



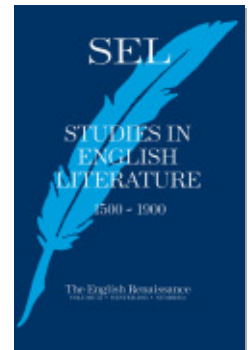
PROJECT MUSE®

Large-Scale Sympathy and Simultaneity in George Eliot's *Romola*

Jacob Jewusiak

SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, Volume 54, Number 4,
Autumn 2014, pp. 853-874 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: [10.1353/sel.2014.0044](https://doi.org/10.1353/sel.2014.0044)



➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/sel/summary/v054/54.4.jewusiak.html>

Large-Scale Sympathy and Simultaneity in George Eliot's *Romola*

JACOB JEWUSIAK

George Eliot begins her historical novel *Romola* (1862–63) in Renaissance Florence shortly after the death of Lorenzo de' Medici. The political turmoil that ensues signals a shift from the old order to what the narrator describes as “government on a broader basis.”¹ George Eliot's interest in the transition from an oligarchy to a republic hinges on how individuals—especially those in positions of leadership—relate to the needs of large groups of people: how does one know what a multitude of citizens, signified by a term like “Florence,” wants or feels?² This question is answered by *Romola*'s theorization of large-scale sympathy, which attempts to include individuals outside one's immediate social sphere without becoming so wide as to evacuate content from that sympathy. The novel pivots on the performance of large-scale acts of sympathy with strangers, such as the attempts—particularly by the Frate Girolamo Savonarola, Tito Melema, and Romola de' Bardi—to imagine the experience of, and still act ethically toward, others with whom they are not familiar.

Romola's narrative on the volatility of Florentine politics provides George Eliot with a representative occurrence through which to explore the operation of sympathy in the wake of Victorian concerns about large groups of newly enfranchised English. Given the complexity and magnitude of the large group, is sympathy even possible on such a scale?³ If so, what are the conditions that facilitate such an act? I am defining a large-scale act of sympathy as a relation between an individual and a group of people who solicit sympathy from that individual. The specific size of the group is less important than the fact that this group has

Jacob Jewusiak is an assistant professor at Valdosta State University.

enough people to give it an identifying feature that might solicit sympathy. The city-state of Florence might provoke a large-scale sympathetic response, but so might a group of people within that city—for example, the Mediceans or the Dominicans. While the number of individuals within the group may or may not be countable, the number must not be so small that it can be instantly intuited.⁴ As such, acts of large-scale sympathy necessarily involve an expansive and agile imagination that is capable of producing feeling outside the limits of immediate experience.

Large-scale sympathy has received much less attention from critics than the kind of sympathy that is performed between individuals. Even when critics claim to account for large-scale sympathy, this often manifests as a generalization of what a character does on an individual basis to what that character might do on a larger scale.⁵ Most relevant to my argument is the work of Candace Clark, who, in the context of her analysis of the “social form” of American sympathy, provides an account of sympathy that allows for “feeling for people we will never know.”⁶ According to Clark, “Even in the absence of a face-to-face relationship, a sympathizer can open a sympathy account for a stranger to whom he or she feels related by common membership in a particular community, society, or in the general category of humankind.”⁷ In *Romola*, George Eliot tests the limits of sympathy generated “in the absence of a face-to-face relationship,” thereby interrogating the symbolic function of “common membership” in facilitating large-scale acts of sympathy. George Eliot represents large-scale sympathy as a primarily temporal relation not necessarily bound to the object of sympathy by spatial proximity. This large-scale sympathy permits the imagining of unknown others who exist alongside one’s self and yet are outside one’s everyday experience.⁸ In her novel, large-scale sympathy always involves detaching the individual from the personal relations in his or her life, or a shifting from the individual diachronic experience to the synchronic, in order to create the possibility for an individual to relate ethically to large groups. But such detachment has the tendency to disable the crosscurrents of affect that make sympathy an ethical act.⁹

In what follows, I argue that we read George Eliot’s *Romola* as an experiment that assesses the limits of sympathy when confronted with the multitude of subjects that linger outside one’s immediate experience.¹⁰ *Romola* presents the reality that there are too many objects requiring a sympathetic response at any given time. As much of George Eliot’s critique is linked with the way particular characters in *Romola* correspond with a certain

scale of sympathy, my argument will proceed as a case study of characters, addressing the following problems: first, the failure of minor characters to hold multiple objects of sympathy in their minds at the same time; second, Savonarola's tendency to avoid this difficulty by grouping objects of sympathy into a generalization; and third, the danger that large-scale sympathy poses for the operation of sympathy on an individual scale. In the most fully realized episode of large-scale sympathy in the novel—Romola's intervention in the plague village—the possibility of large-scale sympathy appears as a tenuous negotiation between the collective and individual registers of social experience.

Renaissance Florence provides George Eliot with an example of the difficulty of faithfully representing large, heterogeneous populations—a political problem that England faced in the early 1860s as Parliament debated increasing the franchise with another Reform Act.¹¹ In *Romola*, large-scale sympathy provides a solution to this political crisis; it holds out the utopian possibility for leaders to meet the wants and needs of the multitude both accurately and ethically. George Eliot warns, however, that this solution can devolve into an ethically neutral engagement when individuals exploit knowledge about the multitude for personal gain. Thus, what *Romola* allows us to see is a fault line at the heart of George Eliot's work whereby the necessity of imagining the simultaneous experience of others is continually brought into conflict with the impossibility—and the danger—of doing so.¹²

MINOR CHARACTERS AND THE FAILURE OF SYMPATHY

In his study of characterization and the nineteenth-century realist tradition, Alex Woloch argues that there are “dual impulses to bring in a multitude of characters and to bring out the interiority of a singular protagonist.”¹³ Woloch is especially interested in the dynamics of the minor character, whose “strange significance ... resides largely in the way that the character disappears, and in the tension or relief that results from this vanishing.”¹⁴ While such a claim is likely true of the minor character in any realist novel, it holds a special resonance for those minor characters in *Romola* that are consistently unable to imagine the concurrent experiences of other minor characters, and instead channel their sympathy into a single object at the expense of everyone else. Privileging only a single object of sympathy, characters such as Tessa, Bardo de' Bardi, and Baldassarre Calvo demonstrate how minor characters are erased or forgotten from the narrative. The

difficulty that minor characters have in sympathizing with more than one object at a time produces a critique of sympathy that is based solely on a spatial model; these characters are represented as dimwitted, antisocial, and deranged, primarily because they are unable to imagine the experiences of others that proceed simultaneously outside their immediate proximity.

The difficulty of confronting the expansiveness of simultaneity is registered in Tessa's myopia. The novel's villain, Tito, has two wives: his lawfully wedded wife, Romola, a respected member of Florentine society, and his "other wife," Tessa, a Contadina whom he tricks into believing that she is married to him (p. 432). When Tito leaves Tessa's immediate proximity, she is unable to imagine Tito's deceit; her "mind had never formed an image of his whereabouts or his doings when she did not see him: he had vanished, and her thought, instead of following him, had stayed in the same spot where he was with her" (p. 146). When Romola discovers Tessa's identity later in the novel, she does not feel anger or disgust toward the affair with his "other wife" but rather disbelief, asking Tessa, "and you never know where your husband goes to when he leaves you?" (p. 438). Tessa cannot imagine that Tito has a life that proceeds simultaneously with her own. Her experience is limited to her immediate surroundings; while Tessa waits for Tito, she does not imagine the things that he might be doing in the meantime. Instead, the moment Tito leaves Tessa's side, it is as if his life pauses, only to resume when she sees him again, proceeding in time with herself. Yet, when Tito sleeps on Tessa's lap, his very proximity seems to overwhelm her consciousness: "She was too happy to go to sleep—too happy to think that Tito would wake up, and that then he would leave her, and she must go home. It takes very little water to make a perfect pool for a tiny fish, where it will find its world and paradise all in one, and never have a presentiment of the dry bank" (p. 105). When he is away, Tessa cannot imagine that Tito has an independent and concurrent experience of his own; when he is with her, Tessa is incapable of imagining a world (the "dry bank") outside that specific space. In short, Tessa is so engrossed in her immediate experience that she closes off everything else—even the simple awareness that other people exist contemporaneously with herself.

This myopia is further illustrated by Romola's scholarly father, Bardo, who is chastised by his cousin for closing himself off from the world: "[I]f I didn't bring you some news of the world now and then, I do believe you'd forget there was anything in life but these mouldy ancients" (p. 118). Bardo's lack of interest in the "news

of the world” signifies his reluctance to acknowledge events that occur simultaneously with his own experience. Instead, he takes refuge in the “mouldy ancients” who exist outside the current of the present time. Bardo’s physical blindness, a condition that he describes as a “world of memory in which the distant seems to grow clearer and the near to fade,” embodies his refusal to imagine the experiences of others (p. 123). If Bardo’s blindness facilitates his academic project, a similar kind of myopia helps to fuel Baldassarre’s revenge. Betrayed by his adopted son Tito and traumatized by slavery, Baldassarre spends most of the novel impotently obsessing over his vengeance. Consumed with the injustice of his lot, Baldassarre’s hatred restricts his sense of social relations by focusing his attention on a single person: “I only know one man,” he says to Tessa (p. 281). In each case, the text registers how the narrow focus on one’s own interests comes at the cost of imagining the experiences of others.

In *Romola*, the failure of characters to engage in large-scale sympathy has ethical repercussions. In the obsessive drive to master a single object, these myopic characters—both unfairly and unknowingly—implicate other people in their own schemes; for example, Bardo’s interest in academic subjects overshadows his responsibility to his daughter, whom he uses as a pawn to facilitate his research. These characters practice an egocentrism that results in a social myopia whereby the many are either ignored or reduced to insignificance. George Eliot later transposes her critique of this egocentrism to the level of narration when the narrator interrupts the story of *Middlemarch: A Study in Provincial Life* to ask, “But why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage?”¹⁵ George Eliot stresses that, when the narrator only follows the story of Dorothea Brooke, the reader forgets or ignores the fact that other characters are having thoughts simultaneously with Dorothea. The reader is in danger of reducing the elderly scholar, Edward Casaubon, to a set of “blinking eyes” and “moles” that stand in for the “intense consciousness within him.”¹⁶ With the rupture of narrative continuity signaled by “why always Dorothea?,” the reader is immediately alerted to the presence of multiple, simultaneous narratives that also deserve his or her attention. Despite the allure of “young skins,” there is an obligation on the part of narrative to offer even the “faded” characters to the reader’s sympathies.¹⁷ The egocentrism of Tessa, Baldassarre, and Bardo is implicated in *Middlemarch*’s argument against narrative myopia, and both novels critique a sympathy that is routed exclusively

from one individual to another. This critique suggests the need for an alternative way of relating to—and sympathizing with—the multitude of people that exist simultaneously with one's self.¹⁸

SYMPATHY, SCALE, AND GENERALIZATION

In contrast to the myopia of the novel's minor characters, Savonarola experiences the difficulty of reconciling his fantasy of a "universal Church" with the realities of his expanding congregation (p. 198). Charismatic, politically savvy, and intensely spiritual, Savonarola's ambition to "represent all Christendom" resonates with the expansiveness of simultaneity, but his goal of social and moral reform—what he calls "unseen Purity"—is continually problematized by the existence of discrete individuals within his social generalizations (pp. 200 and 479–80). Savonarola's rise to power is marked by his tendency to generalize large groups of people as a collective body, an expedient that allows him to sidestep the difficult task of engaging with an overwhelming number of individuals. In his sermons, for example, he repeatedly addresses his audience as "Italy," "Florence," "people," or "my children" (pp. 216–7 and 479). Although practical, Savonarola's use of generalizations underscores a deeper need to sympathize with his audience by projecting solidarity upon it. This need is inflected in the religious garb that distinguishes the Florentine monks: "Every one knew that these mysterious forms were Florentine citizens of various ranks, who might be seen at ordinary times going about the business of the shop, the counting house, or the State; but no member now was discernible as son, husband, or father. They had dropped their personality, and walked as symbols of a common vow ... the garb of all was a complete shroud, and left no expression but that of fellowship" (p. 357). As many scholars have already shown, George Eliot's fiction underlines the "ethical importance of particularizing"; the problem that Savonarola raises, however, is the difficulty of modulating one's sympathy when there are multiple particulars—individuals—that require a sympathetic response at the same time.¹⁹

By directing his sympathy toward the universal rather than the individual, Savonarola loses the flexibility to account for the fluctuations of human sympathies and the vicissitudes of the individual lot. For example, when a group of prominent Mediceans are convicted of treason and sentenced to death (including Romola's godfather, Bernardo del Nero), Savonarola justifies revoking their right of appeal by the following: "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 ... a light matter weighed against the furthering of God's Kingdom upon earth" (p. 464). In other words, the few must be sacrificed for the greater good. Romola's attempt to create sympathy for her elderly godfather has little traction in the face of the generalization of "God's Kingdom." As a consequence, Bernardo is executed shortly after Romola's meeting with Savonarola. While the scale of his ministry is expansive, Savonarola is unable or unwilling to refocus his sympathy on the individual. His error in deciding Bernardo's fate is neatly summarized by the complaint of Lorenzo Tornabuoni, a member of the group of Florentines loyal to the exiled Medici: "This theory of the Frate's, that we are to have a popular government, in which every man is to strive only for the general good, and know no party names, is a theory that may do for some isle of Cristoforo Colombo's finding, but will never do for our fine old quarrelsome Florence" (p. 327).²⁰ Tornabuoni's comparison suggests that Savonarola's failure results from the inability of his theory to account for Florence's heterogeneity and its large scale. It would be much better, Tornabuoni suggests, that Savonarola deploy his generalizations on a social group that is delimited and homogenous—"some isle of Cristoforo Colombo's finding"—rather than the complex and expansive society of Florence.

The slippage in Savonarola's ethical judgment between the individual and the aggregate is exemplified by his evasion of personal contact with other individuals. Tornabuoni expresses the difficulty of arranging a private meeting with the Frate: "I have been favoured with an interview in the Frate's own cell, which, let me tell you, is not a common favour" (p. 326). When Romola schedules a meeting with him, the narrator observes that "[t]he rigidity with which Savonarola guarded his life from all the pretexts of calumny made such interviews very rare, and whenever they were granted, they were kept free from any appearance of mystery" (p. 456). Savonarola's recoil from the individual is embodied in the admonition that he gives to Romola: "You have lived with those who sit on a hill aloof, and look down on the life of their fellow-men ... As if you, a wilful wanderer, following your own blind choice, were not below the humblest Florentine woman who stretches forth her hands with her own people, and craves a blessing for them; and feels a close sisterhood with the neighbor who kneels beside her and is not of her own blood; and thinks of the mighty purpose that God has for Florence" (p. 341).

The Frate begins by encouraging Romola to renounce her individualism and recognize the fact that she exists alongside—even below—the “humblest” woman. This responsibility branches out to “sisterhood with the neighbor” and culminates in generating sympathy for an entire city. He advises Romola to engage in large-scale sympathy and to feel “the glow of a common life with the lost multitude” (p. 342). There is no room for the individual in Savonarola’s doctrine, just as there is no room for the individual in his personal life; individual specificity is continually sacrificed upon the altar of ever-expanding social generalizations.

The narrator illustrates how the large-scale nature of Savonarola’s ethical project—the vastness and heterogeneity of his congregation—threatens to overwhelm it: “No man ever struggled to retain power over a mixed multitude without suffering vitiation: his standard must be their lower needs, and not his own best insight” (p. 223). Eventually, Savonarola’s generalizations lose touch with the very people for whom they are supposed to account. In his attempt to include everyone, Savonarola merely gestures to the lowest common denominator. George Eliot identified a similar tendency in contemporary politicians early in her career. In “The Natural History of the German Life,” she writes, “Probably, if we could ascertain the images called up by the terms ‘the people,’ ‘the masses,’ ‘the proletariat,’ ‘the peasantry,’ by many who theorize on those bodies with eloquence ... we should find that they indicate almost as small an amount of concrete knowledge—that they are as far from completely representing the complex facts summed up in the collective term, as the railway images of our non-locomotive gentleman. How little the real characteristics of the working classes are known to those who are outside them.”²¹ Without the direct experience of the working class, politicians derive their policies from impressions that they receive from painters “still under the influence of idyllic literature, which has always expressed the imagination of the cultivated and town-bred, rather than the truth of rustic life.”²² Thus, without direct knowledge, those in power “talked for the ‘people,’ and forgot that the peasants were included in the term.”²³ George Eliot warns that the substitution of the artistic ideal for actual experience cultivates this tendency toward political generalization. This generalization, in turn, replaces the individuals of a social group with a stereotype, since the term “people” does not include any people at all. Rather, the “people” refers to the highly mediated image of the “peasant” that is separated from its referent, an idealization that has become a generalization obscuring the original ground. Such

“acts of distancing,” Amanda Anderson suggests, “produce a more primary effect, which is psychological: the underdevelopment of the moral faculties, particularly the faculty of sympathy.”²⁴

Nevertheless, the target of George Eliot’s criticism—the “many who theorize on those bodies with eloquence”—does not protect her against relying on the same kind of generalization that she critiques in others.²⁵ As Amanda Anderson goes on to argue, George Eliot’s critique in “The Natural History of the German Life” ultimately results in a conflicted position that forces her “to mediate between sympathetic immersion and detached analysis and judgment.”²⁶ In a surprising way, Savonarola is capable of both as he addresses “the wide multitude” as if this composite group were an individual entity in which “[e]very changing tone, vibrating through the audience, shook them into answering emotion” (p. 218). Through this gesture, Savonarola illustrates the possibility of large-scale sympathy. Yet such an act cannot be sustained for long. Not only does Savonarola bring together the people of Florence to purify them, but he also creates the conditions of their dissolution; the crowd, as critics of George Eliot have noted, is a force of destruction as well as reform.²⁷ It is not long until the crowd—now a “hooting multitude”—abuses Savonarola as he is escorted to prison: “[H]e felt himself spat upon, smitten and kicked with grossest words of insult” (p. 509). The large-scale act of sympathy, like the one performed by Savonarola, is fleeting.

The magnitude of Savonarola’s public addresses physically and emotionally exhausts him so that he cannot sustain long-term sympathetic engagement; the narrator notes “the passion with which he offered himself as a victim became at last too strong to allow of further speech, and he ended with a sob” (p. 218).²⁸ While the temporality of large-scale sympathy is determined in part by the psychological and physiological limitations of the subject, it also results from the methodological assumptions that make such an act possible in the first place. Savonarola uses generalizations as a means of addressing his object of sympathy, and thus, he detaches himself from a diachronic experience; in other words, for Savonarola, the multitude is not a group of individuals that proceed through time, but a synchronic snapshot—the generalization—that represents the simultaneous experience of others.²⁹ Simultaneity cultivates a detached, synchronic perspective of the organization of social bodies that provides a much wider purview than the situated knowledge that direct experience produces. Such temporal distancing in *Romola* parallels what Amanda Anderson identifies in her reading as George Eliot’s desire to “mediate

between sympathetic immersion and detached analysis." But it also suggests that, if large-scale sympathy is possible, then it is only so momentarily.

Sympathizing with a group—with “the many”—has the problematic tendency toward devolving into sympathizing with a generalization rather than the discrete individuals that compose the group. While generalization is a tempting solution to the problem of managing one's sympathy on a large scale, George Eliot suggests in *Romola* and “The Natural History of the German Life” that this universalizing tendency is insufficient as an ethical response. Indeed, such a response derives from the mistaken assumption that sympathy operates in the same way at both the micro and the macro levels. Rae Greiner argues “Sympathy takes place *in* time, in what we might call narrative time. Here simultaneity is replaced by more protracted, reflexive, and deliberative acts.”³⁰ While this may be true for sympathy on an individual level, when it comes to large-scale sympathy, the conditions that produce a successful act are primarily synchronic in nature. As such, though processing sympathy collectively has the virtue of being expansive, it is also overwhelming and fleeting. As I have already stated, it is difficult to remember others who exist outside of one's social context; while characters such as Tessa, Bardo, and Baldassarre are incapable of such an act, Savonarola resorts to generalizing as a way to manage his sympathy, gaining and losing his object of sympathy at the same time.

NARRATIVE OMNISCIENCE AND THE COSMOPOLITAN STAKES OF SIMULTANEITY

Early in the novel, Nello, the loquacious barber, explains the difference between his chosen profession and that of an author: “Now a barber can be dispassionate; the only thing he necessarily stands by is the razor, always providing he is not an author ... I saw very early that authorship is a narrowing business, in conflict with the liberal art of the razor, which demands an impartial affection for all men's chins” (p. 35). Even as the novel represents a wide swath of society, it is by necessity a “narrowing business” that is partial to the representation of only a few characters' chins. Nello highlights a problem that is fundamental to the projects both of narrative omniscience and of cosmopolitanism: how does one balance the multitude of objects available to one's sympathies at any given time? Approaching the level of the narrator's omniscience, Tito embodies a cosmopolitan ideal

while problematizing the way that the narrator tries to channel sympathy into a single story. Preternaturally aware of things that are happening simultaneously with his actions, and yet unwilling to act upon the channels of sympathy that such awareness creates, Tito indicates that the problem of large-scale sympathy is perspectival, related to the detached positions of omniscience and cosmopolitanism. If Savonarola illustrates how an act of large-scale sympathy is possible only momentarily, Tito shows how it is potentially dangerous insofar as large-scale sympathy contributes to two related problems: first, the obfuscation of the feeling that makes a sympathetic act ethical; and second, the tendency of large-scale sympathy to make individual acts of sympathy seem inconsequential.

In Amanda Anderson's account, the cultivation of detachment—the aspiration to distance one's self from a given discourse in order to understand it—forms the basis of the Victorian notion of cosmopolitanism, or the “reflective distance from one's original or primary cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures and customs, and a belief in universal humanity.”³¹ Cast ashore after his boat was attacked by a Turkish slave ship, Tito is *Romola's* most cosmopolitan character. Tito says to Bardo during his interview early in the novel, “I have resided both at Constantinople and Thessalonica, and have traveled in various parts little visited by Western Christians since the triumph of the Turkish arms” (p. 59). He adds, “I have rested in the groves of Helicon, and tasted of the fountain Hippocrene ... High over every fastness, from the plains of Lacedæmon to the straits of Thermopylæ, there towers some huge Frankish fortress, once inhabited by a French or Italian marquis, now either abandoned or held by Turkish bands” (p. 65). Tito's extensive scholarship matches his extensive travel; indeed, it is upon the basis of his wide-ranging knowledge and quick intellect that Tito first begins to have success in Florence, ingratiating himself to the Florentine secretary, Bartolommeo Scala. In line with the cosmopolitan ideal, Tito also has refined taste; at a dinner hosted by Bernardo Rucellai, he enjoys supper with exquisitely crafted cutlery and the expensive, if inedible, delicacy of peacock flesh. Tito's cosmopolitan tendencies give him the critical distance necessary for a successful political career, but they also have the negative effect of making him callously insensitive to others. Pleased with the effect of his oration to a crowd of Florentines, Tito comments, “The gestures and faces of weavers and dyers were certainly amusing when looked at from above in this way” (p. 250).

To fulfill his cosmopolitan aspirations, Tito practices a version of large-scale sympathy that is detached from an ethical register.³² Exceptionally sensitive to what people are doing and thinking even when he is not in immediate contact with them, Tito uses his insight into large groups as a means of pursuing his political schemes. The narrator remarks of Tito, "It was very easy, very pleasant, this exercise of speaking to the general satisfaction: a man who knew how to persuade need never be in danger from any party; he could convince each that he was feigning with all the others" (p. 250). During a critical moment of indeterminacy as Savonarola, Dolfo Spini, and the Mediceans vie for power, Tito attaches himself to the interests of each faction: "He managed his affairs so cleverly, that all results, he considered, must turn to his advantage. Whichever party came uppermost, he was secure of favour and money" (p. 379). This kind of maneuvering is only one example among many where Tito's imagination proceeds along several tracks simultaneously. When his fortunes are threatened by Romola's brother, Dino de' Bardi, "[h]is heart sank at the probability that a great change was coming over his prospects, *while at the same time his thoughts were darting over a hundred details of the course he would take when the change had come*" (p. 130, emphasis added). Tito's cosmopolitanism is matched by a temporal detachment that allows him to intuit easily the simultaneous thoughts, feelings, and actions of others—a synchronic operation that facilitates cosmopolitanism's global aspirations. The obvious ethical problem, as Tito's machinations demonstrate, is that such knowledge can be used for the exploitation of others just as easily as it can be used for their good.

Although Tito, as Romola observes, has "the power of seeing everything without seeming to see it," his hubristic certainty of what multiple people are doing and thinking at the same time erodes his ability to engage sympathetically with individuals (p. 362).³³ After Tito surreptitiously sells the library of Romola's deceased father, tensions run high between Tito and his wife. When Tito leaves the house, the narrator observes that, "Tito felt that Romola was a more unforgiving woman than he had imagined ... Still, this petrified coldness was better than a passionate, futile opposition" (p. 302). However, Tito misreads Romola in a way that illustrates his inability to sympathize with her: "But when the door had closed on Tito, Romola lost the look of cold immobility which came over her like an inevitable frost whenever he approached her. Inwardly she was very far from being in a state of quiet endurance" (p. 302). The more Tito becomes embroiled in political

affairs—the more success that he has deducing and exploiting the motives of the many factions in Florence—the more desensitized he becomes to the needs and feelings of the individuals around him: “[H]e found it the less difficult to wait patiently for the return of his home happiness, because his life out of doors was more and more interesting to him ... his imagination had glanced continually towards a sort of political activity which the troubled public life of Florence was likely enough to find occasion for” (p. 297).

Given Tito’s ability to process simultaneity at the macro level, the reader might expect him to navigate personal relations with ease. However, Tito’s downfall is precipitated by his failure to account for the actions of a single, relatively insignificant individual. When Spini asks Tito’s opinion on a certain notary, Ser Ceccone, Tito vouches for Ceccone’s talents. But his recommendation is based on the fact that Ceccone knows incriminating information about Tito: it was Ceccone who overheard Tito promise Romola that he would circumvent the assassination plot against Savonarola—news that would infuriate Tito’s coconspirator, Spini. So, Tito lends Ceccone his support “believing that with this sop and the expectation of more, the waspish cur must be quite cured of the disposition to bite him” (p. 489). But, the narrator warns, “[P]erfect scheming demands omniscience, and the notary’s envy had been stimulated into hatred by causes of which Tito knew nothing” (p. 490). What Tito does not know is that Ceccone was also busy collecting evidence against the Mediceans. Ceccone’s hatred derives from the fact that his own intelligence is too late and less detailed than Tito’s, and thus worthless. The two men play at the same game, and the loser is the one who incorrectly processes the simultaneous thoughts and actions of the other.

Ceccone’s betrayal serves as a reminder that Tito’s machinations fall short of the narrator’s omniscient plotting, for “perfect scheming demands omniscience.”³⁴ As if to assure the reader of this fact, the narrator reiterates only three paragraphs later that, “Tito, however, not being quite omniscient, felt now no more than a passing twinge of uneasiness at the suggestion of Ceccone’s power to hurt him” (p. 491). The observation that Tito is not “quite omniscient” registers the fatal insufficiency of his social knowledge.³⁵ Chased down by an angry mob, Tito attempts to save his life by jumping into a river and swimming to safety. Though he survives the mob and the current of the river, he washes ashore into the vengeful hands of his father, Baldassarre, who presses “his knuckles against the round throat [of Tito], and [kneels] upon the chest with all the force of his aged frame” (p. 516). Ultimately,

Tito's death cannot be attributed to the fact that he is out-schemed by Ceccone—Ceccone tells Spini about Tito's betrayal, Spini directs the mob to Tito's house, the mob molests Tito, and then Tito escapes and washes up safely on the banks of the river. The fact that Baldassarre waits in the exact spot that Tito emerges from the river is not part of this causal chain. Thus, it is not plotting but chance and coincidence that bring Tito to his death.³⁶ Tito is destroyed by the character who is least like the omniscient narrator; no longer able to plot his revenge, Baldassarre just waits by the river for the occasional piece of bread or raw carrot to float his way. Moreover, the fact that Tito is killed by the most myopic character in the novel underwrites the failure of Tito's detached perspective to account for the things that should be the easiest for him to acknowledge: individual—even familial—relations.

In the "Proem" to *Romola*, George Eliot sets the stage for her novel by imagining a stereotypical "old Florentine" who is both cosmopolitan and regional: "His politics had an area as wide as his trade, which stretched from Syria to Britain, but they had also the passionate intensity, and the detailed practical interest, which could belong only to a narrow scene of corporate action; only to the members of a community shut in close by the hills and by walls of six miles' circuit, where men knew each other as they passed in the street" (p. 6). The marriage of expansive politics with the "narrow scene of corporate action" is something that eludes Tito, ultimately resulting in the failure of his sweeping and nefarious ambitions. As George Eliot's idealization of the Florentine suggests, the wide view offered by detachment—whether it be cosmopolitan or narratological—works best when it is balanced by an ethics that is grounded in the individual experience. The problem that George Eliot presents in *Romola* is that the reconciliation of these two positions is extremely difficult, if not impossible. In order to realize a positive model of large-scale sympathy, George Eliot looks outside Florence and the conventions of nineteenth-century realism. In the next section, I argue that *Romola*'s bizarre intervention in a plague village reads like an instruction manual for large-scale sympathy, albeit one that both revises and compromises the global aspirations of Savonarola and Tito.

ROMOLA IN THE PLAGUE VILLAGE

Throughout most of the novel, *Romola* oscillates between two responses to the experiences of others: the myopia that afflicts Tessa, Bardo, and Baldassarre, and the expansive view of social

relations employed by Tito and Savonarola. In the first half of the novel, she is overly invested in the local relations of her life. Obsessively devoted to her father and infatuated with Tito, Romola's isolation and worldly inexperience is defined by the way she channels her sympathy into a single conduit. When Tito proposes that they leave Florence, she responds by saying, "I am not thinking of other Italian cities and the whole civilized world—I am thinking of my father, and of my love and sorrow for him, and of his just claims on us. I would give up anything else ... *what else did I live for but for him and you?*" (p. 271, emphasis added). As Romola becomes disillusioned with her marriage to Tito, she flees Florence and encounters Savonarola. His lecture on responsibility not only precipitates Romola's return to her husband, but it also occasions the expansion of her sympathies from "the near and the loved" to the hungry citizenry outside her social orbit (p. 305). As she begins to nurse those who fall ill during the famine, she develops a capacity for large-scale sympathy: "[S]he found herself involved in a crowd who suddenly fell on their knees; and she immediately knelt with them" (p. 356). Though she begins the novel by disavowing "other Italian cities and the whole civilized world," Romola eventually replaces the myopia of her personal responsibilities with an expansive sense of social responsibility, one that opens her to the simultaneous experience of "the less fortunate of her fellow-citizens" (p. 367).

However, when Savonarola executes her godfather, the arbitrary separation of small and large-scale acts of sympathy is made devastatingly apparent: "It was inevitable that she should judge the Frate unfairly on a question of individual suffering, at which *she* looked with eyes of personal tenderness, and *he* with the eyes of theoretic conviction" (p. 472). Both Romola's emphasis on local relations and Savonarola's obsession with generalized social groups ultimately fail because the characters are unable to recognize that individual and large-scale acts of sympathy are mutually implicated. With the dichotomy of "personal tenderness" and "theoretic conviction" torturing her, Romola flees Florence for a second time. Distraught, she attempts suicide by lying down in the bottom of a small boat with the hope that she will blindly meet her death at sea.

The way that the narrator describes Romola's attempted suicide signals the novel's shift from a realist mode to a romantic one: "[F]ew had cared for her, while she had cared for many. She had done enough; she had striven after the impossible, and was weary of this stifling crowded life. She longed for that repose in

mere sensation which she had sometimes dreamed of in the sultry afternoons of her early girlhood, when she had fancied herself floating naiad-like in the waters" (p. 473). As Felicia Bonaparte notes, "when Romola enters the boat she falls asleep, and from that moment the narrative is like a dream sequence ... [like] a medieval allegory in which real events are stripped of their complexity and ambiguity and appear truly in their most fundamental relations in a world in which time is perceived in the context of eternity."³⁷ Multiple detachments occur here.³⁸ Romola's entrance into a dream-like state of detachment is matched by the narrative's dislocation from a realist register.³⁹ Moreover, such acts of distancing are coupled with a temporal detachment that seems to take Romola out of the historical and into a synchronic mode—a point that is corroborated by the way the villagers transform Romola's intervention from the stuff of history to that of legend: "Many legends were afterwards told in that valley about the blessed Lady who came over the sea" (p. 527).⁴⁰

We have already seen acts of temporal detachment in *Romola*, as the synchronic, in the form of simultaneity, is a necessary condition for engaging in large-scale sympathetic acts. For Romola, it is no different. Faced with a large group of people who need her help, Romola is wrenched from the torpor of self-pity and propelled into sympathetic action. Her most extraordinary acts occur over the course of one paragraph, where she rescues a Jewish child from privation and reincorporates him into village society as a Christian, triumphing over the villagers' fear of contamination and convincing them to help nurse the ill, bury the dead, and tend the crops. In contrast to Savonarola and Tito, whose large-scale sympathetic acts somehow destroy both themselves and the objects of their sympathies, Romola survives (although she falls ill shortly after) and leaves the village as a kind of pastoral utopia: "In this way, days, weeks, and months passed with Romola [recovering from her illness], till the men were digging and sowing again, till the women smiled at her as they carried their great vases on their heads to the well" (p. 526). Against the background of this bustling scene, Romola practices an enabling detachment that retroactively explains the success of her charity: "[H]er mind, travelling back over the past, and gazing across the undefined distance of the future, saw all objects from a new position" (p. 527). The expansive temporal vista from which Romola surveys her social relations—synchronic arrangement of past and future—leads her to muse, "How could she feel the needs of others and not feel above all the needs of the nearest?" (p. 528).

This temporal detachment enables her to “feel the needs of others” and the “needs of the nearest” simultaneously. Ultimately, her act of large-scale sympathy brings her back to sympathy on a smaller scale—the kind of local, individual relations that defined her experience early in the novel.

The success of Romola’s act of large-scale sympathy does not come without a price—as I note above, she becomes ill after singlehandedly rescuing the village and ends the novel as a widow caring for the mistress and illegitimate children of her deceased husband. Moreover, it is important to note that the scale of Romola’s sympathy is narrower than the examples I discuss above. While Tito and Savonarola attempt to sympathize with incalculably large groups, Romola limits her sympathy to the relatively manageable number of “hardly more than a score” in the plague village (p. 526). After the failures of Tito and Savonarola, the triumph of the plague village suggests that, for George Eliot, there is an optimal object for large-scale sympathy that hovers ambiguously between the overwhelmingly huge and the myopically small and that is determined, in part, by the physiological and moral capabilities of the sympathizer. Finally, the detachment that enables Romola’s large-scale sympathy has the effect of turning the plague village episode into a romantic aside to the narrative’s realist mode. The dream-like and utopian qualities of this episode suggest at least two things about large-scale sympathy that we can take as representative of George Eliot’s position: large-scale sympathy is a fantasy that bears a vexed relation to the “reality” of direct experience and, surprisingly, this fantasy is something worth striving for.

NOTES

¹ George Eliot, *Romola*, ed. Andrew Brown (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), p. 81. Subsequent references to *Romola* are from this edition and will appear parenthetically in the text by page number.

² The problem of the large group came into focus during the time that George Eliot was writing *Romola*. As Mary Poovey argues, “The image of a single culture had begun to seem plausible in 1860—even though different subgroups continued to exist—because the technologies capable of materializing an aggregate known as the ‘population’ had been institutionalized for several decades” (*Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995], p. 4).

³ For an account of George Eliot’s ambivalence toward expanding this franchise, see Evan Horowitz, “George Eliot: The Conservative,” *VS* 49, 1 (Autumn 2006): 7–32. For an account of the problem of individual liberty in *Romola*, see Daniel Malachuk, “*Romola* and Victorian Liberalism,” *VLC* 36, 1

(March 2008): 41–57; and Gary Wihl, “Republican Liberty in George Eliot’s *Romola*,” *Criticism* 51, 2 (Spring 2009): 247–62.

⁴ For further consideration of George Eliot’s concept of largeness and number, particularly as it applies to how she conceptualizes the relation between the individual and the social aggregate, see Jesse Rosenthal, “The Large Novel and the Law of Large Numbers; or, Why George Eliot Hates Gambling,” *ELH* 77, 3 (Fall 2010): 777–811.

⁵ For example, David Marshall’s observation about *Daniel Deronda* that “Deronda’s decision to identify himself with his Jewish heritage could itself be construed as a far-reaching act of sympathy” makes a claim about large-scale sympathy; Marshall supports this claim, however, by quoting from the scenes where Deronda talks with his mother and Mordecai about his Jewish identity (*The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot* [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986], pp. 219–20). My approach differs insofar as I focus on passages where characters actually engage with large groups of unknown others. See also Audrey Jaffe, whose work on sympathy, identity, and nationalism in *Daniel Deronda* asserts that sympathy is not directed toward “the other” but rather to a version of an idealized self that is embedded in a collective identity (*Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2000], p. 130). Both Marshall and Jaffe couch the operation of sympathy in visual terms—through the theater and the image, respectively—underscoring the importance of spatiality for their accounts. As I suggest in this paper, however, when it comes to acts of large-scale sympathy, George Eliot is more concerned with temporal, rather than spatial, structures of one’s sympathetic response.

⁶ Candace Clark, *Misery and Company: Sympathy in Everyday Life* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 19 and 24.

⁷ Clark, pp. 152–3.

⁸ In Benedict Anderson’s account of how temporality facilitates the imagination of communities, he argues that the sense of simultaneity inherent in the novel form—“acts ... performed at the same clocked, calendrical time, but by actors who may be largely unaware of one another”—serves as a “precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* [London: Verso, 1991], p. 26). The realization that subjects exist in and go through time alongside other subjects (that may or may not be aware of each other) serves as the foundation for the imagination of a collective identity to which one belongs.

⁹ For an authoritative account of Victorian detachment, see Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2001).

¹⁰ I am not alone in reading *Romola* as a vehicle through which George Eliot worked through literary and ethical problems. As George Levine observes, “*Romola* needs to be seen as a genuinely experimental work” (“*Romola*’ as Fable,” in *Critical Essays on George Eliot*, ed. Barbara Hardy [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970], pp. 78–98, 81). Raymond Williams also calls *Romola* “an experiment ... which confirms the transition” from her early work to her later novels (*The English Novel: From Dickens to Lawrence* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970], p. 87).

¹¹ Although the second Reform Act—effectively doubling the voter base—was not passed until 1867, attempts at reform began as early as 1860. See Chris R. Vanden Bossche, *Reform Acts: Chartism, Social Agency, and the Victorian Novel, 1832–1867* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2014), p. 190.

¹² Although she approaches simultaneity from a different methodological perspective, Helena Michie's argument for a "a different kind of simultaneity that is attentive to the experience of minor characters, the disenfranchised, and those writing at a historical distance from ourselves" has been very influential for my thinking about the subject ("Victorian[ist] 'Whiles' and the Tenses of Historicism," *Narrative* 17, 3 [October 2009]: 274–90, 289).

¹³ Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2003), p. 30.

¹⁴ Woloch, p. 38.

¹⁵ George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study in Provincial Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), p. 175.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ As this example from *Middlemarch* suggests, instances of large-scale sympathy appear consistently throughout George Eliot's oeuvre. *Romola* is unique, however, because it represents George Eliot's most sustained attempt to theorize large-scale sympathy. Given the political upheaval that underpins the novel, it makes sense to say that *Romola* is about large-scale sympathy, insofar as this ethical relation bears witness to contemporary concerns about the desires of expanding and increasingly powerful populations.

¹⁹ Catherine Gallagher, "George Eliot: Imminent Victorian," *Representations* 90, 1 (Spring 2005): 61–74, 71. Gallagher's argument for an erotics of particularization in George Eliot—where the particular is both an "endpoint of narrative" and a "value-laden desideratum"—provides a compelling account of *Middlemarch's* Dorothea and the longing for "embodied immanence" (pp. 69 and 72). Although my focus on generalization is obviously at odds with Gallagher's argument, Savonarola demonstrates how generalizations can also produce similarly embodied feelings of desire—even rapture.

²⁰ Lorenzo Tornabuoni's reference to "Cristoforo Colombo's finding" recalls how the novel begins in 1492, a date that marked a change in the scale of the world. Although the action of the novel takes place over several years, Philip Fisher observes that 1492 is an "exuberant date to begin with," remarking how George Eliot's "introduction reminds us of [Christopher] Columbus, and the year 1492 is the beginning of the New World, the world open to exploration and development" (*Making Up Society: The Novels of George Eliot* [Pittsburgh PA: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1981], p. 121). The notion of the simultaneous experience of others must change once the boundaries of the known world have expanded. One's imagination is forced to confront the fact that vast, yet unknown, populations of people have been living simultaneously with one's self. For Tornabuoni, the date provides a way to imagine the experience of others for whom Savonarola's regime would be better suited.

²¹ George Eliot, "The Natural History of the German Life," *Selected Essays, Poems, and Other Writings*, ed. A. S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 107–39, 108.

²² George Eliot, "The Natural History of the German Life," p. 109.

²³ George Eliot, "The Natural History of the German Life," p. 126.

²⁴ Amanda Anderson, p. 11.

²⁵ George Eliot makes the same contradiction in *The Mill on the Floss* when she writes, “[A]ll people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the man of maxims” (*The Mill on the Floss* [London: Penguin Books, 1979], p. 628). As William A. Cohen observes of this passage, “[S]he contends that to generalize is an ethically dubious prospect, but, abstracting from the case at hand, she makes this assertion in thoroughly general terms” (*Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* [Durham NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1996], p. 145). In Cohen’s account, George Eliot resorts to the generalization in this case because “people of broad, strong sense” must be “general enough to allow a reader to identify with it” (p. 145).

²⁶ Amanda Anderson, p. 15.

²⁷ Horowitz, p. 19; and Joseph Butwin, “The Pacification of the Crowd: From ‘Janet’s Repentance’ to *Felix Holt*,” *NCF* 35, 3 (December 1980): 349–71.

²⁸ Rachel Ablow develops the necessity for balance between self and other—and the dangers of losing one’s self. Reading George Eliot’s relation to sympathy through *The Mill on the Floss*, Ablow suggests that the novelist has to overcome the fundamental difficulty of “how to eradicate selfishness while maintaining the self-consciousness necessary for ethical relationships” (*The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* [Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007], p. 71). The relation between Stephen and Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* models a kind of absorption of one character into the other that hearkens back to the notion of coverture in marriage laws—Stephen practically takes away Maggie’s ability to make decisions (p. 78). Ablow writes that this alternative model of sympathy—one with no selfishness—places Maggie in a situation where “she must take responsibility for his [Stephen’s] pain”; a painful but deeply ethical act (p. 87).

²⁹ In her taxonomy of the apocalyptic structuring of *Romola*, Mary Wilson Carpenter notes that George Eliot’s narrative was informed by the principle of “synchronisme,” or the concept that prophecies described at different points in the narrative actually occur at the same time” (*George Eliot and the Landscape of Time: Narrative Form and Protestant Apocalyptic History* [Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1986], p. 96). Though Carpenter uses this notion to explain George Eliot’s repeated use of flashbacks in the story, the idea of “synchronisme” also resonates with the way Savonarola privileges simultaneity as a way of relating to large groups of people.

³⁰ Rae Greiner, “Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel,” *Narrative* 17, 3 (October 2009): 291–311, 293.

³¹ Amanda Anderson, p. 63.

³² Importantly, it is not my argument that Tito actually feels what a large group feels, but rather that his large-scale sympathetic act is successful insofar as he correctly intuits and acts upon the feelings of the group. As Greiner argues, “Sympathy is equivalent to no emotion whatsoever. ‘Sympathy’ is a mechanism of feeling-production, an activity with the capacity to generate feelings (‘moral’ and otherwise) but not a feeling in its own right and incapable of certifying which feelings result” (p. 293).

³³ In his aspiration to total knowledge, Tito approaches the type of debilitating omniscience that George Eliot represented with her clairvoyant narrator Latimer in “The Lifted Veil” (George Eliot, “The Lifted Veil,” in *The Lifted Veil*

and *Brother Jacob*, ed. Helen Small [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009], pp. 1–43). Critics of “The Lifted Veil” have shown that George Eliot was aware that exceptional sympathy—in the form of telepathy or omniscience—could produce a response opposite of what sympathy was supposed to achieve. See Charles Swann, “Dêjà Vu: Dêjà Lu: ‘The Lifted Veil’ as an Experiment in Art,” *L&H* 5, 1 (Spring 1979): 40–58, 47; Thomas Albrecht, “Sympathy and Telepathy: The Problem of Ethics in George Eliot’s *The Lifted Veil*,” *ELH* 73, 2 (Summer 2006): 437–63, 439; and Greiner, pp. 304–7.

³⁴ Jaffe argues, “The relationship between narrator and character is in its basic structure a projective one. A fantasy of knowledge, mobility, and authority, the omniscient narrator can come into being only in contrast to limitation, which is constructed in the form of character” (*Vanishing Points: Dickens, Narrative, and the Subject of Omniscience* [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1991], p. 12). Omniscience is relational: in order for omniscience to appear unbound, it must be understood in contrast to something that is bound.

³⁵ Tito’s pseudo-omniscience registers George Eliot’s uneasy sense that Tito’s ability to manipulate simultaneity shares important traits with the practice of novel writing. Illuminating a pattern of “double surrogation” in George Eliot’s works, Neil Hertz argues that George Eliot’s novels characteristically include two antithetical characters who serve as “good” and “bad” surrogates for the author (*George Eliot’s Pulse* [Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003], p. 141). In *Romola*, the “bad” surrogate is Tito, who provides George Eliot with a resource to “articulate [her] writerly concerns” (p. 141). As Hertz argues, Tito represents the threat of someone “whom moral exhortation cannot reach” and who is “beyond the grasp of any verbal claim” (pp. 141 and 144).

³⁶ Noting that most of the novel’s coincidences “almost all involve Baldassarre,” Alexander Welsh writes that “he may have lost his knowledge of Greek and his wits besides, but he has an uncanny knowledge of the plot” (*George Eliot and Blackmail* [Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1985], p. 187). However, there is no evidence to support the claim that Baldassarre has some miraculous knowledge of the plot in addition to his involvement in narrative coincidences; as such, it is more accurate to say that Baldassarre symbolically registers the limitations of plotting and the inability for even an omniscient narrator to account for the multitude of forces that factor into any given narrative event.

³⁷ Felicia Bonaparte, *The Triptych and the Cross: The Central Myths of George Eliot’s Poetic Imagination* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1979), p. 231. See also Welsh, who claims that “*Romola* is the most dreamlike of [George Eliot’s] novels, both in its details and in its overall construction” (p. 174).

³⁸ For an account of how *Romola*’s detachment serves as a model for “novel reading as a quasi-automatic practice,” see David Kurnick, “Abstraction and the Subject of Novel Reading: Drifting through *Romola*,” *Novel* 42, 3 (Fall 2009): 490–8, 495. Kurnick also observes that, “taking a distanced view even of what most closely touches her, *Romola* seems a perfect embodiment of the detachment prized by” theorists of detachment such as Amanda Anderson and David Wayne Thomas (p. 495).

³⁹ In a letter to Sara Sophia Hennell from 23 August 1863, George Eliot agrees that “*Romola* is ideal,” further adding that “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 symbolical elements” (*The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, vol. 4 [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1955], pp. 103–4).

⁴⁰Avrom Fleishman suggests that the plague village constitutes a “rejection of history” (*The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971], p. 161).