

The Eschatology of the Scapegoat:
Fagin in *Oliver Twist* and Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

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by charlie peters

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**The Eschatology of the Scapegoat:
Fagin in *Oliver Twist* and Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss***

BY

Charlie Peters

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree
of
MASTER OF ARTS**

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ABSTRACT

In “The Eschatology of the Scapegoat: Fagin in *Oliver Twist* and Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*,” I employ Rene Girard’s stereotypes concerning the persecution of scapegoats to show how the titular novels operate as persecution texts which scapegoat Fagin and Maggie. Both the rhetoric of these novels and of the 1832 Reform Bill demonstrate Michel de Certeau’s adage that the strategies of the strong “attempt to reduce temporal relations to spatial ones” (38).

Fagin is scapegoated for being a Jew, for his parody of the bourgeois domestic sphere, and for his poaching on Oliver outside the confines of inner-city London. When Fagin’s use of tactics and timing available to the weak are circumvented by the league of gentlemen, Fagin is turned over to the Christian legal system for eschatological judgement.

Maggie’s temporal orientation changes from a focus on the present in childhood, which is universalized by the narrator as the temporality of bourgeois childhood, to a focus on the past and present when Maggie transitions to working-class adulthood. Confined by an interiority distinguished by temporal configurations determined by age and class, Maggie is scapegoated when she is unable to transition to bourgeois adulthood.

In both novels and the 1832 Reform Bill, far-sightedness is the temporal orientation that distinguishes bourgeois interiority. Bourgeois far-sightedness holds in place hierarchical class- and age-based determinations through spatial confinement.

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for kara and chelsea
without you, for me there would be no writing

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Introduction:

A Beginning: *Oliver Twist* and *The Mill on the Floss* as Persecution Texts

Eschatology, a coinage from the mid-nineteenth century, is “the department of theological science concerned with ‘the four last things: death, judgement, heaven and hell,’” according to the *OED*. By the mid-twentieth century, “the sense of this word has been modified to connote the present ‘realization’ and significance of the ‘last things’ in the Christian life” (*OED*). Both senses of eschatology, the distribution from on high of judgements about the value of human life and the interiorization of these valuations, are evident in the situations of Fagin in *Oliver Twist* and Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*.

Fagin is positioned as an outsider in a novel whose preoccupations with religiosity are worn on its sleeve. He is “the Jew” (105, 106, 107, etc.) whose status as outcast, even in relation to the Jewish community, is signaled by everything from his lascivious interest in boys, to his administrative role in plans to steal property, his repulsion of “men of his own persuasion” in his final hours (469), and his preparation of “sausages” (105), not to mention his consumption of the “ham which the Dodger had brought home in the crown of his hat” (109). The league of gentlemen pursue Fagin with their vigilante justice in *Oliver Twist*, then turn Fagin over to lawful authorities for judgement. This decision engages a Christian legal system that would slay the chosen dragon or, more specifically for Fagin, pin the tail on the scapegoat, and mete out judgement before death.

Maggie's desire for death forms a striking contrast to Fagin's terror as he anticipates his execution. Her "overdetermin[ed]" death (Fraiman 32) has been noted by several critics.¹ Yet, in childhood, Maggie is intellectually ambitious, rebellious, and exuberant, and allusions to her death are also overlooked. José Angel García Landa, in his article "The Chains of Semiosis: Semiotics, Marxism, and the Female Stereotypes in *The Mill on the Floss*," suggests "Maggie's death in the flood as a *deus ex machina*" is "the usual view" (78). This implies that her death can be considered a sudden one, since the *OED* defines *deus ex machina* as that which "comes in the nick of time to solve a difficulty." However, there are many allusions to Maggie's death. When Maggie is a child, her death by drowning is predicted by her mother, Bessy Tulliver. Then, when Maggie transitions to adulthood, she begins to wait and long for her own death. As she puts it in conversation with Philip Wakem: "I must wait; this life will not last long" (275). Maggie tells her Aunt Gritty that she wishes she "could have died when [she] was fifteen" (407). When Maggie receives a letter from Stephen Guest after their fateful boat ride, "no image of rest com[es] across her mind, except of that far, far-off rest from which there would be no more waking for her into this struggling earthly life" (462). After she burns that letter, she regrets the prospect of her own longevity: "But how long it will be before death

1 In "*The Mill on the Floss*, the Critics, and the *Bildungsroman*," Susan Fraiman's overview of critics' treatments of the novel includes her assertion that "critics of many feminist stripes have taken for granted the overdetermination of Maggie's doom" (32).

comes! I am so young, so healthy” (465). Then, when the flood comes, Maggie immediately seizes upon it as her opportunity to die: “In the first moments Maggie felt nothing, thought of nothing, but that she had suddenly passed away from that life which she had been dreading; it was the transition of death, without its agony—and she was alone in the darkness with God” (467). The flood is an opportunity for Maggie to avoid living.

This thesis begins with consideration of Fagin’s and Maggie’s deaths because my discussion of their scapegoating will have a decidedly eschatological focus. Fagin and Maggie die because they betray an inviolable or an idealized childhood. Whereas Fagin is set up as scapegoat in relation to the inviolable child Oliver Twist, Maggie is scapegoated in relation to her own childhood, which is retrospectively idealized by Maggie, herself, as well as by some critics of the novel.² Both Larry Wolff and Joseph Litvak identify Fagin’s treatment of children as the predominant component of his criminality—and the one that causes him to be hanged. Wolff names pederasty as Fagin’s specific crime, whereas Litvak suggests it is Fagin’s treatment of Christian children in general that leads to his execution.³ Similarly, I

2 For example, in “*Holiday House: Grist to The Mill on the Floss, or Childhood as Text*,” Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, with considerable irony, given her deconstructive approach to hegemonic constructions of childhood, maintains that “if there is anything critics seem to agree on, [. . .] it is that Eliot, in *The Mill on the Floss*, was preeminently successful in describing childhood” (78).

3 In “Bad Scene: *Oliver Twist* and the Pathology of Entertainment,” Litvak says it is “apparently so self-evident as to go without saying in the narrative” that Fagin “must be punished precisely for pointing a toasting-fork—and later, a knife—at Christian

argue that it is adult-Maggie's working-classed difference from her own bourgeois-classed status in childhood for which she is persecuted by the narrator and made scapegoat of *The Mill on the Floss*.

Persecution Texts

René Girard, medieval historian and professor of French language, literature, and civilization at Stanford University, considers historical, mythological, and religious texts (specifically, the Gospels of The Jerusalem Bible) in *The Scapegoat*. Girard discovers stereotypes regarding persecutions of the scapegoat that are shared by selected texts of these three types. While introducing his analysis of persecutions of the scapegoat, Girard discusses others' methodologies and alludes to his own. He suggests that "[m]any scholars today believe their critical insight develops in proportion to increasing scepticism" (1) and he connects this to "an extreme crisis, which is undermining what was once called historical science" (2). For Girard, texts "contain real information" (1) and historical facts can be known: "Our interpretation

children. As Deborah Heller has observed, Dickens uses Fagin to update the medieval stereotype of the Jew 'as subhuman monster, as poisoner, as kidnapper, mutilator, murderer of innocent Christian children, on whom, perhaps, he cannibalistically feeds in observance of alien rituals.' [. . .] Butchering the butcher, Fagin's executioners would avenge his crime against Christianity" (41). Larry Wolff, in "The Boys are Pickpockets, and the Girl is a Prostitute": Gender and Juvenile Criminality in Early Victorian England from *Oliver Twist* to *London Labour*," identifies Fagin as a pederast during his discussion of "[t]he vagueness of vice" in *Oliver Twist* (230).

of all the texts is confirmed statistically” (7).

The stereotypes concerning persecutions of the scapegoat that Girard discovers are discussed below and comprise the majority of his analysis with the important exception of his work on the Gospel texts. Girard’s many evocative close readings of historical and mythological texts culminate in a close reading of Gospel texts to show Jesus’s situation as the Paraclete, which the *OED* defines as:

“*Christian Church*. In form Paraclete. As a title given to the Holy Spirit (or occas. Christ): an advocate, intercessor; a helper or comforter.” For Girard, Jesus as Paraclete changes the way the term scapegoat can be regarded: “[w]hen we exclaim: ‘The victim is a scapegoat,’ we resort to a biblical expression that no longer has the same significance as it had for the participants in the ritual of that name. It has the meaning of the innocent lamb in Isaiah or the Lamb of God in the Gospels” (202).

Girard defines the Paraclete this way:

Parakleitos, in Greek, is the exact equivalent of advocate or the Latin advocatus. The Paraclete is called on behalf of the prisoner, the victim, to speak in his place and in his name, to act in his defense. The Paraclete is the universal advocate, the chief defender of all innocent victims, the destroyer of every representation of persecution. He is truly the spirit of truth that dissipates the fog of mythology. (207)

Girard engages in a progressivist historical reading of the scapegoat that culminates in a delineation of Christian eschatology. He maintains that “[t]he Spirit is working in

history to reveal what Jesus has already revealed, the mechanism of the scapegoat, the genesis of all mythology, the nonexistence of all gods of violence. [. . .] the Spirit is necessary in history to work to disintegrate the world and gradually discredit all the gods of violence” (207). Needless to say, there is considerable irony in the pairing of Girard’s revelational Christian eschatological structure and my attempts, here, to problematize the workings of that structure in the scapegoating of Fagin and Maggie, using Girard’s definitions and stereotypes of the persecutions of scapegoats.

Girard defines persecution texts as “accounts of real violence, often collective, told from the perspective of the persecutors, and therefore influenced by characteristic distortions. These distortions must be identified [. . .] in order to reveal the arbitrary nature of the violence that the persecution text presents as justified” (9). Both *Oliver Twist* and *The Mill on the Floss* are, I argue, persecution texts. The “real [collective] violence” of these texts is considered in my concluding chapter, “The Crisis of the Scapegoat and the Rhetoric of Reform,” along with the first of Girard’s four stereotypes that characterize the collective persecution of scapegoats: the “generalized loss of differences” (24) that occurs in times of crisis when “[c]ulture is somehow eclipsed as it becomes less differentiated” (14). In that chapter, I trace parallels between contemporary nineteenth-century concerns about electoral reform and these novels’ concerns with relationships between class, mobility, and interiority. Justifications of arbitrary violence are attributable to the texts’ narrators since they double as persecutors who “consider themselves judges, and therefore they must

have guilty victims” (6), to recall one of Girard’s maxims. Since the tyranny of the omniscient narrators’ authority in these novels is unrestrained, if not uncontested, by other narrative elements, their justifications are arbitrary. It is the mechanics of their narrative decision-making—and “every real cultural *decision*,” Girard reminds us, “has a sacrificial character (*decidere*, remember, is to cut the victim’s throat)” (114)—that make Fagin and Maggie scapegoats.

Also relevant is Girard’s distinction between texts which do “not mention that the victim is a scapegoat and force[...] us to articulate that fact instead” and texts which do “tell[...] us explicitly that the victim is a scapegoat” (117). Both *Oliver Twist* and *The Mill on the Floss* are in the former camp, at least where Fagin and Maggie as scapegoats *of* the text are concerned. Whereas the scapegoat *in* the text is “the clearly visible theme,” the scapegoat *of* the text is “the hidden structural principle” (119). According to Girard, only the text that structurally conceals the scapegoat is a persecution text. For example, my discussion focuses on Maggie’s situation as a scapegoat *of* the text (where the constitution of Maggie’s interiority is “the hidden structural principle” which makes her death in the flood necessary) rather than her situation as a scapegoat *in* the text (where Maggie’s scapegoating after the outing with Stephen Guest, particularly by the women of St. Ogg’s, is clearly articulated in the text). The revelation of Fagin’s scapegoating is attributable to his confinement within London’s inner city and the structural opposition between Fagin’s Jewishness and Oliver’s Christianity. Unlike Maggie’s scapegoating, which is also

obscured by the narrator's palpable preference for the protagonist of *The Mill on the Floss*, Fagin's potential as scapegoat is made more evident by his narrator's expressions of revulsion towards him; however, his potential as scapegoat is hidden by the wide distribution of punishments in *Oliver Twist* that obfuscate the significance of Fagin's selection for exposure to legal judgement.

Stereotypes of Persecution

Girard's *The Scapegoat* contains useful descriptions of the four stereotypes that characterize the collective persecution of scapegoats. The first three stereotypes are: 1) the "generalized loss of differences" (24) that occurs when "[c]ulture is somehow eclipsed as it becomes less differentiated" in times of crisis (14); 2) the association of scapegoats with "crimes that 'eliminate differences'" (24), such as incest, bestiality, and parricide; and 3) the selection of victims by criteria typified by "the paradoxical marks of the absence of difference" (24),⁴ such as physical or social

4 The phraseology of this third stereotype may require some clarification. As Girard explains it, "[t]he signs that indicate a victim's selection result not from the difference within the system but from the difference outside the system, the potential for the system to differ from its own difference, in other words not to be different at all, to cease to exist as a system. This is easily seen in the case of physical disabilities. The human body is a system of anatomic differences. If a disability, even as a result of an accident, is disturbing, it is because it gives the impression of a disturbing dynamism. It seems to threaten the very system. Efforts to limit it are unsuccessful; it disturbs the differences that surround it. These in turn become monstrous, rush together, are compressed and blended together to the point of destruction. Difference that exists outside the system is terrifying because it reveals the truth of the system, its relativity, its fragility, and its mortality" (21).

signs considered to be abnormal, like disabilities, extremes of “beauty and ugliness, vice and virtue, the ability to please and to displease” (19), as well as victims’ status as marginal outsiders or insiders, including those who are extremely poor or extremely rich.

Lastly, the fourth stereotype, “stereotypes of violence” (24) against the scapegoat, can involve “total reconciliation” for the community after the victim has been subjected to violence (and, in *The Scapegoat*, this violence is always murderous), since the victim, transmuted into a representative of the sacred in mythological contexts, can “successfully polarize all the suspicions, tensions, and reprisals that poisoned those relationships” (42) within the community. And since the victim is “responsible for everything” (43), the cure as well as the sickness, the dual quality of the scapegoat is very much in evidence here. The scapegoat, or *pharmakos*, is, as Canadian literary theorist Northrop Frye explains, “neither innocent nor guilty” (qtd. in Derrida, *Dissemination* 132, note 59) and, like the *pharmakon*, can represent both remedy and poison for a community. In this regard, I abstain from engaging with Girard’s assertion that the scapegoat after the Gospel texts is innocent. This fourth category, “stereotypes of violence,” can involve the apparently voluntary self-sacrifice of the victim, an aspect that is relevant to Maggie’s scapegoating in *The Mill on the Floss*. For there can also be “subtle element[s] of constraint [that] eat[. . .] away at that freedom” and maintain the victim’s status as scapegoated victim (Girard 62). Since the stereotypes of violence are discussed over

several chapters in *The Scapegoat* and consequently are varied and numerous, here I mention just one other aspect of that violence that is significant to my analysis: the frequency in scenes of collective murder in which “the murderers are in a circle around their victim” (66); this will become significant in the discussion of Fagin’s situation in London’s inner city as scapegoat of *Oliver Twist*.

Finally, it is necessary to elaborate on how I employ Girard’s second stereotype of persecution, the association of scapegoats with “crimes that ‘eliminate differences’” (24), in my analysis of the two novels. While the examples listed above (incest, bestiality, parricide) are, according to Girard, emblematic of such crimes, they are not representative of the range or nuances of the type of criminality that Girard outlines, nor the elasticity which, it seems to me, the term crime will bear in the context of the scapegoat. Girard states that there are “[c]ertain accusations [that] are so characteristic of collective persecution that their very mention makes modern observers suspect violence in the air” (14-15). These crimes “choose as object those people whom it is most criminal to attack,” including symbols of authority, such as kings and fathers, and “the weakest and most defenseless, especially young children” (15). Frequently, the crimes are transgressions of strict taboos and religious precepts, “such as profanation of the host” (15). While both Fagin and Maggie can be charged with crimes that conform to the specific social, cultural, and legalistic parameters that Girard outlines or adumbrates (pederastic and incestuous tendencies, respectively), in my argument, the focus is on ideologically broad transgressive

scenarios which, nonetheless, conform to Girard's stipulation that these are crimes that "attack the very foundation of cultural order" (15). Specifically, I argue that Fagin's principal crime is his transgressive use of the domestic sphere that is a crux of Victorian ideological formulations, while the crime for which adult-Maggie is scapegoated involves her inability to transition to a specifically bourgeois-classed adult temporality as well as her suppression of self-pleasing desires and characteristics such as rebelliousness.

For a text to be persecutive, Girard considers it necessary for only two or three of the four stereotypes to be evident. With regard to Fagin in *Oliver Twist* and Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss*, all four stereotypes can be found. In the first chapter, the scapegoating of Fagin in *Oliver Twist* is explored specifically in terms of the second and third stereotypes of persecution, with aspects of the fourth stereotype, as highlighted above, evident in that discussion. There, I focus on the specifics of Fagin and Oliver's structural opposition, Fagin's parody of the bourgeois domestic sphere, his poaching on the property of the strong and his use of tactics available to the weak, and, finally, the circumvention of Fagin's use of those tactics by the mechanics of a triumphal Christian eschatology, and its attendant temporalizations, which dominate the final pages of *Oliver Twist*. In the second chapter, Maggie's scapegoating in *The Mill on the Floss* is also considered in terms of the same two of Girard's four stereotypes of persecution. There, I explore critics' preoccupation with the novel's ending, adult-Maggie and child-Maggie's structural opposition, the

constant and inconstant attributes of Maggie's interiority, as well as the temporal and classed implications of those attributes.

Hierarchical Difference and the Scapegoat

Plainly, Girard's *The Scapegoat* has been invaluable to me as I structure my argument. Notwithstanding this, Girard's insistence that hierarchical difference mitigates scapegoating practices is not supported by the scapegoating mechanisms evident in *Oliver Twist* and *The Mill on the Floss*. In these novels, scapegoating hinges on hierarchical differences between an inviolable or idealized childhood and a degenerate adulthood that are thoroughly embedded in the structures of both novels and, by the mid-nineteenth century, in many discourses in circulation in Victorian culture.⁵ Significantly, in *Oliver Twist* and *The Mill on the Floss*, generational hierarchization attributes inviolability and moral supremacy to a particular brand of bourgeois childhood, a developmental stage with little actual power and authority, while depositing degeneracy and scapegoatability on adulthood, the developmental stage with the most actual power and authority. These novels' scapegoats are not,

⁵ For example, in *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930*, Carolyn Steedman considers how, throughout the nineteenth century, physiologists, medical practitioners, and parents held in thrall by their discourses through popular child-care manuals and doctor's guides maintained that "the end of growth," and of childhood, marked "the beginning of the material body's decline" (64). I suggest that the ascription of decline to adult bodies is also shared by adult interiorities in *Oliver Twist* and *The Mill on the Floss*.

however, adults with power and authority within their culture. Fagin and Maggie are, respectively, members of the lower and working classes and neither are enfranchised. And yet, when the role of scapegoat settles on Fagin and Maggie, one implicit justification is their adulthood, the degenerate half of a structurally hierarchical continuum in these texts which exalts childhood. Significantly problematic, then, is Girard's recourse to an allegation about the originary status of the family and hierarchy with regard to cultural and social order, respectively, when he claims that "the very foundation of cultural order" is "the family and the hierarchical differences without which there would be no social order" (15). When Girard makes the unverifiable claim that hierarchy is intrinsic to social order and conflates order and hierarchy, he engages in a justification of hierarchical structuration that supports his positioning of Jesus as singular Paraclete. In doing so, he sidesteps the ways in which hierarchy is implicated in scapegoating mechanisms.

In addition to relying on a structurally embedded, hierarchical difference between inviolable or idealized childhood and degenerate adulthood in these novels, scapegoating services hierarchical formations in two particular and similar incidents, one from *Oliver Twist* and one from *The Mill on the Floss*. In these incidents, a grouping of bourgeois or bourgeois and lower-classed characters scapegoat hypothetical or actual others with disabilities either to assert or to tactically or strategically bridge distances between members of those groupings. For example, in *Oliver Twist*, Brownlow and Losberne, newly introduced by Rose Maylie, consider

how they might “bring this man, Monks, upon his knees” (374) and gain for Oliver his inheritance and information about his parents, without compromising Nancy by betraying her confidences. They wish to deal with Monks themselves, rather than risk having him discharged by or only briefly in the custody of the legal system. Brownlow fears that if either of these scenarios were to play out, “ever afterward [Monk’s] mouth would be so obstinately closed that he might as well, for our purposes, be deaf, dumb, blind, and an idiot” (374). Ostensibly, this reference to those with disabilities anticipates Monk’s refusal to communicate what he knows about Oliver’s parentage and inheritance. However, those who do not hear, speak, see, or who might be mentally ill are collectively depicted as obstinately uncommunicative by this reference. In addition, this grouping is introduced as a new alliance between two gentlemen, Brownlow and Losberne, is being formed, and another member of the gentlemanly class, Monks, also known as Edwin Leeford, is being targeted for exclusion from the league of gentlemen. In this example, Brownlow and Losberne employ the criterion of Girard’s third stereotype, “the paradoxical marks of the absence of difference” (24), which includes physical or social signs considered to be abnormal, like disabilities, against hypothetical victims. Their use of this criterion is coincident with the foreclosure of a class alliance with Monks that is insistently asserted to exist elsewhere in the text among men of the same gentlemanly class. While Monks is being ousted from this grouping, he is associated with those with disabilities. Thus, two members of a group near the top of a hierarchical structure

employ criterion associated with scapegoating to assert distance between them and another member of that group, Monks, that contradicts a class alliance that is otherwise sustained without exception in *Oliver Twist*.

Hierarchical formations are also serviced by scapegoating in *The Mill on the Floss*. Bob Jakin and Aunt Glegg meet for the first time when Bob accompanies Tom to the Gleggs' to support Tom's request of a loan for Bob and Tom's joint business venture. The scene stretches over more than seven pages of the text. It opens with Aunt and Uncle Glegg's conversation within Bob's hearing in which the Gleggs agree that it was "the man wi' no legs" who "murdered a young woman in a lone place" (283). References to a "packman with a squint in his eye" (284), Jews, tramps, and other assorted characters from various places and stations vaguely depicted as more or less pitiable are frequent in this scene. Throughout, negotiations take place for Aunt Glegg's purchase of materials such as net and muslin from Bob, a packman so low on St. Ogg's totem pole that he boasts about being responsible for his mother's newly acquired ability to eat meat and potatoes regularly. During the scene, spatial distance reinforces the classed hierarchical distance between the two negotiators when Bob is left standing outside the open French window to converse with Aunt Glegg while Tom, his Uncle and Aunt Glegg have tea inside. While the negotiations take place, Bob flatters Aunt Glegg by calling upon her memories of her privileged youth, her good looks, and her gentlewomanly station while disparaging the lowness of his trade, his regular customers (such as "the poor lasses as live under the

dark thack,” “the huckster’s wife” [288], and “a lady wi’ a cork leg” [290]) as well as his goods, themselves, to convince Aunt Glegg of her bargain in this chapter, “Aunt Glegg Learns the Breadth of Bob’s Thumb” (277). Here, Bob and Aunt Glegg, two characters near either end of a hierarchical class continuum, employ the language of disability associated with Girard’s third stereotype regarding scapegoats to temporarily bridge differences that classed hierarchy, itself, asserts, both to service commodity exchange and to maintain hierarchical difference throughout that exchange.

Girard’s assertion that the maintenance of hierarchical distinctions can preclude the activation of scapegoating mechanisms is not consistent with my analysis of *Oliver Twist* and *The Mill on the Floss*. However, Girard’s close readings of historical and mythological texts convincingly support the scapegoating stereotypes that he describes. While Girard’s privileging of Christian structures and eschatology is a move that poses conceptual difficulty for me, in the course of privileging Christian frameworks, Girard also provides opportunities for considering his methodology, which is not substantially disclosed until he analyzes Gospel texts. For example, Girard considers witch-hunts. Catherine Golden, in her chapter “Prophetic Reading: Maggie Tulliver of George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*,” tells how critics “often point out [. . .] [that] Maggie—the dark-haired, dark complected ‘gypsy,’ even by her own admission [. . .]—is judged a ‘witch’ by St. Ogg’s” (84). In Girard’s view, “[t]he invention of science is not the reason that there are no longer witch-hunts, but