

**THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF FORGIVENESS IN  
GEORGE ELIOT'S SCENES OF CLERICAL LIFE AND ADAM BEDE**

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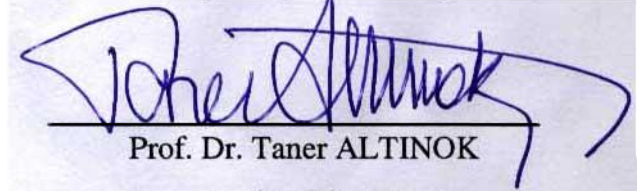
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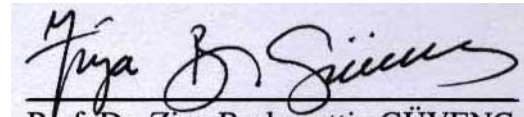
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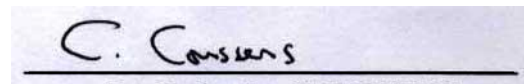
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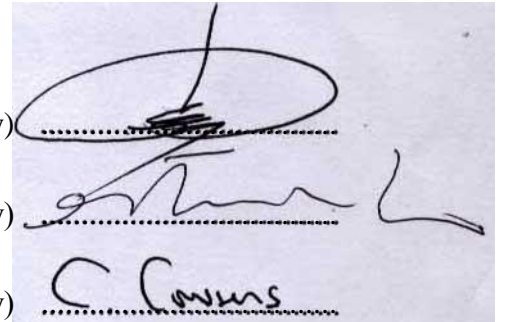
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## ABSTRACT

### THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF FORGIVENESS IN GEORGE ELIOT'S SCENES OF CLERICAL LIFE AND ADAM BEDE

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Religion represents a profound influence on George Eliot's fiction, and on her life and career as a whole. Her attitude developed from a rigidly evangelical perspective during her youth towards an open-minded liberalism and a gradual embrace of the idea of empathy and care for others without expectation of religious reward. Many critics have explored the implications of George Eliot's theory of community. However, this thesis will show how she deploys Christian themes in her earliest work to explore human society. In particular it will focus on the redeeming power of forgiveness in her first two works, *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede*. Eliot emphasizes the importance of religion in helping people to forgive themselves or each other. She demonstrates Feuerbach's idea that moral development is a transition from a subjective, egoistic view of self and world to an objective, broader view. For Eliot, tragic suffering is necessary for people to move beyond their egoism. Though suffering, the abandonment of pride and a sense of community are all

necessary for a person's moral redemption, these cannot be achieved without acts of forgiveness.

**Keywords:** Forgiveness, Redemption, Tragic, Suffering, Community, Sympathy.

## ÖZ

### GEORGE ELIOT'IN SCENES OF CLERICAL LIFE VE ADAM BEDE ROMANLARINDA AFFETMENİN DÖNÜŞTÜRÜCÜ POTANSİYELİ

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Din, George Eliot'ın hayatında, eserlerinde ve kariyerinin tümünde önemli bir etkiye sahiptir. Gençliğinde sahip olduğu katı Protestan olan bakış açısı, açık görüşlü liberalizmi ve yavaş yavaş dini ödül beklemeden başkalarını düşünme ve başkalarının duygularına duyarlı olma felsefesini benimsemek şeklinde değişmiştir. Birçok eleştirmen George Eliot'ın toplum teorisinin etkilerini incelemiştir. Fakat bu tez onun ilk eserlerinde insan toplumunu incelemek için Hıristiyan temalarını nasıl kullandığını göstermektedir. Özellikle ilk iki eseri olan *Scenes of Clerical Life* ve *Adam Bede*'de affetmenin kurtarıcı rolü üzerinde yoğunlaşmıştır. Eliot insanların kendilerini veya birbirlerini affetmelerinde dinin önemli rolünü vurgulamaktadır. Eliot eserlerinde Feuerbach'ın ahlaki gelişim kuramının, 'ben merkezli ' bakış açısından tarafsız, daha geniş bir bakış açısına geçmek olduğu yönündeki görüşünü dile getirmektedir. Eliot için ' trajik acı çekme' kişilerin bencilliklerinden sıyrılarak ahlaki ve vicdani evrimleşmeleri için gereklidir. Acı çekme, gururun terk

edilmesi ve toplum duygusu bir insanın ahlaki olarak kurtarılması için gerekli olmasına rağmen, bunu affetmeden başarmak mümkün değildir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Affetme, Kurtarılma, Trajik, Acı Çekme, Toplum, sempati.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1. CHRISTIAN THEMES OF FORGIVENESS AND REDEMPTION IN GEORGE ELIOT'S WORK<sup>1</sup>

##### 1.1. Christian Models in George Eliot's Early Fiction

This thesis will demonstrate the centrality of Christian concepts of forgiveness and redemption within George Eliot's first two works of fiction, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857-58) and *Adam Bede* (1859). While Eliot renounced formal religious doctrines in her youth, when she came to write fiction in early middle age, she emphasised the value of Christian ideals of behaviour, demonstrating the positive ways in which these could function in society. Eliot's exploration of Christian themes links her fiction to the religious novel which became popular during the Victorian period (James, 210-213). However, while religious novels demonstrate the active influence of divine power in everyday life, in Eliot's work Christian morality is applied to the real, everyday world, and moral growth is achieved by human intervention, specifically the application of sympathy. While religion is a major theme in both *Scenes of*

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<sup>1</sup> Note on the name 'George Eliot'. George Eliot was christened Mary Anne Evans, and uses this name in her earliest letters. From around 1857 she used the name 'Mary Ann', and from 1859, 'Marian'. Her fiction was consistently published under the name of George Eliot. In 1880, she reverted to 'Mary Ann' (Block et al). For convenience, throughout this thesis I have used the name 'George Eliot'.

*Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede*, neither work offers an evaluation or affirmation of specific religious ideas or practices; instead, Eliot traces the transformative potential of Christian models of thinking by exploring the mechanics of forgiveness and redemption within realistic portrayals of individuals' moral decisions.

Eliot's fiction demonstrates her commitment to the new European realism, like that practised by Gustav Flaubert in France, and her rejection of the increasingly sensational and unrealistic British novels of the period. In a review of the work of Wilhelm Heinrich von Riehl, she praised realism as:

...the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mess of feeling, in place of finite substantial reality. ("The Natural History of German Life," *Westminster Review* [July 1856], reprinted in Pinney, ed. *Essays*, 271)

However, she also emphasised that "the greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, or poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies" ("The Natural History of German Life," 271). James has identified a fundamental difference between Eliot and Flaubert: "where Flaubert aspired to emotional detachment, George Eliot made empathy central to the enlargement of the reader's understanding" (James, 33). Gatens has suggested that, for Eliot, artistic realism, rather than simply mirroring contemporary reality, represented an opportunity to "give expression to realisable pathways out of the gridlock of the conflicting religious, social and sexual values of nineteenth-century England", an enterprise which involved envisaging the potential ideal as well as the actual (Gatens, 39). In placing the ideal of human forgiveness for others at the centre of her fictional project, therefore, Eliot moved beyond realism towards an exploration of the influence of ideal, but not unrealistically so, moral conduct on human society.

Eliot's early personal and literary background, particularly her childhood experiences of the impact of religion on rural communities, and her later work as a critic and translator of controversial religious and philosophical texts, prepared the ground for her exploration of social themes through the lenses of religion and philosophy. She began writing fiction in the middle of the nineteenth century, at a time when radical challenges to Christian doctrine were dominating intellectual discussion. However, her first two works of fiction explore the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, focusing on small, close-knit rural communities in the Midlands, an area she knew well. Eliot was particularly interested in the role of social and familial roots in shaping people's moral choices and binding such communities together. During the nineteenth century, rural traditions were under threat because of the widespread move to cities and towns: "Victorians found themselves pulled in two directions. Scattering from their original communities, they spent the rest of their lives trying to reconstitute these earlier networks in imaginary forms" (Hughes, 4). Numerous works of this period explored the condition of England in terms of social change, and the loss of customs and traditions:

We live in an age of visible transition- an age of disquietude and doubt- of the removal of time-worn landmarks, and the breaking up of the hereditary elements of society- old opinions, feelings, ancestral customs and institutions are crumbling away, and both the spiritual and temporal worlds are darkened by the shadows of change. (Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *England and the English* (1833), ed. Standish Mitcham (1970), 318.

Rather than using her fictional communities as microcosms to describe wider society, Eliot seems to suggest that these communities enable the survival of conditions necessary for traditional forms of community and morality to flourish: conditions such as social rootedness and continuous contact with one's neighbours.

Eliot's childhood in Warwickshire also helped to develop her awareness of the central role religion played in working-class rural life, a subject she explored in

her fiction. Her father was estate manager for the powerful Newdigate family at Arbury Hall, and Eliot saw for herself the lives of poor rural workers on the estate (Hughes, 1-8). Eliot's father was socially conservative, believing in the necessity for strong government "rooted in the power and prestige of land", and the traditions of the Anglican Church (Hughes, 15). Despite Eliot's later rift with her father concerning her religious beliefs, Hughes suggests that her social vision remained essentially conservative:

Despite the ruptures of the speedy present, Eliot believed that it was possible, indeed essential, that her readers stay within the parameters of the 'working-day world'- a phrase that would stand at the heart of her philosophy. She would not champion an oppositional culture, in which people put themselves outside the ordinary social and human networks which both nurtured and frustrated them. (Hughes, 5)

Hardy's recent critical biography of Eliot, on the other hand, emphasises her cosmopolitan openness to other cultures, and awareness of England's limiting provincialism (Hardy, 35). However, in both *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede*, the narrative voice praises conservative, rural traditions, and the value of networks of mutual support based on family, community or religious ties.

During this period, diverse religious movements shaped rural and urban communities. The spread of radical Dissenting religious movements from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, particularly amongst the skilled working classes, rural labourers and lower middle classes, led to conflicts between Anglican traditionalists and religious innovators (Wolffe et al, 1989). Between 1830 and 1850 popular millenarian movements and radical Utopian groups sought a "heaven on earth through reform" (James, 11). When she began to write fiction, Eliot drew on her own early experiences of religious conflict, specifically her experiences of traditional Anglicanism, Evangelicalism, Methodism and Baptism. While she was brought up within mainstream Anglican tradition, as a schoolgirl in Nuneaton from 1828 she came under the influence of Evangelicalism, then spreading dramatically

throughout the working and lower-middle classes in England (Bebbington, 1989). The school's principal, Maria Lewis, had strong Evangelical beliefs, and became a close friend and mentor to Eliot for the next fourteen years (Hughes, 20; Laski, 15-16). Evangelicalism emphasised emotion and mysticism in the spiritual realm, regarding the Bible as the source of imaginative experience of the truths of religion. Converted believers were expected to work consciously for others (James 68). Between 1837 and 1840, Eliot embraced the pleasure-denying and extreme aspects of Evangelicalism, refusing to read secular literature, and following an intensive programme of religious study (Hughes, 20-23; 30-32).

Later, Eliot attended a school at Coventry, where she was taught by two Baptist sisters, Mary and Rebecca Franklin. Baptism focused intensively on the experience of conversion: "that moment when an individual realises his sinfulness and asks to be born again in Christ" (Hughes, 24). During this period Eliot became even more religious-minded, undergoing a conversion experience herself, and embracing a "sterner non-conformity, with a stress on hell-fire and the need to be saved" (Laski, 17). At one point, she composed a poem entitled 'On Being Called a Saint': in this poem she asserted that while others believed her to be morally and spiritually perfect, she was aware of her own human limitations (Hughes, 24). The poem demonstrates Eliot's early awareness of the danger of confusing religious devotion with personal egoism, a subject she later explored in her fiction.

Eliot also had some contact with Methodism, through her aunt and uncle, who visited her family in 1839. Her aunt, Elizabeth Evans, had once been a Methodist lay preacher, and later inspired the character of Dinah in *Adam Bede* (Hughes, 29). Eliot's correspondence with her aunt also shows her deep concern over whether her ego was sufficiently subdued: "Instead of putting my light under a bushel, I am in danger of ostentatiously displaying a false one" (Hughes, 30). In both her literary criticism and her fiction, Eliot demonstrated

the negative effects of religious didacticism and the positive benefits of humility and modesty. In *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede*, Eliot's characters range in religious belief from Anglican clergymen to Methodist women preachers. However, they are praised or criticised according to their responses to others, rather than their specific religious allegiances.

After 1840, Eliot became less religious, and began to read secular literature. Her interest in Romantic philosophy led her to think deeply about human relationships, both secular and spiritual. In an essay entitled "On Gusto" the Romantic writer, William Hazlitt, had argued that sensations gave direction to human relationships, since human action was driven by the "liveliness and force" of feeling for others, stimulated by the power of imagination (*The Round Table*, 1817, qtd. in James, 68-69). In her fiction, Eliot came to emphasise the importance of imaginative identification with others as a part of the progress towards moral growth.

This period saw major challenges to religious authority, particularly in the new German Higher Criticism and works such as the liberal Broad Church thesis, *Essays and Reviews* (1860), which challenged the truth of the Bible, and in scientific works such as Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859). During the 1840s, Eliot lost her faith in orthodox religion. After moving to Foleshill with her father in 1841, she met Charles and Cara Bray, and the intellectual circle that surrounded them in Coventry (Haight, *Biography*, 38). Through this friendship, she gained intellectual confidence and access to the "world of ideas" (Haight, *Biography*, 65). The Brays were interested in unconventional religious perspectives: Charles Bray was influenced by "Necessitarianism", a philosophy based on the work of the eighteenth-century philosopher, Joseph Priestley, who argued that the universe was governed by God-created laws which man should discover and follow in order to improve the world along progressive lines, rather than focusing on prayer (Hughes, 47). According to Haight, "Mary Anne found in the Brays the same doubts about Christianity that

she had been secretly harboring for quite some time” (Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* 38).

She was also introduced to Charles Hennell, who had been brought up a Unitarian. Unitarianism was a tolerant, rational sect influenced by the Enlightenment ideas of John Locke, especially concerning the influence of education and environment on personality. Unitarians rejected mysticism, the idea of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, and embraced political reform, scientific progress and social radicalism (Hughes, 46). Eliot was especially influenced by Hennell’s controversial work, *An Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity* (1838), which she read between 1840 and 1841 (Hughes, 46). Hennell suggested that the Gospels were essentially mythical, rather than historical writings. After reading the book twice, Eliot stopped going to church (Haight, *Biography*, 66-67).

Eliot’s translation of David Friedrich Strauss’s *Das Leben Jesu (The Life of Jesus Critically Examined, 1835)*, an example of the German Higher Criticism, consolidated her position within the intellectual movements disputing Christian orthodoxy. Strauss suggested that religion was a product of human beings’ fundamental need to believe in a higher power than themselves (Hughes, 70). Strauss examined each episode in the life of Jesus, as told in the four Gospels of the New Testament, and showed how this narrative was likely to have been a product of the inherited beliefs of his disciples, particularly associated with the “Jewish tradition of the returning Messiah” (Hughes, 70). According to Hughes, Eliot regretted Strauss’s rejection of any sense of the miraculous or unique in Christianity (Hughes, 71). This suggests that she continued to believe in the value of religion in society.

Three years later, Eliot published another translation of a controversial work, Ludwig Feuerbach’s *Das Wesen des Christentums (The Essence of Christianity, 1841)*. Like Hennell, Feuerbach argued that the central notion of



the suffering of Christ made Christianity uniquely a religion of “feeling”: whereas in other faiths “the heart and the imagination are divided, in Christianity they coincide” (James, 67-68). Feuerbach’s ideas represent a major and persistent influence on Eliot’s fiction, which can be felt in both *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede*. A similar influence was the work of Harriet Martineau, especially *Practical Piety; or the Influence of the Religion of the Heart on the Conduct of Life* (1811), which also tried to reconcile the new thinking to religious feeling (Roberts, 2002).

These ideas were closely associated with Auguste Comte’s philosophy of Positivism, which argued that “not only knowledge but also moral values must be based on the methods and discoveries of the physical sciences” (Laski, 69). Positivism was regarded by many thinkers as a possible replacement for Christianity. Eliot and her partner, George Henry Lewes, eventually found this scientific philosophy inadequate: instead, Eliot defined her own belief as “meliorism”, an approach “which affirms that the world may be made better by rightly-directed human effort” (Laski, 69). As Gatens has said, Eliot’s fiction demonstrates a consistent engagement with theology as well as philosophy (Gatens, 34). Moreover, her early works do not challenge orthodox religion; in fact, many of her characters are deeply religious. Eliot’s intellectual and emotional responses to religion can be distinguished: she sympathised with those whose spiritual beliefs were sincere, also admitting that the Church of England remained important to her “as a portion of my earliest associations and most poetic memories” (Hughes, 259; *Letters* IV, 214). She also targeted characters, whatever their religious allegiance, who were hypocrites and careless of the feelings of others. Therefore, while insisting that it was better to live without religion, Eliot recognised the value of true Christian feeling in society.

From 1851, Eliot gained more knowledge and experience of religious and philosophical controversy by editing the left-wing journal, the *Westminster*

*Review*, which had been bought by John Chapman, and became the principal organ of radical opinion of the time (Lodge 8). In her essays for this periodical, rather than condemning religious belief, Eliot distinguished between what she saw as intolerant religious teaching and the human sympathy Feuerbach suggested Christianity could promote in the secular world. In 1855, she wrote a harsh critique of Evangelical doctrine as taught by a popular preacher, Dr. Cumming (“Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming”, *Westminster Review*, October 1855). Eliot begins the essay by asking:

Given a man with moderate intellect, a moral standard not higher than the average, some rhetorical affluence and great glibness of speech, what is the career in which, without the aid of birth or money, he may most easily attain power and reputation in English society? (“Evangelical Teaching”, 38)

She suggests that such a man should become an Evangelical preacher, who may then “shun practical extremes and be ultra only in what is purely theoretic” (“Evangelical Teaching”, 38). Eliot emphasises that personal ambition, rather than Christian feeling, is often the motivation for such a man to adopt a clerical career. For Eliot, Cumming represents a damaging force in society because he is characterised by “hard and literal” doctrine (“piety”), rather than sympathy and forgiveness (“Evangelical Teaching”, 39).

The word “sympathy” occurs many times in this essay: Eliot condemns Cumming for failing to understand “the life and death of Christ as a manifestation of love...of sympathy with that yearning over the lost and erring which made Jesus weep over Jerusalem”, or the key virtues Eliot believes redeems mankind: disinterested kindness, sympathy and mercy (“Evangelical Teaching”, 41, 60). She asserts the power of these virtues to defeat inflexible religious dogma: “Fatally powerful as religious systems have been, human nature is stronger and wider than religious systems, and though dogmas may hamper, they cannot absolutely repress its growth” (“Evangelical Teaching”, 65). Eliot insists that divine love should be “contemplated as sympathizing

with the pure elements of human feeling, as possessing infinitely all those attributes which we recognise to be moral in humanity (“Evangelical Teaching”, 66). Eliot’s conception of religion is therefore the opposite of Cumming’s, but is just as convinced. The following section will examine some of the critical discussions of Eliot’s ‘religion of sympathy’, and its role in her fiction.

## **1.2. Literature Review (George Eliot’s Religion of Sympathy)**

Many studies have explored the influence of religious beliefs and movements on Eliot’s fiction. Coulson (1981) emphasised the connections between religious feeling and imaginative identification with human suffering, an idea that was further developed by Pyle (1995). Hardy’s early work focused on the importance of tragic suffering in Eliot’s fiction as a force which could subdue personal egoism: what in the Victorian period was described as “pride” (1959). In a subsequent study, she explored the influence of sects like Methodism and their emphasis on feeling and emotion on Victorian fiction (1986). Jay (1979) explored the specific influence of Evangelicalism on Eliot, suggesting that in her youth she associated millennial transformation with political revolution and social progress, while Fraser (1986), considered the broader influence of religious thinking on Eliot, especially concerning morality, marriage, childhood and family life, death and the reverence for beauty.

Other critics have interpreted Eliot’s emphasis on sympathy as an effort to compromise between the personal need for religion and the secular intellectualism that denied the truth of divine authority. According to Spittles (1993), although Eliot could not accept religious systems, she was deeply concerned with morality, and therefore sought to replace orthodox religion with a “religion of humanity” based on compassion, with the aim of giving moral meaning to life (Spittles, 86-87). Pinion has also stressed that, for Eliot, the idea of goodness was entirely human, expressed through people’s duty to

help one another and avoid immoral or unkind treatment towards others, not because of the expectation of reward or fear of punishment, but because of the compassion human beings should feel for one another (Pinion, 77). Ermarth (1985) has defined Eliot's conception of "sympathy" not as "selfless benevolence", but as a difficult psychic "negotiation between self and other":

In her work, sympathy depends absolutely upon a division in the psyche, a split in consciousness that permits two conflicting views to exist simultaneously. This mental division is the material of conscience. (Ermarth, 23-24)

Similarly, Carroll (1992) has analysed Eliot's novels through their characters' conflicting interpretations of reality, which finally bring about a process of moral testing, and the eventual subjugation of the ego.

Siegel's study of *Adam Bede* is important in its examination of Eliot's concept of "the secret of deep human sympathy" in terms of an effort to reflect the particular ethical ambitions of literary realism:

True sympathy, she believes, cannot be achieved through the inherited conventions of literature, but must arise out of an accurate and diverse picture of the human condition. Sympathy requires the human subject to rise above a provincial point of view, and to recognise her neighbours' virtues and failings within a web of larger historical and social patterns. (Siegel, 48)

As Siegel suggests, many critics have attempted to interpret the role of sympathy in Eliot's novels as a force for collective social, and implicitly political, progress (Siegel, 49-50). According to Graver (1984), for example, Eliot's "true idea of community" replaces old-fashioned community ties with modern notions of individual responsibility. Similarly, Semmel (1994) has argued that historical traditions influenced Eliot's belief that the selfish individual could transcend his or her ego and feel a sympathetic interest in his immediate community, and subsequently for the whole nation (Semmel, 6, cited in Siegel, n. 4), and McDonagh (1997) has suggested that in Eliot's early

pastoral novels “ties of affection and sympathy” represent a foundation for modern social organisation (McDonagh, 55, cited in Siegel, n. 3).

Siegel, however, suggests that while Eliot conflates the terms “charity” (the active application of sympathy in the world) with “sympathy”, she is primarily interested in its active effects in the everyday world of individuals, rather than the wider, political sphere (Siegel, 49). According to Siegel, Eliot tries to expand the individual’s idea of sympathy, while not necessarily applying this to public life (Siegel 49). Therefore, Eliot calls for a “personal sympathy” which, in her fiction, is frequently depicted as going against established conventions in society (Siegel, 49). This personal form of sympathy is not necessarily associated with “social progress” and “community-consciousness”; instead, it is bound up with individual experience, which frequently brings about a “climactic moment of personal conversion - the moment when the characters’ suffering brings about a sudden and enhanced extension of sympathy” and represents their “accession to a higher life of reciprocal relations and social forms” (Siegel, 49).

Siegel concludes that while Eliot and her contemporaries “feared that the new, liberal forms of charity might forfeit the rewards of spontaneous giving”, they “had faith [that the] extraordinary fact of sympathy - a sympathy that must struggle to overcome the resentments, complacencies, and antagonisms that plagued all encounters between rich and poor - would itself be grounds for perpetual surprise” (Siegel, 71). Eliot was therefore interested in the function of sympathy in promoting understanding of, and tolerance for, others, regardless of their social positions or experiences. In her fiction, sympathy remains a personal and private choice. This point is central to this thesis, which will demonstrate Eliot’s conviction that acts of forgiveness represent individual, frequently difficult and unpopular, rather than socially-directed choices. Siegel concludes that Eliot regarded both artistic truth (her conception

of realism) and sympathy as spontaneous, and demonstrative of man's extraordinary capacity for sympathy and compassion (Siegel 49).

### **1.3. Forgiveness in Christian Thought**

None of these critics, however, has focused adequately on the centrality Eliot gives to the redemptive value of forgiveness, and its subsequent role in reforming and transforming both individuals and communities. Despite their portrayal of realistic communities, *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* both trace their characters' progress from error through suffering, forgiveness, and finally, redemption and moral growth. In these works, Eliot follows the Christian doctrine that those who make one suffer should be regarded as friends rather than enemies, because they help to test one's values, see the world from a different point of view and contribute to one's personal development. In both works, Eliot demonstrates that forgiveness represents a major moral challenge. In Eliot's fiction, forgiveness heals by conquering egoistic pride, leading characters on to the path of self-regeneration and moral success. Similarly, in Christian thinking forgiveness is a primary, and the most difficult, virtue, representing an active decision requiring prior identification with others. While in Christian thought, those who forgive are rewarded by God's love, in Eliot's fiction, forgiveness both mirrors God's mercy towards mankind, and brings self-knowledge and the regeneration of the human community.

Following Paris (1965), Granlund has shown how Eliot's fiction demonstrates Feuerbach's belief that moral development requires a transition from a subjective, egoistic view of the self and world to a wider, objective view (Granlund, 72). The necessary conditions for transformation from lower to higher egoism are social integration, tragic suffering, the fall of self-image, the ability to confess one's faults, the experience of love for others, and emotional and intellectual openness (Granlund, 52). Paris identified a sequence of three

stages the self must go through to achieve moral growth. The first is the “egoistic” (subjective) stage, in which “the distinction between the inward and the outward self is obscured; the self is seen as the centre of the world and the world as an extension of self” (Paris, 134, cited in Granlund, 72). This is followed by “a stage of disenchantment, when the egocentric self experiences alienation and loss under the impact of reality and suffering”, and subsequently the “fall” of his or her false self-image, and journey towards despair (Paris, 134, cited in Granlund, 72). A third or final stage, which Paris associates with Feuerbach’s “objective approach”, fuses the self with reality: “reality is conceived of as an autonomous entity of which the self is a part” (Paris, 134, qtd in Granlund, 72).

Granlund links these ideas to early Christian thinking, specifically the “Augustinian concept of *amor sui* or lower egoism in its cognitive/perceptual aspect” (Granlund, 72). Saint Augustine writes that man must reject his “subjective” and “egocentric” perspective of the world and move towards a more objective view of reality (Granlund, 72). For both Augustine and Feuerbach, man’s abandonment of his egoistic perspective in order to gain a higher objective moral vision is preceded by a sense of loss (of his previous self-image). However, while Feuerbach conceives of reality in terms of the visible world, rejecting the idea of an “invisible [divine] reality”, for Augustine, “the ultimate reality is the invisible theocentric universe” (Granlund, 72). Feuerbach, therefore, associates man’s higher moral development with his adaptation to visible, human society, while in Christian thought higher moral development demands man’s acceptance of a transcendent invisible reality (Paris, 134; Granlund, 72).

However, as this thesis will demonstrate, Eliot’s fiction focuses particularly on the issue of forgiveness, a concept central to Christianity, since it is symbolised in the figure of Jesus Christ, who asks God to forgive his persecutors when he is nailed to the cross to die: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what

they are doing." (Luke 23:34). The commandment that people should forgive each other is also emphasised in the Bible:

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. (Mark 11:25, 26)

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven...How can you say to your brother, "Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye," when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Luke 6:35-38; 42)

Eliot suggests that the act of forgiveness liberates individuals by enabling them to understand others, freeing them from feelings of guilt, hatred and anger, and serving to conquer pride and egotism. In Eliot's fictional worlds, forgiveness both heals and redeems individuals, and enables the continuity of their communities. Unlike conventional religious novels, however, the characters in *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* do not represent extremes of good or evil: instead, they often occupy a middle ground, achieving moral transformation through learning to understand the ways in which people can assist one another, and by extension, their communities, to survive.



## CHAPTER 2

### IDEAS MADE FLESH

#### 2. THE ROLE OF FORGIVENESS IN SCENES OF CLERICAL LIFE

*Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* focus specifically on three main religious groups: orthodox Anglicanism, Evangelicalism (which remained a branch of the Anglican Church, though was more radical in its approach), and Methodism, which began as a species of Evangelicalism, but finally broke away from the English Church. Within each of these two early works, representatives from all three religious groups are presented sympathetically, according to their relationships with others, specifically, their humility and capacity to understand others.

Eliot's first work of fiction was a set of three novellas entitled *Scenes of Clerical Life*. In this work, through a close focus on rural communities during the early nineteenth century, Eliot explores issues of religious practice and belief, and the ways in which these impact on human lives. The clerics she portrays vary from Evangelical to traditional Anglican positions, and demonstrate many of the real-life issues affecting the Church of England. The stories explore Eliot's evolving ideas about religion, community and morality. They can also be read together as an exploration of the potential for forgiveness to redeem human beings and regenerate human communities.

Just before she began to write *Scenes of Clerical Life*, Eliot published an article in the *Westminster Review* called "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists", in which

she criticises the vast amount of sensational, romantic fiction published written by women in the nineteenth century, which she describes as either “frothy”, “prosy”, “pious” or “pedantic”. (Eliot, “Silly Novels”,140.) She complains that much contemporary fiction by women depicts ridiculously idealised upper-class women of refined sensibility, sensational or melodramatic plots, and characters who represent unrealistically high-minded philosophies. Eliot also condemns the tendency of Evangelical authors to set their stories amongst the middle and upper classes, rather than amongst the lower and lower middle-classes, where Evangelicalism flourished. She describes this “white neck-cloth species” of novel as “a kind of genteel tract on a large scale, intended as a sort of medicinal sweetmeat for Low Church young ladies” (Eliot, “Silly Novels”,156). These novels often represented “Evangelical love stories” in which romantic passion was subsumed into a scheme of regeneration and atonement (Eliot, “Silly Novels”,156’).

This essay is an important indication of Eliot’s approach to fiction-writing, which, she believed should be treated as a “sacred art” committed to depicting the real, or realisable (Gatens, 37). In the same period Eliot’s partner, George Henry Lewes, also wrote an article on female-authored fiction, “The Lady Novelists”, in which he suggested that women were particularly well suited to the portrayal of everyday life, because of their “greater affectionate needs [and] greater range and depth of emotional experience” (*Westminster Review*, July 1852, 133). While Eliot’s narrative voice in “Silly Novels” is implicitly masculine, representing a critique of contemporary “female” literary fashions (Gatens, 37), Lewes’s essay prepares the ground for the public’s reception of a female author able to render life in a morally meaningful, but also realistic way.

*Scenes of Clerical Life* focuses on human dilemmas and non-heroic characters to explore the ways in which moral transformation might be achieved in real communities, through the application of Christian virtues of sympathy for

others, rather than the efforts of impossibly virtuous characters. Many nineteenth-century novelists had used religious institutions, church hierarchies and customs, and the characters of clergymen themselves as subject matter. The Victorian critic, David Masson, claimed: “Especially within Britain, there has been a determination to make representatives of all classes of clergymen and all religious creeds sit for their photographs in novels” (qtd. in James, 50). Earlier novels frequently represent satires of clergymen (for example, the pompous Mr Collins in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, 1813). In Dickens’s novels, published during the first half of the nineteenth century, Evangelical clergymen are particularly vilified as smug hypocrites (James, 51).

However, *Scenes of Clerical Life* resists caricaturing or idealising the clergy in order to focus on their human weaknesses and strengths. Eliot intended *Scenes of Clerical Life* to represent “precise portrayals of individualised clergymen, presented without malice towards Christian believers, and with a view to provoking the powerful aesthetic response of sympathy in readers” (Lovesey, 22). Eliot’s clergymen are neither ideals nor anti-ideals. In a letter to her publisher, Blackwood, she insisted: “My artistic bent is directed not at all to the presentation of eminently irreproachable characters, but to the presentation of mixed human beings in such a way as to call forth tolerant judgement, pity, and sympathy” (*Letters* II, 299). She told Blackwood that she had written the stories “from “close observation” of life, to show “how these [religious] groups interact at the social as well as the theological level” (*Letters* 11, 347). Within the text, Eliot explains her attitude towards her subject: “My irony, so far as I understand myself, is not directed against opinions -against any class of religious views - but against the vices and weaknesses that belong to human nature in every sort of clothing. (*Letters* II, 348)”

Eliot explores her characters, whatever their profession, in terms of human frailty, a central doctrine in Christianity. George Henry Lewes explained

Eliot's aims in a letter to Blackwood, written under Eliot's direction, proposing the series:

It will consist of tales and sketches illustrative of the actual life of our country about a quarter of a century ago; but solely in its human and not at all in its theological aspect...representing the clergy like any other class with the humours, sorrows and troubles of other men. (Haight, *Letters*, 269)

Eliot began to write the first story in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, 'The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton', in August 1856, and it was published anonymously on New Year's Day, 1857. The story was widely believed to have been written by a male cleric (Haight, *Biography*, 212). Eliot chose to write about the clergy within a tight-knit and pious community, partly because, as Pinion states, she had acquired a lot of material from her family, her own childhood experiences in rural parishes and observations of ministers and services while she was at school (Pinion, 77). The characters and settings were based on remembered figures and places from Eliot's childhood: Milby (in "Janet's Repentance") is based on Nuneaton, and Shepperton (in "Amos Barton" and "Mr Gilfil's Love Story") is based on Chilvers Coton, near Eliot's childhood home at Griff (Hughes, 179). The character of Gilfil, the central character of "Mr Gilfil's Love Story", the second narrative in *Scenes*, was based on the Reverend Bernard Gilpin Ebdell, Vicar of Chilvers Coton and Astley until 1828 (Hughes, 184).

The clergyman at Griff in Warwickshire, where Eliot lived with her father after 1836, was the Reverend John Gwyther, a priest who was resented by his parishioners for his obstinacy and tactlessness, and represents the model for Amos Barton (Hughes, 179). Barton's story so closely resembled that of Gwyther that his daughter thought he had written it himself (Lodge, 11-12). Gwyther was an enthusiastic Evangelical who attempted to reform the parish along nonconformist lines, by opposing old customs, changing old hymns for new, and punishing moral lapses (Hughes, 179). There was also a scandal

involving his personal life: he had become friendly with a female arrival in the parish, describing herself as a countess, and lived with a man supposedly her brother but rumoured to be her lover (Hughes, 180).

In the late 1820s Eliot met the Reverend John Edmund Jones, a successful preacher who achieved an Evangelical revival in Nuneaton (Pinion, 77). He became the model for the character of Tryan in “Janet’s Repentance”, the third story in *Scenes*. Jones was resented by the conservatives in the community, who campaigned strongly against him in favour of Anglican orthodoxy. The town was divided into two groups, and the subsequent civil disturbances only ended with Jones’s premature death in 1831. Jones’s chief enemy was a lawyer named Buchanan, who, like Dempster in ‘Janet’s Repentance’, died in a riding accident. Buchanan’s wife was a disciple of Jones, and represents the model for Janet in the story (Hughes, 180-81).

These events are all depicted in Eliot’s stories: however, they represent the external framework of a series of narratives designed to demonstrate her moral philosophy concerning human behaviour and the fundamental importance of forgiveness. Eliot’s desire to represent ordinary lower middle and working-class people can also be associated with both her personal experience and her evolving social and religious philosophy. According to Pinney, “the real drama of Evangelicalism...lies among the middle and lower classes” (Pinney, *Essays*, 318). As a realist, George Eliot believed that since the middle and lower classes suffered far more than the aristocracy, they deserved to be written about (Lodge, 18).

When an old friend of Eliot’s in Geneva wrote to express surprise at her choice of subject matter, she defended her changing attitude towards religion:

I have no longer any antagonism towards any faith in which human sorrow and human longing for purity have expressed themselves: on the contrary I have a sympathy with it that predominates over all argumentative

tendencies...I have not returned to dogmatic Christianity - to the acceptance of any set of doctrines as a creed, and a superhuman revelation of the Unseen - but I see in it the highest expression of the religious sentiment that has yet found its place in the history of mankind, and I have the profoundest interest in the inward life of sincere Christians in all ages. (Letter to Monsieur D'Albert Durade, Haight, *Letters*, III, 230-231)

As this quotation shows, although George Eliot did not accept the idea of a life after death, or that people were rewarded or punished by God for their good and bad actions, she remained a moralist who believed people should do the right thing towards others. Lodge has argued that there is no contradiction between George Eliot's radical ideas and her decision to write *Scenes of Clerical Life* instead of a great novel of religious doubt, since she never denied her allegiance to Christian feeling, only its orthodox teaching:

Orthodox religion is allowed to serve as a metaphorical vehicle for humanist values without itself being called radically into question...Marian Evan's decision to change from writing criticism to writing fiction seems to have coincided with a significant shift of balance in her stance towards Christianity from scepticism to conciliation. (Lodge, 8)

As Lodge suggests, instead of rejecting Christianity, Eliot assimilated it into a "nobler and more comprehensive faith" (Lodge, 16). Eliot's interest in Feuerbach suggests that she saw religion as a system of values generated from the human heart, rather than written doctrines. According to Feuerbach, Christianity was the product of man's capacity for identification with, and sympathetic care for others.

"Amos Barton" concerns an uncharismatic man of forty with six children. His salary of eighty pounds per annum is not enough for him to maintain his family, and he relies on assistance from his parishioners, who consequently look down on him. The story describes a social moment in which traditional consensus concerning religion (as described in "Mr Gilfil's Love Story", set at the turn of the century) has been lost, but not replaced by the vitality and conflicts of Mr. Tryan's mid-century era in "Janet's Repentance". During the

nineteenth century the Church of England was forced to widen its doctrines because of challenges from groups aiming to reform it. It therefore absorbed Evangelicalism (which was associated with the same impulses and groups that also created Methodism, and in the Church of England became the Anglican Low-Church faction), as well as the High Church and Tractarian factions, which all differed from one another, and subsequently led to a splintering of factions between the Church of England and that of Rome (Wolff et al, 13).

In Barton's community, Shepperton, people are preoccupied with Evangelicalism and the question of tolerance for Roman Catholicism, but have lost their enthusiasm for Anglican religious practice as it is represented by Barton (*Scenes*, 60). Barton is an ineffective pastor, confused by the conflicting doctrines disrupting the community (Carroll, 40). He does not have the ability to move people, preaching "Low Church doctrine [while making] a High Church assertion of ecclesiastical powers and functions" (*Scenes*, 53). His poor parishioners are unable to understand him, since he discusses religious matters in too sophisticated a way to be understood, while also (like Dr Cumming) threatening people with the punishment of an angry God, rather than helping them to feel God's love. Eliot emphasises Barton's non-heroic status, while also depicting him as a tragic, suffering figure:

The reverend Amos Barton, whose sad fortunes I have undertaken to relate, was, you perceive, in no respect an ideal or exceptional character; but...you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones. (*Scenes*, 80)

Barton is described as "the quintessential extract of mediocrity": he has neither a "flexible imagination nor...an adroit tongue" (*Scenes*, 63). He contrasts with another local clergyman, Mr Cleves, an effective priest who preaches excellent sermons which can be understood by everyone.

Barton's moral weakness is also demonstrated when he is impressed by a newly arrived widow, calling herself Countess Czerlaski, who lives with her half-brother. Despite the fact that she once worked as a governess, and her brother has made his money through trade, the countess acts the part of an upper-class Evangelical gentlewoman, flattering Barton that he is a great preacher, and pretending to act as his patron. Barton does not have the good judgement to recognise her insincerity and selfishness. When her brother tells her he plans to marry her servant, she feels socially insulted and leaves the house to stay with the Bartons. This has tragic consequences, since the household is unable to support a selfish guest. The parishioners also turn against Barton, suspecting that his relationship with the countess is immoral. Finally, Barton's pregnant wife, Milly, begins to lose her health and strength. By the time the countess leaves the house Milly is ill, and soon afterwards dies in childbirth.

Eliot emphasises the pathos of the family's situation: the children are too young to understand that they will never see their mother again: "They cried because mama was so ill and papa looked so unhappy but they thought perhaps next week things would be as they used to be again" (*Scenes*, 110). However, Barton is consumed by a sense of loss and regret, and an awareness that he has neglected and failed to appreciate his wife. Barton's parishioners have mocked, despised and slandered him. However, his wife's death stimulates their sympathy and they are able to forgive his mistakes and work hard to offer effective "solace": "Cold faces looked kind again and parishioners turned over in their minds what they could best do to help their pastor" (*Scenes*, 111). The parishioners offer practical help by raising money for the family, helping the children to go to school, and inviting them to stay. Barton's parishioners forgive him for threatening them with an angry God, for being a snob, and for taking his wife for granted.



The story therefore demonstrates the practical value of Feuerbach's ideal of human compassion. As Carroll observes, "Barton is transformed from the bewildering agent of confusion to a suffering object who can be understood unmistakably in terms of his outward grief" (Carroll, 45). The people's forgiveness of Barton leads to a universal union between Barton and his parishioners, and the community is also restored to harmony.

"Amos Barton" represents Eliot's first fictional exploration of the power of forgiveness. The story represents a moral tale, but the characters' development and motivations are not explored deeply. The story is also open-ended: Barton is unfairly ousted from his post and leaves the community. However, Eliot demonstrates how forgiveness of human weakness and sympathy for others' suffering can lead to love, and subsequently to social re-integration. When Barton leaves Shepperton:

There was general regret among the parishioners at his departure. Not that any one of them thought his spiritual gifts pre-eminent or was conscious of great edification from his ministry. But his recent troubles had called out their better sympathies, and that is always a source of love. (*Scenes*, 113)

In contrast to the opening of 'Amos Barton', the second story in *Scenes*, "Mr Gilfil's Love Story", begins with an affirmation of Gilfil's parishioners' sense of solidarity with him, as they mourn him at his funeral. Like Barton, Gilfil is not a talented preacher:

He had a large heap of short sermons, rather yellow and worn at the edges, from which he took two every Sunday, securing perfect impartiality in the selection by taking them as they came, without reference to topics (*Scenes*, 22).

However, his parishioners respect him. This is partly due to the social moment in which the story is set: ten or fifteen years before Barton's time, a period during which, Eliot suggests, people did not question religion or its representatives in the clergy:

As to any suspicion that Mr Gilfil did not dispense the pure Gospel, or any strictures on his doctrine and mode of delivery, such thoughts never visited the minds of the Shepperton parishioners, who, ten or fifteen years later showed themselves extremely critical of Mr Barton's discourses and demeanour. But in the interim they had tasted that dangerous tree of knowledge - innovation. (*Scenes*, 126)

Gilfil is completely integrated into the community: he does not antagonise his parishioners by forcing theological discussion on them, speaks like them, and keeps his sermons short so that people do not get bored. His endlessly repeated sermons are dull, but reassure the community with a sense of ritual and tradition (Carroll, 47). His parishioners love and respect him as an aspect of their organic community: "He belonged to the course of nature...and, being a vicar, his claim on their veneration had never been counteracted by an exasperating claim on their pockets" (*Scenes*, 122).

Although Gilfil's skills as a preacher do not differ significantly from those of Barton, he is more respected by his parishioners as a representative of the established Church, demonstrating the earlier community's resistance to innovation. Hughes has stressed the importance of religious tradition in the rural communities of Eliot's childhood: "the Parish Church...was at the heart of village life...labourers, farmers and neighbouring artisans gathered every Sunday to affirm not so much that Christ was Risen but that the community endured" (Hughes, 22). As she matured, Eliot came to respect the role of religious worship in strengthening social relations (Hughes, 22). Hughes describes Gilfil as the first in a "long line of theologically lax, but emotionally generous, Anglican clergy in Eliot's fiction", who "extend a charity and understanding to their fellow men which was to become the corner-stone of Eliot's adult moral philosophy" (Hughes, 22-23).

Eliot's story suggests that Gilfil's status as an integrative force in his community can also be attributed to his own experience of suffering and subsequent humility, which enables him to understand his parishioners' needs

and sympathise with their problems. The narrative focuses on an earlier, private period in Gilfil's life, concerning his unrequited love for a girl called Caterina (Tina), the Italian protégée of the local gentry, Sir Christopher and Lady Cheverel. The reader is told that Caterina fell in love with the unprincipled Captain Wybrow, the son of Sir Christopher's youngest sister and chosen heir of the neighbouring estate of Cheverel Manor. Wybrow flirted with her in secret, while becoming engaged to another girl. In despair, Caterina decides to kill him, and goes to find him, carrying a dagger in her pocket. When she reaches his house, however, she finds that he has already died of a heart attack. Her subsequent feelings of guilt make her ill, and it is Gilfil who helps her to recover, teaching her to forgive herself by accepting God's forgiveness of her:

God saw your whole heart; He knows you would never harm a living thing. He watches over his children, and would not let them do things they would pray with their whole hearts not to do. It was the angry thought of a moment, and He forgives you. (*Scenes*, 234)

Tina believes that she is irredeemable: "But when I meant to do it...it was as bad as if I had done it" (*Scenes*, 235). However, Gilfil advises her that human beings are often unable to live up to the standards required of them:

...our thoughts are often worse than we are, just as they are often better than we are. And God sees us as we are altogether, not in separate feelings or actions, as our fellow men see us. We are always doing each other injustice, and thinking better or worse of each other than we deserve, because we only hear and see separate words and actions. (*Scenes*, 235)

As Carroll has said, "by his faith, [Gilfil] rescues Tina from the narrative of desire in which she is guilty, and expiates her sins through his vision of coherence and wholeness" (Carroll, 57).

While this story is more melodramatic than "Amos Barton", again suffering is depicted as an important factor in enabling people to give and receive

sympathy, and the act of forgiveness (here, self-forgiveness), has a transformative value. Once she forgives herself, Tina is rehabilitated into the community, begins to love herself, and finally Gilfil, who subsequently marries her. When Tina dies, Gilfil decides never to marry again: however, the story emphasises that his early experience of love and suffering has taught him to understand and forgive human weakness, forging a bond of sympathy between him and his parishioners.

In both of these stories Eliot deals with the inner lives of clergymen, but “rather than reveal their inner lives from the pulpit, she explores how inadequate these principles are as mechanisms for responding to personal misfortune” (Perlis, 105). In the third story in *Scenes*, ‘Janet’s Repentance’, Eliot again explores the relationship between public roles (the characters include a doctor and a lawyer, as well as clergymen) and individual moral development. The story is set in Milby, a market town recalling Nuneaton, where Eliot went to school. Milby society is essentially materialistic, a value the Church has been unable to challenge. For the residents of the town, going to church is simply a means of presenting “a brilliant show of outdoor toilettes”, while the wealthier residents make fun of those who are inferior in dress and manners during the church services (*Scenes*, 270). They also mock the curate, Mr Crewe, because of his bad preaching, comic speech-style, and the fact that he wears a wig. Similarly, the standard of morals in Milby is low. Crewe’s avarice is obvious, but not criticised: on the contrary, the fact that he has gained a large fortune by owning a private school wins him approval, although he is mocked for his stingy housekeeping. The parishioners’ disrespect for the clergy represents a sign of the decline in the status of religion in the community, in which even Dissenting traditions have become lax and spiritually indifferent (Carroll, 61).

Within the town, the competing branches of the Protestant church are engaged in hostile competition with one another. When a new Evangelical priest, Tryan,

arrives in Milby, the community has difficulty in understanding the value of the spiritual ideas he tries to introduce (Carroll, 61). Evangelicalism was the most important religious movement in England when Eliot began her career in fiction. The movement first came to prominence in the eighteenth century, but had its roots in the Protestant Reformation in Europe; it represented an Anglican response to the growing influence of Dissenting sects like the Baptists and the Independents, which had pushed the Established Church towards increased reform. Evangelicalism tried to reform the Church from within, responding to contemporary complaints about the Established Church, particularly inadequate clergymen, incomprehensible sermons and alcohol abuse in society (Bebbington, 112). By the mid nineteenth century Evangelicalism represented a major influence on society and politics (Bebbington 105). Evangelicalism required justification by faith rather than good works, while Anglican traditionalists put their hope in good works, which they insisted prevented people from behaving immorally.

The town soon becomes divided into two camps: the Evangelical “Tryanites” and the traditionalist “anti-Tryanites”. Tryan’s female supporters regard the town lawyer, Dempster, as an agent of the devil due to his vehement opposition to Tryan. At Tryan’s first Sunday lecture, his opponents, led by Dempster, appear carrying playbills ridiculing him and his supporters.

It is interesting that Eliot creates a highly positive Evangelical character, since, as her essay “Evangelical Teaching” shows, she objected to aspects of Evangelical doctrine. Tryan, however, is motivated by humanity and compassion. The narrator’s efforts to understand Tryan distances the story from Eliot’s earlier anti-Evangelical stance, or that of the objective religious critic:

Any one looking at him with the bird’s-eye glance of a critic might perhaps say that he made the mistake of identifying Christianity with a too narrow doctrinal system; that he saw God’s work too exclusively in antagonism to

the world, the flesh, and the devil; that his intellectual culture was too limited - and so on; making Mr Tryan the text for a wise discourse on the characteristics of the Evangelical school in his day... But I am not poised at that lofty height. I am on the level and in the press with him, as he struggles his way along the stony road, through the crowd of unloving fellow-men. (*Scenes*, 322)

Eliot insists that the compassionate narrator/observer should try to understand individuals without judging them by their external appearances and allegiances: "...surely the only true knowledge of our fellow-man is that which enables us to feel with him - which gives us a fine ear for the heart-pulses that are beating under the mere clothes of circumstance and opinion" (*Scenes*, 322). Despite the fact that he faces prejudice from some of the parishioners, he attempts to guide them towards a less materialistic and more spiritual way of life. Eliot suggests that Tryan's Evangelicalism is less significant than his personal effectiveness as a minister and member of the community.

The focus of the story is Janet Dempster, the lawyer's wife. Abused by her husband, she drinks to numb her feelings, and is searching for someone to help her and understand her anguish. According to Carroll, she is a victim of the moral darkness of Milby, as well as her unhappy marriage (Carroll, 63). Although she has formerly opposed Tryan, when she overhears him speak at the house of one of his female supporters, she is moved, and feels a sense of "fellowship in suffering" with him (*Scenes*, 331). She realises that sincere feelings are much stronger and more effective in fostering good will between people than the most elaborate doctrinal arguments.

When her husband turns her out of the house, she approaches Tryan for help and tells him of her self-hatred: "I shall always be doing wrong, and hating myself after - sinking lower and lower, and knowing that I am sinking" (*Scenes*, 357). Tryan insists that God's love is the only answer to her problems:

How can you tell but that the hardest trials you have known have been only the road by which He was leading you to that complete sense of your own sin and helplessness, without which you would never have renounced all other hopes and trusted in His love alone...I feel that the mystery of our life is great, and at one time it seemed as dark to me as it does to you. (*Scenes*, 358)

“Tryan offers Janet his sympathy, in order to convince her of God’s mercy: as the narrator says, “the tale of the divine pity was never yet believed from lips that were not felt to be moved by human pity” (*Scenes*, 358).”

Rather than demonstrating the rightness of Evangelical doctrine, Eliot shows Tryan’s beliefs have been formed by his personal experience of suffering, and his subsequent ability to understand that of others. Tryan helps Janet to forgive herself by telling her of his own human failings. When he was young, he persuaded a girl from a lower social station to leave her family home, though he never considered marrying her. He later left her, rationalizing that she would come to no harm without him. Three years later he discovered that she had killed herself by poison after working as a prostitute on the street. Tryan convinces Janet that it was this mistake that made him decide to spend the rest of his life trying to help others, but his self-hatred initially prevented him from doing it: “I had no comfort, no strength, no wisdom in my own soul. How could I give them to others? My mind was dark, rebellious, at war with itself and with God. (*Scenes*, 360)”

It was only when he was able to ask God for forgiveness that Tryan felt able to forgive himself. He subsequently dedicated himself to helping others, rather than wasting his life in guilt and despair. The act of forgiving himself has enabled Tryan to lead a meaningful and productive life. While Tryan asks Janet to submit herself, with all her difficulties, to God, Eliot suggests that it is his human and humane agency that enables her to recover:

Ideas are often poor ghosts: our sun-filled eyes cannot discern them; they pass athwart us in thin vapour and cannot make themselves felt. But

sometimes they are made flesh; they breathe upon us with warm breath, they touch us with soft responsive hands, they look at us with sad sincere eyes, and speak to us in appealing tones; they are clothed in a living human soul, with all its conflicts, its faith, and its love. Then their presence is a power, then they shake us like a passion, and we are drawn after them with gentle compulsion, as flame is drawn to flame. (*Scenes*, 364)

Eliot emphasises that human beings are far more powerful than doctrinal ideas, which cannot exist without people to believe in them. Convincing Janet of his sincerity, Tryan succeeds in relieving her from despair; she is able to forgive herself in turn for her own human weakness.

Janet is supported not by Tryan's Evangelical teaching but by his heart and soul: "The thought of Mr. Tryan was associated for her with repose from that conflict of emotion with trust in the unchangeable, with the influx of power to subdue self" (*Scenes*, 409). Janet decides not to waste the rest of her life, and subsequently adopts a daughter. Even after his death, Tryan continues to influence Janet: her life and heart become memorials to him, a "fuller record" than the simple gravestone in the churchyard:

Janet Dempster, rescued from self-despair, strengthened with divine hopes, and now looking back on years of purity and helpful labour. The man who has left such a memorial behind him, must have been one whose heart beat with true compassion, and whose lips were moved by fervent faith. (*Scenes*, 412)

Janet is the most emphatic example in *Scenes of Clerical Life* of Eliot's engagement with the theme of forgiveness, demonstrating the way in which forgiveness and understanding can redeem lives that seem to be lost in sorrow and self-hatred. Having forgiven herself, and later her husband, Janet is able to connect herself to others in the community.

Eliot's loss of religious belief at the age of twenty-two can be associated with her absorption of the ideas of radical enlightened thinkers in Britain and on the Continent, such as Strauss, Comte, Hennell and Feuerbach. However, her first



attempt at fiction focuses on clerical characters and the role of religion within rural communities. While this subject matter assisted her to develop her skill in portraying ordinary, domestic life, it also accorded with her emotional sympathy, if not intellectual agreement, with Christianity. Intellectually, she sought to replace orthodox Christianity with a religion of morality and humanity, believing that people should care for others not because of a system of eternal rewards and punishments but because of internal moral structures: “Our subtlest analysis of schools and sects must miss the essential truth, unless it be lit up by the love that sees in all forms of human thought and work, the life and death struggles of separate human beings (*Scenes*, 322).”

However, *Scenes of Clerical Life* also demonstrates Eliot’s awareness of the power of religion to bind social relations into an organic whole, and her refusal to dismiss faith as a powerfully redemptive influence on people. She suggests that the clergy have an important role to play in maintaining the solidarity of a community. In her letters, Eliot expresses sympathy towards genuinely-held religious beliefs, such as Evangelicalism and Methodism, while admitting that the Church of England remains important to her “as a portion of my earliest associations and most poetic memories” (Hughes 259; *Letters* IV 214). She therefore insisted that it was better to live without religion, while recognising the need for a belief in a spiritual realm (Hughes 259). Finally, the stories also demonstrate a repeated pattern of sin, atonement, forgiveness and moral salvation that places her version of realism within the external religious framework of Christian doctrine.

## CHAPTER 3

### JUSTICE AND PITY

#### 3. FORGIVENESS TO MORAL TRANSFORMATION IN ADAM BEDE

Like *Scenes of Clerical Life*, George Eliot's first full-length novel, *Adam Bede*, deals intensively with religious and moral themes. The novel was begun in October 1857 and completed in September 1858. When it was published it was an immediate success (Haight, *Biography*, 335). The story of *Adam Bede* was constructed from two sources: first, an anecdote Eliot's Methodist aunt, Elizabeth Evans, had told her about the time, before her marriage, when she was a lay Methodist preacher, and spent a night in prison with a young girl condemned to hang for killing her illegitimate baby. The girl refused to admit her crime either to herself or to the authorities. Elizabeth Evans prayed with her all night, until the girl confessed, and then accompanied her to the gallows (Hughes, 197). This story represents the model for that of Hetty in *Adam Bede*, who kills her baby when she is abandoned by her lover.

The second source was the life of Eliot's father, Robert Evans, who worked as a carpenter, forester and bailiff on the Newdigates' estates in Derbyshire and Staffordshire in the early nineteenth century, when the action of *Adam Bede* takes place. Adam recalls Eliot's father in his dependability and rigid notions of right and wrong (Hughes, 197). He is also appointed overseer of the estate's woodland, like Eliot's father, who improved his position until he became estate manager at Arbury Hall (Hughes, 198).

Eliot wrote a retrospective journal account of the “History of Adam Bede” after she was accused of copying the story and characters from real-life events in her youth. She insisted that the characters did not represent her own family or people, but her own ideas about human society (“The History of *Adam Bede*”, G. E. Journal, 30 November 1858 MS Yale, Hughes, 197). Eliot claimed to be driven by a commitment to realism; as the narrator says: “I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things seem better than they were; dreading nothing, indeed, but falsity” (*Adam Bede*, ed. Paterson, 152).

In *Adam Bede*, as in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, Christianity is valued for the ways in which it supports humane values. In her edition of the novel, Roberts emphasises that Eliot accepted not only the enduring importance of Christianity as an historical and social phenomenon, but also its value as myth, and its power as a source of symbols (Roberts, xiv). In *Adam Bede*, however, Eliot applies Christian models of behaviour to human action in the world, demonstrating the ways in which acts of forgiveness, and the consequent awareness of the needs and feelings of others, can enable characters’ moral transformation and redemption. The two main religious denominations depicted in the novel are Methodism (represented by Dinah Morris) and the orthodox Anglican Church (represented by the local priest, Irwine). Eliot depicts the complex roles played by religion in a typical rural community.

Adam is strong and a skilled carpenter, the foreman in a business serving the local farming community. While his brother, Seth, is a Methodist, Adam is not interested in doctrinal disputes, representing a more primal and earth-bound religious sensibility. When he hears that Dinah, a Methodist girl preacher, is going to speak on the village common that evening, Adam sets out his religious philosophy, which resembles Feuerbach’s ideas about the essence of Christianity finding expression in practical care for others:

...there’s the sperrit o’ God in all things and all times - weekday as well as Sunday - and i’ the great works and inventions, and i’ the figuring and

mechanics...if a man does bits o' jobs out o' working hours- builds a oven for's wife to save her from going to the bakehouse, or scrats at his bit o' garden and makes two potatoes grow instead o' one, he's doing more good, and he's just as near to God, as if he was running after some preacher and a-praying and a-groaning. (*Adam Bede*, 7)

For Adam, work is better than prayer, since people can come closer to God while they are working. The novel begins with Adam finishing a hard day's work, and singing a hymn to himself, which can be associated with his personality and outlook:

Let all thy converse be sincere,  
Thy conscience as the noonday clear;  
For God's all-seeing eye surveys  
Thy secret thoughts, thy works and ways (*Adam Bede*, 10)

Adam lives with his mother Lisbeth, father Thias, and brother Seth. Thias is an idle drunkard whose unwillingness to work causes the family financial problems. At the beginning of the novel Adam is working hard to finish a coffin his father has abandoned. While Seth is the most pious member of the family, Adam is the strongest. He accepts responsibility for his father, following the Bible (Romans, 15:1), which says: "They that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of those that are weak" (*Adam Bede*, 41).

However, while Adam has a strong conscience and a clear idea of right and wrong, he is morally limited by his inability to understand others' weaknesses. Hardy describes Adam as "unimaginative" (Hardy, 37), and Granlund sees him as self-righteous, intolerant of others' weaknesses, and quick-tempered (Granlund, 104). Adam is also unable to judge others correctly: he is unsympathetic towards his father, but loves the beautiful and vain Hetty unconditionally, despite her obvious faults. He also looks up to the squire's son, Arthur Donnithorne, as a representative of class, rather than moral status, failing to see his obvious weakness and vanity. Carroll has suggested that since Adam is the most socially integrated and universally admired of the inhabitants

of Hayslope, the testing of his values is critical for the survival of the local community (Carroll, 91). Despite Adam's clear ideas of right and wrong, his moral progress is a key focus of the novel. Through personal suffering, he is led towards a growing understanding of others, and finally towards the ultimate moral goal of forgiveness.

The central tragedy of the novel concerns Arthur's love affair with Hetty, whom he desires but has no intention of marrying. Arthur is aware that he should end the relationship and allow Adam to marry Hetty but, despite approaching Irwine for advice, he fails to do so until it is too late and Hetty is pregnant. When Hetty realises her predicament, she goes in search of Arthur, but in desperation kills her newborn child. When Adam learns of Hetty's arrest for child-murder, Adam is determined to kill Arthur in revenge. However, Irwine succeeds in deterring him, convincing him that revenge is a destructive force, and that Arthur's own "heart and conscience" will punish him (*Adam Bede*, 363-364).

As Perlis has observed, Irwine's role in teaching Adam that the desire for revenge is self-centred, leading only to the commission of a new crime, is crucial in enabling Adam's moral development (Perlis, 118). Irwine convinces Adam to adopt the morally higher path: that of forgiveness, insisting that it is not up to man to "apportion the shares of moral guilt and retribution" (*Adam Bede*, 364).

In helping Adam towards forgiveness, Irwine also increases his own moral stature in the novel. Irwine is a kind, cheerful but lax clergyman, who loves and understands the local people; like many of Eliot's clergymen characters he is a bad preacher, but rooted in the local community, "tender to other men's failings and unwilling to impute evil" (*Adam Bede*, 58). Pinion suggests that Irwine represents Eliot's ideal priest, since he embodies religious as well as human tolerance, both virtues which Eliot values highly (Pinion, 100).

According to Perlis, Irwine also embodies the highest principles of the Bible: “he speaks against judgement and retribution in a way that has a sobering effect on Adam’s egoistic expectation that he can set the world right by eradicating the young squire” (Perlis, 117). Irwine therefore guides Adam towards surrendering his personal pride, and understanding and forgiving others. However, Irwine is only able to guide Adam towards forgiveness once he realises his past failures as a priest and mentor in deciding not to intervene in Arthur’s courtship of Hetty. Eliot suggests that it is only when a clergyman takes full responsibility for his role as moral shepherd (a responsibility that Irwine only fully accepts towards the end of the novel) that he can be really effective in the community.

In fact, Adam’s moral transformation is traced throughout the novel through a series of acts of forgiveness besides the surrender of his egoistic desire to take revenge on Arthur. Earlier in the novel, Adam’s father’s death begins to teach him the inadequacy of his theory of life; he thinks about his father and regrets his past intolerance of him, a “conversion” which occurs as he listens to a sermon in church. This act of forgiveness anticipates his subsequent forgiveness of Arthur and Hetty, the two people who hurt him the most. Adam’s moral transformation is demonstrated at the end of the novel, when he decides to stand by Hetty when she is put on trial for killing her illegitimate child. Hardy regards Adam’s dawning sympathy, first for his father, and then for Hetty, as turning points in his moral development: eventually, “Adam’s pity and awe moves even beyond Hetty towards the true tragic generalization which embraces all poor wretches” (Hardy, 43). As in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, human forgiveness is seen as a necessary step towards a true understanding of divine mercy: at the end of the novel, Adam says: “We hand folks over to God’s mercy and show none ourselves. I used to be hard sometimes. I’ll never be hard again” (*Adam Bede*, 369-370).

The function of forgiveness in healing individuals and communities is also explored through the characters of Dinah and Hetty, the two nieces of the

farming family, the Poyzers. Dinah and Hetty are cousins, and both new arrivals in Hayslope. Hetty is an orphan, who has come to live with her uncle and his family. She is shallow and materialistic, lacks sensitivity towards others, and only interested in her physical appearance and ability to attract men. While Dinah, a committed Methodist, tries to attain a state of selfless spiritual identification with suffering humanity, a feeling alien to Hayslope, Hetty represents the opposite moral sphere, instinctively seeking pleasure and praise alone (Carroll, 75-76). As Carroll suggests, Dinah's selflessness is so extreme that she seems like a "pale spirit"; in contrast, Hetty tries to satisfy her immediate desires like a pleasure-seeking animal (Carroll, 76). Both characters can therefore be seen as other than human (Carroll, 81). Carroll associates Hetty's view of the world with classical and pagan typology, in contrast to Dinah's vision, which can be identified with Christian typology (Carroll, 83). Granlund also describes Hetty as "Eliot's most uncompromising example of female egoism". (Granlund, 54).

Although she realises that Adam loves her, Hetty does not care about him, but is only flattered by his attentions: "she felt nothing when his eyes rested on her, but the cold triumph of knowing that [Adam] loved her" (*Adam Bede*, 84). When she learns that Adam's father has died, she is unmoved, because she is preoccupied by thoughts of Arthur Donnithorne, whom she knows also admires her. Her Aunt Poyser criticises her for her vanity and lack of feeling:

...you're too feather-headed to mind if everybody was dead, so as you could stay upstairs a dressing yourself for two hours by the clock. But anybody besides yourself 'ud mind about such things happening to them as think a deal more of you than you deserve. (*Adam Bede*, 81)

In the early stages of the novel, Mrs Poyser speaks harshly towards Hetty; unlike the other characters she is unmoved by her beauty and seeks to awaken a moral conscience in her. The narrator suggests that Mrs Poyser is more aware of Hetty's faults than the other characters:

It is generally a feminine eye that first detects the moral deficiencies hidden under the 'dear deceit' of beauty...in moments of indignation she had sometimes spoken with great openness on the subject to her husband. 'She's no better than a peacock, as 'ud strut about on the wall, and spread its tail when the sun shone if all the folks i' the parish was dying...It's my belief her heart's as hard as a pebble.' (*Adam Bede*, 133)

With the same clear eye as Mrs Poyser, the narrator distances herself, and the reader, from Hetty's state of moral underdevelopment:

"we must learn to accommodate ourselves to the discovery that some of those cunningly-fashioned instruments called human souls have only a very limited range of music, and will not vibrate in the least under a touch that fills others with tremulous rapture or quivering agony" (*Adam Bede*, 82).

As Granlund notes, while "Adam's love for [Hetty] means only a pleasing sense of power and triumph...her own love for Arthur for Arthur is also mostly made up of vanity and the desire to become a lady", rather than genuine passion. (Granlund, 55). According to Harris, Hetty's pursuit of the socially-superior Arthur Donnithorne is just "a Cinderella-fantasy in which he plays a god-like handsome prince who will magically elevate her above all rivals" (Harris, 54). She dreams of wearing fine clothes and being the wife of a powerful man because she wants to inspire envy in her peers. Hetty is therefore only able to perceive others as instruments by which her own desires can be achieved.

While Adam is strongly rooted in his native community, Hetty is emotionally and socially rootless, feeling nothing for the family she lives with. Her dreams of the future do not include her family, and the relatives and companions of her youth are insignificant for her:

There are some plants that have hardly any roots: you may tear them from their native nook of rock or wall, and just lay them over your ornamental flowerpot, and they blossom none the worse. Hetty could have cast all her past life behind her, and never cared to be reminded of it again. (*Adam Bede*, 234)



The narrator deliberately creates a double perspective of the domestic world of the Poysers, filtering it through Hetty's viewpoint, as irritating and dull, and through the narrator's viewpoint, as comforting and familiar:

I think she had no feeling at all towards the old house, and did not like the Jacob's Ladder and the long row of hollyhocks in the garden better than other flowers - perhaps not so well. It was wonderful how little she seemed to care about waiting on her uncle, who had been a good father to her: she hardly ever remembered to reach him his pipe at the right time without being told, unless a visitor happened to be there, who would have a better opportunity of seeing her as she walked across the hearth. (*Adam Bede*, 132)

As Harris has said, Hetty is "psychologically isolated by her narcissism from all the other characters" (Harris, 51). Eliot suggests that those who lack family feeling and a sense of rootedness in a place fail to develop a sense of responsibility and understanding towards others. As Middleton has commented:

Attachment to a particular place gives a person security in his uniqueness by enabling him to appreciate some of the sources from which his life springs; roots in a particular place at a particular time influence a person's life by encouraging his growth and development while providing a firm emotional, social and intellectual foundation on which to build. (Middleton, 101)

As a rootless person, Hetty is unable to deal with the trials of life successfully, or form a proper balance between her inner fantasy life and her real circumstances.

Granlund has argued that the character of Hetty serves a didactic purpose in the novel, showing "how the choice of self as a highest good permeates the entire personality and arrests the development of the protagonist, emotionally, intellectually and imaginatively" (Granlund, 54). At the beginning of the novel, the narrator's discussion of Hetty is sharply judgmental:

In the presentation of Hetty's egoism...no excuses or explanations in terms of upbringing or social influences are offered. Hetty has grown up surrounded by love, care, and a healthy work ethic. The pity that is expressed for her is based entirely on her future suffering. (Granlund, 57)

Granlund focuses on the narrator's comments on Hetty when tries on her earrings in the mirror; the narrator addresses the reader as a fellow judge and moral arbiter:

Try rather to divest yourself of all your rational prejudices, as much as if you were studying the psychology of a canary bird, and only watch the movements of this pretty round creature as she turns her head...it is too painful to think that she is a woman with a woman's destiny before her - (*Adam Bede*, 294-95)

Eliot suggests that the reader may compare Hetty to an animal or a bird, but the fact that she is human means she will inevitably fail in life (Granlund, 58). Harris, on the other hand, looks for a psychological and social cause for Hetty's selfishness, suggesting that her deficient character is due to an absence of parental love: "The Poysers scrupulously acknowledge their obligation to take care of their niece, but their rigid values might well have a stunting effect on a girl dispossessed at the age of ten when her parents died in poverty. (Harris, 53)"

Harris identifies the voice of Eliot's narrator with the "puritan" values of the Poysers (Harris, 50). However, this seems to misread Eliot's moral agenda, since the narrative makes it clear that the Poysers have tried to treat Hetty as their own child. After her fall, when she reads the letter Adam has forced Arthur to write, in which he tries to end their relationship, Hetty begins to think about the Poysers, realising that her actions will have a damaging effect on the family. Carroll identifies this moment as an important stage in Hetty's transformation from egoist to a subject aware of others' feelings: she suddenly becomes aware of a reality beyond her inner life: "outside are the Poysers and the community at large where she will only discover her own shame and no

sympathy” (Carroll, 95). However, while Hetty begins to imagine her public shame, at this stage she is not able to register her own guilt .(Carroll 95).

The depiction of Hetty as a pretty but fragile boat ready to be wrecked on a stormy sea announces the narrator’s growing sympathy with her:

The actions of a little trivial soul like Hetty’s, struggling amidst the serious, sad destinies of a human being are strange. So are the motions of a little vessel without ballast tossed about on a stormy sea. How pretty it looked with its parti-colored sail in the sunlight, moored in the quiet bay! Let that man bear the loss who loosed it from its moorings. (*Adam Bede*, 293)

Hetty’s lack of moral ‘ballast’ or weight means that she is unfit to manage moral dilemmas. She makes the unwise decision to marry Adam to save herself, without considering his feelings. Once she faces disaster, she begins to consider death. However, this has nothing to do with religious feeling: as the narrator emphasises, although Hetty has been to church every Sunday all her life she has never gained any understanding of the lessons religion can teach concerning moral awareness of others:

She was one of those numerous people who have had godfathers and godmothers, learned their catechism, been confirmed, and gone to church every Sunday, and yet, for any practical result of strength in life, or trust in death, have never appropriated a single Christian idea or Christian feeling. (*Adam Bede*, 330)

As an egoist with a trivial soul, Hetty has been driven by her ambitious desire for sexual and material success. Towards the end of the novel, however, when she leaves Hayslope to find Arthur, she is described as a desperate, wounded animal:

My heart bleeds for her as I see her toiling along on her weary feet, or seated in a cart, with her eyes fixed vacantly on the road before her, never thinking or caring whither it tends, till hunger comes and makes her desire that a village may be near...What will be the end? - the end of her objectless wandering, apart from all love, caring for human beings only through her

pride, clinging to life only as the hunted wounded brute clings to it? (*Adam Bede*, 335)

The narrator again assumes that the reader is a rational, moral being, and identifies her own judgment with his or hers, and the moral world that Hetty has excluded herself from: “God preserve you and me from being the beginners of such misery!” (*Adam Bede*, 335). The reader begins to see Hetty as a suffering creature, rather than the peacock or canary she has been compared to early in the novel. Once she leaves Hayslope on her hopeless journey to find Arthur, Hetty’s status as a suffering soul is gradually emphasised: “she is no longer seen as an alien in the rural world, but, by the beginning of her flight, as a human reality concealed beneath it” (Harris, 63-64). Metaphorically, she also becomes associated with the Christian idea of the lost sheep deserving pity and forgiveness.

As Granlund has said, despite the narrator’s early harshness towards Hetty, she also suggests that Hetty will require the reader’s sympathy, since her simplicity and lack of education have been partly responsible for her moral confusion: “her limited perception prevents her from learning from her experience and so she remains confused and uncomprehending until Dinah conceptualises her experience for her” (Granlund, 55). Harris has also suggested that, despite the narrator’s overt criticism of Hetty early in the novel, Eliot’s final intention is to inspire sympathy for her:

...Hetty’s problem is really psychological, more deserving of sympathy rather than harsh judgment. Mentally she is a child, a case of arrested development, not responsible for her actions, and thus a victim no matter what she may finally do. (Harris, 52)

The narrator’s expression of sympathy for Hetty is designed to inspire the same emotion in the reader. The narrative therefore moves from a condemnation of Hetty’s outward selfishness and frivolity to a sympathetic identification with her inward despair:

In all her writing Eliot combines her stern morality with forgiving pity for the suffering sinner and she tries to lead her reader in the same direction. Both the severity of the earlier treatment and the sympathy of the later can be explained by Eliot's conscious desire to overcome the prejudice and widen the vision of her readers and by her sense of the redeeming power of suffering. (Granlund, ,58)

Barrett has also noted that "Hetty is transfigured by her suffering" and this suffering finally becomes "the source of her strength in the novel" (Barrett, 47, 50). Barrett also identifies Hetty's suffering with that of Christ: when Hetty faints after learning that Arthur has left, she is likened to a "beautiful corpse" (*Adam Bede*, 324). According to Barrett, "this is the moment at which Hetty takes over as Christ figure" (Barrett, 51). Christ's suffering on the cross is recalled in the description of Hetty's extreme physical and emotional suffering. Hetty therefore rises in human status through her suffering, to occupy a different role in the novel and the mind of the reader. Despite her unhappy end (she is put on trial and transported), Hetty is able to achieve a kind of moral advancement through her emergent awareness of others. However, it is only with her confession to her cousin, Dinah, that she is able to achieve the kind of redemption Eliot suggests comes with forgiveness.

While Hetty functions as an example of the lost sheep, or suffering sinner, inspiring sympathy in others, Dinah represents a Christ-like model of selflessness and forgiveness. Her overwhelming belief in Christ's redemptive power enables her to guide others towards moral transformation. Dinah represents the religious energy which tried to compensate for the lax and uninspired Anglicanism practised by many of the Church of England clergy. Hardy (1986) has associated new ideas about "feeling" and emotion emerging in the nineteenth century with the influence on fiction of Methodism and other Dissenting traditions in Victorian England.

Like Evangelicalism, Methodism can be associated with the Puritan ethos that had developed in England in the seventeenth century, with its focus on self-

education, reading the Bible, preaching and strict morality. Methodism broke from the established church in 1795, and gradually became organised into local societies united into larger circuits, appointing its own ministers to preach in special chapels or in the open. Methodism allowed women to preach until 1803, when it was forbidden. Methodist preachers were famous for their earnest sermons, and were often criticised for fanaticism, especially by the representatives of the Established Church.

As Lovesey has pointed out, Methodism found its strongest supporters amongst the working and lower-middle classes, since poor communities responded to a religion that acknowledged and empathised with the hardships of their lives: however, it was generally resisted and opposed by the farming community (Lovesey, 38). Therefore, Dinah is to some extent a misfit in Hayslope. In her public sermons, she emphasises the psychological rewards offered by a complete trust in God: “think what it is not to hate anything but sin, to be full of love to every creature, to be frightened at nothing, to be sure that all things will turn to good: not to mind pain because it is our Father’s will” (*Adam Bede*, 26).

As in the description of the Evangelical Tryan in “Janet’s Repentance”, the narrator demonstrates both a sceptical and a sympathetic attitude towards Methodism:

[Methodists] believed in present miracles, instantaneous conversions, in revelations by dreams and visions; they drew lots, and sought for divine guidance by opening the Bible at hazard; having a literal way of interpreting the Scripture, which is not at all sanctioned by approved commentators; and it is impossible for me to represent their diction as correct, or their instruction as liberal. Still - if I have read religious history aright - faith, hope and charity have not always been found in a direct ratio with a sensibility to the three concords, and it is possible, thank heaven, to have very erroneous theories and very sublime feelings. (*Adam Bede*, 31)

In prompting “neighbourly kindness”, Eliot suggests, the Methodists have a valuable practical role to play in society (*Adam Bede*, 31). Like Tryan, Dinah has taken a conscious decision to dedicate her life to helping others. As in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede* demonstrates Eliot’s lack of interest in religious theory as a motivation for human action. The narrator’s attempt to understand and appreciate a doctrine she is unable to agree with intellectually on the grounds of its capacity for enlarging human sympathy also accords with Feuerbach’s concept of the benevolent impact of religious feeling on human society.

While Irwine initially regards preaching as his profession only, for Dinah it is a spiritual vocation: she does not earn any money by it but believes she has been “called” by God (Lovesey, 39). She experiences sublime feelings, which she describes for Irwine when they meet: “Sometimes it seemed as if speech came to me without any will of my own and words were given to me that came out as the tears come because our hearts are full and we can’t help it” (*Adam Bede*, 76). Dinah describes how she began preaching accidentally, when another Methodist preacher became sick. She remembers feeling “a great movement in my soul and I trembled as if I was shaken by a strong spirit entering my weak body”, and emphasises that the words she subsequently spoke were “given to her” by God (*Adam Bede*, 77). This description of Dinah’s connection with God recalls John Wesley’s emotional awakening, which led to the founding of Methodism, “when John Wesley felt ‘his heart strangely warmed’ in Aldergate Chapel, London, on the evening of 24 May 1738” (James, 67). The idea that God reveals His presence to people through the senses and emotions remained a central aspect of Methodism and Evangelicalism (James 67). For Dinah, preaching is a matter of feeling. Her sermon on the village common is passionately inspired: “Dinah began to tell of the joys that were in store for the penitent, and to describe in her simple way the divine peace and love with which the soul of the believer is filled” (*Adam Bede*, 26).

However, her spiritual vocation is also applied practically in her work for others. When Adam's father dies, she goes to visit his mother, Lisbeth to offer her support:

From her girlhood upwards she had had experience among the sick and the mourning, among minds hardened and shrivelled through poverty and ignorance, and had gained the subtlest perception of the mode in which they could best be touched, and softened into willingness to receive words of spiritual consolation or warning. (*Adam Bede*, 97)

Like Tryan, Dinah is able to console and transform people, enabling their recuperation and reintegration into society. From the beginning of the novel, Dinah is able to sympathise with Hetty rather than condemn her: “[the] blank in Hetty's nature, instead of exciting Dinah's dislike, only touched her with a deeper pity” (*Adam Bede*, 135). Dinah's imaginative identification with others is so powerful that she receives a warning premonition concerning Hetty's future:

Her imagination had created a thorny thicket of sin and sorrow, in which she saw the poor thing struggling torn and bleeding, looking with tears for rescue and finding none. It was in this way that Dinah's imagination and sympathy acted and reacted habitually, each heightening the other. (*Adam Bede*, 135)

Dinah's belief in her contact with God, and through God, with other people, enables her to sense Hetty's destiny: sin, and subsequent despair. Her ability to sense the future resembles her to the saints and prophets in the Bible. She opens the Bible to help her to decide what to do, before attempting to counsel Hetty and offer her support: “I want to tell you that if ever you are in trouble, and need a friend that will always feel for you and love you, you have got that friend in Dinah Morris at Snowfield” (*Adam Bede*, 137).

Dinah represents the model of understanding and forgiveness promoted in Christian thinking. Her lack of egoism means she does not regard Hetty as a



rival but as a fellow soul in need. Dinah offers Hetty forgiveness before she has committed any crime, identifying herself with the whole of suffering humanity:

Trouble comes to us all in this life: we set our hearts on things which it isn't God's will for us to have, and then we go sorrowing...we go astray and do wrong, and bring ourselves into trouble with our fellow-men. (*Adam Bede*, 137)

As a Methodist, Dinah has faith in God to determine what it is right for people, since she believes that everyone is weak: for Dinah, all strength lies in God. Her religious convictions lead her to believe in prayer as a means of transformation, to help show people the right choices and avoid sin.

Hetty rejects Dinah's advice, an action that destroys her last chance to save herself from disaster. Finally, however, after her arrest, Dinah becomes the only person Hetty is able to open her heart to, since she realises that, unlike the rest of the community, Dinah will not judge her by social standards. According to Carroll, all the qualities which have seemed to distance Dinah from the Hayslope community - her abstractedness, inability to identify herself with the local community, selflessness and apocalyptic visions - now become strengths that enable her to help Hetty (Carroll, 99). Dinah lacks physical roots in Hayslope, but this does not disadvantage her as it does Hetty, because Dinah's spiritual vocation provides her with a sense of community (a community of the heart). When Hetty is in prison, and continuing to deny her crime, Dinah visits her to encourage her to confess: according to Dinah's beliefs, Hetty cannot receive God's forgiveness until she admits her guilt. Therefore, Dinah urges Hetty to open her soul to God, but Hetty tells her "I can't feel anything like you...my heart is hard" (*Adam Bede*, 391). Eventually, Dinah is able to help Hetty to confess by invoking the image of Christ. As Carroll has said, the intensity of Dinah's faith achieves Hetty's confession (Carroll, 98). When Hetty tells Dinah about the death of the child ("My heart went like a stone", *Adam Bede*, 391), she gives up her moral isolation.

Carroll has identified this episode as the climax of the novel, suggesting that the two cousins take part in a “symbolic re-enactment of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ “(Carroll, 98). Hetty’s despair can be identified with Christ’s suffering on the cross, whereas Dinah’s forgiveness of Hetty can be identified with Christ’s forgiveness of, and transcendent love for, mankind, a force capable of redeeming the most hardened heart (Carroll, 98). Harris also emphasises Dinah’s crucial role as a medium between divine and human mercy: “the lost sinner can only be saved by Dinah, whose religion emphasises forgiveness and universal suffering represented by Christ as the “Man of Sorrows” (Harris, 65). Hetty’s confession purifies her, increasing her moral stature (Granlund, 71). When Hetty is able to confess, Dinah attributes the agency to the Holy Trinity. However, it is Dinah’s compassion that enables Hetty’s confession, and subsequent peace of mind. The episode represents the most powerful example of a Christian narrative in the novel. Dinah appears to become a more-than-human power, yet she also represents what Eliot sees as the transcendent virtue of human beings: understanding, sympathy and the ability to forgive.

Like Hetty, Arthur Donnithorne also represents a suffering sinner in need of forgiveness. Arthur is impetuous and warm-blooded. He does not have a strong conscience, but cares deeply about his reputation in Hayslope. While Adam is morally steadfast, dedicating himself to his doctrine of work and duty, Arthur is weak, vain and inconsistent. Arthur knows he cannot marry Hetty, but he cannot resist forming a relationship with her. He is motivated by vanity and sexual desire, just as Hetty’s desire for him is based on social ambition and pride. Arthur recognises his own moral inferiority to Adam: “I should think now Adam you never have any struggles within yourself...I mean you are never shilly-shally, first making up your mind that you won’t do a thing, and then doing it after all?” (*Adam Bede*, 142)

Despite Adam's inflexibility, his moral conscience is stronger than Arthur's. He agrees that once he has made his mind up that "a thing was wrong" he is unlikely to change his mind: "It takes the taste out o' my mouth for things when I know I should have a heavy conscience after' em" (*Adam Bede*, 143). Arthur's weakness is also combined with lack of self-knowledge, another factor that contrasts him with Adam:

It was not possible for Arthur Donnithorne to do anything mean, dastardly, or cruel. 'No! I'm a devil of a fellow for getting myself into a hobble, but I always take care the load shall fall on my own shoulders.' (*Adam Bede*, 105-106)

Just as the narrator identifies Hetty early in the novel as a future victim due to her moral failings, she identifies Arthur as a future agent of disaster: "Unhappily there is no inherent poetical justice in hobbles and they will sometimes obstinately refuse to inflict their worst consequences on the prime offender, in spite of his loudly expressed wish" (*Adam Bede*, 106). Arthur is convinced that he will never harm anyone, and that if he does wrong it will only be himself who suffers. He does not consider the fact that in life wrong actions bring bad consequences to many, not only the person originally responsible:

Ships, certainly, are liable to casualties, which sometimes make terribly evident some flaw in their construction, that would never have been discoverable in smooth water; and many a 'good fellow', through a disastrous combination of circumstances, has undergone a like betrayal. (*Adam Bede*, 107)

As the narrator has compared Hetty to a fragile boat, Arthur is likened to a poorly-made ship; both characters are too flawed and weak to keep morally afloat amidst the temptations of life. The metaphor of natural disaster also emphasises the role of fate or chance in the novel. From the beginning, the narrator ensures that the reader is aware that Arthur's passion for Hetty will lead to disaster (Vargish, 80). Paterson also suggests that Arthur's seduction of

Hetty is the product of a sequence of inevitable causes and effects, including Hetty's beauty and vanity and Arthur's ignorance of his own weakness (Paterson, xvii). According to Paterson, the cause of Arthur's moral failure is the "innocence" of the evil within him, rather than the evil outside him (Paterson, xxiv).

When Arthur turns to Irwine for advice about his relationship with Hetty, Irwine fails to guide him firmly enough to prevent the disaster occurring. This failure is partly due to his mistaken belief that Arthur is too dependent on the approval and respect of the community to ruin Hetty's chances of marriage. He is also reluctant to interfere in his parishioners' private lives. As a clergyman, the narrator suggests, Irwine is too lax to guide Arthur properly: "The opportunity was gone. While Arthur was hesitating, the rope to which he might have clung has drifted away - he must trust now to his own swimming" (*Adam Bede*, 149).

Vargish has argued that rather than failing Arthur, Irwine's advice accords with contemporary Christian thinking concerning crime and punishment. When Arthur asks Irwine whether a man who struggles against temptation and loses the battle is as bad as one who does not struggle at all, Irwine replies:

No, certainly; I pity him in proportion to his struggles, for they foreshadow the inward suffering which is the worst form of Nemesis. Consequences are un pitying. Our deeds carry their terrible consequences...consequences that are hardly ever confined to ourselves. (*Adam Bede*, 148)

According to Vargish, "this observation is well within an orthodox providential tradition: whatever God may perform in the form of redress or restitution, individuals continue to bear full responsibility for their actions" (Vargish, 180). Irwine's advice is prophetic, but finally ineffectual. Therefore, Irwine can be considered to have failed Arthur as a priest and mentor, a factor which leads to his far more powerful and successful guidance of Adam towards forgiveness of Arthur. Moreover, Irwine's cautious attempts to counsel Arthur contrast with

Dinah's strenuous attempts to prevent Hetty from ruining her life. Nevertheless, Arthur, like Hetty, is finally redeemed by the power of forgiveness of others, as Adam realises that it is not his role to judge and punish Arthur, but to try to understand him, and Irwine takes over the care of the Donnithorne estate while Arthur leaves to take up his military commission.

The rest of the community is also morally enriched by its recognition of the need to forgive. For example, Mrs Poyser, who has always been harsh towards Hetty, finds it in her heart to pity her at the end of the novel. In this sense, the tragedy of individuals leads to the moral strengthening of the whole community. At the end of the novel, Adam and Dinah marry, a union which, Paterson suggests, "harmonises what they stand for, the claims of subject and object, of inner light and outer light, of spirit and matter" (Paterson, xviii).

The plot of *Adam Bede* has stimulated much critical debate. Critics have suggested that Hetty is abandoned as a character after she falls into temptation, becoming simply a symbol of moral failure; Eliot can therefore be criticised for a morally judgmental, rather than sympathetic vision (James, 169). Dinah's abandonment of her ministry in favour of marriage and motherhood can also be seen as problematic. As James observes, Eliot has frequently been criticised for giving her heroines un-heroic endings (James, 169). *Adam Bede* appears to support a conservative outlook which works to deny characters the freedom to follow their own desires.

However, despite its realistic domestic details, the novel primarily follows the scheme of redemption through forgiveness depicted in the Bible. Paterson has argued that Eliot's depiction of the relationships between Adam and Dinah, and Hetty and Arthur, recalls the narrative of Adam and Eve, describing "that fall from grace unfortunate in the sense that it necessitated the loss of Eden, but fortunate in the sense that it made possible the discovery and recovery of an even better and brighter one" (Paterson, xxvi). The novel is full of allusions to

*Genesis*: the peace of a summer morning is described as “Eden-Like” (*Adam Bede*, 43) and the Hayslope as “this land of Goshen” (*Adam Bede*, 30). Early in the novel Eliot identifies Adam with the “first man” and gardener in Eden (*Adam Bede*, 183). He can also be compared to Milton’s Adam in *Paradise Lost* (1667), who must lose his illusory paradisaic state in order to deserve a higher one. As Nardo has stressed, much of Eliot’s work represents a “strenuous dialogue with Milton’s life and art - a dialogue that animated the epic novels she wrote for an age of unbelief” (Nardo, 12).

The biblical allusions are countered by an alternative world of classical myth, typically associated with the sensual Hetty and Arthur, who have rejected Christian values to pursue their own desires. When Arthur courts Hetty, he imagines himself “a shepherd in Arcadia: the first youth kissing the first maiden” (*Adam Bede*, 118). The Fir-Tree grove where he and Hetty meet is resembled to a sinister place “where many a pagan god took the innocence of many a pagan maiden,” and Arthur is identified with “Eros himself sipping the lips of Psyche” (*Adam Bede*, 117). The classical references describe a pagan world of both innocence and moral danger.

Carroll has argued that Eliot finally fails to achieve a coherent moral narrative: “On the one hand there is the irrevocableness of consequences, on the other, an epicurean enjoyment of life; the two fit together as a calculus, without synthesizing into a redemptive vision” (Carroll, 87). However, the conflict between the Christian and the mythic readings of the novel supports the pattern of human failure and subsequent redemption through an active regeneration of Christian values in the world. Eliot emphasises the role forgiveness, as a radical act involving engagement with the feelings and needs of others, can play in assisting people with their moral dilemmas and aiding subsequent social re-integration.

*Adam Bede* cannot be seen as a religious novel, but it represents a powerful portrait of the way religious feeling could influence individuals. However, within the novel religion represents a transformative influence on people and their choices, which goes beyond secular morality. Adam learns tolerance and understanding. As the most overtly spiritual character in the book, Dinah works to reconcile characters with their natures and problems. Hetty is moved by Dinah and is finally redeemed. Irwine at first seems an ineffectual clergyman; however, he influences Adam to enable him to forgive Arthur and avoid committing another crime. Therefore, like Adam, he finally represents a stabilizing influence in Hayslope. As in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, in *Adam Bede* Eliot focuses intensively on the role of religion and religious characters in society without challenging the fundamental notion of belief. However, she demonstrates the positive, redemptive effects on individuals, and regenerative effects on society, of the fundamental Christian virtue of forgiveness.

## CONCLUSION

George Eliot was deeply involved in intellectual challenges to Christianity in the nineteenth century. Her early career represents her engagement with these ideas, especially her reading and translation of critiques of orthodox Christian doctrine, such as Strauss's *Life of Jesus* (1835), Hennell's *Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity* (1838), and Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1841). Her attacks on unforgiving religious doctrines and condemnation of conventional religious fiction also show that she resisted the unsympathetic didacticism often associated with the role of orthodox religion in society. At the same time, however, the portrayal of Christian beliefs, practices and models of social behaviour dominates the subject matter and thematic design of her first two works of fiction. Despite Eliot's focus on the secular religion of humanity associated with the ideas of Feuerbach and Comte, in her explorations of human community in *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* she emphasises a Christian scheme of moral failure (a 'fall'), suffering, forgiveness and eventual redemption. This suggests a shift in Eliot's thinking towards recognition of the importance of religious life in helping people to live harmoniously with others.

Eliot's first works of fiction also examine the early phases of the nineteenth century in which religion was more influential than the time of her writing (mid-century). Rather than satirising clerical characters or particular religious groups, as many Victorian novels did, *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* show how Anglicanism, Evangelicalism and Methodism can perform valuable roles in society, if they are practised sincerely. While Eliot's narrative voice emphasises her scepticism concerning extreme religious devotion, she continually emphasises the positive value of genuine Christian belief in



promoting tolerance of others and the ideal of divine mercy. Her essay, “Evangelical Teaching” had also stressed her conviction that true belief in God’s love for and mercy towards man, and its subsequent encouragement of people’s mercy towards one another, was the fundamental gift offered by Christianity.

In *Scenes of Clerical Life*, Eliot puts clerical characters and religious practices at the heart of her explorations of community and human relationships. The three clerical characters whose stories are told have all suffered personally in some way, a fact that is more significant than their official religious roles or doctrinal positions. Suffering is shown to aid individuals to understand others, and redeem those who believe themselves to be lost. In *Scenes*, each of the central clerical characters also offers or receives forgiveness.

Amos Barton is not respected by his parishioners, and can be regarded as an anti-ideal, because of his unsympathetic treatment of others and social snobbery. Barton’s parishioners judge and reject him, and he is only reintegrated into society after he experiences intense suffering when his wife dies in childbirth. The story represents Eliot’s first exploration of the theme of forgiveness in her fiction. However, In “Mr. Gilfil’s Love Story”, the clergyman, Gilfil, plays an important role in enhancing the solidarity of the community through his ability to empathise with his parishioners. Gilfil’s early suffering, through the experience of loving Caterina and teaching her to forgive herself and others, has bound him to the human community rather than to the class of didactic preachers who emphasise their own irreproachable piety. Gilfil also demonstrates the cohesive function of religious ritual in binding societies together and promoting feeling for others.

However, Janet’s repentance is the most developed example in *Scenes of Clerical Life* of the role of forgiveness in Eliot’s moral philosophy. The story explores the redemption of Janet Dempster through the selfless efforts of the

Evangelical clergyman, Tryan. Janet's redemption seems more powerful and real than Tina's because she is able to live a long and meaningful life after Tryan's death, while Tina dies soon after marrying Gilfil. While Eliot did not approve of the style of popular Evangelical teaching, she emphasises Tryan's humanity and compassion. Like Gilfil, Tryan has experienced personal guilt and suffering. He repents his youthful carelessness towards others, and decides to dedicate his life to helping humanity. Tryan shows Janet how his own act of self-forgiveness mirrors God's mercy towards mankind, providing her with a Christian model, which helps her to redeem her life. Eliot's sympathetic depiction of the Reverend Tryan demonstrates her careful distinction between those who refuse to tolerate or understand others, and those whose understanding of others provides an example of Christian humility and sympathy.

In *Adam Bede* the theme of personal morality, the roles people play in redeeming others, and the transformative power of human forgiveness, are explored in greater detail and depth. In *Hayslope*, religious practice plays an important role, but Eliot suggests that community can only be maintained and regenerated by the individual acts of forgiveness that follow real understanding of, and empathy for, others. In the novel some characters are tested in order to mature and achieve redemption.

Adam Bede is neither selfless, like Dinah, nor selfish like Hetty. Adam has a strong conscience and sense of morality, but he cannot tolerate weakness and finds it difficult to forgive others. His father's death is the first event to show him that his philosophy of life lacks compassion. The second event to test Adam's values is his discovery of Arthur and Hetty's relationship, and his subsequent ability to forgive Arthur. Irwine succeeds in teaching Adam that the desire for revenge represents a lower, egoistic impulse, which will have a damaging effect on Adam and his community. The last event which completes

Adam's moral regeneration is his forgiveness and support of Hetty following her trial for infanticide.

The other characters are also redeemed by the end of the novel. Arthur is strengthened morally through his guilt, suffering, and subsequent repentance. Hetty is redeemed despite her crime, after a period of suffering which gradually humanises her, and finally resembles her to Christ. The narrator's depiction of Hetty stresses the central value of forgiveness is achieving moral transformation. This transformation is initiated when she succeeds in confessing her crime after Dinah invokes the idea of Christ's suffering. In each of these episodes, Eliot emphasises that forgiveness is a divine virtue.

While Carroll has suggested that in *Adam Bede* Eliot fails to achieve a satisfactory "redemptive vision" (Carroll, 87), in fact the novel represents a synthesis of Eliot's philosophical, religious and moral ideas. For Eliot, the idea of "meliorism" involves confronting the difficulty of forgiving those who have made one suffer, and who appear to be beyond redemption. According to Eliot's philosophy, support should be given to those most in need, no matter what their crime.

While religious practices may help to lead characters towards an understanding of others, Eliot demonstrates the limitations of religious systems alone in achieving moral community. Instead, it is the ties binding each individual to one another, and subsequently to the community, that enables moral feeling to flourish. Like Comte, Eliot regarded society as an organism in which each aspect has its separate function in enabling the whole to continue. This explains why Eliot's most selfish, egoistic and socially isolated characters are those who face the greatest suffering, and cause the greatest disruption in society. Eliot's focus on the need to subdue individual egoism and selfish desires, however, is also mirrored in Christian thinking, which emphasises humility, care for others and a belief in God's mercy to all sinners. The competing influences on Eliot's

characters, which lead them into moral dilemmas, such as desire and duty, or humility and ambition, can all, Eliot suggests, be resolved by following the doctrine of Christian sympathy. This does not necessarily demonstrate Eliot's personal faith in God. Instead, she demonstrates that pursuing a moral course may be difficult for people who do not believe in divine authority, and whose consciences are not developed.

Rather than representing religious didacticism, both *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* acknowledge the difficulty in convincing people to act out of secular morality than to persuade them that they will be punished eternally in Hell if they do wrong. As Paterson notes, for the secular philosopher, such as Comte, the notion of Providence central to Evangelicalism was replaced by the idea of cause and effect: every cause had its irrevocable effects, so acts of right and wrong had their constant consequences (Paterson, x). Oulton also emphasises Eliot's focus on "a law of consequences, an impersonal series of causes and effects, which justify her protagonists in pursuing a moral course unobserved by any higher power" (Oulton, 8). While her interrogation of the role of chance, fate and Nemesis seems to suggest a godless universe, Eliot's intensive focus on the beneficial functions of forgiveness and selflessness identifies her work with Christian ideals of social behaviour. In her depiction of the separate redemptions of Adam, Hetty and Arthur, rather than depicting the merciless working of society, Eliot succeeds in demonstrating the redeeming power of forgiveness. Eliot suggests that if one is able to forgive himself or others, one becomes more positive and morally energetic. Despite Eliot's apparent promotion of social and religious conservatism in her fiction, both *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* demonstrate the revolutionary, transformative potential of human forgiveness, a doctrine derived from, but not limited to, Christianity, and which may frequently be far more challenging and unpopular than socially judgemental behaviour, to enhance the moral and psychological well-being of individuals, and to re-integrate society.

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## APPENDIX

### CURRICULUM VITAE

#### PERSONAL INFORMATION

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#### EDUCATION

Degree	Institution	Year of Graduation
BS	METU English Language Teaching	1989
High School	Gaziantep Kız Lisesi, Gaziantep	1984

#### WORK EXPERIENCE

Year	Place	Enrollment
2008 - Present	Aegean Army	Translator
2007 - 2008	Turkish Armed Forces Band School	English Teacher (Major)
2001 - 2007	Turkish Land Forces Headquarters	Chief Translator (Captain-Major)
1999 - 2001	Army Aviation School	English Teacher (First Lieutenant-Captain)
1997 - 1999	Turkish Armed Forces Band School	English Teacher (First Lieutenant)
1991 - 1997	Maltepe Military High School	English Teacher (Second Lieutenant)

#### HOBBIES

Swimming, Reading, Walking, Theatre