 
which were becoming more and more peremptory" (552). Just as Mag-
gie's rationalizations about Stephen in *The Mill on the Floss* seem to 
reflect Eliot's self-justification for her elopement with Lewes, so Ro-
mola's reasoning in the later novel seems to serve as the novelist's ratio-
nalization for her part in Lewes's decision to separate from his wife and 
live permanently with Eliot without obtaining a legal divorce. Moreover, 
the idealized Romola quite possibly reflects Eliot's self-idealization over 
her support and stepmothering of the Leweses' children.

Eliot frequently mentions her depressions and illnesses in her letters 
before and during the writing of *Romola*. She also reports fluctuations in 
her frame of mind, for example, "despondency and distrust of myself 
... followed by hours of strength when life seems glorious" (*Letters* 
3:460)—a mental state that repeats the pattern of her experience during 
the time when her father was dying. Bowlby emphasizes in his volume 
on *Loss* the high degree of overlap between depressive disorders of all 
kinds and states of chronic mourning (3:255). He explains that disor-
dered mourning is more likely to follow the death of someone with 
whom there has been, until the loss, a close relationship (175), as was the
case with Eliot and her father. He also explains that a protracted period of dying maximizes in the survivor any preexisting ambivalence, thus resulting in pronounced feelings of guilt and inadequacy; if a survivor has done the nursing, she may feel left without a role or function after the loss (182). Such had also been the case with Eliot. Moreover, as I suggested in my chapter on Silas Marner, Eliot associated the loss of her father with her earlier loss of her mother. According to Ina Taylor’s biography, the death of Eliot’s mother had symbolized for her “the end of childhood and the orderly world of school”; she had had to give up any hope of furthering her formal education (23). Her brother Isaac, by contrast (like Romola’s brother Dino), was free to pursue his vocation. Bowlby reports that many patients who had difficulties with mourning had experienced additional distress following the death, for example, in the form of expectations that the bereaved person fill the deceased parent’s role (3:306); he also reports poor outcome when the surviving parent had made strong demands on the children for emotional support or made the child the caregiver (314). Both circumstances occurred in Eliot’s life following her mother’s death and her sister’s marriage: she became her father’s housekeeper; and later, as he aged, became ill, and approached death, she served as his sole caretaker.

The characterizations in Romola taken together form a psychological unity exhibiting the traits that Kernberg describes as characterizing pathological narcissism. As such, they reflect the defensive processes of splitting and projection against the rage that followed from what I believe to be the author’s renewed sense of loss following her family’s estrangement, her sister Chrissey’s death, and her new family’s move into London. Bowlby’s conclusion that the anniversary of a loss can activate feelings about an earlier one (152–60) provides support for my view that Eliot’s current losses revived feelings associated with the difficult time in her life surrounding her move to London ten years before. Her anxiety over the research and writing of a new kind of novel may also have been associated with her feelings at that earlier time, when she was beginning her new work for Chapman at the Westminster Review.

The excessive idealization of Romola serves, as it does in the work of the literary artists in David Aberbach’s study, Surviving Trauma, “to counterbalance extremes of unconscious hatred and guilt also provoked by . . . loss. [Such extreme idealization] is found with unusual frequency and intensity among writers who . . . lost their mothers early on” (146).
Aberbach also writes that “insofar as creativity derives from loss, the quality of the art reflects the artist’s success in mastering it, and in this way he may achieve a measure of symbolic repair” (155). Eliot’s feeling that she had grown into a new stage as a result of writing Romola is in keeping with the psychoanalytic view of “development as a series of mourning experiences” (Rothstein 226). The “weight” and “depth,” as well as the “complex vision” and “intricate symbolic pattern” of this novel are signs of growth in the artist that may also point to a “measure of symbolic repair.” Yet Eliot’s artistic failure to resolve her heroine’s dilemma, reflecting as it does both the intensity and the denial of her own aggression, almost certainly indicates her still incomplete success in mastering her own sense of loss.