‘A Goodness Entirely Human’: The Influence of Feuerbach on George Eliot’s Fiction

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Certified that the Thesis entitled

'A Goodness Entirely Human: The Influence of Feuerbach on George Eliot's Fiction', submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the supervision of Professor Shanta Dutta, Presidency University, and that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/elsewhere.

Countersigned by the

Supervisor:
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INTRODUCTION

> 'What yesterday was still religion is no longer such to-day; and what to-day is atheism, tomorrow will be religion.'[1]

> 'Heaven help us! said the old religions – the new one, from its very lack of that faith, will teach us all the more to help one another.'[2]

The Victorian Age was an age of inquiry; the Victorians began questioning society, gender roles, knowledge, and even religion. With a reaction against dogma and scientific theories that could not be ignored, the Victorians experienced a crisis of faith. Society was changing, and George Eliot is both a product of these new ideas, influenced by the scientists and intellects of her time, and a contributor to new thought and literature. She was more than a great writer; she was a scholar, philosopher, and teacher. Her stories and novels not only entertain, but strive to better our souls by offering moral instruction. She is known for her conversion from the devout Evangelical that she was in youth to the unapologetic atheist of her adult life. It is still debated by critics as to whether Eliot was an agnostic, a Deist, a Pantheist, or a spiritualist. Or, did she return to a thorough belief in Christianity? Eliot in a way straddles the fence between belief and unbelief. George Willis Cooke aptly remarks that Eliot:

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[1]Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Dover Publications, 2008), p. 41. All subsequent citations are to this edition.
[2]*The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-55), vol. II, p. 82.

> both affirms and denies; she is deeply religious and yet rejects all religious doctrines. No writer of the century has given religion a more important relation to human interests or made it a larger element in this creative work; and yet no other literary artist has so completely rejected all positive belief in God and immortality.[3]

Eliot represents the Victorian loss of faith. She became involved in the Higher Criticism movement that grew out of the investigatory Victorian age and viewed her rejection of Christianity as necessary, looking for a surer basis on which to ground belief. Higher Criticism emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, mainly in Germany. It subjected the history of the Bible, its composition and interpretation, to a modern, scientific, evolutionary understanding, free from confessional and dogmatic theology. Their primary questions concerned the determination of the authenticity and the likely chronological order of different sources of the text, as well as the identity and authorial intent of the writers. They were willing to consider some biblical passages as inauthentic and to interpret certain other passages in a symbolic or allegorical sense. They recognized that literary statements can be made in a variety of ways, such as in poetic language or the straightforward reporting of facts, each valid in its own way. The Higher Critics were also concerned with the historical situation or context in which the works were written.

True to the spirit of intellectual conflict in the Victorian Age, scholars were divided in their response to Higher Criticism. Higher Criticism proved that some

[3]George Willis Cooke, *George Eliot: A Critical Study of Her Life, Writings, and Philosophy* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883), p. 221.

biblical accounts could not be literally true when judged by impartial history or factual evidence, and that various biblical works could not have been written by those to whom they had been traditionally ascribed. Some viewed Higher Criticism as an attack on the reliability of scripture, while many biblical scholars viewed it as an indispensable tool of interpretation. Higher Criticism had the potential to disprove the Bible in favour of science, or resolve their differences. The scripture was clearly at odds with scientific thought. Higher Criticism threatened to expose the flaws of scripture to such an extent that its veracity would collapse, but it could conversely be used to clarify biblical meaning in such a way that it is compatible with or at least unharmed by science. Works such as the *The Bridgewater Treatises*, Huge Miller's *The Testimony of the Rocks*, J. H. Pratt's *Scripture and Science not at Variance, Essays and Reviews*, and *Replies to Essays and Reviews* try to reconcile science with the text of the Bible, ultimately affirming the inescapable influence of science. These essays lay out scientific facts and systematically explain how they coincide with religion, and employ rhetoric in order to make a persuasive point, relying largely on the power of faith and people's trust in the Bible. In all cases, there is an attempt to resolve the discrepancies between the findings of modern science and the teachings of the religious text. Science and religion could not remain separate since 'this would imply that there were two mutually exclusive truths relating to the same subjects'.[4] Either the Bible is simply wrong, or its teachings are valuable in spite of new

[4]Peter Addinall, *Philosophy and Biblical Interpretation: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 118.

knowledge. Most Victorian writers were hesitant to show the Bible as completely false, and many of the pieces written on this subject matter are attempts to show how the Bible could overcome problems arising from science.

However, these attempts were for the most part ineffectual. The authors often had to stretch scripture to meet their needs, resulting in weak arguments and sceptical readers. In the desperate attempt to prove the Bible true, they admit there is doubt to begin with. C. W. Goodwin, one of the most successful critics, sees the main failing of other Higher Critics in the way they completely ravage the text of *Genesis* to reconcile it to science, accusing them of eisegesis – i.e. twisting the text of the Bible for the purpose of supporting their own arguments. In his piece 'The Creative Week' from *Replies to Essays and Reviews* (1862), Rev. G. Rorison writes that we must be concerned with what scripture says, not what it can be made to say. None of the critics can simply dismiss geology, although they may argue that the Bible is 'above' science in some way. In doing so, they desperately try to interpret the Bible in a way that will make the two conflicting theories match. Their methods are not always successful, as the authors try to wrap the text of the Bible to suit their aims: to conform the Bible to science.

Higher Critics valued scientific authority as for the most part unquestionable, although that did not automatically discount the importance of the Bible. While some critics produced forced reconciliations and unsound explanations as to why the Bible

differs from science, Strauss and Feuerbach, rather than deny or dismiss, both acknowledge Christianity as a human construct, while retaining its value.

Eliot ushered into England the German Higher Critics by translating seminal works like *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* by David Friedrich Strauss in 1846 and *The Essence of Christianity* by Ludwig Feuerbach in 1854. *The Life of Jesus* was extremely controversial as Strauss treated much of the Gospels, especially the miraculous elements, as 'mythical' in character. The effect was to undermine the historical authenticity of much of the Gospel. In *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach shows that every article of Christian belief corresponds to some instinct or necessity of man's nature, from which he infers that religion is the anthropomorphic formulation of man's highest aspirations. Such ideas were very shocking. Most Christians believed that every word in the Bible was divinely inspired, and therefore its truth was guaranteed. These texts shaped Eliot's future work and placed her firmly in the 'religion-and-science' debate.

While Eliot truly believed that Higher Criticism could illuminate the Bible in a positive way, despite acknowledging the nonexistence of God, many Victorians could not face up to the possibilities presented. If there is no God, how can we face the afterlife? If Jesus is only a man, can we accept his teachings? If his sacrifice was ineffectual, will we go to Hell? It is no wonder many despaired. 'To a culture which had always believed that, no matter how dismal earthly life might be, there was a

reward waiting in heaven', religious doubt 'was a horrifying blow beside which the possibility that one was an ape paled into insignificance'.[5]

A tense environment was created; Victorians fell into two general camps, those who clung to the Bible despite unsatisfactory reconciliations and ardently defended their faith, and those who reckoned with the new knowledge and lamented their loss of faith. New knowledge shook the foundations of what people firmly held before, producing a palpable anxiety. Eliot, so pivotal in introducing Higher Criticism, also provided the cure for this despair. Eliot 'was looked upto almost as a priestess by those contemporaries who suffered in the Victorian vacuum of religious disillusion'.[6] Rather than forcing pieces from two different puzzles together, she bravely rejects the existence of God while still holding on to the valuable maxims of Christianity. Others who confronted the discrepancies in the Bible were moved to deny new knowledge and despair over their loss, but Eliot emerges with a stronger alternative – religious humanism, that combined the realities of science with the best parts of Christianity.

Eliot grew up as a faithful Evangelical; her mentor Maria Lewis cemented her religious zeal, and her early letters are rife with Biblical allusions, quotations from scriptures and pious morality. She not only had a strong relationship with God, but also a strong thirst for information and truth. After the move from her childhood home in Griff to Foleshill, Eliot became acquainted with the Brays and Hennells –

[5]Kathryn Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian* (London: Fourth Estate Limited, 1998), p. 5.

[6]Neil Roberts, *George Eliot: Her Belief and Her Art* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975), p. 44.

Unitarians and free thinkers who helped to open her mind to liberal ideas. Tim Dolin asserts: 'This meeting would change her life',[7] and it was certainly a step towards her metamorphosis. Their ideas, radical to a country girl who painstakingly worked on a chart of Ecclesiastical history, set her mind spinning, and she wrote to Maria Lewis on November 13, 1841 about the experience of reading Charles C. Hennell's book *An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity*:

> My whole soul has been engrossed in the most interesting of enquiries for the last few days, and to what result my thoughts may lead I know not – possibly to one that will startle you, but my only desire is to know truth, my only fear to cling to error.[8]

The letter indicates an important stepping stone in her life; her faith was waning and she was already making the decision to reject Christianity. For me, a close study of Hennell's book was essential not only because it influenced Eliot's renunciation of religion, but since it was the final impetus to her swerving faith.

Hennell aimed to examine the divine origins of Christianity, and to reveal that none of the fantastic accounts of the Bible violated natural law; i.e. they were not supernatural, but merely marvellous stories. Hennell systematically looks at the Bible, concentrating on the four Gospels, examining questions of authorship, the sources used, and when the texts were written. As the majority of stories are not eye-witness accounts, and written long after the events they contain, they are necessarily fallible.

[7]Tim Dolin, *Authors in Context: George Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 11.
[8]*The George Eliot Letters*, vol. I, pp. 120-121.

Each author, or compiler, relates the stories in his own way. Hennell directly compares passages to track the differences, pointing out significant changes and their implications. He points out instances that seem like eye-witness accounts, and other elements that seem like additions or simply reconstructed accounts. Much of the Gospels are constructed from other stories, and borrow heavily from each other. Hennell concludes that we cannot see these stories as factual, although they do have merit. Eliot read the Second Edition, published in 1841 (three years after the original), which Hennell revised after reading Strauss, who in turn had read Hennell's book.

Hennell reveals that Christianity has no divine origins; Jesus was not literally God's son, although Christians are indebted to him for his teachings. His mental superiority and goodness gained him followers and glorified his deeds, but no supernatural events actually occurred. Hennell did not reject Christianity and did not encourage his readers to do so. In fact, he argues that the accounts in the Bible and the doctrine they inspire will 'be placed on a surer basis'.[9] Hennell lays the basis for religious humanism; while Christianity 'no longer boasts of a special divine origin', it presents:

> A system of moral excellence; it has led forth the principles of humanity and benevolence … and compelled them to take an active part in the affairs of life. It has consolidated the moral and religious sentiments into a more definite and influential form than had before

[9]Charles C. Hennell, *An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* (London: T. Allman, 1841), p. ix.

> existed, and thereby constituted an engine which has worked powerfully towards humanizing and civilizing the world.[10]

Whatever conclusions may be drawn about Jesus's actual powers, Hennell urges that they ought not to obstruct the 'perception of the general excellence of the moral system which is connected with his name, or impede their acknowledgement of the beneficial influence which the Scriptures exercise over mankind ….'[11] Eliot advocated a similar 'surer basis' for belief; rather than compulsory virtue, people should follow the precepts of the Bible without striving for reward. Hennell gave Eliot a strong faith, a wide tolerance, a receptivity and a perspective which she was to absorb and use in her criticism and her fiction. She found the religion of humanity, which would inform her work from that point on, solidified by her translations of Strauss and Feuerbach. Graham Handley contends that 'Hennell lives on in her work, one of the most humane and liberal influences who helped to shape her artistic destiny.'[12] Eliot herself wrote to Sara Hennell on September 16, 1847:

> I have read the Inquiry … with delight and admiration …There is nothing in its whole tone from beginning to end that jars on my moral sense, and apart from any opinion of the book as an explanation of the existence of Christianity and the Christian documents I am sure that no one fit to read it at all could read it without being intellectually and morally stronger – the reasoning is so close, the induction so clever, the style so clear, vigorous and pointed, and the animus so candid and even

[10]*Ibid*., p. 481.
[11]*Ibid*., p. vii.
[12]Graham Handley, 'Charles Christian Hennell and George Eliot: Human and Narrative Affinities,' in *The George Eliot Review* 26 (1995): 45.

> generous. Mr. Hennell ought to be one of the happiest men that he has done such a life's-work. I am sure if I had written such a book I should be invulnerable to all the arrows of all spiteful gods and goddesses.[13]

It was after finishing the *Inquiry* that Eliot made the famous decision to stop attending church. On 2 January 1842, for the first time in her life, she told her father that she would not be accompanying him to church:

> I wish entirely to remove from your mind the false notion that I am inclined visibly to unite myself with any Christian community, or that I have any affinity in opinion with Unitarians more than with other classes of believers in the Divine authority of the books comprising the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. I regard these writings as histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction, and while I admire and cherish much of what I believe to have been the moral teaching of Jesus himself, I consider the system of doctrines built upon the facts of his life and drawn as to its materials from Jewish notions to be most dishonourable to God and most pernicious in its influence on individual and social happiness … Such being my very strong convictions, it cannot be a question with any mind of strict integrity, whatever judgement may be passed on their truth, that I could not without vile hypocrisy and a miserable truckling to the smile of the world for the sake of my supposed interests, profess to join in worship which I wholly disapprove.[14]

[13] *The George Eliot Letters*, vol. I, pp. 236-37.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 129.

Frank M. Turner calls this letter a 'most remarkable Victorian document'.[15] He sets Eliot in a larger tradition; her loss of faith is indicative of many similar young adults in England who were swayed by '[n]ew friends and teachers' who 'brought about the acceptance of new ideas',[16] and especially for women who were made aware of the limitations imposed by 'contemporary religion on their lives and action'.[17] As Turner shows, most cases of 'substantial change of faith … involved a rejection of family ties and parental domination'.[18] Eliot's decision affected her family members and she risked the alienation from her father. Concerned with affirming her newly found beliefs while still keeping peace with her father, she compromised in May 1842. She attended church with her father but insisted that it did not signify her belief in the dogma the church proclaimed.

In November 1843, Hennell asked Eliot to take over the translation of *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* by David Friedrich Strauss on behalf of his fiancé Rufa Brabant. The project took her more than two years and 'was physically debilitating and morally dispiriting, as if she herself were being forced to account for each unconvincing article of faith one by one'.[19] The work was finally published anonymously in June 1846.

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[15]Frank M. Turner, 'The Victorian Crisis of Faith and The Faith That was Lost,' *Victorian Faith in Crisis: Essays on Continuity and Change in Nineteenth-Century Religious Belief,* eds. Richard J. Helmstadter and Bernard Lightman (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 28.
[16]*Ibid*., p. 21.
[17]*Ibid*., p. 27.
[18]*Ibid*., p. 26.
[19]Dolin, *Authors in Context: George Eliot*, p. 15.

Strauss's contributions to Higher Criticism were invaluable, and *The Life of Jesus* was 'then regarded as the most advanced and destructive theological work of the day'.[20] Strauss discusses each one of the biblical narratives of Jesus's life, providing a detailed mythical interpretation after first explaining why other theories are not adequate in each case. In his Preface, he explains that his goal is to provide 'a new mode of considering the life of Jesus, in the place of the antiquated systems of supranaturalism and naturalism'.[21] He sets forth the two principal criteria he uses throughout: negative and positive. The negative proofs show that an account is not historical, at odds with natural law, and is inconsistent with other Biblical stories. Just as Hennell compares accounts of the same story from different Gospels, Strauss argues that if parallel narratives exclude each other, 'it is impossible for both to be true'.[22] The positive proofs establish myth, judging whether the story is written in the style of fiction, with legendary characters and poetical form.

Just as Hennell describes the idea of self-fulfilling prophecies, Strauss points out that the lsraelites were expecting a Messiah, and thus seized upon Jesus to fulfill their long-awaited desire. He points out that the authors 'betray an arbitrariness and want of critical accuracy, which must shake our confidence in the certainty of [the] whole genealogy'.[23] He exposes a fatal flaw in the attempts: if Jesus is God's son, and not related to Joseph by blood, how can his genealogy be traced through Joseph's line?

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[20]Turner, 'The Victorian Crisis of Faith and The Faith That was Lost,' p. 29.
[21]Friedrich David Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot (Michigan: Scholarly Press, 1970), p. 3.
[22]*Ibid*., p. 183.
[23]*Ibid*., p. 97.

This is problematic because Jesus is allegedly a descendent of David, granting him the birthright of King of the Jews. Strauss deems both genealogies found in the Bible as unhistorical. Ultimately, it seems as if many of Jesus's followers did regard him as 'a naturally conceived human being'.[24] Thus, the divine origins of Jesus are overturned. Only after disrupting the historical basis and the claims of the supranaturalist and naturalist, does Strauss turn to his own view of the conception as mythus, concerning the birth of Christ. Myth found its way into the New Testament, especially to colour early events in Jesus's life:

> As after the decease of celebrated personages, numerous anecdotes are circulated concerning them, which fail not to receive many and wondrous amplifications in the legends of a wonder-loving people; so, after Jesus had become distinguished by his life, and yet more glorified by his death, his early years, which had been passed in obscurity, became adorned with miraculous embellishments.[25]

Since his primary objective is to reconcile the Bible with natural law, Hennell primarily addresses miracles. On the other hand, Strauss spends the first volume of the book discussing events in Jesus's life apart from the primary miracles, essentially showing that we have no concrete record of Jesus's teachings. Only in the second volume does Strauss finally turn his critical eye towards the miracles, beginning with those of a biological nature. However, he is more interested in the other brand of miracles, where Jesus acts 'on inanimate nature. The possibility of finding a point of

[24] *Ibid*., p. 126.
[25] *Ibid*., p. 33.

union between the alleged supernatural agency of Jesus, and the natural order of phenomena, here absolutely ceases'.[26] For example, he studies '[m]iracles pertaining to the sea' like walking on water and calming a storm. He shows that all interpretations are inadequate:

> Is it more probable that the author should express himself inaccurately, (rather in direct contradiction to the supposed sense), or that he should mean to narrate a departure from the course of nature? For only what he means to narrate is the immediate point of inquiry … and therefore to abolish the miraculous we must not explain it away from the narrative, but rather inquire whether the narrative itself, either in whole or in part, must not be excluded from the domain of history.[27]

If the interpretations necessary to explain the miracles are forced, we must presume the miracle is 'a legendary element',[28] such as Jesus lifting the draught of fishes. Strauss argues that it is reasonable to conclude that often the disciples understood 'literally what Jesus meant figuratively; so the same mistake was made in the earliest Christian tradition'.[29] Strauss concludes that 'the text forbids a natural interpretation', thus 'it is impossible to maintain as historical the supernatural interpretation which it sanctions'.[30]

Strauss is also interested in Jesus's education and his profession. He spends a good deal of time conjecturing that Jesus must have been an exceptional child and

[26] *Ibid*., p. 554.
[27] *Ibid*., p. 559.
[28] *Ibid*., p. 567.
[29] *Ibid*., pp. 578-79.
[30] *Ibid*., p. 608.

attempts to track his intellectual development. He also concludes that Jesus probably took up the trade of his father, who was a carpenter. In some respects, Strauss is trying to discover the man behind the myth; he deals more heavily with Jesus's childhood than either Hennell or Feuerbach.

However, *The Life of Jesus* just seems like a detailed record of the inconsistencies in the Bible. Strauss has a harsher, more pessimistic view than Hennell. He does not create vivid characters as Hennell does; he does not try to bring to life the authors of the Gospel, and though in some instances he seems to be reverential towards the Christian faith, his judgements are severe. In Strauss's words:

> The results of the inquiry which we have now brought to a close, have apparently annihilated the greatest and most valuable part of that which the Christian has been wont to believe concerning his Saviour Jesus, have uprooted all the animating motives which he has gathered from his faith, and withered all his consolations.[31]

Strauss concludes that '… by the Church the evangelical narratives are received as history: by the critical theologian, they are regarded for the most part as mere myth'.[32] The doctrine of the Church is false and problematic – dogma also fails to pass Strauss's tests. Yet, his beliefs were more complicated than those of Hennell or Feuerbach. He does not declare himself an atheist as Feuerbach does, and though he rejects the divine nature of Jesus, he also insists that

[31] *Ibid*., p. 867.
[32] *Ibid*., p. 898.

> … the essence of the Christian faith is perfectly independent of … criticism. The supernatural birth of Christ, his miracles, his resurrection and ascension, remain eternal truths, whatever doubts may be cast on their reality as historical facts.[33]

Despite asserting that a critic is by nature a believer, Strauss requested to be buried without Christian ceremony.

Basil Willey describes how miserable the process of translating Strauss was for Eliot, and the 'fact was that Strauss, with all his vastly greater learning and philosophical depth, could do little for her that Hennell had not already done'.[34] But the idea of Christianity as a myth would be a cornerstone of her beliefs. At this point, she was already convinced that Jesus was not divine and the miracles in the Bible were not literal. So Strauss did not change her mind, although he may have solidified her thoughts on the subject. The idea of trying to incorporate all viewpoints or facets of the case that we see in Strauss does emerge in Eliot's fiction, although not necessarily by direct cause. Eliot always tries to give us glimpses of all the sides of her characters, even when she does not condone their behaviour. The influence of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* is much more apparent and palpable.

George Eliot also read the French philosopher Auguste Comte's account of history in his *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (1830-42). She wrote to Sara Hennell on 12 July, 1861: 'I have just been reading the "Survey of the Middle Ages" contained in

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[33]*Ibid*., p. 4.
[34]Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies: From Coleridge to Matthew Arnold* (New York: Harper & Row, 1949), p. 220.

the fifth volume of the *Philosophie Positive* and to my apprehension few chapters can be fuller of luminous ideas.'[35] This was the part that dealt with the limitations of Catholicism which had failed to achieve complete social harmony and the establishment of the Positivist state. Comte believed that society, like all other phenomena, develops according to invariable laws, progressing through three distinct, historical stages. These stages are not only concerned with the development of human intelligence, but they also extend to each subsequent branch of human knowledge. The first stage is the 'Theological' in which 'natural phenomena are ascribed to the volitions of supernatural beings'; in the 'Metaphysical' stage, 'supernatural power' is superseded by abstract 'principles or forces'; and in the 'Positive' stage, 'social phenomena are studied in exactly the same way as those of Chemistry or Physics'.[36] Comte applies these three phases of development to the individual as well. Here, the preparatory theological phase is marked by egoism, as well as living according to prescriptions, appearances or decorum. The transitory metaphysical phase involves a skepticism, or questioning, as well as isolation, either emotionally or physically from society. The third and advanced positive phase involves a selfless benevolence towards reshaping society. Positivism also attempts an analysis of human nature to explain social existence:

> Man has a spontaneous propensity to the society of his fellow beings ... and possesses a certain amount of natural benevolence, but these social tendencies are always antagonistic to his selfish ones ... [however],

[35]*The George Eliot Letters*, vol. III, p. 438.
[36]Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, p. 189.

> human nature is capable of great amelioration ... and improvement results from the increasing strength of the social instincts.[37]

Comte finally postulates a utopian 'Religion of Humanity'[38] whose goal is this amelioration of human nature which is synonymous with the progress of society. He felt that his philosophy would repair the ravages of centuries of anarchic individualism: 'Positivism becomes, in the true sense of the word, a Religion; a religion more complete than any other, and therefore destined to replace all imperfect and provisional systems resting on the primitive basis of theology.'[39] Duty (defined as the obligations of duty, as well as the sentiments of devotion) to the human race (conceived as a continuous whole, i.e., past, present, and future) is to be the ultimate deciding factor for individual action. A harmonized, social unity is possible only through a personal and collective convergence of effort.

Although George Eliot copiously took down sections from Comte in her notebooks for years, she felt that a Comtian utopia based on a scientific exposition, could not work on the emotions; she required 'to get breathing, individual forms, and group them in needful relations, so that the present [would] lay hold on the emotions as human experience.'[40] In a letter to Sara Hennell in 1857, Eliot describes her great 'disinclination for theories and arguments about the origins of things in the presence of all this mystery and beauty and pain and ugliness, that floods one with conflicting

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[37]John Stuart Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1968), p. 90.
[38]Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, trans. J. H. Bridges (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 357.
[39]*Ibid*., p. 350.
[40]*The George Eliot Letters*, vol. IV, pp. 300-301.

emotion'.[41] She characterizes her writing as a 'set of experiments in life' in another letter to Dr. Joseph Frank Payne in 1876, remarking: 'if I help others to see at all, it must be through the medium of art'.[42] Frederic Harrison, a prominent Positivist and a friend of Eliot, urged her to write a positivist novel. In 1866, Eliot politely rejected his suggestion, writing that: ' … aesthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching because it deals with life in its highest complexity. But if it ceases to be purely aesthetic – if it lapses anywhere from the picture to the diagram – it becomes the most offensive of all teaching.'[43] For Eliot, the pain and ugliness in life was better explained by Feuerbach, who considered the greatest flaw of humanity to be its 'failure to recognize the otherness, the difference, of the great variety of individuals'.[44] Eliot too, was critical of the weakness of human intellect in attaining this goal. She gave importance to the strength of emotions and saw truth of feeling to be the only universal bond of union.

Though a translation, Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* echoes many of Eliot's beliefs and, to use Susan E. Hill's phrase, she 'creatively transforms the text'[45] into something original and her own, while still preserving the integrity of the original. Feuerbach was an atheist and so his text is free from weak arguments to justify divine qualities. But he did value Christianity highly. His discourse is extremely humanist; he argues that Christianity is the product of man, though its doctrines are not literally

[41]*Ibid*., vol. II, p. 341..
[42]*Ibid*., vol. VI, p. 216.
[43]*Ibid*., vol. IV, p. 300.
[44]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 25.
[45]Susan E. Hill, 'Translating Feuerbach, Constructing Morality: The Theological and Literary Significance of Translation for George Eliot', in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (1997): 643. Jstor, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1465655. Accessed 23 October 2011.

true. God is man according to Feuerbach, and so one cannot be completely divorced from religion. This is the case for Eliot as well – although she rejects Christianity, religion never loses sway over her and is an assertive force in her life. As George Willis Cooke puts it:

> The influence of Feuerbach is to be seen in the profound interest which Marian Evans ever took in the subject of religion. That influence alone explains how it was possible for one who did not accept any religious doctrines as true, who did not believe in God or immortality, and who rejected Christianity as a historic or dogmatic faith, to accept so much as she did of the better spirit of religion and to be so keenly in sympathy with it … It was from the general skepticism and rationalism of the times she learned to reject all religion as false to truth and as not giving a just interpretation of life and its facts. It was from Feuerbach she learned how great is the influence of religion, how necessary it is to man's welfare, and how profoundly it answers to the wants of the soul.[46]

Like Strauss, Feuerbach argues that the mystification of religion originates in myth. Miracles, for example, are the inventions of a 'pre-critical' religious community: 'Who does not know that there are common or similar dreams, common or similar visions, especially among impassioned individuals who are closely united and restricted to their own circle?'[47] Such visions are typical of all forms of religious mystification, says Feuerbach, in that they are 'nothing else than a product and reflex

[46]Cooke, *George Eliot: A Critical Study of Her Life, Writings, and Philosophy*, p. 27.
[47]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*.

of the … human mind'.[48] It is important to note, however, that such visions, such myths, are not, in Feuerbach's analysis, the 'reflex' of any Hegelian Idea.

Strauss values myths, like the New Testament life of Jesus, only to the extent that they represent a primitive stage in the unfolding of the Hegelian 'Idea of the Christ'. To Feuerbach, however, the Hegelian Christology at the end of *The Life of Jesus* represents the re-mystification of religion as speculative theology, which 'makes religion say only what it has itself thought … [and] assigns a meaning to religion without any reference to the actual meaning of religion'.[49] For Feuerbach, the 'actual' meaning of religion is what religion says about man himself, not what religion says about any transcendent Hegelian Idea:

> Man … can never get loose from his species, his nature; the conditions of being, the positive final predicates which he gives to these other individuals, are always determinations or qualities drawn from his own nature – qualities in which he in truth only images and projects himself.[50]

Men projecting their own qualities onto a divine 'individual', men in effect creating God in their own image – this psychological process is, according to Feuerbach, the essence of religion. To demonstrate this process, Feuerbach uses his well-known strategy of linguistic reversal. He inverts the subjects and predicates in the expressions of Christian doctrine. 'God is love', for example, is inverted to 'love

[48] *Ibid*., p. xii.
[49] *Ibid*., p. xxxv.
[50] *Ibid*., p. 10.

is God'. To Feuerbach, this means that the love men feel for each other is, quite rightly, thought of as a great virtue: 'Love is not holy because it is a predicate of God, but it is a predicate of God because it is in itself divine.'[51] The sum total of human predicates – love, reason, will – which cannot be found united in any one human individual, are united in the humanly created conception of God:

> The divine being is nothing else than the human being, or, rather, the human nature purified, freed from the limits of the individual man, made objective – i.e., contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being. All attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature.[52]

Feuerbach coincides with Hennell on many points. In his *An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of Christianity*, Hennell aims to dispel the notion of miracles and prove that Biblical events did not violate natural law. Feuerbach seconds this notion: '… for, seen in clear daylight, miracle presents absolutely nothing else than the sorcery of the imagination, which satisfies without contradiction all the wishes of the heart.'[53] Hennell finds value in truth – Jesus was not divine, but he was great, and we do not need further compulsion to follow his teachings. Feuerbach restates the case more drastically; Christian principles should be valuable in and of themselves, with or without rewards in the afterlife: ' … belief in the heavenly life is belief in the worthlessness and nothingness of this life'.[54] Similar to Hennell's argument,

[51] *Ibid*., p. 224.
[52] *Ibid*., p. 12.
[53] *Ibid*., p. 112.
[54] *Ibid*., p. 134.

Feuerbach suggests that we have outgrown religion and matured into science: ' … religion is man's earliest and also indirect form of self-knowledge … Man first of all sees his nature as if *out of* himself, before he finds it in himself … Religion is the childlike condition of humanity.'[55] Jesus's followers did not know any better, and it is not a new theory that religion developed in order to explain the unexplainable. Those who continue to believe now, in a scientific age, remain in the dark:

> Isolated, uninstructed men and nations preserve religion in its original sense, because they themselves remain in that mental state which is the source of religion. The more limited a man's sphere of vision, the less he knows of history, Nature, philosophy – the more ardently does he cling to religion.[56]

Eliot illustrates this case; as a young woman, living in the provincial Griff, she clung to her piety and was susceptible to Maria Lewis' devout evangelicalism. However, Eliot's intellectual curiosity proved too strong. She grew out of religion, rejecting organized religion and gradually rejecting God. Moving to Foleshill, Coventry, her sphere of vision enlarged. Meeting instructed thinkers like the Brays and Hennells opened her mind and helped her cast off religion. Feuerbach insists 'we should raise ourselves above Christianity'[57] and this is just what Eliot does.

What is most original in Feuerbach's analysis, however, is his theory of alienation, the effect that religious belief has on consciousness. Because the believer

[55]*Ibid*., p. 11.
[56]*Ibid*., p. 178.
[57]*Ibid*., p. 221.

does not see that the divine nature is actually a reflection of human nature, Feuerbach argues, he is 'disunited' from himself; 'he sets God before him as the antithesis of himself'.[58] Religion deflects man from his true nature by objectifying it into a being that he does not recognize as of his own making. God therefore acquires all the 'positive realities' of man as a species, while man is left with the 'negatives' of men as 'separate, limited individuals'.[59] As a species, Feuerbach argues, man is infinite, perfect, eternal, almighty, and holy, but in religious belief these qualities are 'relinquished' to God while man is left finite, imperfect, temporal, weak, and sinful. The circuitous way in which man regains these relinquished qualities of human nature is for Feuerbach the paradigm of alienation: ' … the contents of the divine revelation are of human origin, for they have proceeded not from God as God, but from God as determined bv human reason, human wants … And so in revelation man goes out of himself, in order, by a circuitous path, to return to himself!'[60]

In his chapter entitled 'The Contradiction of Faith and Love' in *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach attacks the Christian notion of love because it is 'affected' and 'imitative'. 'Are we to love each other because Christ loved us?' asks Feuerbach; 'Can we truly love each other only if we love Christ?'[61] For Feuerbach, the answer to these questions is 'no', for he defines authentic love as unmediated:

[58] *Ibid*., p. 29.
[59] *Ibid*., p. 127.
[60] *Ibid*., p. 171.
[61] *Ibid*., p. 219.

> Love should be immediate, undetermined by anything else than its object; – nay, only as such is it love. But if I interpose between my fellowman and myself the idea of an individuality, in whom the idea of the species is supposed to be already realised, I annihilate the very soul of love, I disturb the unity by the idea of a third external to us; for in that case my fellowman is an object of love to me only on account of his resemblance or relation to this model, not for his own sake.[62]

For human love to be authentic, Feuerbach argues, it must be unmediated; it must precede the love of Christ. The priority of human love is essential because, like all other qualities of Christ, His love derives from human nature. If love is 'founded on the unity of the species', says Feuerbach, 'then only is it a well-grounded love, safe in its principle, guaranteed, free, for it is fed by the original source of love, out of which the love of Christ … arose'.[63] The original source, the authentic ground – this is what Feuerbach claims to reveal in his demystification of religion. That source or ground is what he calls 'species consciousness'[64] – man's understanding of his own essential nature as a species.

'Only community constitutes humanity',[65] is one of Feuerbach's most important slogans. Humanity, that which distinguishes man from animals, is for Feuerbach not an individual principle but a communal one: 'That man is, he has to thank Nature; that he is man, he has to thank man.'[66] In community, man realizes his

[62] *Ibid*., p. 220.
[63] *Ibid*., p. 219.
[64] *Ibid*., p. 219.
[65] *Ibid*., p. 131.
[66] *Ibid*., p. 70.

full humanity in the diversity and strength of sheer numbers: ‘Four hands can do more than two … four eyes can see more than two.’[67] Community is not just a way to increase arithmetically the powers of the isolated self. In Feuerbach's analysis, the isolated individual can achieve human selfhood only if he possesses ‘consciousness in the strict sense’:

> … for the consciousness implied in the feeling of self as an individual, in discrimination by the senses, in the perception and even judgment of outward things according to definite sensible signs, cannot be denied to brutes. Consciousness in the strictest sense is present only in a being to whom his species, his essential nature, is an object of thought. The brute is indeed conscious of himself as an individual – and he has accordingly the feeling of self as the common centre of successive sensations – but not as a species … Hence the brute has only a simple, man a twofold life.[68]

Like words in a sentence that have meaning only in relation to each other, man's unique twofold life depends on his relation to other men, the relation that Feuerbach calls ‘I – Thou’. Feuerbach's description of this human relationship has been one of the most influential features of his writing: ‘The other is my thou – the relation being reciprocal, – my *alter ego*, man objective to me, the revelation of my own nature, the eye seeing itself.’[69] This reciprocal relationship is crucial to Feuerbach's epistemology:

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[67] *Ibid*., p. 70.
[68] *Ibid*., p. 1.
[69] *Ibid*., p. 131.

> Without other men, the world would be for me not only dead and empty, but meaningless … A man existing absolutely alone would lose himself without any sense of individuality in the ocean of Nature; he would neither comprehend himself as man nor Nature as Nature.[70]

How does the 'I – Thou' relation make the world meaningful?

Although Feuerbach claims that truth can only be found in the simplest natural things, the way to the truth of nature proves not to be simple. We read the book of Nature with our senses but we do not understand it through them. The metaphor of reading is apt here because Feuerbach's epistemology depends on conventions of interpretation shared among men. How then does Feuerbach claim to see things 'as they are'? In fact he does not. Instead he describes a 'social epistemology' in which any man's interpretation of the 'book of Nature' is tested against the interpretations of other men. 'The certitude of those things that exist outside me is given through the certitude of the existence of other men beside myself,' wrote Feuerbach in 1843; 'that which is seen by me alone is open to question, but that which is seen also by another person is certain.'[71] There is some disagreement among Feuerbach scholars on how consistent Feuerbach is on this matter of what can be called 'the social nature of truth'. According to Eugene Kamenka, Feuerbach wavers throughout his career between the view that the agreement of others is a check on truth and the view that it constitutes truth. In *The Essence of Christianity*, however, Feuerbach leans toward the view that

[70]*Ibid*., p. 70.
[71]Ludwig Feuerbach, 'Principles of the Philosophy of the Future,' in *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach*, trans. and intro. Zawar Hanfi (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1972), p. 232.

agreement constitutes truth while disagreement is a kind of madness: 'That is true which agrees with the nature of the species, that is false which contradicts it. There is no other rule of truth … The agreement of others is therefore my criterion of the normalness, the universality, the truth of my thoughts.'[72]

In Feuerbach's description of the social nature of truth, an important gap occurs between the idea of the species and the actual practice of judging truth by agreement within real human communities. Feuerbach himself recognizes the possibility that what is judged normal in one community of interpretation may not be judged normal in another community of interpretation. Hence, '… agreement is the first criterion of truth', says Feuerbach in *The Essence of Christianity*, 'but only because the species is the ultimate measure of truth.'[73] But how accessible is this 'ultimate measure of truth?' How can one determine 'the nature of the species'[74] if one is inevitably interpreting the world and mankind from within one's particular circle or community? Within the world of German philosophy, these problems in grounding human knowledge on the nature of the species led to Marx's break with Feuerbach.

Marx criticizes Feuerbach's theory of species consciousness in his *Theses on Feuerbach* of 1845. The gap between theory and practice in Feuerbach's thought is the theme of most of the *Theses*. In the sixth thesis, Marx directly criticizes Feuerbach's belief that the 'essence of man' lies in his nature as a species. Marx calls this notion an

[72]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 132.
[73]*Ibid*., p. 131.
[74]*Ibid*., p. 132.

'abstraction', just as Feuerbach had called the notion of God an abstraction. Because this essence of man remains an abstraction, Marx argues, Feuerbach cannot provide an articulate link between the species and concrete social reality. Feuerbach is compelled, says Marx, to view the essence of man merely as 'species, as an inner, "dumb" generality which unites many individuals only in a natural way'.[75] Marx wishes to view the essence of man as a historical, social construct, not an eternal, 'natural' part of human nature. In the seventh thesis for example, Marx says: 'Feuerbach consequently does not see that "religious sentiment" is itself a social product, and that the abstract individual he analyses belongs in reality to a particular social form.'[76] Here Marx points to the same gap I have pointed to in Feuerbach's epistemology, the gap between the idea of the species and the actual practice of judging truth by agreement.

Before accepting Marx's criticism of Feuerbach, however, one must consider again Feuerbach's description of the 'I – Thou' relation for that is where Feuerbach hopes to bridge the gap between the abstract species and the individual living in society. Feuerbach himself recognizes that his notion of the species is an abstraction, an abstraction less compelling to most people than the orthodox notion of a personal God:

> God is a deeply moving object, enrapturing to the imagination; whereas, the idea of humanity has little power over the feelings

[75]Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach,' Thesis VI, in *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, trans. and ed. Loyd Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1967), p. 402.
[76]Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach,' Thesis VII, p. 402.

> because humanity is only an abstraction; and the reality which presents itself to us in distinction from this abstraction is the multitude of separate, limited individuals.[77]

In Feuerbach's social epistemology, the species is 'the ultimate measure of truth', the ground of meaning. This ground is hard to reach, however; the abstract mediator needs some mediator closer to 'separate, limited individuals'. That closer mediator is one's fellow man in the 'I – Thou' relation. Says Feuerbach: 'My fellow-man is *per se* the mediator between me and the sacred idea of the species.'[78] Feuerbach attacks religion for the many forms of mediation that it puts between man and 'things as they are' – Christ and the saints, for example, become necessary as mediators closer to men once the concept of God gets too abstract – but Feuerbach's own 'realistic' approach to the world keeps revealing more forms of mediation, more detours, between man and things as they are. The 'I – Thou' relation, for example, must be transacted in language.

In *The Essence of Christianity*, for instance, Feuerbach says: '… only where man communicates with man, only in speech, a social act, awakens reason.'[79] Speech, says Feuerbach, is 'a divine impulse, a divine power'.[80] Yet there is something 'inarticulate' in Feuerbach's description of language as the medium of the 'I – Thou' relation. Feuerbach wants language to be as invisible as air, so the examples Feuerbach gives are such that the actual words spoken between men matter very little:

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[77]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, pp. 127-128.
[78]*Ibid*., p. 132.
[79]*Ibid*., p. 71.
[80]*Ibid*., p. 66.

'The dying man who gives forth in speech his long-concealed sins departs reconciled … The sorrows which we confide to our friend are already half-healed .'[81] The words men speak are important not for their meaning but because they are shared: ' … often in the very moment in which we open our lips to consult a friend, the doubts and difficulties disappear.'[82] The 'real meaning' of these exchanges seems to be the bond of 'species-consciousness', which exists before language itself. Once again, Feuerbach reveals his desire for a source of meaning outside concrete social reality, a desire which matches his claim that man discovers his own nature within the 'I – Thou' relation. Or does man actually create his own nature within the 'I – Thou' relation? Marx insists that that is so, and, I have argued, such is also the implication of Feuerbach's social epistemology.

One of the most important phrases in the translation comes at the end of Chapter One: 'What yesterday was still religion is no longer such to-day; and what to-day is atheism, tomorrow will be religion.'[83] For Feuerbach, atheism does not carry the stigma of immorality, but rather is a celebration of the human. The statement implicitly agrees with the idea that culture has advanced beyond religion. While at the time Feuerbach was writing, people still resisted the loss of Christianity, Feuerbach was confident they would eventually see the truth in his conclusions and the reports of others with similar ideas. Eliot was ahead of the curve, and what her detractors saw as atheism, she turned into a new religion, a religion of humanity free from the

[81] *Ibid*., p. 67.
[82] *Ibid*., p. 67.
[83] *Ibid*., p. 27.

pessimism and cynicism of other non-believers. This was her religion; she needed something to believe in and converted her loss of faith into something positive and constructive. In effect, atheism does become its own religion in the guise of a religion of humanity. One of Feuerbach's most important contributions is that the atheist has the same moral sensibilities as the believer:

> To the religious man at least, the irreligious or un-religious man appears lawless, arbitrary, haughty, frivolous; not because that which is sacred to the former is not also in itself sacred to the latter, but only because that which the un-religious man holds in his head merely, the religious man places out of and above himself as an object, and hence recognises in himself the relation of a formal subordination.[84]

They have the same ethics, but the 'irreligious' man comes to these beliefs on his own impulse. In a way, he is more sincere. At times we reject the morals of society, including Christian teaching, in order to revaluate these beliefs for ourselves. If we, on our own terms, find merit in them, we can re-adopt them, but we need to have a surer basis for our beliefs than obedience. Feuerbach asserts: 'He who has an aim, an aim which is in itself true and essential, has, *eo ipso*, a religion.'[85] For Eliot and Feuerbach, this aim was to improve the well-being of society.

Critics have either concentrated on a close study of George Eliot's art by focusing their attention on 'form', thus ignoring the ideological purposes which shape the formal features of her novels; or, conversely, aware of George Eliot's centrality as

[84] *Ibid*., pp. 54-55.
[85] *Ibid*., p. 55.

a Victorian thinker, they have reconstructed her ideology in the light of Darwin, Huxley, Comte, Mill, Spencer, Lewes, Hennell, Strauss or Feuerbach. However, I have found that a consistent analysis of how the influence of Feuerbach achieves complexity and vitality in relation to Eliot's fiction, has remained one of the major gaps that exist in George Eliot criticism today. My study will demonstrate how Eliot, in her novels, conceived of Christianity and of human relationships in a thoroughly Feuerbachian way. It is appropriate to look at her fictional output in chronological order, as being representative of the track of her thought processes and her development as both writer and thinker.

Chapter One is on George Eliot's first novel, *Adam Bede* (1859), which voices Eliot's moral belief that our highest calling is to try and live up to the superior qualities of human nature: love, forgiveness and duty. Success is measured by the respect we have for those around us. If we help others when we can, we have done our part to make the world a bit better. This is the basis of Eliot's religious humanism and Feuerbach's essence of Christianity. Feuerbach's insight into the history and psychology of religion is crucial for considering the novel's treatment of the Bible, Methodism, and ethics. Chapter Two examines *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), as an exploration of Feuerbach's assertion that strong relationships, motivated by a generous, unegoistic love, can repair some of the damage circumstances have thrust upon us or even the wounds that we inflict by our own imperfections. Eliot's humanitarian religion is clear, without any obtrusive preaching, also in *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe* (1861), where she shows that it is not God, but a foundling

child, who revives the humanity that is latent in the protagonist. Human action is more effective than relying on an unseen, spiritual force. Chapter Three examines Eliot's concern with the political and social aspects of justice in *Romola* and *Felix Holt*. *Romola* (1862), is the first of Eliot's writings to explore, as a major subject, the heroine's passage from disillusionment through false guides to a positive human faith based on self-reliance and work for human betterment. In *Felix Holt: The Radical*, published in 1866, out of the inward impulse to do good, to live and die for man, Felix devotes his life to reform and without the help of any supernatural power, influences the lives of others more than the Church. He is promoting humanism, arguing that we have the potential to do good within ourselves. We shouldn't wait for the next life to improve our lot, but need to use our best qualities now. Chapter Four analyzes Feuerbach's assertion that community is not just a way to increase arithmetically the powers of the isolated self. The self must be validated by others – some form of community – to avoid an epistemological crisis that Feuerbach calls madness. In *Middlemarch* (1871-72), escape from the local community becomes necessary for characters of exceptional desire to make a happy ending in their lives and in the novel. The upper-class English society seen in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), is more cosmopolitan than that in *Middlemarch*, and not just the community life of a single village or town but the community life of a whole nation seems to be at stake in the novel.

CHAPTER 1

The need for a 'Suffering God': *Adam Bede*

George Eliot's first novel *Adam Bede* (1859) can be seen as a secular rendering of the deepest sentiment of Christianity. When Adam Bede makes a toast to Arthur Donnithorne, he tells the crowd: ' … he's one o' those gentlemen as wishes to do the right thing, and to leave the world a bit better than he found it, which it's my belief every man may do'.[1] Adam is voicing Eliot's moral belief that our highest calling is to try and live up to the superior qualities of human nature: love, forgiveness and duty. Success is measured in the respect we have for those around us. If we help others when we can, we have done our part to make the world a bit better. This is the basis of Eliot's religious humanism and Feuerbach's essence of Christianity.

Feuerbach's insight into the history and psychology of religion is crucial for considering the novel's treatment of the Bible, Methodism, and ethics. Feuerbach's philosophy has rightly been called a dream of human development, for his acknowledged goal was the realization of the species, or the actualization of human predispositions, abilities and vocations. Man needed to transcend an illusory religion and replace it with the purely human essence that depended on another human being. As Feuerbach succinctly phrased it, to have no religion is to think only of oneself; to have religion is to think of another; and so long as we have just two, as man and wife, we still have a religion: 'Two, difference, is the origin of religion – the Thou, the God

[1]George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 294. All subsequent citations are to this edition.

of the I, for the I is not without the Thou. I am dependent on Thou. No Thou – no I.'[2] In short, the human must replace the divine; the contradictions inherent in the divine must be eradicated for the actualization that needs to take place.

Adam Bede is set back in time about sixty years, in familial territory for the author, recalling the provincial surroundings of her childhood. Against the rich background of village life, the novel studies the 'tendencies towards disintegration or towards development not in whole classes but in the lives of four main characters: Adam Bede, Hetty Sorrel, Dinah Morris and Arthur Donnithorne'.[3] The difficulty of discussing these characters individually lies in their interdependence. Each becomes who he or she is because of what the others do in the course of the novel. In fact, the patterns of 'development or disintegration' among the four characters can best be summarized in terms of their changing relations to the local community. As George Eliot says in *Felix Holt*, 'there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life'.[4] At the beginning of *Adam Bede*, Adam, Arthur, and Hetty live safely within the local community, largely defining themselves in terms of their community. Dinah lives outside the community, defining herself in terms of her religious community, the Methodism which seems at first to threaten the tranquillity of the local community. By the end of the novel, the dangerous crisis of the novel proves to be Arthur's love affair with Hetty for which they are expelled from the community.

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[2]Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity in Relation to The Ego and Its Own*, trans. Frederick M. Gordon, in *Philosophical Forum* 8 (1977): p. 87.
[3]Karl Kroeber, *Styles in Fictional Structure: The Art of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 231.
[4]George Eliot, *Felix Holt, the Radical* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 29.

On the other hand, the novel's central crisis also re-integrates Adam and Dinah into the community with their marriage.

The lives of the characters are sometimes spoken of in the traditional linear terms of a journey or a path. Seth Bede says, for example, that Dinah refuses to let comforts of this world ‘draw her out o' the path as she believed God had marked out for her’.[5] Adam accepts the hardship of living with his aging parents: ‘It's plain enough you get into the wrong road i' this life if you run after this and that only for the sake o' making things easy and pleasant to yourself.’[6] The moral choices of Arthur and Hetty are represented by the literal paths they choose to walk through the woods. The novel reveals that no character is seen to walk a path entirely on his own; the paths of these four main characters criss-cross throughout the novel. The local community as a whole may be said to consist in the network of paths available for the characters to walk. A character like Hetty who gets out of the main road on her ‘The Journey in Despair’ risks destruction. These characters are not, however, real people walking real paths. As fictional characters, they are created in the sequence of their actions, one after another, in a linear chain throughout the novel. George Eliot's scrupulous time scheme for the novel demonstrates the importance of this sequence of actions for explaining that character is essentially development or disintegration along a clear line. Yet there are pauses in the series of actions, moments where logical sequence is suspended. These moments are associated with love, love that either destroys or

[5]*Adam Bede*, p. 550.
[6]*Ibid*., p. 55.

regenerates the self. Which path love will take depends on the relation of that love to the community.

The sixth chapter of the novel introduces Hetty Sorrel, Dinah's cousin, who is also residing in the home of their aunt and uncle, the Poysers. Eliot contrasts Dinah and Hetty by describing the vast difference in the way they embody George Eliot's chief spiritual virtue and vice – Dinah's self-sacrifice against Hetty's self-worship. The relationship between the two presents Eliot's ethic of fellow-feeling as preparing the way for redemption.

Hetty is self-absorbed in her own physical beauty, and clings to the hope that her sensuality will enable her to make an escape from her life as a poor, simple farm girl. The reader first sees Hetty looking and admiring her own reflection in the dishes that have been set out on the family dining table. Such narrow introspection necessarily prevents her from accepting the world as it is and prompts her to make life comply to her vision of what she desires it to be. Soon after this introduction, two visitors arrive at the Poysers' home – the Reverend Irwine, the affable parish priest, and Captain Arthur Donnithorne, the young man who will inherit the Hayslope farms when the current squire, his grandfather, dies. Just as the succeeding Eliot heroines (Maggie, Romola, Esther, Dorothea and Gwendolen) will expect the fulfillment of their dreams in the attention of their respective guides, so Hetty readily accepts Arthur's admiring attention as a promise of a golden future of becoming Mrs. Arthur Donnithorne:

> Captain Donnithorne couldn't like her to go on doing work: he would like to see her in nice clothes, and thin shoes and white stockings, perhaps with silk clocks to them; for he must love her very much – no one else had ever put his arm around her and kissed her in that way. He would want to marry her, and make a lady of her; she could hardly dare to shape the thought – yet how else could it be? [7]

When reality threatens Hetty's dream, 'she hates everything that is not what she longs for';[8] yet she neither questions the validity of her imaginary world nor doubts her own conduct therein. When the 'pleasant narcotic effect'[9] of Arthur's interest in her wears off in an awareness of abandonment, she experiences a sickening sense of lifelong misery. In the absence of a 'supreme sense of right',[10] her amoral nature precludes any personal sense of shame for her deeds. However, the shame others feel for her assumes a conscionable function for her: 'They would think her conduct shameful; and shame was torture. That was poor, little Hetty's conscience.'[11] When she can no longer conceal her pregnancy, she flees from the anticipated censure of family and friends only to encounter public condemnation of a worse deed in the courtroom at Stoniton.

Hetty's avoidance of shame is not merely a defense mechanism of her vain nature but it is also an unwillingness to recognize truth or reality. In earlier attempts by Dinah and Adam to awaken her to actuality, Hetty had denied to herself the need

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[7] *Ibid*., p. 165.
[8] *Ibid*., p. 148.
[9] *Ibid*., p. 109.
[10] *Ibid*., p. 370.
[11] *Ibid*., p. 366.

for their counsel. Dinah's warning that suffering is appointed to all and her appeal, that ' … there comes a time when we need more comfort and help than the things of this life can give',[12] had produced only a chill fear of future evil but had made no lasting impression on Hetty. Adam's decisive tone, in an attempt to remove her self-deception about Arthur's love, had also shaken Hetty with fear. But, as with Dinah's warning, Hetty had firmly held on to her dream world in defiance of the encroaching realities of life.

Feuerbach seems to echo Eliot's skillful execution of Hetty's ordeal, the physical exhaustion and financial hardship experienced by her during her journey to Windsor and back. He observes that: 'He who has an aim has a law over him; he does not merely guide himself; he is guided. He who has no aim, has no home, no sanctuary; aimlessness is the greatest unhappiness.'[13] The images of light and warmth of the early spring-summer with its ripe vegetation, hay and ripened grain are seen to be replaced by miserable dreariness. Hetty's journey also demonstrates Feuerbach's slogan: 'Only community constitutes humanity.'[14] For Feuerbach, humanity distinguishes man from animals. It is not an individual principle but a communal one:

> … man is the God of man. That he is, he has to thank Nature; that he is man, he has to thank man; spiritually as well as physically he can achieve nothing without his fellow-man … In isolation human power is limited, in combination it is infinite. The knowledge of a single man is

[12]*Ibid*., p. 174.
[13]Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Dover Publications, 2008), p. 64. All subsequent citations are to this edition.
[14]*Ibid*., p. 131.

> limited, but reason, science, is unlimited, for it is a common act of mankind …. [15]

When Hetty's journey to meet Arthur at Windsor fails to secure her a refuge from a painful present or an escape from personal ignominy, Hetty finds herself in an alien and indifferent world, 'out of all human reach', and a prey to 'cold, and darkness, and solitude'.[16] She becomes a victim of coarse comments and is taken for a wild woman and beggar. With no money left, she wanders aimlessly into the surrounding countryside. She disappears from the narrative; the next time the reader sees her, she is in prison and about to undergo a trial for the murder of her infant!

Hetty's subconscious movement toward Dinah's affectionate kindness is no more than an instinctual desire for pity and scarcely a defined quest. Her eventual confession to Dinah softens the hardness of her heart, but her superficiality prevents any serious conversion although she does seek 'to be taught'[17]:

> Although her poor soul is very dark, and discerns little beyond the things of the flesh, she is no longer hard: she is contrite – she has confessed all to me. The pride of her heart has given way, and she leans on me for help, and desires to be taught.[18]

Hetty's desire for Adam's forgiveness and her willingness to forgive Arthur show no real deepening of her soul. She admits to Adam that she does so only because Dinah

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[15]*Ibid*., p. 70.
[16]*Adam Bede*, p. 419.
[17]*Ibid*., p. 28.
[18]*Ibid*., p. 496.

urges her to and she adds: '… for else God won't forgive me'.[19] In Dinah, then, Hetty seeks the removal of her fears, solitude, loneliness and death. Her own soul remains essentially narrow but, as U. C. Knoepflmacher rightly observes, her story expands the souls of Arthur and Adam, making them 'sadder but wiser men'.[20]

Arthur Donnithorne represents an intensely human portrait. He manifests a depth of character that Hetty in her physical beauty but spiritual shallowness lacks. Arthur may have his faults but as the narrator, Adam, and the Rev. Irwine repeatedly observe, Arthur also has 'a conscience and a will to do right'.[21] Just as his 'prudent resolution' to go to Eagledale for a week of fishing, so as to remove himself from the temptation to see Hetty, is 'founded on conscience'[22] so also his discomfort at the homage he receives at his birthday feast arises not from simple embarrassment but from 'a twinge of conscience'[23]:

> … we've niver known anything on you but what was good an' honorable. You speak fair an' y' act fair, an' we're joyful when we look forrard to your being our landlord, for we b'lieve you mean to do right by everybody, an' 'ull make no man's bread bitter to him if you can help it.[24]

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[19]*Ibid*., p. 500.
[20]U. C. Knoepflmacher, *George Eliot's Early Novels: The Limits of Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 97.
[21]*Adam Bede*., p. 265.
[22]*Ibid*., p. 137.
[23]*Ibid*., p. 289.
[24]*Ibid*., p. 289.

Even as he hears these words of Mr. Poyser, Arthur knows that he has transgressed the boundaries of propriety with Hetty. This sensibility to wrong, as the narrator observes, is Arthur's promise of salvation:

> One thing is clear: Nature has taken care that he shall never go far astray with perfect comfort and satisfaction to himself; he will never get beyond that border-land of sin, where he will be perpetually harassed by assaults from the other side of the boundary. He will never be a courtier of Vice, and wear her orders in his button-hole.[25]

Repeatedly the narrator emphasizes Arthur's quick sense of guilt. Thus no sooner does Arthur kiss Hetty for the first time than a drop of bitterness falls into his own 'fountain of sweets',[26] and the narrator observes that he finds discomfort rather than pleasure in the moment. Reflecting upon his conduct regarding Hetty, he 'was dissatisfied with himself, irritated, mortified'.[27] But not entirely for selfish reasons – for although he regrets his weakness, as giving way to emotion, and dislikes the prospect of scandal and of thereby losing the respect of the tenants, he also realizes that he is jeopardizing Hetty's reputation as well as the Poysers'. He trusts his own self-mastery and believes that she will not be harmed. Like Adam, Arthur exudes self-confidence, but whereas the former has an 'iron will',[28] Arthur lacks the tenacity to make his resolutions effective. Consequently, his relationship with Hetty is one of broken resolutions to see her no more.

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[25]*Ibid*., p. 137.
[26]*Ibid*., p. 150.
[27]*Ibid*., p. 151.
[28]*Ibid*., p. 182.

The teachers of Arthur's youth, Adam Bede and the Rev. Irwine, are also his mentors in early adulthood. Feuerbach noted that the reality of the species, which otherwise was only a rational conception, became a matter of feeling in love, 'a truth of feeling'. Friendship can provide similar results:

> Friends compensate for each other; … Friendship can only exist between the virtuous, as the ancients said. But it cannot be based on perfect similarity; on the contrary, it requires diversity, for friendship rests on a desire for self-completion. One friend obtains through the other what he does not himself possess. The virtues of the one atone for the failings of the other.[29]

Arthur has genuine affection for Adam and Irwine. Toward Adam, Arthur has both the 'love of patronage'[30] and the respect arising from a recognition of Adam's uprightness of character. For Irwine, Arthur's affection is 'partly filial, partly fraternal; – fraternal enough to make him like Irwine's company better than that of most younger men, and filial enough to make him shrink strongly from incurring Irwine's disapprobation'.[31]

Mr. Irwine, a major clerical character in the novel, is the best representative of Eliot's unorthodox interpretation of Christianity. He is not a zealous preacher with lofty aims and theological enthusiasm. Yet, despite his lax theology, he earns the esteem of the readers. In his funeral oration for Thias Bede, with its theme that in the midst of life we are in death, he aptly stresses that the present moment is the time for works of mercy, righteous dealing and family tenderness. As Adam says of Irwine,

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[29]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 130.
[30]*Adam Bede*, p. 178.
[31]*Ibid*., p. 136.

'he's got more sense nor to meddle wi' people's doing as they like in religion'.[32] Adam respects Irwine, and so does the narrator who tells us:

> … his was one of those large-hearted and sweet-blooded natures that never know a narrow or a grudging thought; epicurean, if you will, with no enthusiasm, no self-scourging sense of duty; but yet, as you have seen, of a sufficiently moral fibre to have an unwearying tenderness for obscure and monotonous suffering.[33]

This passage reveals a laxity common to most of Eliot's clerics, yet Irwine's compassion, instead of compulsion, is the preferred approach for a cleric. He is well-loved by his parishioners, and his 'influence in his parish was a more wholesome one than that of the zealous Mr. Ryde, who … insisted strongly on the doctrines of the Reformation … and was severe in rebuking the aberrations of the flesh'.[34] Ryde is Irwine's severer successor. The narrator's opinion is influenced by Adam:

> But I gathered from Adam Bede … that few clergyman could be less successful in winning the hearts of their parishioners than Mr. Ryde. They learned a great many notions about doctrine from him … "But," said Adam, "I've seen pretty clear, ever since I was a young un, as religion's something else besides notions. It isn't notions sets people doing the right thing – it's feelings."[35]

In this pause we get an important clue to decipher the tension between organized religion and humanism – 'feelings'. At the root of the religion in the novel lies the

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[32]*Ibid*., p. 13.
[33]*Ibid*., p. 75.
[34]*Ibid*., pp. 197-198.
[35]*Ibid*., p. 198.

religious humanist's conviction that it is our inherent virtue that sets us to do right. It is not doctrine or supernatural superstition but our fellow-feeling which is our guide and the surest basis for religion. So by substantiating the contrast between Irwine and Ryde, Eliot shows that a cleric ought to reach out a helping hand rather than lecture us from the pulpit. Ryde scolds his parish 'from the pulpit',[36] while Irwine never tries 'to play th' emperor',[37] Irwine wins over his tenants with his kindness. His standpoint is not the absolute and arbitrary one of divinity, but that of the infinite human consciousness. Murray Krieger regards Irwine as lax but points out that through his admonition to Adam not to harbour revenge against Arthur, he prevents another tragedy.

Arthur's friendship with Adam and Irwine, however, is as much an obstacle as a stimulus to confidence. Esteem for them moves Arthur toward confiding in them but his own desire for their reciprocal respect and love shunts him away. Amazed and indignant at his irresolution in his relationship with Hetty, Arthur thoughtfully though indirectly contrasts his own weakness with Adam's strength:

> I should think now, Adam, you never have any struggles within yourself. I fancy you would master a wish that you had made up your mind it was not quite right to indulge, as easily as you would knock down a drunken fellow who was quarrelsome with you. I mean, you are

[36]*Ibid*., p. 198.
[37]*Ibid*., p. 199.

> never shilly-shally, first making up your mind that you won't do a thing, and then doing it after all?[38]

Adam's 'iron will' is little consolation to this 'shilly-shally' Arthur who rationalizes that resolutions cannot control feelings: 'We may determine not to gather any cherries, and keep our hands sturdily in our pockets, but we can't prevent our mouths from watering.'[39] It is Hetty, of course, 'a cherry wi' a hard stone inside it',[40] for whom Arthur's mouth waters. Significantly enough, Adam's response that 'there's nothing like settling with ourselves as there's a deal we must do without i' this life'[41] firmly echoes Irwine's earlier, more understanding, admonition to Arthur about paying attention to Hetty:

> When I've made up my mind that I can't afford to buy a tempting dog, I take no notice of him, because if he took a strong fancy to me, and looked lovingly at me, the struggle between arithmetic and inclination might become unpleasantly severe. I pique myself on my wisdom there, Arthur, and as an old fellow to whom wisdom has become cheap, I bestow it upon you.[42]

Arthur, however is too self-indulgent to accept a prescription of self-denial. In his subsequent decision to seek counsel from Mr. Irwine, Arthur experiences a struggle between the desire to confess and make amends and the desire for approval. He finds, as in his spontaneous conversation with Adam, and that he can only

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[38] *Ibid*., p. 182.
[39] *Ibid*., p. 183.
[40] *Ibid*., p. 369.
[41] *Ibid*., p. 183.
[42] *Ibid*., p. 112.

approach his problem indirectly in a theoretical discussion and not directly as a personal matter where he must admit guilt and bear blame. He returns again to the topic of his morning meeting with Adam, the frustration of doing what one would not: 'It's a desperately vexatious thing, that after all one's reflections and quiet determinations, we should be ruled by moods that one can't calculate on beforehand.'[43] Irwine's retort that one can do nothing at variance with his own nature is brushed aside by Arthur, who dislikes admitting seriously to himself that he might have within him 'a few grains of folly'.[44] Seeking sympathy for his position, rather than condemnation, he pleads the extenuating circumstances of struggle. Irwine's sympathetic nature, revealed in his response that he pities a man 'in proportion to his struggles',[45] contrasts with Adam's hard unwillingness to admit the possibility of struggle. Irwine is in accord with Adam, however, when he says that it is best for man to fix his mind on the terrible consequences of his actions and not on excuses for himself. This is the very thing that Arthur cannot do. Rationalizing his actions is much easier for Arthur, as for Tito Melema later, than admitting that evil might come of them. His denial to Irwine of any personal interest in their moral discussion leaves Arthur dependent on his own insufficient self-mastery.

Adam rather than Irwine is more successful in forcing Arthur to face the truth about himself. Coming upon Arthur and Hetty in the woods, Adam's angry words and actions recall part of his conversation with Arthur several months ago: 'I'll never fight

[43]*Ibid*., p. 187.
[44]*Ibid*., p. 187.
[45]*Ibid*., p. 188.

any man again, only when he behaves like a scoundrel. If you get hold of a chap that's got no shame nor conscience to stop him, you must try what you can do by bunging his eyes up.'[46] The young squire, acutely aware of his moral inferiority to Adam, finds himself susceptible to the carpenter's scorn: 'I tell you you're a coward and a scoundrel, and I despise you.'[47] Confronted for the first time in his life by words of hatred and contempt directed at him, Arthur's illusion that no man will ever reproach him, justly crumbles before the reality of 'the first great irrevocable evil he had ever committed'.[48] Humiliation shocks his self-contentment until rationalization once more exonerates him. Adam demands that Arthur end his relationship with Hetty and apologize for the impropriety of the affair by writing a letter to her. Arthur writes the letter, ending the relationship; but also convinces himself that the entire episode will benefit Hetty in future. Thus, guilt and compunction, although intensely felt by Arthur, is seen to be silenced by a self-assured blamelessness in order to retrieve his own good opinion of himself:

> … he had never meant beforehand to do anything his conscience disapproved – he had been led on by circumstances. There was a sort of implicit confidence in him that he was really such a good fellow at bottom, Providence would not treat him harshly.[49]

Although Arthur's crisis is largely experienced before that of Hetty and Adam, his is nevertheless resolved after theirs. Returning to Hayslope for his grandfather's

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[46]*Ibid*., p. 182.
[47]*Ibid*., p. 329.
[48]*Ibid*., p. 328.
[49]*Ibid*., p. 344.

funeral, Arthur, ignorant of Hetty's sufferings and trial, confidently expects that 'the future should make amends'[50] for his affair with Hetty. News of Hetty's being sentenced to death, however, destroys the foundation of his confidence and forces him to admit to himself the responsibility for his deeds. Unable to secure a full pardon for Hetty, Arthur realizes for the first time that he cannot compensate for irretrievable wrong. He admits to Adam: 'There's a sort of wrong that can never be made up for.'[51]

Henry James wrote that Arthur Donnithorne was the only one in *Adam Bede* to show 'development of character or of purpose'. Hetty's fall was 'without struggle and without passion' and Adam 'has arrived at perfect righteousness when the book opens; and it is impossible to go beyond that'.[52] It is true that Adam does not experience the inner conflict that Arthur does, but I feel that Adam's hardness towards weaker individuals hinders 'perfect righteousness'. He stands as a pillar of integrity whose will remains unshaken by any temptation to compromise his character. In his life and work, he incarnates the morality that depends on the will, about which Feuerbach expresses unequivocally: 'I cannot conceive perfect will, the will which is in unison with law, which is itself law, without at the same time regarding it [as] an object of will, i.e., as an obligation for myself.' According to Feuerbach, the conception of the morally perfect being is not a 'merely theoretical, inert conception, but a practical one, calling me to action, throwing me into strife, into disunion with myself'.[53] The

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[50]*Ibid*., p. 480.
[51]*Ibid*., p. 590.
[52]Henry James, 'The Novels of George Eliot,' in *Atlantic Monthly* 38 (October 1866): p. 25.
[53]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 47.

rigorous Adam is not in disunion with himself, but his moral excellence, however, carries with it a harsh, judgemental tendency toward those who lack his same steadfast and capable will to do the good. If Arthur is mistakenly confident of his self-mastery, Adam is excessively proud of his own rectitude. Consequently, he is indignant with his fellow workers for laying down their tools as the clock begins to strike, firm in having his own way, hard on his father for transgressing with the bottle, and angry and vengeful toward Arthur for seducing Hetty. Although his neighbours regard him with respect and high regard, they nevertheless admit that 'he's a little lifted up an' peppery-like'[54] and 'over-hasty and proud'.[55] Adam himself confesses to being harsh and hard, and these faults are repeatedly emphasized in the novel as flaws which need to be tempered in the fire of suffering.

The narrator observes that apparently ordinary, painstaking men like Adam contribute to society by building roads, improving farming practice, and reforming parish abuses. In saying that these are not negligible achievements, Eliot is in clear sympathy with Feuerbach's interpretation of God as Creator:

> The idea of activity, of making of creation, is in itself a divine idea; … In activity, man feels himself free, unlimited, happy; in passivity, limited, oppressed, unhappy. Activity is the positive sense of one's personality. That is positive which in man is accompanied with joy; hence God is, as we have already said, the idea of pure, unlimited joy. We succeed only in what we do willingly; joyful effort conquers all

[54]*Adam Bede*, p. 21.
[55]*Ibid*., p. 266.

> things. But that is joyful activity which is in accordance with our nature, which we do not feel as a limitation, and consequently not as a constraint. And the happiest, the most blissful activity is that which is productive.[56]

Feuerbach had also defined 'the understanding as that part of our nature, which is neutral, impassible, not to [be] bribed, not subject to illusions'.[57] Adam is imperceptive; unlike Irwine and Dinah, he does not look below the surface of other peoples' characters and actions. He fails to exercise his natural powers of judgement in relation to Hetty's character, which does not resemble his own imaginings. Moreover, Feuerbach's highest law of feeling lies in the immediate unity of will and deed. But such a unity combining theoretical and practical activity has no place here since Hetty does not return Adam's love and cannot live up to his unrealistic expectations.

Eliot emphasizes Adam's moral and physical strength quite extensively in the first four books of the novel. Thus, when Adam faces a crisis in the fifth book, his struggle is made less crucial because we know that, automatically, he will have the strength to surmount it. His crisis, of course, arises from what he thinks of Hetty's running away from their approaching wedding and, more particularly, her trial for child murder. Before hearing of Hetty's arrest, Adam turns to Irwine, not for advice per se, for as usual he has made up his mind about a course of action, but to share, unlike Arthur and Hetty, his burden with the Rector: 'I can't stand alone in this way

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[56]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 179.
[57]*Ibid*., p. 34.

any longer.'[58] W. J. Harvey states that Adam's suffering as he awaits Hetty's trial and sentencing brings him to the realization 'that his initially-held rules and moral categories are too rigid and are inadequate to the complex facts of experience which successively confront him'.[59] At his father's funeral, for example, Adam says to himself: 'I was always too hard.'[60] Such a recognition is the first step in a 'long and hard lesson, and Adam had at present only learned the alphabet of it in his father's sudden death'.[61] After the worse sorrow of Hetty's arrest and trial, he says: 'I'll never be hard again.'[62] He has presumably mastered reading and writing the alphabet of sympathy. A passive recipient rather than an active searcher, Adam receives counsel from Irwine to control his desire for vengeance on Arthur and also from Bartle Massey, to stand by others in their sorrow. Submitting to these moral mentors, Adam moves from hard rectitude to merciful sympathy:

> Mr. Massey … I'll go back with you. I'll go into court. It's cowardly of me to keep away. I'll stand by her – I'll own her – for all she's been deceitful. They oughtn't to cast her off – her own flesh and blood. We hand folks over to God's mercy, and show none ourselves. I used to be hard sometimes: I'll never be hard again. I'll go, Mr. Massey – I'll go with you.[63]

As George R. Creeger observes, Adam's decision to stand by Hetty has two consequences: ' … it leads to his being able to forgive Arthur, and it makes him

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[58]*Adam Bede*, p. 438.
[59]W. J. Harvey, *The Art of George Eliot* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), p. 179.
[60]*Adam Bede*, p. 220.
[61]*Ibid*., p. 229.
[62]*Ibid*., p. 467.
[63]*Ibid*., p. 467.

capable of a new sort of love … '[64] The former is expressed in the handshake between Adam and Arthur at their second meeting in the woods and the latter in Adam's marriage to Dinah. Feuerbach describes this relation between love and sympathy when he writes: 'Love does not exist without sympathy, sympathy does not exist without suffering in common.'[65]

In *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach, wishing to recover the 'true or anthropological essence'[66] of his man-centred religion, insisted that all rituals were merely a semi-conscious expression of man's reverence for the forces of nature. He contrasts the sacraments of Baptism to the Lord's Supper and propounds the 'moral and intellectual'[67] significance of water, bread and wine:

> Water, as a universal element of life, reminds us of our origin from Nature, an origin which we have in common with plants and animals. In Baptism we bow to the power of a pure Nature-force; water is the element of natural equality and freedom, the mirror of the golden age. But we men are distinguished from the plants and animals, which together with inorganic kingdom we comprehend under the common name of Nature; – we are distinguished from Nature. Hence we must celebrate our distinction, our specific difference. The symbols of this our difference are bread and wine. Bread and wine are, as to their materials, products of Nature; as to their form, products of man. If in water we declare: Man can do nothing without Nature; by bread and

[64]George R. Creeger, 'An Interpretation of *Adam Bede*', in *George Eliot: Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. George R. Creeger (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 103.
[65]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 54.
[66]*Ibid*., p. 29.
[67]*Ibid*., p. 226.

> wine we declare: Nature needs man as man needs Nature. In water human mental activity is nullified; in bread and wine it attains self-satisfaction … Hence this sacrament is only for man matured into consciousness, while baptism is imparted to infants.[68]

Feuerbach concluded his sermon with the following exhortation:

> Hunger and thirst destroy not only the physical but also the mental and moral powers of man; they rob him of his humanity of understanding, of consciousness. Oh! if thou shouldst ever experience such want, how wouldst thou bless and praise the natural qualities of bread and wine, which restore to thee thy humanity, thy intellect! It needs only that the ordinary course of things be interrupted in order to vindicate to common things an uncommon significance, *to life, as such, a religious import.* Therefore let bread be sacred for us, let wine be sacred, and also let water be sacred! Amen.[69]

In this connection, U. C. Knoepflmacher, in accordance with Feuerbach's enumeration of the importance of water, bread and wine, has depicted the 'mental and moral'[70] education of Adam through a series of symbolic suppers, which ultimately lead him toward a Feuerbachian 'religion of suffering'.[71] In the first supper scene, Adam is seen to finish a coffin that his father Thias Bede, to whom he feels quite superior, has failed to complete. He refuses to have the food that his mother gives him, but passes it on to his hungry dog to eat. However, soon he calls for 'light and a

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[68]*Ibid*., p. 227.
[69]*Ibid*., p. 228.
[70]U. C. Knoepflmacher, 'George Eliot, Feuerbach, and the Question of Criticism', in *George Eliot: Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. George R. Creeger (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 82.
[71]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 53.

draught of water',[72] takes a second 'drop o' water',[73] and says that he is getting 'very thirsty'.[74] When later he discovers his intoxicated father's body in a nearby creek, his acceptance of the two sips of water foreshadows his acceptance of his father's drunkenness. Remorse and pity dissolves his hardness. According to Knoepflmacher:

> The symbol of water … is designed to remind Adam of his subservience to and origin from Nature, 'an origin which we have in common with plants and animals'. The water which has 'nullified' the 'mental activity' of Adam's father, stresses man's own integral part in the dual cycle of extinction and preservation which governs life.[75]

Both George Eliot and Feuerbach opined that if we must submit to the force of Nature, we must also learn how to rise above it. Adam is unaware of this second rule at the next supper which occurs during Arthur Donnithorne's birthday feast. He is now the proud keeper of the woods and is seen sitting at the Squire's table, drinking rich Loamshire ale. He accepts a toast in which Arthur wishes him to have 'sons as faithful and clever as himself'.[76] Ironically, Arthur is the seducer of Adam's bride Hetty. Adam is yet to learn that his full 'humanity' can only be celebrated through his 'distinction' from Nature – a need soon to be accentuated by Arthur and Hetty, the 'natural' creatures he surprises in the woods he keeps. The suffering that both would bring upon Adam, can, according to George Eliot and Feuerbach, elevate man above the merely organic. The third and the most important scene relies entirely on

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[72]*Adam Bede*, p. 49.
[73]*Ibid*., p. 54.
[74]*Ibid*., p. 54.
[75]U. C. Knoepflmacher, 'George Eliot, Feuerbach, and the Question of Criticiam', p. 82.
[76]*Adam Bede*, p. 293.

Feuerbach's allegorization of the Lord's Supper. It takes place in a bleak lodging in Stoniton. Adam is grief-stricken and perturbed, 'powerless to contemplate the irremediable evil and suffering'[77] that surround Hetty's trial. At this time, Bartle Massey, the crippled schoolmaster, enters the room and tells the unshaven, brooding, half-starved Adam about the trial he has witnessed. He urges him to have 'a bit of the loaf and some of that wine Mr. Irwine sent'.[78] But Adam pushes the cup aside. After a while, he agrees to drink 'a little'.[79] On hearing about Hetty's suffering and Irwine's kindness, he exclaims: 'God bless him, and you too, Mr. Massey.'[80] The involuntary blessing reverses his earlier remark about Hetty: 'God bless her for loving me.'[81] Bitter regret and agonized sympathy make him finally learn how to celebrate his 'distinction' from Nature in a way that will impart a true religious significance to his life. He promises to 'stand by'[82] Hetty at court. Soon after, Mr. Massey asks him to eat a 'bit'[83] and to drink

> … another sup, Adam, for the love of me … Nerved by an active resolution, Adam took a morsel of bread, and drank some wine. He was haggard and unshaven, as he had been yesterday, but he stood upright again, and looked like the Adam Bede of former days.[84]

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[77] *Ibid*., p. 463.
[78] *Ibid*., p. 465.
[79] *Ibid*., p. 465.
[80] *Ibid*., p. 466.
[81] *Ibid*., p. 398.
[82] *Ibid*., p. 467.
[83] *Ibid*., p. 467.
[84] *Ibid*., p. 467.

Adam's baptism, regeneration, conversion to a new state of awe and pity, which is the crux of George Eliot's and Feuerbach's religions of humanity, is thus attained.

Eliot's reading of Feuerbach endorsed her own feeling that religious projections and dogmas could have a harmful influence on individuals and their relations with others. On the other hand, it also supported her contrary feeling that holiness, truth and purity that lie at the core of religion reflect the highest aspects of man's nature. Accordingly, Eliot portrays her Methodists, Dinah Morris and Adam's brother Seth Bede, in such a way that the human essence of love and understanding emerges almost unscathed by their beliefs. Though their interpretation of religion appears flawed and they could be looked upon as rustics, their faith is regarded by Eliot as infinitely superior to the idea that certain people have of that religion: 'Dingy streets, sleek grocers, sponging preachers, and hypocritical jargon – elements which are regarded as an exhaustive analysis of Methodism in many fashionable quarters.'[85]

Seth Bede is a young man, aged twenty three, who loves Dinah and thinks her to be greater and better than himself. Even the narrator considers Seth's love to be barely distinguishable from religious feeling. George Eliot invests such a religious projection with profound significance:

> Our caresses, our tender words, our still rapture under the influence of autumn sunsets, or pillared vistas, or calm majestic statues, or Beethoven symphonies, all bring with them the consciousness that they are mere waves and ripples in an unfathomable ocean of love and

[85] *Ibid*., p. 43.

> beauty; our emotion in its keenest moment passes from expression into silence, our love at its highest flood rushes beyond its object, and loses itself in the sense of divine mystery.[86]

This 'sense of divine mystery' is retained by Feuerbach in his idea of the unfathomable human divinity when he explains that reason and will are powers in man through which he can lose his subjectivity and attain a universal sense of the species. Feuerbach's idea of human divinity which appealed to Eliot led her to make Seth an embodiment of divine human power, who, besides his capacity to love profoundly, has a deep capacity for meditation. As Adam puts it, 'th' lad liked to sit full o' thoughts he could give no account of; they'd never come t' anything, but they made him happy'.[87] Although Seth lacks Adam's magnetism, his genuine sympathy and wisdom are revealed in his ungrudging resignation to suffering after he has been rejected by Dinah. He has a constant, tender, watchful concern for his mother's welfare despite the latter's preference for Adam. Seth is neither jealous of Adam for dining with the major tenants at Arthur's twenty-first birthday feast, nor of his brother's success in business, in becoming Jonathan Burge's partner, nor even of Adam's betrothal to Hetty not long after he himself has been less fortunate in love. And finally, when Adam becomes bethrothed to Dinah, Seth accepts reality with a rare grace.

Feuerbach considered that only in sympathetic communication could egoistic sensation rise into feeling. Dinah Morris incarnates the active principle of sympathy as the most necessary element in human relations. She is a deeply spiritual woman who

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[86] *Ibid*., p. 42.
[87] *Ibid*., p. 531.

does not engage in flowery, pedantic discussions on religion and philosophy in parlour rooms, but lives out her faith in her ministry to widows, prisoners and the working poor. Peter C. Hodgson aptly remarks: 'George Eliot's portrayal of Dinah Morris is quite extraordinary and of undeniable theological interest. While not exactly a Christ figure, Dinah was the mediatrix of a divine redemptive presence.'[88]

As the novel begins, Dinah is visiting her aunt and uncle, the Poyser family, in Hayslope, where she prepares to preach in an open field at the end of the day. Many people in the town of Hayslope look on from the outskirts of the open area, curious to witness this preaching that is both outside the church building and performed by a woman. Yet the hostility of the townspeople is soon alleviated. The eye of suspicion cast upon Dinah is first softened by her 'feminine delicacy', and then it completely disappears in recognition of the 'total absence of self-consciousness in her demeanour'.[89]

In his chapter on the 'Mystery of the Incarnation,' Feuerbach had explained:

> It is the consciousness of love by which man reconciles himself with God, or rather with his own nature as represented in the moral law. The consciousness of the divine love ... is the mystery of the Incarnation ... God became man out of mercy: thus he was in himself already a human God before he became an actual man; for human want, human misery, went to his heart. The Incarnation was a tear of the divine compassion, and hence it was only the visible advent of a Being having human

[88]Peter C. Hodgson, *The Mystery Beneath the Real: Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot* (London: Canterbury Press Limited, 2001), p. 52.
[89]*Adam Bede*, p. 27.

> feelings, and therefore essentially human ... the idea of the Incarnation is nothing more than the human *form* of a God, who already in his nature, in the profoundest depths of his soul, is a merciful and therefore a human God.[90]

Dinah's speech, which echoes Feuerbach's ideal of God as merciful love, had a clarity, simplicity and insight that were luminous and transformative. She preached on the Hayslope green for about an hour, no book in her hand, speaking directly to the people gathered before her, using words and ideas they could readily grasp, but with no condescension and no avoidance of difficult questions: 'She was not preaching as she heard others preach, but speaking directly from her own emotions, and under the inspiration of her own simple faith.'[91]

One of the most fundamental aspects of Feuerbach's interpretation of religion was that God is the existence corresponding to man's wishes and feelings:

> God is the power by which man realises his eternal happiness; God is the absolute personality in which all individual persons have the certainty of their blessedness and immortality; God is to subjectivity the highest, last certainty of its absolute truth and essentiality.[92]

This concept is reflected in Dinah's principal message that God's love turns poverty into riches and satisfies the soul: 'It is the good news that Jesus came to preach to the poor. It is not like the riches of this world, so that the more one gets the less the rest

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[90]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, pp. 43-44.
[91]*Adam Bede*, pp. 32-33.
[92]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 144.

can have. God is without end; his love is without end.'[93] She proclaims that her listeners can know that God loves them because Jesus loves them, and their love is one and the same. Because Jesus 'came in a body like ours',[94] we share a mutual sympathy, a fellow-feeling with Jesus. Peter C. Hodgson elaborates it further:

> The simplicity of her faith evoked the radical kind of relationship to God that characterized Jesus' own faith. It was a relationship of direct trust, without resentment, conditions, calculation, cultic and moral paraphernalia – an instance of the feeling of utter or simple dependence that is at the heart of true religion.[95]

Dinah describes the sinfulness of the people of Hayslope whose self-absorption and folly contrasts with the godly and wise life of self-sacrifice. For Feuerbach, morality is 'the condition, the means of happiness'.[96] This is implicit in Dinah's avowal to her audience that uneasy desires and fears can be expelled, the temptation to sin extinguished, and heaven begun on earth because 'no cloud passes between the soul and God, who is its eternal sun'.[97] Bessy Cranage, a local girl listening to Dinah from a distance, is terrified by the grave part of her message that God is so near that He can see her sinfulness in her selfish inclination towards ornamenting herself, most evident in the earrings that she wears.

In relation to subjective human feelings, Feuerbach had observed that God, as the object of prayer, is already a human being since he sympathises with human

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[93]*Adam Bede*, p. 37.
[94]*Ibid*., p. 31.
[95]Peter C. Hodgson, *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot*, p. 53.
[96]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 118.
[97]*Adam Bede*, p. 36.

misery and grants human wishes, but still 'he is not yet an object to the religious consciousness as a real man'.[98] He is always a remote being, who stands at a distance from us and is personally unknown to us. Our supreme wish to see God is fulfilled by Christ, in whom the last wish of religion is realised and the mystery of religious feeling is solved:

> So long as we have not met a being face to face, we are always in doubt whether he be really such as we imagine him; actual presence alone gives final confidence, perfect repose. Christ is God known personally; Christ, therefore, is the blessed certainty that God is what the soul desires and needs him to be … for what God is in essence, that Christ is in actual appearance.[99]

In line with this idea, Dinah speaks of Christ's human receptiveness, and the manifestation of God's forgiveness in the life of Jesus, dwelling on the latter's lowliness and acts of mercy. Her description of Jesus' agony in the garden, with his words: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do',[100] and the reminder that He called not the righteous, but sinners, to repentance, iterate Feuerbach's stress on suffering as feeling and on the human need for compassion.

In his chapter on the 'Mystery of the Incarnation', Feuerbach had explained God as love, or a being of the heart. What, he asked, did the words 'God is love' mean? Who is our Saviour and Redeemer: God or Love? It is Love, he pointed out,

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[98]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 121.
[99]*Ibid*., p. 121.
[100]*Adam Bede*, p. 29.

that has saved man, love which transcends the difference between the divine and human personality:

> So long as love is not exalted into a substance, into an essence, so long there lurks in the background of love a subject ... a diabolical being, whose personality, separable and actually separated from love, delights in the blood of heretics and unbelievers, – the phantom of religious fanaticism. Nevertheless the essential idea of the Incarnation, though enveloped in the night of the religious consciousness, is love.[101]

Dinah's discourses primarily focused on the presence of a suffering, infinite love, which is God's very being. She spoke to people who had their souls 'suffused … with the sense of a pitying, loving, infinite Presence, sweet as summer to the houseless needy'.[102] As she meditated on 'the Redeemer's cross', Dinah wrote to Seth Bede:

> I feel it, I feel it – Infinite Love is suffering too … while there is sorrow and sin in the world: sorrow is then a part of love, and love does not seek to throw it off … Is there not pleading in heaven? Is not the Man of Sorrow there in that crucified body wherewith he ascended? And is He not one with the Infinite Love itself – as our love is one with our sorrow?[103]

Her belief that 'infinite love' must suffer, and that the desire to be free from suffering is pure egoism, again represents her alignment with Feuerbach's universal, self-sacrificing love. Also, when Hetty prepares to run away because of her advancing pregnancy, the narrator comments: 'No wonder man's religion has much sorrow in it;

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[101]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 45.
[102]*Adam Bede*, p. 43.
[103]*Ibid*., p. 357.

no wonder he needs a suffering God.'[104] The need for a 'suffering God' can be linked to Feuerbach's statement that: 'The Christian religion is the religion of suffering.'[105] For him, the image of the crucified one which we still see in all churches, represents the crucified, the suffering Christ more than the Saviour. I think that George Eliot did not wish to replace the religion of the cross by the religion of humanity. Rather, she maintained that the religion of the cross, by linking love and suffering, offers profound resource for human development.

Feuerbach also saw the power of love, thought, the desire for knowledge, energy of will, the force of morality as 'constituent elements'[106] of man's nature. Man is nothing without an aim, an object in which he could invest or realize his powers. This object [religion] was essentially his own reflected powers; or, as he puts it, his own 'objective nature … Consciousness of the objective is the self-consciousness of man, … his manifested nature, his true objective ego … The absolute to man is his own nature'.[107] George Eliot verges on such an explicitly Feuerbachian recognition when she describes how well Dinah's charity, her power of loving, objectifies her own inner nature and she can cope with Lisbeth Bede's sorrow over the death of Thias Bede. Her visit to the Bede home grants great clarity to both her character and her understanding of ministry:

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[104]*Ibid*., p. 395.
[105]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 53.
[106]*Ibid*., p. 3.
[107]*Ibid*., pp. 4-5.

> God didn't send me to you to make light of your sorrow but to mourn with you, if you will let me. If you had a table spread for a feast, and was making merry with your friends, you would think it was kind to let me come and sit down and rejoice with you, because you'd think I should like to share those good things; but I should like better to share in your trouble and your labour, and it would seem harder to me if you denied me that.[108]

Eliot draws upon Dinah's ministry to Lisbeth as a tangible example of selfless love, thus revealing her own conception of God as a fellow sufferer who sympathizes with his hurting creatures. Peter C. Hodgon beautifully summarizes Dinah's spiritual goodness in the following words:

> Dinah's actions were effective as her speech. She soothed, touched, calmed, fed and healed by her physical presence. She did not deny suffering when it was real, did not offer false assurances, did not engage in abstract exhortations. She knew intuitively when quiet sympathy was best, and when it was appropriate to speak. As she comforted Adam's mother Lisbeth after the death by drowning of her drunken husband Thias … Dinah herself, through her face and voice, became an embodiment of the divine nurture.[109]

The linear model for Dinah's life is quite consciously that of a pilgrimage through this world leading to the next. Her dedication to her pilgrimage baffles the Poysers. They cannot imagine why anyone would choose to live as she does in the

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[108]*Adam Bede*, p. 121.
[109]Peter C. Hodgson, *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot,* p. 54.

ugly town of Snowfield, filled with 'lonely, bare, stone houses',[110] rather than in lovely Loamshire. Such a spirit of self-sacrifice can be understood in terms of Feuerbach's 'I – Thou' relationship, where man as a 'species'[111] can be properly understood not as a single individual but only in terms of an 'I' and a 'Thou':

> In another I first have the consciousness of humanity; through him I first learn, I first feel, that I am a man: in my love for him it is first clear to me that he belongs to me and I to him, that we two cannot be without each other, that only community constitutes humanity.[112]

In describing Dinah at the beginning of the novel, George R. Creeger states: '… despite her mildness and compassion, her selflessness and love of God, she has little genuine vitality. Dinah is all heart … Confronted by a vigorous fruitful world, she retreats'.[113] The reason behind such an analysis, I feel, may be Dinah's sitting silent all day long with the thought of God 'overflowing' her soul. Earlier in the novel, talking of herself to Mr. Irwine, Dinah had said:

> I'm too much given to sit still and keep by myself. It seems as if I could sit silent all day long with the thought of God overflowing my soul … and it's my besetment to forget where I am and everything about me, and lose myself in thoughts that I could give no account of, for I could neither make a beginning nor ending of them in words.[114]

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[110]*Adam Bede*, p. 132.
[111]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 1.
[112]*Ibid*., p. 131.
[113]George R. Creeger, 'An Interpretation of *Adam Bede*', p. 104.
[114]*Adam Bede*, p. 99.

Creeger sees Dinah as a holy, inspired figure who observes the human condition with sympathy and compassion, but without any involvement. However, Feuerbach maintains that to be solitary is a sign of character and thinking power: 'Solitude is the want of the thinker, society the want of the heart.' He further asserted that we are independent only in the solitary act of thought, and that solitude is 'self-sufficingness'.[115] Contrary to Creeger's analysis and in accordance with Feuerbach's views, I see Dinah's moments of religious contemplation as an indication of her reliance on divine strength, that proves to be much firmer and stronger than Hetty's reveries about Arthur that suffuse her with languor.

Bernard J. Paris, who discusses the relevance of Feuerbach to *Adam Bede*, argues that the novel is a Feuerbachian analysis of the spiritual life of the community and of Dinah in particular. Dinah's confrontation with Hetty in prison, for example, is an 'I – Thou' experience that restores Hetty to consciousness of the species. Dinah enters the prison cell as a vessel of divine comfort and hope to one facing imminent execution. She tells Hetty that her suffering would be less hard if she knew somebody was with her, to feel for her, to care for her:

> But, Hetty, there is some one else in this cell besides me. Some one who has been with you through all your hours of sin and trouble … if you had a friend to take care of you after death … some one whose love is greater than mine … If God our Father was your friend … if you could believe he loved you and would help you, as you believe I

[115]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 67.

> love you and will help you, it wouldn't be so hard to die on Monday, would it?[116]

There is no false consolation here, no promise of divine rescue or of personal immortality, only the assurance that 'whether we live or die, we are in the presence of God'.[117] But Hetty cannot accept the love of the Invisible God as easily as she can receive the tangible love of Dinah whom she can see, hear and touch. Her lack of faith does not deter Dinah from urging her to confess and pray for God's mercy. Feuerbach regarded prayer as the essential act of religion, 'that in which religion puts into action what we have designated as its essence ... Prayer is all-powerful. What the pious soul entreats for in prayer God fulfils'.[118] Hetty sobs out Dinah's name, throwing her arms around her and confessing that the abandonment of her crying, newly born baby caused its death. To Feuerbach, it is in Christ that the blending of feeling and imagination are realized:

> … in Christ all anxiety of the soul vanishes; he is the sighing soul passed into a song of triumph over its complete satisfaction; he is the joyful certainty of feeling that its wishes hidden in God have truth and reality, the actual victory over death, over all the powers of the world and Nature, the resurrection no longer merely hoped for, but already accomplished; he is the heart released from all oppressive limits, from all sufferings, – the soul in perfect blessedness, the Godhead made visible.[119]

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[116]*Adam Bede*, p. 488.
[117]*Ibid*., p. 488.
[118]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 160.
[119]*Ibid*., p. 120.

Dinah herself becomes almost Christ-like, in this sense, as her sympathy and imagination work together, leading her to experience an intensification of her feelings for Hetty. Eliot crowns Dinah an incarnational queen and she becomes an embodiment of divine compassion affecting the potential salvation of Hetty. Hetty could not trust the divine forgiveness offered by God through Jesus Christ, as Dinah had urged her to do, but she finds one kind person who embraces rather than condemns her in her final moments. Dinah manifests God's love as she becomes a fellow sufferer with Hetty. Hetty's life is spared when Arthur comes to the Stoniton square with a government pardon reducing her sentence to Australian imprisonment.

Near the end of the novel, after a year and-a-half has passed since Hetty's trial and Arthur's departure from Hayslope, Dinah is forced to make a decision about her future. She is now experiencing a conflict between two strong desires: that love which, as Feuerbach understood it, is best exemplified in the relation between the sexes and in marriage, and her altruistic love dedicated to proclamation and spiritual guidance. With much difficulty, she exchanges her ascetic vocation for motherhood and domesticity. Feuerbach had stressed that 'to the strict idea of love two suffice'.[120] Dinah finally consents to marriage, recognizing that her love for Adam might compete with her love for God, but she is convinced that their union is God's will since without Adam her life would be a divided one. Feuerbach also affirms that the history of the Passion that affects the human heart most deeply is not an invention of the understanding or the poetic faculty, but of the heart:

[120]*Ibid*., p. 68.

> The heart, however, does not invent in the same way as the free imagination or intelligence; it has a passive, receptive relation to what it produces; all that proceeds from it seems to it given from without, takes it by violence, works with the force of irresistible necessity. The heart overcomes, masters man; he who is once in its power is possessed as it were by his demon, by his God.[121]

After her marriage, Dinah gives up preaching. Rather than viewing this as a submission, perhaps we are meant to see that she has grounded her life on a surer basis – family and human relationships. According to U. C. Knoepflmacher, Eliot corrects Dinah's nun-like love of Christ and transforms it into the essential love of the species: '… where there arises the consciousness of the species as a species, the idea of humanity as a whole, Christ disappears, without, however, his true nature disappearing'.[122] Adam does not think that loving him could drive Dinah away from ministering to the poor:

> … it's only adding to what you've been before, not taking away from it; for it seems to me it's the same with love and happiness as with sorrow – the more we know of it the better we can feel what other people's lives are or might be, and so we shall only be more tender to 'em, and wishful to help 'em. The more knowledge a man has, the better he'll do's work; and feeling's a sort o' knowledge.[123]

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[121]*Ibid*., p. 51
[122]*Ibid*., p. 269.
[123]*Adam Bede*, p. 556.

Adam is virtually echoing Feuerbach's view that 'feeling is alone real knowledge'.[124] As Feuerbach explained, it is important to know the want of something in order to know it: we learn what justice is through an experience of injustice, or happiness through an experience of misery. It is through this experience of feeling that we gain true knowledge. Both Creeger and Knoepflmacher argue that Dinah's vision is incomplete. Knoepflmacher asserts that Dinah's intuitive vision must be accommodated to Adam's empirical view of reality. Creeger, using different terminology but arguing essentially the same point, states that Dinah as heart must be reconciled to Adam as head. Consequently, both scholars view the marriage of Adam and Dinah as a necessary synthesis of two individually incomplete entities. I too view their union as nearly verging on Feuerbach's unity of man's divided consciousness, the 'true, self-satisfying identity of the divine and human being, the identity of the human being with itself'.[125]

K. V. Adams concedes that Adam represents a version of Christianity 'that is more humanistic and thus more progressive than Dinah's Methodist beliefs, which Feuerbach would criticize as other-worldly, self-deluding, and self-alienating … Dinah's beliefs seem to be physically as well as psychologically alienating'.[126] In his old age, Adam reflects: 'I began to see as all this weighing and sifting what this text means and that text means, and whether folks are saved all by God's grace, or whether

[124]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 228.
[125]*Ibid*., p. 231.
[126]Kimberly VanEsveld Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism: The Madonna in the Work of Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller, and George Eliot* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), p. 155.

there goes an ounce o' their own will to't, was no part o' real religion at all.'[127] Real religion is sincerity of feeling and active, practical virtue. Eliot could not abandon religion completely, especially at the risk of alienating her audience, but it is significant that Dinah, the main bearer of religion in the novel, is a Methodist preacher, who emphasizes personal faith over dogma and individual interpretation of the Bible. As Adam says, religion is a personal and private matter. While she still represents organized religion, in describing Dinah's philosophy, Eliot stresses specifically humane aspects. It is remarkable how religious the book is; the prayers are written with such earnestness and reverence. Is this Eliot's lingering respect for Evangelicalism? We must remind ourselves that the author does not always agree with her characters, but there is something stronger at work here. Although I have shown that Eliot's moral instruction in the novel bends towards humanism, we cannot completely write off the contradiction between the extreme religious character of the novel and her personal belief in a system of moral excellence that does not rely on God. I will offer a more conclusive explanation after looking at the rest of her novels, where, indeed, the religious character of *Adam Bede* fades.

[127] *Adam Bede*, p. 200.

CHAPTER 2

'The Clue of Life': *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*

> So deeply inherent is it in this life of ours that men have to suffer for each other's sins, so inevitably diffusive is human suffering, that even justice makes its victims, and we can conceive no retribution that does not spread beyond its mark in pulsations of unmerited pain.[1]

The Mill on the Floss, published only a year after *Adam Bede*, in 1860, steers us along the course of the Tulliver family's misfortune, showing us their sorrows which are never entirely overcome until they are washed away with the flood. As George Levine aptly describes it:

> The novel develops as Tom and Maggie grow: it sets them within the framework of a family and society which extensively determine what they become, shows the inevitable development of their characters according to the pressures of heredity and irrevocable events, and traces their destinies chronologically from love, to division, to unity in death.[2]

Eliot's primary theme is the force of nature, which is both restorative and destructive. 'Nature repairs her ravages – but not all',[3] and the novel focuses on how people survive and overcome. The novel is an exploration of Feuerbach's assertion that strong relationships, motivated by a generous, unegoistic love, can repair some of the damage that circumstances have thrust upon us or the wounds we inflict by our own imperfections: 'Love … is the substantial bond, the

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[1]George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 9. All subsequent citations are to this edition.

[2]George Levine, 'Intelligence as Deception: *The Mill on the Floss*', in *George Eliot: Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. George R. Creeger (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 110.

[3]*The Mill on the Floss*, p. 543.

principle of reconciliation between the perfect and the imperfect, the sinless and the sinful being, the universal and the individual, the divine and the human.' [4]

Eliot stated that the characters in *The Mill on the Floss* generally represented a lower level of humanity than those in *Adam Bede*. F. R. Leavis sees Maggie's emotional and spiritual stresses as belonging to a stage of development where the capacity to make essential distinctions has not been arrived at. Even the citizens of St. Ogg's, according to George Levine, lack the clarity of vision Feuerbach desiderated. They are therefore unable to make the right choice:

> Quite deliberately, she was creating a society which has not yet moved beyond the egoism of man's animal beginnings to the sympathy and benevolence which Feuerbach and Comte believed would grow out of egoism. Among other things, the frequency with which all the characters are compared to insects and animals makes plain that George Eliot does not see them as ready for any but the slightest advance toward the full intellectual and moral development from egoism to intelligent sympathy towards which she aspired.[5]

The Dodsons and the Tullivers are the dramatic embodiments of St. Ogg's essential nature and their oppressive narrowness creates a tension for both readers and characters. Eliot delivers a harsh indictment on the religion of the Dodsons and Tullivers:

> Observing these people narrowly, even when the iron hand of misfortune has shaken them from their unquestioning hold on the world, one sees little trace of religion, still less of a distinctively Christian creed. Their belief in the unseen, so far as it manifests itself at all, seems to be rather of a pagan kind: their moral notions, though held with strong tenacity, seem to have no standard beyond hereditary custom. You could not live among such people; you are stifled for

[4]Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Dover Publications, 2008), p. 41. All subsequent citations are to this edition.
[5]George Levine, 'Intelligence as Deception', p. 113.

> want of an outlet towards something beautiful, great, or noble: you are irritated with these dull men and women …[6]

It is this sort of Christianity with no introspection or study, this pettiness, narrowness, paganism, gossip, stinginess, the total absence of all spirituality in the British farmer circles, that weighed upon George Eliot. They fail to see the real relation of things and are unable to understand the unchangeable order of the world. As George Levine has observed:

> George Eliot saw with Feuerbach that society included not merely rigid conventions but also the slowly, painfully earned developments in man's intelligence and sensibility. Maggie, then, must learn what other characters suffer by not learning – that everything must be judged on its unique merits, that no laws, habits, or traditions can apply indiscriminately in all situations. On the other hand, much of what she does learn in this way turns out to be a relearning of the values already implicit in social conventions. Dodsons and Tullivers fail to establish an adequate relation to their own traditions and are therefore unable to understand their own motives derived from myriad causes out of the past.[7]

On the one hand, Maggie must transcend such unthinking adherence to tradition if she is to rise above 'the mental level of the generation before her'. On the other hand, she is tied to that generation 'by the strongest fibres' of her heart. In 'the onward tendency of human beings',[8] the Dodsons and Tullivers must go, but they cannot be ignored and they must, indeed, be loved. Such a focus on family is related directly to Feuerbach's idea that the family is the primary means by which man can transcend his egoism and animality. Participated life, he feels, is the true, self-satisfying, divine life, 'the supernatural mystery of the Trinity': 'Solitude is the want of

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[6]*The Mill on the Floss*, p. 284.
[7]George Levine, 'Intelligence as Deception', p. 113.
[8]*The Mill on the Floss*, p. 284.

the thinker, society the want of the heart. We can think alone, but we can love only with another. In love we are dependent, for it is the need of another being.'[9]

According to Feuerbach, man's being is characterized by specific determinations or attributes namely Reason, Will and Affection. As the essential attributes of the human species, they are infinite, absolute or as Feuerbach says, 'true, perfect, divine'.[10] In their totality, they make up the complete nature of the human being. Feuerbach calls reason the 'light of the intellect', will the 'energy of character', and affection 'love'. It is important to realize that man cannot exist apart from these determinations. They are rather his being itself. They are the 'constituent elements of his nature, which he neither has nor makes, the animating, determining, governing powers – divine, absolute powers – to which he can oppose no resistance'.[11] Concerning this point, Feuerbach asks: 'Is it man that possesses love, or is it not much rather love that possesses man?'[12] Love, or affection, being one of the essential powers and perfections of the human nature, goes into the making of the beings which we are. Thus to exist as human is necessarily to love, to think and to act. The duality in *The Mill on the Floss* is between two radically different kinds of characters. While Tom represents utilitarianism, and remains permanently trapped in the confines of the egoistic self, Maggie, with her loving nature strives, though imperfectly, toward Feuerbachian values. Tom develops a sense of honour, and may be seen as acting unselfishly when he saves his earnings to rescue his family's reputation. But by Feuerbach's standards, his approach to life is in many ways flawed. Feuerbach says: 'No man is sufficient for the law which moral perfection sets before us; but, for that reason, neither is the law sufficient for man, for the heart. The law condemns; the heart has compassion even on the

[9]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 57.
[10]*Ibid*., p. 3.
[11]*Ibid*., p. 2.
[12]*Ibid*., p. 3

sinner.'[13] Tom is motivated by practical considerations but also, contrary to Feuerbachian compassion, he is guided impractically by hatred. For instance, he takes up his father's grudge against the lawyer, Wakem, extending it to Wakem's deformed son, Philip, who was his former schoolmate at Mr. Stelling's. He is like Adam Bede in his strong will, morality of purpose, narrow imagination and intellect, power of self-control and an inclination to exercise control over others. But he lacks Adam's power of loving and subordinates love to duty.

Maggie's life can be seen as an 'amalgam of opposing elements, her life a chronicle of collisions'.[14] We are told that the 'need of being loved' was the 'strongest in poor Maggie's nature', and that she 'rushed to her deeds with passionate impulse'.[15] She is intense and earnest. Her primary weakness is an inability to reel in her feelings, whereas many of the other characters, including her brother Tom, have little compassion and can hardly exert any energy to control it. Feuerbach points out that 'the negation or annulling of sin is the negation of abstract moral rectitude, – the positing of love, mercy, sensuous life'.[16] Only sensuous living beings, and not abstract beings, are merciful. His conception of mercy as the 'justice of sensuous life'[17] is epitomized in George Eliot's presentation of Maggie. In Eliot's opinion:

> If the ethics of art do not admit the truthful presentation of a character essentially noble but liable to great error – error that is anguish to its own nobleness – then, it seems to me, the ethics of art are too narrow, and must be widened to correspond with a widening psychology.[18]

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[13]*Ibid*., p. 47.
[14]John P. Bushnell, "Maggie Tulliver's 'Stored-Up Force': A Re-reading of *The Mill on the Floss*", in *Studies in the Novel* 16 (1984): 388.
[15]*The Mill on the Floss*, p. 41.
[16]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 42.
[17]*Ibid*., p. 42.
[18]*The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-55), vol. III, p. 318.

Maggie and Tom are quickly forced to grow up after Tulliver loses his fortune; the subsequent suffering forever defines the family. Peoples' reactions to the crisis are telling. The Dodson sisters, despite their devotion to kin, are reluctant to help their sister, and only buy what is necessary from the house auction. However, Eliot, like Feuerbach, believed that humans were inherently good. The narrator describes 'the primitive love that knits us to the beings who have been nearest to us, in their times of helplessness and anguish',[19] implying love and sympathy are programmed into human beings. Bob Jakin emerges from the woodwork to offer his savings to the family. Though Maggie and Tom decline the sovereigns, this offer of friendship is invaluable to them. Mrs. Stelling is moved by the grieving siblings. Her small act of sympathy introduces Maggie to 'that new sense which is the gift of sorrow – that susceptibility to the bare offices of humanity which raises them into a bond of loving fellowship, as to haggard men among the icebergs the mere presence of an ordinary comrade stirs the deep fountains of affection'.[20] Maggie and Tom's most tender moments, such as the nuzzling of noses, establishes our need for human fellowship and attempts to reconnect ourselves to our most basic impulses, to our place in the world as rational animals.

Following the impoverishment and humiliation of her family, Maggie 'wanted some key that would enable her to understand and, in understanding, endure, the heavy weight that had fallen on her young heart'.[21] She has an intellectual curiosity similar to Eliot's when she was a girl; she is always eager for new books, even reading the dictionary to ease her starvation for knowledge. 'Her soul's hunger',[22] devours Thomas a Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*. Essentially, Kempis's philosophy accords with Feuerbach's notion of the suffering God, that is,

[19]*The Mill on the Floss*, p. 175.
[20]*Ibid*., p. 167.
[21]*Ibid*., p. 298.
[22]*Ibid*., p. 251.

the virtue of self-sacrifice for the good of others and the giving up of egoism: 'Love attests itself by suffering … the suffering of the innocent, endured purely for the good of others, the suffering of love – self-sacrifice.'[23] The book teaches Maggie about the duty she owes to others, and that her life is 'an insignificant part of divinely-guided whole'.[24] She immediately judges herself as recklessly selfish, believing her whole life has been motivated by self-gratification.

Bernard J. Paris describes the beneficial influence of *The Imitation of Christ* upon Maggie as 'an excellent example of how Christian experience of the past can be living truth in the present, despite the fact that the form in which it was cast is now alien'.[25] Maggie finds religion, but it is not organized; it is an individual calling, 'without the aid of established authorities and appointed guides – for they were not at hand, and her need was pressing'.[26] She renounces her other books and throws herself into divine devotion. But as, Paris remarks, Maggie's renunciation is not 'completely genuine or realistic – hence it does not last'.[27]

Feuerbach himself emphasized not only the need to subordinate selfish desire to altruistic feeling, but human development i.e. the need for human beings to fully realize their powers. But Maggie is excessive in her renunciation:

> From what you know of her, you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and willfulness, some pride and impetuosity, even into her self-renunciation: her own life was still a drama for her, in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity. And so it came to pass that she often lost the spirit of humility by being excessive in the outward act; she

[23]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, pp. 50-51.
[24]*The Mill on the Floss,* p. 302.
[25]Bernard J. Paris, 'George Eliot's Religion of Humanity', in *George Eliot: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. George R. Creeger (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 110.
[26]*The Mill on the Floss,* pp. 304-305.
[27]Bernard J. Paris, 'George Eliot's Religion of Humanity', p. 29.

> often strove after too high a flight, and came down with her poor little half-fledged wings dabbled in the mud.[28]

In Maggie's case, bitter experience has taught her not only the sorrow that accompanies renunciation, but also the recognition that the denial of egoism does not require a denial of self-hood, a refusal to be loved, to enter into relationships of love. Rosemarie Bodenheimer comments: 'It is often difficult to know whether the narrative endorses Maggie's sacrificial thoughts on behalf of others or whether they are presented as Maggie's way of describing to herself what she most wants or needs to do.'[29] In my reading of the novel, it is clear that the narrator represents Maggie's sacrificial thoughts as excessive and fanatical. Philip and Tom both react negatively to this change in Maggie. She was never purely selfish, and her new regimen of sacrifice and renunciation, as Tom puts it, is 'ascetic and harsh'.[30] Philip also warns her saying: ' … you are shutting yourself up in a narrow self-delusive fanaticism, which is only a way of escaping pain by starving into dullness all the highest powers of your nature'.[31] Neil Roberts argues that 'the moral imperative' that governs the novel actually 'hampers Maggie's moral development; asceticism is too strict, and Maggie must abandon her fanatical attitudes in order to flourish properly'.[32]

A primary motif in the novel is the complex nature of love which is shown in its passionate, platonic, and filial aspects. At various times, Maggie is torn between different loves: her deep love for her brother, a platonic love for Philip Wakem, and a passionate love for

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[28]*The Mill on the Floss*, p. 305.
[29]Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 109.
[30]*The Mill on the Floss*, p. 350.
[31]*Ibid.*, p. 340.
[32]Neil Roberts, *George Eliot: Her Beliefs and Her Art* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975), p. 93.

Stephen Guest, Lucy Deane's undeclared fiancé and the richest, best-looking young bachelor in St. Oggs.

When Feuerbach states that '… marriage as the free bond of love – is sacred in itself', he means that a 'religious marriage, which is a true marriage'[33] corresponds to the essence of marriage, that is, of love. Stephen is not given much scope to develop as a complex character in his own right. On the other hand, however this may not be so much a flaw in his characterization as an indication of the nature of the interest he inspires in Maggie. Over the years, Maggie's relationship with Philip develops very much as an intellectual and spiritual connection. But her attraction towards Stephen is clearly sexual – and, as such, instinctive and spontaneous. This commensurates with Feuerbach's own pragmatic definition of love that can be seen to evoke a greater passion than is evident in Maggie's feeling for Philip:

> What the old mystics said of God, that he is the highest and yet the commonest being, applies in truth to love, and that not a visionary, imaginary love – no! a real love, a love which has flesh and blood, which vibrates as an almighty force through all living.[34]

Stephen is most frequently associated with music and the river. These two things epitomize the irresistible force of the intoxication which Maggie increasingly feels in his presence. When she listens to Stephen sing, her soul is captured by an invisible influence, 'the inexorable power of sound',[35] and she is swept along as by a wave 'too strong for her'.[36] Even Feuerbach argues strongly for the power of music:

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[33]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 222.
[34]*Ibid.*, p. 42.
[35]*The Mill on the Floss*, p. 434.
[36]*Ibid.*, p. 435.

> What would man be without feeling? It is the musical power in man. But what would man be without music? Just as a man has a musical faculty and feels an inward necessity to breathe out his feelings in song; so, by a like necessity, he, in religious sighs and tears, streams forth the nature of feeling as an objective, divine nature.[37]

Stephen is one of the recurring 'self-pleasing' characters in Eliot's fiction. He attempts to persuade Maggie to run away with him, arguing: 'What could we care about in the whole world beside, if we belonged to each other? ... We can't help the pain it will give.'[38] This, however, is what holds Maggie back – she cannot willfully pain her cousin and Philip. *The Saturday Review* critic discusses Maggie's spiritual journey:

> When her suffering becomes too intense, she takes refuge in mystical religion. Later on, she seems to accept the doctrine inculcated by one of her loves, that resignation cannot be the highest end of human life, as it is merely negative. She then passes into a stage where she is absorbed in the fierce moral conflicts awakened by a passion to which she thinks it wrong to yield.[39]

Maggie explains to Stephen that they cannot renounce the duties life made for them before they fell in love. She has outgrown the fanciful notion of self-sacrifice, but can never fail to see or ignore the effect her actions will have on others.

Feuerbach had pointed out that the consciousness of 'moral law, of right, of propriety, of truth itself',[40] was intrinsically united with man's consciousness of another than himself, so that his fellow-man could function as an objective conscience, making his failings a reproach, and guiding him toward the right. As her secret feeling for Stephen Guest becomes more compelling,

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[37]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 54.
[38]*The Mill on the Floss*, p. 394.
[39]In David Carroll, *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1971), p. 117.
[40]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 131.

Maggie begins to look on Philip as Feuerbach's 'objective conscience'. Feuerbach elaborates it further:

> Unity in essence is multiplicity in existence. Between me and another human being – and this other is the representative of the species, even though he is only one, for he supplies to me the want of many others, has for me a universal significance, is the deputy of mankind, in whose name he speaks to me, an isolated individual, so that, when united only with me, I have a participated, a human life.[41]

Philip's appeal is to Maggie's womanly devotion and not to her egoism. So it creates a 'sanctuary'[42] where she can find refuge from the alluring influence of Stephen which she needs to resist.

But Maggie does yield to her passion; with her new passiveness gained from religion, she allows herself to float away with Stephen. When she finally remembers herself, she returns home to St. Ogg's without Stephen. She was not welcomed with open arms. Public opinion would have judged Maggie more kindly if she had actually married Stephen and come back a rich wife. Dr. Kenn, who becomes her confessor, feels she has been judged too harshly, and reproves his congregation:

> The Church ought to represent the feeling of the community, so that every parish should be a family knit together by Christian brotherhood under a spiritual father. But the ideas of discipline and Christian fraternity are entirely relaxed – they can hardly be said to exist in the public mind … if I were not supported by the firm faith that the Church must ultimately recover the full force of that constitution which is alone fitted to human needs, I should often lose heart at observing the

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 131.
[42] *The Mill on the Floss*, p. 500.

> want of fellowship and sense of mutual responsibility among my own flock. At present everything seems tending towards the relaxation of ties.[43]

Dr. Kenn's conception of the Church is a humanist one. He substantiates Maggie's best feelings, whose 'heart has given [her] true light on this point'.[44] The Church has failed to realize the original Christian vision of a true fellowship in which members exercised mutual responsibility and forgiveness toward each other. The society of St. Ogg's is condemned for its vicious gossip and inability to forgive. It needs to learn from Bob Jakin, who at one point says: 'I shouldn't like to punish anyone, even if they'd done me wrong; I've done wrong myself too often.'[45] In other words, the town needs to learn what Eliot reinforced in her religious humanism – that the only way to revitalize Christianity is to put the focus on human beings, not on God or an afterlife. We should not try to save our own souls, but the souls of others.

Maggie faced one final test. Heavy rains came. As it beat against her window one midnight, she was reading a letter from Stephen in which he requested her to let him return to her. As she prays to God for guidance, alternately accepting Stephen's letters of proposal and recoiling against her impulse to do so, the fatal flood rises above her knees. She manages to get into a boat with the resolve to find the Mill and rescue Tom and her mother. Tom, stranded in the attic, is amazed to see her. Maggie and Tom go out together into the current to rescue Lucy and the others, but huge floating masses bear down on them, their boat capsizes, and they are drowned in 'an embrace never to be parted'.[46]

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[43] *Ibid*., p. 435.
[44] *Ibid*., p. 435.
[45] *Ibid*., p. 430.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 542.

Water, for Feuerbach, is the sacrament which symbolically asserts man's dependence on nature; the flood is an act of nature, of natural rhythms and forces, not of an angry, vengeful God. Curiously, Feuerbach states that in water 'the scales fall from [man's] eyes: he sees and thinks more clearly', and at the same time 'human mental activity is nullified'.[47] Both these effects of water operate in the novel. With Stephen, Maggie falls into oblivion as she floats downstream; by contrast, with Tom the scales fall from her eyes as she reflects: 'What quarrel, what harshness, what unbelief in each other can subsist in the presence of a great calamity, when all the artificial vesture of our life is gone, and we are all one with each other in primitive mortal needs.'[48] Here, appropriately, Maggie not only 'sees' and thinks more clearly, but she is forced to these reflections by the power of Nature over the merely 'artificial'. In the death that follows, consciousness is nullified, but only after, by symbolically crying 'Maggie', Tom avers the love which dominated in the natural state of childhood. Feuerbach regards water as having not merely physical, but also moral and intellectual effects. Among the virtues of water, he cites purification of body and mind, mental clarity and discipline, a feeling of freedom and, most significantly in relation to this novel, the extinguishing of 'the fire of appetite'.[49] He says: 'The bath is a sort of chemical process, in which our individuality is resolved into the objective life of Nature. The man rising from the water is a new, a regenerate man … Water is the simplest means of healing for the maladies of the soul as well as of the body.'[50] The deaths are purification for both Maggie and Tom. They did not survive the flood, but found reconciliation. Tom, for his part, had redeemed the Mill and honoured the memory of his father. Maggie, on the other hand, through

[47]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 226.
[48]*The Mill on the Floss*, p. 539.
[49]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 52.
[50]*Ibid*., p. 226.

her courage and resolve, became in the end someone like the Virgin, who was seen on the waters during storm and flood, shedding light so that others might be safe.

The Mill on the Floss reminds us of the fragility of the human existence in the world, and of the fact that good and innocent people sometimes suffer indiscriminate harm. The novel is subtle in terms of Eliot's religious humanism – we learn from Maggie's mistake, rather than by a positive example of how people can rescue each other. Eliot writes some of her most scathing criticism about the Church, urging a change from lackadaisical, selfish worship, to a humanist conception of fellow-feeling. Maggie is exemplifying Feuerbach's 'suffering of love', for Feuerbach saw the Christian passion as expressing the nature of the heart, and the essence of Christianity, purified from theological dogmas and contradictions, as springing '… out of the heart, out of the inward impulse to do good, to live and die for man, out of the divine instinct of benevolence which desires to make all happy, and excludes none'.[51] Feuerbach not only affirms that to suffer is the highest command of Christianity, but also that redemption is the result of that suffering. Maggie has undergone temptation; she has been judged and surely, in a sense, crucified by the 'world's wife' [52] and by her own kin. Yet she held on to the clue of life and in the end was faithful to those whom she loved the best.

Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe is a culmination of many of Eliot's influences. In the words of Rosemary Ashton, 'Feuerbachian community spirit, Wordsworthian restoration of joy through a child and through closeness to nature, and the equally Wordworthian notion of gain

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 226.
[52] *Ibid.*, p. 476.

and loss (Eppie for gold), work unobstrusively through the story'.[53] Feuerbach's principles of nature are coexistence and coordination, as opposed to the categories of succession and subordination of the critical philosophies of history. For Feuerbach, nature relates to the connection of all individuals in a harmonious, reciprocal interaction where all is relative, all are at the same time both cause and effect. Confidence in nature and the belief that power of transformation resides in it are the basis of the process of change. In *Silas Marner* there is a return to nature in accordance with these principles.

The main action of the novel is set in the Midlands village of Raveloe. Silas Marner, an obscure, self-employed weaver, lives a lonely embittered existence on the outskirts of the village. He had arrived there fifteen years before the main story takes off, having been denounced by the Calvinist community of Lantern Yard, in the north of England, following a false accusation of theft made against him by his best friend William Dane. The latter subsequently married Silas' fiancée.

The first few pages of retrospective account represent George Eliot's fictional attack upon the kind of religion she disapproved of. Thus, David Carroll comments:

> For George Eliot, and Feuerbach, the only valid religion is that which celebrates the best qualities of the human species. The more fanatical and otherworldly the sect, the more readily is this essential human core of religion jettisioned, and the more intolerant and dangerous the resultant creed.[54]

[53]Rosemary Ashton, *George Eliot: A Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996), p. 250.
[54]David Carroll, 'Reversing the Oracles of Religion', in *Literary Monographs*, vol. I, ed. E. Rothstein and T. K. Dunseath (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p. 189.

In Lantern Yard, Silas is shown to be a young man of 'exemplary life and ardent faith',[55] and accepted as a normal member of the sect until the time when, during a prayer meeting, he experiences his first cataleptic fit. The reaction of the 'narrow religious sect' is to reject immediately any natural explanation: 'To have sought a medical explanation for this phenomenon would have been held by Silas himself, as well as by his minister as well as fellow members, a willful self-exclusion from the spiritual significance that might lie therein.'[56] Lantern Yard virtually denies the need of a solitary individual to reconcile with an ordered yet alien universe and seeks refuge in the miraculous and otherworldly. Such blind acceptance of the miraculous, the constant search for supernatural justification behind these false miracles in Lantern Yard, seem to be the obvious parallel to Feuerbach's 'contradistinction' between man and his own nature:

> Religion is the relation of man to his own nature, – therein lies its truth and its power of moral amelioration; – but to his nature, separate, nay, contradistinguished from his own; herein lies its untruth, its limitation, its contradiction to reason and morality; herein lies the noxious source of religious fanaticism, the chief metaphysical principle of human sacrifices, in a word, the *prima materia* of all the atrocities, all the horrible scenes, in the tragedy of religious history.[57]

Though Feuerbach identifies miracle as 'an essential object of Christianity, an essential article of faith',[58] he admits that when faced with reason, miracle is absurd and inconceivable. He further explains that:

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[55]George Eliot, *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe* (London, Penguin Books, 1996), p. 9. All subsequent citations are to this edition.
[56]*Ibid*., pp. 9-10.
[57]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 163.
[58]*Ibid*., p. 107.

> If the explanation of miracles by feeling and imagination is superficial, the charge of superficiality falls not on the explainer, but on that which he explains, namely, on miracle; for, seen in clear daylight, miracle presents absolutely nothing else than the sorcery of the imagination, which satisfies without contradiction all the wishes of the heart.[59]

Feuerbach exhorts the reader:

> … exchange your mystical, perverted anthropology, which you call theology, for real anthropology … Admit that your personal God is nothing else than your personal nature, that while you believe in and construct your supra-and extra-natural God, you believe in and construct nothing else than the supra-and extra-naturalism of your own self.[60]

For George Eliot, life consists of coming to terms with the unavoidable realities of law, necessity and Nature. She feels that belief in the supernatural is a crystallization of the natural, human response to life and to one's fellows. However, in the events, which lead up to Silas' excommunication, she shows how this persistent belief in the miraculous can really destroy human fellowship and community. She also advocates the need to remove the myths, the superstitions and the miracles if one wants to get to the essential core of humanity. Feuerbach describes the process in the following words:

> … that which in religion is the predicate we must make the subject, and that which in religion is a subject we must make a predicate, thus inverting the oracles of religion; and by this means we arrive at the truth. God suffers – suffering is the predicate – but for men, for others, not for himself. What does that mean in plain

[59] *Ibid*., p. 112.
[60] *Ibid*., p. 90.

> speech? Nothing else than this: to suffer for others is divine; he who suffers for others, who lays down his life for them, acts divinely, is a God to men.[61]

William Dane, jealous of Silas' betrothal to a young serving-woman, takes advantage of his next catalepsy to frame him in a theft. The sect tries the case in its usual way by 'praying and drawing lots'.[62] Silas submits to the test in perfect faith, 'relying on his own innocence being certified by immediate divine interference'.[63] When the lots declare him guilty, he loses both his religion and faith in God: 'There is no just God that governs the earth righteously, but a God of lies, that bears witness against the innocent.'[64] As David Carroll aptly comments:

> Silas lost his faith in the God of Lantern Yard because it was inadequate as a means of encountering a complex world. The rejection of the rational and the belief in the miraculous were expressions of the beleaguered community's inability to face up to this complexity.[65]

Silas moves to Raveloe where in complete solitude he can weave at his loom, hoard his earnings and forget his past. This is the phase in which natural affection almost withers away, though he still feels for the earthernware pot which has been his companion for twelve years. Silas' daily ritual of fetching water from the well indicates that he still retains an essential humanity in his appreciation of nature's bounty. Feuerbach demythologizes the Sacraments and affirms that the essential meaning of baptism lay in the water itself: 'Water, as a universal element of life, reminds us of our origin from Nature, an origin which we have in common with plants and animals. In Baptism we bow to the power of a pure Nature-force; water is the element

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[61]*Ibid.,* p. 51.
[62]*Silas Marner,* p.13.
[63]*Ibid.,* p. 13.
[64]*Ibid.,* p.14.
[65]David Carroll, 'Reversing the Oracles of Religion', p. 170.

of natural equality and freedom, the mirror of the golden age.'[66] After accidentally breaking the pot, he stuck the bits together and kept the ruin in its old place for a memorial.

Inside his isolated cottage, Silas hides from his neighbours and under his floor in a hole he hides his growing hoard of gold. His only gestures of affectionate response are made toward this gold, the product of his own automatic activity. The weaving and gold offer a sharp contrast to the purposeful existence advocated by Feuerbach:

> Not mere will as such, not vague knowledge, – only activity with a purpose, which is the union of theoretic and practical activity, gives man a moral basis and support, i.e., character … The aim is the conscious, voluntary, essential impulse of life, the glance of genius, the focus of self-knowledge – the unity of the material and spiritual in the individual man.[67]

But, for Silas, his solitary work recompensed in gold provides a limited purpose to his existence and gives him a sense of rewarded effort. It first becomes an absorbing passion, and then eventually a habit.

Raveloe is quite different from Lantern Yard. All religious rites are vague; the people don't have a strong grasp over doctrine, but are not bothered by it. The people are more Christian in deed than the fundamentalists of Lantern Yard, as a critic perceptively points out:

> Unlike in George Eliot's previous works, in which moral wisdom tends to be associated with characters – whether clergy of the Established Church, Dissenting ministers or Methodist preachers – whose essentially humanist morality coincides with active and honest, though not always particularly spiritual, Christian commitment, in *Silas Marner* ethical authority resides primarily with ordinary lay

[66]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 227.
[67]*Ibid*., p. 55.

> people whose allegiance to a particular church or creed matters far less than their sense of empathy, compassion and generosity to their neighbours.[68]

In Lantern Yard, Silas' life seemed to be dictated by the Church, which had far-reaching authority. For example, His fiancée, Sarah, was reluctant to break off the engagement after Silas' first fit (which William Dane interpreted to the community as a Satanic visitation), since it had been recognized by the church, and 'could not be broken off without strict investigation'.[69] They could not see true moral action through their dogma and failed to exhibit Christian mercy when it was most needed. By contrast, Raveloe is more spiritually relaxed. Its inhabitants 'were not severely regular in their church-going'.[70] The church is flawed in Raveloe, too, but the people's life extends beyond religion they are relatively unscathed. They take it for granted that the clergy are imperfect and do not pay much heed to it:

> For it would not have been possible for the Raveloe mind, without a peculiar revelation, to know that a clergyman should be a pale-faced memento of solemnities, instead of a reasonably faulty man, whose exclusive authority to read prayers and preach, to christen, marry, and bury you, necessarily co-existed with the right to sell you the ground to be buried in, and to take tithe in kind.[71]

When Silas' hard-earned and scrupulously saved money is stolen, he is struck by the compassion of the town. Though initially wary of the weaver, the community is ready with sympathy for Silas when he is robbed. In his encounter with the villagers sitting in the local pub, he recognizes the goodness that is disguised by their blunt and uncomplimentary language. And when Mr. Macey tells him not to accuse the innocent, he is reminded of his own past bitterness. He apologises to Jim Rodney for having accused him of stealing his hoarded treasure. The fact

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[68]Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *George Eliot* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), p. 97.
[69]*Silas Marner*, p. 10.
[70]*Ibid.*, p. 77.
[71]*Ibid.*, p. 100.

that his misfortune brings him closer to his fellowmen, illustrates Feuerbach's point that man needs other men to gain a sense of his own identity: 'Man cannot get beyond his true nature. He may indeed by means of the imagination conceive individuals of another so-called higher kind, but he can never get loose from his species, his nature.'[72] The gold is not recovered, but Silas gains something more valuable – human fellowship. The narrator observes:

> Formerly, his heart had been a locked casket with its treasure inside; but now the casket was empty, and the lock was utterly broken. Left groping in darkness, with his prop utterly gone, Silas had inevitably a sense, though a dull and half-despairing one; that if any help came to him it must come from without; and there was a slight stirring of expectation at the sight of his fellow-men, a faint consciousness of dependence on their goodwill. He opened the door wide to admit Dolly.[73]

It is through Dolly Winthrop that George Eliot demonstrates the novel's fundamental message of human solidarity. As regards doctrine, Dolly Winthrop's Christianity is simple to the point of ignorance, but her sense of right and wrong never falters. Being an illiterate peasant, she neither understands the significance of the letters 'IHS' which she puts on her lard cakes nor could she appreciate the theological inappropriateness of that practice. But her kindness in sharing her cakes with Silas makes her transcend the limitations of theology and play a significant role in the process of Silas' moral regeneration. Her vague remark 'there's breaking o' limbs'[74] expresses her recognition of the existence of human suffering and evil in the world,

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[72]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, pp. 9-10.
[73]*Silas Marner*, p. 81.
[74]*Ibid.*, p. 145.

and of 'suffering humanity's need for love in a mysterious universe'.[75] As David Carroll points out:

> We see that her trust in this tenderhearted God is simply an index of her own tenderhearted affection for other human beings. In other words, Dolly's trust in a loving but mysterious God who rules an ordered universe must be demythologized into the statement that, in an ordered cosmos which we don't fully understand, the love and trust of others is an essential act of faith.[76]

In explaining the significance of the Creation in Judaism, Feuerbach maintains that:

> Egoism is essentially monotheistic, for it has only one, only self, as its end. Egoism strengthens cohesion, concentrates man on himself, gives him a consistent principle of life; but it makes him theoretically narrow, because indifferent to all which does not relate to the well-being of self. Hence science, like art, arises only out of polytheism, for polytheism is the frank, open, unenvying sense of all that is beautiful and good without distinction, the sense of the world, of the universe.[77]

William Myers, who regards Dolly as slightly ridiculous, comments that her very ignorance 'enables her to be, in Feuerbachian terms, an instinctive polytheist – unlike the miracle-mongering fanatics of Lantern Yard'. The fact that she always refers to God in the plural 'is technically a specific sign of a religious constitution wholly free from religious egoism'.[78]

Eppie initiates the great beginning of Silas' final stage of regeneration. After her mother dies in the snow, the two-year old baby with her golden hair makes her way to Silas' door to warm herself by the fire. To Silas' 'blurred vision, it seemed as if there were gold on the floor in

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[75]*Ibid.*, p. 150.
[76]David Carroll, 'Reversing the Oracles of Religion', p. 165.
[77]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, pp. 95-96.
[78] William Myers, 'George Eliot: Politics and Personality', in *Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Lucas (London: Metheun, 1971), p. 105.

front of the hearth. Gold! – his own gold – brought back to him as mysteriously as it had been taken away!'[79] The symbolism is obvious – 'the gold had turned into the child'.[80] And this is true; Silas no longer needs gold to fill his life. The 'little child had come to link him once more with the whole world'.[81] Silas immediately attends to the child, 'almost unconsciously uttering sounds of hushing tenderness'.[82] He welcomes the child into his life, adopting her as his own. He focuses his energy on tending to her needs, becoming refilled with emotion. It is not God, but a child that revives Silas. Human action is more effective than relying on an unseen, spiritual force. Silas shifts his values from money to mankind. We see religion cast off and humanism adopted as the cure for despair. George Eliot's depiction of such a progress in terms of the adoption of duty is a confirmation of her belief in Feuerbach's assertion that '… when the individual is not strengthened by love then the combination of life's elements can only appear to him fortuitous; but when strengthened by love, he makes out of them a pattern, a meaning'.[83]

Feuerbach enters, too, into Eppie's natural love for the mother she does not remember. It is expressed in her wish to take into the garden the furze bush against which Molly died, bringing her mother in a mythical sense into her home. Snowdrops and crocuses will be planted underneath, which will not die out but increase, conferring a kind of immortality on Molly. Appropriately, when Eppie is married, it is with her mother's wedding ring. We can understand why this tribute to her dead mother is necessary to Eppie's happiness if we recall Feuerbach's view that the highest and deepest love is the mother's love. In associating the Mother of God with the idea of the Son of God, he elaborates:

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[79] *Silas Marner,* p. 108.
[80] *Ibid.*, p. 120.
[81] *Ibid.*, p. 129.
[82] *Ibid.*, p. 110.
[83] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 271.

> Where the Son is, the Mother cannot be absent; The son is the only-begotten of the Father, but the Mother is the concomitant of the Son … to the Son the Mother is indispensable; the heart of the Son is the heart of the Mother … the Mother is never out of the mind and heart of the Son.[84]

As Elizabeth Deeds Ermath has observed: 'The central characters in *Silas Marner* are linked not by blood ties or legal ties, as they are in the first two novels, but by accidents of neighbourhood.'[85] Godfrey Cass is the central character in the Cass-Lammeter sub-plot of the novel and the counterpart of Silas Marner in the overall structural pattern of the story. He is strong, energetic and good-hearted, but also indisciplined and indecisive, guided mostly by impulse rather than by informed purposefulness and self-control. His faith that things will turn out right for him is based on his own selfish desires, rather than the universal love of the species which is present in Silas. As Feuerbach notes, 'faith is essentially a spirit of partisanship … it is preoccupied only with itself'.[86] Godfrey's trust in Chance, the 'God of all men who follow their own devices',[87] to save him from unpleasant consequences, seems equivalent to the drawing of lots at Lantern Yard, calling to mind Feuerbach's exhortation about religion as a lottery:

> Religion denies, repudiates chance, making everything dependent on God … but this denial is only apparent; it merely gives chance the name of divine sovereignty ... out of divine caprice, as it were, determines or predestines some to evil and misery, others to happiness.[88]

Eppie is born of Godfrey's secret marriage to a barmaid Molly Farren, who is addicted to opium. The barrenness of his second marriage to Nancy Lammeter particularly embitters him because he has refused to acknowledge his own child. Silas adopts Eppie, unknowingly replacing

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[84]*Ibid*., p. 61.
[85]Ermarth, *George Eliot*, p. 131.
[86]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 255.
[87]*Silas Marner*, p. 135.
[88]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 188.

Godfrey as the father of the apparently orphaned infant. The plot concerns the nature and consequences of the eventual revelation of the secret after sixteen years:

> Their lives are strangely intertwined, and the prodigality and sin of the one are craving and spiritual need of the other. Godfrey's unacknowledged child becomes Silas Marner's link with society and the means of his salvation; eventually she reconciles both men, in their distinct ways, to the significance of their past lives.[89]

At the climax of the novel, when Silas and Godfrey come face to face in the presence of Eppie, Eliot demonstrates how Godfrey's assumptions based on the 'natural' law of biological paternity are defeated by Silas' appeals to a 'moral' law that transcends it. Silas counters Godfrey's appeal, by saying: 'Your coming now and saying "I'm her father" doesn't alter the feeling inside us. It's me she's been calling her father ever since she could say the word.' [90] Eppie's feelings likewise vibrate to every word Silas speaks, and she rejects Godfrey's offer:

> We've been used to be happy together everyday, and I can't think o' no happiness without him. And he says he'd nobody i' the world till I was sent to him, and he'd have nothing when I was gone. And he's took care of me and loved me from the first, and I'll cleave to him as long as he lives, and nobody shall ever come between him and me ... I can't feel as I've got any father but one. [91]

Feuerbach sees moral perfection as man's own need to act according to his own conscience. The conception of duty in *Silas* Marner is Feuerbachian, as it is based on both conscience and an unselfish love for a worthy object. Those characters who do not follow the path of duty will suffer the consequences. Silas rejects his fellowmen and is solitary for fifteen years; Godfrey leaves his own child unclaimed and is childless for fifteen years. Both the men face bitterness

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[89]Henry Auster, 'A Qualified Redemption of Ordinary and Fallible Humanity,' in *Local Habitations: Regionalism in the Early Novels of George Eliot* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 227.
[90]*Silas Marner*, p. 170.
[91]*Ibid*., pp. 172-173.

and despair, yet Silas 'recovers completely from his transgression and is suitably rewarded because his affection has preserved him, whereas Godfrey's lapse is more criminal and his punishment more severe'.[92] Through a foundling child, Silas is emotionally healed and firmly linked with the village community. He moves from a state of alienation to one of integration, from loss of faith to trust and hope in the future and a sense of purpose, from passivity to activity, from misery to happiness.

Bernard J. Paris enumerates the three stages of moral development which Eliot's characters undergo in the process of maturation:

> The inevitable awakening to the disparity between the inward and the outward is frequently a source of moral growth; it makes clear to the individual the real relation of things and is the baptism of sorrow which renders him capable of true sympathy and fellowship. It makes him a sharer in the common lot; and, if it does not drive him back into illusion or into an embittered, defensive egoism, it nurtures in him the vision and sympathy necessary for the highest human fellowship. In the third stage of moral development, the individual's painful sense of the world's independent, alien existence is moderated by his vision of his connection with his fellow men and by his awareness of other human beings as subjective objects. He is moved, often, by an identification with and enthusiasm for groups and ends which transcend his individual existence; and his life-purpose becomes not primarily the pursuit of personal gratification but the achievement of genuine significance through living for others.[93]

For both George Eliot and Feuerbach, a sense of religious orientation in the cosmos arises from the individual's feeling of solidarity with his fellowmen. Man needs to respond to his consciousness for a humanized world. Society and other individuals who are endowed with

[92]David Carroll, 'Reversing the Oracles of Religion', p. 199.
[93]Bernard J. Paris, 'George Eliot's Religion of Humanity', p. 28.

consciousness are the chief humanizing agencies that mediate between our consciousness and the completely alien, unconscious world of physical nature. Feuerbach contends that consciousness of the world is consciousness of the limitations of our own ego, and that we cannot pass directly from our initial egoistic state to an awareness of the world without

> introducing, preluding, and moderating … this contradiction by the consciousness of a being who is indeed another, and in so far gives me the perception of my limitation, but in such a way as at the same time to affirm my own nature, make my nature objective to me. The consciousness of the world is a humiliating consciousness; … the first stone against which the pride of egoism stumbles is the *thou*, the *alter ego*. The ego first steels its glance in the eye of a *thou* before it endures the contemplation of a being which does not reflect its own image … I reconcile myself with the world only through my fellow-man. Without other men, the world would be for me not only dead and empty, but meaningless. Only through his fellow does man become clear to himself and self-conscious.[94]

Silas never turns back to God, but his faith in humanity is restored. He tells Dolly Winthorp, 'There's good in this world – I've a feeling o' that now; and it makes a man feel as there's a good more nor he can see, i' spite o' the trouble and wickedness. That drawing o' lots is dark; but the child was sent to me.'[95] Instead of the Deity coming forth to justify his afflicted creature and teach him better, a little child proves to the world the good qualities of his heart. It may seem unnecessary that the author should send Silas back to the scenes of his early life, but without this incident, the reader would remain in doubt whether his later faith was stronger than his old doubts. 'The old place is all swep' away', Silas said to Dolly Winthrop on the night of his return from the seat of his unwarranted tragedy: 'the little graveyard and everything. The old home's

[94]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 70.
[95]*Silas Marner*, p. 145.

gone; I've no home but this now'.[96] For all the earnestness of their belief, the community of Lantern Yard cannot survive the replacement of the humanizing influence on Silas by the self-serving hypocrisy of William Dane. The ways of God remained dark to him, but out of the darkness had reached out the guiding hand of a little child, and we hear the last words of Silas Marner before he passes into the silence of a happy life: 'Since the time the child was sent to me and I've come to love her as myself, I've had light enough to trusten by; and now she says she'll never leave me, I think I shall trusten till I die.'[97] Though men are no longer saved from destruction by angels, 'a hand is put into theirs, which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and the hand may be a little child's'. [98] Thus, George Eliot's humanitarian religion re-affirms the Feuerbachian idea that is based on the irreducible factor of love being at the centre of any valid mythology of life:

> The highest idea, the God of a political community, of a people whose political system expresses itself in the form of religion, is Law, the consciousness of the law as an absolute divine power; the highest idea, the God of unpolitical, unworldly feeling is Love.[99]

George Eliot re-establishes the value of religion at the end of the story, but, as David Carroll insists, 'it is a religion which has been carefully revalued and established as an exaltation of the human'.[100]

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[96]*Ibid*., p. 179.
[97]*Ibid*., p. 180.
[98]*Ibid*., p. 131.
[99]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 101.
[100]David Carroll, 'Reversing the Oracles of Religion', p. 184.

CHAPTER 3

A Middle Ground: *Romola* and *Felix Holt*

On a casual reading, *Romola*, following Eliot's most autobiographical novel, *The Mill on the Floss*, seems to reflect Eliot's personal life less than any other of her works. She has abandoned the English Midlands of her own childhood and youth for the life of Florence in fifteenth-century Italy. *The Mill on the Floss* is largely concerned with Eliot's evocation of her past experience. Mary Ann Evans' relationship with her brother Issac is far more sharply parallel to Maggie's relationship with Tom than is Romola's relation to Dino (or Fra Luca). Nevertheless, the sense of separation of sister from brother, through divisions in faith and in loyalties, is still a preoccupation with Eliot in her historical novel.

The climate in Florence in the fifteenth-century illustrated many Victorian issues. R. H. Hutton in the *Spectator* (July 18, 1863) underlines the great artistic purpose of the novel, which is:

> To trace out the conflict between liberal culture and the more passionate form of the Christian faith in that strange era, which has so many points of resemblance with the present, when the two in their most characteristic forms struggled for pre-eminence over Florentines who had been educated into the half-pedantic and half-idealistic scholarship of Lorenzo de Medici, who faintly shared the new scientific impulses of the age of Columbus and Copernicus, and whose hearts and consciences were stirred by the preaching, political as well as spiritual, of one of the very greatest as well as earliest of the reformers – the Dominican friar Savonarola. No period could be found when mingling faith and culture effervesced with more curious result … We find here the strife between the keen definite knowledge of the reviving Greek learning, and the turbid visionary mysticism of the reviving Dominican piety. We find a younger generation,

> represented by Romola, and Dino, and Tito, that has inherited this scholarship, and finds it wholly inadequate for its wants, looking upon that almost as dry bones which the older generation felt to be stimulating nourishment, – and either turning from it, like Dino, to the rapture of mystical asceticism, or using it, like Tito, as a useful sharp-edged tool in the battle of Florentine politics, or trying, like Romola, to turn it to its true purpose, viz., that of clarifying and sifting the false from the true elements in the great mysterious faith presented to her conscience by Savonarola.[1]

Fifteenth-century Florence exhibited the same tension between science and faith as the Victorian era. The characters of *Romola* must navigate these new waters which test their faith in crisis and push them towards enlightenment. We can equate the 'reviving Dominican piety' with the Evangelical revival, which ironically instigated further religious doubt, and the scientific impulses of the Victorian age move beyond Copernicus, to Darwin. Romola must combine the two elements to achieve a strong and sure faith.

Several critics have hinted at Positivistic influences in *Romola*. J. B. Bullen points out that 'What Comte called "continuity" – the relations between past and present generations – and "solidarity" – the mutual interdependence of social groups based on the family life – all these play an important part in *Romola*'.[2] Leslie Stephen suggested that Romola's sentiments show that she had been prematurely impressed by the Positivistic 'Religion of Humanity'. U. C. Knoepflmacher noted that towards the end of the novel, Romola 'bears some parallels to the emblematic banner of the Positivists'.[3] Jerome Thale mentions George Eliot's interest in 'spiritual evolution' and speaks of 'Romola's passage from humanism to Christianity to secular

[1]In David Carroll, *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1971), pp. 200-201.
[2]J. B. Bullen, 'George Eliot's *Romola* as a Positivist Allegory', in *George Eliot*: *Critical Assessments*, Vol. III, ed. Stuart Hutchinson (East Sussex: Helm Information Ltd., 1996), p. 237.
[3]U. C. Knoepflmacher, *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel: George Eliot, Walter Pater, and Samuel Butler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 40.

altruism'.[4] William Myers suggested that *Romola* makes a perceptive attempt 'to envisage the historical destiny of the human personality in Positivistic terms'.[5] Comte had argued that: 'It is from the feminine aspect only that human life, whether individually or collectively considered, can really be comprehended as a whole' since woman is 'the purest and simplest impersonation of Humanity'.[6] His emphasis that only woman could symbolically represent the soul of man extends even to his *The Catechism of the Positive Religion*, where he writes: 'Never will art be able worthily to embody Humanity except in the form of woman.'[7] In the same book, he also establishes that: 'In all cases the growth of the individual must, in all essential features, be a reproduction of the growth of the race.'[8] This is what Romola's growth represents. She first faces the primitive 'polytheistic', undeveloped stage of man's moral nature, characterized by the stoicism of her father Bardo d' Bardi and the epicureanism of her husband Tito Melema. Then the 'monotheistic' stage in her life is marked by the monasticism of her brother Dino and a fallible spiritual guide Savonarola, who stands for narrow political opportunism. Romola finally emerges from her experiences as the embodiment of an enlightened life, passing from disillusionment, through false guides, to a positive human faith based on self-reliance and the need to work for human betterment.

Comte saw true happiness to be 'the result of a worthy submission, the only sure basis of a large and noble activity'.[9] For Feuerbach, man's ultimate felicity derives from self-development. Thus, Comte's notion of unquestioning submission, which will lead to altruism but

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[4]Jerome Thale, *The Novels of George Eliot* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 79.
[5]William Myers, 'George Eliot: Politics and Personality', in *Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Lucas (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 119.
[6]Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, freely translated and condensed by Harriet Martineau, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), vol. II, p. 234.
[7]Auguste Comte, *The Catechism of Positive Religion*, trans. Richard Congreve (London: John Chapman, 1858), p. 119.
[8]*Ibid*., p. 286.
[9]*Ibid*., p. 216.

also conflict with Romola's improved understanding and true development, is supported but also questioned in *Romola*. Although both the philosophers exalt the mother, Feuerbach focuses on the essential quality of love, rather than of women being the object of men's worship as proclaimed by Comte. While acknowledging sexual difference, Feuerbach's emphasis on essential humanity is relevant to Eliot's wider purpose that encompasses mankind as a whole and not merely a subordinating sexism.

Feuerbach insisted on atheism yet retained the fundamental Christian truths. Comte believed in scientific secularism, yet advocated a new 'Religion of Humanity' based on the veneration of a 'Great Being',[10] that was ritualized to the extent that it almost constituted a new religion. Still, I feel that Feuerbach's dual rejection and adoption of Christianity was more suitable to Eliot's line of thought towards the need to 'rise into religion'[11] than to rise above religion. Harriet Martineau in the Preface to her translation and abridgment of *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, a volume which Eliot read, speaks of 'those who have passed through theology and metaphysics, and, finding what they are now worth, have risen above them'.[12] While epitomizing Comte's tripartite view of evolution, Eliot's first secular heroine will finally enlarge her life by rising above religion, but she first needs to imbibe the moral truths inherent in religion, as postulated by Feuerbach.

No figure is more curiously and continuously implicated in Romola's history than the artist Piero, who forecasts her destiny in his first sketch. Henry Alley views Piero as the novel's 'consistently best example of the broad humanity, freed from conventional religion, which is

[10]Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism,* p. 349
[11]George Eliot, *Romola* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 501. All subsequent citations are to this edition.
[12]Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, vol. I, p. 10.

embodied in the narrator herself'.[13] Hugh Witemeyer has noted Eliot's description of characters and scenes as if they were visual compositions. He also describes how Hawthorne taught Eliot to use ecphrasis, or the verbal imitation of works of visual art, as a technique of psychological revelation and prophecy. Feuerbach, too, presents a didactic and affective rationale for literary symbolism when he states that: 'Man, as an emotional and sensuous being, is governed and made happy only by images, by sensible representations. Mind presenting itself as at once type-creating, emotional, and sensuous, is the imagination.'[14] Eliot uses Piero's pictorial symbolism to express 'that force of outward symbols by which our active life is knit together so as to make an inexorable external identity for us'.[15]

The sketch by Piero in Nello's barber shop is of three masks:

> … one a drunken laughing Satyr, another a sorrowing Magdalen, and the third, which lay between them, the rigid, cold face of the Stoic: the masks rested obliquely on the lap of a little child, whose cherub features rose above them with something of the supernal promise in the gaze which painters had by that time learned to give to the Divine Infant.[16]

Tito, seeing Piero's sketch, immediately calls it a 'symbolical picture', and offers two possible interpretations. The child, he says, may represent the Golden Age, or the child may represent the philosophy of 'Epicurus, removed alike from the gross, the sad, and the severe'.[17] On the other hand, a number of critics have seen images in Piero's sketch which they think are fundamental to the novel as a whole. Henry Alley, for example, who claims omniscience for Piero di Cosimo,

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[13]Henry Alley, *The Quest for Anonymity: The Novels of George Eliot* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997), p. 91.
[14]Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Dover Publications, 2008), pp. 63-64. All subsequent citations are to this edition.
[15]*Romola*, p. 319.
[16]*Ibid*., p. 34.
[17]*Ibid*., p. 34.

says: 'So too must Romola, in reaching the novel's conclusion, pick and choose among the qualities of Bardo, Savonarola, and Tito in order to form her triptych of the completed human psyche …. '[18] Felicia Bonaparte offers her own interpretation of the masks:

> The first mask, since the satyr is a Bacchic figure, suggests Tito. The second, in Piero's sequence, seems to allude to Bardo, who is a Stoic. The third is a more difficult and complex symbol. Certainly it must be seen primarily as a general representation of the Christian vision to which Romola will be converted by Savonarola.[19]

Mary Wilson Carpenter offers yet a different interpretation:

> The first mask represents not only hedonism and pleasure-giving but drunkenness and sensuality – an aspect of the Bacchic myth manifested at the first Carnival … The second mask [suggests] a narrow, Christian Puritanism … Lastly, the third mask [stands for] a love of martyrdom, thus pointing to the third Carnival and Savonarola's bid for martyrdom or a miracle.[20]

Witemeyer reads the masks from left to right as 'a progression from an animalistic paganism that takes pleasure in this world, to a philosophical stoicism that endures this world, to a metaphysical sorrow that yearns to transcend this world'.[21] William Sullivan interprets the sketch as representing stages of human development leading beyond Christianity to a higher plane of existence that can be reached by 'living through all our pain with conscious clear-eyed endurance'.[22] Whether we interpret the Magdalen as Savonarola or Romola, or as descriptive of a philosophy, I find the figures suggestive of stages in Romola's life which proceed through three

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[18]Henry Alley, *The Quest for Anonymity: The Novels of George Eliot*, p. 95.
[19]Felicia Bonaparte, *The Triptych and the Cross: The Central Myths of George Eliot's Poetic Imagination* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), p. 36.
[20]Mary Wilson Carpenter, *George Eliot and the Landscape of Time: Narrative Form and Protestant Apocalyptic History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p. 79.
[21]Hugh Witemeyer, *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 198.
[22]*The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-55), vol. III, p. 366.

phases – stoicism, pagan pleasure and Feuerbachian suffering. She is purged of her narrow secularity and attains the kind of happiness envisaged by Feuerbach as being the ultimate meaning of religion: 'The beneficial influence of religion rests on the extension of the sensational consciousness. In religion man is in the open air … in the sensational consciousness he is in his narrow confined dwelling-house.'[23]

In *Romola*, the scholar, who pursues dead data backward and is portrayed in vivid contrast to a young girl filled with an urgent need to escape the prison of his library, is not only old but also blind. Bardo feels himself to be surrounded by rivals on whom Fame smiles with unjust partiality. He is not simply a scholar pursuing great works for enriching humanity. He desires fame for himself, if not for his scattered work then for his collection of 'the precious remains of ancient art and wisdom'.[24] His pride rankles under the knowledge that posterity will remember Poliziano and Ficino while he, who is 'more than their equal',[25] will be forgotten. 'I too have a right to be remembered',[26] he indignantly protests. Bitter about being denied his rightful pre-eminence for posterity, Bardo is even more bitter about the son whose defection from the liberal pursuits of scholarship for the superstitious fancies of monasticism, has denied the elderly father the collaborator he needs. While he castigates his son for being no better than an 'energumen whose dwelling is among tombs',[27] he admits, ironically, to having lived his own entire life among the 'great dead'.[28] His theoretical acceptance of the maxims of Stoicism fails to silence his own passionate demands for recognition. Nevertheless, he cannot perceive that intellectual pursuits cannot fully satisfy the soul's deepest aspirations.

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[23]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 178.
[24]*Romola*, p. 53.
[25]*Ibid*., p. 53.
[26]*Ibid*., p. 56.
[27]*Ibid*., p. 52.
[28]*Ibid*., p. 51.

On the other hand, oppressed by 'the lifeless objects around her – the parchment backs, the unchanging mutilated marble, the bits of obsolete bronze and clay',[29] Romola regards her father's library with 'sad dreariness'.[30] Viewing the bulky volumes of her husband's notes, Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* is to feel a similar oppression by the lifeless machinery of Casaubon's studies. If, as Will Ladislaw will angrily assert, Dorothea is to be 'shut up in that stone prison at Lowick' to be virtually 'buried alive',[31] Romola is no less entombed with her father in the Bardi household behind the grim doors of a sombre stone building with barred windows, 'aloof from the life of the streets'.[32] She is often 'inwardly very rebellious'[33] at Bardo's monotonous exacting demands and desires more gaiety in her life. Nevertheless, she considers the fulfillment of her father's lifelong ambition, for a library bearing his name, to be a 'sacramental obligation'.[34] For Romola, love elevates duty whereas for Dorothea, disillusionment will only weigh down duty with fetters.

Romola's early inheritance of stoicism through her life and affection for Bardo marks the first, secular stage of her quest in which she endures uncomplainingly and is quite unaware of the world outside her father's books. She lacks knowledge of the world, self-knowledge, and a wider altruism and at this point is what Janet Gezari has called 'a vibrating sensibility',[35] rather than a more realized consciousness. She sees her future, much as Dorothea does, in terms of marriage to some great scholar who will fill for Bardo the place of a son. When Tito Melema, a young Greek scholar, first meets the Bardi, his bright face is described as 'a wreath of spring, dropped

[29]*Ibid.*, p. 52.
[30]*Ibid*., p. 52.
[31]George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 163. All subsequent citations are to this edition.
[32]*Romola*, p. 114.
[33]*Ibid*., p. 243.
[34]*Ibid*., p. 245.
[35]Janet Gezari, 'Romola and the Myth of Apocalypse', in *George Eliot: Centenary Essays and an Unpublished Fragment*, ed. Anne Smith (London: Vision Publishers, 1980), p. 100.

suddenly in Romola's young but wintry life …. '[36] In *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie's meetings with Philip in the Red Deeps had become for her 'an opening in the rocky wall which shut in the narrow valley of humiliation'.[37] Similarly, Will Ladislaw is to extend to Dorothea the promise of a brighter life in her imprisonment at Lowick: ' … the mere chance of seeing Will occasionally was like a lunette opened in the wall of her prison, giving her a glimpse of the sunny air.'[38] Romola looked up to Tito as a deliverer from wearisome labours, who will require no rebellion against the exacting demands of her father. When the young pair have a moment's privacy in a cabinet adjoining the library where they had gone to fetch a manuscript, Romola says to Tito, 'I hope he will not weary you; this work makes him so happy,' and he responds, 'And me too, Romola – if you will only let me say, I love you …. '[39] Romola misinterprets Tito's character and confesses her love for him: 'I do love you … I know *now* what it is to be happy.'[40] This phase of illusory happiness, this prospect of freedom and spontaneous joy, is destined to be short-lived.

Eliot emphasizes Tito's pleasure-loving nature in her earlier chapters. When he is shown Giotto's campanile by Nello the barber, he disdains the subordination of rationalistic humanism to spiritual asceticism with its predilection for 'hideous smoked Madonnas; fleshless saints in mosaic, staring down idiotic astonishment and rebuke from the apse; skin-clad skeletons hanging on crosses, or stuck all over with arrows, or stretched on gridirons; women and monks with head aside in perpetual lamentation'.[41] Later, to Bardo, he disclaims any affection for monkish

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[36]*Romola*, p. 59.
[37]George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 284. All subsequent citations are to this edition.
[38]*Middlemarch*, p. 265.
[39]*Romola*, p. 120.
[40]*Ibid*., p. 121.
[41]*Ibid*., pp. 32-33.

vagaries: ‘ … the renunciation of all that makes life precious to other men’,[42] he asserts, is no more than yoked servitude. His predisposition to pleasure is more a recognized guide for conduct than a mere theoretical inclination. He deals with his negative emotion not by correcting his inner self but by relying on defensive armour, ingenuity and duplicity. With an amoral rationalization, he explains in a utilitarian fashion the claims of his foster-father Baldassarre on him:

> But, after all, *why* was he bound to go? What, looked at closely, was the end of all life, but to extract the utmost sum of pleasure? And was not his own blooming life a promise of incomparably more pleasure, not for himself only, but for others, than the withered wintry life of a man who was past the time of keen enjoyment, and whose ideas had stiffened into barren rigidity? [43]

Tito is aware that society would not approve of his action but he reasons that no wise man would be guided by the sentiment of society, except so far as his own comfort was concerned. Basically, then, it is his own *pleasure* which motivates his decisions.

Tito’s duplicity and pleasure-loving nature can be well understood in relation to Feuerbach’s analysis of the essential difference between man and brute. Feuerbach compares man’s consciousness of the infinite (which is consciousness of his own infinite nature, that of the species) with the narrow consciousness of the caterpillar:

> The consciousness of the caterpillar, whose life is confined to a particular species of plant, does not extend beyond this narrow domain … A consciousness so limited, but on account of that very limitation so infallible, we do not call

[42] *Ibid*., p. 66.
[43] *Ibid*., p. 115.

> consciousness, but instinct. Consciousness, in the strict or proper sense, is identical with consciousness of the infinite.[44]

The brute, according to Feuerbach, is indeed conscious of itself as an individual, but not as a species. On the hand, the inner life of man is related to his species, to his general, as distinguished from his individual, nature. Consciousness, in the strictest sense, is present only in a being to whom his species, his essential nature, is an object of thought. In this respect, Tito resembles the animal which Feuerbach saw as unable by nature to have a religion or higher consciousness.

If Bardo has kept himself aloof from the world through his studies, Dino, or Fra Luca, has withdrawn from it through his religion. For Bardo, the world is no more than a dream, but for Dino it is a throbbing reality. Bardo's studies of the classical writings have made him oblivious to human sin and misery. Dino says that his father has been 'like one busy picking shining stones in a mine, while there was a world dying of plague above him'.[45] For Dino, the maxims of philosophy clashed with the realities of life, their injunction being in strong conflict with his recognized weaknesses. His soul's hunger for 'a life of perfect love and purity'[46] prompts him to flee the world of men, both secular and religious, and to live his life as a hermit:

> Before I knew the history of the saints, I had a foreshadowing of their ecstasy. For the same truth had penetrated even into pagan philosophy that it is a bliss within the reach of man to die to mortal needs, and live in the life of God as the Unseen Perfectness. But to attain that I must forsake the world: I must have no affection, no hope, wedding me to that which passeth away ….[47]

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[44]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 2.
[45]*Romola*, p. 154.
[46]*Ibid*., p. 155.
[47]*Ibid*., p. 155.

For Romola, however, the highest good had been to serve her father faithfully, without questioning the value of her father's scholarship. It is her loving choice to comply with Bardo's aim of scholarship, if not his egoistic desire for immortality in having the library named after him. Dino, by contrast, had been more concerned with the lack of value in such scholarship and could not in good conscience fritter his life away, disengaged from the suffering masses of the world. The vision he communicates on his death bed to his sister Romola, prophetically warns her of the inadequacy and sterility of scholarship as an answer to the sorrows of life:

> Romola, in the deep night, as I lay awake, I saw my father's room – the library – with all the books and the marbles and the leggio, where I used to stand and read; and I saw you – you were revealed to me as I see you now, with fair long hair, sitting before my father's chair. And at the leggio stood a man whose face I could not see. I looked, and looked, and it was a blank to me, even as a painting effaced; and I saw him move and take thee, Romola by the hand; and then I saw thee take my father by the hand; and you went all three down the stone steps into the streets, the man whose face was a blank to me leading the way.[48]

Such a vision graphically shows how arid rationalism can, at best, be nothing more than mockery. Romola was brought up, like her brother, 'with a silent ignoring of any claims the Church could have to regulate the belief and action of beings with a cultivated reason'.[49] She despises Dino's vision as a sickly fancy of fanatical superstition. Dino's vision comes true, not simply in the grim procession of Time after Romola's bethrothal to Tito but more significantly in the failure of pagan learning to assuage her suffering after Tito's treacherous betrayal of Bardo's

[48]*Ibid*., p. 157.
[49]*Ibid*., p. 152.

trust. Romola still prefers to be led by reason and love rather than by phantoms of what she considers 'sickly fancies'.[50]

Feuerbach viewed religion as being the consciousness of the infinite. It can be nothing else than the infinite consciousness that man has of his own nature: 'A really finite being has not even the faintest adumbration, still less consciousness, of an infinite being, for the limit of the nature is also the limit of the consciousness.'[51] Dino has divided his consciousness as his monkhood has divorced him from the real world of human affections. He could have exposed Tito's duplicity since he knew the incident related to the pawning of Baldassarre's ring. But he is unable to link Tito with his sister. Appropriately, Tito's face is a blank in Dino's vision.

With Dino's death, new images of sorrow blend with the tyranny of dead learning in Romola's imagination and are concentrated in the crucifix Dino has given her. She places the crucifix in her family's cabinet, but Tito, who recoils at the symbol of suffering, is soon found to replace it with his bethrothal gift of the triptych, constructed and painted by Piero. Romola asks Tito: 'But if I ever wanted to look at the crucifix again?'[52] Tito's response indicates his disavowal of any good reason to consider the suffering Christ: 'Ah! for that very reason it is hidden – hidden by these images of youth and joy.'[53] Piero's mask of the drunken, laughing satyr bears a relation to Tito, who is explicitly identified with Bacchus and appears in Dino's vision as 'the Great Tempter'.[54] Increasingly, Tito disappoints Romola and Bardo by devoting less time to the older man's studies and more to the political and social life of Florence. We are bound to the past through love and, as Comte insists, the past contributes to the present order and future

[50]*Ibid*., p. 158.
[51]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 2
[52]*Romola*, p. 199.
[53]*Ibid*., p. 199.
[54]*Ibid*., p. 323.

knowledge and progress. Tito's attitude contradicts Comte's principle of continuity, where the past should be treated with reverence as it makes a valuable contribution to human development. The trajectories of Will Ladislaw and Tito diverge significantly as their histories progress. Tito is to leave simple enjoyments for more and more complex thirsting for power and wealth through the exercise of duplicity. Under Dorothea's guidance, Will Ladislaw is to enter politics to assure that justice is done to everyone. Tito's treachery precludes any such possibility of beneficent collaboration for Romola. Initially, she clings to those facets of her husband's character which support her earlier illusions about him: 'Tito was really kinder than she was, better tempered, less proud and resentful; he had no angry retorts, he met all complaints with perfect sweetness; ….'[55] Nevertheless, she cannot ignore his quiet escape 'from things that were unpleasant'.[56] Even in the 'disappointment of [her] ignorant hopes',[57] however, she cannot admit to herself that Tito might be acting unworthily. One of Romola's primary dilemmas, quite relevant to her Comtian subordination, had already been articulated by Feuerbach: 'If I despise a thing, how can I dedicate to it my time and faculties? ... How can I worship or serve an object, how can I subject myself to it, if it does not hold a high place in my mind?'[58] Also, Feuerbach considers reason, as well as feeling, to be the 'profoundest and most essential necessity … We are all come into the world without the operation of knowledge and will; but we are come that knowledge and will may exist'.[59] Romola's generous submission to Tito denies her that state of independence which, for Feuerbach, derives from the mind.

[55]*Ibid*., p. 244.
[56]*Ibid*., p. 244.
[57]*Ibid*., p. 244.
[58]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 141.
[59]*Ibid*., p. 37.

With Tito's deceitful disposal of Bardo's books and antiquities, complete alienation supplants disappointment in Romola's heart. 'You are a treacherous man!'[60] she scornfully accuses Tito. Tito's beauty, no longer the harbinger of joy and goodness for Romola, becomes instead a sign of loathsome perfidy. Romola's conception of marriage is similar to Feuerbach and Eliot's: a true marriage is based on love. According to Feuerbach, the highest and the first law of human nature must be the love of man for man. Life as a whole is, in its essential substantial relations, like that of child and parent, of husband and wife, of brother and friend – in short, all the moral relations are '*per se* religious'.[61] Consequently, Feuerbach asserts that true marriage is a religious marriage which corresponds to the 'free bond of love'.[62] If the bond of love evaporates, the contract must be null and void. Tito has sinned against the religion of humanity by violating human bonds. Although Romola's resolve to leave Tito is motivated by strong feeling of revulsion against him, she nevertheless incorporates her father's stoical philosophy into her ideas of the future: '… so far as she conceived her solitary loveless life at all, she saw it animated by a proud stoical heroism, and by an indistinct but strong purpose of labour, that she might be wise enough to write something which would rescue her father's name from oblivion.'[63] Faced with the truth of her brother's vision, Romola is conscious of a loneliness that longs for 'supreme fellowship with suffering'.[64] The departure of love denies her the one support she had found strength in. Prepared for a life of sorrow, loneliness and hardship, Romola leaves Tito and Florence.

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[60]*Romola*, p. 285.
[61]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 222.
[62]*Ibid*., p. 222.
[63]*Romola*, p. 322.
[64]*Ibid*., p. 324.

In Savonarola, Romola finds a mentor who leads her to an understanding of suffering. But the Dominican monk, for all the austerities of his life, will (like Tito) falsely identify his own selfish aims with what are ostensibly his ideal purposes. Himself convinced that he is a messenger of God, he views his gift of prophecy as 'a mighty beacon shining far out for the warning and guidance of men'.[65] His words and actions are received with a mixture of hostility and faith. Charges of arrogance and lust for power mingle with praises of his preaching and saintliness. In one area, however, there is unanimity of opinion: '… this man had a power rarely paralleled, of impressing his beliefs on others, and of swaying very various minds.'[66]

Romola, although contemptuous of monks and their fanatical visions, is, like the majority of the Florentine people, responsive to the peculiar influence of Savonarola's personality. In their first meeting at San Marco, in which both are attending her dying brother, Romola is moved by the 'subtle mysterious influence'[67] of Savonarola's personality, and she vibrates to the tone of 'quiet self-possession and assurance of the right, blended with benignity'[68] in his rich voice. When Romola's marriage to Tito frees her from the reclusive confines of scholarship and draws her into the active political scene, she attends one of Fra Girolamo's (Savonarola's) sermons in the Dumo to understand better his growing dominance over Florentine life. She is introduced to the 'suffering God'[69] that figures in Feuerbach's theorizing, and feels herself:

> … penetrated with a new sensation – a strange sympathy with something apart from all the definable interests of her life. It was not altogether unlike the thrill which had accompanied certain rare heroic touches in history and poetry; but the

[65]*Ibid*., p. 208.
[66]*Ibid*., p. 207.
[67]*Ibid*., p. 157.
[68]*Ibid*., p. 156.
[69]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 50.

> resemblance was as that between the memory of music, and the sense of being possessed by actual vibrating harmonies.[70]

The music metaphor, in conveying Romola's wider experience of feeling, can be related to an intimation of the truth of Feuerbach's dictum that '… to suffer for others is divine; he who suffers for others, who lays down his life for them, acts divinely, is a God to men'.[71] The highest command of Christianity, for Feuerbach, is moral, voluntary suffering, the suffering of love and the power of the self to sacrifice purely for the good of others. Romola's knowledge that suffering may be a form of nobility, will prepare her to accept sorrow into her own life.

Savonarola assumes that he is directed by divine command, and so arrests Romola's departure from Florence. He chides her for acting contrary to the 'bare duty of integrity'[72] and for withdrawing from the pledge given in marriage. He exhorts her to recognize her bond with other Florentine women and to return to her place in the service of Florence. Finally, pointing towards the crucifix, he challenges her to conform her life to that image of 'Supreme Offering, made by Supreme Love, … ',[73] in uniting her sorrows with those of her fellow men:

> And you think nothing of the sorrow and the wrong that are within the walls of the city where you dwell: you would leave your place empty, when it ought to be filled with your pity and your labour. If there is wickedness in the streets, your steps should shine with the light of purity; if there is a cry of anguish, you, my daughter, because you know the meaning of the cry, should be there to still it. My beloved daughter, sorrow has come to teach you a new worship.[74]

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[70]*Romola*, p. 247.
[71]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 51.
[72]*Romola*, p. 357.
[73]*Ibid*., p. 359.
[74]*Ibid*., p. 361.

Savonarola's guidance comes to Romola as a ray across darkness, illuminating for her new perceptions in human duty. Responsive to the energy of his beliefs and emotions, she submits herself to him: 'Father, I will be guided. Teach me! I will go back.'[75] In a passage interpreting the mystery of the Incarnation, a part of which was marked by George Eliot in her copy of *The Essence of Christianity* in the Eliot/Lewes library, Feuerbach had noted:

> God is not deaf to my complaints; he has compassion on me; hence he renounces his divine majesty, his exaltation above all that is finite and human; he becomes a man with man; for if he listens to me, and pities me, he is affected by my sufferings. God loves man – i.e., God suffers from man. Love does not exist without sympathy, sympathy does not exist without suffering in common.[76]

God's sympathy comes from sympathy with man's suffering; as Feuerbach emphasizes, 'sympathy presupposes a like nature',[77] one must feel the suffering man's pain. Submission succeeds proud rebellion when Romola sees in Savonarola's glance a sympathetic interest in her, free from any personal feeling: 'a gaze in which simple human fellowship expressed itself as a strongly-felt bond'.[78] Consequently, she no longer questions Savonarola's authority to speak to her and resumes her wifely duties.

Tito becomes enmeshed thoroughly and unabashedly in the intricate webs of Florentine politics. He poses as the helpful accomplice to Savonarola as well as to the Mantuans and to the Friends of the Medici all at one time, trying to make sure that whichever party ultimately succeeds, he will have a safe and profitable place. Romola's increasing awareness of Tito's duplicities widens the gulf between husband and wife so that her discovery of Tito's betrayal of

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[75]*Ibid*., p. 362.
[76]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 46.
[77]*Ibid*., pp. 46-47.
[78]*Romola*, p. 356.

his foster-father Baldassare only intensifies the revulsion she already feels for her husband: 'Our union is a pretence – as if a perpetual lie could be sacred marriage.'[79] In loneliness and disbelief, she leaves him for a second and final time. Romola's guide to joy has in reality become her guide to sorrow. Falsity as a way of life, which substitutes self-interest and convenience for all bonds of duty and affection, is intensely depicted in Tito's successive betrayals of Baldassare, Bardo, Romola and, finally, the very city of Florence itself.

Renunciation of one's own will to a higher good is a leitmotif running through Eliot's novels. Its emphasis on sympathy and strength in the endurance of sorrow echoes the teachings of Thomas a Kempis, without Maggie's misdirected interpretation. Unlike Maggie, Romola no longer seeks for happiness as a replacement for sorrow. Instead, she will learn with Savonarola's guidance how to endure sorrow in brotherly sympathy:

> All that ardour of her nature which could no longer spend itself in the woman's tenderness for father and husband, had transformed itself into an enthusiasm of sympathy with the general life. She had ceased to think that her own lot could be happy – had ceased to think of happiness at all: the one end of her life seemed to her to be the diminishing of sorrow.[80]

Part of Savonarola's teaching is the practical admonition against gifts to shrines, such as the tabernacle housing the image of Madonna. Donations should be given to the poor instead. May be this is what attracts Romola, who tries to ignore his increasing egoism for quite long. She becomes the visible Madonna as she takes up Savonarola's work and nurses the poor, the suffering and the dying. Andrew Sanders has emphasized that she is 'a humanized, familiarized Virgin Mary: her message is unspoken, but its implications are present and Feuerbachian, not

[79] *Ibid*., p. 482.
[80] *Ibid*., p. 388.

doctrinal and transcendent'.[81] In moving out from the world of domestic relations to the larger community of her native city, Romola is putting into effect Feuerbach's 'I – Thou' relationship and gaining a wider humanity: 'The inner life of man is the life which has relation to his species, to his general, as distinguished from his individual, nature … Man is himself at once I and Thou; he can put himself in the place of another …. '[82]

Romola's conversion to Christianity is not an intellectual act but an expression of her emotional attachment to Savonarola. In fact, the narrator tells us that Romola 'felt her relation to the Church only through Savonarola; his moral force had been the only authority to which she had bowed'.[83] She admires his faith, but insofar as he is a role model, it is to direct her to right, virtuous action and duty as opposed to a relationship with God. Even at the height of her commitment to him, pagan skepticism prevents her from accepting the dogmas of the church and Savonarola's own visions. When Savonarola's reforming zeal narrows to what Romola interprets as self-interest in conflict with human feelings, she turns away from her guide and from Christianity:

> 'Take care, father, lest your enemies have some reason when they say, that in your visions of what will further God's kingdom you see only what will strengthen your own party.'
>
> 'And that is true! ... The cause of my party *is* the cause of God's kingdom.'
>
> 'I do not believe it! ... God's kingdom is something wider – else, let me stand outside it with the beings that I love.'[84]

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[81]Andrew Sanders, *The Victorian Historical Novel 1840-1880* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 190.
[82]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, pp. 1-2.
[83]*Romola*, p. 45.
[84]*Ibid*., p. 492.

Romola could have had overlooked the flaws in his character, but when he refuses to use his influence to spare the nobles, falsely accused of political conspiracy, including her godfather Bernardo del Nero, she faces a complete mental separation from the Friar whom she has loved and revered. We witness here a fatal opposition between thought (Savonarola) and feeling (Romola), dramatizing the conflict that can exist between what Feuerbach viewed as man's subjective and objective modes of expression. However, the objective narrator emphasizes that it is inevitable that Romola should judge Savonarola severely on a question of individual suffering which she looks at with 'personal tenderness' and he with 'theoretic conviction'.[85] Savonarola's greatness is defeated by his personal ambition, which generates a departure from truth. With her trust in Savonarola gone, Romola sees his version of political utility overshadowing his essential goodness. Consequently, her vision of a great altruistic purpose in life is lost and she falls into selfish complaining. In Feuerbach's words, 'with the [loss of the] beloved object', she has lost her heart, 'the activity of [her] affections, the principle of life'.[86] Man grieves, loses pleasure in life when he has lost his beloved object. Romola's relapse involves not intellectual but emotional distress.

In her half-hearted suicide attempt, Romola drifts away down the river in a boat, in a way freeing herself from conflict, the burden of choice, immersing herself in pure sensation and relaxation of the will. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the water imagery had profound archetypal connotations. Here, in *Romola*, it is symbolic of death and rebirth. The impression of Romola as Madonna is solidified in the last chapters, when she chooses to alleviate the plight of survivors in the plague-ridden village where the boat lands. Although isolated from Florentine society, she first rescues an infant, and then begins to tend to the survivors in an unidentified Mediterranean

[85]*Ibid*., p. 501.
[86]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 49.

village that represents the world in microcosm. With the removal of all the human guides in her life, affection alone, free of weak human personalities, becomes her guide. Although she had rejected Savonarola, she has in the end adopted his exhortation to serve others.

Romola is mistaken for 'the Holy Mother'[87] by the villagers. Citing *Romola* in particular, U. C. Knoepflmacher argues that in her novels, 'George Eliot fell back on her earlier Feuerbachian stereotypes, an earthly "Madonna" and a working-man "Saviour", to carry her now undisguised ethic'.[88] Kimberly VanEsveld Adams is particularly interested in the Madonna as a symbol of female empowerment. She argues that:

> Eliot focused … on the Madonna as Virgin and Mother, seeing her as a figure at once intellectually self-reliant and fulfilled by her family relationships. As such, the Madonna represented the self-perfection and completion that ordinary women would achieve when freed from social restraints.[89]

She also asserts that 'contrary to representations of many Victorian authors and modern critics … it was the pure Madonna who enjoyed freedom of movement, and it was the sexually "impure" woman who lacked social standing and had her sphere of action restricted'.[90] For instance, when Romola begins to minister to the poor, she dons religious dress, 'and for the first time [is] able to move freely about the city and share her substance with the sick and needy'.[91] Eliot revaluates and appropriates religious tradition, using the Madonna figure to represent the ideal of humanity and to affirm 'women's full humanity'.[92]

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[87]*Romola*, p. 554.
[88]Knoepflmacher, *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel*, p. 61.
[89]Kimberly VanEsveld Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism: The Madonna in the Work of Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller, and George Eliot* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), p. 1.
[90]*Ibid*., p. 10.
[91]*Romola*, p. 10.
[92]*Ibid*., p. 12.

Ashton writes that all of Eliot's novels 'allow for religious belief and endorse it where it is seen to aid or guide sympathetic action. Indeed, *Romola* is, as regards its heroine's progress, an odyssey from unbelief, through flirtation with mysticism, to a kind of respiritualised secular humanism'.[93] In his review of *Romola*, R. H. Hutton concludes:

> Large and genial as is the sympathy with Savonarola, there is, perhaps, no wish to represent his faith altogether as a triumphant faith. Yet Romola's faith in goodness and self-sacrifice, and in little children and "the eternal marriage of love and duty", and so forth, which the proem tells us is ever to last, would be an idle dream for the world, without a Christ in whose eternal nature all these realities live and grow.[94]

Though Hutton is right that Savonarola's fanatic Catholicism is not triumphant, and neither is any brand of Christianity, I do not agree that we need a Christ to maintain our faith in love and duty. Rather, I second Feuerbach when he says that the nature of love is unlimited and triumphs over all particularity. Man as a rational and loving being is to be loved for man's sake. If man interposes between his fellowman and himself the idea of an individuality, in whom the idea of the species is supposed to be already realized, he annihilates the very soul of love. In this connection, Feuerbach maintains that Christ, as the consciousness of love, is the consciousness of the species:

> We are all one in Christ. Christ is the consciousness of our identity. He therefore who loves man for the sake of man, who rises to the love of the species, to universal love, … is Christ himself. He does what Christ did, what made Christ Christ. Thus, where there arises the consciousness of the species as a species, the idea of humanity as a whole, Christ disappears, without, however, his true nature

[93] Rosemary Ashton, *George Eliot: A Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996), p. 276.
[94] In David Carroll, *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, p. 205.

> disappearing for he was the substitute for the consciousness of the species, the image under which it was made present to the people …. [95]

George Eliot also shared Comte's emphasis on the feminine role in spiritual meliorism. Comte declared that: 'Woman is the spontaneous priestess of Humanity. She personifies in the purest form the principle of Love upon which the unity of our nature depends.'[96] It is no coincidence then that on atleast two occasions in the novel, Romola, for her acts of human charity, is identified as a living 'Madonna', the secular equivalent of the Virgin Mary. She had given up on life and wanted to die, but the sufferings of the people in the plague-stricken village wake her from lethargy in the call to lighten their sorrow. This experience is like a new baptism for Romola, opening her to 'the simpler relations of the human being to his fellow-men'.[97] By bringing to bear all the lessons in human sympathy, social altruism and selflessness, she helps to reconstruct a new world. Much as the narrative uses religious imagery and associates Romola with the relatable image of the Madonna, who beyond her service to Christianity represents maternal care in general, Eliot always brings us back to her own belief in human beings. Ashton explains further that Romola 'finishes the novel a secular Madonna, believed by the inhabitants of an Italian plague village to be the Virgin Mother herself, but helping them in a purely Feuerbachian effort of human sympathy'.[98] Romola is converted, for the final time, to religious humanism. She has risen to Feuerbach's universal love of the species.

With *Felix Holt: The Radical*, Eliot returned to the midlands of her native country, as the epigraph on the title page announces. As with her earlier English novels, she looks to her own

[95]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 221.
[96]Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism,* p. 253.
[97]*Romola*, p. 560.
[98]Rosemary Ashton, *George Eliot*, p. 265.

past for inspiration and draws on her childhood memories of Nuneaton at the time of the First Reform Act of 1832 for the setting of her political novel. The plot of the novel transpires between September 1832 and May 1833. It was a time when the character of the old market town of Treby Magna, in North Loamshire, had changed with the coming of mines and manufacturing and was preparing to hold its first election under the reforms enacted the previous June. Whereas Eliot had painfully identified with her subject matter in *The Mill on the Floss*, in *Felix Holt* she continues to exercise, notably in her portrayal of the Transome family, the objectivity so laboriously gained in her depiction of Tito and a large part of her other evocation of Florentines and Florentine life. Romola herself is deeply felt; I have also suggested the profound parallels between Romola and Dorothea Brooke of *Middlemarch*. If Felix Holt is considered an arbitrary and inadequately distanced character, Eliot's portrayal of Mrs. Transome and the characters surrounding her, including her son Harold, represents a power for objective creation that Eliot was unable to command before her long and arduous struggle in the writing of *Romola*.

In *Felix Holt*, Eliot once again probes the moral limits of egoism. The epigraph to Comte's introductory comments in *A General View of Positivism* – 'We tire of thinking and even of acting; we never tire of loving,'[99] – reflects Feuerbach's fundamental theme that the 'divine trinity' of 'Reason, Will, Love are … absolute perfections of being … True existence is thinking, loving, willing existence. That alone is true, perfect, divine ….'[100] While recognizing that practical life must, to a great extent, be regulated by self-interest, Comte considered that the active principle of reason and sympathy could overcome the prevalence of self-love in society. Positivism, in his opinion, stood for a standard of morality that was higher than any that had

[99]Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, p. 1.
[100]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 3.

formerly existed. *Felix Holt*, then, is seen to incorporate not only Feuerbach's concept of humanity but also a Comtian one that has fundamental principles in common with it.

However, I find Eliot disagreeing with Comte in her description of the starkly egoistic Mrs. Transome, and this raises questions about the role and status of women in society. For Comte, as we have seen, the married woman should be subordinate to her husband. Esther Lyon epitomizes Comte's theories as to woman's special powers of love, sympathy and altruism. She is presented as a woman for whom 'fullness of perfection'[101] must be attained in marriage. By contrast, Mrs. Transome's indomitable thirst for power and her negative attitude call into question both the social and sexual patterns of hierarchical dominance. She lives in the midst of 'desecrated sanctities';[102] social distinctions have become her religion, social niceties her dogma. She exercises power by enjoying the subordination of her tenants and her husband who finds solace in his collection of dead insects. Her earlier girlish foolishness was caused by her acceptance of fashionable standards which saw morality as dull and stupid. Hence, she and her lover Jermyn got involved in their desires, while her husband was fully and unhappily cognizant of the affair. The consequences proved harder for her than for Jermyn, who has married and almost forgotten the past intimacy.

Mrs. Transome found 'ridicule of Biblical characters very amusing, and she was interested in stories of illicit passion: but she believed all the while that truth and safety lay in due attendance on prayers and sermons, in the admirable doctrines and ritual of the Church of England',[103] a view of the world which preserves 'the existing arrangements of English

[101]George Eliot, *Felix Holt, The Radical* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 429. All subsequent citations are to this edition.
[102]*Ibid*., p. 380.
[103]*Ibid*., p. 29.

society'.[104] Not only did Feuerbach believe the essential act of religion to be prayer ('Prayer is all-powerful. What the pious soul entreats for in prayer, God fulfills,'[105]) but also, Mrs. Transome's religious feelings are a perfect example of Feuerbach's central thesis that a man's religion is an unconscious projection of his ideas about, and hopes for, humanity: 'The end of religion is the welfare, the salvation, the ultimate felicity of man; the relation of man to God is nothing else than his relation to his own spiritual good ….'[106]

For fifteen long years, Mrs. Transome has been nursing a powerful illusion that the return of her son Harold will bring fortune, honour and joy to Transome Court. Harold returned, but he was his father's son: a good-humoured, facile, selfish, energetic, insensitive second-rater. He brings with him a little son of dubious parentage, plenty of ambition, but no sense of the past in which his mother lived. Harold 'had no wish opposed to filial kindness',[107] but his unexpectedly strange attitude was extremely perturbing to Mrs. Transome. His thoughts were governed by habits which did not reconcile with the feelings and expectations of his mother. He had an Oriental view of woman, took the reins of the estate into his own hands, desiring to impress upon his mother the necessity of sitting on cushions and dressing in silks. Further, guided by his ambitious nature and with an eye to making the most of his position and wealth, he intended to contest for a seat in Parliament as a Radical. This announcement came as a great shock and humiliation to his mother who had been tied to Tory principles by her feelings and by her property.

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[104] *Ibid*., p. 29.
[105] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 160.
[106] *Ibid*., p. 153.
[107] *Felix Holt*, p. 19.

This state of utter frustration and the feeling of self-annihilation forces Mrs. Transome from the centre to the periphery, from the dream of self to feeling for others. Her 'spring of suffering'[108] is as Feuerbach says, can be a means to redemption because it constitutes feeling: 'The heart is the source, the centre of all suffering. A being without suffering is a being without a heart … I feel; and I feel feeling … as belonging to my essential being.'[109] Mrs. Transome finds her regeneration in the sympathy of Esther, who listens to her complaint, comforts her and realizes her heartache that is intensified by loneliness and indifference.

Rufus Lyon, the Dissenting Minister, associates high principles with sectarian phraseology. This is why he is less sympathetic to the plain-spoken Felix Holt than he would otherwise have been – a point integral to Feuerbach's concept of alienation, that illustrates the way in which alienation through religious dogmatism can detract from human qualities. Lyon is a strangely comic figure whose situation demonstrates Feuerbach's principle that if religious imagination takes precedence, reality loses its value. He saw his 'mad wishes'[110] for Annette, Esther's mother, as a spiritual defection irreconciliable with his role as a Christian minister, and had for a while resigned his ministry. Such a conflict, dividing man's spiritual and sensuous nature, had been forecast by Feuerbach: 'The unworldly, supernatural life, is essentially also an unmarried life.'[111] Heaven becomes man's 'treasure-casket',[112] the supreme object of his faith and hope. A true Christian feels no need of culture, since it is a worldly principle, as opposed to feeling. He also feels no need of natural love, as God supplies his want of love, of a wife, of a family. But the sexual instinct runs counter to this view; it is in contradiction with his ideal. The

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[108]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 53.
[109]*Ibid*., p. 53.
[110]*Felix Holt*, p. 82.
[111]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 136.
[112]*Ibid*., p. 140.

principle of sexual love is excluded from heaven as an earthly, worldly principle: 'The Christian certainly experienced the need of sexual love, but only as a need in contradiction with his heavenly destination, and merely natural, in the depreciatory, contemptuous sense …'[113] Lyon loves Annette despite himself, deprecating his own feelings, but his real spiritual defection is his failure to discover Esther's parentage and the delay in telling his adopted daughter that he is not her father.

I find George Eliot's portrayal of Rufus Lyon to be a bit ambivalent. While he may seem a simple person with quaint and dogmatic theories, Lyon reinforces the Comtian law of submission and Feuerbach's moral law when he tells Felix that the right to rebellion is the right to seek a higher rule, and not to wander in 'mere lawlessness'.[114] He is swept along by the musical analogy into a theological speculation:

> And even as in music, where all obey and concur to one end, so that each has the joy of contributing to a whole whereby he is ravished and lifted up into the courts of heaven, so will it be in that crowning time of the millennial reign, when our daily prayer will be fulfilled, and one law shall be written on all hearts, and be the very structure of all thought, and be the principle of all action.[115]

This appears quite similar to Eliot's own vision of an ideal society in which an incredible diversity of voices contributes to a harmonious whole, and in which the law of justice is written on all hearts. Such a kingdom of justice might be an unattainable utopian ideal, but it inspires sustained efforts toward social betterment. Eliot looks through Lyon's so-called illusions to the Feuerbachian truths that lie concealed in it: 'For what we call illusions are often, in truth, a wider vision of past and present realities – a willing movement of a man's soul with the larger sweep of

[113] *Ibid*., p. 139.
[114] *Felix Holt,* p. 150.
[115] *Ibid*., p. 151.

the world's forces – a movement towards a more assured end than the chances of a single life.'[116] The narrator's vision of how little things fit together into a greater whole is fully redolent of a Feuerbachian universality of understanding, notions of strength and self-sacrifice: 'The understanding is interested not only in man, but in the things out of man, in universal nature. The intellectual man forgets even himself in the contemplation of nature … The understanding is universal, pantheistic, the love of the universe.'[117] Lyon's past crisis teaches him to make the right decision when he learns the truth of Esther's parentage. He achieves self-renunciation by confessing the truth to Esther, only to find she loves him more because of her new knowledge of him.

The story draws up the contrasts between the two Radicals – Harold Transome, who returns to his family estate after fifteen years and resolves to contest in the Parliamentary elections as a Radical candidate, and Felix Holt, who returns home at about the same time, and is heir to his late father's stock of quack medicines. Harold is a Radical of quite a different sort than Felix and as one critic nicely puts it:

> Harold's Radicalism was utilitarian, compromising, self-serving and privileged; Felix's was based on integrity, honest labour, opposition to privilege, and moral and educational roots far deeper than the franchise. Harold figured that the Radical Party was his best route to political power, and he hired cheap political operatives to insure success by making false promises to the working men, while Felix was a harsh critic of all political hypocrisy and chicanery.[118]

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[116]*Ibid*., p. 184.
[117]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 40.
[118]Peter C. Hodgson, *The Mystery Beneath the Real: Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot* (London: Canterbury Press Limited, 2001), p. 98.

In Harold Transome, Eliot combines an egoistic, calculating utilitarianism with a far-sighted morality. Despite his personal antipathy towards Jermyn, he makes a 'calm and clear-sighted resolve not to quarrel with the man while he could be of use'.[119] Again, he supports Felix in prison, with the intention of enhancing his own merit in Esther's eyes. Even Esther perceives his habit of weighing the value of things according to the contribution they make to his own pleasure. His benevolence is seen by Esther to be unsympathetic because it does not come from any keen understanding or deep respect for the person he obliges or indulges: ' … it was like his kindness to his mother – an arrangement of his for the happiness of others, which, if they were sensible, ought to succeed.'[120] The same underlying motive of pleasure invests even his political views. He means to be a commoner, but 'a peerage might present itself under acceptable circumstances'.[121] Esther is shocked when Harold discloses that his wife, Harry's mother, had been a slave and 'was bought, in fact'.[122] It was a commercial transaction, possibly one of utility rather than of emotion. Although he is genuinely attracted to Esther, it would be for him a marriage of convenience that would save him from losing the Transome estate.

In his *General View of Positivism*, Comte had concluded that the working classes, with their personal experience of misery, were able to recognize the supremacy of social feeling and solidarity. Their occupations, which allowed time for thought, were more conducive to philosophical views than those of the middle classes. Felix Holt is the working man's voice. He has withdrawn from the 'push and scramble for money and position'[123] because he genuinely wants to help the working man toward gradual change. Contemptuous of those who 'put their

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[119]*Felix Holt*, p. 108.
[120]*Ibid*., p. 411.
[121]*Ibid*., p. 419.
[122]*Ibid*., p. 421.
[123]*Ibid*., p. 259.

inward honour in pawn by seeking the prizes of the world',[124] Felix refuses to aspire to clerical respectability despite his mother's prompting. Like a Comtian priest of humanity, he will act in an advisory role, with the appointed task to make life less bitter for a few within his reach. He is disappointed with electioneering chicanery. For him, it is useless to purify the proceedings when three-quarters of the men in the country value nothing in an election but self-interest, and nothing in self-interest but some form of greed. When he listens to a working-man urging the crowd to demand universal suffrage, annual Parliaments, vote by ballot, and electoral districts, Felix asserts: 'No! – something else before all that.'[125] Going to the roots of change, he finds that in the present climate of opinion, reform of the electoral system will not offer any practical solution to the problems of the working class. Instead, he calls for a reformation of public opinion as a primary tool for political reform. The great enemy of the common good is ignorance, which both causes and is reinforced by low expectations, poverty, slavery and superstition. Society must find a way to break the vicious cycle through a programme of universal public education, which is the key to true political reform and the essential foundation of democracy.

Adam Bede and Caleb Garth of *Middlemarch* also consecrate the doctrine of work. Adam chides his fellow carpenters for throwing down their tools 'the minute the clock begins to strike, as if they took no pleasure i' their work, and was afraid o' doing a stroke too much'.[126] Similarly, Caleb, in 'fervid veneration' of what he calls 'business', reveres 'good practical schemes, accurate work, and the faithful completion of undertakings: his prince of darkness was a slack

[124]*Ibid*., p. 286.
[125]*Ibid*., p. 290.
[126]George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 7.

workman'.[127] Although Caleb will initiate Fred Vincy into proper respect for the honour of work, neither he nor Adam Bede has the proselytizing spirit of Felix:

> I want to be a demagogue of a new sort; an honest one, if possible, who will tell the people they are blind and foolish, and neither flatter them nor fatten on them. I have my heritage – an order I belong to. I have the blood of a line of handicraftsmen in my veins, and I want to stand up for the lot of handicraftsman as a good lot, in which a man may be better trained to all the best functions of his nature than if he belonged to the grimacing set who have visiting-cards, and are proud to be thought richer than their neighbours.[128]

George Eliot makes Felix a guide preaching a religion of humanity, but I feel that he is primarily an abstraction talking like a tract and he does not come to life. He is the only guide who is free from inner conflict or doubts, and it is this perfection, or absence of ambivalence, which I feel accounts for his woodenness. Still, Felix does incarnate Feuerbach's highest degree of the understanding and reason, in his independence, freedom and self-knowledge: 'To a complete man belong the power of thought, the power of will, the power of affection.'[129] Felix's bluntness, which verges on boorishness, is nonetheless preferable to Tito's smooth deceptiveness.

Savonarola had the simpler and stronger level of religion, while Felix Holt elevates Esther to a lofty height by the subtle force of his own character. Felix is not at all spiritual, and stands out as the most prominent atheist in all Eliot's novels. Mrs. Holt is uncomfortable with her son's radical leanings, and is indignant that Felix won't carry on with his father's quack medicines. When she tells Mr. Lyon that Felix says 'I'd better never open my Bible, for it's as bad poison to

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[127]*Middlemarch*, p. 185.
[128]*Felix Holt,* p. 262.
[129]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity,* p. 2.

me as the pills are to half the people as swallow em',[130] one senses the possibility of meeting an interesting character. Lyon interprets Felix's words as a warning against 'giving a too private interpretation to the Scripture'.[131] Felix's religious views are not pressed, and he is not criticized for his secularism. He is over-confident and slightly self-righteous, yet we feel for him and his wish to improve his environment. He explains himself to Lyon: 'The world is not a very fine place for a good many of the people in it. But I've made up my mind it shan't be the worse for me, if I can help it.'[132] He always vows to be poor and never to marry so that he may remain a secular preacher and inspire men to better themselves. He believes: 'teach any truth you can, whether it's in the Testament or out of it.'[133]

Esther Lyon asks Felix why he does not 'always go to Chapel' or 'join the Church'. Felix answers: 'There's just the difference between us – I know why I don't do those things. I distinctly see that I can do something better. I have other principles, and should sink myself by doing what I don't recognize as the best.'[134] Felix hopes to impart these principles to Esther, as he sees in her the potential to be a noble woman. Daniel Deronda, quite reluctantly, will accept the role of confessor that Gwendolen Harleth forces on him, but Felix relishes the idea of influencing Esther: 'I should like to come and scold her every day, and make her cry and cut her fine hair off.'[135] Totally convinced of the strength of his ideas, Felix has no qualms about the direction of his own life or about his ability to kindle others, including Esther, to a higher ambition.

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[130] *Felix Holt*, p. 56.
[131] *Ibid*., p. 57.
[132] *Ibid*., p. 62.
[133] *Ibid*., p. 65.
[134] *Ibid*., p. 122.
[135] *Ibid*., p. 72.

Like Gwendolen Harleth who will regard Daniel Deronda as 'unique to her among men, because he had impressed her as being not her admirer but her superior …',[136] Esther Lyon sees in Felix not admiration for her person but an immeasurable superiority. Their first meeting is marked by his intention to point out to her the falsity of her selfish and trivial way of life: 'You must know that your father's principles are greater and worthier than what guides your life. You have no reason but idle fancy and selfish inclination for shirking his teaching and giving your soul up to trifles.'[137] He bluntly informs her: ' … I want you to change.'[138] Although indignant at Felix's liberty in chastising her, Esther nevertheless recognizes that he is in theory right about her. Thus she cannot contradict his judgment about the shallowness of her fastidious tastes. Unable to forget his disapprobation of her life, Esther is equally unable to imagine life not conforming to her own satisfaction: 'Her life was a heap of fragments, and so were her thoughts: some great energy was needed to bind them together.'[139] This is not to be the case of Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch*, who possesses energy and concentration of thought from the beginning and actively searches for a channel for her pent-up forces. Esther has an essentially docile nature and seeks no heroic way of life. Dorothea or Romola will settle for nothing less than undomestic pursuits, actively aiding a companion who is expected to serve mankind through scholarly or political means. It is inconceivable that following devastation and disillusionment, Esther would, like Romola, go to the heroic rescue of plague-ridden people, or, like Dorothea, dream of serving as lampholder to a scholar hero of the stature of Locke or Milton. Esther is consciously cast by Eliot in a much smaller mould. Her dream is far more modest. She experiences 'an awakening

[136]George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 311.
[137]*Felix Holt*, p. 123.
[138]*Ibid*., p. 123.
[139]*Ibid*., p. 173.

need for reliance on one whose vision was wider, whose nature was purer and stronger than her own'.[140]

Although Esther, in nettled pride, assures herself that 'she could never love any one who was so much of a pedagogue and a master, to say nothing of his oddities',[141] her thoughts revert more than once to that impossibility. When she goes to Felix's home under the pretence of having her watch repaired, she realizes for the first time that he is not always 'pungent and denunciatory'[142] but indeed '… very kind. There is something greater and better in him than I had imagined. His behaviour to-day – to his mother and me too – I should call it the highest gentlemanliness, only it seems in him to be something deeper'.[143] Felix is hardly the guide to joy that Philip or Tito or Will Ladislaw propose to be to their respective pupils. On the contrary, Felix, in Esther's estimation, 'had chosen an intolerable life … '[144] Nevertheless her incipient love for Felix nudges forward the sense that if Felix loves her, her life could be exalted into a new blessedness.

Already more than a little attracted to Esther, Felix desires that the beauty of her face may be combined with the nobility of her mind so that she may be 'the woman whose beauty makes a great task easier to men instead of turning them away from it'.[145] For his part, Felix suffers too; not to marry Esther is a sacrifice; but he cannot be distracted from his important aim in life. The novel progresses with the recognition of their feelings for each other; their mutual feeling will lead to a happy union only after Esther proves her worth. Eventually, Felix will reach a proper

[140]*Ibid*., p. 173.
[141]*Ibid*., p. 125.
[142]*Ibid*., p. 225.
[143]*Ibid*., p. 228.
[144]*Ibid*., p. 228.
[145]*Ibid*., p. 262.

notion of woman's sympathy, not as an unattainable ideal but as realized in Esther, and his harshness will be softened. But consistent with Feuerbach's thesis, without morality and rationality backing up his passion, he will not allow himself to succumb and so subvert his noble purpose. For Feuerbach, it is only a morally perfect being, a being of understanding, who can be conscious of love 'as the highest, the absolute power and truth'.[146]

Esther desires to be worthy of Felix but she shrinks from 'the inevitable renunciation'[147] of his presence:

> The first religious experience of her life – the first self-questioning, the first voluntary subjection, the first longing to acquire the strength of greater motives and obey the more strenuous rule – had come to her through Felix Holt. No wonder that she felt as if the loss of him were inevitable backsliding.[148]

This passage brings together both the religious ideals and the humanist values – we see a mortal man as 'the miraculous Redeemer, the Mediator, the God-man'[149]; we see a human relationship opening up a person's better self. Esther's values shift; she begins to see that a simple, sacrificing life is the best life. Just as Gwendolen will cling to Deronda's guidance as inseparable from the outward direction of her life, so too Esther believes that only marriage with Felix can secure her goodness. She is the least aspiring of Eliot's heroines. Even Rosamond desires the distinctions of rank, with a singleness of purpose and an intensity that is lacking in Esther. Consequently, when her dream of luxuries appears to be realized in the revelation of her inheritance of Transome Court, Esther can neither accept her good fortune with joy nor reject it for higher motives. She has become so accustomed to look at her life through Felix's eyes, that she cannot

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[146]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 42.
[147]*Felix Holt*, p. 309.
[148]*Ibid*., p. 265.
[149]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 117.

respond to her inheritance without imagining his opinions: 'That is clearly your destiny', she fancies he would tell her, ' – to be aristocratic, to be rich, I always saw that our lots lay widely apart. You are not fit for poverty, or any work of difficulty. But remember what I once said to you about a vision of consequences; take care where your fortune leads you.'[150]

Esther does not want to get rich at the expense of others. Furthermore, she does not want to alienate Felix. Her change of heart is first seen in the narrator's comment at Felix's trial: ' … the man she loved was her hero; that her woman's passion and her reverence for rarest goodness rushed together in an undivided current … Her feelings were growing into a necessity for action, rather than a resolve to act.'[151] Esther's fortune eventually leads her to a choice between Felix Holt and Harold Transome. She recognizes Felix's moral superiority to Harold, but the more significant factor in Felix's favour is her own resultant emotional and moral dependence on him:

> More than all, there was this test: she herself had no sense of inferiority and just subjection when she was with Harold Transome; there were even points in him for which she felt a touch, not of angry, but of playful scorn; whereas with Felix she had always a sense of dependence and possible illumination.[152]

Her conversion is complete when she gives up the Transome estate for the more valuable treasure of Felix's love. Having 'divested' herself 'of all personal considerations, whether of vanity or shyness',[153] Esther exemplifies that aspect of Feuerbach's will that spontaneously leads to ardent, altruistic action: '… he who loves, gives up his egoistical independence; he makes what he loves indispensable, essential to his existence.'[154] Esther realizes that a simple life of

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[150]*Felix Holt,* p. 362.
[151]*Ibid*,. p. 447.
[152]*Ibid*., p. 406.
[153]*Ibid*., p. 448.
[154]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 217.

love is worth more to her than a loveless life of luxury. In renouncing her inheritance, she seeks to confirm Felix's influence over her life by making herself worthy of him, and with 'quivering hope'[155] she expectantly awaits the return of her love. Indeed, in the final analysis, her love for Felix offers her an easy process of epiphany. She cannot be said to struggle; she simply capitulates to Felix's larger nature. 'I am weak', she explains to Felix at the end of the novel, 'my husband must be greater and nobler than I am'.[156]

Some critics have complained that Felix fails to make any deep impression on the miners at Sproxton, when, with some money from the Transome estate and a pension for his mother, he settles down to a life freed from the practical difficulties faced by the workers whom he is educating. He has been termed as an abstraction, who is not a product of the society, but has been imposed from outside as an embodiment of an ideal for society. On the other hand, one could argue that Esther loses much of the reader's sympathy or esteem because her dreams are so narrow. However, I see *Felix Holt* as an embodiment of certain Comtian notions that get modified by Feuerbachian values. A new, harmonious relation between the individual and the society may not be fully realized in the novel, but I feel that George Eliot has convincingly portrayed how Esther and Felix individually go through the Feuerbachian development of consciousness, with their happiness underlined by the tragic dilemma of Mrs. Transome and the harsh fate of the unsympathetic Harold.

Reviewers were not blind to the secular and humanist platform of the novel. John Morley evaluates *Felix Holt* by pointing out that:

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[155] *Felix Holt*, p. 464.
[156] *Ibid*., p. 475.

> … the most elevated form of what may without offence be called modern paganism makes way where a dull cut-and-dried theology was worthless, because it was embodied in a vehement and enthusiastic man, who does not shrink from throwing away a livelihood which he thought involved a trick upon his fellows.[157]

Felix is the only guide in Eliot's novels whose teachings are unquestionably intended to be authentic. He is also the only guide who is portrayed as an effective teacher who turns the heroine to a fulfilling life. Feuerbach teaches us that Jesus was a mortal man and admirable for his redeeming and reconciling power. He says that 'Christ is God known personally … who sympathises with human misery, grants human wishes … Christ remains man even after his ascension, – man in heart and man in form … '[158] In this novel, Felix, the mere mortal, out of the inward impulse to do good, to live and die for man, out of the divine instinct of benevolence which desires to make all happy, becomes an appropriate Jesus figure. He devotes his life to reform and without the help of any supernatural power, influences the lives of others more than the Church. He insists that to propel society towards change, a force 'must come out of human nature – out of men's passions, feelings, desires. Whether the engines will do good work or bad depends on these feelings'.[159] He is promoting humanism, arguing that we have the potential to do good within ourselves. We shouldn't wait for the next life to improve our lot, but need to use our best qualities now.

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[157]In David Carroll, *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, p. 257.
[158]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 121.
[159]*Felix Holt*, p. 293.

CHAPTER 4

Communities of Interpretation – *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*

'Relations to be developed',[1] reads an early entry in the notebook for *Middlemarch*, and the list that follows pairs Dorothea and Causaubon, Lydgate and Rosamond, Fred Vincy and Mary Garth, and so on. This emphasis on personal relations may well derive from Feuerbach's emphasis on the 'I – Thou' relation, the most fundamental form of community in Feuerbach's analysis of the social nature of man. 'Only community constitutes humanity',[2] is one of Feuerbach's most important dictums. Humanity, that which distinguishes man from animals, is for Feuerbach not an individual principle but a communal one. The self can exist only within community, says Feuerbach, and community can exist in practice only within the web of shared interpretation among men. In this more radical insight of Feuerbach's epistemology, the isolation of an individual from agreement with others is a form of madness:

> … my fellow-man is to me the representative of the species, the substitute of the rest, nay, his judgment may be of more authority with me than the judgment of the innumerable multitude ... The agreement of others is therefore my criterion of the normalness, the universality, the truth of my thoughts.[3]

Community constitutes meaning; hence the individual, outside community, finds life meaningless.

In *Adam Bede*, escape from the novel's community is difficult. Hetty Sorrel and Arthur Donnithorne, for example, are virtually destroyed when their dream-world challenges the world

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[1]George Eliot, *Quarry for Middlemarch*, ed. Anna Theresa Kitchel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), p. 45.
[2]Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Dover Publications, 2008), p. 131. All subsequent citations are to this edition
[3]*Ibid*., p. 132.

of their local community. *Middlemarch*, however, offers many more forms of community than does *Adam Bede*. The private dream-world becomes harder to separate from the public world of 'old provincial society'.[4] Nonetheless, moving from one form of community to another is still difficult. Characters who make such a move risk temporary isolation from any form of community. This isolation causes the epistemological dislocation that Feuerbach describes as madness.

George Eliot's picture of 'old provincial society', in *Middlemarch*, proves to be made up of several levels of community for the up-and-down movements of the novel's characters. Analogous to Hayslope and its rural environs, the local community of *Middlemarch* consists of the town of Middlemarch and the rural parishes of Tipton, Freshitt, and Lowick surrounding the town. There are other, wider circles of community in the novel. This area in Loamshire is seen as a part of England at a crucial time in its history, the era of the first Reform Bill in the late 1820s. The early chapters in Rome also provide another perspective on the local community. Within all of these communities, marriage and vocation are the processes by which individuals attempt to reach out from their isolation and validate themselves in another person, in marriage, in vocation, or in the community as a whole. Love and money are the driving forces of these closely related processes, forces which often seem to undo the bonds of community that marriage and vocation are supposed to create. From the start, Dorothea, Lydgate, Rosamond, Bulstrode, and Ladislaw do not quite fit into the local community – their stories of marriage and vocation are impelled by a centrifugal force that eventually hurls them outside the local community.

Feuerbach considered the great moral failing of Christianity to be the subjectivity which turns the attention of man towards his own soul: 'Christianity … sets the same stamp on all men

[4]George Eliot, *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 95. All subsequent citations are to this edition.

alike, and regards them as one and the same individual, because it knows no distinction between the species and the individual: it has one and the same means of salvation for all men, it sees one and the same original sin in all.'[5] For Feuerbach, the greatest flaw of humanity was its failure to recognize the otherness, the difference, of the great variety of individuals: 'My fellow-man is my objective conscience; he makes my failings a reproach to me; even when he does not expressly mention them, he is my personified feeling of shame. The consciousness of the moral law, of right, of propriety, of truth itself, is indissolubly united with my consciousness of another than myself.'[6] George Eliot's great egoists fail to recognize this feeling of otherness. Her major heroines – Maggie, Romola, Dorothea, Gwendolen – begin with a kind of involuntary egoism, similar to what Feuerbach characterizes as man's primitive human need to project the self, and its needs, into the fictive 'other' of religion. The protagonists recognize the difference of others and achieve morality through a characteristic process of the imagination which Feuerbach describes as a psychological necessity:

> It is the imagination alone by which man neutralises the opposition between God and the world. All religious cosmogonies are products of this imagination ... a middle term between the abstract and concrete. And the task of philosophy … is to comprehend the relation of the imagination to the reason – the genesis of the image by means of which an object of thought becomes an object of sense, of feeling. [7]

Eliot uses the same terminology in *Middlemarch* to describe Dorothea's emergence from the 'moral stupidity' in which we are all born, 'taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme

[5]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 132.
[6]*Ibid*., p. 132.
[7]*Ibid*., pp. 68-69.

selves'.[8] Dorothea is described as having all her passion 'struggling towards an ideal life'[9] that involves a level of grandeur and rises above the average intellect and morality. She asks her sister Celia: 'How can one ever do anything nobly Christian, living among people with such petty thoughts?'[10] Dorothea's ideal for herself does not fit into her social surroundings. She is the later-born Theresa promised in the 'Prelude' to the novel, and her version of the desire to soar 'after some illimitable satisfaction'[11] is a devotion to Evangelicalism. What George Eliot calls Dorothea's 'hereditary strain of Puritan energy'[12] makes her unhappy with her passive social role in the 'unfriendly mediums of Tipton and Freshitt'.[13] Yet, as the narrator hints from the start, this 'spiritual grandeur'[14] is unlikely to get her anywhere. She disapproves of vanity, including of ornaments such as her mother's jewellery. Yet, when her eye catches 'a fine emerald with diamonds', she is struck by their beauty and 'a new current of feeling'.[15] This is indicative of Dorothea's conflicted self. She harbours many strict moral principles, in good faith, but she can't help bending a little eventually. Over the course of her story, she must learn to shed her fanatic, self-sacrificing piety.

To her community, which is most interested in her marriage prospects, Dorothea's religious desires are simply 'peculiarities'[16] that may hinder her chances for a good husband. 'The rural opinion about the new young ladies', says George Eliot's narrator, 'was generally in favour of Celia [Dorothea's younger sister], as being so amiable and innocent-looking, while

[8]*Middlemarch*, p. 211.
[9]*Ibid*., p. 45.
[10]*Ibid*., p. 37.
[11]*Ibid*., p. 3.
[12]*Ibid*., p. 8.
[13]*Ibid*., p. 38.
[14]*Ibid*., p. 3.
[15]*Ibid*., p. 13.
[16]*Ibid*., *p*. 10.

Miss Brooke's large eyes seemed, like her religion, too unusual and striking. Poor Dorothea!'[17] Celia sees the blindness in Dorothea's religious ambition and tells her: ' … you went on as you always do, never looking just where you are, and treading in the wrong place … it is impossible to satisfy you; yet you never see what is quite plain.'[18] Dorothea's search for more meaning in her life takes the form of one of the novel's many searches for origins: in her case, the Evangelical's desire to recover the original fervour of the early church. This desire makes her sense of history quite different from that which prevails in her community. While everyone around her believes that Reformation is an epoch-making event, Dorothea believes that the crucial historical event has already occurred, that she is a late-comer living in an age lacking direct contact with God. Unlike Dinah Morris, an active Methodist preacher, Dorothea does not seem to have distinct visions of Christ the mediator. Instead, she seems to be looking for a husband who will be a mediator, someone who can bring close to her what is so distant in history.

Casaubon is nearly twenty-seven years older than Dorothea. In the narrow world of Tipton, his scholarly project seems to offer her the opportunity to satisfy her desire to recover the origins of her religious faith: '… here was a living Bossuet, whose work would reconcile complete knowledge with devoted piety; here was a modern Augustine who united the glories of doctor and saint.'[19] She views marriage not as a medium for her own happiness but as a way through which she can be of use to someone. She subconsciously sees giving herself to Casaubon as the ultimate self-sacrifice and as a pathway into the good work she hopes to do with her life.

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[17] *Ibid*., p. 9.
[18] *Ibid*., p. 36.

[19] *Ibid*., p. 25.

Like Don Quixote's vision of a cavalier wearing a golden helmet, Dorothea's vision of Casaubon's intellectual grandeur is illusory. Far from being a '*Key*',[20] Casaubon's study proves to be a maze. R. H. Hutton observes that Dorothea is 'not the mere loving baby without power to see where she has made mistakes and where the weakness of others lies', but she has 'a strong, though utterly unpractised intellect of her own'.[21] Her pet project is to improve housing conditions for estate-workers. She has been studying plans to build new cottages, and hopes to win either Sir James or Casaubon to her cause. Her one disappointment in her husband-to-be is that he 'apparently did not care about building cottages'.[22] Though she is agitated by this indifference, she is blind to contrary signs due to her preconceived notion that Casaubon represents the height of spiritual elevation and intellect.

Before we see the cobweb of Dorothea and Casaubon's marriage 'pinched into its pilulous smallness'[23] during their honeymoon trip to Rome, George Eliot introduces the novel's other important story of pre-matrimonial acquaintanceship: Lydgate and Rosamond. Tertius Lydgate is a reform-minded doctor seeking, like Dorothea, 'the most direct alliance between intellectual conquest and the social good'.[24] Like Dorothea, his intellectual pursuit is a search for origins, in his case the search for some 'primitive tissue'[25] of which all human organs are made. Like Dorothea, his unusual interests also make the local community suspicious; the other doctors in Middlemarch reject Lydgate and his reforms. Only the sponsorship of Bulstrode gives him a chance to attempt some of his reforms, but this alliance proves harmful to Lydgate when Bulstrode's scandalous past is exposed. More harmful to Lydgate's vocational dreams, of course,

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[20]*Ibid*., p. 85.
[21]In David Carroll, *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1971), p. 290.
[22]*Middlemarch*, p. 33.
[23]*Ibid*., p. 22.
[24]*Ibid*., p. 145.
[25]*Ibid*., p. 148.

is his marriage to Rosamond Vincy, a marriage that mires him in debt and isolates him from any source of compassion.

Bernard J. Paris writes: 'The egoist tends to assume that the order of things corresponds to the desires of the mind; and instead of cultivating a true vision of causal sequences, he delights in imaginatively shaping the future in accord with present wishes.'[26] Rosamond is certainly such an egoist, and I refer to the well-known parable of a pier-glass, 'minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions',[27] that George Eliot and Paris use to describe her egoism:

> … place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! The scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection. These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent – of Miss Vincy, for example.[28]

More than a gloss on Rosamond's egoism, this parable, describes human knowledge as the ordering of the random events of the world in one's mind. For Feuerbach, there is only one evil, that is egoism, but his social epistemology demonstrates that the escape from egoism is not an escape from interpretation entirely, but rather a willingness to share – or create – a community of interpretations of the world. The implications of this parable, spread throughout *Middlemarch*, call into question each character's attempt to understand his lot, call into question any one community's definition of 'madness', and call into question even the omniscient narrator's ability to interpret for us the complex web of the novel itself. Madness in *Middlemarch* may be defined as the removal of an individual's candle from the chaotic pier-glass of experience and the

[26]Bernard J. Paris, *Experiments in Life* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), p. 129.
[27]*Middlemarch*, p. 264.
[28]*Ibid*., p. 264.

consequent sense of complete disorientation in the rush of incomprehensible events. Religion, as both Strauss and Feuerbach claim, is one candle the community offers its members to make events comprehensible. In asserting that religion is a supreme archetypal existence, Feuerbach emphasizes that:

> That which has essential value for man, which he esteems the perfect, the excellent, in which he has true delight, – that alone is God to him … His faith is the consciousness of that which is holy to him; but that alone is holy to man which lies deepest within him, which is most peculiarly his own, the basis, the essence of his individuality.[29]

Clifford Geertz, an American anthropologist, offers a very similar description of the interpretative function of religion, a description analogous to what I have called the experience of epistemological 'madness' in *Middlemarch*:

> There are at least three points where chaos – a tumult of events which lack not just interpretation but interpretability – threatens to break in upon man: at the limits of his analytic capacities, at the limits of his powers of endurance, and at the limits of his moral insight. Bafflement, suffering, and a sense of intractable ethical paradox are all, if they become intense enough or are sustained long enough, radical challenges to the proposition that life is comprehensible ... challenges with which any religion, however primitive, which hopes to persist must attempt somehow to cope.[30]

On her honeymoon trip to Rome, Dorothea experiences the loss of the illusion that has helped her to interpret her world. Her analytic capacities cannot deal with the historical complexities of Rome and her moral insight cannot deal with her fears that Casaubon is not after all a Pascal or a Milton. When she looks at Rome, she has no candle with which to arrange a

[29]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 54.
[30]Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 100.

coherent image. Her 'deep impressions' of Rome are of 'superstition divorced from reverence', 'an alien world', and 'ambitious ideals ... mixed confusedly with the signs of breathing forgetfulness and degradation'.[31] Rome is a historical pier-glass. In fact, the effect Rome has on Dorothea is simply an exaggerated version of the effect her local community has on her.

Dorothea's disillusionment also includes the growing fear that her husband's *Key to all Mythologies*[32] is as lacking in an interpretive centre as is Rome itself: '… the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband's mind were replaced by ante-rooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither.'[33] Dorothea quickly repents when she realizes that Casaubon has no interest in using her as 'a lamp-holder'[34] – she does menial tasks for him, but he never tires to teach her about his work. Her offers of encouragement and practical assistance seem only to anger Casaubon, pushing him deeper into his mental maze. She feels stifled and is gravely disappointed: 'The duties of her married life, contemplated as so great beforehand, seemed to be shrinking with the furniture and the white vapour-walled landscape … When would the days begin of that active wifely devotion which was to strengthen her husband's life and exalt her own? Never perhaps …'[35] Even before the honeymoon is over, they argue with each other, and Dorothea becomes increasingly depressed. R. H. Hutton comments:

> The most remarkable thread of spiritual melancholy in the book constitutes the real end for which it is written, – the picture of Dorothea's beautiful and noble, but utterly unsatisfied and unresting character, and the illustration of the wreck of happiness which results from her unguided spiritual cravings.[36]

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[31]*Middlemarch*, p. 193.
[32]*Ibid*., p. 85.
[33]*Ibid*., p. 195.
[34]*Ibid*., p. 18.
[35]*Ibid*., p. 274.
[36]In David Carroll, *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, p. 300.

In looking for a religious and spiritual duty to fulfill, Dorothea had blindly made a marriage that can only promise to thwart her efforts to do good, rather than lead her onward in her philanthropic quests. It is only after Casaubon's death that she can indulge in her own wishes, such as her cottage project.

Dorothea's egoism lies not only in her illusion – now gone – that Casaubon is a great scholar, but also in her inability to recognize that Casaubon's empty scholarship is the supporting illusion, the 'candle', of his life. While in Rome, Dorothea simply escapes Casaubon by literally escaping from the city. The centrifugal force that eventually impels her out of her local community is here prefigured by her drives out of Rome into the peaceful Campagna. Will Ladislaw, Casaubon's dilettante second-cousin, also helps Dorothea amuse herself in Rome, and it is Will who figures both in the increasing coldness of Dorothea's marriage and in the eventual happy ending of her new marriage outside the constraints of her local community.

The first marriage rises to a climax when Casaubon has a fit (possibly a heart attack) and asks Dorothea if she will complete his work upon his death. Dorothea would have earlier eagerly seized his request as an opportunity to walk down the grandest path and learn the secrets of life. But now, she has enough clarity and strength to pause before she answers. Nonetheless, as a duty, she decides to agree to the task, so that she doesn't stress him unduly. It is the '… ideal and not the real yoke of marriage'[37] that had bound her to this decision, along with her husband's nature and her own compassion. But the next day, after she resolves to take up his grand academic task, she finds him dead.

Following Casaubon's death, Celia, her sister, urging Dorothea not to make a religious duty of grieving, states very bluntly: 'If he has been taken away, that is a mercy, and you ought

[37]*Middlemarch*, p. 481.

to be grateful.'[38] Though Dorothea wears black for a period of time, she emerges from her mourning with altruistic intentions. When asked about her plans, she responds: 'I should like to take a great deal of land, and drain it and make a little colony, where everybody should work, and all the work should be done well. I should know every one of the people and be their friend.'[39] Her ambition is to create a society of her own making, where the ills of the world are lessened because of the kindness and service of one to another.

Casaubon's will denies Dorothea his fortune if she ever marries Will Ladislaw. The shock upon learning of the jealousy that haunted her husband, takes the form of a kind of madness, for Dorothea has again lost the candle of her ordered view of life:

> … she was undergoing a metamorphosis in which memory would not adjust itself to the stirring of new organs. Everything was changing its aspect: her husband's conduct, her own duteous feeling towards him, every struggle between them – and yet more, her whole relation to Will Ladislaw. Her world was in a state of convulsive change; the only thing she could say distinctly to herself was, that she must wait and think anew.[40]

This chaos in her view of life lasts only till she gives up her illusions about Casaubon and re-forms her desire around the only thing that remains untarnished after her honeymoon and brief marriage: 'a very little seed'[41] of her love for Will Ladislaw. This redirection of Dorothea's desire is virtually denied by the effects of her husband's will. The dangers of Dorothea's new social position are suspected by her friends and relatives. Celia and Sir James, now happily married, do not want Dorothea to return alone to Lowick. Mrs. Cadwallader is called upon to speak as the warning voice of Dorothea's community:

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[38] *Ibid*., p. 491.
[39] *Ibid*., p. 550.
[40] *Ibid*., p. 490.
[41] *Ibid*., p. 786.

> ‘You will certainly go mad in that house alone, my dear. You will see visions. We have all got to exert ourselves a little to keep sane, and call things by the same names as other people call them by ...’
> ‘I never called everything by the same name that all the people about me did,’ said Dorothea stoutly.
> ‘But I suppose you have found out your mistake, my dear,’ said Mrs Cadwallader, ‘and that is a proof of sanity.’
> Dorothea was aware of the sting, but it did not hurt her. ‘No’, she said, ‘I still think that the greater part of the world is mistaken about many things.’[42]

This bit of dialogue summarizes well the relation of Dorothea to her local community. Her movement away from the values of her local community is gradual and difficult. Even though her friends are suspicious of Will Ladislaw, Dorothea herself does not realize that the centre of her life has already shifted toward Will. She bids farewell to him without realizing either that she loves him or that he loves her. Will also involves himself in Mr. Brooke's election campaign to be closer to her, and stays on in Middlemarch even after he is banished from the rural parishes because of the scandal of Casaubon’s will. During the time of their separation, Dorothea occupies herself with what Celia describes as ‘all sorts of plans’,[43] and her story retires to the background while George Eliot turns to Bulstrode and Lydgate, stories also of egoism and of saving illusions.

Middlemarch explores ‘the future life’[44] as Feuerbach understood the term. He refers to this life, not as a metaphysical ‘hereafter’, but as the manifestation of man’s inward nature as it is

[42] *Ibid*., p. 537.
[43] *Ibid*., p. 551.
[44] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 134.

developed over time and through significant experience. He clarifies his interpretation of the Christian idea of the future life, which for most Victorians was synonymous with immortality:

> Where life is not in contradiction with a feeling, an imagination, an idea, and where this feeling, this idea, is not held authoritative and absolute, the belief in another and a heavenly life does not arise. The future life is nothing else than life in unison with the feeling, with the idea, which the present life contradicts. The whole import of the future life is the abolition of this discordance, and the realisation of a state which corresponds to the feelings, in which man is in unison with himself. An unknown, unimagined future is a ridiculous chimera: the other world is nothing more than the reality of a known idea, the satisfaction of a conscious desire, the fulfilment of a wish; it is only the removal of limits which here oppose themselves to the realisation of the idea.[45]

Feuerbach himself notes that the sum of the idea of the future life is happiness, 'the everlasting bliss of personality, which is here limited and circumscribed by Nature'.[46] He characterizes religion as an archetypal process of human development, one that seeks to rise above individual limitations and bring unconscious elements of the personality to consciousness. The end result of the development of personality, for Feuerbach, is a resolution of conflict, allowing a state of unity and harmony to be realized by the individual. Consciousness of this kind is the 'self-verification, self-affirmation, self-love, joy in one's own perfection … that exists only in a self-sufficing, complete being'.[47] Feuerbach also pointed out that some individuals made their own limitations those of the species, an error he identified with 'love of ease, sloth, vanity and

[45]*Ibid*., p. 147.
[46]*Ibid*., p. 152.
[47]*Ibid*., p. 5.

egoism'.[48] Such self-alienated individuals would not attain the universality that was intrinsic in his notion of the species.

Eliot imbibed Feuerbach's archetypal theory of human development. The gaps that occur between characters in *Middlemarch* are not fundamentally different from the gaps that occur within their innermost selves. The hypocrisy of Bulstrode represents the extreme form of such distorted self-reflection in the novel. He is not a 'coarse hypocrite',[49] says George Eliot's narrator, but 'simply a man whose desires had been stronger than his theoretic beliefs, and who had gradually explained the gratification of his desires into satisfactory agreement with those beliefs'.[50] The image for Bulstrode's self-delusion is a web of private arguments that '… the years had been perpetually spinning … into intricate thickness, like masses of spider-web, padding the moral sensibility …'[51] His end justifies his means, enforcing a 'discrimination of God's enemies, who were to be used merely as instruments',[52] and whom he seeks to prevent from gaining influence by restricting their monetary resources. The fragility of his fiction is revealed by the fear that John Raffles could expose him by telling all of Middlemarch about their past association. Public disgrace forces him to avoid speech entirely. He retreats home in silence and cannot bear to meet his daughters or confess to his wife or find comfort in prayer. Cut off from any form of 'I – Thou' relation, Bulstrode feels miserable: 'He felt himself perishing slowly in unpitied misery. Perhaps he should never see his wife's face with affection in it again. And if he turned to God there seemed to be no answer but the pressure of retribution.'[53] Harriet Bulstrode, however, is a loyal wife and provides a touching exemplification of Feuerbachian

[48] *Ibid*., p. 7.
[49] *Middlemarch*, p. 619.
[50] *Ibid*., p. 619.
[51] *Ibid*., p. 617.
[52] *Ibid*., p. 619.
[53] *Ibid*., p. 750.

love and forgiveness. She goes to her husband and they weep together, though this scene too is silent: 'They could not yet speak to each other of the shame which she was bearing with him, or of the acts which had brought it down on them. His confession was silent, and her promise of faithfulness was silent.'[54]

These silent signs of affection save Bulstrode from the complete isolation that might create what I have called the conditions for epistemological crisis. Nonetheless, an ultimate silence remains between husband and wife even when they leave Middlemarch. In light of Feuerbach's views on man's essential connection with others, this physical alienation or complete separation from Middlemarch dramatizes, and could be seen as, the strictly logical result of his alienation from himself. Bulstrode's life is stricken not only by his banishment from his adopted community, but also by a paradox in his chastened marriage. He desperately needs his wife's presence, yet this 'unloving proximity'[55] has its own sort of withering effect on his soul. Harriett's thoroughly good action is still unable to overcome the silence that Bulstrode must keep to preserve what little is left of his sustaining fiction of moral integrity: '… the acts which he had washed and diluted with inward argument and motive, … what name would she call them by? That she should ever silently call his acts Murder was what he could not bear.'[56]

The silence between Lydgate and Rosamond is more terrible than that between Bulstrode and Harriet. The spontaneous beliefs and indefinite trust that make up Rosamond and Lydgate's delicate web of love might never have been challenged if Lydgate's financial troubles and his involvement in the Bulstrode scandal had not threatened Rosamond's fiction of happiness. Practical cuts in their household expenses – e.g. giving up her silver and jewellery, or moving from their expensive house – would be painful blows to Rosamond, and her impulse is to leave

[54] *Ibid*., p. 750.
[55] *Ibid*., p. 749.
[56] *Ibid*., p. 824.

Middlemarch sooner than suffer the social disgrace represented by their loss. Middlemarch gossip has already convicted Lydgate of complicity in Bulstrode's murder of Raffles, but Lydgate cannot validate his interpretation of events until he finds someone else who will listen to his story. Dorothea re-enters the novel as a source of sympathy and financial help to him. While Lydgate's own nature is, as we have seen, at times lubricated by a certain base practicality and a distorted sense of values, his friendship with Dorothea provides the sympathy he sorely needs: 'The presence of a noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the lights for us … [Lydgate] felt that he was recovering his old self in the consciousness that he was with one who believed in it.'[57]

Feuerbach felt that the contradiction between the divine and the human is an illusory one and thus there was no need for the divine, or supernatural. In his *Essence of Christianity*, he asserts that Christ's power of saving and redeeming is not so much a celebration of the power of morality as of the power of example. In other words, he removes the supernatural Christ, and gives the power of love to the will of humanity. Maintaining that love is the primary tie between humans, he defines love as compassion, and romantically claims that love is the true unity of God and man, of spirit and nature. For him, human love, one to another, in the form of compassion, is the reconciliation of opposing forces, an aesthetic, or goal, toward which to strive. To her community, Dorothea's naive idealism is rash madness, but to Lydgate it is rescue. Her faith in Lydgate when nobody else believes in him springs naturally from her love of humanity.

Like Lydgate, Rosamond looks outside their marriage to escape from the pressures on her identity. She preserves her romance fiction by replacing the fallen hero, Lydgate, with a new hero, Will Ladislaw. Thus, Will has become an object of repressed desire for both Dorothea and

[57] *Ibid*., p. 762.

Rosamond. With his reappearance in Middlemarch, the lots of Dorothea and Rosamond suddenly converge. The crisis begins when Dorothea walks into Rosamond's drawing room and finds Rosamond in a tearful confession to Will of Lydgate's financial woes. From their intimate posture, Dorothea instantly believes in an adulterous relationship between the two, and leaves the scene. Rosamond and Will are left frozen in the drawing room in 'the painful vision of a double madness'.[58] Turning on Rosamond, Will shouts at her and openly proclaims his love for Dorothea: 'No other woman exists by the side of her. I would rather touch her hand if it were dead, than I would touch any other woman's living.'[59] Under this barrage, Rosamond virtually goes mad, her identity destroyed. She is mute in misery and must look into the pier-glass without a candle: '… the terrible collapse of the illusion towards which all her hope had been strained was a stroke which had too thoroughly shaken her: her little world was in ruins, and she felt herself tottering in the midst of a lonely bewildered consciousness.'[60]

When Dorothea leaves the Lydgate drawing room, she retreats home to a night of agonized self-examination. Her 'habit of direct fellow-feeling'[61] asserts itself, and she resolves to return to Middlemarch the next day to help Rosamond reconstruct the world of her illusion. The effect of Dorothea's genuine sympathy is hardly a complete change in Rosamond's egoism. In fact, with Lydgate restored to his original role as hero, his marriage is saved, but his career as a reformer is over. He is so scourged by his troubles that Rosamond ultimately overmasters him, according to the novel's 'Finale', and he spends the rest of his career treating the ailments of the wealthy.

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[58] *Ibid*., pp. 803-804.
[59] *Ibid*., p. 778.
[60] *Ibid*., p. 780.
[61] *Ibid*., p. 619.

T. R. Wright praises *Middlemarch* 'for its vivid and accurate representation of the agonies endured in the nineteenth century by those learning to live without God'.[62] The whole tone of the story is both morally and intellectually noble, but the way in which George Eliot excludes all faith in God from her characters is shocking to the readers. Lydgate naively believes: 'A model clergyman, like a model doctor, ought to think his own profession the finest in the world …'[63] Fred Vincy does not actually want to enter the church but considers entering it, for lack of anything better to do. He needs a job, and the church is the traditional path open to him. If Fred entered the church, preaching would be a small part of his life, while the rest would be given over to secular pursuits. Rev. Camden Farebrother himself admits that he is '… not a model clergyman – only a decent makeshift'.[64] His free time is spent enjoying 'non-clerical occupations',[65] including not only entomology and study of natural history, but also smoking and gambling. Nevertheless, he is 'sweet-tempered, ready-witted, frank', and Lydgate 'liked him heartily'.[66] He is a good man, but not a good preacher.

T. R. Wright asserts: 'The narrative of *Middlemarch* … never for a moment suggests that God might exist. It is, however, a religious novel in the broad sense that it is concerned with religious need, the desire for unity, meaning and purpose in life, in a world in which God, to use one of the key words of the novel is a "blank".'[67] U. C. Knoepflmacher eloquently sums up the religious contribution of the novel:

> Through her reconciling and combining of the incomplete opposites of materialism and idealism, science and morality, thought and feeling, and

[62]T. R. Wright, '*Middlemarch* as a Religious Novel or Life without God,' in *Images of Belief in Literature*, ed. David Jasper (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), p. 139.
[63]*Middlemarch*, p. 176.
[64]*Ibid*., p. 176.
[65]*Ibid*., p. 178.
[66]*Ibid*., p. 178.
[67]T. R. Wright, '*Middlemarch* as a Religious Novel,' p. 140.

> abstraction and experience, George Eliot hoped to make the adjustments necessary for a creed based on imperishable truths … [This religion] is a middle march between the discarded beliefs of the past and the longed-for faith of the future.[68]

Dorothea finally sheds her overtly strict piety, though she is always dutiful, selfless and generous. She stops trying to go through the motions of a Puritan, and instead devotes her energies to social projects. She tells Will how little she can lean on any divine power external to herself: 'That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil – widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower.'[69] Will calls this mysticism, but Dorothea corrects him: 'Please not to call it by any name … It is my life. I have found it out, and cannot part with it. I have always been finding out my religion since I was a little girl. I used to pray so much – now I hardly ever pray.'[70] T. R. Wright asserts: 'Dorothea's religion … is perfectly clear. She ceases to pray to God who no longer has any meaning.'[71] Prayer is ineffectual; Dorothea transmutes her own desires into a striving for the good for all.

Dorothea's major transformation occurs during her first marriage, and the rest of her story leads her into the arms of Ladislaw where she belongs. This is another instance of sacrifice, as Dorothea must give up her fortune, but this time she is true to herself. Though her neighbours look down on her marriage to Ladislaw, she has converted her imprudent religious ardour into something stronger and more useful. The book ends on a humanist note:

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[68]U. C. Knoepflmacher, *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel: George Eliot, Walter Pater, and Samuel Butler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 106.
[69]*Middlemarch*, p. 392.
[70]*Ibid*., p. 392.
[71]T. R. Wright, '*Middlemarch* as a Religious Novel,' p. 145.

> … the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive; for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.[72]

Though most scholars agree that *Middlemarch* is a Godless novel with a Godless ending, Peter C. Hodgson insists that ' … it should not be concluded that Dorothea has replaced her belief in the divine power against evil with belief in human power. The key religious insight is that a power greater than human power is needed to break the idolatry of self-securing and self-aggrandizement, the source of all evil'.[73] I find his reading to be extremely unsatisfactory. The last lines of the novel point to the importance of human action, and Eliot would be dismayed to learn that critics interpreted her beliefs in a way that negated human activity. T. R. Wright states that 'Dorothea's task is to fill the blank vacated by God, to reconstruct her world-view and to retain some kind of religion'.[74] Like in Eliot's own life, religious humanism fills that gap. Eliot was quite clear that spiritual influence is not necessary to do good and that human beings revere sacred principles for their inherent worth. If our behaviour is motivated only by duty to God or fear of punishment, it is not sincere, and Hodgson's statement, that 'a power greater than human power' is required to satisfactorily guide action, is seriously at odds with Eliot's beliefs. Dorothea becomes a stronger, more effectual person once she stops relying on a higher power and begins to actively use her own abilities.

Following the pattern set by George Eliot's studies of provincial life, *Daniel Deronda* tests English and European life by creating characters who do not easily fit into their available

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[72]*Middlemarch,* p. 838.
[73]Peter C. Hodgson, *The Mystery Beneath the Real: Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot* (London: Canterbury Press Limited, 2001), p. 122.
[74]T. R. Wright, *'Middlemarch* as a Religious Novel,' p. 144.

communities. I would like to examine the troubled strategies of selfhood in both Gwendolen Harleth and Daniel Deronda, and then the cure offered by the novel's visionary community.

The narrative of *Daniel Deronda* has typically been divided into two plots: Gwendolen's romantic story and Deronda's introduction into Judaism i.e. the English plot and the Jewish plot. The novel opens in a gambling casino in Leubronn, and the opening scene brings the two principal characters together when much of their stories has already occurred. Gwendolen, one of Eliot's foremost egoists, is engaged in an emblematic egoistic activity: gambling. Her favourite key to life is doing as she liked, and she has almost come to the decision to marry Grandcourt, a decision motivated only by her selfish impulses for social status and financial gain. She leaves Leubronn after she learns her family has lost all their money and shortly decides to go ahead and marry Grandcourt. She ends up suffering because of this wrong decision through Grandcourt's emotional abuse and the assertion of his sexual power. Socially acceptable, strong-willed and silent, Grandcourt effectively displaces the romantic paradigm of the Byronic hero. He is egoistic in wishing always to have his own way and is blind to any ideals of commitment to others. In fact, his desire for power, ability to inspire fear, and regard for outward appearances are almost matched by Gwendolen, who had wished 'to mount the chariot and drive the plunging horses herself'.[75] In such a marriage, as Eliot noted in *Romola*, there will be a struggle for mastery.

Like Dorothea, Lydgate, and Ladislaw in *Middlemarch*, like Hetty and Dinah in *Adam Bede*, Gwendolen Harleth is not deeply rooted in a community. George Eliot's narrator comments on this rootlessness in a passage early in *Daniel Deronda*, a passage that fundamentally connects Gwendolen's situation with that of the novel's homeless Jews:

[75]George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 137. All subsequent citations are to this edition.

> Pity that Offendene was not the home of Miss Harleth's childhood, or endeared to her by family memories! A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth, for the labours men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge …[76]

This lack of roots makes Gwendolen create her self, or selves, as she goes along. She is the best example in George Eliot's fiction of the self as actor. As in *Middlemarch,* the consequence of such a strategy of selfhood is madness, a madness for which Daniel Deronda is supposed to be the cure. Gwendolen is vulnerable to a kind of madness because she is different from those around her in the rural community in which her twice-widowed mother has settled. Like Dorothea, Gwendolen finds her life of leisure amid the rural gentry very dull. Her strong will makes her neighbours hope that she will soon be safely married. Her uncle, Mr. Gascoigne, says of Gwendolen: 'The point is, to get her well married. She has a little too much fire in her for her present life with her mother and sisters.'[77]

Robert Cirillo has observed that Eliot uses music as the external manifestation of Gwendolen's failure to communicate properly: 'Music exists in time while it transcends time; it is a species of art which transcends all barriers, including the void outside the self, and communicates feeling, merging subjective and objective into the common lot.'[78] He finds that Feuerbach's conception of melody as audible feeling, feeling communicating itself, is central to the function of music in the novel: 'Who has not experienced the irresistible power of musical sounds? And what else is this power if not the power of feeling? Music is the language of feeling

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[76]*Ibid*., p. 22.
[77]*Ibid*., p. 78.
[78]Robert Cirillo, 'Salvation in *Daniel Deronda*: The Fortunate Overthrow of Gwendolen Harleth,' in *Literary Monographs*, vol. 1, ed. Eric Rothstein and Thomas K. Dunseath (Madison: University of Winconsin Press, 1967), p. 219.

– a musical note is sonorous feeling or feeling communicating itself.'[79] Gwendolen is bound by the 'wirework'[80] of social convention – her society is a cage, not a sustaining community. She has no way to share her private fears or awe with others. The inability to assert herself is tied to a need for an audience to escape from her private anxiety. She is fond of looking at herself in mirrors, says George Eliot's narrator, but she needs to find 'a pleasant reflection of that self in her friends' flattery as well as in the looking-glass'.[81] Like a character in fiction, Gwendolen exists only when she is read by another. In fact, her four nearly anonymous sisters habitually regard her as a charmed character from fiction. When she is first engaged to Grandcourt, the four sisters are thrilled to find that 'real life was as interesting as 'Sir Charles Grandison'".[82] When Gwendolen rides up to Offendene on horseback after her marriage, the four sisters imagine that she is a heroine from Richardson or Scott. Paradoxically, the result of such highly mediated views of Gwendolen's character is to isolate her from those around her, from her audience.

The fits of dread that George Eliot dramatizes in *Daniel Deronda* are chiefly Gwendolen's fears of a bizarre picture in the house at Offendene. When she first enters the drawing room, she sees an organ and immediately decides to play Saint Cecilia. She seats herself before the organ 'in an admirable pose'.[83] The pose is interrupted by her sister's discovery of a sliding panel that hides a 'picture of an upturned dead face, from which an obscure figure seemed to be fleeing with outstretched arms';[84] Gwendolen's mother gives the picture a look of 'mere disgust',[85] but Gwendolen 'shuddered silently',[86] and her perceptive sister says: 'You will

[79]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 3.
[80]*Daniel Deronda*, p. 53.
[81]*Ibid*., p. 18.
[82]*Ibid*., p. 310.
[83]*Ibid*., p. 27.
[84]*Ibid*., p. 27.
[85]*Ibid*., p. 27.
[86]*Ibid*., p. 27.

never stay in this room by yourself, Gwendolen.'[87] Gwendolen angrily responds: 'How dare you open things which were meant to be shut up, you perverse little creature?'[88]

The reappearance of the hidden picture causes one of the most striking of Gwendolen's fits of dread. At one of the amateur theatricals in Offendene, Gwendolen has chosen to pose as Hermione from the ending of *A Winter's Tale*. At the moment when Hermione is to 'come to life'[89] before Leontes, the panel covering the ghoulish picture of the dead face and fleeing figure slides open. The sight terrifies Gwendolen, who shrieks and collapses in fear. George Eliot's narrator describes the experience as 'a brief remembered madness, an unexplained exception from her normal life'.[90] Gwendolen's normal life is acting; the unexplained exception to her normal life is a moment when she suddenly stops acting. In his *Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach had noted that fear 'inevitably intermingles itself'[91] with primitive religion; the conscience is under restraint because doubt, the principle of theoretic wisdom, appears to be a crime to the believer. Also, since the highest idea and the highest existence in religion is God, so the highest crime is doubt in the very existence of God. But as Feuerbach further explains: '… that which I do not trust myself to doubt, which I cannot doubt without feeling disturbed in my soul, without incurring guilt; that is no matter of theory, but a matter of conscience, no being of the intellect, but of the heart.'[92] If Gwendolen's religion is utilitarianism – an egoistic desire for pleasure and happiness – these dramatic surges represent unconscious doubt about her way of life, an ungovernable force that wells up against her will.

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[87] *Ibid*., p. 27.
[88] *Ibid*., p. 27.
[89] *Ibid*., p. 520.
[90] *Ibid*., p. 63.
[91] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 154.
[92] *Ibid*., p. 154.

The complexity of the above scene reveals that for Gwendolen, selfhood consists of roles within roles. It is difficult to decide when the 'real' Gwendolen appears from underneath her masks. Throughout the novel, mirrors multiply the image of Gwendolen, especially at times of crisis. When she arrives at Grandcourt's house after their wedding, she walks into her private suite and is happy to see 'herself repeated in glass panels with all her faint-green satin surroundings'.[93] The luxurious, cool surroundings provide the stage scenery that her 'girlish dreams'[94] have always included. A few minutes later, however, when Grandcourt's diamonds are sent to her with the bitter letter from Lydia Glasher, she is paralyzed in another fit of terror. Once again her image of herself is shattered by a surprise she cannot fit into her conception of herself. George Eliot returns to the multiple images of Gwendolen in the mirrors around the room: 'She could not see the reflections of herself then: they were like so many women petrified white ….'[95] Mirrors reflect Gwendolen's image of herself, except when she is too shocked to look at it. She goes from one shock to her self-image to another, each time restoring her sense of self by reconstructing, as best she can, a new fiction. Like the egoists Hetty and Rosamond, Gwendolen must keep lowering her expectations. Each shock produces a more chastened fiction, a more chastened image of herself.

When Grandcourt walks in and finds his new wife paralyzed in her chair with his diamonds strewn around the floor, Gwendolen begins to scream hysterically. George Eliot's narrator provides both the question Grandcourt asks himself – 'Was it a fit of madness?'[96] – and the affirmative answer – 'In some form or other the Furies had crossed his threshold.'[97]

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[93]*Daniel Deronda*, p. 358.
[94]*Ibid*., p. 357.
[95]*Ibid*., p. 359.
[96]*Ibid*., p. 359.
[97]*Ibid*., p. 359.

Grandcourt uses the language of madness much as Mrs. Cadwallader does in *Middlemarch*, to signify his disapproval of another's behaviour. When Lydia Glasher tells him she will not give up the diamonds, Grandcourt says: 'Of course, if you like, you can play the mad woman,'[98] and then, 'what is the use of talking to mad people?'[99] Grandcourt dislikes Gwendolen's 'carrying on'[100] with Daniel Deronda in public, so he tells her: 'Oblige me in future by not showing whims like a mad woman in a play.'[101] What strikes the 'fastidious egoism'[102] of Grandcourt as madness will hardly qualify as such, yet Gwendolen's growing isolation becomes a kind of madness: 'After every new shock of humiliation she tried to adjust herself and seize her old supports – proud concealment, trust in new excitements that would make life go by without much thinking ….'[103] She conceals her miseries from her family, friends, and, as much as possible, from Grandcourt. By the time Grandcourt takes Gwendolen yachting in the Mediterranean, her ideal web has become a prison. The narrator says that Gwendolen 'is at the very height of her entanglement in those fatal meshes which are woven within more closely than without …'[104]

Disillusionment in George Eliot's fiction often takes the form of seeing the world as having changed for the worse. Not surprisingly, enlightenment or conversion takes the form of seeing the world as having changed for the better. Heroines like Romola, Esther Lyon, and Dorothea Brooke needed a confessor, a mentor, to help them convert to a better role, from a private vision to a public vision. What Gwendolen too needs is a new way to interpret her world, a new candle for the pier-glass of her life. Throughout the growing misery of her marriage, Gwendolen's only hope of rescue has been Daniel Deronda. From the first time she sees him

[98] *Ibid*., p. 350.
[99] *Ibid*., p. 351.
[100] *Ibid*., p. 398.
[101] *Ibid*., p. 446.
[102] *Ibid*., p. 278.
[103] *Ibid*., p. 423.
[104] *Ibid*., p. 668.

watching her in the gambling casino at Leubronn, Gwendolen thinks that Daniel has an 'evil eye'[105] for her. As her marriage turns into a nightmare, she believes more and more that Deronda offers some sort of rescue from the distorted view of the world Grandcourt enforces on her: '[Gwendolen's] hidden helplessness gave fresh force to the hold Deronda had from the first taken on her mind, as one who had an unknown standard by which he judged her. Had he some way of looking at things which might be a new footing for her .... ?'[106] The narrator describes Gwendolen's feelings about Daniel, for example, as the reverence one has for a priest: 'Without the aid of sacred ceremony or costume, her feelings had turned this man, only a few years older than herself, into a priest ….'[107] Through Deronda's guidance, she admits her own faults: 'I *am* selfish. I have never thought much of any one's feelings, except my mother's. I have not been fond of people.'[108] His advice for her is the moral advice of the novel:

> Look on other lives besides your own. See what their troubles are, and how they are borne. Try to care about something in this vast world besides the gratification of small selfish desires. Try to care for what is best in thought and action – something that is good apart from the accidents of your own lot.[109]

This is an echo of Feuerbach's insistence on man's objective as well as subjective existence. In the former, reason is:

> … the profundest and the most essential necessity. In the reason first lies the self-consciousness of existence, self-conscious existence; in the reason is first revealed the end, the meaning of existence. Reason is existence objective to itself as its

[105]*Ibid.*, p. 10.
[106]*Ibid*., p. 430.
[107]*Ibid*., p. 430.
[108]*Ibid*., p. 450.
[109]*Ibid*., p. 446.

> own end; the ultimate tendency of things. That which is an object to itself is the highest, the final being; that which has power over itself is almighty.[110]

Feuerbach also noted that 'Man is nothing without an object',[111] that the great models of humanity had a dominant passion to achieve an absorbing aim; in doing so, they sought fulfillment of their own 'objective'[112] nature. After Deronda, in conjunction with Gwendolen's own conscience, has broken down her sense of autonomous but perverted individuality, in Feuerbachian terms he becomes her ideal objectification of the moral life. Deronda perceives that what Gwendolen needs is 'the higher, the religious life, which holds enthusiasm for something more than our own appetites and vanities'.[113] She must transform herself from a self-pleasing character into a self-sacrificing character. Deronda sermonizes: 'The few may find themselves in it simply by an elevation of feeling; but for us who have to struggle for our wisdom, the higher life must be a region in which the affections are clad with knowledge.'[114] Eliot's conception of religion is at this point something other than organized religion. It means a self-sacrificing, dutiful life. Eliot hopes we can all be better people by learning from others, and in turn, giving them comfort and guidance. Even if we are simply good listeners, that is an invaluable service for some. At her most desperate moment, sitting in the yacht with Grandcourt and wrestling with her hatred for her husband and her evil desires, Gwendolen holds to the thought of Deronda as her only hope: 'She clung to the thought of Deronda: she persuaded herself that he would not go away while she was there – he knew that she needed help. The sense that he was there would save her from acting out the evil within.'[115] Although she does not end up murdering Grandcourt,

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[110]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 38.
[111]*Ibid*., p. 4.
[112]*Ibid*., p. 4.
[113]*Daniel Deronda*, p. 451.
[114]*Ibid*., p. 451.
[115]*Ibid*., p. 681.

she is plagued with guilt when he dies, thinking she could have tried a bit harder to save him, saying: 'I did kill him in my thoughts.'[116] Deronda comforts her, but does not turn to theology in his comfort; instead, he turns to Gwendolen's actions in the world: 'I believe that you may become worthier than you have ever yet been – worthy to lead a life that may be a blessing.'[117] Thus, Gwendolen's redemption and change has been through human means – through Deronda's sympathy and love. In fact, Eliot admits as much: 'In this way our brother may be in the stead of God to us, and his opinion which has pierced even to the joints and marrow, may be our virtue in the making.'[118] When Deronda comforts her for the last time before leaving, and tells her that she could be 'among the best of women',[119] his words have a spiritual effect:

> The words were like the touch of a miraculous hand to Gwendolen. Mingled emotions streamed through her frame with a strength that seemed the beginning of a new existence, having some new power or other which stirred in her vaguely… So potent in us is the infused action of another soul, before which we bow in complete love.[120]

But even now, Gwendolen cannot separate the spiritual from the human: ' … the new existence seemed inseparable from Deronda'.[121] He seems to be the kind of redeeming Christ of Eliot's religion: 'Persons attracted him … in proportion to the possibility of his defending them, rescuing them, telling upon their lives with some sort of redeeming influence.'[122] He is responsible for not only Gwendolen's renewed faith, but also Mirah's. The latter tells Mrs. Meyrick the story of almost drowning herself and, in the last lines, links Deronda's person to her

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[116] *Ibid*., p. 695.
[117] *Ibid*., p. 700.
[118] *Ibid*., p. 763.
[119] *Ibid*., p. 769.
[120] *Ibid*., p. 769.
[121] *Ibid*., p. 769.
[122] *Ibid*., p. 324.

own faith: ‘Faith came to me again: I was not forsaken. He told you how he found me?’[123] David Carroll points out that Deronda becomes each of the three persons of the Trinity for Gwendolen: he is her judge, then shares her guilt and crucifixion, and then leaves her but promises to always be with her. Mrs. Meyrick even chides her son for ‘… always taking Mr. Deronda’s name in vain’.[124] And Mordecai himself takes on the role of God, as the one who foresees the prophetic vision which finds its incarnation in Deronda. He says to Deronda: ‘You will be my life: it will be planted afresh; it will grow. You shall take the inheritance; it has been gathering for ages.’[125]

At the end of the novel, urging Gwendolen to look for new duties in her life, Deronda says that if she can be selfless enough to keep looking for ‘newly-opening needs’ then she will find her ‘life growing like a plant’.[126] The organic metaphor is ironic because George Eliot’s narrator has, from the very beginning, spoken of Gwendolen as rootless, and her acting supports a self not at all organically centered. The gap between Deronda's advice and Gwendolen's ability to follow it may account for Gwendolen's powerful reaction when Daniel leaves her for the last time:

> When he was quite gone, her mother came in and found her sitting motionless. ‘Gwendolen, dearest, you look very ill,’ she said, bending over her and touching her cold hands.
>
> ‘Yes, mamma. But don't be afraid. I am going to live,’ said Gwendolen, bursting out hysterically.[127]

Gwendolen’s symptoms here are the same as in her earlier fits of dread when she played Hermione and when she received Lydia Glasher's letter: a cold, death-like paralysis followed by

[123] *Ibid*., p. 223.
[124] *Ibid*., p. 728.
[125] *Ibid*., p. 500.
[126] *Ibid*., p. 769.
[127] *Ibid*., p. 806.

hysterical shrieking when she is touched. After a day and a half of such shrieking, at the end of the novel, Gwendolen wakes up in the morning in a calmer state and tells her mother that she will live, that she will 'be better'.[128] As with the calm mornings that follow Hetty's and Dorothea's nights of suffering over shattered illusions, Gwendolen has somehow managed to reconstruct a fiction to live by. It is a chastened fiction, of course, and its value is never tested in the novel. George Eliot does not offer a 'Finale' to follow up Gwendolen's resolve and to see if she is successful. At the end of the novel, Gwendolen's 'cure' remains a very open question.

That Daniel does not 'cure' Gwendolen more definitively – say, by the conventional last-chapter marriage – is especially disturbing to the symmetry of *Daniel Deronda*. Structurally, they seem similar to Adam and Dinah in *Adam Bede*, whose patterns of development lead them to a marriage that unites the novel and reunites the novel's pastoral community. Such a 'happy ending' does not occur in *Daniel Deronda*, of course, much to the displeasure of some of the novel's readers, and also to the displeasure of Sir Hugo within the novel. Sir Hugo thinks that Daniel and Gwendolen would make a 'neatly prepared marriage'.[129] Perhaps the effect is similar to the possible effect on Adam Bede if Dinah had, after all, married Seth Bede, a man from within her sect, and Adam had been left alone at the end of the novel. The possibility of a match between Daniel and Gwendolen is strongly felt in the novel by Daniel himself: '… if all this had happened little more than a year ago, he would hardly have asked himself whether he loved her: the impetuous determining impulse which would have moved him would have been to save her from sorrow, to shelter her life for evermore from the dangers of loneliness ….'[130]

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[128] *Ibid*., p. 807.
[129] *Ibid*., p. 764.
[130] *Ibid*., p. 765.

What has intervened is Daniel's new identity, his discovery of his Jewish origins and his dedication to the dream of a Jewish nation in the Middle East. As a vocation, this dream satisfies Daniel's quest throughout the novel for origins and community. This quest is Daniel's personal pilgrimage at first, the religious overtones of which are clear when the narrator says that for Daniel, 'the words Father and Mother had the altar-fire in them ....'[131] Eventually his quest also becomes a communal quest, one that seeks to unify past and future in a vision of community that cannot be realized in England. In *Adam Bede*, Methodism is the alternative that calls the community of the novel into question, although its radical inwardness is eventually absorbed into the community. In *Daniel Deronda,* however, Daniel's Judaism provides an alternative to the community of England itself, an alternative that cannot be absorbed into English national life. Methodism offers conversion to anyone, so joining the alternative community is relatively easy. Judaism, however, requires a historical-genetic link to the form of community it offers. This is why Gwendolen must make do with Daniel's advice, not his companionship. She cannot follow him on his pilgrimage. The Meyricks originally think about trying to convert Mirah to Christianity, but, as Mab exclaims: 'How can an ugly Christian, who is always dropping her work, convert a beautiful Jewess, who has not a fault?'[132] Even when Deronda falls in love with Mirah and knows it is futile because she will never marry anyone who is not a Jew, conversion is not an option. Conversion, which is only a spiritual act, necessitates some kind of theological space, spiritual presence. And it is not a possibility in *Daniel Deronda* because spirituality has been transformed into the material world of human relations, as I have shown in my analysis of Gwendolen's renewal.

[131] *Ibid*., p. 469.
[132] *Ibid*., p. 362.

In a discussion about the differences between Judaism and Christianity, Mirah announces: 'But I could not make myself not a Jewess … even if I changed my belief.'[133] This adds some clarity to Eliot's choice of Judaism, for Judaism is not only a religion but also a heritage, a race. When Mrs. Meyrick suggests that if Jews kept changing their religion, making no difference between themselves and Christians, 'there would come a time when there would be no Jews to be seen',[134] Mirah takes that statement as the first unkind thing that Mrs. Meyrick had ever said to her. Judaism is something material, and therefore something that cannot be changed simply by changing belief. When doctrine (even human doctrine) fills theological space, it limits spiritual possibilities. Eliot admired the family bonds that characterize Judaism. Amanda Anderson points out that Mirah, rather than a religious model, 'represents what Deronda comes to recognize and avow: the importance of a deeply felt connection to family and culture'.[135] She is extremely conscious of her Jewishness, and despite an acknowledged ignorance of its tenets, she is loyal to her roots and follows the religion as best as she can. She is alive to the family connection and feels closer to her absent kin. Her 'religion was of one fibre with her affections'.[136] When we meet Mordecai, he quickly displaces Mirah as the most devout. He is fully absorbed in his Hebrew origins, waiting eagerly for a disciple who can carry on his work. All the Jews are devout (except Daniel's mother and Mirah's father, who are essentially villains). Sympathy with the Jewish race becomes a virtue, and renunciation becomes a flaw. My argument is that Eliot, in *Daniel Deronda*, transforms theology into the material world in the form of the Jewish tradition because it is a religion which is not only grounded in history and community, but also a religion willing to transform its doctrinal beliefs as its history progresses.

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[133] *Ibid*., p. 375.
[134] *Ibid*., p. 375.
[135] Amanda Anderson, 'George Eliot and the Jewish Question,' *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1997): 53.
[136] *Daniel Deronda*, p. 362.

Feuerbach blames theology – what he calls 'religion contemplating itself' – for concealing the simple, 'reflexive'[137] relation of man and his religion. Theology denies that the real content of the divine nature is human nature. Theology 'fancies its object, its ideas to be superhuman',[138] says Feuerbach, and to defend the superhuman status of the divine nature, theology separates God's existence from His human attributes. Theology claims that God is pure existence, pure being, to which attributes are accidental or unnecessary. The human qualities attributed to God represent only man's imperfect attempts to describe God's ineffable nature. Feuerbach argues, however, that such a supernatural mode of existence is impossible or irrelevant except as a logical exercise: '… that which has no predicates or qualities, has no effect upon me; that which has no effect upon me has no existence for me. To deny all the qualities of a being is equivalent to denying the being itself.'[139] For Feuerbach, then, there can be no supernatural ground of being, no God, except one created by man. Eliot follows Feuerbach's notion that freeing religion from theology actually restores it to its 'true original form'.[140] By turning what was once a religious theological system into a material, political reality, Eliot transforms theology into something purely secular in the novel. Felicia Bonaparte explains Eliot's belief in the distinction between religion and theology; in the theological scheme, 'ideals had their existence in God', but in the secular scheme, 'ideals must have material existence or they have no existence at all'.[141] Since Jews have been able to separate religion and theology, they had been able to hold on to their faith and transmit their heritage. The vision Mordecai has for his people is political:

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[137]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 11.
[138]*Ibid*., p. 11.
[139]*Ibid*., p. 12.
[140]*Ibid*., p. 22.
[141]Felicia Bonaparte, *Will and Destiny: Morality and Tragedy in George Eliot's Novels* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), p. 39.

> I say that the effect of our separateness will not be completed and have its highest transformation unless our race takes on again the character of a nationality. That is the fulfillment of the religious trust that moulded them into a people, whose life has made half the inspiration of the world … Then our race shall have an organic centre, a heart and brain to watch and guide and execute …[142]

And Deronda's plan at the end, the result of his Jewishness and Mordecai's transmitted vision, the outlet for his spiritual impulses, is also political:

> I am going to the East to become better acquainted with the condition of my race in various countries there … The idea that I am possessed with is that of restoring a political existence to my people, making them a nation again, giving them a national centre … That is a task which presents itself to me as a duty; I am resolved to begin it, however feebly. I am resolved to devote my life to it.[143]

The way Eliot moves from religious (spiritual, theological) power to political or nationalistic power is explained in the Philosopher's Club scene, in which Eliot speaks theoretically of the dynamics she embodies in the novel. The discussion is built around the idea of nationality, particularly the development of nations. Mordecai articulates Eliot's views on this issue as it relates to Judaism's benefit for the world and provides another reason why she chose Judaism to explore these issues:

> I justify the choice as all other choice is justified, … I cherish nothing for the Jewish nation, I seek nothing for them, but the good which promises good to all the nations … Our national life was a growing light. Let the central fire be kindled again, and the light will reach afar … So will a new Judaea, poised between East and West – a covenant of reconciliation.[144]

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[142] *Daniel Deronda*, pp. 534-35.
[143] *Ibid*., p. 803.
[144] *Ibid*., p. 803.

The Jewish religion was the seed which will grow into the Jewish nation, which Mordecai foresees will be a light to the whole world. Haris Meyrick, who falls in love with Gwendolen, wonders why Gwendolen didn't fall in love with him. He admits to himself: 'No woman ever wanted to discuss theology with me.'[145] The irony here is, of course, that Gwendolen and Deronda never really discuss theology, never consider God's character or the relationship between God and humanity. Their conversations, like the rest of the novel's narrative, only had to do with humanity's potential and how ideals can be worked out in the material world. Whatever divine power we find in the world of *Daniel Deronda*, it is only an outgrowth of humanity's own identity. Theology is only relevant when transformed into something that is not theological at all.

In acceding to Mordecai's desire, Deronda does not forsake Sir Hugo but goes beyond his conventional ideas. After aiding Gwendolen, he will marry Mirah and head East to help the Jewish people, in a destiny which reconciles East with West and past with present. His Jewish mission relates not to God but to man – the human species. Although his personal relation to Mordecai is based on the mystical Kabbalistic doctrine of the transmigration of souls, Deronda will, significantly, not profess to believe exactly as his Jewish forebears did, but he will maintain his grandfather's notion of 'separateness with communication'[146] and make his vocation the restoration or perfecting of the common life of the Jewish people. Amanda Anderson agrees that Deronda 'persistently acknowledges the benefits accrued by his own displacement',[147] but in a somewhat different sense. Deronda asserts that although he should have been brought up knowing he was a Jew, 'it must always have been a good to me to have as wide an instruction

[145]*Ibid*., p. 800.
[146]*Ibid*., p. 725.
[147]Anderson, 'George Eliot and the Jewish Question,' p. 46.

and sympathy as possible'.[148] Here Deronda explicitly links the wide instruction he received as a cosmopolitan Englishman with the wide sympathy that he developed through this experience. U. C. Knoepflmacher asserts: 'To George Eliot, Judaism contains a proportionate combination of the ideal and the actual, the spiritual and the material, the traditional and the progressive. Like the religion of the ministers of the earlier novels, its emphasis is on the secular rather than the abstract ....'[149] This is more to the point. Eliot reconceptualises Judaism in a way closest to her existing philosophy, but though she saw its value, she would not have realistically envisioned its adoption or for it to replace Christianity. 'For [Deronda], as to George Eliot, Judaism is an evolutionary faith',[150] so perhaps she saw Judaism as more adaptable. The most important thing Judaism gives to Deronda is a sense of tradition. His recovery of an ancestral tradition provides him with a 'fixed local habitation to render fellowship real' and makes him 'an organic part of social life'.[151]

In Feuerbach's analysis, community is not just a way to increase arithmetically the powers of the isolated self. The self must be validated by others – some form of community – to avoid an epistemological crisis that Feuerbach calls madness. Yet any form of community is created by the shared fictions of individuals. Neither self nor community, therefore, is grounded outside itself. In *Middlemarch*, escape from the local community becomes necessary for the characters of exceptional desire to make a happy ending in their lives and in the novel. Dorothea Brooke, for example, finds happiness in her marriage with Ladislaw and in their lives in the national community of English politics. This new community is described only sketchily in the

[148]*Daniel Deronda*, p. 662.
[149]U. C. Knoepflmacher, *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel*, p. 144.
[150]*Ibid*., p. 146.
[151]*Ibid*., p. 128.

‘Finale’ of *Middlemarch*, and we are simply told that Dorothea's beneficent influence in her new role is important, though diffusive. *Daniel Deronda* continues to widen the circles of community. The upper-class English society seen in *Daniel Deronda* is more cosmopolitan than that in *Middlemarch*, and not just the community life of a single village or town but the community life of a whole nation seems to be at stake in the novel. Important parts of *Daniel Deronda* are set in Europe, and England's national life is judged as part of European life. George Eliot's last novel might be called a study of national or even international life.

CONCLUSION

My present study has considered some of the influences of Feuerbach on the intellectual career of George Eliot and has demonstrated how they achieve complexity and vitality in the world of her fiction. I have also tried to analyze whether Eliot was able to give her readers a clear conception of, and a more active admiration for the vital elements which bind together and give meaning to their existence. In my study, I have already acknowledged the valuable inputs of critics like Bernard J. Paris, U. C. Knoepflmacher, George Levine, Joseph Wiesenfarth, David Carroll, and William Myers who have recognized George Eliot's debt to Feuerbach. I have tried to define differences as well as similarities in the infusion of Feuerbachian assumptions in George Eliot's fiction. The opening description of George Eliot's philosophical education indicates how her own thoughts fused with those of Feuerbach, so that they appeared even in her later fiction, probably by that time quite unconsciously.

George Eliot was attracted to Feuerbach's consistently empirical theological anthropology and his attention to psychological sources of basic Christian beliefs. Feuerbach maintains that 'the object and contents of the Christian religion are altogether human'.[1] He emphasizes a non-speculative, experiential reality – the essence of Christianity is really 'the essence of human feeling'[2] and the only divinity is 'the divinity of human nature'.[3] Christianity, for both Eliot and Feuerbach, was reducible to religious experience, that is, to *real* human experience. It was only in Feuerbach that Eliot found an alternative expression of a religious orientation to the universe, an orientation grounded in experience rather than abstraction. Her

[1]Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Dover Publications, 2008), p. 11. All subsequent citations are to this edition.
[2]*Ibid*., p. 117.
[3]*Ibid*., p. 117.

transition from Hennell and Bray, through Strauss, to Feuerbach's purely psychological demythologization was crucially important to her in offering a bridge from the traditional theological formulations of religion to an essential humanism, which was meaningful to her, and which she then felt would be equally meaningful to her readers.

Despite her claim that she thoroughly agreed with Feuerbach, Eliot does break with his philosophy over the question of human nature and the progress of history. While Feuerbach and Eliot share a celebration of the human imagination and the almost sacramental nature of love, Eliot does not evade, as does Feuerbach, the darker shapes that human desiring can assume:

> The total absence of the idea of the species in Christianity is especially observable in its characteristic doctrine of the universal sinfulness of men … All men are sinners. Granted; but they are not all sinners in the same way … One man is inclined to falsehood, another is not; he would rather give up his life than break his word or tell a lie; the third has a propensity to intoxication, the fourth to licentiousness; while the fifth … exhibits none of these vices. Thus, in the moral as well as the physical and intellectual elements, men compensate for each other, so that, taken as a whole, they are as they should be, they present the perfect man.[4]

For Feuerbach, evil is simply local imperfection, just as infinity is simply the sum total of individual perfections in the species. According to Feuerbach's arithmetical valuing of human actions and instincts, individual virtues and vices add up to a total sum of unalloyed virtue. His notion of the 'species' supplies an earthly ground for human desiring, but it also curtails such desiring at both extremes – in the experience of the ecstatic and of the horrific. Eliot, with her respect for the sanctity of the individual consciousness, found herself uncomfortable with Feuerbach's eagerness to reduce the singular to the general. Human consciousness need not be

[4]*Ibid*., p. 129.

restricted to the contemplation of its own presumed perfection. It may proceed into deeper waters necessitated by the sharp awareness of limit, by a sense of the terrible, the tragic and the complex. Eliot recognizes that the fact that human beings share traits cannot be used as a medium for obliterating differences. She focuses on particularity, not on the conflation of the individual to the species. For her, generalizing is the refuge of deficient intellectual activity and deficient feeling. Therefore, while Eliot shares Feuerbach's anthropocentric understanding of the world, and while she recognizes a potential for good in human nature, her work does not convey the same optimistic regard for human nature generally, nor does the species replace the individual as the central focus of her fictional work. This emphasis can, of course, be partly attributed to the fact that she employs a narrative structure, as the novel is a form uniquely suited to the task of dramatizing the development of individual character. However, I believe, that Eliot's fictional works argue for the individual rather than the species as the basis for the moral development of the community; in the complex relationship between the individual and his social environment, the development of the individual provides the primary factor in the evolution of society. Eliot's expectations for humanity are generally founded upon her sense of the individual's potential for moral regeneration. Her meliorist views are balanced by her equal awareness of the human susceptibility to corruption and the effect of such corruption on social development. Therefore, Eliot, unlike Feuerbach, displays a profound awareness of humanity's potential for both good *and* evil and an understanding that the virtue of one person cannot offset the evil of another in some sort of blissful calculus.

Eliot moves beyond Feuerbach in her insight into the deepest levels of human motivation. She gives a realistic depiction of life in her fiction, with all its pain, love, suffering, and joy, and shows how they are inextricably linked with human well-being and happiness. She concludes

that a balance must be maintained between the distinct attributes of sympathy, morality and will. She agrees with Feuerbach as to the possible merits of suffering, but also shows how suffering may foster new knowledge and reawakening of thought by the passing away of a loved person, by consciousness of sin, and even by an unhappy marriage.

Feuerbach's influence on Eliot's fiction is most explicit in her early works, where she assesses the weight of imperfection that presses human desiring beyond the scope of Feuerbach's imagined ideal. As she matured as an artist, Eliot's protagonists developed increasingly wide conceptions of the relationships which constitute themselves and their world. While Adam Bede evolves from a work-obsessed isolationist into a sympathetic member of his immediate, identifiable community, later characters such as Felix Holt conceive of themselves in terms of a wider, national community: '… there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life'.[5] Similarly, when Romola is fleeing Florence after Tito's treachery has been revealed, Savonarola reminds her of her wider responsibilities: 'And you think nothing of the sorrow and the wrong that are within the walls of the city where you dwell: you would leave your place empty, when it ought to be filled by your pity and your labour.'[6]

Eliot's descriptions of man's essential nature harmonize with Feuerbach's concept of the transition from alienation to 'essence' – a movement from egoism through suffering to sympathy which bears the imprint of Feuerbach's interpretation of Christianity. Both view suffering as an ultimately redemptive experience and confession as a healing act of speech – a turning point that has the power to reconcile human beings with their past wrong doing and help them to work towards the Feuerbachian goal of a unified self, achieved through love and reason. It is at this

[5]George Eliot, *Felix Holt, The Radical* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 50.
[6]George Eliot, *Romola* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 361.

very point of seeming connection that Eliot's religious humanism becomes distinct from Christian orthodoxy. While Calvinism argues that suffering is for the sake of heavenly reward, suffering within the context of Eliot's humanism yields only the benefit of a somewhat ameliorated human situation. In Eliot's vision, pain is universal and perennial, and does not change into beatific bliss. What remains is a religious humanism, in which the limitations of human beings, coupled with the forces of nature and circumstance, make human sympathy, animated by suffering and resulting in duty, the highest, indeed the only, possible spiritual achievement. Jesus serves as an example and shows us how to love our neighbours in a selfless way. As Feuerbach argues: '… only in Christ is the last wish of religion realised, the mystery of religious feeling solved: … for what God is *in essence*, … Christ is in actual *appearance*'.[7]

Feuerbach views sin as an instance of estrangement from our fellow beings. It is through love that we are reconciled to one another. Christ, therefore, as the image of love for the species, saves us from sin and suffering, from both self-alienation and estrangement from each other. The self-sacrificing love of Jesus, then, is the same thing as the highest human love:

> … the true human love, which is alone worthy of this name, is that which impels the sacrifice of self to another. Who then is our Saviour and Redeemer? God or Love? Love; for God as God has not saved us, but Love, which transcends the difference between the divine and human personality.[8]

For Feuerbach, God is the species conceived as an individual; Christianity does violence to the species by conceiving of God as an independent being: '… the separation of God from

[7]Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 121.
[8]*Ibid*., p. 46.

man is … the separation of man from man, the unloosening of the social bond'.[9] Eliot was also concerned about certain Christian doctrines and attitudes being subversive of true moral development. Christianity weakens interhuman relations because, in Christianity, 'man has all in himself, all in his God … God fills to me the place of the species, of my fellowmen'.[10]

Clearly, then, while Eliot distances herself from the more optimistic and simplistic elements of Feuerbach's thought, her interest in ethics is reinforced by her reading of Feuerbach, whose 'I – Thou' formulation (drawn from Hegel) is the basis for her moral theory. The Feuerbachian Eliot insists that the self becomes aware of the species and enters into the community through her or his relationship with another human being, with a 'thou': 'In love the reality of the species', otherwise an abstract conception, becomes 'a matter of feeling, a truth of feeling; for in love, a man declares himself unsatisfied in his individuality taken by itself; … he declares the life which he has through love to be the truly human life.'[11] The life-changing encounter with the other, experienced by many of Eliot's characters, is understood and presented in relation to Feuerbach's idea: 'Only through his fellow does man become clear to himself and self-conscious.'[12] Eliot consistently reiterates in her essays and letters, and embodies in her fiction, the idea that reconciliation with the world and with oneself becomes possible only through genuine human contact. We attain consciousness of the world through consciousness of another. Coming into consciousness, for individuals, is coming into self-consciousness through a connection with a specifically human 'other'. Neither the self nor the 'other' can truly exist

[9] *Ibid*., p. 203.
[10] *Ibid*., p. 133.
[11] *Ibid*., p. 133.
[12] *Ibid*., p. 70.

without each other, that is, as abstractions. Eliot's fiction labours to show the self as an interactive process in the material world.

Eliot did not believe in God or immortality. She rejected Christianity as a historic or dogmatic faith. But I have tried to show what she finally put in the place of God, how she translated Feuerbach's anthropology in her novels, thereby establishing her faith in firm and lasting relations, which could be attained through the adjustment of the individual to the community. This adjustment comes as a corollary to the protagonist's realization of the principles that promote love, respect, tolerance and sacrifice for others. By living for others, and by envisioning the effects of our existence upon those who live after us, we can experience a sense of impersonal immortality.

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