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02

"THE UNDYING HABIT OF FEAR": THE PRESENCE OF THE GOTHIC IN GEORGE ELIOT'S NOVEL *ROMOLA*

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Abstract: This paper proposes an analysis of George Eliot's 1862 novel *Romola* so as to demonstrate that it makes use of gothic conventions. We argue that there are several elements in Eliot's fourth novel that could be read from the perspective of gothic studies, such as language, setting, symbols, imagery and character representation. We focus our analysis on two of these elements. We look first at the imagery which appears in some crucial moments of the narrative to observe how a web of gothic images emerges in these moments. After that, we look at the characterisation of Romola in order to identify traits that are common

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in gothic heroines. We rely mainly on the studies of Mahawatte (2013) for our understanding of how the gothic appears in Eliot's novel and on the research of Garrett (1969), who identifies in Eliot's novel an innovative use of scenes and symbols. In the end, we hope to demonstrate how the gothic emerges in certain moments of the narrative and shapes some of the protagonist's characterisation as well as her relationship with fear and anxiety.
Keywords: *Romola*. George Eliot. Gothic. Gothic imagery. Female Gothic.

Resumo: Este trabalho propõe uma análise do romance *Romola*, escrito por George Eliot in 1862, com vistas a observar o uso que ali se faz de certas convenções góticas. Apresentamos o argumento de que diversos elementos deste quarto romance de Eliot poderiam ser lidos pela perspectiva dos estudos do gótico, tais como a linguagem, o espaço, os símbolos, as imagens e a representação dos personagens. Dois desses elementos concentram o foco de nossa análise. Primeiro, analisamos as imagens que surgem em certas cenas decisivas da história e observamos como elas produzem uma série de imagens góticas. Em seguida, direcionamos nossa atenção para a personagem Romola com o intuito de identificar em sua trajetória traços comumente encontrados nas heroínas góticas. Buscamos embasamento em dois principais estudos: Mahawatte (2013) contribui com nosso entendimento do gótico na obra de Eliot e Garrett (1969) nos auxilia a identificar no romance um uso inovativo de cenas e símbolos. Ao fim, esperamos demonstrar como o gótico surge em certos momentos da narrativa e molda certos aspectos da caracterização da protagonista bem como sua relação com o medo e a ansiedade.
Palavras-chave: Romola. George Eliot. Gótico. Imagens góticas. Gótico Feminino.

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Fear and anxiety are familiar feelings to practically all female experience. Not by chance is such a great portion of gothic fiction authored by women writers, despite the hopefully outdated idea that "Gothic novels are men's reading" (LEDOUX, 2017, p. 2). If we consider, as Mahawatte does, that "the Gothic is concerned with the representation and management of incomprehension – fear" (2013, p. 7) we might be able to look naturally at the idea that Gothic tropes may have had an important role in the fiction of female authors not primarily associated with this literary mode, such as is the case of George Eliot.

In the historiography of English literature, the work of George Eliot is closely associated with nineteenth-century realism, of which she is often considered a great exponent. This association, valid and necessary, combined with the author's "aesthetic and moral aspirations [and] her deep seriousness and determined pursuit of respectability" (LEVINE, 2001, p. 1) gave rise to the idea that the works of George Eliot represent "the voice of a higher culture" (LEVINE, 2001, p. 1), which stands in opposition to allegedly more popular forms such as the entertaining fiction of Charles Dickens (LEVINE, 2001), "the evangelical novel, the occult novel, the tale of the supernatural, the silver-fork school, as well as the novel of sensation" (MAHAWATTE, 2017, p. 8) and, naturally, gothic fiction. In this conjuncture, critics' attention was, at least initially, drawn away from the points of her work which might be in touch with aspects of these often marginalized kinds of fiction.

Mahawatte's (2013) study *George Eliot and the Gothic Novel* is a turning point in Eliot's critical fortune and opens up different possible paths for new understandings of the interactions of

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fictional genres in the nineteenth century. He looks at the presence of the Gothic novel in Eliot's prose fiction from *Scenes of Clerical Life* to *Daniel Deronda*, which he considers "the highest development of the Gothic[1] in George Eliot's novels (MAHAWATTE, 2013, p. 29). His analysis of *Romola* centres specifically on the interpretation of Tito Melema as a male Gothic villain. The present paper aims at expanding this study of Eliot's fourth novel in order to encompass other aspects of the text in which we believe the Gothic may have had an important contribution. Our position is that *Romola* uses a wide array of tropes that are characteristic of eighteenth and nineteenth-century gothic fiction such as setting, plot, character representation, language and imagery. The novel's plot, for example, has instances of dark revelations, prophecies, ghost-like apparitions and persecutions. The setting is also striking: the fact that *Romola* is the only one of Eliot's novels to be set entirely in medieval Florence should, by itself, prick up the Gothic scholar's ears. There are several elements in Eliot's fourth novel that could be read from the perspective of gothic studies, but for reasons of concision and direction, we choose to focus on two of these as we believe they touch on other aspects as well. We propose to look first at the imagery which appearsin some crucial moments of the narrative to observe how a web of gothic images emerges in decisive scenes of the novel. After that, we look at the characterisation of Romola to identify traits that are common in gothic heroines.

1 See also Judith Wilt, who already in 1980, had claimed that *Daniel Deronda* was Eliot's "most Gothic novel" (WILT, 1980, p. 176).

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"A HUGE AND GHASTLY IMAGE": *ROMOLA* AND ITS GOTHIC IMAGERY

The idea that George Eliot's work effects a transformation in the English novel is not new. Already in the 1950s, Walter Allen realized that "her work marks a change in the nature of the English novel, a change so significant as almost to amount to a mutation of the form" (ALLEN, 1975, p. 128). Allen, however, does not define precisely what the mutation consists of. It was Peter Garrett's 1969 study that qualified it in terms of "a profound change of mode, a transition from the realistic to the symbolic novel" (GARRETT, 1969, p. 6). Eliot's novels are known for the richness of details that shape her realism and *Romola* has often been criticized for its excess of detail (BENNETT, 1966, p. 144). Garrett's reading of Eliot's novels as initiating a shift from realism to symbolism enables us to understand her use of ample detail as containing profuse symbolic potential. This, as this section hopes to demonstrate, is particularly relevant to an analysis of Gothic imagery in *Romola*.

Although Garrett does not discuss *Romola* in his analysis of scene and symbol in Eliot's novels, much of what he says sheds light on how "the highly fashioned prose style[2] Eliot used contains imagery of the supernatural, fairy-tales, doubles, the occult and

2 It might be relevant to mention the frequency with which certain words appear in the text of *Romola*. The word *fear* appears 91 times whereas *death* appears 92 times. *Mortal*, which can be considered a variation of *death*, appears 22 times. The word *dark* appears 133 times, although, naturally, it does not always convey an idea of darkness that suggests a gothic atmosphere. *Evil* and *blood* appear 51 times each; *shadow*, 50 times, and *dread*, 56 times. The added number of occurrences of the words *horror* (16), *horrible* (7); *terror* (23) and *terrible* (21) is 67. The words *ghost* (7), *phantasmal* (1), *monster* (5), *monstrous* (3), *corpse* (5), *tomb* (6), *ghastly* (5) and *demon* (19) total 51 occurrences. All these words together total more than 600 occurrences, which suggests that, even if not all of them are instances of gothic images, the language used in *Romola* is a language of fear.

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even elements from Gothic fiction itself" (MAHAWATTE, 2013, p. 4). Not by chance, Garrett starts his analysis of Eliot's symbolism by commenting on a passage in *Daniel Deronda*, considered by both Wilt (1980) and Mahawatte (2013) as having a strong gothic feel, as mentioned above. Combined, the studies of Mahawatte and Garret offer a basis for a reading of realistic detail, symbolism and Gothicism in *Romola*.

In his interpretation of the scene in *Daniel Deronda* in which we see a former church presently used as a stable, Garrett considers that

> in George Eliot the actual predominates; the profuse detail, creating an elaborate verbal picture, works toward an effect not only of 'piquant picturesqueness' but of the solidity and multiplicity of an actual physical presence, rooted in history. Nevertheless, beneath the realistic detail we discern the strong and basically simple outline of a symbolic configuration. (GARRETT, 1969, p. 3)

Although the majority of Garrett's examples come from *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, his observation of how Eliot's writing outlines a symbolic configuration is also revealing of what happens in *Romola*. An attentive reading of her fourth novel shows that, in some of the key moments in the narrative, the symbolic imagery that emerges from the language takes on a distinctly gothic hue. With this in mind, we can look at two such key moments, the first of which happens just outside the Basilica of the Holy Cross right after Romola's and Tito's betrothal.

> While they came out, a *strange dreary chant*, as of a *Miserere*, met their ears, and they saw that

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> at the extreme end of the piazza there seemed to be a stream of people impelled by something approaching from the Borgo de' Greci.
>
> 'It is one of their masqued processions, I suppose,' said Tito, who was now alone with Romola, while Bernardo took charge of Bardo.
>
> And as he spoke there came slowly into view, at a height far above the heads of the onlookers, *a huge and ghastly image of Winged Time with his scythe and hour-glass*, surrounded by his winged children, the Hours. He was mounted on a high car completely *covered with black*, and the bullocks that drew the car were also *covered with black, their horns alone standing out white* above the gloom; so that in the *sombre shadow of the houses* it seemed to those at a distance as if Time and his children were *apparitions floating* through the air. And behind them came what looked like *a troop of the sheeted dead gliding above blackness*. And as they glided slowly, they *chanted in a wailing strain.* (ELIOT, 2005, p. 200, our highlights)

The description of the scene is careful and detailed, as we would expect from Eliot's narrator and creates, in Peter Garrett's words, "an elaborate verbal picture" (GARRETT, 1969, p. 3). The location of the scene outside the famous basilica in Florence and the use of a historical carnival float[3] designed by Piero di Cosimo, a historical

3 It is known that George Eliot wrote *Romola* from thorough research in history, arts and philosophy. One of her most relevant sources was Giorgio Vasari's book *Life of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptures and Architects*. In his biographical sketch of Piero di Cosimo, Vasari mentions this carnival float designed by Piero di Cosimo in 1511. Dennis Geronimus, in his massive 2006 study about the life and art of Piero di Cosimo both confirms and expands Vasari's report. According to him, "Piero's artistic activity far exceeded painting alone [...]. In fact, it was Piero's masques and processional triumphs [...] that were singled out by Vasari as perhaps the most striking embodiments of Piero's idiosyncratic brand of invention" (GERONIMUS, 2006, p. 29). As Geronimus goes on to explain, the float which Eliot portrays here was inspired by the *Triumphs* of the poet Petrarch and is called *carro della Morte*, or *Triumph of Death* and it "astonished all

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character which Tito Melema will refer to right after the quoted paragraph, help establish "the actual physical presence, rooted in history" (GARRETT, 1969, p. 3) that Garrett has observed in Eliot's other novels. Although "the actual predominates" (GARRETT, 1969, p. 3) in this description, the procession works as a grim prophecy for both Romola and Tito.

Prophecies and curses, as we know from as early as *The Castle of Otranto*, are common gothic tropes, but, more than that, the whole passage abounds in gothic imagery. There are the artistic creations of Piero, such as the "sheeted dead", the figures "covered with black" and the very image of death herself, not to mention the "dreary chant" that gives the scene its sinister effect. But there are also the buildings around the basilica that seem to be contaminated by the gothic atmosphere and are seen as "the sombre shadow of the houses". The scene is packed with meaning: like the apparition of a ghost, it recalls Romola's brother's rather gothic vision of her wedding, which will be mentioned below, and of their father's death, two sad episodes of her past that will haunt her throughout the narrative. At the same time, it symbolically represents Romola's naivety and sombre future as well as Tito's forthcoming treachery. Besides its gothic imagery, Piero's procession functions in the narrative as a ghost and a prophecy for both main characters. Not by coincidence, Eliot thought it was strong and significant enough to close the novel's first book.

Florence" (GERONIMUS, 2006, p. 29). Its presence in this scene of *Romola* creates an entire network of historical and artistic references that come to symbolize the main character's gloomy future. The image of the *carro della morte* had such symbolic strength in Eliot's vision that she gave up historical accuracy in anachronically placing it in 1492-3 when it was known to have been put up in 1511.

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The second key moment we highlight happens at the beginning of Book II, when Baldassare Calvo, Melema's adoptive father, arrives in Florence as a prisoner and manages to escape.

> The soldier he saw was struggling along on the north side of the piazza, but the object of his pursuit had taken the other direction. That object was the eldest prisoner, [...]. But in mounting the steps, his foot received *a shock*; he was precipitated towards the group of signori, whose backs were turned to him, and was only able to recover his balance as he clutched one of them by the arm.
>
> It was Tito Melema who *felt that clutch*. He turned his head, and saw the face of his adoptive father, Baldassarre Calvo, close to his own.
>
> The two men looked at each other, *silent as death*: Baldassarre, with *dark fierceness* and a *tightening grip* of the *soiled worn hands* on the velvet-clad arm; Tito, with *cheeks and lips all bloodless, fascinated by terror.* [...]
>
> The first sound Tito heard was the short laugh of Piero di Cosimo [...].
>
> 'Ha, ha! I know what a *ghost* should be now'.
>
> 'This is another *escaped prisoner*,' said Lorenzo Tornabuoni. 'Who is he, I wonder?'
>
> '*Some madman, surely*,' said Tito.
>
> He hardly knew how the words had come to his lips: there are moments when our *passions* speak and decide for us [...]. They carry in them an *inspiration of crime*, that in one instant does the work of long premeditation.
>
> The two men had not taken their eyes off each other, and it seemed to Tito [...] that *some magical poison had darted from Baldassarre's eyes*, and

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> that he felt it rushing through his veins. But the next instant the *grasp on his arm* had relaxed, and Baldassarre had disappeared within the church. (ELIOT, 2005, p. 219-220, our highlights)

Just as Piero's "ghastly image of Winged Time" (ELIOT, 2005, p. 200), Baldassarre Calvo appears to Tito both as a ghost and as a prophecy. And more than that, the old, ragged man's sudden appearance does not only recall the image of a ghost but also reveals to Piero, who is now present in the episode, how to finish a portrait in which he had used Tito's face for one of his characters.[4] The passage concentrates a number of gothic elements: there is not only the apparition of a ghost-like figure and the terror it causes on Tito but also the emergence of dark emotions, such as passions that speak and decide and an inspiration of crime. The looks exchanged by both men also help establish the passage's gothic appearance.

It is Baldassarre's fierce clutch of Tito's arm that will cause the latter to wear his "garment of fear" (ELIOT, 2005, p. 236), a phrase which entitles chapter twenty-six and refers to an armour Tito

4 The scene under analysis here is from chapter 22, "The Prisoners". In chapter 18, "The Portrait", a chapter of central importance to the symbolism in *Romola*, Piero shows Tito one of his ongoing works, a portrait in which Tito's face appears in one of the characters: "I call this as good a bit of portrait as I ever did," [...] "Yours is a face that expresses fear well, because it's naturally a bright one. I noticed it the first time I saw you. The rest of the picture is hardly sketched; but I've painted *you* in thoroughly". Piero turned the sketch, and held it towards Tito's eyes. He saw himself with his right-hand uplifted, holding a wine-cup, in the attitude of triumphant joy, but with his face turned away from the cup with an expression of such intense fear in the dilated eyes and pallid lips, that he felt a cold stream through his veins, as if he were being thrown into sympathy with his imaged self. "You are beginning to look like it already," said Piero, with a short laugh, moving the picture away again. "He's seeing a ghost — that fine young man. I shall finish it some day, when I've settled what sort of ghost is the most terrible — whether it should look solid, like a dead man come to life, or half transparent, like a mist" (ELIOT, 2005, p. 186). Baldassare's appearance in chapter 22 and Piero's statement at the moment suggests that he has decided to paint the ghost as a "dead man come to life", which is what Baldassere is to Tito.

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starts wearing after the encounter. He tries to pass the armour out to Romola as a mere precaution, but her sensitivity understands exactly what the armour symbolizes: "This fear — this heavy armour. [...] I could fancy it a story of enchantment — that some malignant fiend had changed your sensitive human skin into a hard shell. It seems so unlike my bright, light-hearted Tito!" (ELIOT, 2005, p. 250). The use of the word *fiend* in such a moment of the narrative recalls an image from Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, who, like Tito, "walks on / And turns no more his head: / Because he knows, a frightful fiend / Doth close behind him tread[5]" (COLERIDGE, 2008, p. 275).

Both these passages exemplify an important aspect of the narrative technique in *Romola*: its realistic detail, as Peter Garrett claimed, forms the outline of a complex symbolic structure. The meanings of both scenes create a web of images and symbols that will reverberate throughout the story. Differently from what tends to happen in Eliot's other novels, in some decisive moments of the narrative of *Romola*, the tone changes and the description of its realistic detail assumes a distinct gothic quality, indicating the extent to which *Romola* can be understood, at least partly, as a gothic horror story, even if Eliot never consciously meant it to be so.

We are aware that to claim *Romola* can be read, even if partially, as a gothic story is unusual. But *Romola* is unusual, a result of Eliot's changing views on art and life, "a book that was, and remains, to some extent, her least popular novel" (DONADA, 2014, p.77). The claim is not to be supported only by the analysis

5 George Eliot mentions Coleridge's *Rime* in her first novel, *Adam Bede*, so we can be certain that it has a place in her poetic imagination.

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of isolated key moments of the narratives for it is not exclusively in these specific passages that gothic traits appear in the text. As Mahawatte (2013) has demonstrated, Eliot's fourth novel has a gothic villain in the character of Tito Melema. Here we propose to take a step further and look at the extent to which Romola can also be read as a gothic heroine.

ROMOLA AS GOTHIC HEROINE

Mahawatte's book about the Gothic in George Eliot's novels is a thorough study which looks carefully at the relationship between her writing and what he calls the "genres of feeling"[6] that were popular throughout the British nineteenth century. He observes a contradiction between Eliot's engagement with realism and her use of certain conventions of the genres of feelings, clearly stating that "many passages from George Eliot's novels bear a similarity to writing from the genres of feeling" (MAHAWATTE, 2013, p. 30). When looking at *Romola*, he presents a reading of Tito Melema as a "gothicized male figure" (MAHAWATTE, 2013, p. 135) and explores the several ways in which his portrayal resembles those of the male protagonists found in the genres of feelings in general and in the gothic more specifically. However, His focus on Tito Melema assumes the risk of implying that this character concentrates all the presence of gothic aspects in the novel and therefore invites a reading of other moments and characters of the narrative when a gothic atmosphere or portrayal manifests itself.

6 Mahawatte refers to "the evangelical novel, the occult novel, the tale of the supernatural, the silver-fork school, as well as the novel of sensation" (2013, p. 8) and the gothic novel as genres of feeling "because the literary representation of the management of feeling, particularly fear, though not always, is a prime concern of these forms of writing and is a concern that often presides over naturalistic representation" (2013, p. 8).

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Such is the case of the passages analyzed above, in which crucial moments of the story are treated in gothic terms. But there is another instance in which a gothic representation insinuates itself in several moments and that is the representation of Romola as a character. According to Mahawatte,

> Eliot's women are connected to Gothic writing via analogy, irony, intertextuality and fakery, rhetorical methods which function to highlight their limited perspectives and thirsty imaginations. Eliot's men, however, experience exponents of Gothic novels in their lives. Secrecy, seductions, doubling, haunting and dreaded revelations appear as real-time events in Eliot's writing of men. When viewed in terms of male characters, *Romola* and *Felix Holt, The Radical*are Gothic narratives. (MAHAWATTE, 2013, p. 135)

His text goes on to demonstrate how the "exponents of Gothic novels" appear in Melema's life. In this section, we argue that something similar could be said about Romola and point to moments of the narrative in which she too will experience secrecy, doubling, haunting and dreaded revelations. Moreover, this section also looks at other common traits of the female gothic heroine that hover over Romola and observes moments of the text in which she is described either as having a gothic image or as being in an atmosphere that suggests gothic traits.

It is revealing to think about Pampa Arán's description of the typical gothic characters with *Romola* in mind:

> the villain, a rebel antihero who fights against the fate that has condemned him to be malignantly excessive and whose redemption can only start with death; the *femme fatale*, diabolic, ambitious

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> and seductive; the gentleman, always dashing, noble and worthy; the heroine, sum of all classical virtues, usually an orphan but of noble origin, beautiful, naïve and always persecuted and outraged but who remains firm in her principles and finally obtains the hero's love. Among the most important characters are the ghost, a representation of the past in the present, and the vampire. (ARÁN, 2019, n.p)[7]

Naturally, exact correspondences are not found in Eliot's work and still less in *Romola*, in many ways, as suggested elsewhere, her most unsettling book (DONADA, 2011). Tito Melema, as we can observe from the studies of Arán (2019), Wilt (1980) and Mahawatte (2013), shares features of both the villain and the hero, although his hero-like attributes are mostly ironic and will be displaced by the outcomes of the plot. Baldassarre Calvo "is Tito's nemesis, and he brings to mind the theme of the wraith, the double and the personified nemesis crucial to the resolution of Gothic fiction" (MAHAWATTE, 2013, p. 139). As we have seen, Eliot's text subtly crafts this character to resemble a ghost. And Melema, because he feeds on Romola's and Tessa's life and love, displays vampiric traits. It is beyond this paper's scope to analyze other characters than Romola, but it is relevant to mention that besides Tito and Baldassarre, Savonarola and Tessa also share features of typical gothic characters. Tessa is the prototype of the gothic damsel in

7 Original tex in Spanish: "elvillano, antihéroe rebelde que lucha contra el destino que lo ha condenado a ser malignamente excesivo y cuyo proceso de redención solo puede comenzar con la muerte; lamujer fatal, diabólica, ambiciosa y seductora; el caballero, siempre apuesto, noble y valeroso;la heroína, suma de todas las virtudes clásicas, generalmente huérfana, pero de origen noble, bella, inocente y siempre perseguida y ultrajada, que sin embargo se mantiene firme en sus principios y finalmente, pese a todas las pruebas, alcanza el amor delhéro e. Entre los personajes de mayor desarrollo, descuellanel fantasma, representación del pasado en el presente y el vampiro".

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distress and Savonarola, the monk, in several ways, resembles the male gothic villain when he exercises gender and religious oppression over Romola, who needs literally to escape his coercion.

But our interest here is in Romola and in instances in which she appears as a gothic heroine, exhibiting several of the characteristics mentioned above by Pampa Aran: a clear emphasis is placed on Romola's many virtues so that she can be understood "in a long literary tradition of idealized femininity" (STRAUB, 2008, n.p). She starts the story as motherless and her father's death appears in the early stages of the narrative. So she is an orphan and her origin, if not noble is, at least, "conspicuous", as the narrator tells us in chapter five, in which her family is described as "a proud and energetic stock, [...]; conspicuous among those who clutched the sword in the earliest world-famous quarrels of Florentines with Florentines" (ELIOT, 2005, p. 45). Although not a lot of stress is placed on her beauty, "the beautiful Romola" (ELIOT, 2005, p. 39) will be described as such in several moments, as is the case of the chapter that narrates her betrothal, in which her beauty is metaphorically portrayed: "Romola entered, all white and gold, more than ever like a tall lily" (ELIOT, 2005, p. 197). As for being naïve, one could argue that this part is better played by Tessa, in many ways Romola's double or counterpart. She appears naïve though, in comparison to the seductive and elusive Tito Melema.

Strictly speaking, Romola is not a victim of persecution. It is Melema who is literally persecuted by Baldassarre. However, as we have seen, a lot of the meaning of the story is constructed symbolically and Romola is both persecuted and haunted by symbols of her dilemmas and oppressions. Among these symbols

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we highlight the procession she encounters on the day of her betrothal, the vision and the crucifix she receives from her dying brother in chapter fifteen, the portrait Piero di Cosimo paints of her husband in chapter eighteen and "the grey serge dress of a sister belonging to the third order of Saint Francis" (ELIOT, 2005, p. 318), which she wears as a disguise to escape literally from Florence and symbolically from the forms of persecution and oppression she is subjected to in that city. A detail of Eliot's language reinforces that the character is symbolically persecuted: in her first attempt to flee from her city in chapter forty, she is coerced by Savonarola to return. The chapter's title is "An arresting voice". Romola is thus arrested by this symbol of authority and brought back to a symbolic prision. This chapter might be the novel's most evident use of the image of female imprisonment, symbolized in the narrative by Bardo, Tito, Savonarola and by the very city of Florence. Here too "the trope of the Gothic prison has been extended to cover an entire social system" (MILBANK, 2002, p. 149) of oppression which Romola literally tries to escape, like the typical emprisoned gothic heroine. Both the characters and the city that symbolize Romola's imprisonment will outrage her in different ways and degrees: Bardo by wishing she was a son rather than a daughter, Savonarola, by trying to force her into a place she resents, Tito by betraying her trust in all areas of life and Florence uniting, at least initially, all this forms of imprisonment, persecution and outrage.

The last attributes of the gothic heroine as described by Arán is that she "remains firm in her principles and finally obtains the hero's love" (ARÁN, 2019, n.p). In further analyzing the character, one could say that it is precisely because she remains firm in her principles

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that Romola has to face many of the sufferings and dilemmas she encounters. In crucial moments in her story, Romola's strong sense of duty will be put to test and her greatest difficulty will be to decide which of her principles is the strongest. Again, the scene of her first attempt to escape the city of Florence appears as one of the most significant moments in which this can be observed: she feels that her duty to her father is stronger than that she has towards either her city or her husband. Romola too, as early as 1862, refuses to serve her home, her fatherland or her church[8]. And her refusal is all the more radical because she is a woman. She will encounter similar moments throughout her story in which she will feel the need to confront her father, her brother, her husband and finally, her confessor. She obtains the hero's love at the beginning of the story precisely because Tito's portrayal as hero is ironic, the true story of the novel being the story of how Romola will be liberated from the hero who is actually a villain.

To close this analysis of Romola, we now look at two passages that are particularly relevant to observing how she often appears in a gothic scenario or situation. The first passage is that in which Romola first appears in the story, in chapter five, "The blind scholar and his daughter":

> The house in which Bardo lived [...] was one of those *large sombre masses of stone building* pierced by comparatively small windows, and surmounted by what may be called a roofed terrace or *loggia* [...]. *Grim doors*, with *conspicuous scrolled hinges*,

8 This is a reference to James Joyce's character Stephen Dedalus, who thus tells his friend Cranly in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: "I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church" (JOYCE, 1992, p.191). There is reason enough to argue that "*Romola* has many things in common with [...] *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*" (DONADA, 2013, p. 55 - 56).

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> having high up on each side of them a small window defended by *iron bars*, opened on a *groined entrance-court*[9], empty of everything but a massive lamp-iron suspended from the centre of the *groin*. A *smaller grim door* on the left-hand admitted to the *stone staircase*, and the rooms on the ground-floor. [...] A large table in the centre was covered with *antique bronze lamps* and small vessels in dark pottery. The colour of these objects was chiefly *pale or sombre*: the vellum bindings, with their deep-ridged backs, gave little relief to the *marble, livid with long burial*; the once splendid patch of carpet at the farther end of the room had long been *worn to dimness*; the *dark bronzes* wanted sunlight upon them to bring out their tinge of green [...].
>
> The only spot of bright colour in the room was made by the hair of a tall maiden of seventeen or eighteen, who was standing before a carved *leggio*, or reading-desk [...]. The hair was of a reddish gold colour, enriched by an unbroken small ripple, such as may be seen in the sunset clouds on grandest autumnal evenings. It was *confined by a black fillet* above her small ears, from which it rippled forward again, and made a natural *veil* for her neck above her square-cut gown of black *rascia*, or serge. Her eyes were bent on a large volume placed before her. (ELIOT, 2005, p. 47-48, our highlights)

Before having its protagonist make its first appearance, the chapter carefully introduces the place where Romola will be seen for the first time and often in subsequent chapters, especially those of volume I of the novel. The Bardi house is described to give out a gothic impression: the repetition of the words “sombre”, “stone”, “grim”, “marble/bronze” and “dark/black” in themselves would

9 The rib vault, a common feature of gothic architecture is a development of the groined vault. Both architectural elements have similar features and visual effects.

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already be suggestive. But besides that, details of the building's decoration and architecture also resemble the gothic houses of nineteenth-century gothic novels and stories. The centre table has bronze lamps that are antique (not *old*, but *antique*), the pottery and bronze figures are dark, the carpet has been worn out and the marble looks livid as a buried corpse. Architecturally, the house is not only a large sombre stone building with grim doors and a stone staircase. It has a groined hall, with the word "groin" appearing again just a few lines below for added emphasis, and a *loggia*. Both the groined vault and the *loggia* are common in Medieval Florence and both are very familiar to gothic architecture.

Appearing as "the only spot of bright colour in the room" (ELIOT, 2005, p. 48), Romola contrasts with the setting's bleakness. Her golden hair initially seems to illuminate the gloomy place until we are told that is confined (a word that resonates strongly in gothic narratives, especially in the so-called female-gothic) in black. Romola herself, the reader will soon notice is half-confined in that space. One could argue that the brightness of her portrayal diminishes the gothic feeling of the passage but, stylistically, it can equally be claimed that it produces an effect that is also familiar to the gothic: the chiaroscuro, a technique of Renaissance painting that is often used in gothic art to help create an intense emotional effect. The chiaroscuro technique has often been used in gothic literature to suggest fear, tension or heightened emotional states. In Eliot's novels in general and in *Romola* particularly, the visual arts[10] tend to have a significant space but the reading we wish to

10 *Romola* has a strong visual element that comes mostly from the privileged place that the art of painting has in the novel. As I have argued elsewhere, "In *Romola*, George Eliot incorporates the concreteness of painting to her writing in a way which only came

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offer of the appearance of a scene in chiaroscuro in this passage is that it foreshadows later developments of the plot. As already mentioned, the confront of light and darkness resembles the moral confrontations Romola will later experience.

Finally we look at a crucial scene in which Romola's bother Dino will reveal to her a prophetic vision he has had and give her the cricifix that will symbolically haunt her for the rest of the story. In chapter fifteen, Dino thus speaks to his sister:

> Romola, [...] I saw my father's room — the library — with all the books and the *marbles* and the leggio, [...]; and I saw you — you were revealed to me as I see you now, with fair long hair, sitting before my father's chair. And at the leggio stood a man whose face I could not see. I looked, and looked, and *it was a blank* to me, even as a painting effaced; and I saw him move and take thee, Romola, by the hand; and then I saw thee take my father by the hand; and you all three *went down the stone steps* into the streets, the *man whose face was a blank* to me leading the way. And you stood at the *altar in Santa Croce*, and the priest who married you had the *face of death*; and the *graves opened*, and *the dead in their shrouds rose* and followed you like a bridal train. And you passed on through the streets and the gates into the valley, and it seemed to me that he who led you hurried you more than you could bear, and *the dead were weary* of following you, and turned back to their *graves*. And at last you came to *a stony place where there was no water*, and no trees or herbage; but instead of water, I saw written parchment unrolling itself everywhere, and instead of trees and herbage I

to be fully developed by the Modernist writers a few decades later. A brief comparison of the visual appeal of *Romola* and of Virginia Woolf's "Kew Gardens", for instance, can illustrate the point" (DONADA, 2013a, p. 324).

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> saw *men of bronze and marble* springing up [...]. And my father was faint for want of water and fell to the ground; and the *man whose face was a blank* loosed thy hand and departed: and as he went I could see his face; and it was *the face of the Great Tempter*. And thou, Romola, didst *wring thy hands* and seek for water, and there was none. And the *bronze and marble figures* seemed to mock thee and hold out cups of water, and when thou didst grasp them and put them to my father's lips, they turned to parchment. And the *bronze and marble figures* seemed to turn into *demons* and *snatch my father's body* from thee, and the *parchments shrivelled up, and blood ran everywhere* instead of them, and *fire upon the blood*, till they all vanished, and the plain was *bare and stony* again, and thou wast alone in the midst of it. And then it seemed that *the night fell* and I saw no more... Thrice I have had that vision, Romola. I believe it is a *revelation* meant for thee: to warn thee against marriage as a temptation of the enemy; [...]. (ELIOT, 2005, p. 157-158, our highlights)

His vision is arguably a gothic story. Dreamy and dark in atmosphere, it has got a gloomy and barren landscape[11], a helpless heroine and an evil villain, references to demons and a great tempter, blood everywhere and the dead leaving their open graves: perfect gothic nightmare. But it is not only in setting and atmosphere that Dino's vision is gothic. Its function in the narrative is that of a prophecy which will be confirmed as the

11 It is possible to observe a certain resemblance between the gothic aspect in this scene and certain scenes in The Waste Land: "After the agony in stony places / The shouting and the crying / Prison and palace and reverberation / Of thunder of spring over distant mountains / He who was living is now dead / We who were living are now dying" (ELIOT, 1998, p. 39-40). T. S. Eliot's poem has often been associated with the gothic because of its dark images and visions of life in death and death in life. It can be understood as a piece of "Modernist-Gothic" (ELBERT, 1994, p. 19).

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story progresses. The vision haunts Romola from the moment when she hears it up to the point in which she leaves Florence for the second time, several years later. It is one of the "dreaded revelations" (MAHAWATTE, 2013, p. 135) that Mahawatte considers particular to the experience of male protagonists in Eliot's writing. According to him, as stated above, "secrecy, seductions, doubling, haunting, and dreaded revelations appear as real-time events in Eliot's writing of men" (MAHAWATTE, 2013, p. 135). However, as we hope to have demonstrated, Romola also experiences these events in her life. Seductions, one could argue, are not the character's strongest point, although she was seduced by both Tito and Savonarola. Secrecy enters her life with Tito but she will also act secretively in some pressing moments, such as when she first flees from Florence in disguise. Another meaningful moment when she is reticent is in trying to warn her godfather, her only surviving bond to Florence, about the risks he faces:

> I have heard things — some I cannot tell you. But you are in danger in the palace [...]. "Oh no, no!they are not old truths that I mean," said Romola, pressing her clasped hands painfully together, as if that action would help her to suppress what must not be told. They are fresh things that I know, but cannot tell. (ELIOT, 2005, p. 452)

She prefers to keep the truth about Tito's betrayals secret even at the cost of losing the only person alive she truly loves. Bernardo del Nero, her godfather, is clearly a double of Bardo, her deceased father. He is the latter's more understanding side, a father figure who does not resent her gender and who loves her more unreservedly. He helps keeps Romola and ties her to Florence's political life in the

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present thus contrasting with Bardo, who lives "among his books and his marble fragments of the past" (ELIOT, 2005, p. 47). This leads us to doubling, a common characteristic of gothic literature also found here. Romola herself has four doubles who will enact roles that she either refuses or has no need of. Tessa is the double that plays the part of mother and submissive wife which Romola will resist fiercely. Dino lives the spiritual life she cannot access and her cousin Monna Brigida, by converting to religious faith, liberates Romola from so doing. Savonarola, perhaps the most important of her doubles, will experience moral dilemmas similar to Romola's but he will approach them from a very different position as a man, a priest, a leader and a political figure. In one of the most compelling scenes of the novel, when Romola pleas for her godfather's life, the narrator reveals the central core of these characters' actions: "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" (ELIOT, 2005, p. 468). Romola ends up deciding that "rebellion might be sacred too" (ELIOT, 2005, p. 468) and that decision holds to key to explore the entire system of George Eliot's complex morality. But this is a discussion that requires and deserves a space of its own. We end this section by trying to connect Eliot's morality with the gothic expression we have observed in her fourth novel: "for all Eliot's erudition and secularism, she could not let go of a morality of virtue[12] and retribution. Much of this was conveyed through Gothic idiom: thrilling events and startling emotional

12 It is interesting to observe that for George Levine, this kind of morality is not only predominant in Eliot's writing but, more widely, in realist fiction. For him, "the mythology of virtue rewarded, central to English realism, is put to question in the gothic landscape" (LEVINE, 1981, p. 27).

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lessons" (MAHAWATTE, 2013, p. 20). This lets us see the extent to which a gothic representation, even if emerging unconsciously, was relevant to Eliot's fictional imagination.

FINAL REMARKS

This paper is a tentative effort to reflect on the presence of gothic elements in George Eliot's fourth novel. More than an attempt to read *Romola* as a gothic text, it tries to observe in its gothic manifestations a small part of this book's idiosyncrasies and of the role it plays in Eliot's literary imagination. The long tradition of criticism in which Eliot's work is approached as fundamentally realistic has taught us much about her novels and stories but has not encouraged a systematic study of ways in which the more sensational, sentimental or fantastical genres of the nineteenth-century have interacted with her writing. Mahawatte's study is an important step in this direction and gives the topic the attention that its complexity demands, offering a valid complement to more canonical studies as those of Knoepflmacher (1968) and Levine (1981). The more complex discussion of realism in *Romola* remains outside the scope and competence of the present study. Suffice it to say, for the moment, that *Romola* occupies a peculiar place in Eliot's *oeuvre* and that the "common criticism that […] it seemed to have lost hold on realism" (DONADA, 2014, p. 78) might be better clarified by such studies as this, Mahawatte's (2013) and Wilt's (1980).

For the development of our argument, we have chosen a methodological procedure similar to that employed by Peter Garrett but against which Garrett himself warns us. What he does is to "direct attention toward scenes of heightened significance"

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(GARRETT, 1969 p. 15). This is exactly what we have done in analyzing scenes that are pivotal to the development of the narrative. We have chosen this approach because it is precisely in such scenes that we recognize a concentration of gothic elements, although, as already discussed, they also appear in the novel's protagonists. According to Garrett,

> […] this procedure carries a greater risk of distortion when applied to Geroge Eliot [...]. We must recognize that many of her most characteristic scenes do not display a notable concentration of meaning. An important element of her realism is its concern with, indeed its insistence on the normal. (GARRETT, 1969, p. 15)

We agree with Garrett's position and assume the risk because we see *Romola* as an experiment in which Eliot allowed herself to manipulate her objects differently and more freely than she had done in her English novels. In a letter to a friend, when considering the unpopularity of her fourth novel, Eliot once wrote that "if one is to have the freedom to write out one's own varying unfolding self, and not be a machine always grinding out the same material [...], one cannot always write for the same public" (ELIOT, apud HAIGHT, 1985, p. 360). Something then, even if small, must have changed in her conception of novel writing when she wrote *Romola*. Our position is that this methodological procedure is valid for *Romola* (even if potentially dangerous in the analysis of Eliot's other novels) as it contributes to pinpointing important aspects of the gothic's presence in this novel precisely because in some of these crucial scenes, the narrative's tone changes: the language becomes charged with fear and darkness and the gothic emerges.

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Important scenes and topics remain unaddressed here. We choose, for example, to leave out an analysis of the scene in chapter sixty-eight, when Romola arrives at a plague-stricken village and finds there what is possibly the novel's most gothic scenario. Although symbolically crucial to the development of the narrative, the passage is considerably longer than the ones we have discussed and its gothic images, although plenty, are scattered through several paragraphs and is, therefore, difficult to quote. We have also refrained from attempting a fuller consideration of the connection between realism and the gothic in Eliot's work, as this would demand another kind of research. The issue of how "realism and symbolism coexist in some degree of tension without the one negating the other (NEWTON, 2010, p. 79) and the complex question of gender representation in Eliot's use of the gothic have only been superficially scratched. However, this much we may be able to state: whether consciously or not, something gothic appears in the language, scenery, characters and plot of *Romola*, a novel in which the title character struggles for an identity in which womanhood can be associated with some degree of freedom and agency. For that, Romola needs to escape from different forms of female imprisonment. In this scenario, it is not surprising that she should find herself among several symbols of confinement and isolation and represented, at least on certain occasions, as a gothic heroine. The novel's controversial ending offers the protagonist, perhaps idealistically, a way to try and put an end to the experience of that "undying habit of fear" (ELIOT, 2005, p. 544) and anxiety which appears so often in gothic stories and in the female experience of life.

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