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Romola
and the Individuation Process

by JAMES D. BENSON

MOST OF the commentary on George Eliot's Romola over the years has been unremittingly harsh, and several recent generalizations about the novel are very powerful, as well. It has been claimed, for example, that Romola is shot through with the melancholy of George Eliot's most sterile and unproductive period. It has been contended that the novel goes round and round in circles, ending up as a feeble monument to a failed Carlylean ethic. It has also been argued that while Romola is remarkable, the heart of its failure is that it consists of two stories, one symbolic and ideal (Romola's), and the other realistic (Tito's), that do not and cannot work together. My aim is to make countergeneralizations about the novel, and to show by means of a Jungian analysis that they rest on a solid foundation. I shall argue that Romola is characterized by a great maturity and even buoyancy; that Romola's personality, by clearly defined stages, develops significantly in breadth and depth; and that structurally, the two stories are closely interrelated. Indeed, they are equally symbolic aspects of the same thing, the individuation process of Jungian psychology.

There are many reasons for adopting a Jungian approach, but one of the most fundamental is that both George Eliot and Jung hold the religious function to be supremely important. Jung's definition of religion is particularly appropriate to Renaissance Florence as George Eliot presents it in the novel:

Religion appears to me to be a peculiar attitude of mind which could be formulated in accordance with the original use of the word religio, which means a careful consideration and

1. Miriam Allott writes that the effort of convincing both herself and her readers "of the truth of her meliorist beliefs" was costly: "There was an incalculable toll in health, energy, and artistic vitality as she toiled on, trying to ennoble her readers by her teachings in Romola and The Spanish Gypsy and Felix Holt while the 'horrible scepticism about all things' paralyzed her mind and imagination." "George Eliot in the 1860's," Victorian Studies, V (1961), 106-7.

2. Carole Robinson concludes her reading of the novel: "There is perhaps only one truth in Romola of which George Eliot is convinced, a melancholy fable hidden amidst affirmations; and that is the fact of Romola's confusion, isolation, and despair, a mood in which the validity even of her own emotions is eventually called into question. . . . Perhaps finally we may consider Romola, with its massive erudition camouflaging its uncertainties, a revealing achievement of the Victorian spirit, and a memorial to its determination to make labor compensate for the absence of belief." "Romola: a Reading of the Novel," Victorian Studies, VI (1962), 41-42.

3. George Levine writes: "The difficulty with Romola is not so much that it is as strictly controlled by fabulous and symbolic elements as Silas Marner, but that it seems to be struggling to be a different kind of work—to be, that is, a traditional novel. The different modes do not mesh. Being asked to take Romola and Baldassarre as real characters in a real world, the reader balks at Romola's idealization and Baldassarre's melodramatic function as Tito's Nemesis." "Romola as Fable" in Critical Essays on George Eliot, ed. Barbara Hardy (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 79.
observation of certain dynamic factors that are conceived as "powers": spirits, daemons, gods, laws, ideals, or whatever name man has given to such factors in his world as he has found powerful, dangerous, or helpful enough to be taken into careful consideration, or grand, beautiful, and meaningful enough to be devoutly worshipped and loved. . . . We might say, then, that the term "religion" designates the attitude peculiar to a consciousness which has been changed by experience of the numinosum.4

Equally important, both see development of personality issuing from the conflict of opposites. The world of Romola, like Jungian psychology, teems with contending opposites, both public and private: joy and sorrow, law and rebellion, justice and law, rescue and revenge. Christianity and paganism, regeneration and degeneration. Romola herself, even before her marriage, sees existence in these terms, when she weighs Dino's vision against Tito's promise: "Strange, bewildering transition from those pale images of sorrow and death to this bright youthfulness, as of a sun-god who knew nothing of night! What thought could reconcile that worn anguish in her brother's face—that straining after something invisible—with this satisfied strength and beauty, and make it intelligible that they belonged to the same world? Or was there never any reconciling of them, but only a blind worship of clashing deities, first in mad joy and then in wailing?"5 Romola does come to reconcile the opposites during the course of the novel, and Jung's theory of individuation provides a way of looking at how the reconciliation is achieved.

Jung postulates two main phases of life. The first half is characterized by the strengthening and crystalizing of the ego, a necessary strategy for adapting to external reality. Equally necessary, in the second half of life is bringing the ego back into contact with the self, and adapting it to internal realities. Individuation fills the need for the expression of the religious function, which Jung sees as a human drive as basic as sexuality or aggression. The drive remains a fact, whether or not institutionalized religion affords a medium for its expression. Individuation itself, according to one writer on Jung, could be "formulated as the finding of the God within or the full experience of the archetype of the self." The self is one of "the principal archetypes affecting human thought and behaviour."6 The others are the persona, the shadow, the anima/animus, the wise old man, and the great mother. There are two kinds of individuation, the natural and the artificial. The first is an autonomous and unconscious process. The second is more consciously directed, whether by the analyst in the consulting room, or through the religious institution of confession.

At the heart of the individuation process is the withdrawal of the


archetypal projections of the unconscious, and their integration within one's conscious personality. Individuation might be thought of, schematically, as happening in stages. The indispensable condition for all further development is the recognition that the shadow, or the dark side of the human personality, is located within, not without. If this insight is achieved, the individual is prepared to come to terms with the contrasexual aspects of his personality, the anima for the man, and the animus for the woman. Next comes the assimilation of the archetypes of the wise old man or the great mother. The danger at this stage is that the conscious personality will be inflated by the archetype to the point of megalomania. The "final" stage is the discovery of the self, or the archetype of wholeness, in which the opposites are reconciled. This is the goal of the individuation process.

Romola's experience closely follows this pattern. She projects her own shadow on Tito, but withdraws it under Savonarola's guidance. She projects her animus on Savonarola, but ultimately, when she breaks with him, withdraws it. She is overcome by a negative inflation in "Drifting Away," which paradoxically is also an expression of the archetype of the self. This goal has been prepared for throughout the many chapters of the novel that chronicle Romola's conflicts of duty. The working of her conscience shows the polarities of the individuation process—the conflicting opposites and their resolution—in their clearest light. Tito, on the other hand, exemplifies a failure to individuate. He represses his shadow, and projects his anima, consistently avoiding the integration of the archetypes of the unconscious. The price he pays for this one-sidedness, by a Jungian law as ineluctable as George Eliot's "law of consequences," is to be overwhelmed by the unconscious, in its collective and personal aspects. In what follows I shall fill out this admittedly crude scheme with generous citations from Jung, who is his own best expositor, and discuss its implications for the novel's psychological, moral and artistic coherence.

1. Tito, Romola, and Tessa: Projection and Repression

The mechanisms of projection and repression, which are very clearly illustrated in the early chapters of the novel, begin to show why both stories might be regarded as equally symbolic. Because her eros has been repressed in caring for her father, Romola can easily carry Tito's projections. She is scarcely a femme fatale, and it is Tito who invests her with the power and fascination of a goddess, feeling himself "strangely in submission" to her: "he felt for the first time, without defining it to himself, that loving awe in the presence of noble womanhood, which is perhaps something like the worship paid of old to a great nature-goddess, who was not all-knowing, but whose life and power were something deeper and more primordial than knowledge" (Ch. 9). Even as late as Chapter 47, "Check," Tito feels "helpless" before her. As his courtship proceeds, he
sets about making her a goddess in earnest: “‘My Romola! My goddess!’
Tito murmured with passionate fondness, as he clasped her gently, and
kissed the thick golden ripples on her neck. He was in paradise: disgrace,
shame, parting—there was no fear of them any longer” (Ch. 17). More­
ever, Tito wants Romola to participate in the acting out of his fantasies.
He wishes that they might leave Florence and move to the south: “I should
like to see you under that southern sun, lying among the flowers, subdued
into mere enjoyment, while I bent over you and touched the lute and sang
to you some little unconscious strain that seemed all one with the light and
the warmth. You have never known that happiness of the nymphs, my
Romola” (Ch. 17). Tito pursues this fantasy by commissioning the portrait
of themselves as Bacchus and Ariadne. When, on their betrothal day, he
locks up the crucifix in the triptych, he is wilfully splitting off a whole
range of experience, as his interpretation of the portrait makes clear:
“while I am away, you will look every day at those pretty symbols of our
life together—the ship on the calm sea, and the ivy that never withers, and
those Loves that have left off wounding us and shower soft petals that are
like our kisses; and the leopards and tigers, they are the troubles of your
life that are all quelled now” (Ch. 20).

The causative factor behind the projection Jung calls the anima: “Every
mother and every beloved is forced to become the carrier and embodimen­
t of this omnipresent and ageless image, which corresponds to the deepest
reality in a man.” Tessa, as well as Romola, is a carrier of Tito’s anima
projections, but since her innocence puts no constraint on his uncon­
scious, she inevitably becomes an idealized mother for him. When he first
meets her, in Chapter 2, “A Breakfast for Love,” Tessa is already a
maternal provider. In “Under the Plane-tree,” Tito, whose only memory
of his adolescence (prior to being “rescued” by Baldassarre) is of being
beaten (Ch. 9), certainly regresses to an idealized childhood. When he
“rescues” Tessa from the conjuror—a repeated pattern in the novel—he
seems to be comforting a helpless child; in reality, it is Tito who is being
 cradled in a mother’s arms: “He lay down on the grass again, putting his
cap under his head on a green tuft by the side of Tessa. That was not quite
comfortable; so he moved again, and asked Tessa to let him rest his head
against her lap; and in that way he soon fell asleep” (Ch. 10). When a man
is under the spell of the anima, Jung writes, his “Eros is passive like a
child’s; he hopes to be caught, sucked in, enveloped, and devoured. He
seeks, as it were, the protecting, nourishing, charmed circle of the mother,
the condition of the infant released from every care, in which the outside
world bends over him and even forces happiness upon him. No wonder the
real world vanishes from sight!”

Tito’s attitude towards Romola about Barde’s library suggests that he

8. Ibid., p. 11.
projects sentimentality, another anima characteristic. Tito never understands how deeply rooted his sentimentality, which partly explains his repeated inability to undeceive Tessa, really is. He is "not tormented by sentimental scruples" about the library, and Romola's feeling that she has a sacred obligation to prevent its dispersal is to him "a piece of sentimental folly" (Ch. 31). But Romola's refusal to be cajoled by his announcement that he has sold it impels Tito to project yet more of his own femininity, now turned rancid and irrational: "It is useless," he said, coolly, 'to answer the words of madness, Romola. Your peculiar feeling about your father has made you mad at this moment. Any rational person looking at the case from a due distance will see that I have taken the wisest course'" (Ch. 32).

Tito also accuses Baldassarre of madness, and consideration of him as a shadow figure shows how projection shades off into repression. Repression has much in common with projection, since both prevent unconscious contents from being integrated by consciousness. Tito's repression of his shadow is explored in Chapter 9, "A Man's Ransom." In the previous chapter, "A Face in the Crowd," Tito has actually seen two faces, those of Fra Luca (Romola's brother Dino) and Tessa. Although he is on his way to Romola, the glimpse of Tessa momentarily distracts him, but the face of the "sickly fanatic" is disturbing, and triggers an "importunate thought, of which he had till now refused to see more than the shadow as it dogged his footsteps," and which now "rushed upon him and grasped him" (Ch. 9). The thought is his father Baldassarre, who during the course of the novel clutches at him many times, until they are finally locked in a death embrace. Such a grasping at the ego is thoroughly characteristic of the shadow, which "personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself and yet is always thrusting itself upon him directly or indirectly—for instance, inferior traits of character and other incompatible tendencies." Tito's growing conviction that his father is dead, and that he is under no obligation to search for him is therefore a repression. That it is a repression of the shadow is indicated by Tito's sense of shame: "he had avowed to himself a choice which he would have been ashamed to avow to others, and which would have made him ashamed in the resurgent presence of his father" (Ch. 9).

Tito's resolve to bury his father in his unconscious has momentous consequences: "Under every guilty secret there is hidden a brood of guilty wishes, whose unwholesome infecting life is cherished by the darkness. The contaminating effect of deeds often lies less in the commission than in the consequent adjustment of our desires—the enlistment of our self-interest on the side of falsity; as, on the other hand, the purifying influence of public confession springs from the fact, that by it the hope in lies is for ever swept away, and the soul recovers the noble attitude of simplicity"

(Ch. 9). The consequences, however, have psychological as well as moral significance. Jung regarded the religious institution of the confessional as the prototype of psycho-analytical treatment, and saw secrecy as the environment in which repression thrives: "Once the human mind had succeeded in inventing the idea of sin, man had recourse to psychic concealment; or, in analytical parlance, repression arose." Jung's description of the wages of repression, in terms very similar to those of George Eliot describing Tito, reveals how deeply neurotic he is: "Freud discovered that repression is one of the main mechanisms in the making of a neurosis. Suppression amounts to a conscious moral choice, but repression is a rather immoral 'penchant' for getting rid of disagreeable decisions. Suppression may cause worry, conflict and suffering, but it never causes a neurosis. Neurosis is always a substitute for legitimate suffering." Romola's "legitimate suffering" will ultimately lead to her salvation, while Tito's repression of Baldassarre leads him directly (in the next chapter) to Tessa, and deeper into fantasy.

II. Romola and Savonarola: "An Arresting Voice"

Romola's self-denial tends to obscure the fact that she too projects her shadow, but the lesson that Savonarola teaches her in Chapter 40, "An Arresting Voice," is essentially that she must withdraw the projection. When Romola decides to run away from Tito, because life with him has become intolerable, the imagery declares a significantly Jungian opposition. The sun suddenly breaks through the morning gloom: "The light is perhaps never felt more strongly as a divine presence stirring all those inarticulate sensibilities which are our deepest life, than in these moments when it instantaneously awakens the shadows. A certain awe which inevitably accompanied this most momentous act of her life became a more conscious element in Romola's feeling as she found herself in the sudden presence of the impalpable golden glory and the long shadow of herself that was not to be escaped" (Ch. 37). While "looking at nothing but the brightness on the path and at her own shadow, tall and shrouded like a dread spectre," she sees Savonarola (Ch. 37). His explanation of why Romola must return makes it necessary for her to recognize her darker side. He accuses her of being unfaithful to the "spoken word" of the marriage vow, to "the bare duty of integrity," and she at once sees what he is driving at: "the suggestion . . . of a possible affinity between her own conduct and Tito's" (Ch. 40). After all, Tito had broken his word about Bardo's library, and Savonarola underlines the point by insisting that Romola's action is highly self-indulgent: "There is hunger and misery in our streets, yet you say, 'I care not; I have my own sorrows; I will go away, 10. "Problems of Modern Psychotherapy," C. W., XVI, 55.
if peradventure I can ease them' " (Ch. 40). Nevertheless, while Romola can perceive Tito's shadow easily enough, her indignant response—she is "going away to hardship," not "to ease and self-indulgence" (Ch. 40)—shows that she is unaware of the projection of her own onto him. This is why Savonarola finds it necessary to make the extreme admonition that if Tito "were a malefactor, your place would be in the prison beside him" (Ch. 40): you cannot run away from your shadow—it is part of you. Romola returns to her place with this recognition, which as has already been mentioned, is the prerequisite for further development.

In this chapter, however, Savonarola does much more than bring Romola face to face with her shadow. Romola already has an impulse to integrate the contents of the unconscious, which is why she removed the crucifix from the triptych and brought it with her; and since Savonarola explicitly takes Dino's vision as his authority for intervening, he becomes a mediator of the unconscious. In this way Savonarola becomes an animus figure for her, an archetype with both positive and negative aspects. Negatively, the animus manifests itself in the woman as the force of "opinion" that is impervious to masculine "logic," and Romola's possession by the animus is never more evident than in her arguments with Tito about the library. It is also psychologically fitting that it should be her father's library, since the father is the ultimate source of animus "opinion."12 The animus also gives strength, an aspect of the "Bardi pride," which is indispensable if Romola is not to be crushed by her fate. Positively, the animus becomes a means of assimilating the contents of the unconscious. As Jung says: "Through the figure of the father [the animus] expresses not only conventional opinion but—equally—what we call 'spirit,' philosophical or religious ideas in particular, or rather the attitude resulting from them. Thus the animus is a psychopomp, a mediator between the conscious and the unconscious and a personification of the latter. Just as the anima becomes, through integration, the Eros of consciousness, so the animus becomes a Logos; and in the same way that the anima gives relationship and relatedness to a man's consciousness, the animus gives to woman's consciousness a capacity for reflection, deliberation, and self-knowledge."13 Savonarola, then, clearly represents an animus figure for Romola, and although under his influence she will begin the stony path of individuation, she must eventually withdraw the projection.

12. Jung also points out that in domestic argument the man may even generate the animus of his own anima, which certainly happens to Tito.
13. Aion, C.W., IX, ii, 16.
III. Romola: From “Coming Back” to “Drifting Away”

*ROMOLA* is frequently said to present a stasis of unrelieved conflict, which is particularly evident in the chapters between “Coming Back” (Ch. 41) and “Drifting Away” (Ch. 61). While it is true that Romola endures great suffering, it is hardly to no purpose, and moreover she becomes a very different person in the course of this sequence. The change can be measured by contrasting her initial utter dependence on Savonarola and her final break with him: “Romola’s trust in Savonarola was something like a rope suspended securely by her path, making her step elastic while she grasped it; if it were suddenly removed, no firmness of the ground she trod could save her from staggering, or perhaps from falling” (Ch. 44). This is in fact an instance of the transference phenomenon, which she overcomes by withdrawing the animus projection: “The two faces were lit up, each with an opposite emotion, each with an opposite certitude. Further words were impossible” (Ch. 59).

The whole point of this section of the novel is that Romola should suffer irreconcilable conflict, or “get stuck” in Jung’s phrase, and both Tito and Savonarola contribute to the process. The anatomy of the conflict is shown in Chapter 52, “A Prophetess.” Nowhere can Romola find support and guidance: “Where were the beings to whom she could cling, with whom she could work and endure, with the belief that she was working for the right?” In Savonarola “moral energy” is difficult to separate from “fanaticism,” and in her godfather Bernardo “affection and memory” are tainted by the possibility of criminal plots: “still surmounting every other thought was the dread inspired by Tito’s hints, lest that presentiment should be converted into knowledge, in such a way that she would be torn by irreconcilable claims” (Ch. 52).

But within this seemingly impossible situation are the seeds of further development. Romola has gone to the prophetess, Camilla Rucellai, to find out the nature of her accusations against Bernardo. Camilla’s vision, “in which it had been revealed to her by Romola’s Angel, that Romola knew certain secrets concerning her godfather, Bernardo del Nero, which, if disclosed, might save the Republic from peril,” is clearly mad. In weighing why Savonarola will not denounce such visions, Romola comes to a very Jungian insight into the opposites: “The answer came with painful clearness: he was fettered inwardly by the consciousness that such revelations were not, in their basis, distinctly separable from his own visions” (Ch. 52). While Romola’s insight helps her to withdraw her animus projection from Savonarola (“Her heart was recoiling from a right allied to so much narrowness”), at the same time it drives her to rely on herself, despite the risks, but without repudiating Savonarola as an individual in his own right: “It flashed upon her mind that the problem before her was essentially the same as that which had lain before Savonarola—the
problem where the sacredness of obedience ended, and where the sacredness of rebellion began. To her, as to him, there had come one of those moments in life when the soul must dare to act on its own warrant, not only without external law to appeal to, but in the face of a law which is not unarmed with Divine lightnings—lightnings that may yet fall if the warrant has been false” (Ch. 56).

IV. Romola: “Drifting Away”

The development of Romola’s conscience in fact explains why Savonarola’s original admonition, that she should remain faithful to the marriage vow and return to her place, cannot work. Jung distinguishes between the “moral” and the “ethical” conscience. The distinction can be seen in a conflict of duty situation, where two valid duties collide. The conflict can be settled in accordance with custom, the “moral” conscience, but in this case one of the opposites will have to be suppressed. Romola’s initial decision to fulfill the “sacredness of obedience” has led her to suppress its opposite, “the sacredness of rebellion.” And in affirming the opposite, Romola begins to be guided by the “ethical” conscience. Romola’s conflict of duty is not aimlessly painful, but prepares her for her encounter with the archetype of the self, and leads purposefully to what George Eliot considered the symbolic heart of the novel, “Drifting Away” and “Romola’s Waking.”

Conflicts of duty which are not resolved in favor of custom have a profoundly religious significance: “The fact that Christian ethics leads to collisions of duty speaks in its favour. By engendering insoluble conflicts and consequently an afflictio animae, it brings man nearer to a knowledge of God. All opposites are of God, therefore man must bend to this burden; and in so doing he finds that God in his ‘oppositeness’ has taken possession of him, incarnated himself in him. He becomes a vessel filled with divine conflict.”

Jungian psychology makes credible an interpretation of “Drifting Away” and “Romola’s Waking” as something other than a flirtation with suicide from which George Eliot lamely “saves” her noble heroine, while concurrently “punishing” the selfish Tito. “Drifting Away” in fact is Romola’s ultimate submission to the unconscious, from which a creative solution emerges: “in situations where there are insoluble conflicts of duty . . . the ego is a suffering bystander who decides nothing but must submit to a decision and surrender unconditionally.” Its main symbol is the “night sea journey,” which for Jung is an archetype of the individuation process.

15. George Eliot wrote to Sara Hennell in August 1863 that “‘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 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), IV, 104.
17. Aion, C.W., IX, ii, 45.
tion process: “The night sea journey is a kind of descensus ad infernos—a descent into Hades and a journey to the land of ghosts somewhere beyond this world, beyond consciousness, hence an immersion in the uncon­scious.” Jung sees this return to the womb as a positive experience leading toward rebirth, not as a negation and a regression: “Those black waters of death are the water of life, for death with its cold embrace is the maternal womb, just as the sea devours the sun but brings it forth again. . . . In dreams and fantasies the sea or a large expanse of water coincides with the nature of the unconscious. The maternal aspect of water coincides with the nature of the unconscious. . . . Hence the unconscious, when interpreted on the subjective level, has the same maternal significance as water.” The “night sea journey” is also what Jung calls a “negative inflation,” whose promise is less certain: “With the integration of projections . . . the personality becomes so vastly enlarged that the normal ego-personality is almost extinguished. In other words, if the individual identifies himself with the contents awaiting integration, a positive or negative inflation results. Positive inflation comes very near to a more or less conscious megalomania; negative inflation is felt as an annihilation of the ego. . . . At all events the integration of contents that were always unconscious and projected involves a serious lesion of the ego.”

All this describes Romola’s situation in “Drifting Away.” She is now completely “stuck,” and her ego virtually annihilated: “The vision of any great purpose, any end of existence which could ennoble endurance and exalt the common deeds of a dusty life with divine ardours, 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” (Ch. 61). She certainly experiences a descensus ad infernos: “Romola felt orphaned in those wide spaces of sea and sky. She read no message of love for her in that far-off symbolic writing of the heavens, and with a great sob she wished that she might be gliding into death.” And yet George Eliot emphasizes her willing submission, not to death, but to the paradoxical opposition of life and death: “To be freed from the burden of choice when all motive was bruised, to commit herself, sleeping, to destiny which would either bring death or else new necessities that might rouse a new life in her!” (Ch. 61).

V. “Romola’s Waking”

THE INDIVIDUATION process is no ordinary task. Even the integration of the shadow is a significant achievement. This is why the return from the eclipse of a negative inflation can be regarded as a manifestation of God’s grace: “If the work succeeds, it often works like a miracle, and one can

18. “Psychology of the Transference,” C.W., XVI, 244–45.
understand what it was that prompted the alchemists to insert a heartfelt *Deo concedente* in their recipes, or to allow that only if God wrought a miracle could their procedure be brought to a successful conclusion.”21 Romola’s deliverance has this same miraculous character: “Instead of bringing her to death,” the boat “had been the gently julling cradle of a new life” (Ch. 68). Her deliverance signifies a rebirth of personality, the discovery of the self: “Not that the new personality is a third thing midway between conscious and unconscious, it is both together. Since it transcends consciousness it can no longer be called ‘ego’ but must be given the name of ‘self’ . . . The self too is both ego and non-ego, subjective and objective, individual and collective. It is the ‘uniting symbol’ which epitomizes the total union of opposites. As such and in accordance with its paradoxical nature, it can only be expressed by means of symbols. These appear in dreams and spontaneous fantasies and find visual expression in the mandalas that occur in the patient’s dreams, drawings, and paintings.”22 The chapter “Romola’s Waking” is not unlike a dream, and has the ordering characteristics of a mandala.23 The landscape itself, as well as Romola’s deep calm, suggest a kind of primordial coherence: “In a deep curve of the mountains lay a breadth of green land, curtained by gentle tree-shadowed slopes leaning towards the rocky heights . . . The rays of the newly-risen sun fell obliquely on the westward horn of this crescent-shaped nook: all else lay in dewy shadow. No sound came across the stillness; the very waters seemed to have curved themselves there for rest. The delicious sun-rays fell on Romola and thrilled her gently like a caress. She lay motionless, hardly watching the scene; rather, feeling simply the presence of peace and beauty” (Ch. 68).24

Jung’s commentary on a medieval alchemical treatise provides a summarizing up of the significance of this passage: “The black or unconscious state that resulted from the union of opposites reaches the nadir and a change sets in. The falling dew signals resuscitation and a new light: the ever deeper descent into the unconscious suddenly becomes illumination from above. For, when the soul vanished at death, it was not lost; in that other world it formed the living counterpole to the state of death in this world. Its reappearance from above is already indicated by the dewy moisture . . . The preceding union of opposites has brought light, as always, out of the darkness of night, and by this light it will be possible to see what the real meaning of that union was.”25 Part of the “real meaning” is that the opposites persist: “Was there some taint lurking

21. Ibid., p. 190.
22. Ibid., p. 264.
23. *Psychology and Alchemy*, C.W., XII, 212.
24. Jung’s account of what the experience of the mandala has meant to his own patients is strikingly similar: “They came to themselves, they could accept themselves, they were able to become reconciled to themselves, and thus were reconciled to adverse circumstances and events. This is almost like what used to be expressed by saying: He has made his peace with God, he has sacrificed his own will, he has submitted himself to the will of God.” “Psychology and Religion,” C.W., XI, 81–82.
amongst the green luxuriance that had seemed such an inviting shelter from the heat of the coming day?" The village with the plague symbolizes Romola's recognition that chaos, retribution, and death cannot be escaped, but are to be accepted. Finally, as Jung observes of the symbol of the cross, in the "Answer to Job":

Why this inevitable product of Christian psychology should signify redemption is difficult to see, except that the conscious recognition of the opposites, painful though it may be at the moment, does bring with it a definite feeling of deliverance. It is on the one hand a deliverance from the distressing state of dull and helpless unconsciousness, and on the other hand a growing awareness of God's oppositeness, in which man can participate if he does not shrink from being wounded by the dividing sword which is Christ. Only through the most extreme and most menacing conflict does the Christian experience deliverance into divinity, always provided that he does not break, but accepts the burden of being marked out by God. . . . In principle it does not seem to fit God's purpose to exempt a man from conflict and hence from evil. It is altogether human to express such a desire but it must not be made into a principle, because it is directed against God's will and rests only on human weakness and fear. Fear is certainly justified up to a point, for, to make the conflict complete, there must be doubt and uncertainty as to whether man's strength is not being overtaxed. 26

VI. Tito: "Waiting by the River"

BEFORE CONSIDERING the precise nature of her new personality, I should like to discuss Tito's story in connection with Romola's. Essentially it is a parody of the individuation process, and while Romola's plunge into the unconscious delivers her, Tito is destroyed by it. Thus "Waiting by the River" (Ch. 67) is intimately linked with "Drifting Away," which it follows, and "Romola's Waking," which it immediately precedes.

As with Romola, the unconscious demands to be recognized. In "A Man's Ransom," for example, when the thought of Baldassarre "at last rushed upon him and grasped him," Tito "was obliged to pause and decide whether he would surrender and obey, or whether he would give the refusal that must carry irrevocable consequences" (Ch. 9). Tito rebels, but in a way that parodies Romola's conscience in defying the moral code. It is true that society would expect Tito to make use of his money to rescue Baldassarre, but "what was the sentiment of society?—a mere tangle of anomalous traditions and opinions, which no wise man would take as a guide" (Ch. 11). And so he rationalizes away his obligation to his father as a defiance against the hypocrisy of the moral code: "Any maxims that required a man to fling away the good that was needed to make existence sweet, were only the lining of human selfishness turned outward: they were made by men who wanted others to sacrifice themselves for their sake. . . . Gratitude! seen closely, it made no valid claim" (Ch. 11). Part of the meaning of the parody is that, unlike Romola, Tito endures no genuine conflict.

In repressing Baldassarre, as both personal shadow and collective un-

conscious, Tito is playing a dangerous game: "He was at one of those lawless moments which come to us all if we have no guide but desire, and if the pathway where desire leads us seems suddenly closed; he was ready to follow any beckoning that offered him an immediate purpose" (Ch. 13). At this early stage, Tito fears that Romola will discover from Dino that he has abandoned his father, and his defence against the chaos of the unconscious, in the garish light and "confused din" of "The Peasants' Fair" is to "marry" the peasant girl in a mock ceremony, which was "a sufficiently near parody of sacred things to rouse poor little Tessa's veneration" (Ch. 14). This is also the chapter in which Tito decides to sell the ring, which from a Jungian point of view is a totality symbol, something of immense value that is being thrown away.27

When Baldassarre clutches Tito on the steps of the Duomo, Tito denies him to his face. It is entirely appropriate that Baldassarre should be a prisoner, since Tito has imprisoned him in his unconscious, and it is equally appropriate that Tito should call him a "madman," since the unconscious is anything but rational (Ch. 22). Tito's treatment of Baldassarre is also a parody of Romola's relation to the unconscious. She consistently tries to integrate it, and is not afraid of it. Much later on, Romola typically seeks out Baldassarre: "To some women it might have seemed an alarming risk to go to a comparatively solitary spot with a man who had some of the outward signs of madness which Tito attributed to him" (Ch. 53).

The chapters "No Place for Repentance" (Ch. 34) and "A Supper in the Rucellai Gardens" (Ch. 39) continue the theme of Tito's unwillingness and inability to cooperate with the unconscious, while at the same time parodying Romola's parallel situation in "The Tabernacle Unlocked" (Ch. 37) and "An Arresting Voice" (Ch. 40). They complement Romola's experience at this stage of her development, just as "Waiting by the River" complements "Drifting Away" and "Romola's Waking." In "No Place for Repentance" Tito makes a final effort to come to terms with Baldassarre, who has been given shelter by Tessa.28 But he wants to confess to Baldassarre in private: "it was a repentance that would make all things pleasant again, and keep all past unpleasant things secret" (Ch. 34). The confrontation takes place in a moonlit night world, which symbolizes Tito's wish to restrict it to a subliminal, dreamlike, and therefore forgettable transaction. But the unconscious can't be fooled, which explains why Baldassarre immediately lunges at him with his dagger. In Chapter 39, Baldassarre denounces Tito before the assembled guests at the supper in the Rucellai Gardens, but his mind goes blank and he fails to make credible his charges. Here the "arresting voice" of the unconscious is somehow weaker than the ego, although Tito's reprieve is of

27. See George Levine, "Romola as Fable," pp. 86–88, for related aspects of the ring symbolism.
28. The coming together of Tessa and Baldassarre is no accident, since the two are as much Tito's unconscious projections as they are "real" characters.
course illusory. The night world of “No Place for Repentance” implies that Tito cannot see his shadow, and contrasts sharply with Romola’s perception of it in Chapter 37, when the sun breaks through the early morning gloom. Moreover, while Baldassarre fails in his attempt to discredit Tito, giving him an illusion of mastery, Romola’s submission to the numinous authority of Savonarola in “An Arresting Voice” means that for her the process of integration can begin in earnest.

Tito’s jumping into the Arno to escape the mob is itself a kind of parody of the “night sea journey.” Tito is constantly “drifting away” during the course of the novel. In “Under the Plane-tree” he fails asleep on Tessa’s lap, in a paradigm of his entire relation to her: “he was inclined for a siesta, and inclined all the more because little Tessa was there, and seemed to make the air softer” (Ch. 10). As mentioned earlier, Tito’s interpretation of “the ship on the calm sea” in the portrait is an escapist fantasy (Ch. 20), and even before they are married, Tito hopes to leave Florence (Ch. 17). Tito recurs to this theme, just before he breaks the news that he has sold the library: “there is something in the Florentines that reminds me of their cutting spring winds. I like people who take life less eagerly; and it would be good for my Romola, too, to see a new life. I should like to dip her a little in the soft waters of forgetfulness” (Ch. 32). “Waiting by the River” is thus more than a melodramatic lapse, which makes the reader all the more uncomfortable for knowing that George Eliot “Killed Tito in great excitement!”29 Rather than submitting, like Romola, to the opposites, Tito denies them, and his Nemesis is to be overwhelmed by the unconscious. Tito’s death at the hands of Baldassarre is George Eliot’s “law of consequences” given a psychological validity: “The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate.”30

It is important to realize that George Eliot is not, as Yeats would have it, punishing Tito: “Great literature . . . is . . . the forgiveness of sin, and when we find it becoming the Accusation of Sin, as in George Eliot, who plucks her Tito in pieces with as much assurance as if he had been clockwork, literature has begun to change into something else.”31 He is being punished by himself from within, not from without. Psychologically he has gone over the brink into psychosis. And he, not Romola, conceivably has the suicidal personality. George Eliot stresses on several occasions that Tito is anxious to avoid hurting others: “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” (Ch. 23). That his aggression is directed against himself is made clear by his recognition of Baldassarre as a “living revenge.” He can understand what “makes a man sacrifice himself to his passion as if it were a deity to be worshipped

30. Aion, C. W., IX, ii, 71.
with self-destruction," (Ch. 23) and since Baldassarre is an aspect of himself, the implication is clear.

Baldassarre himself George Eliot presents as objectifying the unconscious. In Chapter 30, "The Avenger's Secret," she says of his revenge: "It is in the nature of all human passion, the lowest as well as the highest, that there is a point where it ceases to be properly egoistic, and is like a fire kindled within our being to which everything else in us is mere fuel." Baldassarre considers how he must look to others. His appearance of madness results from the intense and frustrated longing of the unconscious to become conscious:

in the long hours when he had the vague aching of an unremembered past within him—when he seemed to sit in dark loneliness, visited by whispers which died out mockingly as he strained his ear after them, and by forms that seemed to approach him and float away as he thrust out his hand to grasp them—in those hours, doubtless, there must be continual frustration and amazement in his glance. And more horrible still, when the thick cloud parted for a moment, and, as he sprang forward with hope, rolled together again, and left him helpless as before; doubtless, there was then a blank confusion in his face, as a man suddenly smitten with blindness (Ch. 30).

When, in "The Black Marks become Magical," the Greek text becomes intelligible to him, Baldassarre experiences a consciousness that has been supremely "enriched" by the unconscious: "he only felt the glow of conscious power. . . . He was once more a man who knew cities, whose sense of vision was instructed with large experience, and who felt the keen delight of holding all things in the grasp of language. Names! Images!—his mind rushed through its wealth without pausing, like one who enters on a great inheritance" (Ch. 38). But for all this promise, George Eliot insists on the dark side in his possession by the raw, irrational power of the unconscious: "Baldassarre felt the indestructible independent force of a supreme emotion, which knows no terror, and asks for no motive, which is itself an ever-burning motive, consuming all other desire" (Ch. 38). Later, Baldassarre tells Romola his story in terms of his striving toward consciousness, and of Tito's role in the process: "when I was in the ship on the waters I began to know what I longed for; it was for the Boy to come back—it was to find all my thoughts again, for I was locked away outside them all" (Ch. 53). Ultimately, this is Tito's sin: the thwarting of the impulse of the unconscious to become conscious. Romola herself sees Tito's "light abandonment of ties" in these terms, as fundamentally a violation of inner rather than outer imperatives: "She felt that the sanctity attached to all close relations, and, therefore, pre-eminently to the closest, was but the expression in outward law of that result towards which all human goodness and nobleness must spontaneously tend. . . . What else had Tito's crime towards Baldassarre been but that abandonment working itself out to the most hideous extreme of falsity and ingratitude?" (Ch. 56).
VII. Romola: "Homeward"

The consequences of Romola’s experience are spelled out in Chapter 69, "Homeward." First of all, she has had a shattering experience: "the presence of the new does not nullify the failure and breach of the old. Life has lost its perfection: it has been maimed" (Ch. 69). But the "experience was like a new baptism," giving her a "new position" from which to evaluate her past and future. Romola’s capacity to "judge herself as she had never done before," is a function of her integration of the animus: "in the same way that the anima gives relationship and relatedness to a man’s consciousness, the animus gives to woman’s consciousness a capacity for reflection, deliberation, and self-knowledge."32 She questions her rashness, her arrogance, and her dissatisfaction with others. She is no longer possessed by her "indignant grief for her godfather," and acknowledges "her sense of debt to Savonarola." Her flight now appears "cowardly" and egoistic: "the grounds on which Savonarola had once taken her back were truer, deeper than the grounds she had had for her second flight" (Ch. 69).

Romola also is now able to understand the danger of inflation by the "mana-personality," which Jung describes, for the woman, as "a sublime, matriarchal figure, the Great Mother, the All-Merciful, who understands everything, forgives everything, who always acts for the best, living only for others and never seeking her own interests."33 When Romola returned to her place, after her first flight, she was perhaps somewhat infected by this collective figure. In "The Visible Madonna," her "woman’s tenderness for father and husband, had transformed itself into an enthusiasm of sympathy with the general life." She no longer thought of personal happiness: "the one end of her life seemed to her to be the diminishing of sorrow" (Ch. 44). Now, at the end, her perspective is quite different, and her decision to return to Florence is not made in a spirit of "heroism or exalted charity" (Ch. 70). She comes back with a sense of wholeness, rather than of perfection, which is a consequence of her experience of the self: "Where the archetype predominates, completeness is forced upon us against all our conscious strivings, in accordance with the archaic nature of the archetype. The individual may strive after perfection . . . but must suffer from the opposite of his intentions for the sake of his completeness."34

Romola’s return to the domestic tranquility of Tessa and Lillo, her son by Tito, which to most readers is the most unsatisfactory part of the novel, is nevertheless consonant with the culminating symbolism. The family circle provides a focus for what Jung calls "kinship libido," and Romola’s return to Tessa and Lillo is another aspect of her turning away from

32. Aion. C. W., IX, ii, 16.
34. Aion. C. W., IX, ii, 69.
Savonarola: "being an instinct, it is not to be satisfied by any mere substitute such as a creed, party, nation, or state. It wants the human connection. That is the core of the whole transference phenomenon, and it is impossible to argue it away, because relationship to the self is at once relationship to our fellow man, and no one can be related to the latter until he is related to himself." 35

The novel does not conclude with a quaternity symbol, as might be expected. 36 The presence of the child archetype in Lillo, however, implies that the individuation process is never "completed." Although it looks retrospective, 37 like the only apparent regression of "Drifting Away," the archetype is really forward-looking. The child "represents the strongest, the most ineluctable urge in every being, namely the urge to realize itself. It is, as it were, an incarnation of the inability to do otherwise, equipped with all the powers of nature and instinct. . . . The urge and compulsion to self-realization is a law of nature and thus of invincible power, even though its effect, at the start, is insignificant and improbable." 38 The "little children" really are "the symbol of the eternal marriage between love and duty," as George Eliot characterizes the union of opposites in the "Proem" to the novel. Her belief in "piety," or "loving, willing submission, and heroic Promethean effort towards high possibilities, which may result from our individual life" 39 points to the way in which this union is sustained. In Romola, the marriage is entirely symbolic, although the ordering of the novel leads inevitably to it, and has the same import as the "royal marriage" in alchemy, which is "a symbol of the supreme and ultimate union, since it represents the magic-by-analogy which is supposed to bring the work to its final consummation and bind the opposites by love, for 'love is stronger than death.'" 40 In turning from the "Epilogue" to the "Proem," it is easy to sympathize with George Eliot's statement about the difficulty of the incarnation of thought in her fiction: "When one has to work out the dramatic action for one's self under the inspiration of an idea, instead of having a grand myth or an Italian novel ready to one's hand, one feels anything but omnipotent." 41 But it is impos-

35. "Psychology of the Transference," C.W., XVI, 233. Kinship libido is perhaps involved also in Romola's marriage to Tito. Since Bardo at first regards Tito as a surrogate for his "lost" son Dino, in a sense Romola is marrying her brother. In "Dawning Hopes," for example, Romola's relation to Tito is largely brotherly: "It was like the dawn of a new sense to her—the sense of comradeship" (Ch. 6).

36. "Alchemy teaches that the tension is four-fold, forming a cross which stands for the four warring elements. The quaternity is the minimal aspect under which such a state of total opposition can be regarded." "Psychology of the Transference," C.W., XVI, 303.

37. That the novel ends with a symbol of the "retarding ideal" (Lillo) rather than a symbol of the "progressive ideal" (Tito) is another aspect of George Eliot's "conservatism." The former "is always more primitive, more natural (in the good sense as in the bad), and more 'moral' in that it keeps faith with law and tradition." The latter "is always more abstract, more unnatural, and less 'moral' in that it demands disloyalty to tradition. Progress enforced by will is always convulsive." "The Psychology of the Child Archetype," C.W., IX, i, 163.


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It is not possible not to admire and respect the way in which she wove her psychological insights into a meaningful mythic pattern that more closely approximates a moral-aesthetic whole than is generally recognized.

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