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Re-Interpreting the Novels of George Eliot Through Aspects of Christian Love

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Thesis Abstract:

Representations of Christian love in Victorian literature are often overlooked. However, this thesis will argue that attending to theological ideas about love gives a deeper understanding regarding how individuals put inward expressions of love into action. There are four Greek words attributed to theological love in the Bible: *eros* (married, romantic love), s*torge* (familial love), *philia* (a love of friendship and cooperation) and *agape*. *Agape* is God's unconditional love for humankind, which humanity can express via acts of love for one another. Alongside the concept of *philia*, I will also examine the Latin term, *caritas*, denoting how Christians put love into action. Despite the high level of scholarly attention paid to Eliot's novels, the theological influences on her thought remain underexplored. Those who do write about Eliot and theology, such as Elizabeth Jay, Peter Hodgson and Marilyn Orr do not pay close attention to theological love. In my thesis I consider how George Eliot seeks to normalise and domesticate Christian love by interweaving theological storylines into her narratives. Eliot rarely addresses Christian love directly, but her narrative emphases on kindness, altruism and sympathy are suggestive of Christian interpretations of theological love.

Using these emphases as a framework, my thesis examines how Christian love is suggested through reading Eliot's novels theologically. My first chapter will discuss *Adam Bede* and evaluates Christian love as *philia* and *caritas*, developing cooperative friendships in the community. In the second chapter, I re-examine familial love in *The Mill on the Floss* by suggesting that it can be interpreted as *storge* through sacrifice, obligation, and affection. My third chapter addresses the domestication of *agape* in *Silas Marner* by evaluating the reciprocity of spoken dialogue in the expression of Christian Love. The final chapter will assess the role of *eros* in *Middlemarch* and queries whether the narrative suggests a renewed Christian understanding of the term.

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Love is all you need.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere. This thesis is my contribution solely and has not been written in conjunction with any other individual and their research.

Kathryn Poole.

1: Introduction- Exploring the Centrality of Christian Appropriations of Love in George Eliot's Fiction

For many scholars of the Victorian period, the term 'love' is shaped by a secular vision that is sceptical about the divine and sees religion as increasingly marginal to British culture in the nineteenth century. Writing on the emergence of scientific epistemology, George Levine suggests that the 'pushing aside of the church and religion as an authority in knowledge' meant that the Victorians 'fac[ed] the immorality of the world [and required] a higher morality than that of traditional religion.'[1] Writers such as George Eliot are understood by many scholars of Victorian literature to be speaking to this loss of religion and filling the vacuum that arises when individuals are detached from earlier religious traditions. For Barry Qualls, George Eliot's 'writing shows us the increasing severance of an individual from his heritage and his past' and explores a '"merry England" which will allow her questing protagonists to relate the community's evolving life to their spiritual needs.'[2] While I agree with aspects of what Levine and Qualls have to say about Eliot's understanding of the spiritual needs of her age, I am less convinced that theology disappears so neatly from her ideas. Timothy Larsen asks how our views of the period change 'when theological voices are allowed to be heard?'[3] He goes on to explain that understanding spiritual lives requires the modern reader to recognise how the Victorians experienced a contestation of belief:

> Rather than, as it is so often presented, the 'loss of faith' being the keynote explanatory narrative when it comes to the intersection between Victorian religion and modern thought […] the nineteenth- century story is really one of contested Christianity rather than the ebbing of the sea of faith.[4]

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[1] George Levine, *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 4.

[2] Barry Qualls, *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction: The Novel as Book of Life* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), pp. 143-4.

[3] Timothy Larsen, *Contested Christianity: The Political and Social Contexts of Victorian Theology* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2004), p. 1.

[4] Larsen, *Contested Christianity*, p. 4.

The idea of an ebbing of the sea of faith' is linked back to Romanticism. Romanticised love became a proxy for faith in this period, and the legacy of this view for many Victorian writers is perhaps most famously captured in the last two stanzas of Matthew Arnold's poem, 'Dover Beach' (1867):

> The Sea of Faith
> Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
> Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
> But now I only hear Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
> Retreating, to the breath
> Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear
> And naked shingles of the world.
>
> Ah, love, let us be true
> To one another! for the world, which seems
> To lie before us like a land of dreams,
> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
> And we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night. (21-37)[5]

Arnold signposts a renewed way of looking at love: amid the waning of faith, love remains independently, without faith, 'retreating to the breath of the night wind' (25-26). The final stanza paints a poignant view of the changed nature of love. In this final vision, society has been alienated from love. It is an intense feeling, and one that provides a degree of personal comfort but Arnold's account of love is one that struggles to address the pain or suffering it witnesses and even causes. Understanding love as a quasi-mysterious place from which to view the rest of the harrowing world can turn our understanding inward and end up limiting our view of love's meaning.

[5] Matthew Arnold, 'Dover Beach' in *Matthew Arnold: Selected Poetry*, ed. by Keith Silver (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1994), p. 106.

Such limitations to humanity's understanding of love mean that an individual will sometimes turn to synonyms rather than pausing to think about love further. Words such as kindness, fondness, understanding, regard, devotion, sympathy, and affection seem better placed to describe our relationships with one another. This thesis contends that many of these synonyms are better understood with an extended definition of love, one that draws on the complex history of love's Christian heritage. The thesis aims to provide a theological framework to enhance our twenty-first century understanding of 'love' in the context of Victorian literature. That framework includes, for instance, the often-quoted passage on love from St Paul's letters to the Corinthians:

> Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1Corinthians 13: 4-7)

St Paul's description of love resonates with many who do not identify as people of faith, and much of what he has to say about love is not the exclusive property of Christianity. But the important point for my thesis is that the contours of St Paul's contribution, along with the writings of other Christians, played a key role in nineteenth-century worldviews. As Werner G. Jeanrond observes, albeit in a larger context than the nineteenth century, `Love neither is a Christian invention or possession. Rather the Christian understanding of God's relationship to the world in Christ opens up an ethos marked by attention to love.'[6]

This thesis argues that attending to theological ideas about love gives a deeper understanding about how individuals united in nineteenth-century communities. A great deal has been written about the treatment of those communities in Eliot's work, but the theological influences on this (and other) aspects of her thought remain underexplored. In my thesis I consider how Eliot seeks to normalise and domesticate Christian love by interweaving theological storylines into her narrative communities. Through considering different points of view, Eliot includes a plethora of individual

[6] Werner G. Jeanrond, 'Biblical Challenges to a Theology of Love', *Biblical interpretation*,11,3, (2003), 640-653, (p. 650)

stories, whereby having a Christian faith is one of many options. Spiritualities of individuals are explored through Eliot's novels and include, but are not limited to, Christian denominational stances. As such, Eliot weaves together narrative strands that are both religious and secular as she invites readers to think about her fictional societies.

Although the life and work of George Eliot has been examined by many working within Eliot Studies such as David Carroll and K.M Newton, and Eliot biographers such as Kathryn Hughes and Gordon Haight, much less research has been carried out into the theological life of Eliot and the implications this had for her fiction.[7] As K. M Newton points out: 'Eliot's agnosticism is generally unquestioned by critics and biographers.'[8] Eliot's spiritual life is rarely explored. The same can be said about Eliot's relationship with Christianity following her departure from organised religion in her early twenties. My focus on theological aspects of love, therefore, offers an insight into the lived, spiritual experience of Eliot and how she came to write fiction that incorporated many theological points of view.

George Eliot was born Mary Anne Evans on the 22nd November, 1819, a few miles from Nuneaton on the Arbury Estate, where her father Robert cared for some 7000 acres of farmland. She was raised by her father, who was an Anglican, but she was also heavily influenced by her governess, Miss Maria Lewis, when she went to study at The Elms in Nuneaton from the age of eight. Miss Lewis was 'serious in her religion, belonging to the Evangelical wing of the Church of England.'[9] Eliot's own father, Robert Evans, even began to be 'affected by Evangelical fervour', although he was 'too much of a conservative to do more than dip into this new moral and political force.' [10] Eliot watched her father uphold Anglican traditions and continued to attend her parish church at Chilvers Coton.

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[7] See Gordon S. Haight, *Selections from George Eliot's letters* (London: Yale University Press,1985), David Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations: A Reading of the Novels* (Cambridge, CUP, 1992), K.M Newton, *George Eliot for the Twenty-First Century: Literature, Philosophy, Politics* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillian, 2018), Kathryn Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian* (London: Fourth Estate, 1998).

[8] Newton, *George Eliot for the Twenty-First Century*, p. 52.

[9] Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian*, p. 30.

[10] Ibid, p. 31.

Eliot was also witness to the 'hazy, casual observance'[11] of the parishioners at the local church, and she came to abhor this attitude, given her resolve to 'know Christ as a personal redeemer.'[12] Her ambition to know the personal nature of Christ was to later influence her portrayal of Christian belief in her fictional communities, such as Hayslope in *Adam Bede* (1859) and Raveloe in *Silas Marner* (1861). Eliot continued to follow Maria Lewis's 'rigorous, but sweet and sentimental' influence into her early twenties, when she had 'abandoned God at the age of twenty-two.'[13] Her experience through her teenage years, however, flavoured Eliot's approach to the Christian faith. Eliot met, befriended, and was influenced by the Franklin sisters who were daughters of a local Baptist minister, and practicing Baptists themselves. Under their influence, and through absorbing the atmosphere of the Church, Eliot became deeply committed to her own faith. As Hughes suggests: 'It is not clear if Eliot underwent a sharply defined crisis in her mid-teens, but it is certainly the case that she became more ponderously religious than ever before.'[14] In her mid-late teens, Eliot was at home, at Griff House, looking after her aging father, Robert. She provided him with companionship and was 'the comforter of his declining years'. She welcomed guests into the home such as former schoolteachers Miss Lewis and the Misses Franklin during 1839.[15] Still connected to her old teachers of faith and Evangelicalism, Eliot maintained spiritual ties with her family and familial friends.

The pivotal shift in religious attitude in Eliot's early adult life, however, occurred in early 1839 when her Methodist aunt and uncle were visiting Griff from Derbyshire. 'Elizabeth Evans was a devout Methodist and a one-time preacher', states Hughes in her description of Eliot's aunt.[16] Elizabeth later formed the basis of the character of Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede*. Hughes goes on to describe Elizabeth as a 'genuinely good woman, [she] radiated the kind of generous fellow feeling which was

[11] Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian,* p. 31.

[12] Ibid, p. 30.

[13] Ibid, p. 32.

[14] Ibid, p. 34.

[15] Ibid, p. 40.

[16] Ibid, p. 41.

anathema to her sour-minded niece.'[17] Much to her own abhorrence, Eliot was drawn towards her aunt as the one person with whom she could 'share the daily experience of faith.'[18] Unfortunately, Eliot was torn by the gap between her ambitions of faith and her actual feelings. In a letter written to her aunt, just after her 1839 visit, Eliot expresses despair at failing to reach God:

> Instead of putting my light under a bushel, I am in danger of ostentatiously displaying a false one. You have much too high an opinion my dear Aunt, of my spiritual condition and of my personal and circumstantial advantages […] I feel that my besetting sin is the one of all others most destroying, as it is the fruitful parent of them all, Ambition, a desire insatiable for the esteem of my fellow creatures.[19]

Around eighteen months before she ceased to attend Church, Eliot was questioning the previous fervour of her teenage years. She was disappointed in recognising the truth about herself – that she was driven by ambition rather than spiritual advantage. During this period, Eliot maintained correspondence with Maria Lewis, informing her of the theological and philosophical volumes that she was reading in 1838 and 1839, demonstrating that she was in dialogue with varying positions on faith. Hughes states that: 'years later it was this ability to empathise with intellectual and psychological positions far from her own that would mark George Eliot's mature art.'[20] Eliot threw herself into writing, art, reading and correspondence, in addition to socialising with her peers. In the March of 1840, this climaxed in an inward battle that was too much for her. 'Desire threatened to press in on Mary Ann from all sides, [and] she broke down completely.'[21] Eliot decided to distance herself from practicing Christianity and to focus on her other intellectual pursuits – classic literature, philosophy and science, alongside the dissecting of prominent sermons and theological scripts. David Carroll describes Eliot's break from organised Christianity as a process: 'The individual life is seen as a

[17] Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian,* pp. 41-2.

[18] Ibid, p. 42.

[19] Gordon S. Haight, *The letters of George Eliot, Volume I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 158.

[20] Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian*, p. 45.

[21] Ibid, p. 52.

process of disconfirmation as well as discovery, and part of the process is the recognition of feeling as an essential element of knowledge.'[22] In short, Eliot focussed on broadening her outlook beyond an overtly dogmatic approach to faith.

Eliot's interest in philosophy grew to such an extent that she read many German works, including Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), culminating in her own translations of Strauss's *The Life of Jesus* (1846) and Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1854).[23] *The Life of Jesus* outlines Strauss's view that 'biblical interpretation had tried for centuries to be both rationalist and supernaturalist in its approach.'[24] To resolve this, Strauss put forward a mythical method of hermeneutics that he then applied to his interpretation of the gospels. Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* 'goes beyond extreme heterodoxy', maintaining that religion is a coded and hidden truth which requires demystifying.[25] *The Essence of Christianity* details Feuerbach's philosophical critique of Christianity, providing an analysis of how humans perceive God and the significance of having a God figure. Feuerbach's books went on to influence many notable figures, including Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche. Eliot, too, was influenced by Feuerbach, although we should not conflate their views. Although, as Carroll notes, Eliot 'acknowledged her indebtedness to Feuerbach', she was 'only too aware that the dismantling of orthodoxies could lead to new forms of hubris.'[26] While Strauss's and Feuerbach's works influence Eliot's fiction, my thesis does not engage extensively with their works: my interest in love is better served by not simply retracing the well-trodden ground of a philosophical approach to Eliot. I do, however, refer to both Strauss and Feuerbach, recognising that their philosophical reading of Christianity is not wholly separate from the theological strands shaping Eliot's narrative.

Suzanne Graver highlights the significance and impact of Eliot's focus on community in *George Eliot and Community: A Study in Social Theory and Fictional Form*

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[22] David Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations: A Reading of the Novels* (Cambridge, CUP, 1992), p. 17.

[23] Friedrich Schleiermacher was a German reformed Protestant theologian, philosopher, and biblical scholar. He is considered an early leader in Liberal Christianity.

[24] Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 13.

[25] Ibid, p. 14.

[26] Ibid, p. 14.

(1984). In the study Graver posits Eliot as participating in a tradition of 'social thought that was preoccupied with the rediscovery of community.'[27] Such a fixation with the 'rediscovery of community', Graver demonstrates, includes 'four principal elements':

> The perception of a breakdown in traditional values, the belief in a need for social regeneration, the desire (virtually impossible to fulfil) to distinguish between fact and value so to validate both, and the assumption that society could recover a sense of solidarity through a revolution of thought and feeling.[28]

Eliot, through her emphasis on community and its importance highlights the breakdown of traditional values, the regeneration of society, and most importantly the need to make prominent the values of humanity, which this thesis argues are chiefly love. A cohesion of community is achieved through Graver's final point, a revolution of thought and feeling, examining the values and spiritualities of individuals. Such portrayals endeavour to reinterpret sympathy, compassion, and ultimately love.

In her first published work of fiction, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858), George Eliot mentions the word 'love' a total of 261 times. The frequency of the term's use is indicative of the centrality of the concept in her fiction. Eliot's application of theological love, however, is most prominent in the final tale, 'Janet's Repentance':

> Blessed influence of one true loving human soul on another! Not calculable by algebra, not deductible by logic, but mysterious, effectual, mighty […] Ideas are […] sometimes […] made flesh; they breathe upon us with warm breath […]and speak to us in appealing tones; they are clothed in a living human soul, with all its conflicts, its faith, and its love.[29]

Through the short story, Janet is in search of love, or, more accurately, a sense of divine love to help her through her lived trauma. The passage details aspects of love

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[27] Suzanne Graver, *George Eliot and Community: A Study in Social Theory and Fictional Form* (London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 3.

[28] Graver, *George Eliot and Community: A Study in Social Theory and Fictional Form*, p. 3.

[29] George Eliot, 'Janet's Repentance 'in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, ed. By Thomas A. Noble (Oxford: oxford World's Classics, OUP, 2015, 3rd Impression), p. 291. All further mentions of the text will appear with the subtitle and the page number within the main body of my work.

that, if read theologically, provide an underlying premise in her fiction that has remained overlooked. The opening sentence sets the tone in which it is intended to be read. The phrase that Eliot uses, 'Blessed influence', likens the excerpt to a psalm or a hymn, guiding the reader towards a Christian reading.

Christian doctrine and liturgy state that Jesus is God incarnate: fully human and fully God.[30] Regarding the human nature of Christ (as both fully human and God), Eliot alludes to the personhood of Jesus and the phrase, 'of one true loving human soul to another' could be read as theological allegory, representing Jesus conversing with another person. Eliot's initial theological allusions then mix with her view of the nature of love in the second sentence: 'Not calculable by algebra, not deductible by logic, but mysterious, effectual, mighty […]'. In this sentence, the love of God is alluded to through a plethora of descriptors that appear to draw attention towards the supernatural and away from earthly domain.

Imagery of the supernatural is then quickly brought back to an earthly reference about human ideas: 'But sometimes they are made flesh […]' The choice of words in this instance is overtly theological, given the connotations of the phrase 'made flesh' in Christianity:

> […] And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-14 KJV)[31]

The 'Word made Flesh' reflects the key Christian belief that Jesus is God in human form, the 'only begotten son of the Father'. If the ideas posed through this section of Eliot's narrative are indeed 'made flesh', for instance in a real and tangible human form, it replicates the idea of the presence of God in humanity. God, then, becomes an 'idea', sometimes 'made flesh'. In a departure from the classic idea of Christ being both fully God and fully human, Eliot indicates that focus should be drawn towards Christ's

[30] See The Nicene Creed, for example, with reference to Christine doctrine and liturgy. The creed is often read out by the congregation in Church. **'**For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man.' <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/202102/nicene-creed.pdf > [ACCESSED 12/04/2024]

[31] I will be citing the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible throughout, as that is the version that was in circulation among English Protestant communities at the time that Eliot wrote her fiction.

human nature, adding the phrase 'clothed in a living human soul, with all its conflicts, its faith and its love.' It is in human form, Eliot suggests, that love can express itself fully as part of a web of human desires: 'its conflicts, faith and its love'.

The work of the founder of the Methodist movement, John Wesley (1703-1791) provides a starting point to better understand the theological tradition of love at the turn of the nineteenth century — a period that Eliot writes about in her early novels. Wesley held the conviction that what was in the hearts of believers was the key, not only to their salvation, but their existence on earth. His sermons and writings indicate the centrality of love, felt experience and the true nature of faith. For instance in 'Sermon 18: The Marks of the New Birth' (1748), Wesley indicates that faith, hope and love are true marks of a Christian's faith, but '[the] third scriptural mark of those who are born of God, and the greatest of all, is love.'[32] The greatest mark of a true (re)born Christian, Wesley contends, is love. Albert C. Outler, in his commentary on Wesley's sermons indicates that he demonstrates 'the marks of the New Birth are faith, hope and love […] Here Wesley comes as close as he ever will to an unnuanced notion of the Christian life as sinless.'[33] Wesley's influential stance indicates that not only can Christians achieve a near sinless perfection, but put into action the loving conviction of their hearts.

Another point of contention that my thesis highlights is that if we dismiss a theological approach in our consideration of Eliot's novels, we are overlooking a spiritual avenue through which the author intended the reader to view the text. As Timothy Larsen notes, the people of the nineteenth century were 'immersed in the scriptures.'[34] Religion, and the impact that faith had on everyday lives was a key concern for many in the Victorian era. Eliot was no different, despite her apparent departure from the Christian faith in her adult years. She read widely, and still took pleasure in reading volumes as diverse as those written by Thomas a' Kempis (1380-1471), John Henry Newman (1801-1890) and John Stuart-Mill (18061873). She

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[32] John S. Knox, *John Wesley's 52 Standard Sermons: An Annotated Summary* (London: Wiph and Stock Publishers, 2017), p. 45.

[33] *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology* ed.by Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon press, 1991), p. 173.

[34] Timothy Larsen, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), p. 1.

consciously represented an array of Christian spiritualities and faiths in her novels, from traditional Church of England parishes, Methodist communities, and Evangelical congregations. Such theological strands of narrative are woven into the main narratives of her novels, and as such require further examination. To dismiss the theological narrative of Eliot's novels, therefore, would be to negate a key aspect of the text which adds a layer of depth to literary analysis: that of the inclusion of many different Christian spiritualities in her fictional communities.

The attention that Eliot gives to the myriad of conflicting loves is the focus of my thesis. I will explore what is innately theological about the way that Eliot posits such desires and examine how these are expressed through Christian ideas of love. The Christian attributes of love are derived from the Christian Bible, specifically the Greek New Testament. However, I also incorporate a Latin term that emerged from biblical interpretation in the Middle-Ages and has remained in use since.

Framing the Message of Eliot's Novels through Aspects of Christian Love

My attention to the theological, has at its core, the central Christian concept of love. When examining literary text through such a lens, the reader can draw out allusions to biblical representations of love through the illustrative example of Christ. For Eliot, understanding the nature of Christ is key to exploring modes of sympathy, compassion, but above all, the love humans share. Motifs of sacrifice, forgiveness and reconciliation are endlessly explored alongside the more positive attributes of kindness and hospitality. Through a myriad of plots in her early novels, Eliot paints a cognitive picture, leading the reader towards core expressions of love, in many forms and guises. Fellow-feeling is scrutinised through novels such as *Silas Marner* and the concept of the outsider is re-examined, focussing on expressions of love. Journeys of self-sacrifice, compassion and ultimately, forgiveness are prevalent in Eliot's fiction, as such concepts are constantly re-evaluated and finessed in later novels, culminating in the expression of desire in *Middlemarch* (1871).

Through examining the connotations of some of the names given to types of love within the Christian tradition, my thesis will explore how Eliot engages with the

Christian theology of love in her novel communities. An exploration of biblical terms for love would begin with the concept of *Rakhmah* – the Aramaic term later applied to passages of the Old Testament, indicating a specific type of love. *Rakhmah* signifies the love of God, that is unconditional. Jesus, who was an Aramaic speaker would have been aware of this love found in the scriptures, and he would then expand upon this love in many of his teachings, including the golden rule, the new commandment (John 13:31-37). The terms were then translated into Greek in the Gospels. Eliot's work draws heavily on the 'Four Loves' of the Christian Gospels. In the twentieth century these loves were discussed and popularised by C.S Lewis in *The Four Loves* (1960). Lewis identifies the 'Four Loves' as being affection, friendship, eros and charity. The context in which Lewis writes is overtly theological in nature, and he places Christian concepts of affection as stemming from the Greek, *storge*, to mean kindness and kinship. Lewis also indicates that the Christian concepts of friendship, originating from the biblical idea of *philia*, and *eros* as a state of 'being in love[...] but includ[ing] other things besides sexual activity', and finally charity as a form of 'gift-love', replicating the love given from God, back into humanity.[35] Lewis takes his thinking from the concepts cemented into Christian thinking linked to the ancient thought of Aristotle (384-322 BCE), and the work of influential Early Christian thinkers such as Augustine of Hippo (354-430), and the later, medieval theology of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274).

Aristotle's philosophy of love acknowledges the conceptual parallels between human and divine love but insists, as Gabriel Richardson Lear has noted, that 'the forms of living things are valuable in themselves. They are not instruments of a cosmic soul.'[36] Aristotle's focus on the human dimensions of love leads him to think about how love is acted out through the 'good'. This leads to a particular interest in moral concerns:

> When we protect those we love courageously, dine with them temperately, give to them generously, and accept their honours with greatness of soul, we

[35] C.S Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Harper Collins, 1960), pp. 39, 70, 111, 155.

[36] Gabriel Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good: An Essay on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 86.

> grasp the practical truth— we are embodied, political animals who find our rational happiness only in common with others.[37]

According to Aristotle, we should protect those we love, dine with them, give to them generously and most importantly accept their attributes. Only then, can humans grasp 'the practical truth'- that it is only through interactions with others that we can find happiness, but finding this happiness requires acts of love, such as giving.

Thomas Aquinas's interest in showing how Christian theology was in conversation with the Aristotelian as much as the Platonic traditions led him to emphasise Aristotle's work on giving and tie it to the later Christian concept of charity. Aquinas refers to this as *caritas,* a Latin term used to depict acts of charity. Aquinas was also heavily influenced by the work of St Augustine. Augustine's theology focusses on a 'Law of love' and is central to his work *On Christian Doctrine*. For Augustine, the Christian view of charity is pivotal to Jesus's commandments to his disciples in The Sermon on the Mount, and summarised throughout the gospels, including the two-fold commandment to 'Love the Lord, your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind', and 'love your neighbour as yourself'.[38]

Augustine's focus on charity reverberates throughout a great deal of Western literature, including Eliot's work in the nineteenth century. This is why Alan Jacobs's book about love being at the core of hermeneutics includes a brief analysis of Eliot's *Adam Bede*:

> For Adam, the love of God and the love of others are mutually reinforcing, whereas for Marian Evans the love of God, or rather the whole notion of God has a strictly instrumental function and can safely be abandoned when it is no longer needed as a stimulus to the love of one's fellow humans.[39]

Although Jacobs sees the fictional character of Adam Bede reinforcing Augustine's notion of the 'law of love', he views Eliot's stance on the love of God as having a 'strictly instrumental function' that is abandoned when it is no longer required as a

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[37] Richardson Lear, *Happy Lives and the Highest Good: An Essay on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 207.

[38] See Matthew 22: 36-40

[39] Alan Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading: The Hermeneutics of Love* (Colorado and Oxford: Westview Press, 2001), p. 29.

prompt to the love that humans share. My own view is different. Rather than abandoning a theological concept of good works and actions when focussing on the love between humans, Eliot's thinking continues to draw on the Christian tradition as she explores the meaning of love in her work.

Although I am influenced by the context and importance of identifying the four Christian loves, as Lewis and many other Christian thinkers before him have done, my thesis also pays attention to Aquinas's concept of *caritas*. The 'Loves' I will, therefore, address in my thesis are four Greek terms, and one Latin term. These are: *philia*, *storge*, *agape*, *eros* and *caritas*. Connected with the concept of *philia*, I argue, is the Latin term, *caritas*, which I include alongside my analysis of *philia* as a fifth aspect of Christian love. The meaning of these five Greek and Latin words forms the basis of my approach to Eliot's fiction. Explicating the Christian view of love in this way allows me to pay particular attention to the Christian roots of fellow feeling as it is explored by Eliot. In some narrative strands, such as Hetty Sorrel's trial and eventual deportation in *Adam Bede*, the concern with how humans relate to and support one another is particularly overt. But it can also be felt in texts like *Silas Marner*, which concentrates on Silas's and Eppie's acceptance as adoptive father and daughter.

Although I use these five Greek and Latin words to organise the thesis and draw out different elements of the Christian view of love, I acknowledge that the words are not entirely discrete. One reason why the words appear to overlap so strongly is the widespread and sometimes casual use of synonyms associated with these aspects of love. For example, synonyms of *philia*, such as kindliness and affection towards fellow humans, also strongly resonate with attributes of *storge*, or familial love. The concepts of kindliness and affection are strongly attributed to aspects of familial love and the overlap between *philia* (fellow-feeling) and *storge* (kind affection) become blurred in some narrative strands of Eliot's fiction.

Philia denotes love within the Christian community and is derived from brotherly love and affection (as monks and friars would demonstrate towards one another). Sometimes *philia* is used as a synonym for fellowship. *Philia* is the most general type of love in Scripture, encompassing love for fellow humans, care, respect, and compassion for people in need. There are several instances in Eliot's early fiction that allude to brotherly love, and to *philia*. For example, in 'Amos Barton', the clergy,

clerical meetings, book societies and brotherly love are mentioned in conjunction with one another. 'The clergy had agreed to have a clerical meeting every month, wherein they would […] cement their brotherly love by discussing a good dinner. A Book Society naturally suggested itself as an adjunct of this agreeable plan.' (*Scenes*, 26). *Philia* is alluded to in the passage, as the friendship between clergy is suggested using the phrase 'cement their brotherly love'. Although this is referring to a book society, the allusions towards 'brotherly love' and a specific bond between Christians is indisputable, as this meeting is for clergy members.

It is helpful to pause further on the communal nature of the love described by Eliot. Her interest in the spiritual cohesion that draws such groups together should not be seen as consequentialist, or a numbers game — with some individuals acting for the greater good of the community as their sole focus and purpose. During the nineteenth century, ethical theories based on consequentialism, such as the theory of utilitarianism originally devised by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) were scrutinised by those such as John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Utilitarianism is a moral and ethical framework that suits the masses- placing numerical calculation over individualism- working towards what became the greater good. Boyd Hilton addresses the nature of utilitarianism:

> The core of utilitarian moral theory, especially as elaborated by Bentham, was consequentialist, in that the ethical value of an action was estimated by considering what effect it had on the actor and on others, not by making judgements as to the actor's motives and intentions. The appeal of such an approach is that we can be tolerably certain what the consequences of an act are but must always remain ignorant to the actor's state of mind.[40]

Utilitarian ethics look to negate the value and needs of the individual and this is not the position taken up by Eliot. But she was equally keen to avoid the individualism that was central to the evangelical tradition in which she grew up. As Elizabeth Jay explains, the utilitarian movement was also directly at odds with the emerging evangelical movements of the age: 'Evangelicalism asserted the unique importance of the individual

[40] Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1988), p. 182.

[…] Utilitarianism's best-informed critic, John Stuart Mill, recognised the Protestant religion as a theoretical champion of the individual'.[41]

Suzy Anger confirms the point that Eliot's move away from evangelicalism did not lead her to Utilitarianism. Anger tells us that: 'Eliot is not a consequentialist […] she criticises the utilitarian ethics deriving from Jeremy Bentham […] "Human pain," she insists, "refuses to be settled by Equations"[42] The needs of individuals cannot be solved by simply conforming to the needs of the greatest number in society. Even if the character's individual needs and concerns work towards the betterment of her fictional communities, such as Dinah Morris working towards the needs of the villagers in Hayslope (*Adam Bede*), the focus returns to Dinah's own story and her unfulfilled need to assist those she cares about, drawing them (as she sees it), into a loving community of Christ.

In developing an account of love that avoids the extremes of individualism and a Utilitarian emphasis on the needs of the community, Eliot's understanding of love is thoroughly relational and situational. The meaning of love is not fixed or absolute, but, rather, is shaped by the experiences of individuals living in community. This is evident throughout Eliot's novels, including the difficult decisions about relationships that Daniel makes in *Daniel Deronda* (1876), the actions of Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede*, and the loving and unloving choices made by a myriad of characters in *Middlemarch.* In all of these novels, and elsewhere in Eliot's writing, the meaning of love is shaped by the circumstances in which love is expressed. My argument in this thesis is that this relational and situational view of love is best understood as a continuation and development of the Christian tradition rather than a break from theology. Pursuing this line of thought, we might describe Eliot as a theological nominalist rather than a theological realist.

Eliot's theological nominalism is best understood by highlighting the different aspects of the Christian tradition on which she drew. In parts of the thesis, I show this by referring to some of the Christian thinkers that Eliot read, but the reader can also

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[41] Elizabeth Jay, *The Religion of the Heart: Anglican Evangelicalism and the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 7.

[42] Suzy Anger, 'George Eliot and Philosophy' in *The Cambridge companion to George Eliot: Second Edition*, ed. by George Levine and Nancy Henry (Cambridge: CUP, 2019) pp. 215-235, p. 218.

see Eliot's immersion in Christian thought by looking to later theologians who write about Christian love in ways that intersect with her own thinking. For instance, Eliot's interest in differing spiritualities and the felt experience of fictional characters is illuminated by turning to the work of Sarah Coakley, a twentieth and twenty-first century Christian theologian. Coakley stresses that modern audiences assume that desire is a physiological phenomenon: 'The presumption, is that physiological desires and urges are basic and fundamental in the sexual realm, and to this is often added a second presumption: that unsatisfied (physical) sexual desire is a necessarily harmful and 'unnatural' state.'[43] In particular, Coakley addresses the misinterpretation that modern audiences have regarding desire, and calls for a 'right ordering of human desire', as Mary Catherine Hilkert stresses:

> Coakley's central charge that there is a 'messy entanglement' between human desire for God and (often-repressed) physical sexual desire fosters a welcome integration of dimensions of human experience which the Christian tradition has long held in opposition […]with particular attention to Origen, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine […] Coakley identifies an entangled web of 'intense desire for God, problematic feelings about sexual desire, and a new creative understanding of God as Trinity.' She argues that no one of those interwoven threads is reducible to the other, nor can any one of them be dismissed or ignored.[44]

Drawing on work of the early Church leaders, and early medieval texts, Coakley also points towards a re-ordering of spiritual desires of the individual. Through a specifically Christian lens, Coakley shines a light on the misrepresentation of desire in the modern age, and it is through returning to older Christian theories and appropriations of desire that a modern audience can hope to understand and engage with God and theological aspects of desire and community. Hilkert summarises the impact of Coakley's work on desire, by concluding her volume 'goes a long way toward restoring

[43] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), p. 7.

[44] Mary Catherine Hilkert, 'Desire, Gender, and God-Talk: Sarah Coakley's Feminist Contemplative Theology', *Modern Theology*, 30, 4 (2014) 575- 581, (pp. 576-7)

the essential link between spirituality and theology'.[45] This is a link that Coakley has argued has been lost in many modern theological interpretations of desire. The key to understanding Coakley's work, however, is to be able to re-structure modern thought on desire: `Most important of all, this volume has the potential to prompt and reframe conversations about the depth and complexity of human desires–and how those desires reveal an infinite longing for God.'[46] This thesis draws on, in part, Coakley's emphasis on human desire, and the right attribution towards God and human community. I emphasise, for example, in the chapter on *Middlemarch*, *eros* and desire, Coakley's interpretation of Gregory of Nyssa's (335-394) work on *eros*, and the gifting of love back into the community. To examine Gregory of Nyssa's commentary on marriage whilst also exploring 'his contribution to technical trinitarian terms', is, as Coakley herself puts it 'not customary'— but provides the reader with a renewed and often overlooked theological account of desire. [47]

My analysis of *philia* in the thesis also incorporates the Thomistic and Latin term *caritas. Caritas* is understood by Aquinas as 'the friendship of man for God', which 'unites us to God'. He holds it as 'the most excellent of the virtues.'[48] In Eliot's fiction, another scene from 'Janet's Repentance' sheds light on the notion of *caritas,* and how that is alluded to by Eliot. When speaking of Christ, and having faith in him, Mr Tyran explains to Janet: `He does not tell you, as your fellow men do, that you must first merit His love; he neither condemns nor reproaches you for the past […]' (*Scenes*, 287-8) This signals the belief that Christ's love is given unconditionally, without care for the past. The context of Tyran's speech is significant, as he is dying at a young age, and he finds a connection with Janet through her sorrow. His narrative seemingly suggests that if you know you are loved, you can reciprocate that love to others.

Storge is the name given to familial love, the foundations of which are built around the concepts of kindliness and affection. This Greek word describes family love,

[45] Hilkert, 'Desire, Gender, and God-Talk: Sarah Coakley's Feminist Contemplative Theology', 575- 581, (p. 581).

[46] Ibid, 575- 581, (p. 581).

[47] Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 3.

[48] See Liz Carmichael '4: Thomas Aquinas- Caritas is Friendship with God' pp. 101-128' in *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 113.

the affectionate bond that develops naturally between parents and children, and brothers and sisters. Many examples of family love are found in Scripture, such as the mutual protection among Noah and his wife (Genesis 6:9-22), the love of Jacob for his sons (Genesis 37:1-12), and the strong love the sisters Martha and Mary had for their brother Lazarus (John 11:1-37). Through Eliot's fiction, the reader can see many instances of kindliness and affection, often of a familial nature. For instance, in 'Mr Gilfil's Love Story', tenderness and familial affection is alluded to through acts of love that a man has towards a woman: `In the love of a brave and faithful man there is always a strain of maternal tenderness; he gives out again those beams of protection and fondness which were shed on him as he lay on his mother's knee.' (*Scenes*,170) Viewing the love of a human man as maternal, is a comforting image, as 'tenderness' is the key act of love, in addition to 'protection' and 'fondness'. Such instincts are suggestive of familial kindliness and affection, in this case, the nurturing instincts of a mother-figure.

Agape defines God's immeasurable and incomparable love for humankind. It is the divine love that comes from God. *Agape* is perfect, unconditional, sacrificial, and pure. Key examples of *agape* in the Bible include the story of the disciple, Peter, and his redemption through following Jesus. Peter had formerly been a sinful man, fishing for, and only thinking of himself (Luke 5:8). Jesus forgave him and encouraged Peter to fish for the people of his community (Luke 5:10). From there, Peter became a disciple of Jesus. Following his resurrection, Jesus asked Peter if he loved him (*agape*). Peter replied three times that he did, but the word he used was *phileo* or brotherly love (John 21:15–19). Peter had not yet received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; he was incapable of *agape* love — and had not witnessed the true nature of God's love. But after Pentecost, Peter was so full of God's love that he spoke from his heart and 3,000 people were converted. Regarding *agape*, Peter felt the love of Christ and replicated that love through preaching his teachings. Peter achieves a universality of love towards his fellow humans, imitating the *agape* he felt towards Jesus. In Eliot's fiction, *agape* is alluded to on multiple occasions, not only in the example from 'Janet's Repentance' given at the beginning of this work, but also in 'Mr Gilfil's Love Story', when Mr Gilfil addresses Tina: 'God sees what is in our hearts: 'Tina, my loved one, you would never have done it. God saw your whole heart […].' (*Scenes* 174) The seemingly simplistic

narrative of God being able to 'see what is in our hearts' indicates that God senses what is inward within humanity and can see the love that lies therein. Love is what is truly felt within the heart, within the person. This idea reinforces the theological example given in John 21 of the human heart being where God's love resides, and from where love is put forth. *Agape*, however, must not only be felt but expressed. Only through putting love into action, can *agape* be realised, because without turning words into deeds, humans cannot express a selfless, universal love.

Aspects of *agape* often resemble other modes of Christian love. This is inevitable given the Christian emphasis on love as an action and is illustrated through the way in which the term *caritas* is used to refer to putting God's love on earth into human deeds. Some of the Christian interpretations of love I consider in this thesis also cross over into other terms. *Philia* is another definition of love that involves loving action in a community. My point, in other words, is that the expression of *agape* should sometimes look very much like *philia* and *caritas.* And looking beyond these specifically Christian terms, there are numerous other forms of love in Eliot's work (e.g. kindness and charity) that complicate any attempt to keep definitions neat and separate.

Despite this overlap of definitions there is a value to using different terms to direct each chapter. Perhaps the most striking example of this is *eros*, which denotes romantic or intimate love, like that within the constitution of marriage. But within the boundary of marriage, *eros* love is to be celebrated and enjoyed as a beautiful blessing from God (Proverbs 5:18–19; see also Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 7:5; Ecclesiastes 9:9) Even though the term e*ros* is not found in the Old Testament, the Song of Solomon vividly portrays the passion of erotic love (Song of Soloman 1: 1-17), sections of which are often read out at wedding ceremonies to denote married love and sexual desire. In *Scenes of Clerical Life*, Eliot emphasises romantic love, and the importance of a loving marriage through 'Amos Barton'. This is represented through Amos's loss of his wife, Milly, and how he cannot seem to do without her love:

> Amos for the first time, felt that he was alone – that day after day, month after month, year after year, would have to be lived through without Milly's love […] She was gone from him; and he could never show her his love any more, never

> make up for omissions in the past by filling future days with tenderness. (Scenes, 65)

Amos's loss is conveyed through all hypothetical future instances, where he cannot show his appreciation towards his wife, nor tenderness towards her. Eliot also portrays the problematic nature of love and desire in 'Mr Gilfil's Love Story'. One strand of narrative, surrounding Gilfil and Tina questions the concept of love and the marriage plot, as Tina states to her friend, Sir Christopher Padroncello: 'No,no, dear Padroncello, do not say so; I could not marry him.' '[…] Why, it is plain to everybody that you love him.' (*Scenes*, 151). Tina does not wish to marry Gilfil, despite some inward (and outward) perception that she loves him. Simply put- Tina's desire is not to marry for romantic love. Padroncello's response is one that is based on appearances: how the outside world views the courtship of Gilfil and Tina. This is problematic, as highlighting such opinions in the narrative, throws light on the nature of relationships, and how desire and love aren't always as they seem. Some Christian theologians emphasise that *eros* is not always romantic or about sexual desire (see, for example, Gregory of Nyssa 335 – 395), and that the purpose of love in a marriage is also to send love back out into the community. The examination of *eros* would seem an apparent anomaly among the other types of love explored in this thesis. However, a theological and philosophical framework reframes what *eros* means within a Christian context. Following the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa (and indeed the work of Sarah Coakley), *eros* means a desire to do good, and more specifically to replicate the love you feel towards a partner back in the exterior world, through acts of good deeds.[49] Here, *eros* links to the concept of caritas, of charitable works, putting love into action in the outside world. *Eros* has more to do with desire, and more specifically the desire to do good, rather than the sexually erotic. This links the concept firmly with the other aspects of love examined, such as *philia*, and *caritas*.

Through utilising a theological framework to evaluate aspects of love within Eliot's novels, I am not suggesting that secular modes of love are rendered irrelevant, nor am I suggesting that to read the novels through the lens of theological love is the only credible method of examining Eliot. Instead, I am opening up the possibility that

[49] See Gregory of Nyssa, quoted through Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism*.

synonyms of love that Eliot utilises in her narrative modes of expression link with the concepts outlined in Christian aspects of love such as *philia*, *storge*, *agape*, *eros* and *caritas*. The relevance of reading the novels through such a framework is central to exposing a secularised audience to concepts that are relevant, not only to a desacralised society, but also a theological one. Some of the characters and protagonists in Eliot's novels are deeply committed Christians, and, as such, it is important to consider how her fictional narrative communities may have been influenced by Christian thought and expression. Some of the theological concepts are specific to certain denominations and sections of Christianity, such as Methodists and Evangelical Churches, but a vast majority of the theological strands of Eliot's narrative allude to aspects of love, that tie in with a broader, spiritual sense of Christianity and Christian life. In short, Eliot's narratives aid the twenty-first century reader to understand and approach underlying aspects of love, that also connect with Christian concepts of what love is and means on a human level.

George Eliot rejected the orthodoxy of organised Christian belief, as previously discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Although it is true that Eliot abandoned dogmatic Christianity (and stopped attending Church), her complete rejection of the faith is something of a misnomer, as those writing from an emerging post-secular age would indicate.[50] There is much debate over the extent to which Eliot removes herself from the realm of religious belief, but writers such as Norman Vance (2013), K.M Newton (2018), and the biographer, Kathryn Hughes (1998) suggest that she rejected Christian orthodoxy, rather than Christian spiritualities altogether.[51] Eliot's translation of F. Strauss' *The Life of Jesus* in English from the original German in 1846 caused her to question the validity of orthodox, dogmatic Christianity. Through interpreting the Christian philosophy of Strauss: who centralised the human example of Jesus in his theories, she came to question much of her dogmatic Christian faith, becoming

[50] See, for example, Jan-Mellissa Schramm, *Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth- Century Narrative* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012).

[51] See Norman Vance, *Bible and Novel: Narrative Authority and the Death of God* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), K.M Newton, *George Eliot for the Twenty-First Century*: Literature, Philosophy, Politics (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), and Kathryn Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian* (London: Harper Collins, 1998).

'Strauss-Sick' as is pointed out by those working on Eliot.[52] But what, exactly is meant by the 'rejection of orthodoxy'? Some explanation can be found in an oft-quoted letter of December 1869 to Eliot's good friend, Mme D'Albert Durade, where she refers to her previous stance on Christianity:

> When I was at Geneva, I had not yet lost the attitude of antagonism which belongs to the renunciation of any belief […]Ten years of experience have wrought great changes in that inward self: I have no longer any antagonism towards any faith in which human sorrow and human longing for purity have expressed themselves; on the contrary, I have a sympathy with it that predominates over all argumental tendencies. I have not returned to dogmatic Christianity – to the acceptance of any set of doctrines as a creed, and a superhuman revelation of the Unseen – but I see in it the highest expression of the religious sentiment that has yet found its place in the history of mankind, and I have the profoundest interest in the inward life of sincere Christians in all ages. […] I hope that my heart will be large enough for all the love that is required of me.[53]

In her heartfelt and sincere apology for her behaviour and attitude as a younger woman, Eliot reflects on her beliefs and reveals how her experience of the plights that humanity share draws her to love and understand 'the inward life of sincere Christians' that she goes on to represent in her novels. She has 'not returned to dogmatic Christianity', but that does not mean that Eliot rejected Christian beliefs and values altogether. Eliot's focus on values is further emphasised through the narrative attention paid to sympathy and kindness.

The same letter continues to discuss the nature of Eliot's writing and her new work, which she hopes will be translated into French. The ending further emphasises the centrality of love in her novels, however, as she concludes: 'I hope that my heart

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[52] See, for example Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian,* p. 99, Vance, *Bible and Novel: Narrative Authority and the Death of God,* p. 1, and Newton, *George Eliot for the Twenty-First Century,* p. 21.

[53] `To Francois D'Albert Durade, 6 December 1859' in Gordon S. Haight ed., *Selections from George Eliot's Letters* (London: Yale University Press, 1985). pp. 236-7. See also Newton, p. 32: `The later Eliot regretted that her hostility to Christian belief in 1848 may have disturbed the faith of Mme D'AlbertDurade, her more mature self having no desire to undermine the faith of religious believers.'

will be large enough for all the love that is required of me.' Love is the value that is required, Eliot stresses, to be able to write her novels effectively, and to represent that 'inward life of sincere Christians.' Such recognition serves as a basis through which love can be communicated through the storylines of her novels, as love is the underlying force in the communication of Eliot's sympathy. A later letter of 1860 to her long-standing friend, Sara Hennel, also stresses her views on love and piety: 'In proportion, as I love every form of piety – which is venerating love - I hate hard curiosity; and unhappily my experience has impressed me with the sense that hard curiosity is the more common temper of mind.'[54] For Eliot, in both her personal life and her novels — love, sympathy, piety and the faith in one's inward being is paramount. In colloquial terms, it is the love felt in your heart that is of importance, as it drives your feelings and your actions. As Norman Vance also observes in his analysis of Eliot's works in *Bible and Novel: Narrative Authority and the Death of God* (2013): 'George Eliot […] rebelled against the religion of her upbringing, but not, it can be argued against God or the Bible.' [55] Vance supports the claim that Eliot rejected only dogmatic Christianity, and not Christian faith. It is important to note this distinction between dogmatic religion and faith, as Eliot continued to read Christian sermons, prose and philosophy throughout her adult life, and used her extensive knowledge to replicate the lived experience of Christians in her fictional communities. Christianity and piety, for Eliot, therefore, is something that resides within the individual, rather than in a strict dogmatic creed.

Addressing Theology in Eliot Studies

Gillian Beer remains a key figure in the twenty and twenty-first century study of George Eliot. In *Darwin's Plots* (1983), Beer considers evolution and the transformative meaning of the term in literature. She explains how, following the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), evolution came to be known as a term that encompassed humanity as a species, rather than the expression of one's own personal life journey. Beer addresses a plethora of interconnected ideas that relate to

[54] `To Sara Hennel, 8 February 1861', in Haight ed. *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, p. 256.

[55] Vance, *Bible and Novel: Narrative Authority and the Death of God,* p. 92.

both the scientific and social discourse of the second half of the nineteenth century. For instance, to draw focus to scientific evolution, Beer addresses the concept of transcendence in Eliot's novels. Beer uses 'transcendence' to examine the representation of evolution and evolutionary processes in Eliot's work, and links this to the integration of scientific discovery in Victorian culture and writing.[56] Traditionally, transcendence has alluded to the nature of God as being above human understanding. Beer's application of the term to scientific discovery serves to strengthen her claims through the reclamation of a theologically charged term. Beer's claims include that the evolutionary discourse is interconnected to all other processes of the historical period in which Eliot was writing, and that evolutionary science permeated all other modes of discourse, through Darwin's influence.

Beer then turns her focus on the topic of incarnation in Eliot's work: 'Incarnation summarises all that is most difficult for her and rewarding to her as a novelist. […]'[57] For Beer, Eliot makes ideas incarnate within her narratives, linking evolutionary science, nature, and other cultural markers of the mid-nineteenth century. This is a complex endeavour, as scientific threads of narrative are placed alongside cultural and theological strands. Highlighting the necessity of incarnation in Eliot's work, Beer continues to demonstrate how this can enhance the scientific understanding of her audience, linking discovery to other social discourses of the age. Beer's interpretation of Eliot's approach to faith is sceptical, as she utilises the myth hypothesis in order to approach theological traditions suggested by nineteenth-century philosophers such as Feuerbach: 'She [Eliot] contrasts the knowledge of classical myth with the general ignorance of the symbolism of medieval Christian legend in a way likely to discomfit the modern reader.'[58] For Beer, to explore theological meaning and significance is not in line with an interpretation that the modern readers would be comfortable with, given the revelations of evolutionary science, an observation that also drives the study of empiricism within Eliot studies.

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[56] See Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Fiction* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000 2nd Edition), pp.141-2.

[57] Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 144.

[58] Ibid, p. 164.

Another key influence on the way that twenty-first century audiences think about religion and George Eliot is George Levine. Levine shares Beer's focus on discourses of evolution. Writing on the empiricism of the scientific movements of the long nineteenth-century, Levine links scientific discoveries and approaches to the literature of the age. Focussing on the importance of the shift in knowledge from theological to scientific, he looks to the evolution of morality in the period: 'The voice of science was the voice of this morality.'[59] Levine suggests that morality, which was once guided by the Church was now evolving to be guided by scientific empiricism, in line with discoveries of the age. Through empiricism and scientific discovery, knowledge is then linked to not only self-denial but the virtues of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice, themes Eliot addresses in her heroines. These themes present themselves under the guise of altruism, which particularly rings true in the narrative of Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*. Levine stresses, that although some have found her lecturing on these virtues problematic, 'those virtues were the conditions, as George Eliot understood it, for her own intellectual successes.'[60] If the virtues science inherited served to keep women in their place, therefore, then knowledge was certainly a way to escape these imposed norms. Although I agree with Levine's claims regarding knowledge, and virtues being the conditions of such awareness, I depart from his scientific mode of analysis, as I contend such assets are also indicative of theological qualities pertaining to the expression of love.

Levine's views on Eliot and religion are developed further in the introduction he co-authors with Nancy Henry for the second edition of the *Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* (2019). Levine and Henry describe Eliot as someone who, as 'a young woman[,] renounced Christianity.'[61] For Levine and Henry, Eliot's own life is reflected in her novels: 'Although from her first stories she wrote about Church and clergy with a compassionate knowingness, she built a strong case against Christianity.'[62] The 'compassionate knowingness' that Eliot writes with regarding Church and clergy, gives

[59] George Levine, *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) p. 4.

[60] Levine, *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England*, p. 7.

[61] George Levine and Nancy Henry, eds.: *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* Second Edition (Cambridge: CUP, 2019) p. 2.

[62] Levine and Henry eds., *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot,* p. 2.

way to her bitter portrayal of community and family. Not all representations of love and kindness in Eliot's fiction are positive but it is important to recognise that this is not the whole picture. In contrast to Levine and Henry, I see a more complex theological picture in Eliot, which includes the more positive portrayals of religious love in different communities. Although the assertion that Eliot's journey with Christianity ends in her mid-twenties is seemingly accurate, this does not mean that she ceases to engage with theology from a non-traditional perspective. Her engagement with Christian spirituality and belief is persistently stressed throughout theological strands of her tales.

Eliot does, in fact, as Levine and Henry touch upon, deal with the positive nature of communities (faith-based and secular) with a great deal of nuance and compassion. The judgements 'made by a complacent society', however, are made by characters she deems irreligious (regardless of if they are individuals of faith or not). This is evidenced in her letters, when Eliot writes about her first publication of three short stories (later known as *Scenes of Clerical Life*). As she wrote to her publisher in June 1857: 'The collision in the drama is not at all between "bigoted churchmanship" and evangelicalism, but between irreligion and religion […] the conflict lay between immorality and morality – irreligion and religion.' [63] Rather than turning away from addressing Christianity, or indeed theology in her novels, she engages it from two sides, that which is irreligious and immoral, and that which represents the religious and moral. This is a distinction she makes regardless of the character's religious outlook.

One way to contextualise the importance of viewing the theological in Eliot's works lies in the emerging study of Naturalism in the Victorian age. Amy King addresses the theme of the commonplace in nineteenth century literature and naturalism by turning attention to the notion of the divine in the ordinary: 'Whether theological or moral in intent, the representation of commonplace people and objects was shared by naturalists and novelists alike.'[64] King explores the broad concepts of naturalism, theology and ethics in her monograph. More specifically, she unpacks the

[63] Gordon S. Haight ed. 'To John Blackwood [Publisher], 11 June 1857', *Selections from George Eliot's Letters* (London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp.173-4.

[64] Amy M. King, *The Divine in the Commonplace: Reverent Natural History and the Novel in Britain* (Cambridge: CUP, 2019), p. 35.

societal interpretations of the emerging natural sciences and their place alongside theologies and spiritualities: 'God's world and our view of the world come to coincide. This contrasts with modern science, which has no expectation that our view of the world must be closely coincident with how the world works.'[65] She focusses on how the contrast between our personal worldview and a scientific outlook should be put into conversation with one another, and how such pathways coincide, conflict and eventually resolve.

King then extends her findings to the literature of the age, focussing her attentions on Eliot, alongside other authors. For King, Eliot situates her novels amongst the discursive culture of natural history, linking it firmly to a theology of nature. Such an approach, she contends is the author's choice 'to put the commonplace […] figure at the centre of her narrative.'[66] In her concluding remarks on her chapter dedicated to Eliot, King surmises that as a modern thinker who intellectually conveys the ordinary lives of her characters, Eliot 'may remind us of ourselves'.[67] The danger in assuming that Eliot thinks almost as we do, however, is as King goes on to suggest, that belief looks much different in the nineteenth century than it does now, and that we must remember that 'there was no measurable loss of religious participation during Eliot's lifetime.'[68]

Peter C. Hodgson is one of the leading figures in the field of Eliot studies and theology. Hodgson's focus, not unlike my own, is the fiction of Eliot, and he includes both her early and later works in his monograph. The subtitle of this study is *The Mystery Beneath the Real,* indicating the embedded nature of theological strands in Eliot's novels. Hodgson carefully positions his study against widely held assumptions about Eliot abandoning interest in religious beliefs and narratives.[69] It is the assumption that Eliot became a non-believer that reinforces other methods of reading her fiction

[65] King, *The Divine in the Commonplace: Reverent Natural History and the Novel in Britain,* p. 1.

[66] Ibid*,* p. 169.

[67] Ibid, p. 180.

[68] Ibid*,* p. 180.

[69] Peter C. Hodgson, *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot: The Mystery Beneath the Real* (London: SCM Press, 2001) p. 1.

over a theological framework. Hodgson stresses throughout the monograph, that Eliot's religion was one that was based on humanity:

> […] but for her the objective of religion is to reorient human beings from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness, with 'reality' understood to include other persons […] what is needed is service and sympathy, the reduction and ignorance and degradation, the purifying and ennobling of human life with connecting it with something greater than itself. [70]

Hodgson suggests that, for Eliot, religion is found within humanity, but more importantly through the search for the truth and sympathy in others, that ultimately points to something 'greater than itself': a higher power. This culminates in the concluding example given through Dinah's preaching address in *Adam Bede* (1859) (245) whereby through the example of the (very human) Jesus, we can, as humans see God's heart and love for humanity:

> To say that Jesus was 'the son of God' does not mean that he had a divine nature miraculously conjoined with human nature; he was not a god in human flesh. Rather, it means that he was just like God,' and he was just like God in his love, his deep compassion and sympathy for those in need.[71]

Hodgson rightly suggests that Dinah re-addresses the old Christological problem of how Jesus is both divine and human. Presenting the example of Christ as God-like, 'Just like God' in his actions and words for those in need, is a reconstruction that 'make[s] sense to persons that live in an age of modernity and postmodernity.'[72] The figure of Christ, therefore, is reconfigured in a way that makes sense to an increasingly modern audience. Jesus, instead of being God on Earth, embodies qualities of God in human form. For Eliot, it is only through a human example of God's power and intervention, that we can find the ultimate truth but above all, love. In relation to Hodgson's approach, my thesis also examines how human relations communicate theological aspects of Eliot's novels. As Hodgson has identified sympathy as being central to Eliot's

[70] Hodgson, *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot,* p. 153.

[71] Ibid, p. 175.

[72] Ibid, p. 175.

fiction, I focus on how such expressions of sympathy show love. Sympathy is one of the key markers in the expression of love in Eliot's novel communities.

Like Hodgson before her, Marilyn Orr focuses on Eliot's religious imagination and how that is then drawn out through her fiction, but that is where the similarities cease. Orr addresses Romanticism as being central in the expression of the human imagination: as Eliot 'implicitly accepts the Romantic view of the imagination as the predominant human faculty.'[73] She addresses how Eliot then incorporates both religious and scientific motifs within her novels, and her belief in evolution which is theopolitical. Central to Orr's argument is the notion that Eliot continues to believe in the incarnation as the 'basis for human values and relations'[74] This is, as Orr argues, a fundamentally human endeavour, but it also looks to something beyond humanity, 'invest[ing] the natural and human with a sense of sacred value and significance.'[75] Such focus on the incarnate, inevitably leads Eliot to link that key idea in her writing back to the example of Christ. Orr concludes that:

> While the explanations of evolutionary Christianity were unavailable to George Eliot, then, her imagination responded to "the Idea of the Christ" and its evolution as represented symbolically and poetically and musically. And as we have seen throughout, it is at a profound imaginative level that George Eliot's consciousness embraced deeply felt ideas. [76]

The concept of the incarnate, and subsequentially of Christ, is one that Eliot evolves throughout her fiction, and her imaginative spaces. As a result, 'deeply felt ideas' are both embraced and evolved within her work and become individualistic for each character that Eliot evolves in her novels.

The example of Christ is an emerging and important focus in nineteenth century literary studies. Works that examine the figure of Christ in this period investigate themes of incarnation, love, and self-sacrifice, and how they are central in a cultural understanding of the age. Ilana Blumberg addresses such complexities in her

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[73] Marilyn Orr, *George Eliot's Religious Imagination: A Theopolitics of Evolution* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018), p. 3.

[74] Orr, *George Eliot's Religious Imagination,* p. 4.

[75] Ibid*,* p. 135.

[76] Ibid, p. 137.

2013 volume, *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in Mid-Century Novels*. Blumberg suggests that novelists moved away from the idea of self-sacrifice in service of another's good. Instead, they sought an ethical realism characterised by the belief that virtuous action could benefit all parties involved.[77] Such a rapid movement is also addressed by Jan-Melissa Schramm. In the introduction to her 2012 monograph, *Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century Narrative*, she indicates that nineteenth century writers were like wanderers through a new age of rapid social and moral change.[78] As a result, a new age of Christianity-inspired writing emerges forth to fill a void: 'which would make suffering meaningful'[79] In light of this challenge, how can writers embed this shift in ethical and moral outlook into their novels? Here, Schramm highlights the importance of theological discourse, rather than Blumberg's focus on the ethical. For Eliot, Schramm suggests, the incarnation of ideas is paramount. Through her re-envisioning of incarnation, Eliot gives 'fictional flesh to the ways in which a life of self-sacrifice makes real the metaphors of Christ's atoning work on the cross.'[80] Whatever Christ's death meant for Eliot, Schramm concludes, it was not 'in any way substitutionary', as suffering is a universal concept: a burden that should be shared. [81] Through fellowship, love and self-sacrifice, humans can alleviate suffering. In short, this is what Eliot set out to convey through her novels, which I maintain, can be achieved through a new theological lens. In relation to Blumberg and Schramm, my thesis will look at how an ethical model, or rather how a framework examining the values found in putting theological love into action, can stress the importance of examining theological aspects of Eliot's novels. Tied to my framework of reading the texts theologically are the concepts of examining the text through an ethical model — that of Christian values of love, involving not only sympathy, but acts of self-sacrifice. Such acts of love highlight an aspiration towards a universality shared by many of the characters in Eliot's novels. Acts of self-sacrifice are tied, but not limited to, the

[77] See Ilana Blumberg, *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in Mid-Century Novels* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2013)

[78] Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth- Century Narrative* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012) p. 1.

[79] Schramm, *Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth- Century Narrative,* p. 1.

[80] Ibid, p. 15.

[81] Ibid, p. 219.

narratives of Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede*, Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*, and the narrative of Celia Brooke in *Middlemarch.* Without an act of self-sacrifice, my thesis highlights, Christian love cannot be fully expressed.

Those writing in the twenty-first century on the centrality of Christology in the nineteenth century also include Elizabeth Ludlow and Jeffrey Keuss.[82] Schramm's main points of focus are the examples of self-sacrifice and atonement in nineteenth-century narratives, whereas Ludlow's edited collection and Keuss's monograph deal with the myriad ways in which the personal exploration of Christ's journey influenced and permeated nineteenth-century literary thought. In the twenty-first century, 'Representations of the figure of Christ have remained relatively underexplored'.[83] Both Ludlow, and more significantly, Keuss, expose the relevance of examining Christology to the modern thinker. This is particularly relevant in the examination of the progression of theological and literary thought in the nineteenth century, as the nature of Jesus is not only examined in philosophical or theological thought, but also through the popular literature of the age.

For Keuss, the work of George Eliot, in particular, 'exempl[ifies] the tensions surrounding poetics in nineteenth century theological and literary circles.' [84] A focus of the Keuss' work, therefore, is how Eliot posits herself to examine the personal, but also the 'face' of Christ. Keuss stresses that Eliot's (female) protagonists `embodied similar questions of meaning that showed different expressions of a common 'face' that troubled Eliot from the beginning of her fictional output.'[85] The 'face' on which Eliot focusses, Keuss continues, 'was that which is found in what she termed "the beautiful story "of Jesus.'[86] The story, and personhood of Christ, therefore, is fundamental to Eliot's literature, and her characters. Such an approach breathes life into an important

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[82] See Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth Century Narrative* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), Elizabeth Ludlow, ed. *The Figure of Christ in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) and *Jeffrey F. Keuss, A Poetics of Jesus: The Search for Christ through Writing in the Nineteenth Century* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002).

[83] Ludlow ed., *The Figure of Christ in the Long Nineteenth Century*, p. 2.

[84] Keuss, *A Poetics of Jesus,* p. 3.

[85] Ibid*,* p. 4.

[86] Ibid, p. 4.

[69] Ibid, p. 7.

conversation. Eliot not only addresses the philosophical questions, but the theological ones, suggesting that she doesn't just address humanist views in her literature, but opens avenues of theological interpretation. Through 'figuring her fiction through a poetics that is deeply Christological'[69], Keuss suggests, 'Eliot's poetics [is] a search for meaning in what is to be authentic in relation to what is truly sacred.'[87] Such a search for meaning is not only a philosophical or humanist endeavour but addresses the theological aspects of the conversation, most notably those of Christ, searching for meaning in the 'face' of her characters. Keuss's observations act as further inspiration for the trajectory of my thesis, as I look towards how the story of Christ leads us to examine Eliot's novels differently. Specifically, it is the love that Christ taught the disciples that we should share for one another that becomes a key focus of this work in relation to Eliot, specifically *agape* as a universal love we should all aspire to achieve.

Following from Keuss's interpretation of the face of Christ, recent work on theological symbolism and embodiment in literature, has indicated the Victorian turn to a feminine view of God. A feminine representation of God was particularly found in novels by female novelists. For instance, Rebecca Styler indicates that for many women authors 'a maternal model of deity gave sacred symbolism to their most pressing religious needs, whether to supplement or even supersede the masculine sacred persona.'[88] Motifs of sympathy, Styler continues, signified a maternal divine image 'in both its ethical and ontological sense[…] divine motherhood emphasised compassion at the heart of the godhead and as an ethical ideal for humanity.'[89] The feminine becomes irretrievably linked with core Christian teachings of virtue and compassion, represented through the life and teachings of Christ in the Victorian age, as Styler implies:

[87] Keuss, *A Poetics of Jesus,* p. 8.

[88] Rebecca Styler, *The Maternal image of God in Victorian Literature* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2024), p. 2.

[89] Styler, *The Maternal Image of God in Victorian Literature*, p. 2.

> Christian virtues –moral purity, love and self- denial –were widely thought to be 'more easily practised by women than by men', a connection which the discourse of 'Christian manliness' had to work hard to undo. [90]

In the late nineteenth century, then, Christian virtues such as love were more widely associated with women and feminine discourse, than with prior patriarchal narratives. Eliot's feminine protagonists and minor characters, therefore, reflect a turn to viewing feminine discourse as displaying Christian virtues such as compassion, self-sacrifice, and ultimately Chrisitan appropriations of love. Although a feminine view of Christ-like attributes is not central to the argument of this thesis, it is important to recognise the significance of this view of Christ to Victorian thought more generally and also to recognise the ways in which this body of thought does intersect with the representation of love that I explore in Eliot's novel communities.

Christ-like virtues of sympathy and compassion became synonymous with feminine attributes in Eliot's novels, as Gail Turley Houston also suggests in her work on *Romola* (1863). Turley Houston stresses, that unlike other female authors that she has worked on, such as Browning, Eliot was an agnostic. As a result of rejecting abstract dogma, 'Eliot believed that only "truth of feeling" could create love and generosity between human beings, and then only gradually.'[91] A human-centric view of Christian virtues is at the fore of Eliot's novel communities, and this links back to a Feuerbachian influence, as Turley Houston continues: 'Viewing love as the premier emotion, she concludes that *caritas* is "essentially feminine" and that any belief in love must acknowledge that the highest form of godhood was feminine.'[92] *Caritas*, and the loving action of charity are central in Eliot's fiction, and viewing these attributes not only as essentially human but also as essentially feminine, assists the reader in relating to Eliot's female characters. Ultimately, the reader is also able to engage with feeling and suffering as a part of the expression of such love, as Turley Houston concludes: 'Eliot also accepts that feeling and suffering are necessary to deepen human knowledge, hermeneutic insight, and charity so that humanity can move from solipsism toward the

[90] Styler, *The Maternal Image of God in Victorian Literature*, p. 12.

[91] Gail Turley Houston, *Victorian Women Writers, Radical Grandmothers, and the Gendering of God*. (Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2012), p. 122.

[92] Turley Houston, *Victorian Women Writers, Radical Grandmothers, and the Gendering of God,* p. 123.

communal.'[93] It is the evolution from self-centred behaviours in solipsism to communal interests through *caritas* that signify the view of the divine feminine- the true face of Christ in women, rather than men. Attributes that are not only found to be Christ-like, are also therefore essentially viewed as being feminine features in the later Victorian era. Considering such work pertaining to the evolution of theological discourse from the masculine sphere to the feminine, therefore, it is essential that this thesis further explores the impact and representation of the female role in communicating such Christian-appropriated virtues, and the turn from self-centred behaviours to communal ones through putting love- *caritas* into action.

Through examining the turn to feminine discourse through theological strands of Victorian narratives, Kimberly VanEsveld Adams examines the significance of the figure of the Madonna in Victorian Literature to the modern reader's understanding of essentialist feminism and it's 'centrality to feminist spirituality'.[94] She links George Eliot to her understanding of how 'the Madonna represented the self-perfection and completion that ordinary women would achieve when freed from social restraints.' [95] Through examples given in *Adam Bede*, *Romola* and *Middlemarch*, VanEsveld Adams explores the notion of the two types of Madonna figure as being both the Mary and Martha of the biblical story:

> Both Mirerva and Muse, and enjoying the male privilege of an intellectual vocation as well as a family of her own[…] Eliot ironically suggested the benefits of sexual and psychic virginity: a woman could enjoy freedom and empowerment only in the virgin's state of physical and emotional denial.[96]

It is only through denying themselves sexual and intellectual pleasures, that characters in Eliot's fiction, such as Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede* (a key example that VanEsveld Adams points to) that they can achieve perfection and a Madonna- like status in the narrative. George Eliot's treatment of religion ensures that her 'Madonna's cannot be

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[93] Turley Houston, *Victorian Women Writers, Radical Grandmothers, and the Gendering of God,* p. 142.

[94] 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. 49.

[95] VanEsveld Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism,* p. 1.

[96] Ibid, pp. 2-3.

understood apart from her feminist beliefs and religious views.'[97] More specifically, VanEsveld Adams continues, 'her enduring concerns [are] the origin of religion, the status of the image, the transmission of religious inheritance, and the nature of the Divine Mystery.'[98] Eliot's treatment of religion is fundamentally human-centric. In a similar vein to others writing on the feminine turn in theological discourse, VanEsvald Adams, stresses how Eliot's human-centric narrative is enhanced by the female experience: 'She insists that female experience and actual women be acknowledged as part of the ideals, work and destiny of the human race.'[99] This thesis indicates how lived experience female characters in Eliot's novels serve to work towards Christian virtues of compassion and love. In her analysis of *Adam Bede*, VanEsvald Adams's main focus is Dinah Morris: A 'Madonna figure' to Adam's 'Christ figure'.[100] Dinah represents a figure of 'benefice, purity and power[…and] has the Madonna's role of intercessor, she comforts the poor child-murderer, Hetty, in prison, and pleads for her with God.'[101] Dinah, therefore, does not achieve her goal, as Hetty remains in discomfort, and ultimately does not embrace God and Christian spirituality, as Dinah intended. The ending of the story leaves Dinah, the Madonna figure as 'contained by a maternal body, hedged in by the household, and silenced as a preacher. It seems that Eliot's text unhappily follows Feuerbach's: The Madonna- figure is displaced by the Christ-figure and disempowered.'[102] The Madonna status cannot always be maintained by Eliot's characters, and the search for their true desires can sometimes remained unfulfilled. This is a topic that I return to in my chapter on *eros* and the desire of female characters in *Middlemarch*.

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[97] VanEsveld Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism,* p. 150.

[98] Ibid, p. 151.

[99] Ibid, p. 152.

[100] Ibid, p. 156.

[101] Ibid, pp. 157-8.

[102] Ibid, p. 158.

Nineteenth-Century Studies, Religion and Literature

There is a long-standing dialogue between literature and theology, stemming from interest in the academy from the nineteenth century onwards. Christianity has been the predominant focus of studies in literature and theology, as has been noted by those such as Mark Knight, pointing out that, for the study of English Literature 'Christianity (and, to a lesser extent, its parent religion, Judaism) has been most influential historically.'[103] To frame the conversation, the post-secular turn in literary studies can be used as a lens for looking at the relationship between literature and religion.[104] Lori Branch, for example, addresses four predominant methods of applying the post-secular, the latter of which is the one that concerns the literary academy: 'a descriptor of humanities and social science scholarship in what has been called the "religious turn"'.[105] Such a mode of inquiry, Branch continues, 'would advance critical awareness of the history and ideology of the secular/religious boundary'.[106] Branch also emphasises a different understanding of the post-secular: concerning the relationship between the religious and the secular. To utilise a post-secular approach, therefore, would be to demonstrate an approach to literary studies that is not only theologically aware, but historically and culturally aware, exploring the religious significance of narrative modes in nineteenth-century studies, for example. My approach also builds on the post secular approach to literature, acknowledging the historical, cultural, and scriptural importance of the theological allusions to love that Eliot is making: impacting not only her named characters but also her narrative communities as a whole.

The study of literature and theology also lends itself to a deep textual interpretation, focussing on interpretation of texts and intertextuality. Victorian

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[103] See `Introduction: literature, Religion and the Art of Conversation', pp. 1-11. in Mark Knight, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Religion*, (London: Routledge, 2020, Second Edition), p.7 See also: David Jasper, *The Study of Literature and Religion* (Basingstoke: Macmillian, 1992), T.R Wright, *Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), *Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, ed. by Andrew W. Hass and Elizabeth Jay (Oxford: OUP, 2007). See also useful distinctions in the *Blackwell Companion to the Bible in English literat*ure, ed. by Emma Mason, Rebecca Lemon et al. (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009): 'Literature and Theology', 'Christianity and Literature', 'Religion and Literature', 'The Bible as Literature' and 'The Bible and Literature'.

[104] See Philip Blond ed., *Post-Secular Philosophy*: *Between Philosophy and Theology* (London: Routledge 1998).

[105] Lori Branch `Postsecular Studies' pp. 91-101 in Mark Knight ed., p. 91. Branch states the four important applications of the term.

[106] Branch, `Postsecular Studies', p. 94.

readership also focussed on literary interpretation, and much of the reading pursuits centred around the reading of scripture, with readers immersing themselves in not only scripture, but scriptural and doctrinal interpretation, published sermons and Christian philosophy. Often, families, couples and individuals devoted their evenings to a broad range of intellectual reading pursuits, reflecting the 'claim made repeatedly in nineteenth-century Britain [that] Literature was becoming modernity's functional religion […].'[107] Reading was central to not only the pursuit of intellect, but leisure and family-orientated time, and the novel was at its core.

Authors of the nineteenth century also utilised the novel to address social concerns of the age such as the impact of industrialisation, alcoholism, and decrepit living conditions. Such concerns were placed in a literary context that most readers would be familiar with: that of the Christian Bible. Such as Timothy Larsen have suggested that a modern annotated copy of a Victorian novel would `include biblical allusions that it never occurred to the author would ever need explaining.' [108] The Bible, and knowledge of biblical stories, moreover, provided an `essential set of metaphors and symbols.'[109] Such symbols and metaphors, that modern readers may feel a discomfort with.[110] The position (and assumed knowledge) of modern readers is in sharp contrast, therefore, to Victorian readers, who applied the moral of biblical stories to wider literary contexts. Without such assumed knowledge of the Bible and its literary parables, the modern reader might overlook cultural, theological, and literary symbols that are significant within the novel. Rebecca Styler also indicates that Eliot presented a moral or philosophical viewpoint, but in a subtle and covert way through fiction:

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[107] William R. McKelvy, *The English Cult of Literature: Devoted Readers 1774-1880* (London: University of Virginia Press, 2007), p. 1.

[108] Timothy Larsen, *A Book of One People*, p. 4. See also: Chapter 22: `The Bible and the Realist Novel', Jan-Melissa Schramm pp. 263- 273 in Jo Carruthers, Mark Knight and Andrew Tate, eds. *Literature and the Bible: A Reader* (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, Routledge Literature Readers, 2014).

[109] Larsen, *A Book of One People,* p. 4.

[110] See The General Introduction to Jo Carruthers, Mark Knight and Andrew Tate, eds. *Literature and the Bible: A Reader*, xi: `For those unfamiliar with the biblical story, religious allusions may be more jarring than they might have been to earlier readers who were more familiar with the Bible.' See also: Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots* (Introduction).

> George Eliot, too, felt that 'art' could instil a moral or philosophical viewpoint through its subtle, indirect method more effectively than the overt discourse of 'hundreds of sermons and philosophical dissertations'. Women writers were conscious that they were rivalling formal theological discourse and presented their work as an alternative which better suited the times.[111]

Through presenting the theological in a covert manner, Styler suggests, Eliot is providing an undercurrent to her novels, which not only rivals formal theological discourse, but makes theological aspects of her work more accessible to a modern audience, as a set of morals and philosophies. Theological discourse was changing in the nineteenth century, and biblical allusion replaced direct quotation.

Building upon a premise of a culture of literature and the Bible, Charles LaPorte addresses the changing nature of how the Bible is regarded in the Victorian Era. His 2011 volume, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible,* explores not only how religious debate 'held a more central place in the intellectual life of nineteenth-century Britain', but how 'much of that discord centred upon the Bible's status as the culture's foundational religious text.'[112] In the nineteenth century, different biblical interpretations were developed, recognised and debated over. LaPorte continues to stress that some of the best-known literature of the age 'reflects profound changes in biblical interpretation, and that concerns the revolutionary ideas found in such epoch-marking works as [...] George Eliot's (Marian Evans') translation of David Friedrich Strauss's *Life of Jesus* (1846) [...]'.[113] The impact of Strauss's *Life of Jesus* on renewed interpretations of not only the Bible but of Christianity was not to be underestimated. Some regard the work as denying that Jesus ever existed, something which La Porte contends: `In reality, Strauss's Life never disputes that Jesus himself existed [...]'[114] In Laporte's terms, Strauss' philosophical work was an 'epoch-marking event in the nineteenth century higher critical considerations of Jesus […]'. Norman Vance

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[111] Rebecca Styler*, Literary Theology by Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 2010), p. 4.

[112] Charles LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible*, (London: University of Virginia Press, 2011), p. 1.

[113] LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible,* pp. 1-2.

[114] Ibid*,* p. 74.

describes Strauss's work as 'harshly demythologising', interpreting the very human life of Jesus.[115] Such was the significance of Strauss's work (and Eliot's translation) in re-examining the figure of Jesus, that arguments surrounding the volume permeated all aspects of intellectual literary debate. Indeed, as LaPorte suggests, 'for Tennyson, the national faith required as much saving from Strauss's British critics as it did from Strauss.' LaPorte concludes his discussion of the impact of the higher critics on biblical interpretation by stating: 'most of the higher critics believed in the Bible's literary – though not literal – inspiration.'[116] My thesis recognises the observation of LaPorte regarding the Bible's literary inspiration, as moving in a similar vein, I argue that Eliot draws upon this tradition in her fictional communities. Eliot alludes to biblical stories and interpretation, and such allusions are interwoven into the narrative of the characters she portrays.

Chapter Synopses

My thesis explores the centrality to Eliot's fiction of the search for authenticity through the expression of Christian love. Through the Greek and Latin examples I have explored through my introductory paragraphs, a biblically grounded insight is provided into how love is communicated through literary narrative strands. Crucially, however, they suggest a theological and literary framework through which the novels of Eliot can be re-examined.

I have chosen to explore, in the most part, Eliot's earlier novels in my analysis of love and how that manifests itself through her myriad of narrative strands. My thesis runs chronologically by volume, beginning with Eliot's first full-length novel, *Adam Bede*, and ending with *Middlemarch.* The rationale for exploring Eliot's earlier works alongside her most well-known novel of *Middlemarch* is to address how Eliot conveys love, in its many forms through an existing framework of Greek and Latin terms, some of which (such as *caritas*), Eliot refers to directly. By-words for love are implemented throughout the novels explored, and themes such as kindness, hospitality, adoration,

[115] Norman Vance, *Bible and Novel: Narrative Authority and the Death of God* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 1.

[116] LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible,* p. 79.

sympathy, compassion, and forgiveness are interwoven as part of Eliot's narratives of love between humans. Further, motifs of fellow-feeling, acts of charity, and welcoming outsiders abound in Eliot's earlier novels, and some strands of narrative are strongly linked to theological expressions of love, sometimes alluded to by synonyms for love. It is through Eliot's earlier novels that such synonyms form the basis of her fictional communities, bringing the centrality of love, in all its forms, to the fore of the narratives.

Sometimes, such allusions to love throw light on the complexities of how humans experience such emotions. For example, Eliot explores the concepts of forgiveness and compassion, through acts of sacrifice and self-denial in the narratives of Hetty Sorrel (*Adam Bede*) and Maggie Tulliver (*The Mill on the Floss*), and how acts of kindness help overcome darker emotions such as isolation and loss. The darker side of love is explored, and the key concept of forgiveness and overcoming of hardship is central to some of the narrative strands in Eliot's earlier works. This is not to mean that Eliot's later novels do not explore such concepts in depth, but it is through her earlier novels, that we see such complexities laid bare, that are then built upon, culminating in the representations of love present in *Middlemarch*. The narratives of Dorothea, Celia, Mary Garth and Rosamond all centre on how different desires are expressed, repressed and moreover exposed through relationships with other characters. It is love, in all its guises that formulates the core on which Eliot builds in her narrative. A vision of humanity, driven by fellow-feeling.

The language of love is at the fore of George Eliot's narrative in her 1859 novel, *Adam Bede*, indicative of both theological and secular approaches to individuals and their inward, human feelings. Love can be read as a secular phenomenon, but I contend that thinking about theological approaches alongside the non-religious aid in our understanding of Eliot's thinking about love. Understanding how individual thoughts and feelings of characters shaped Eliot's narrative can help us appreciate how the Christian language of love is received differently by individuals, through different `ways of seeing'. Building upon Charles Taylor's `conditions of belief', in *A Secular Age* (2007), I examine how individual interpretations of faith are represented by the characters in *Adam Bede.* In doing so, I expand on the findings of Keuss, Hodgson, Schramm, and Orr, exploring the theological undertones of Eliot's narrative and positing how

working to a framework focussed on love aids us with our understanding of Eliot's fictional communities.

One lens that strands of Eliot's narrative can be read through is *caritas*. *Caritas*, for Eliot, is a love that is shared through kindness and acts of charity to signify love, and she once described it as `the highest love or fellowship' in an 1862 letter. While the term, *caritas* is not directly mentioned in *Adam Bede*, connotations can be drawn from Eliot's understanding of this broadly Christian term. Eliot suggests both humanist and theological aspects of *caritas* in her narrative, building bonds of love. If we are to consider strands of Eliot's narrative theologically, the concept of *philia* can be perceived as an extension of *caritas*, in that it builds strong bonds of friendship that the kind acts of *caritas* ultimately lead to. Theologically, it is a love that brings together believers in acts of friendship, but I argue that Eliot's nod to *philia* is inclusive of nonbelievers in the community. *Philia*'s emphasis on friendship through the bonds of faith resonates in Eliot's theological strands of narrative. This is also implicit in her more secular threads, building bonds of friendship and community through acts of love. Ultimately, the example of Christ is replicated in the village of Hayslope, with acceptance at its core.

My second chapter assesses the Christian dimension of familial love and obligation in *The Mill on the Floss*, showing how Christian love frames Eliot's treatment of family in her work. The Greek name for familial love is *storge*, and in the Bible the word is used to describe family love, or, as the *King James Bible* translates it, 'to be kindly affectioned' (Romans 12:10). *Storge* refers to the natural and affectionate bond that develops between parents and children and amongst siblings, and it is this bond that Eliot problematises in her narrative, questioning the role kindness plays in family relations. Using the theories of Sophie Gilmartin (1998) and Rosemary O'Day (1994) on family relationships as a starting point, I assess the role of family in Eliot's novel. In building upon the more recent theories of Simon Calder (2010), Schramm (2012) and Blumberg (2013), I then evaluate the role of Kindness and altruism in the modification of Maggie Tulliver's behaviour towards her family. Kindness does not have to be evaluated theologically, but I am evaluating the concept using a Christian framework, in part because of the debt that the novel has to Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* (1427).

Maggie Tulliver's emotional reactions to family members are suggestive of *storge* and her concept of what is loving. My chapter considers Maggie's perception of familial relationships and other case study examples in the extended Tulliver household. I argue that Maggie's theological reading of à Kempis promotes patient kindness towards others through her altruism, and she concentrates on becoming a good daughter and better sister. Using Mary Wilson Carpenter's volume on Family Bibles (2003), I evaluate the role that obligation and allegiance play in *The Mill on the Floss* in communicating familial love. Obligation to one's family, demonstrated through acts of kindness, are suggestive of *storge*, a traditional Christian understanding of familial love. Building upon the work of Boyd Hilton and Rosemary O'Day, I suggest how generational views of family obligation conflict in the novel.

The third chapter further explores how Christian love is communicated in the novel. Oral storytelling is examined as a mode of expression, and I pay particular attention to the significance of oral storytelling and memorisation. I examine the role of speech and dialogue as advocating theological love through non-formal and inclusive methods of teaching and learning such as passage memorisation and interpretation of scripture. Using Catherine Robson's work on passage memorisation in the Victorian age as a starting point for my discussion of memorised theological passages, I question whether dialogue communicates love in a democratic way and examine whether Eliot's narrative is suggestive of theological speech. The spoken word in *Silas Marner* is suggestive of Christian teachings, but more importantly of Christian concepts of love, or more specifically, *agape.* The Greek term *agape* refers to God's universal love for humanity, in addition to the love that humans have for God. The use of the term, *agape* also extends to the love of fellow humans, as the universal love between God and humans is made manifest in one's unselfish love for others. *Agape* is unconditional love, but I argue that it requires a sympathetic response. A covenant is reached through acts of love and kindness: bringing together even the most unlikely of strangers in the Rainbow Tavern. Eliot's dialogue is indicative of a reciprocal love between humans, going beyond an unquestioned universality. Motifs of sympathy are key in demonstrating how a reciprocal (almost) universal love is demonstrated through Eliot's dialogue, reflective of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* (1854) on the importance of love, sympathy, and affection in human interaction. I use thinking in the

field of literary studies to also convey this, expanding upon the theories of Rae Greiner (2009) and Kristen Pond (2013).

In my final chapter, I examine Eliot's depiction of "romantic" love, or *eros* in *Middlemarch* and assess whether it reflects Christian representations of the term. My own focus is on a relatively underrepresented element of *Middlemarch*: erotic desire, or *eros* and how Eliot utilises differing concepts of the erotic. Thinking about the role of *eros* for relationships in the novel reveals the subtleties of Eliot's engagement with romantic love and sheds light on the multitude of relationships in *Middlemarch*. Throughout the chapter, I refer to the term *eros* when examining aspects of the erotic and desire. *Eros* is usually applied in relation to sexual or romantic love, but I contend that the term requires re-examination to include other modes of desire. In reading *Middlemarch*, we are invited to perceive the erotic in many ways, not just the physical. Drawing upon the work of David Kurnick (2010), I argue that Eliot invites us to re-examine *eros*, not through sexual relations alone, but rather through a plethora of bodily, cognitive, and spiritual engagements.

My focus for re-examining desire in the novel is theological, building upon recent work on desire and the self by Sarah Coakley. She examines the concepts of desire, sexuality, and the self through a theological lens, linking the pursuit of platonic desires that is in-line with the work of Gregory of Nyssa (335-395). A renewed interpretation of the teachings of Gregory of Nyssa provides us with a theological understanding of erotic love, surpassing the common Christian conception that the purpose of erotic love is primarily for child-rearing. *Eros*, for Gregory of Nyssa requires a more worldly and cultural awareness of the individual. It is the action of "giving back", repurposing the love felt for one another as a couple into the wider Christian community, that provides more substance to erotic desires.

2: 'The highest love or fellowship': *Caritas* and *Philia* in *Adam Bede*

Fellowship is a fundamental concept within Christianity that is connected to love or rather, kindness and sympathy towards other individuals. Acting on love, for believers, is one of the truest expressions of faith, alongside kindness, fellowship or fellow feeling. The active expression of love is not exclusive to Christianity, but Eliot focusses on the expression of love through narratives of her theological characters, representing many Christian denominations. As previously set out in the thesis introduction, Eliot situates the meaning of love as dependant on specific contexts, emphasising a relational understanding of her novel communities. Such diverse viewpoints also are indicative of a continuation and development of the Christian tradition, rather than a break from a theological approach. In *Adam Bede* (1859), different Christian denominations are represented. The characters live in the primarily Church of England community of Hayslope, but the emerging Methodist movement is also represented through outsiders coming to preach and through a handful of Methodist converts in the community such as Seth Bede. An understanding of how love is represented in the community becomes central in understanding narrative strands in Eliot's novels.

Examining such strands theologically provides an understanding of how the author viewed and understood the diverse theological communities of the historical period in which the novel is set (1799), and how they constructed bonds of fellowship. The Latin term, *caritas,* utilised by St Paul in his epistles, encapsulates Christian understanding of love in action. Eliot regarded *caritas* as being central to love and human fellowship, quoting 1 Corinthians in an 1862 letter:

> I meant what charity meant in the elder English, and what the translators of the Bible meant in their rendering of the thirteenth chapter of 1st Corinthians— *Caritas*, the highest love or fellowship, which I am happy to believe that no philosophy will expel from the world.[1]

[1] George Eliot, 'Letter to the Brays, 29th December,1862' in Gordon S. Haight, ed. *The George Eliot Letters, Vol. IV 1862-1868* (London: OUP,1956), p. 72.

Eliot uses the terms fellowship and love together to define a kindly and charitable act of humanity: *caritas*. She prioritises the term, most specifically in its biblical application. Not only does Eliot consider it 'the highest love or fellowship', but she also believes, 'no philosophy will expel [it] from the world'. When reading the letter, it is plausible that Eliot is pitting philosophy against the concept of love — as nothing would 'expel [love] from the world'. For Eliot, love is a constant in the world, seen through fellowship and *caritas*. No new philosophy or understanding of the world will surpass such a notion. *Caritas*, for Eliot, is a universal concept, although she places it in a Christian context only a few years after *Adam Bede*'s publication, as the letter dates from 1862. Eliot's letter addresses love, or how we should continue to love one another, albeit in a very different way to St Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Both letters address the centrality of love in daily life: whether that is our lived lives, or within fictional communities. Both act as love-letters but are different from those written from one lover to another. They are letters of love that indicate how we should treat other people: with charity, kindness, and fellowship.

Eliot's understanding of *caritas* is significant to her fictional writing, as she holds the concept in such high regard, referring to her understanding of love. St Paul teaches, '[…]and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.' (1 Corinthians: 13:2). Charity, or its later Latin, *caritas*, is for Paul the cornerstone of Christian faith. If you do not have charity, you are nothing, or rather, your faith counts for nothing. It is such a focus on how 'the highest love', or indeed fellowship is presented, therefore, that Eliot emphasises in her fiction - the focus being on the community and individual voices within it. Reading love as part of Eliot's portrayal of community also indicates the centrality of fellowship.[2] For Christians, such love denotes the Greek term, *philia*: a love for one another within the bonds of faith.

Love is important in the reader's consideration of *Adam Bede*, as the term brings together Eliot's commentary of inward kindness, altruism, and sympathy. The chapter draws on the work of prominent scholars in the field such as Peter C. Hodgson, Jan-Melissa Schramm, Marilyn Orr and Jeffrey F. Keuss. I will explore a

[2] fellowship, n., *Oxford English Dictionary (online)*, <https://wwwoedcom.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/69110?rskey=HZjELY&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>, [ACCESSED 08/09/21]

different approach towards kindness, altruism and sympathy in *Adam Bede*, suggesting that love is central to these themes.[3] A renewed approach to a theological reading of *Adam Bede*, allows us to recognise and identify with a fresh understanding of love, as Eliot refers to the term frequently as part of her narrative. Love is also an important consideration for the novel theologically, as some characters such as Dinah, Seth and Adam consider the love of God, or teachings of Christ, as part of their own view of love**.** For Dinah Morris, an act of divine love sheds light on an otherwise bleak landscape:

> […] it's very blessed on a cold, bleak day, when the sky is hanging dark over the hill, to feel the love of God in one's soul, and carry it to the lonely, bare, stone houses, where there's nothing else to give comfort.[4]

Dinah highlights the importance of the love of God for her, including the ways in which it brings comfort to her, and to others in times of need. Acting on the love of God, therefore, is essential, according to Dinah. Love, for Dinah, is what is left when everything else is gone. In her perceived embodiment of God's love, Dinah also reflects a feminine 'face of Christ' and view of God, prevalent in the work of Rebecca Styler, Gail Turley Houston but particularly that of Kimberly Van Esveld Adams.[5] In fact, Van Esveld Adams reads Dinah as a figure of 'benefice, purity and power […and] has the Madonna's role of intercessor.'[6] Even in dark times, Dinah can always find a crevice containing love, and 'carry it to the lonely, bare stone houses, where there's nothing else to give comfort.' (109)

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[3] See: Peter C. Hodgson, *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot: The Mystery Beneath the Real* (London: SCM Press, 2001), Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Atonement and Self-sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century Narrative* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), Marilyn Orr, *George Eliot's Religious Imagination: A Theopolitics of Evolution* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018) and Jeffrey F. Keuss, *A Poetics of Jesus: The Search for Christ Through Writing in the Nineteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

[4] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, ed. by Carol A. Martin (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, OUP, 2008), p. 109. All further mentions of *Adam Bede* will be in-text e.g.: (109).

[5] See Rebecca Styler, *The Maternal image of God in Victorian Literature* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2024), p. 2, Gail Turley Houston, *Victorian Women Writers, Radical Grandmothers, and the Gendering of God*. (Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2012), p. 122, and 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. 49.

[6] VanEsveld Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism*, pp. 157-8.

In this chapter, I will show how theological love stems from a centrality of immanence in the text. Immanence is essential in understanding how *philia* and *caritas* link to human interaction. This is because it is what is felt within the human that then leads to a positive action within the community. Both *philia* and *caritas,* as expressions of love originate from inward feelings of sympathy and kindness. The term immanence, however, has both theological and nontheological meanings.[7] Taken to suggest an attribute that can otherwise be defined as 'embodied', immanence is significant throughout Eliot's novel. The concept of immanence is closely related to embodiment, as both terms refer to what is within a person, or rather what qualities they possess as part of their being. I go beyond examining immanence generally and suggest how the novel leaves itself open to be read theologically, and more specifically how one can read the concept of God's immanence within the text. With regards to the expression of love, the immanence of emotions is the driving force behind acts of love such as *philia* and *caritas*. Because our feelings of sympathy and kindness are immanent they can be put into action.

My analysis will demonstrate how Eliot's interpretation of felt experience and the expression of love is influenced by various spiritualities but is also influenced by Christian belief. Amalgamating both Christian and aspects of other forms of spirituality aids in the reader's knowledge of how personal experiences of Eliot's characters are communicated, bringing together many views. Through such shared aspects in the spiritual experience of her characters, underlying themes of kindness and sympathy convey love in Eliot's novels, and I argue that this is suggestive of aspects of Christian love. In my utilisation of the terms *caritas* and *philia*, I demonstrate how the two types of love can work together to build bonds of community but also how they are distinctive from one another. *Caritas* refers to the concept of charitable actions within a community to aid those less fortunate or who are suffering. *Philia* seemingly, whilst similar (as it aids in the building of communities), is distinct from *caritas*. *Philia* brings a

[7] immanence, n., in Oxford English Dictionary (Online) <https://www-oedhttps://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/91796?redirectedFrom=immanencecom.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/91796?redirectedFrom=immanence#eid> [ACCESSED 08/09/21]

Esp. of God: the fact, condition, or quality of being immanent; presence or dwelling in or within a person or thing. Cf. indwelling n.

specifically Christian community together through a shared faith and indicates the bonds of fellowship that are shared between believers.

In *Adam Bede*, George Eliot explores differing concepts of love and devotion through acts of fellowship. Using Christian-specific terminology as a framework for understanding love would clarify how characters feel towards one another through the text. To illustrate and scrutinise this point, I will be focussing on two Christian terms that strongly correlate with how Christian love is expressed: *caritas* and *philia*. Christian understandings of friendship as being a form of love have their origins in the notion of *caritas*. As the twenty-first century theologian Steve Summers suggests, *caritas* 'is love of God – this then becomes a pattern or template for all other love, including the love known as friendship, for love is the supreme gift of God.'[8]. This concept also ties in with C.S Lewis's concept of gift-love: that the love God gifts to humans, is then distributed between humans. [9] Expanding upon Lewis's premises of gift-love and charity, I am using the term *caritas* to represent Christian teachings on how believers should treat all people with love. Christian concepts of love and friendship also denote *philia* as a God-given love. *Philia* is also integral in forming the bonds of human relationships, uniting all believers in fellowship.[10] Through considering *caritas* and *philia*, the chapter will also focus on aspects of shared human spirituality, based upon the concept of immanence and its role in guiding the kind acts of the characters explored in *Adam Bede*. Eliot evaluates key concepts such as 'goodness' and 'kindness', and how they are based on intrinsic qualities of individuals and more specifically how those qualities lead to acts of kindness towards others. 'Goodness' and 'kindness' are also integral to some forms of love such as *philia*, and through acts of kindness, Christians are also acting on the love felt towards others.

Caritas, and the gateway that it provides into understanding Christian concepts of friendship, should be considered as a way of reading *Adam Bede*. This is because the concept focusses on mutual aid among humans, reflecting the love that God has for

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[8] Steve Summers, *Friendship: Exploring Its Implications for the Church in Postmodernity*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 85.

[9] See C.S Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 'Charity' pp. 141-170.

[10] See Werner G. Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love* (London: Continuum Books, 2010), pp. 207-210 for reference to the love of friendship in monastic communities as a bond between believers, signifying the love of God.

humanity. Moreover, it also relates to the personhood of Christ. The figure of Christ is exemplified as being a human example of God in world (God incarnate). The figure and personhood of Christ is also central to Eliot's progressive understanding of Christology. In stating her approach is progressive, I am implying that Eliot takes a non-denominational view of the personhood and sanctity of Christ as a figure, alluding to his example and humanity. The personhood of Christ also suggests that love is an attribute innate within the individual, reflective of God's immanence — as Christ is both fully human and fully God in Christian doctrine.[11] It is important to note that less overtly theological interpretations also hold the concept of immanence in common with such aspects of Christian love, acting on inner kindness to bring about good outcomes.

Caritas, as a concept, has been debated in Christian theological belief from the Early Church. It was Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), however, who developed the widely accepted idea of *caritas* to denote charity as an act of love, 'being fully expressed in the relationship of friendship – it is not a secondary expression of love.'[12] In other words, the act of charity is part of the love Christians deem to be friendship, not merely a reaction to it. Charity, therefore, is a primary act of love, not merely a secondary expression. The indication that charity is foremost in the expression of both friendship and love is significant, suggesting that the bonds of friendship are built upon charitable acts, those borne from unconditional love. The connection between friendship and unconditional love is crucial in understanding *caritas*. Love is an inherent attribute within humanity, and must be reflected not only of God's love, but also of the need to act on the love one feels towards another human.

Philia is also significant, in my view, for understanding love and fellowship in *Adam Bede*. The focus of fellowship and friendship built through the bonds of faith, resonates with examples in the text, such as the friendship between Dinah Morris and Seth Bede, through their shared Methodist beliefs. *Adam Bede* considers the Methodist movement to be significant, as it serves to highlight the shared plights and experiences of different Christian denominations among the characters of Hayslope and Stonyshire.

[11] See references made to the Nicene Creed in 1: Introduction for clarification.

[12] Summers, *Friendship: Exploring Its Implications for the Church in Postmodernity*, p. 86.

The representation of Methodism in the novel, I argue, serves to bring communities together through acts of love through *philia* and *caritas*. Although not part of any formal Christian denomination in her later adult life, Eliot knew and understood Christian concepts of love, and more importantly the bonds of friendship, borne from a belief in love in action. She also read theological works extensively, including the works of John Henry Newman (1801-1890). Newman was a convert to Roman Catholicism from Anglicanism and placed great emphasis on Christian spirituality. Eliot's theological views were very different from the Roman Catholic traditionalism of Newman. However, there are some, perhaps surprising, areas of overlap or resonance in terms of their view of love.

Newman preached extensively on the topic of love when at the University of Oxford, as then, a practicing Anglican. He likened love to many things, including the ties of brotherly affection as the 'zeal against the prophets of error'[13] and as a 'wedding garment of faith and love'[14]. But it is in Newman's sermons addressing Faith and Reason, that it becomes apparent that Love (Newman's emphasis with an uppercase L) has a much larger role. In my opinion, Newman's reflections on love are similar to Eliot's own central position regarding love, reason, and sympathy, which is communicated in her novel, *Adam Bede*, albeit in a very different manner. Her reflections on Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua* are relayed to her friend Sara Hennell in an 1864 letter:

> But the *Apology* now mainly affects me as the revelation of a life – how different in form to one's own, yet with how close a fellowship in its needs and burthen – I mean spiritual needs and burthens. [15]

Eliot reflects that although Newman and herself lead very different lives, she felt close to him through fellowship whilst reading *Apology*. The term, 'fellowship' that Eliot

[13] John Henry Newman, 'Sermon VII: Contest Between Faith and Sight (Preached May 27, 1832)' in *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford between AD. 1826 and 1843*, ed. by James David Earnest and Gerard Tracey, (Oxford: OUP, 2006), p. 91.

[14] Newman, 'Sermon VIII: Human Responsibility, as Independent of Circumstances (Preached November 4, 1832)', pp. 101-113, (113).

[15] GE to Sara Hennel, 13th July 1864 in Gordon S. Haight, ed., *Selections from George Eliot's Letters* (London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 296-297.

applies can be read in different ways. However, given the subject of the letter, a 'fellowship' with Newman was created through reading *Apology*, and Eliot saw his and her own spiritual journeys as being linked. The fellowship that Eliot refers to, here, is different to the one that I write about at the start of the chapter, however. Eliot refers to spiritual fellowship between herself and Newman — and how fellowship can also include shared spiritual needs and hardships: working towards shared spirituality in faith. Such a shared spirituality is portrayed through the characters of Seth Bede and Dinah Morris: a spiritual *philia*, rather than one that revolves around acts of love in the community. Newman, like Eliot focussed on the topics of love and goodness, although he approached this from a Roman Catholic angle. As a traditional theological thinker, Newman tied the subjects ultimately to the divine, whereas Eliot only attributed ideas to the divine through certain narrative strands in *Adam Bede*. (Such strands as those of Adam and Seth Bede and Dinah Morris, for instance.)

In his sermons on Faith and Reason, Newman uses terminology such as 'Divine Goodness'[16] to describe the centrality of theological love within Christianity. Divine Goodness (Newman's capitalisation) illuminates the listener (or reader) about the 'human messenger' of the 'word of life'.[17] Through Jesus, therefore, Newman suggests that the message of God becomes accessible to humanity. For Newman, Jesus as the 'human messenger', indicates the necessity of Christ's humanity, to communicate God's love. Such an intrinsic nature of human (and divine) love points the reader towards a related term: that of immanence. Eliot herself, focussed on the humanity of social interaction, and alludes to the personhood of Christ in her fiction. Eliot's emphasis on humanity is at the centre of her theological observations. Through allusions to Christian love, she also signposts the reader towards a renewed portrayal of immanence and embodiment.

In addition to overtly theological narratives that are addressed in the novel of *Adam Bede*, the themes of kindness, altruism, and sympathy are linked to the concept of love between humans. The narrative also engages with the theological concept of

[16] Newman, 'Sermon XI: The Nature of Faith in Relation to Reason (Preached January 13, 1839)' in *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford between AD. 1826 and 1843*, ed. by James David Earnest and Gerard Tracey, (Oxford: OUP, 2006), pp. 143-154, (p. 143)

[17] Newman, 'Sermon XI', p. 143.

immanence, and how a spiritual connection or understanding may be formed between humans. For some this link may also bring them closer to the love of God, and for others it develops their bond with other humans. Theological concepts of immanence are discussed in Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007), inviting the reader to imagine a secularised world alongside the theological or religious, as 'conditions of belief'.[18] Through Taylor's study, concepts of immanence and transcendence are discussed in both theological and secular terms. For Taylor, the transcendent defines theological experiences, whereas the immanent links a shared human experience of spirituality and non-theological faith.

Taylor's interpretation of the transcendent and the immanent has theological limitations, as Hauerwas and Coles suggest in their reflections on his volume. They argue that Taylor's handling of both transcendence and immanence is not in line with many Christological approaches. Hauerwas and Coles are concerned that:

> Taylor's use of the immanent/transcendent duality may reproduce the habits of a Christianity that still longs to be a civilizational order. It does so just to the extent such a scheme can tempt us, Christian and non-Christian alike, to think that our primary concern is maintaining a place for transcendence.[19]

By raising the concern that Taylor positions the immanent and transcendent as opposed to one another, Hauerwas and Coles suggest that his interpretation can encourage the reader to think that faith requires transcendence rather than focussing on the central belief in Immanence.

Taylor, in identifying transcendence as the primary attribute of Christianity, creates almost a dichotomy from the immanent model of non-Christian beliefs. Such a reading of his work suggests that the theologically minded seek to primarily believe in the transcendent. This is a mistake, as Hauerwas and Coles continue to stress, as '[f]or Christians immanence first and foremost names that God became man that we might participate in the very life of God. So, nothing can be more immanent than God with

[18] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 2.

[19] Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles, "'Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet", Reflections on *A Secular Age*', *Modern Theology*, 26,3 (2010), 349-362, (p. 350).

us.'[20] In my view, Hauerwas and Coles are right to suggest that, for many Christians, the focus of their faith lies truly in the belief in immanence. For instance, in the Church of England tradition, God (Jesus) resides within the human heart, as demonstrated in common worship:

> The love of the Lord Jesus draw you to himself, the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you in his service, the joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts; and the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you all today and always.[21]

The presence of God is a felt one, immanent within the body. This presence is described in this short blessing twice, utilising the word 'love'. This suggests that God's immanence and love often go together, and, moreover, that love is central to Christian belief. For Christians, the belief in God's immanence is just as important as the belief in His transcendence. Furthermore, God's immanence ensures that humanity can relate to the presence and involvement of God in their lives, particularly to Christological approaches to the divine: an aspect that Hauerwas and Coles suggest that Taylor has overlooked in *A Secular Age*.

I disagree with Taylor's theological focus on transcendence, and like Hauerwas and Coles, turn to look at the significance of immanence in Christian belief. Immanence is crucial for understanding belief, as such concepts are developed and built upon in the individual's own mind and being, and although Taylor suggests the importance of immanence to faith, his analysis also suggests different types of immanent frame than the one displayed by Eliot. Eliot's portrayal of immanence is more in line with the model proposed by Hauerwas and Coles, indicating the centrality of the Incarnation. My analysis, therefore, would build upon the theological application of immanence through the Incarnation, as Hauerwas and Coles advocate, emphasising Eliot's focus on the human nature of immanence. Radically different from the theological view generally, however, Eliot's approach to immanence combines theological, philosophical,

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[20] Hauerwas and Coles, "'Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet", Reflections on *A Secular Age*', 349-362, (p. 350).

[21] Revd Charles Read, "Blessing", '19th July, Trinity 6', Church of England <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/202007/19th%20July%20Service%20Trinity%206%20-%20OOS%20VF.pdf>, p. 10 [ACCESSED 14.08.2021].

and humanist traditions, reflecting the fact that not only did she read fervently and widely, but her fiction reflected many views. It is immanence, therefore, I suggest, that ties her characters together in shared aspects of human experience, whether they are Christian believers or not.

Eliot's fictional communities provide us with a multitude of characters of different Christian faiths, or of none. Through characters such as Adam Bede, Seth Bede and Dinah Morris, the reader is introduced to Eliot's underlying theological narrative. The reader is also exposed to a cross-denominational representation of theological thought in *Adam Bede*, as characters such as Adam, Lisbeth and the Poysner family are identified as Anglican, whereas Seth and Dinah are described as being Methodist. This is an important consideration when reading Eliot, as representation of different denominations aids us in looking at different ways of seeing, or different interpretations of Christian spirituality and belief. Discussion and scrutiny of such theological beliefs are posed by Eliot, highlighting differing attitudes to theological love but more importantly love towards the community. Eliot draws the attention of the reader towards different attitudes towards theological love, as she also indicates that varying perspectives have common links, such as immanence and acting on love. Such narrative strands are placed alongside less overtly theological expressions of love, based on kindness and acts of love towards fellow humans, to give a holistic and realistic representation of the community of Hayslope. Eliot positions Dinah as an empath, seeing and experiencing the sorrows of others.[22] Through her actions of attending to those who suffer, Dinah experiences grief and loss with those whom she aids, building bonds of cooperative friendship that are not only suggestive of *caritas*, but which go beyond this premise, forming deeper bonds of cooperative friendship.

However, Dinah's abilities as an empath also lay bare her limitations. Victorian life and capital punishment expel Hetty to Australia after the death of her child. The narrative could be seen as expelling a suffering that is beyond Dinah's capacity to redeem the situation with her empathy. The suffering that Hetty experiences is not

[22] See Anna Lindhé, 'The Paradox of Narrative Empathy and the Form of the Novel, or What George Eliot Knew', *Studies in the Novel*, 48:1, (2016), pp. 19-42: '[…]owing to the "affective turn"[…], empathy has primarily come to denote a psychological process[…] similar to what would have been called sympathy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries[…]' (22).

fully made well simply through the empathy that Dinah exudes towards her and her plight. Chapter 35 of *Adam Bede* emphasises that humanity requires a remorseful God, alluding to the Crucifixion. When Hetty sets off on her journey to look for Arthur, she 'come[s] across something by the roadside which has remined me I am not in Loamshire: an image of great agony — the agony of the Cross.' [327][23] Suffering is an important consideration in Christian theology. For instance: Christ made the ultimate sacrifice: to die, for humanity to live. Suffering and theology in nineteenth century literature is explored by those such as Jan-Melissa Schramm, Marilyn Orr, and Ilana Blumberg, and they indicate the centrality of sacrifice in both literature of the age, and its theological allusions. All three writers approach the subject of sacrifice differently, indicating its significance in Victorian narrative spaces.[24] In the case of Hetty in *Adam Bede*, the suffering of a mother and child is represented. This mother and child are placed outside of legitimate, respectable society due to their status. Dinah's empathy, therefore, can provide comfort to Hetty, but only to an extent. Although faced with making the ultimate sacrifice — that of herself through hanging, Hetty is instead deported, signalling a new hope with the possibility of finding a new community and a new home.

Narrated experiences of love and fellowship mean that the reader is exposed to a plethora of individual interpretations of kindness, demonstrated by the characters in *Adam Bede*. To examine narrative in terms of character and the impact of individual experience is important, as highlighted by those such as Deidre Lynch (1999) and Jonathan Farina (2017), and a renewed interest in the role of character as a critical category has emerged in recent years. Lynch looks to a new examination surrounding characterisation as commerce, as our identifying with character in fiction is: 'a consumption practice reshaped by […] romantic knowledge: that our transactions

[23] See *Adam Bede* 522: Explanatory Notes: 327- George Eliot refers to the custom in Roman Catholic countries of placing wayside images of the Crucifixion along public byways, as reminders of the suffering Christ who died that we may be saved.

[24] See Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century Narrative* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), Marilyn Orr, *George Eliot's Religious Imagination: A Theopolitics of Evolution* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018) and Ilana Blumberg, *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in MidCentury Novels* (Columbus Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2013).

with characters remain, that change, not withstanding, profoundly social experiences.'[25] If our identification with character is a consumption practice, as Lynch suggests, such a process also shapes the way in which we perceive individual characters, and in turn, changes the way in which we experience society around us. Lynch proposes that all engagement with characters acts as a form of commerce, albeit a commerce of ideas. My interests, however, do not focus on commerce as consumption but rather examine acts of love as part of the commerce of ideas. I suggest that our engagement with the character, therefore, shapes the way in which we redefine our place in society, and contributes to a change in perception of other aspects of society around us.

Farina contends that characterisation acts as epistemological legitimacy when we read novels, and 'characterisation might help us responsibly legitimate our truth claims for fiction in a world all too liable to trade in blatant falsehoods'.[26] Through close reading, the reader can helpfully be lead to the truth, or rather their own interpretation of the truth. The use of character for the modern reader is then contrasted throughout Farina's volume against the experience of nineteenth century readers:

> For nineteenth-century readers […] character was the signature feature by which a person or thing impressed upon another as a metal type impresses a paper page.[27]

For readers in the nineteenth-century, character marked the difference between the self and others — a personal signature. In contrast, for twenty-first century readers of nineteenth century novels, character signposts the epistemological narrative of the novel. Building upon Farina's theory of highlighting character as indicative of epistemological narrative, I will examine how differences in characterisation in *Adam Bede* indicate the presence of a shared notion of theological and non-theological fellowship and ultimately, love. This shared notion, however, is brought about through a process that is both epistemological and affective. Utilising theological and non-

[25] Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago, Chicago University press, 1998), p. 20.

[26] Jonathan Farina, *Everyday Words and the Character of Prose in Nineteenth-Century* Britain (Cambridge: CUP, 2017), xix.

[27] Farina, *Everyday Words and the Character of Prose in Nineteenth-Century* Britain, p. 24.

theological emphases on affect and the epistemological, I will identify how, through different narrative journeys, the thoughts and values of characters are brought together through a sense of fellowship, indicative of acts of love, *caritas* and *philia*.

Theological Love as the Opening Premise of *Adam Bede*

Theological terminology indicating God's love for humanity is used widely in the opening two chapters of *Adam Bede*. Phrases that denote God's love include 'the love of God' (8), 'the love that Jesus showed […] is the same love that God has for us' (24-5) and 'the love of the Saviour' (26) The number of references to divine love, however, is not enough to suggest that aspects of Christian love are the driving force of Eliot's opening narrative. Instead, it is the placing of such notions alongside more secular ideas of love that uncovers the importance and value of Christian love. Eliot explores both theological and non-theological strands of narrative in *Adam Bede* as one of many ways to express love. She demonstrates that the Christian purpose of love is to bring believers closer to God, through ideas of fellowship. Theological love, therefore, is something that is not only central to Christian belief, but aspects are drawn out through Eliot's plot.

Eliot had a keen theological interest throughout her younger adult life and her fervent research around Christian traditions and beliefs led to what she then regarded as 'heterodoxy'.[28] She broke from more orthodox methods of worship, and from Anglicanism in her early twenties, but continued to have a keen interest in different Christian spiritualities and beliefs. In stating her 'heterodoxy', Eliot is suggesting that her opinions differ from those that are normative within the Church (Church of England), and that she explores many denominations of the Christian faith. Through paying attention to how others explore their faith, Eliot provides the reader with many points of view in *Adam Bede*. Writing to her friends, the Brays, when staying in Geneva in 1850, she states, 'I go to the Genevese Churches and nourish my heterodoxy with orthodox sermons'.[29] Later in life, she would refer to her younger adulthood as a time

[28] George Eliot, 'Letter to the Brays, 15th Feb, 1850', *George Eliot's Life, Vol. I*, p. 144-Cross (Project Guthenburg: June 29, 2013 [EBook #43043]).

[29] George Eliot, 'Letter to the Brays, 15th Feb, 1850', pp. 144-5.

where she held pantheistic beliefs.[30] She continued to nourish her broad ideas of religion and belief, and included many Humanist approaches in her own reading, alongside theological ones. Such a multiplicity of beliefs held by Eliot at the time of writing *Adam Bede* would suggest that she writes from a position that incorporates many aspects of theological and non-theological spiritualities.

Among the many spiritualities that Eliot conveys in *Adam Bede*, the most prominent spirituality in the opening of the novel is that of Christianity and Christian views of love. In Chapter Two of *Adam Bede*, the reader is introduced to Adam's perspective on Christian love. He demonstrates that, for Christians, the love of God is central to a person's faith, no matter what they believe, as he explains to his brother, Seth, that he is not biased against Methodists:

> Nay, Seth, lad; I'm not for laughing at no man's religion […] I know a man must have the love o' God in his soul, and the Bible's God's word. […] (8)

Adam's belief that the love of God is also in a man's "soul" refers to his belief in the inherent nature of God and subsequently that God's love resides within everyone. The passage also alludes to immanence. It is Adam's belief that the love of God is true for all Christians, such as Methodist dissenters, like his brother Seth. Adam's discussion of God, however, contains a silent "but", as the comment prompts him to think about work, small deeds, and the material world beyond. Love becomes intertwined with the deeds of humanity, and its works. Adam's primary claim may have theological roots in key early Christian thinkers such as St Paul, and St Augustine. Such theological roots are carried forward to more modern Christian thought. This alludes not only to the nature of human love, but to the divine. Eliot, through her narrative suggestions, links her observations to the teachings of many theological thinkers and indicates that her influences are not just that of her Anglican and Methodist upbringing: rather they reflect her heterodoxy.[31] Such influences as early Church and medieval theologians

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[30] See 'GE to Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, London, 8 May,1869' in *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, ed. by Gordon S. Haight, p. 360.

[31] George Eliot's father and brother were fervent Anglicans, whereas her maternal aunt was a Methodist. Eliot's narrative of *Adam Bede* has been readily discussed by biographers of her life such as Fleishman, Hughes, and Davis, in addition to scholars who offer theological readings of Eliot's work, such as Hodgson and Orr.

ensured that George Eliot considered Christian concerns from a broad perspective. Her focus, however, is on the love of humanity and how humans show kindness to one another in good deeds.

The belief that love is God-given, represented through Adam's narrative was prevalent in the late eighteenth century, when the novel is set and was also a commonly held belief well into the nineteenth century, with prominent philosophers and theologians writing on the subject.[32] Philosophers such as Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) explored concepts of love and inwardness and related these concepts through aspects of Christian teaching. Marilyn Orr, in her recent volume on Eliot and religion suggests that Eliot, like Kierkegaard, relays theological messages using parables:

> Like Kierkegaard, I would argue, she uses stories not to tell the reader what to believe, but to inspire in the individual reader a belief in her or his own […] The only thing one can say with certainty is that she leaves the theological meaning a matter of interpretation, demanding that readers recognise the personal message of love and charity.[33]

The 'personal message of love and charity' that readers are requested to recognise is theological but not linked to any Christian denomination. Eliot, through her narrative strands, tells personal messages of love and charity, Orr suggests. I would build upon Orr's relevant interpretation of the necessity and importance of love in the interpretation of Eliot and suggest that the reader, is drawn towards a theological narrative by Eliot, albeit one that leaves the reader to draw their own interpretations. Unlike Orr, however, I will not look to utilise Kierkegaard in my analysis of the novel, but I will assess how the 'personal message of love and charity' are enhanced by the presence of a theological narrative. Rather than taking a philosophical approach to theological aspects of Eliot's narrative, I will look to how aspects of theological love are communicated through the personal stories of the characters in *Adam Bede*. It is through Adam's narrative that the reader is introduced to Eliot's concept of

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[32] Philosophers such as Kant, Feuerbach, Strauss and Kierkegaard stated implicitly that love is God-given. See Marilyn Orr's *George Eliot's Religious Imagination: A Theopoetics of Evolution* ((Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018) and James R. Martel, *Love is a Sweet Chain: Desire, Autonomy and Friendship in Liberal Political Theory* ((London: Routledge, 2001) for more information.

[33] Marilyn Orr, *George Eliot's Religious Imagination: A Theopoetics of Evolution* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press,2018), p. 25.

theological, but more specifically Christian love. This premise comes to define any further reading of such mentions of divine love within the text and leads the reader to a specifically Christian-inspired understanding of love.

From the beginning of her sermon in Chapter Two, 'The Preaching', Dinah's words signify friendship and equality between herself and the villagers of Hayslope. This is significant, as Dinah, a Methodist from outside the community is coming to preach to an Anglican village. Dinah, as an outsider is perceived as bringing a theological bomb into the community, introducing evangelical ideas that are perceived to be very different from the traditional village-church views of Hayslope. Dinah's aim is to close the perceived gap between the two denominational approaches, and address villagers in a manner that focusses on evangelical spirit and fellowship. Her opening address, 'Dear friends […]' (22) directs readers towards friendship and inclusivity, but it is not immediately apparent that such an address is one of Christian love. Dinah draws similarities between herself and her audience. Addressing everyone as 'friends', she has placed herself on equal terms with those that have gathered to hear her preach. It is through such egalitarian language of friendship that Dinah communicates her interpretation of Christian love and, more specifically, that of *philia*. Dinah's interpretation of Christian love is one that is community-centric with the purpose of bringing her congregation closer to the religious love that she feels — the inward love of God. She uses the immanent nature of God and the replication of such love between humans as the basis of her sermon, allowing her observers to access her experience of the love of God. Through advocating the love that humans share, Dinah can be seen to interpret the spirit of *philia*, a love that brings fellow believers closer to the love of God.

Eliot's observational narrative of the traveller depicts the language of friendship that Dinah uses when referring to God. The traveller's narrative is significant, as her sermon is portrayed through the eyes of a stranger. An observational narrative reinforces the idea of Dinah's influential presence — the stranger is impressed by Dinah's presence and sermon, an opinion that is unaffected by local hearsay. The stranger's narrative is necessary, as it emphasises that *philia* draws believers together, no matter which denomination they are from, in bonds of friendship. The chapter gives precedence to the outsider's narrative, as if to provide an observational view of the

visiting preacher. As Monika Flundernik stresses, the focus of the chapter is the traveller's 'witnessing of the Methodist preaching [He] has extremely favourable impressions of Dinah, thus directing our sympathies towards her […]'[34] Through a benevolent observational narrative, the reader is drawn towards her preaching, and the focus is on Dinah's address.

Dinah's address, as the focus of this section of *Adam Bede*, also points to the necessity of proclamation, the spoken word, and the human link to Christ. The focus is on proclamation of 'the word': what Dinah has to say about our relationship with Christ. The twentieth-century theologian, Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976) indicates the centrality of proclamation to the Christian faith. To address the nature of theology and proclamation, Bultmann focusses on 'The New Testament *kerygma* as the locus of faith.'[35] *Kerygma* is a Greek term, referring to the preaching or proclamation of religious truth. Bultmann applies the term to centre on 'certain core New Testament beliefs: e.g., the confession that Jesus is Lord, that God has raised up Jesus who was crucified, etc.'[36] However, *kerygma* has its limitations, Roger A. Johnson suggests in his commentary, where he argues that since 'Bultmann rejected every effort to identify the *kerygma* with any past confession of faith […] it is nothing else than God's word of address to a particular person.' [37] Ultimately, Johnson concludes that Bultmann's application of the *kerygma* is dependant on human interaction and communication:

> It can never be spoken except in a human language and formed by human thought. This very fact confirms its [proclamation's] kerygmatic character; for

[34] Monika Flundernik, 'Eliot and Narrative' in A. Anderson and H.E Shaw eds, *A Companion to George Eliot* (London: John Wiley and Sons, 2013) pp. 21-34, (p. 29).

[35] `The Relation Between Theology and Proclamation' (1950) (pp. 235-240) in Roger A. Johnson, ed. *Rudolph Bultmann: Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, *The Making of Modern Theology*, 1991), p. 235.

[36] Johnson, ed. *Rudolph Bultmann: Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era,* p. 235.

[37] Ibid, p. 235.

> it makes it clear that the statements of the kerygma are not universal truths but are personal address in a concrete situation.[38]

Taking proclamation as a personal affirmation of truth, therefore, suggests that it is an innate human experience. *Kerygma* is not about universal truth, rather a personal truth, communicated by speech: a proclamation. The prominence of speech as delivering the (personalised) truth of God is reliant on the present. The necessity of the present moment in the delivery of Dinah's sermon means that it is communicated in such a way that is personal to everyone who witnesses it. Without the personal approach of oral speech, I contend, the written speech loses its immediate human connection: it becomes impersonal. Dinah provides a personal oral speech, proclaiming the word and message of Christ to all on the green at Hayslope.

Dinah, through her sermon, places the love of God and friendship together. Her address concerns not only the friendship that she and her congregation share, but also the reciprocal friendship between God and humanity:

> "Ah! Dear friends, we are in sad want of good news about God […] God lasts when everything else is gone. What shall we do if he is not our friend?" (24)

She is suggesting to her audience that God is a friend to humanity, and that through friendship in a shared faith, humans can become closer with God. The receiving of 'good news' about God, alludes not only to the good news among humans and the sharing of such in friendship, but also the Good News of the Gospel within Christianity. That is, the message that Jesus died for the salvation of humanity.[39] The prominent link between friendship, love, and God cements the fact that we can view love in theological terms but more specifically through the lens of *philia*. Dinah's sermon indicates that friendship not only exists between humans, but that we share of that friendship in a shared Christian faith. Through using egalitarian language, therefore, Dinah reflects the belief that a selfless love is within everyone. This type of love, it is suggested through Dinah's sermon, is immanent, innate within each human being and such a love is interpreted by Dinah as being God's presence. Such a love, Dinah

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[38] Johnson, ed. *Rudolph Bultmann: Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era,* p. 239.

[39] See Ilana Blumburg, *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in Mid-Century Novels* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013).

suggests, is then replicated, and takes place between human beings. This opening address, however, has a darker side, that of alluding to heaven and hell. Dinah concludes by saying, 'What shall we do if he is not our friend?' The question that Dinah raises reflects the belief that to follow God is to be saved. If God is not our friend, her speech seems to suggest, we cannot be saved from damnation. Dinah may well be aligned with a theology involving hell and damnation and through spreading God's gospel and message of love, she would believe that not only would God save her soul, but that of all other 'sinners', too. Dinah subscribes to the belief that it is only through belief in, and administering the Good News that humanity can find its salvation.

Through the Good News of the Christian message, humans also share a friendship with God — with Christ. Dinah, furthermore, suggests that if God is our friend, he will also be our salvation. To further illustrate her point about Christian love and friendship, Dinah goes on to exemplify divine love through the humanity of Jesus. This example is demonstrated using the language of divine love:

> […] he was the Son of God – in the image of the Father, […] We can understand what Jesus felt, because he came in a body like ours , and spoke words such as we speak to each other. […] our Blessed Saviour has showed us […] what God's heart is, what are his feelings towards us […] (24-5)

Dinah indicates to her audience the simultaneously human and divine love of Jesus. Jesus, being God in human form, came to earth to tell us of God's love and care for humanity. She also indicates that we can understand Jesus's love for humanity because he 'came in a body like ours and spoke words as we speak to each other.' Dinah uses the concept of incarnation to demonstrate her beliefs about Jesus.[40] Dinah's speech is intriguing, as it points to the human qualities of Jesus as the key to understanding the divine nature of God, rather than focusing on divine qualities. The human nature of Christ that Dinah stresses in her sermon holds great significance in a renewed Christology, as Peter Hodgson suggests:

[40] The term, incarnation, holds succinctly different meanings for theists and non-theists. Theologically speaking, the Incarnation is the doctrine of God made flesh, through God the Son, Jesus Christ. From a non-theistic perspective, incarnation means a person who embodies in the flesh either a deity, a spirit or abstract quality. A more secular definition would indicate that incarnation is synonymous with the term embodiment.

> To say that Jesus was the Son of God does not mean that he had a divine nature miraculously conjoined with human nature; he was not a god in human flesh. Rather it means he was 'just like God', and he was just like God in his love, his deep compassion and sympathy for those in need. [41]

Dinah enhances the humanity of Christ through her speech, being accompanied by human nature, as Hodgson suggests. It is through the (very human) nature of Christ that we are shown how we can be 'just like God' in our love, compassion and sympathy but we cannot ever be God, like Christ was. Instead, Dinah's view directs the reader towards a Christ-like approach. This is the communal model that Dinah is also trying to convey, in her attempt to close any gaps between the two faith communities of Stonyshire and Hayslope.

In this way, Dinah indicates that Jesus's humanity points believers to the divine nature of God. The speech is left to reader interpretation, based upon their own personal beliefs, although the topic matter is overtly theological. Some may feel that Jesus can be read as being fully human. Others may interpret that Jesus's human characteristics ensure that individuals value and understand concepts of love. Marilyn Orr proposes that Eliot 'continues to believe in the incarnation as the basis of human values and relations.'[42] Orr's argument, however, neither points toward a theological interpretation nor a non-theological one. She does not argue that Jesus is fully human but rather indicates the human message that Eliot promotes through the example of the Incarnation. I suggest, then, that in accordance with Orr's opinion, interpretations of incarnation are utilised by Eliot to focus on the human qualities of Christ, rather than prompt theological readings. Through Dinah's interpretation, Eliot is demonstrating that Jesus's humanity ensures God's love is communicated and acted upon effectively. For Christians, therefore, the incarnation becomes part of human values and relations to the divine, putting into action the love of God through the example of Jesus. Using humanity in spreading the message of God's love, ensures that humans can relate to love not only as being God-given but as intrinsic to Christian

[41] Hodgson, *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot* p. 175.

[42] Orr, *George Eliot's Religious Imagination*, p. 4.

belief and unity, through the example of Christ. This is the message of unity in friendship through love that Dinah is communicating to her audience.

The ending of the sermon is the most poignant in relation to divine love, as, 'nothing could part us from the God that loves us and fills our hearts with peace and joy' (29). Dinah refers to the inward nature of faith and divine love, that "fills our hearts"; the same love that binds humans in friendship. Such a love is suggestive of *philia*, as humans work together in acts of love and fellowship, building deep connections of friendship. Dinah's address to Hayslope through her preaching in Chapter Two, therefore, is fundamental to re-imagining Eliot's broad portrayal of love as not only God-given, but one that builds strong bonds of Christian friendship, of *philia*.

Caritas and Philia in Adam Bede: Or How to Love with Fellow-Feeling

In my analysis of the narrative of Adam Bede, I am examining how theological and non-theological modes work together to form personal stories and how they then contribute to Eliot's understanding of the human condition. Eliot's interpretation of the human condition, both theistically and non-theistically, draws attention to the stories surrounding individual characters. Such attention to the individuality of narrative forms helps the reader access the lived experiences of characters and to have an insight into their personal thoughts and feelings. A detailed narrative insight into the inward thoughts of characters produces a 'narrative painting', which I contend includes many individual stories.[43]

The opening two chapters of *Adam Bede* concentrate predominately on theological narratives and perspectives. Seth and Adam's theological discussion in

[43] 'Narrative painting' is a term explored by Molly Youngkin in 'Narrative Readings of the Images She Sees: Principles of Nineteenth-Century Narrative Painting in George Eliot's Fiction', *George Eliot and George Henry Lewes Studies*, 67, 1, (2015), 1-29, (p. 3).

Chapter One is centred around the beliefs and practices of the Christian (Church of England) faith and dissenters, such as Methodists, such as Seth. Adam's attitude towards those of a different faith to himself is evident in his quick response to Ben's teasing: "'Mester Irwine's got more sense than to meddle wi' people's doing as they like in religion. That's between themselves and God, as he's said to me many a time.'" (8-9). This is contrary to what his brother Seth thought of him: "'Thee doestna believe but what the dissenters and the Methodists have got the root o' matter as well as the church folks.'"(9) Adam then states that he doesn't laugh at anybody's faith. It is significant that Adam tolerates Seth's (perceived) alternative beliefs as a Methodist. This is because through wider bonds of non-denominational faith, the brothers are not only bound by *storge*, or familial love, but also by *philia* and fellowship through their faith. From the beginning of the novel, Eliot creates a narrative that is sympathetic to such varied beliefs.

In creating a narrative that is sympathetic to such diverse beliefs is problematic, as Eliot presents the reader with contradictory stories. Seth and Adam's relationship also illustrates the extent and limitations of brotherly love and affection, not dissimilar to the concept of *storge*. Although the brothers show affection to each other, and they tolerate each other's opinions, it becomes unclear what limitations exist in the love between the siblings. However, there are changes in their attitudes towards religious beliefs. For instance, Seth, as a Methodist has broken with the religious traditions observed by his brother Adam, and his mother, Lisbeth. Although there are many similarities between the Anglican and Methodist approaches, there is more emphasis on biblical and scriptural interpretation within the (then emerging) Methodist tradition, whereas, historically, there is more dogmatic and liturgical emphasis within the Anglican tradition. In his introductory chapter to *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (1989), David Bebbington identifies four qualities that set apart the emerging evangelical movement from other more 'traditional' strands of Christianity:

> There are the four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the

> cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism. […] John Wesley was willing to describe two doctrines as fundamental: justification, the forgiving of our sins through the atoning death of Christ; and the new birth, the renewing of our fallen human nature at the time of conversion.[44]

The markers of evangelical branches of the Christian faith that Bebbington identifies, therefore, would also be practiced by characters in *Adam Bede* such as Dinah Morris and Seth Bede. Such a change in values and approach within Seth would suggest that he is searching for a truth and a fervour within his faith. He finds these attributes of faith in his stay with the Methodist community in Stonyshire, 'some thirty miles away from Hayslope' (15).[45] Seth holds a preacher named Dinah Morris in very high regard, and her beliefs are shown to be markedly different from the traditional Hayslope community. The way in which Dinah's approach differs the most is the human-centric approach she takes to both preaching and approaching the personhood of Jesus. Belief is often associated with liturgy and rituals, in acts of worship. More emphasis, therefore, is placed on Jesus as God incarnate, rather than the humanity or personhood of Christ. Eliot, through her recognition and portrayal of differing Christian approaches and spiritualities, establishes a broadly philosophical narrative right at the start of *Adam Bede*, one which continues to dominate the many storylines of the novel.

Eliot's narrative is sympathetic to various personal beliefs, and she also incorporates more secular or less overtly theological motifs of love throughout *Adam Bede*. She ensures that the reader is presented with different viewpoints through the thoughts and actions of her characters, reflecting aspects of her own individual spirituality. Her humanistic interpretations of various spiritualities are interwoven amongst the theological narratives that underpin the representations of characters such as Adam, Seth and Dinah, and are represented through characters such as Hetty

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[44] David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to The 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989) pp. 2-3.

[45] N.B: It is believed that 'Stonyshire' is based on the county of Derbyshire, where Eliot's Methodist Aunt and Uncle lived.

Sorrell and Lisbeth Bede. Eliot outlines characteristics that are shared theologically and in a secular manner: those of kindness, sympathy, and, more specifically, love.

In Lisbeth Bede's storyline, for example, the reader observes an outlook that connects faith and love, which contrasts with the explicit theological narrative of her children. At her husband's funeral, through an observational narrative, a more nuanced representation of human love and pity is introduced: 'it was poor Lisbeth's blind way of feeling that human love and pity are a ground of faith in some other love.' (182). Lisbeth being described as having a 'blind way of feeling' could indicate that she is unenlightened by faith and opens up other ways of feeling and 'seeing'. Not only is the reader drawn towards a more philosophical narrative, one that places faith in 'some other love' but this narrative does not necessarily attribute love to a Christian God. Eliot broadens the narrative of love, and questions whether it is attributed to the divine, indicating an anthropocentric representation through Lisbeth's story.

Eliot presents to the reader through Lisbeth, a view that is not overly theological but is instead one that opens up the possibility of a more humanist approach as a reflection of 'some other kind of love'. Seth indicates to his mother, through his theological interpretation of love, that God is within the heart of a human being: "'There's nobody but God can control the heart of man.'"(41) Through his statement and encouragement, Seth is indicating the heart as being where love is centred, and that God has the power to control a person's heart. Lisbeth, by contrast, focusses on the human nature of love, in her 'poor, blind way.' Lisbeth may be blind to the theological ideas of other characters, but she has knowledge and experience of goodness and love. Although Lisbeth's narrative is not as fervently Christian as that of her two sons, she has a personal belief indicative of a faith in another presence or power - that is to say, 'some other sort of love'. This is interpreted as being present in Lisbeth's interpretation of an inherent presence. In the narrative that surrounds the interaction of love and situates the importance of love, it is possible for us to interpret both a theological and humanist understanding of *caritas* (through Dinah's visits) as being central to the premise of love. Eliot proposes an anthropo-centric interpretation of *caritas*, focusing on human example and putting feelings of kindness and compassion into action.

For Eliot, love is human-centric. This is shown through both theological and non-theological strands of her storylines. To examine the numerous narrative approaches to love, it is beneficial to examine August Comte's Religion of Humanity, which Eliot read thoroughly.[46] Comte's focus, not unlike Eliot's, is on the philosophical and empirical ties that humankind shares. One such tie is that of love, as T. R. Wright suggests in his evaluation of Eliot in *The Religion of Humanity* (1986): 'Love and reverence are the two fundamental altruistic instincts on which George Eliot built her faith in humanity'.[47] In his recognition that Eliot also focussed on altruism and its importance for society (placing others before yourself), Wright argues that love and reverence (two Comtean principles) are evident in her early fiction, and that the words, reverence, and love 'recur throughout the novels'.[48] Wright cites an example from *Adam Bede*, that: 'Adam's tenderness lay very close to his reverence, so that the one could hardly be stirred without the other' (GE, *AB* II 157).'[49] Drawing attention to the words 'love' and 'reverence', Wright places the Religion of Humanity not as central to Eliot's fiction, but as an influence on her writing with a human focus. I agree with Wright that Eliot's focus in her fiction was very much on a tradition of community, albeit based on the social and human-centric teachings of Christianity. In a departure from Wright's analysis, I then link Eliot's focus on the human community with her broadly Christian interpretation of the community and *caritas*.

Caritas, as a lens through which we consider the narrative, continues to point to a human-centric love: one that expresses kindness, charity, and friendship. In the chapter entitled 'In which the story pauses a little' (Chapter 17), Eliot considers an observational account which examines Eliot's portrayal of sympathy, goodness and love in the novel:

> It is more needful that I should have a fibre of sympathy connecting me with that vulgar citizen who weighs out my sugar […] more needful that my heart

[46] See 'GE to Sara Hennell, 2nd September 1852' in Gordon Haight, Selections from George Eliot's Letters, p. 108.

[47] T.R Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), p. 193.

[48] T.R Wright, *The Religion of Humanity,* p. 193.

[49] Ibid, p. 193.

> should swell with loving admiration at some trait of gentle goodness in the faulty people who sit at the same hearth as me, or in the clergyman of my own parish […] (162)

This passage departs from the main narrative to explore in-depth feelings of fellowship and shared human experience. The main message of loving one's neighbour or loving a stranger or outsider with fellow feeling resonates not only through overtly theological stands of Eliot's story line, but also through the more secular ones. Through this inward and explorative narrative, Eliot places themes of sympathy and the necessity of recognising motifs of kindness in others, be they strangers or family, the 'faulty people who sit at the same hearth as me.' In a non-theistic portrayal, Eliot demonstrates attributes of what I consider to be *caritas*. Human sympathy, goodness, kindness: a 'fibre of sympathy' that brings humanity together.

The connection between humanist and theological views of love is made through a language that is strongly associated with shared human experience. My interpretation of Eliot's plots of shared human experience is that they echo the Christian concept of *caritas*. Presented through the notions of fellow feeling and compassion, Adam's narrative focuses on the language of companionship and humans aiding each other through a journey: 'without this fellow-feeling, how are we to get enough patience and charity towards our stumbling, falling companions in the long and changeful journey […]?' (190) Without a commonality of kindness and fellow feeling, Adam is suggesting, we cannot build strong bonds as a community and aid those outsiders who need our love throughout the 'long and changeful journey. Here, Adam is alluding to the journey of life. Through a secular address, Adam is demonstrating how we should treat our fellow man, and his suggestion of charity reflects Eliot's own understanding of *caritas*, as the highest act of Christian charity and fellowship.[50] He then links the concept to 'the journey of life' — that the members of the community are like travellers through life's events, and we should love those who need it. Charity bonds itself to fellowship, as it is a social concept that benefits the whole community.

[50] See George Eliot, 'Letter to the Brays, 29th December 1862' in Gordon S. Haight, ed. *The George Eliot Letters, Vol. IV 1862-1868* (London: OUP,1956), p. 72.

Acts of charity are further facilitated by *philia,* the bonds of community through a shared faith.

The concept of the community as travellers in fellowship also relates to Adam's own personal reading, which includes, we later learn, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) by John Bunyan. (192) Narrated through a dream sequence by an observational and omniscient narrator, *The Pilgrim's Progress* recounts a journey from its central character's hometown to the afterlife. The narrative account of a journey through Adam's eyes is one which is taken together by several members of another fictional community: this time Hayslope. C. Stephen Finley identifies the importance of Bunyan in the Victorian imagination:

> Indeed, for many of the Victorian faithful, including many of the men and women who were to go on to greatness in Victorian literary and religious circles, Bunyan played a role in their religious formation and in their personal mythologies of quest and development, second only to that of the Bible itself.[51]

Although set in the last throws of the 1700's, Adam's narrative resonates strongly with Finley's claim that Bunyan's volume 'played a role' in his 'religious formation' and 'personal mythology'. Following the influence of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Adam is calling for a fellowship. Eliot's nod towards texts such as Bunyan's allegorical work serve to link her characters together in acts of *caritas*, albeit in a way that is not overtly theological. Her approach indicates a human-centric slant to the text, not linked to the devout pilgrims of Bunyan's work.[52]

Significant theological undertones underpin the narrative between Seth and Dinah in the novel, such as their address to one another as "brother" and "sister," despite not being related by blood. This is indicative of a sibling-like bond, through the shared faith of the Church (and in this instance, the Methodist church), and is suggestive of both *philia* and *storge*. My reading, here, is a theologically-specific one but

[51] C. Stephen Finley, 'Bunyan Among the Victorians: Macaulay, Froude, Ruskin', *Literature and Theology* 3,1 (1989) 77-94, (p. 77)

[52] See also Barry Qualls, *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction: The Novel as Book of Life*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1982) for secular accounts of allegory of journey in Victorian Fiction.

this concept is not exclusively Christian, and has other religious, spiritual and secular connotations. Motifs of theological love are evident through their shared narratives, alluding to Christian representations of different forms of love. *Caritas* is used as a common motif between the two representations, as a strong regard and kindness for each other is evident throughout the novel. But Seth and Dinah's theological placing of love is close to the Christian understanding of *philia,* or at least through Dinah's understanding of their relationship.

Seth and Dinah hold each other in vastly different regard. Seth feels intimacy and desire, present when we think of erotic love, or *eros*. Dinah does not replicate these feelings. For example, when Dinah comforts his mother, Lisbeth, after the death of his father, Seth was happy by the mere presence of Dinah. 'Seth was so happy now Dinah was in the house that he could not help thinking her presence was worth purchasing with a life in which grief incessantly followed upon grief […]' (101). Tinged with the sadness of grief, the perceived comfort that Dinah gives in such tender and anguished times, draws Seth closer to her. Seth realises, however, that Dinah's love for him is significantly different to his love for her, and this is communicated theologically. In the chapter, 'In the Cottage' (Chapter 11), Seth confides his anguish to Adam: 'Ay, Addy, I do love her — too much, I doubt. But she doesna love me, lad, only as one child o' God loves another.' (111) Through this passage, Eliot communicates Seth's belief that Dinah only loves him as another child of God. Seth is concerned that Dinah does not care for him in the way that he cares for her, only that she cares for him as she would any other person. Such terminology as 'another child of God' also suggests that a belief in God joins the journeys of Seth and Dinah together, bonded by their shared Methodist faith. Dinah's view of Seth is suggestive of *philia*, a love that in the Christian context, involves being kind and aiding one another in Christian fellowship. It is this belief that Eliot continues to draw upon through Seth and Dinah's narrative, and is particularly overt through the letter that Dinah writes to Seth:

> Dear Brother Seth
>
> […] Farewell, dear brother – and yet not farewell. For those children of God whom it has been granted to see each other face to face and to hold communion together and feel the same spirit working in both, can never

> more be sundered, though the hills may lie between. For their souls are enlarged evermore by that union, and they bear one another about in their thoughts continually as it were a new strength. – Your faithful Sister and fellow-worker in Christ,
>
> Dinah Morris (295-7)

The letter expresses Dinah's feelings for Seth's mother and family in addition to her own, but it is the opening address and conclusion of the letter that highlights the significance of a theological understanding of love in Seth and Dinah's interactions. Dinah addresses Seth as 'brother' and signs off her letter 'Your faithful Sister and fellow-worker in Christ'. These familial modes of address may appear to be secular but hold significant theological implications, particularly in the consideration of theological love and the Christian understanding of community and *philia*. Such a reading, through *philia* changes the way that the reader may perceive the excerpt: Dinah and Seth being bound together familiarly through their shared belief in Christ. Dinah indicates strong bonds between them which are communicated theologically through phrases such as 'children of God' and 'hold communion together' but also draws upon a deep-rooted regard of each other through souls: 'for their souls are enlarged evermore by that union.' The bonds of such a 'union', for Dinah are strong, as the bonds are those of faith, fellow-feeling, and working together, enacting the love of Christ. This differs from the 'union' that Seth desires through their shared love of Christ: that of a marriage union, where an *eros* love would ultimately mean that their shared love would assist the community through their actions. Dinah values the bond that Seth and she share above any sort of *eros*, or marriage. The love of Christ is her focus, and she sees a similar strength in her 'brother', Seth.

The framing of the letter through a familial-style bond is indicative of the concept of fellowship and can be read as *philia*. In my interpretation of the two terms, *caritas* refers to the concept of charitable actions within a community, following on from fellow-feeling. *Caritas* aids in the building of bonds within a community through charitable acts. While *Philia* is seemingly similar to *caritas*, it is distinctive from it, as although *philia* brings a community together, it denotes the bonds of fellowship that are shared between two believers, and for Seth and Dinah this is in a specifically

Christian context. The Christian understanding of *philia* unites believers in a shared faith that brings about strong bonds of friendship. Such a love also extends to outsiders, as many residents of Hayslope have different beliefs. This also applies to those who share the same faith, in this instance Dinah and Seth as Methodists. The original application of *philia* denoted friendship in monastic settings, and so the brotherly and sisterly language used throughout the letter, but particularly the opening address and ending paragraph highlight the theological importance of *philia*. Through the expressly theological portrayal of love through Seth and Dinah's narrative, it highlights, as Marilyn Orr suggests: Eliot's '[…] conviction that genuine Christians will put their beliefs into action in the form of love.'[53] Through Dinah's romantic rejection of Seth, a stronger theological love is formed: that of *philia*. Through Dinah and Seth's narrative, aspects of love that we find through a theological understanding of *caritas* begin to manifest themselves as a Christian representation of *philia*.

Hetty's Narrative: Inward Feeling versus Empiricism

It is through Hetty's personal story that the reader is informed of her capacity for love and kindness. The significance of examining inward narrative in this way enables the reader to see spiritualities, both theological and humanist, as part of the varied 'conditions of belief'. Charles Taylor examines the inward frame of religious and non-religious experience. It is through the immanent, we perceive the individual and have a good knowledge of `different kinds of lived experience[…] what it's like to be a believer or unbeliever.'[54] Taylor examines 'conditions of belief ', and views immanent frames as a plethora of individual choices.[55] Through examining secularisation in this way, whether religious, scientific or humanist, individuals have a choice in their beliefs: 'Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives.'[56] Hetty represents

[53] Orr, *George Eliot's Religious Imagination*, p. 16.

[54] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 5.

[55] Ibid, p. 3.

[56] Ibid, p. 3.

alternative views of faith posed by Eliot in *Adam Bede*, those that are not necessarily in line with pious or more traditional views, such as that of Anglicanism, or indeed Methodism. Philosophical views are posed by Eliot, that are in line with those readers would readily consider in the twenty-first century but may have been unorthodox for Eliot's readership. This is largely due to the context of Hetty's narrative, that includes the sin of infanticide, her pregnancy out of wedlock, and her abandoning of home and family in confusion. Some Victorian readers would have been condemning of actions such as Hetty's, but Eliot wanted to convey a more philosophical and inclusive approach to these hard-hitting issues of the age, re-examining what is meant by charity and compassion.

My own analysis of Hetty and her actions deviates from that which the narrative voice suggests: that Hetty is selfish in her actions throughout the course of the novel, and that she is very morally limited. An alternative view of Hetty's journey as an eventual agent of *philia* and *fellow-feeling*, therefore, is an optimistic one, and suggests that along with her indefensible actions, there is also a chance of redemption. A renewed understanding of *caritas* can aid the reader in seeing how Hetty's experiences are important in the overall narrative of *Adam Bede*. In the same chapter as Hetty's sorrow and anguish is discussed, a chance emerges for her for aid and redemption. Hetty, whilst looking at a letter from Dinah, expresses emotions linked to the kindness she was shown in the past:

> Now, for the first time, she remembered, without indifference the affectionate kindness Dinah had shown her, and those words of Dinah in the bedchamber – that Hetty must think of her as a friend in times of trouble. Suppose she were to go to Dinah, and ask her to help her? Dinah did not think about things as other people did: she was a mystery to Hetty, but Hetty knew she was always kind. (341)

In this short excerpt, different strands of the storyline are drawn out, relating to Hetty's understanding of kindness and love. Synonyms for love are included in this section of her narrative, such as kindness, help, and affection, all of which she attributes to her friend and cousin, Dinah. Hetty remembers 'without indifference' the kindness that Dinah had shown to her, indicates that she not only is recollecting

Dinah's words and demeanour, but also remembers it with fondness. Next, and of most significance, is the act of remembrance. Hetty remembers specifically the kindness that Dinah had shown. It is through the term 'kindness' that the reader can see a human-centric expression of devotion, suggestive of love and affection. Through the language of kindness, a suggestive link to *caritas* is made affirming a humanistic understanding of the term through affection. Readers could place Hetty's remembrance of kindness alongside the theological trajectory of Dinah's narrative, dealing with spiritual understandings of affection. A resemblance to *caritas* can be observed. Hetty's outlook is clarified through indicating that she did not fully understand why Dinah does not think about things as other people did: possibly a connection to Dinah's overtly theological narrative of love and kindness, which does not resonate with Hetty. Hetty's conclusion that she associates Dinah with kindness, however, indicates a form of love or affection, not dissimilar to a humanistic interpretation of *caritas*: that Dinah is 'a friend in times of trouble'.

Hetty's lack of 'religious' understanding is reinforced through her reflections in 'The Journey in Despair' (Chapter 37). Through the language of affect and the epistemological, the narration focusses on the absence of religious presence that Hetty feels:

> Religious doctrines had taken no hold on Hetty's mind: she was one of those numerous people who have godfathers and godmothers, learned their catechism, been confirmed, and gone to church every Sunday, and yet, for any practical result of strength in life, or trust in death, never appropriated a single Christian idea or Christian feeling. You would misunderstand her thoughts during these wretched days, if you imagined that they were influenced either by religious fears or religious hopes. (344)

Eliot is positing a narrative of doctrine versus spirituality, and in Hetty's case, broader spiritualities are considered, rather than orthodox beliefs. Through the narrative strand, she is suggesting that to lack in either kindness or fellow feeling is to lack in love. Hetty's is a narrative that Eliot indicates to be specifically non-theological, even during her days of intense anguish and stress. Eliot also writes on Hetty's nominal beliefs that she doesn't believe in the way Dinah does. Hetty's beliefs do not require as

much deep thought as Dinah's; they are achieved through instinctive knowledge, rather than religious doctrine. When viewed through Taylor's reassessment of the secular, Hetty's is an understanding of emotion, kindness, and affection, one gained through personal choice. Her narrative also is one which rejects the affective aspects of faith, one which does not have emotion and feeling as its driving force.

Barry Qualls refers to Hetty directly as being Godless: 'her sense of the godlike is non-existent. But George Eliot appeals to the typical, and to the readers' recognition of it, even as she varies its resolution to make her *human* case.' [57] Qualls's definition of the typical when applied to Hetty is that her experience is referred to in theological terms, to express her indifference to it. Eliot, for Qualls, replaces the theological with the human, without abandoning the theological terminology. I disagree with Qualls's statement that Hetty 'having no Christian thought or feeling,' stresses Hetty's indifference to the concept of theological affect. For me, Hetty's narrative is not in direct contrast to Dinah's theological narrative of the feeling and 'the heart.' Eliot does not place Hetty's and Dinah's narratives surrounding kindness and affection as opposites of one another. Rather, their storylines represent separate approaches to kindness, or as Taylor would stress, a personal choice of faith and approaches to it.

Hetty desires to gain a practical insight into her own emotions through a more epistemological approach, as Levine argues. Empiricism would provide an alternative for her, an avenue that explores choice. George Levine's evaluation of the epistemological narrative mode provides a different insight into Hetty's narrative. Levine states that: 'Beyond beginnings and endings, in the very middle of the activity of knowing, there is the injunction of self-sacrifice: to sacrifice anything and everything, particularly one's own desires, in order to know.'[58] I believe that Dinah's narrative is not linked to Hetty's through an epistemological mode, but rather her self-sacrifices are due to affect and what she feels towards Hetty, the love that they have built in times of crisis. The difference between the epistemological and affect is that the epistemological focusses on the concept of knowledge, whereas affect focusses on feeling and instinct. In this scene, it is apparent that feelings and a felt 'knowledge' of

[57] Barry Qualls, *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), p. 145.

[58] George Levine, *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 20.

each other are shared through imparting how each other feels, or 'what is in the heart.' Hetty, through an act of self-sacrifice, confesses to Dinah. Dinah attempts to know the sorrows of Hetty and impart her love to her. Through Dinah, a theological mode of affect is displayed: through acts of love. Suzy Anger, in her evaluation of Eliot's philosophy, states: 'Eliot does not believe that empiricism is the only route to knowledge, and she never surrendered her view that feeling is a source of knowledge.'[59] Fellow-feeling is a particular source of knowledge, and empathetic modes bond characters such as Hetty and Dinah together. There is a glimmer of hope for Hetty as she is beginning to know and understand feelings of love and affection. I concur with Anger's argument, here: that feeling is a source of knowledge in *Adam Bede*, and the affective becomes a source of the knowledge of love, whether that is the love of God, or the love of humanity. For Eliot, the intrinsic nature of the heart ultimately wins out against the empiricism of the head.

Although feeling can be described as a source of knowledge, something which Eliot implies through her narrative spaces, limitations in accessing and implementing one's feelings can provide an obstacle to putting love into action. Simply put, we can love another person, but to what extent? What, indeed, are our limitations in our expressions of love? Actions of love such as kindness, and fellow feeling have bounds which we cannot breach. Dinah's love for Hetty, for example, has its limitations as we have seen in the narrative spaces provided to us surrounding Hetty's trial and the anguish she feels in the lead up to her arrest[60]. No matter how good Dinah's intentions are towards Hetty, or how kind she is to her in her situation, there are limits to the extent of the power of her love. It is a relatively benign form of punishment that Hetty is transported to Australia for her crime, rather than hanged, but she is not acquitted by the judge and jury, nor is her plight properly understood (Chapters 38-41). Dinah's kindness cannot protect Hetty from experiencing harm, nor can it ensure her ultimate happiness with Arthur. This is despite Dinah's best efforts, out of her love and fellow feeling for Hetty. What is interesting, however, is that Dinah seemingly understands her own limitations considering Hetty's case.

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[59] Suzy Anger, 'George Eliot and Philosophy' in *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot, Second Edition,* ed. by George Levine and Nancy Henry (Cambridge: CUP, 2019), pp. 215-235, (p. 222)

[60] See the previous analysis of Chapter 37.

Dinah's self-awareness comes from knowing that she will not be able to "save" Hetty. In lieu of her not being able to provide salvation for her friend from her circumstances, she turns to her beliefs to provide ultimate salvation: a place for Hetty in the kingdom of heaven. As God provides humans with so love, according to Dinah's beliefs, she turns to the love of God to guide and support Hetty in her time of distress, praying for her forgiveness and salvation:

> "While you cling to one sin and will not part with it, it must drag you down to misery after death, as it has dragged you to misery here in this world, my poor, poor Hetty […] Cast it off now, Hetty – now: confess the wickedness you have done – the sin you have been guilty of against your heavenly Father. Let us kneel down together, for we are in the presence of God." […] At last Hetty spoke, in a tone of beseeching, "Dinah … help me… I can't feel anything like you … my heart is hard" […] "Come, Lord, and gather of the fruits of thy travail and thy pleading: stretch forth thy hand, thou who art mighty to save to the uttermost, and rescue this lost one […]" (403-404)

Hetty recognises that her 'heart is hard, and, despite Dinah's encouragement, cannot find the emotion to pray for her own salvation. Kneeling with Dinah, she clings to her emotional strength, and so Dinah beseeches God for Hetty's forgiveness, for her salvation and 'rescue'. Dinah is hopeful that Hetty the 'lost one', will find God's forgiveness in her time of need.

Hetty's salvation comes, but only by degrees. It involves her own self-sacrifice to create a new beginning. Hetty is saved from death but still receives punishment in the form of transportation for life. However, such a punishment also suggests that she may be offered salvation on earth, in a new place, and in the form of a new start, away from the previous social and theological pressures she felt in the community of Hayslope. Dinah opened up her heart to confess and receive God's forgiveness, "'Dinah, do you think God will take away that crying and the place in the wood, now I've told everything?"'.'(408) Ultimately, there is some sense that Hetty will build upon her new feelings of relief at confessing and use her new-found feelings to enact her love to others. However, we must be aware that this is not part of the narrative, rather one that we permit ourselves to imagine, being so drawn to Hetty's plight. Love

has its limitations, but there is an anticipation of some sort of salvation: hope being the essence that remained after the opening of Pandora's box.

Conclusion

Through my discussion of immanence as being essential to our understanding of Eliot's narrative, I have demonstrated that love is a key element in *Adam Bede*. Immanence is the notion that binds theological and non-theological narratives told through the characters and their interpretation of love, and more specifically, acts of love. Love, for the characters in *Adam Bede*, comes from within, and as such the language of emotion and affect comes into play. This also coincides with the concept of felt religion, and so when the narrative is read through a theological lens, one cannot help but associate emotions and expression with theological aspects of the novel.

Examining attributes incarnate within the characters of *Adam Bede* leaves us to question whether Eliot intended for every aspect of immanence to be a part of human interaction. *Adam Bede*'s narrative uncovers a multitude of emotions and responses, linked to putting aspects of Christian love into action, but there are some feelings that cannot or, simply are not, expressed outwardly by characters. If it was her intention or not, Eliot does humanise concepts of immanence or rather puts them as part of human felt experience. This is true for both theological and non-theological strands of her narrative, the former attributing immanent qualities to the presence of God. Whether 'God is in a man's heart', as Adam believes, or human behaviour points towards 'some other good,' as his mother, Lisbeth feels, immanent qualities are part and parcel of human experience, and, as a result, human action, and interactions of love. Whether such human interactions of love stem from the immanence of God is up to reader interpretation, but this is true for characters such as Dinah. For Dinah too, such actions were also modelled for humanity through the example of Christ, 'who came to us in a body like ours, and spoke words like we speak'. The Christian understanding of Immanence, therefore, is strongly linked to the concept of the Incarnation. Immanence, for Christians, becomes a human interaction that reflects the actions and love of God.

Human love, however, has its limitations. Dinah, who is so focused on putting the love of Jesus into action, and following his example, is also limited by how her love is expressed. This is particularly prevalent in her character's interactions with Seth Bede and Hetty Sorrel. Seth wants a different sort of love from Dinah, one of *eros*, whilst Dinah can only see Seth as a brother in Christ. Her love for Seth is limited, however, to the kind of love regarding the sacrament of marriage. Dinah's focus is the work of Christ, but even her life's work has its limits in the love she tries to share with Hetty. Dinah's loves make Hetty aware of the importance of kindness, compassion and self-sacrifice, and Dinah's expression of *caritas* eventually shifts some emotion within her. Ultimately, however, as Kimberly VanEsveld Adams suggests, Dinah 'has the Madonna's role of intercessor, she comforts the poor child-murderer, Hetty, in prison, and pleads for her with God.'[61] However, she does not achieve her goal, as Hetty remains in discomfort, and ultimately does not embrace God and Christian spirituality, as Dinah intended. Although Hetty may not be a Christian believer, the confession of her traumatic experiences stir hope within her, that she can both feel and enact kindness.

Caritas and *philia*, the two Christian terms that I have been utilising throughout my chapter translate as actions of love, brought about by immanence. *Caritas*, as Eliot defined the term, was an act of love, of charity and fellowship. *Philia* is a love traditionally between believers, drawing them nearer to the love and presence of God. Reflecting on my approach also leaves room to explore the terms of *caritas* and *philia* non-theologically, as terms to define acts of love and fellowship. Traditionally, the terms linked to the biblical verses demonstrate the love of God. Even so, there is no reason why the terms cannot be applied to human actions of love not expressly linked to the theological. *Caritas* and *philia*, therefore, do not have to be regarded as purely theological expressions of love. They are instead actions that bring believers and nonbelievers together in love for one another.

[61] VanEsveld Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism,* p. 158.

3: Familial Love Read as *Storge* in *The Mill on the Floss*

The concept of family is central to the narrative of *The Mill on the Floss*, with original working titles of the novel including *Sister Maggie*, *The House of Tulliver* and *The Tulliver Family*.[1] In this chapter, I examine Christian interpretations of familial love and obligation in T*he Mill on the Floss*, showing how theological love reflects Eliot's treatment of family in her work. The Greek name for familial love is *storge*, and in the Bible the word is used to describe the love you hold for your kin, or, as the King James Bible translates it, 'to be kindly affectioned' (Romans 12:10). *Storge* refers to the natural and affectionate bond that develops between parents and children, and amongst siblings.[2] Many examples of familial love are to be found in the Bible, including the love that Jacob has for his sons (Genesis 42-46) and the love that Martha and Mary felt for their brother, Lazarus (John11). These two biblical stories differ greatly in their content and context, but they both address the same type of love: that which in New Testament Greek came to be known as *storge*. The story in Genesis of Jacob and his sons revolves around the concept of lineage and extends not only to the family of Jacob, but the continuing genealogy of family that God seems to establish with him. His son, Joseph makes a new home for his family in Egypt for his parents and brothers to continue their lives. John 11 addresses the love of Martha and Mary for Lazarus, their brother. Upon hearing that their brother is gravely ill, the sisters send for Jesus to visit them and Lazarus. By the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus has died, or 'fallen asleep' (John 11:11). When Jesus witnesses the distress of Martha and Mary, he consoles them, saying that their brother will awaken. A resurrection takes place, with Lazarus being returned to his sisters having 'been in the tomb four days' (John 11:17). Through the story of Lazarus' resurrection, love between siblings is exemplified in the New Testament. Above all, biblical references to *storge* outline the kindness that families should display, doing good deeds for one another and working together cohesively.

[1] 'George Eliot to John Blackwood, Wandsworth, 3 January 1860' in Gordon S. Haight, ed. *The George Eliot Letters: Volume III 1859-1861*, (London: OUP, 1954), pp. 240-241 (p. 240).

[2] 'Storge' in *Oxford English Dictionary* Online, <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/storge_n?tab=meaning_and_use> [ACCESSED 12/03/2024]

Moreover, *storge* shows the deep love that family members hold for one another, be they siblings, or parent and child. *Storge* is the love that families can comprehend, replicated through related stories of affection in the Bible.

Eliot's narrative focuses on kindness and affection. This reflects the influence of Feuerbach's philosophy on Eliot's thinking. Inspired by her own translation of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1854). Eliot sees kindness as the greatest human good. Feuerbach identifies affection as a human-centric quality, as it is affection that, according to the biblical definition of *storge*, is the central quality of familial love. Feuerbach alludes to Christian concepts of theological love, identifying that 'Love identifies man with God and God with man, consequentially it identifies man with man.'[3] Eliot's The Mill on the Floss echoes this understanding of acts of Christian love as an imitation of the reciprocal love between God and humanity: love requires reciprocity, and Christians are told to love God, as God loves them. Through the example of Christ, Christians are then taught to replicate such love among themselves, requiring a reciprocal response. Eliot's broad understanding of kindness and affection in human acts of love are demonstrated through not only the application of Feuerbach's philosophy but the Christian concept of *storge*, practiced in Christian society for centuries prior to the German philosopher's text.

In addition to the influence of Feuerbach's philosophy, Eliot's argument surrounding familial love in *The Mill on the Floss* owes something to the thinking of Thomas à Kempis (1379-1471). Eliot directly quotes part of à Kempis's volume, *The Imitation of Christ* (first published in 1427 and still in print) as part of Maggie Tulliver's self-reflection. Whilst re-examining her behaviour, Maggie applies the altruism suggested by à Kempis to align her actions with those of Christ and be more selfless and loving.[4] Through the negation of the self, a' Kempis suggests that selfishness, fear and excessive emotions will cease:

[3] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 247.

[4] By Altruism, I am referring to acts of selflessness and kindness towards others, focussing on compassion. In the context of Maggie reading a 'Kempis' work, this is heavily based on the teachings of Christ.

> Forsake thyself, resign thyself, and thou shalt enjoy much inward peace… Then shall all vain imaginations, evil perturbations, and superfluous cares fly away; then shall immoderate fear leave thee, and inordinate love shall die.[5]

The phraseology employed by à Kempis provides the reader with the opportunity to examine themselves to modify their behaviour and reevaluate their desires and feelings. Moreover, à Kempis suggests that to resign yourself to the love of Christ means that all forms of 'inordinate love shall die', suggesting that true and pure love will remain. Maggie can feel a renewed love towards her family. Maggie, whose behaviour has been described by her father as being 'too cute for a woman' (12), has often found that her emotional responses to her family have caused her great pain and upset in her childhood years. As a young woman, she looks for a clue in understanding her behaviour and she turns to reading à Kempis, one of the books given as a present by her kindly neighbour Bob (264-5). Maggie reads à Kempis at regular intervals, alongside The Bible and John Keble's *The Christian Year* (1827) (267). Neither the Bible nor *The Christian Year* are directly quoted through the narrative of *The Mill on the Floss*, but the two-page study on à Kempis's volume reveals the centrality of his theory to the reformative nature of Maggie's story. The altruism endorsed by à Kempis's theological work leads Maggie Tulliver to re-examine her own behaviour and, in turn adopt a model of being that aids her action her kindly affection towards her immediate family. Her past excessive displays of passion and love towards them, which à Kempis suggests is 'inordinate love', now expresses itself in a manner that is calm. Through her altruism, therefore, Maggie can express her love towards her family in a way that is not selfish or assertive, acting through kindly affection. The approach to love outlined in à Kempis's work is also reflective of the wider theological approach of this thesis which argues that the meaning of love is shaped by the circumstances in which love is expressed. This relational and situational view of love is best understood as a continuation and development of a broad and historical Christian tradition rather than a break from theology.

[5] Gordon S. Haight, ed. George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, New Edition (Oxford: OUP, 2015), p. 269. All further mentions of the novel will appear in brackets in the main body of the text.

Eliot engages with theological questions through the representation of Maggie's acts of love, drawing these out in her narrative as ordinary, everyday acts of affection and kindness. *Storge* enriches the way that we view these small acts of love and is an example of an argument that is part of Eliot's storyline, where she conflates what is sacred and what is secular. If read through the theological lens of *storge*, kind acts can be linked to Christian love. Through evaluating small acts of human kindness in the narrative, I question if the familial love in *The Mill on the Floss* is reflective of a kindly and instinctive affection, or whether such approaches are absent in the Tulliver family's treatment of one another. I place the suggestion of allegiance alongside the juxtaposition of Maggie's altruistic approach to loving her family. Both actions, although contrasted, are intentional and are not reflective of an instinctive affection. There are instances, however, when the Tulliver family pull together through an instinctive and kindly bond, most notably at the novel's (and, ultimately, the family's) demise. Through following the example of Christ, and her devotional reading of à Kempis, Maggie Tulliver also reflects a feminine turn in Christian spirituality. Following from Keuss's interpretation of the 'face of Christ'[6], recent work on theological symbolism and embodiment in literature, has indicated the Victorian turn to a feminine view of God. Rebecca Styler, for example, signals the Christian virtues that were attributed to feminine qualities: 'moral purity, love and self- denial – were widely thought to be more easily practised by women than by men.' [7] Such qualities, in particular that of self-denial is practiced through Maggie's attempts to improve her demeanour and outlook towards her family.

In Christianity, a renewed understanding of the family also emerged as an institution of love. Such institutions are in line with a New Testament understanding of the term, derived from Jesus' teachings. The family encouraged Christian values and households taught the love of the 'family of God'.[8] As Werner G. Jeanrond states:

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[6] Jeffrey F. Keuss, *A Poetics of Jesus: The Search for Christ through Writing in the Nineteenth Century* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), p. 4.

[7] Rebecca Styler, *The Maternal image of God in Victorian Literature* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2024), p. 12.

[8] Werner G. Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love* (London: Continuum Books, 2010), p. 176.

> […] for him [Jesus] the crucial unit of faith was the family of God and not any particular household. In other words, Jesus used the household language of his tradition, but he radicalised and extended it to comprise all women and men who do the will of God (Luke 11:27-8 'blessed is the womb who bore you, and the breasts which nursed you'; 14:25-6 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.'; 18:28-30 'there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife and children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time and in the age to come eternal life.').[9]

In his teaching, Jesus presents a radical view of familial love: to become a disciple, a follower must leave their family behind, to take up the cross and devote their lives to God. Theologically, this presents a radically renewed view of *storge*. Familial love is important, and is presented as such throughout the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments; but Christ presents his disciples with a new challenge — to abandon their homestead and break familial bonds to form another type of family. To break the bonds of *storge*, therefore, involves a great sacrifice for the individual who chooses the life of a disciple. However, through their sacrifice of their own self, their sense of family, and the bonds of kin, a renewed family is formed: one through faith and discipleship. The familial bonds of the Church are formed, through the 'family of God'. The relationship between believers indicates the 'family of God' is not reliant on the household, or what we would regard as the nuclear family. Instead, the early Christian understanding of familial love encompassed the family of fellow believers, in addition to one's household.

Although the role of familial linage has been addressed with regards to *The Mill on the Floss* by those such as Sophie Gilmartin and Rosemary O'Day, the concept of

[9] Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*, p. 176.

familial love and the term, *storge* has not been considered.[10] Although Gilmartin and O'Day write in very different academic disciplines (Literary Studies and History, respectively), their insight into the evolving nature of the family unit in Nineteenth Century England sheds light on the importance of the family, not just for lineage but for social standing and for the holistic raising of offspring. Nineteenth-century narrative bears witness to *storge*, signifying the loving bond between parent and offspring, and this is central to understanding the narrative of Maggie Tulliver in relation to her mother's negative description of her as 'a wild thing' (12). I argue that, through the narrative of Maggie Tulliver, Eliot's narrative is suggestive of *storge,* especially through Maggie's theological reading and the impact which it has on her conduct towards her family. Through the central focus of the family in the novel, Eliot is suggesting that family and roles of individuals in the family are important, and that this concept is (almost) universal. Kin is important in Eliot's writing, but she also realises and overtly states its limitations. Eliot is questioning what actions fall under familial obligation and what acts are done through the love that family members have for one another. Through the narrative of the Tullivers, acts of obligation can be read as acts of loving kindness towards family members, suggestive of Old Testament notions of familial love.

Affection and kindness are shown through everyday acts of love in the narrative of *The Mill on the Floss*. Such acts of kindness are highlighted by Maggie's response to her aunt's reaction following her father's illness and bankruptcy. She and her brother Tom have been berated by family members and it is suggested that they work hard to keep the family afloat (198-200). Maggie defends her mother and father, a peculiar reaction, given the family dynamic. For Maggie, assisting one's family is an act of kindness, particularly if other family members can afford to help financially. Through stating that her father would have helped them in times of trouble, Maggie highlights the importance of acts of kindness towards one's own siblings, emphasising the bond she hoped to have with her brother, Tom. She points out to her aunt the love her

[10] See Sophie Gilmartin, *Ancestry and Narrative in Nineteenth-Century British Literature: Blood Relations from Edgeworth to Hardy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth- Century Literature and Culture,CUP, 1998) and Rosemary O'Day, *The Family and Family Relationships, 1500-1900: England, France, and the United States of America* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994).

father has for their family; 'he was kind, he would have helped *you* […]' (220). The type of kindness highlighted by Maggie's plea to her aunt can be viewed as resembling Christian love as it centres around acts of kindness and Mr Tulliver's willingness to help. The acts of kindness mentioned in Romans 12:10 are not only inferred but the Greek term, *storge,* is suggested in a reaction that is motivated by kindness. Maggie perceives that family are obligated to act kindly toward one another and assist in times of need. Unfortunately, this view is not upheld by all those in her close family unit, and the clash of viewpoints serves to highlight the limitations of Maggie's focus on being more loving towards her family. I argue that Maggie's transformative narrative of love, through reading à Kempis's volume, promotes patient kindness towards others, and she can focus on her obligation to her family to be a good daughter and a better sister. Obligation to one's family, demonstrated through intuitive acts of kindness, are suggestive of a New Testament application of *storge*, and thus central to a Christian understanding of familial love.

"There is no self-love": Maggie, Thomas à Kempis and Altruism

Theological concepts presented by Thomas à Kempis are central, or rather the key in understanding Maggie's narrative in *The Mill on the Floss*. The placement of his work in the novel is not accidental, and further evidences its pivotal role in influencing a spiritual change in Maggie. Not only is it important in Maggie's story, there is evidence that the work also formed the thinking of Eliot, at the very least in preparation for writing the novel. In her journal dated 18th November, 1859, Eliot states, 'I am reading Thomas à Kempis.'[11] Reviews of a permanent exhibit dedicated to her memory in 1927 also state that there was '[…] a copy of Thomas à Kempis, inscribed by George Eliot to Sara Hennell'. [12] The inclusion of the work in the permanent exhibit is crucial as it suggests the centrality of the volume in Eliot's spiritual life. The inscription is also significant as it indicates that the volume held such importance that she also inscribed

[11] 'GE Journal, Wandsworth, 18 November 1859' *The Letters of George Eliot*, p. 205.

[12] Margaret Harris, 'THE GEORGE ELIOT CENTENARY OF 1919', *The George Eliot Review*, 38 (2007), 32-48, (p. 43).

the inside front cover to her close friend, Sara Hennell and gifted her a copy. The volume that was inscribed, it is worth noting, is *The Imitation of Christ:* a guide on how to follow the Cross and the teachings of Jesus. Such mentions would suggest that à Kempis played a large part in not only the spiritual life of the fictional Maggie Tulliver, but in the life of Eliot herself.

Thomas à Kempis (1379 – 1471) was a medieval monk, living in fifteenth-century Germany. His prominent work, *The Imitation of Christ* 'has been translated into fifty languages and has established itself during the course of the centuries as an influential book of Christianity'.[13] The volume focuses on acts of altruism in order to better understand and aid others through the example and teachings of Christ.[14] À Kempis provides solace and direction for the teenage Maggie, as indicated by the rate and frequency that she reads the text: 'Maggie read so eagerly and constantly in her three books, the Bible, Thomas à Kempis, and the 'Christian Year' […] that they filled her mind with a continual stream of rhythmic memories[…]' (272) As readers in the twenty-first century, we are less inclined to be familiar with devotional acts of reading such as Maggie's habit in reading à Kempis, Keble and ultimately, the Bible itself. Such constant reading, therefore, would indicate that she finds a strong direction through interpreting à Kempis. Maggie's reading holds the "key" to her new life, as Rosemary Mundhenk explains: 'Maggie for a time would characterize her conversion by Thomas à Kempis as her initiation into a new life, the discovery of a key and secret of life.'[15] The concept of inward contemplation as learning the secret of life is echoed in the work of Simon Calder, who views Maggie as finding a key to her new life: 'Maggie believes herself to have found just such a key in Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*.'[16] We should be careful in using such terminology of 'keys', however, for, as Calder continues, ' […] it becomes clear that Maggie has discovered something in à Kempis.

[13] George F. Maine trans. Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, (London: Collins, 1960), VI-VII.

[14] Altruism is unselfish concern for other people's happiness and welfare. Synonyms: selflessness, charity, consideration, goodwill. <https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=altruism > [accessed 12/03/2024].

[15] Rosemary Mundhenk, 'Patterns of Irresolution in Eliot's "The Mill on the Floss"', *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 13, 1 (1983), 20-30, (p. 25).

[16] Simon Calder, 'The Art of Conduct, The Conduct of Art and the 'Mixed Science' of Eliot's Ethics: 'Sympathetic Impulse' and 'The Scientific Point of View' in The Mill on The Floss', *The George Eliot Review*, 41, (2010), 60-74, (p. 60).

What she has found, suggests Eliot's narrator, is not a key but a 'clue'.'[17] Rather than providing a 'key' to all Maggie's troubles, the guidance provided by à Kempis provides a clue, an avenue through which Maggie is permitted to decide her own outcome, however oblivious to this she may appear.

The reader's understanding of Christian altruism stems from two pages of the narrative, as Maggie begins to read Thomas à Kempis. Along with the Bible and *The Christian Year*, Maggie 'read so eagerly and constantly' (272) *The Imitation of Christ*, and its contents, thus re-evaluating her attitude towards her family. Through her journey of inward contemplation and submission to the will of God, Maggie gives up her own will, or self-love, in favour of what God wishes. For Maggie, submission of will is through a process of reflection and the evocation of memories, aiding her to modify her own, wilful behaviour. Her ready pursuit of patience, however, deviates from à Kempis' own message: Maggie's reading is not a literal one, rather an interpretation of the message. (502). Maggie's 'interpretation' of the message, rather than being a literal reading indicates that she is reading the volume with feeling. She is taking from the volume what is significant to her: to modify her behaviour to be able to love her family better. Although Maggie's read passage deviates somewhat from à Kempis' text, it is important to note the significance of the message that permeates into Maggie's consciousness: that of patience, compassion, and altruism. Patience remains one of à Kempis's main teachings, as a method for understanding others, and understanding yourself, '[…] that thou mayst pluck up and destroy that hidden inordinate inclination to thyself, and unto all private and earthly good.' (268). Privately and inwardly, Maggie must seek to destroy her "hidden inclination to thyself" and seek a patient way of understanding and loving others for her own "private and earthly good". For à Kempis, this instruction does not come from human interaction, but from the divine interaction of God and humans. He urges that we do not follow the example of people in this world, but instead look to God and commune with him for divine guidance. In the section of *The Imitation of Christ* entitled 'On Gratitude for God's Grace', à Kempis teaches that Christians should seek patience, rather than comfort: 'Dispose yourself to patience rather than to comfort and to carry the cross rather than enjoyment. What temporal person would

[17] Calder, 'The Art of Conduct, The Conduct of Art and the 'Mixed Science' of Eliot's Ethics', 60-74, (p. 60).

not gladly receive spiritual consolations if such a person could keep them always?' [18] Maggie's interpretation reads as: 'which way soever thou dost turn thee, everywhere thou shalt find the Cross: and everywhere of necessity thou must have patience, if thou wilt have inner peace and enjoy an everlasting crown […]' (286). Although Maggie's reading deviates from the text and does not quote it verbatim, the message remains the same, just through a different lens: Maggie's. But she experiences 'a strange thrill of awe' as she continues to read, becoming 'hardly conscious that she was reading, seeming rather to listen' (268-9). The significance of Maggie's awe is that she realises that she has found the clue to understanding her family and how to act to show her love for them.

À Kempis's' theological influence on Maggie's narrative forces a change in both her outlook and actions. Consolidating the main teachings from à Kempis' work, Maggie takes stock. She sees the lessons, not only as reflective of what she must do, but as a 'secret of life that would enable her to renounce all other secrets.' (269). The 'secret of life' is, of course, to follow the example of Christ, and his teachings: the way of the Cross. Putting aside her own desires, Maggie is determined to seek her inward 'truth', to be more able to love her own family. She now believes her will not to be entirely her own, and she consents to be led by a 'divine' presence: '[…] but this was the voice out of the far-off Middle Ages was the direct communication of a human's soul's belief and experience and came to Maggie as an unquestioned message.' (270). À Kempis's 'voice out of the far-off Middle Ages' thus guides and directs Maggie towards a new way of examining and conducting her life. Maggie can firmly place her own will into God's hands. Maggie now seeks to conduct herself not out of self-interest, but through bending to the will of others:

> It flashed through her like the suddenly apprehended solution of a problem, that all the miseries of her young life had come from fixing her heart on her own pleasure, as if it were the essential necessity of the universe; and for the first time she saw the possibility of shifting the position from which she looked at the gratification of her own desires – of taking her stand out of herself, and looking at her own life as an insignificant part of a divinely-guided

[18] Clare L. Fitzpatrick ed., 'Book Two: Considerations for Interior Life' pp. 67-101 in *The Imitation of Christ in Four Books by Thomas A' Kempis* (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp, 1993), p. 86.

> whole. She read on in the old book, devouring eagerly the dialogues with the invisible Teacher, the pattern of sorrow, the source of all strength […] (269)

Through her reading, Maggie pits her own pleasure against that of others. She realises that she has been putting the needs of herself above those of her own family and recants her previous convictions of self. Maggie's interpretations of à Kempis, in this way can also be tied to the concepts laid out by another influential Christian theologian: those of Gregory of Nyssa (335-395), who also concentrated on the concept of desire, and how those desires can then yield positive actions.[19]

Gregory of Nyssa focussed on the concept of desire, but more importantly, how one's inward desires can be used to put love into action. Through her reading, there is a shift in Maggie's own perceived position in her family, and she realises the love she has for her own kin. With a crashing realisation, furthermore, Maggie also realises her own mortal insignificance, that she is merely part of a divinely guided whole. She finds herself guided by the invisible Teacher. It is important to note that the capitalised term, 'Teacher' alludes to the name given to Jesus by his disciples. It can therefore be suggested that the invisible 'Teacher' that Maggie is thinking of is Christ. Like the disciples, Maggie, through her readership and devotion, also takes up the Cross. Through reading and interpreting à Kempis, therefore, Maggie brings Christology to the fore. In her interpretation of the text, patience and self-reflection are at the core of her re-imagined *storge*: Maggie follows the ways of Christ to be a better daughter and sister.

Through sacrificing her own love of self, Maggie can become more devoted to others in a thoughtful and considerate way. In undergoing such inward contemplation daily, she is carefully considering acts of 'kindly affection' (Romans 12:10), ensuring that she can act on her love for her family without the need for impulsive and selfish behaviour. Maggie radically adjusts her mindset. Through such an adjustment, she can behave well towards her brother and mother. She begins to accept how her brother

[19] This theory is prevalent in my following chapter of the thesis, that focuses on desire and a renewed perception of *eros* in *Middlemarch*. In the chapter, I use the theory of the British Theologian, Sarah Coakley, who utilises Gregory of Nyssa's teachings to reposition and re-examine themes of desire. See Sarah Coakley, God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity' (Cambridge: CUP, 2013) and Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

feels and acts coldly towards her, as '[…] she strove to be contented with that hardness, and to require nothing.' (272) Realising that little action on Tom's behalf meant that he was not displeased with her, Maggie takes comfort from this, and refrains from fighting with him or feeling rejected at his firmness with her. Through her altruistic reading, Maggie can feel affection towards her family, and put her feelings into action, bringing *storge* to the fore of the narrative.

The concept of acting kindly towards her family brings comfort to Maggie, and acts of *storge* drive her narrative forward. Any temporary comfort in her new view of Tom, however, is short-lived. Her wilful nature appears to inhibit all her actions, despite Maggie's attempts to constrain her emotions. Influenced by her regular reading, Maggie also wishes to do anything to please her parents and be a good and dutiful daughter but even this is hampered by her defiance, as indicated in the text. Maggie '[…] threw some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity, even into her self-renunciation […] She '[…] often hosted the spirit of humility by being excessive in the outward act.' (271). Her stubborn nature has led Maggie to once again be at war with her own selfishness, even when she is wanting to please her parents. This is especially the case with how Maggie wishes to be perceived by her mother. Her new, inward life seemed to give her new scope in building better relations with her mother:

> That new inward life of hers, notwithstanding some volcanic upheavings of imprisoned passions, yet shone out of her face with a tender soft light that mingled itself as added loveliness with the gradually enriched colour and blossoming youth. Her mother felt the change in her with a sort of puzzled wonder that Maggie should be 'growing up so good' it was amazing that this once 'contrairy' child was to become so submissive, so backward to assert her own will. (272)

Becoming consciously quieter and more submissive in her demeanour towards her mother, Maggie is becoming the daughter that she wished she had been as a child, letting her mother style her hair and pick out dresses for her to wear. (273). As a result, her mother was 'getting fond of her tall, brown girl, the only bit of furniture on which she could bestow her anxiety and pride.' (273) Maggie's appearance is likened to

the brown furniture in the house, and becoming so familiar now to her mother, that she becomes as a 'bit of furniture' herself. Her wilfulness subsides, and her demeanour seemingly fades into the background of the narrative, becoming unimportant. Sara Ahmed argues, 'When you treat someone like furniture you put them into the background.'[20] Although Ahmed views this episode as undermining Maggie's independence, it can also be read as one that brings delight to her — as her new attitude has had a positive effect on her mother. Wilfully fitting into her mother's concept of daughterly affection and attentiveness, Maggie has finally earnt her place as part of the family, quietly and reliably sitting in the background. Finding her 'clue' to acceptance within the family, Maggie has also found the clue to showing love towards her family.

Self-sacrifice is a key theological motif in mid-nineteenth century literature and culture, as Schramm and Blumberg have argued. In *Atonement and Self- Sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century Narrative*, Schramm indicates that the theology of atonement was central to mid-Victorian literature.[21] In order to atone for previous actions an element of self-sacrifice was often deemed necessary – as seen in the narrative journey of Maggie. For Blumberg in *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in Mid-Century Novels,* self-sacrifice is '[l]ying at the core of the "dominant Victorian moral sensibility" […]'[22] The theological significance of atonement and the example of Christ sacrificing his human life to provide humanity's salvation infiltrates Victorian literature and culture, with Blumberg explaining: 'British Christians were largely agreed in understanding personal suffering and sacrifice in imitation of Christ as critical elements of genuine religious experience.'[23].

Schramm indicates that in reading à Kempis, Maggie '[…] finds her most intense consolation.'[24] Maggie's consolation comes to her through self-sacrifice: to become a

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[20] Sara Ahmed, '"Wilful Parts" Problem Characters or the Problem of Character', *New Literary History*, 42,2 (2011), 231-153, (p. 246).

[21] Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century Narrative*, (Cambridge, CUP, 2012), p. 3.

[22] Ilana M. Blumberg, *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in Mid-Century Novels*, (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2013), p. 2.

[23] Blumberg, *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in Mid-Century Novels,* p. 6.

[24] Schramm, *Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century Narrative,* p. 13.

better daughter, a better sister, a better niece. As Blumberg puts it, 'Maggie Tulliver can imagine no ethical alternative to self-sacrifice.'[25] Her attempts at self-sacrifice do not bring Maggie any immediate relief, but it is the act of patience, that Maggie subsequently submits to. She has '[…] learnt the lesson […] – better to suffer than to inflict suffering […]'[26] Building upon the arguments of Blumberg and Schramm to include *storge*, I argue that that self-sacrifice is needed in Maggie's narrative. Through her altruism and understanding of Christian sacrifice, she puts aside her self-worth and aims to 'fit the mould' of her family. She achieves this through the understanding achieved through reading à Kempis whilst interpreting his message. In sacrificing a part of herself — her independence, she achieves her perceived aim: to fulfil her role within her family. Her abandonment of selfishness becomes an act suggestive of *storge*, a loving kindness that pleases her mother and presents Maggie as the dutiful daughter. Maggie's self-sacrifice is also suggestive of communicating with the divine, through the reciprocated love of God.

Through the suggestion that suffering is a link to the divine, Eliot is not only echoing the words of à Kempis, but those of Feuerbach. For Feuerbach, in Blumberg's analysis, '[…] all things 'divine' were those highest goods that humanity could imagine, so self-sacrifice, according to Feuerbach was a pinnacle of human achievement.'[27] The act of imitating Christ's demeanour, imitating the divine, is reflected in the text Eliot quoted from Thomas à Kempis. For Blumberg, Eliot alludes to a sense of duty and self-sacrifice in the portrayal of Maggie as an example of what she refers to as 'maximalist altruism,' the ability to 'strive for an altruism purified of any speck of self-interest.'[28] In Maggie, 'maximalist altruism' is realised in the narrative of *The Mill on the Floss*, as she sacrifices her own self-interest for the benefit of her own family and her role within it.

Maggie's atonement and sacrifice has its theological limitations. She is, in fact, fully human in body and in spirit, and so, theologically speaking, although she can take up the teachings of Jesus, and the 'way of the Cross', she is not divine. Her human nature does not permit her to achieve a perfect love, a 'perfect' *storge*: due in no small

[25] Blumberg, *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in Mid-Century Novels,* p. 1.

[26] Schramm, *Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century Narrative,* p. 13.

[27] Blumberg, *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in Mid-Century Novels,* p. 3.

[28] Ibid, p. 11.

part to the differences in outlook between her, her father, mother and brother. This barrier is the most difficult to overcome, as a clash in spiritual and philosophical outlooks, causes alienation within the family unit. Ultimately, Maggie, despite her 'constant reading' of à Kempis, *The Christian Year* and the Bible, struggles to become the better daughter: a better sister. Her attitude and demeanour changes towards family members but they are slow to adapt to her new outlook.

Family Roles and Obligations in *The Mill on the Floss*

Family roles and obligations form most of the relationships between characters in *The Mill on the Floss* and Eliot questions what it means to be kind towards your family. The biblical concept of family treating each other with 'kindly affection' is scrutinised by the author and the focus on allegiances to family members throughout the narrative pushes the bounds of *storge*. When framed with regards to Christian theology, the concept of sacrificing your own happiness for the betterment of your family is demonstrated clearly in Eliot's portrayal of families in the novel. In his historical work on Evangelicalism, social and economic thought, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795- 1865* (1988), Boyd Hilton suggests that, by the late 1800s, Anglican concepts of sacrifice and atonement shift to looking towards compassion:

> By 1870 it was commonplace for Anglicans to assert that a theological transformation had recently taken place, whereby a worldly Christian compassion, inspired by the life of Jesus, had alleviated such stark evangelical doctrines as those of eternal and vicarious punishment.[29]

Hilton notes a shift away from atonement (and the focus on self- sacrifice) to an emphasis on Christ as an example. Christ's example becomes central in the popular theological focus, with compassion at its centre. Maggie's understanding of following

[29] Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 5.

the ways of Christ, and 'taking up the cross' therefore, indicate a renewed turn to following closely the example and teachings of Christ.

Maggie's understanding of self-sacrifice and compassion is not shared by her family members, as they often exhibit a world view of hardship, punishment, and retribution. Her father, for example, is focussed on retribution towards those who he feels have wronged him, such as the Wakem family. Boyd Hilton suggests that such a focus on retribution is indicative of a shift in a generation before.[30] Such a focus is based on a mixture of Christian influences and the underlying theme that those who turn from God will be punished, and deserve to be so.[31] Mr Tulliver, through his act of dedicating the front page of the Tulliver Family Bible to the ongoing feud between his family and the Wakems, evokes a renewed understanding of the term, covenant: both theologically speaking, and from a socio-economic perspective.[32]

Maggie views herself as being different from other family members and struggles to feel part of the family. Throughout her narrative, she attempts to fit in where she can, even going to such extremes of running away to live with a Gypsy community on the fringes of the village. Gypsies are often used in nineteenth-century literature as a motif for 'strangeness' and 'otherness', as they reside on the fringes of communities. Aspects of their looks, dress and demeanour are referred to in novels of the period, and stereotypes of gypsies came to form their roles in fiction. Despite being often depicted as being on the fringe of communities, gypsies were often romanticised in narratives as communities of the 'other', a collective separate from the village or town community. Building on the idea of gypsies as a community of the 'other', I argue that their community is representative of a family of another sort, one that is imagined by Maggie Tulliver as welcoming, differing greatly from her own unaccepting family.

Maggie is treated as a pariah by some family members in early childhood because she is not physically akin or alike in attitude. She is described by her family as displaying the stereotypical features of a gypsy and as not resembling the fair looks of her mother and her aunts. Maggie has 'dark heavy locks' and 'gleaming black eyes' (13).

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[30] Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, p. 5.

[31] Ibid, p. 4.

[32] See Hilton, *The Age of Atonement,* p's 50, 53 regarding social cooperation for more detailed information.

Her darkened appearance and wild hair mean that her aunts cannot attribute to her the physical qualities of the Dodson family (her mother's ancestral line), as neither her skin-tone, nor her hair are fair or light in colour, unlike her cousin, Lucy. Through such modes of distinction, Eliot is alluding to literary accounts of the nineteenth century, reflecting the stigma surrounding the Gypsy and Roma communities at the time, as 'Many […] shared the belief that the Romany "race",[…] was a breed apart, possessed of "black blood", swarthy complexion, and curling dark hair.'[33] Such assumptions are used by Eliot to convey a sense of Maggie as the 'other'.

Glimpses of *storge* can be seen through Maggie's relationship with her father. Her father is the only member of her immediate family who treats her with any respect and kindness, and who sees Maggie's loving and protective nature. This is reflected in Maggie's love and concern for him, even when she absconds to join the gypsies, as 'She thought of her father as she ran along […]' (99) Maggie felt that despite her father looking over her with love and affection, other members of her family sought to undermine her and disassociate themselves from her looks and behaviour. Determined to run away, therefore, she hopes to find her kindred spirits in the gypsy community on Dunlow Common. The description of the 'gypsy-mother' provides a mirror to the reader through which they can see a sense of belonging and family identity for the fraught Maggie:

> Maggie looked up at the new face rather tremblingly as it approached and was reassured by the thought that her aunt Pullet and the rest were right when they called her a gypsy, for this face, with the bright dark eyes and the long hair, was really something like what she used to see in the glass before she cut her hair off. (102)

Maggie sees familiarity through 'something like what she used to see in the glass': that of a young gypsy woman. Such a visual sense of familiarity ensures that she is comfortable while staying with them. This familiar feeling, however, is short lived. Her initial concerns upon experiencing the community were in fact correct, as '[…] her ideas about the gypsies had undergone a rapid modification in the last five minutes.'

[33] Deborah Epstein Nord, '"Marks of Race": Gypsy Figures and Eccentric Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing', *Victorian Studies*, 41, 2 (1998) 189- 210, (p. 189).

(106) Maggie quickly realises that she needs to return home: to the familiar warmth and kindness of her father, and to be welcomed back into the fold of the family.

The bond between Maggie and her father is exemplified throughout the narrative. When, for example, Maggie returns from her visit to the gypsies, all is forgotten. She is 'greeted tenderly by her father, the parent who does love her, Maggie is happily restored to her family, disabused of her gypsy fantasies.'[34] What is particularly significant, however, about the closing of this escapade is that Mr Tulliver addresses this situation in the sense that 'Maggie never heard one reproach from her mother, or one taunt from Tom, about this foolish business of her running away to the gypsies.' (109) Her family's taunting of her appearance and demeanour had not gone unnoticed by the head of the household. The family carries out their obligation to Mr Tulliver, and now seemingly to Maggie, the daughter whom he loves. In search of a kindly affection, suggestive of the Christian concept of *storge*, Maggie seeks a family in those that she was told were her true kin. This effort, however, is futile, as Deborah Epstein Nord concludes: '[t]he gypsies cannot be her tribe […] and yet […] neither is she wholly of the family to which she has been born.'[35] Maggie has tried to find those kindred to her and failed, except for the love that is reciprocated by her father.

Traditional views of familial love are also scrutinised when we are to consider the storylines focussing on the Dodson sisters. The relationships between the four women bring to the fore the problematic nature of family obligations and allegiance. *Storge* is therefore an unconventional lens for regarding the relationship between the four Dodson sisters (all now known under their married names), Mrs Tulliver, Mrs Deane, Mrs Pullet and Mrs Glegg. Their familial dynamic, however, serves to emphasise the representation of obligation to one's kin in very difficult circumstances. Through reading passages in the sisters' storyline, mere feelings of kindness and affection are problematised. The sisters, instead, take a pragmatic approach to situations that affect the family. The family dynamic of the sisters is void of affection, highlighting Bessie's precarious situation. This was also in the minds of contemporary readers, as George Eliot's publisher, John Blackwood suggests in his analysis of the Dodson sisters:

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[34] Epstein Nord, '"Marks of Race": Gypsy Figures and Eccentric Femininity in Nineteenth- Century Women's Writing', 189- 210, (p. 201).

[35] Ibid, 189- 210, (p. 202).

> The Dodson family are all very good. I was going to say I am divided betwixt Mrs Pullet [and] Mrs Glegg; when I think, however of Mrs Tulliver in her quiet helplessness I begin to doubt whether she is not as good as either.[36]

It is hard for readers not to imagine the plight of Mrs Tulliver in her 'quiet helplessness' and be sympathetic to her plight, where her own family members may not. Devoid of affection, the bond between the Dodson sisters can be scrutinised in a new way, using the framework of Christian love.

The Dodson sisters frequently dismiss the opinions and advice of one another. Mrs Tulliver in particular feels overwhelmed and overshadowed by the 'advice' of her sisters. In the chapter entitled 'The Family Council' (191-205), Eliot highlights the fraught emotions felt by Mrs Tulliver and the often-dismissive tone of her sisters. All three of Mrs Tulliver's sisters have different reactions to the circumstances at hand. Mrs Deane takes great pains to be observant of the situation and moderates her language to reflect a calmer and more practical attitude. This is indicated by her deliberate and considered tone: "Yes, sister', she said deliberately.' (192) Mrs Pullet, however, is not as restrained. She enters the Tullivers' home, 'at all times […] expressing what her views of life in general, [were] and what, in brief, were the opinions she held concerning the particular case before her'. (192) In other words, Mrs Pullet had a good way of presenting the essential facts of a situation regarding the family. Mrs Glegg, on the other hand, appears to be superior and confrontational from the point at which she enters the narrative, as she 'had on her fuzziest front […] a costume selected with the high moral purpose of instilling perfect humility into Bessy and her children.' (192).

The absence of affection between the sisters is highlighted in 'The Family Council', as Eliot carefully depicts how Mrs Tulliver is belittled and dismissed by her sisters. Bessie Tulliver had invited the sisters to her house for them to purchase heirlooms, such as linens and silverware, before they are repossessed. (195) The reaction of her elder sister suggests that some of her own kin may not be as well-

[36] 'William Blackwood to GE, Edinburgh, 10 February 1860', in Gordon S. Haight, ed. *The George Eliot Letters: Volume III 1859-1861*, (London: OUP, 1954), p. 260.

attuned to her situation as the reader. For instance, Mrs Tulliver's sense of inferiority to her elder sister, Jane Glegg, is demonstrated clearly in the chapter:

> Mrs Tulliver, always borne down by the family predominance of sister Jane, who had made her wear the yoke of a younger sister in very tender years, said pleadingly: 'I'm sure, sister, I've never asked anybody to do anything, only buy things as it 'ud be a pleasure to 'em to have, so as they mightn't go and be spoiled I' strange houses […]' (195)

Mrs Tulliver makes it clear that she is not wanting charity from her sisters, rather she is wanting items that are dear to the family to stay in the family's possession. Mrs Glegg is seemingly supportive of Mrs Tulliver's plight:

> 'Pray, how are you to be purvided for, if your own family don't help you? You must go to the parish, if they didn't […] and ask us humble to do what we can for you, i'stead o' […] making a boast.' (195)

Due to the conflicting views of close family regarding the troublesome situation and the perception that Bessie Tulliver is 'making a boast' through not asking for assistance, it is apparent that the problem will take time to settle between the sisters. What is significant about this brief dialogue is that Mrs Glegg is aware of the social pressures facing her sister if she does not get support from her family; that she would have to go through the process of asking for alms from the parish community. The plot surrounding the Dodson sisters is central in understanding how family allegiances can be divided and ignored. In sharp contrast to the concept of discounting allegiances, it is suggested that if Mrs Tulliver cannot accept help from her family, she would have to go to the parish community for financial assistance. The concept of alms or charity-giving resonates with other forms of Christian love examined in this work, particularly *caritas*.[37] Accepting charity from those outside the family unit would be seen as a disgrace to the Dodson family, and a show of their inability to aid their own kin, as 'kinship connection still mattered'.[38]

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[37] See Chapter 2 of the thesis on *Adam Bede*, *philia* and *caritas.*

[38] Rosemary O'Day, *The Family and Family Relationships, 1500-1900: England, France, and the United States of America*, (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 125.

The Dodson sisters can be seen to fulfil their familial obligation to their sister. A show of practical support can be interpreted as a demonstration of familial love through a 'kind act' does not have to be interpreted theologically. When linked to the Christian concept of 'kindly affection', however, practical support alone falls short of *storge*. An act of obligation to one's family, although a loving and kind act, is void of affection in this instance. The desire to do what is best for family appearances is at the forefront of the Dodson sister's actions. The fact that the sisters agree to help Betsy and disagree on how this should be done is irrelevant. The act of kindness towards one's kin, and the eventual encouragement of Betsy's children, Maggie and Tom to take a stand and help their mother and father (220-222), shows that the sisters fulfil their obligation towards their kin. I argue that this act of kindness is largely done without outward shows of affection. Through their narrative, Eliot has demonstrated that although their approach acts on their obligation to their sister as kin, any show of affection is lacking. Familial love and kindness are displayed through the narrative of the Dodson sisters, but this is not fully evocative of *storge*.

The sibling bond between Mr Tulliver and his younger sister, Mrs Moss, is important in demonstrating familial allegiances in *The Mill on the Floss*. The siblings help each other through times of difficulty, both financially and emotionally, demonstrating a family allegiance that goes beyond mere obligation. There is a heartfelt kindliness to the relationship and a mutual understanding of support. Mr Tulliver has lent his sister and her husband money in the past when they fell upon difficult times financially and Mrs Moss is willing to support in any way that she can, even if it is to the financial detriment of herself and her own family. The affection between brother and sister is reciprocal, as Mrs Moss's affectionate approach to her kin's plight is evident in the chapter, 'The Family Council'. Such reciprocity is important, as Chrisitan concepts of love require that love shared between humans needs to be reciprocal: mirroring the love that God and humans have for one another. As soon as she enters the Tulliver household, she is described as having 'that entire absence of self-consciousness which belongs to keenly-felt trouble.' (201) She had a focus: her nephew and niece. 'Mrs Moss seemed to notice no one except Tom, whom she went straight up to and took by the hand.' (201) Despite the commotion, she was 'still not seeming to notice the presence of the rest,' as Maggie led her to the sofa (201). Mrs Moss' emotional

approach to her brother's financial upset is in stark contrast to that of the Dodson sisters – she has the concerns of the children at heart. Her actions in this short section of the story indicate a show of selflessness and a genuine love and respect for her brother's family. Immediately, she states that the burdening issue is that her brother had lent her and her husband three hundred pounds of his own money and there had been a receipt of transaction: 'Yes, there was security. My husband gave a note for it. We're not the sort o' people […], as 'ud rob my brother's children; and we looked to paying back the money, when the times got a bit better.' (201) It is obvious that she does not wish her nephew and niece to go without if it is within her power.

Reading the novel through the lens of *storge*, and how mere familial obligation falls short of this, enables the reader to question concepts of family allegiance. Familial obligation, coupled with kind actions and words in times of familial trouble, aid the reader in imagining a new framework for understanding the novel. Such a structure provides an avenue through which theological love plays a role in the narrative — familial love can in fact be *storge*. It is through actions that are 'kindly affectioned' in addition to being practical, that Mrs Moss enacts her obligation to her kin and shows genuine affection with a focus so powerful she is willing to put her own children in poverty (202). Mrs Moss, through an act of selflessness, has encouraged her nephew and niece to assist their father and ensures that she plays her own role in gratitude: repaying her debt. Mrs Moss has put the needs of her brother's family before her own, demonstrating a selflessness through her own potential sacrifice.

Familial obligation also extends to the approval of family members in life decisions such as marital union, particularly with regards to daughters and sisters. Mr Tulliver confides in his son that he did not necessarily approve of his aunt's decision to marry Mr Moss (203), but he always swore that he would stand by her and support her. This is demonstrated to the reader through Tom's show of support:

> He said something to me about Maggie, and then he said, "I've always been good to my sister, though she married against my will -- and I've lent Moss money: but I should never think of stressing him to pay it. I'd rather lose it. My children must not mind being the poorer for that." And now my father is ill, and not able to speak for himself, I shouldn't like anything to be done contrary to what he said of me. (203)

Tom, through informing his maternal aunts of the intentions of his father in giving out the loan that he did to aid his sister (203), acts out of family obligation. As Claudia Nelson suggests, in Victorian society, it falls to the son to carry out the role of the father and head of the household, when their father cannot do so. This is particularly the case in financial matters, as sons were expected to enhance the family's assets and prosper further in business: '[…] a son was encouraged to differentiate himself from his father, whether by expanding the family business or by taking up a new and higher-status line of work.'[39] Tom seeks to revive and build upon what the family has lost, and this is tied to his concept of family duty.

The notion of a Son's duty to their father is exemplified in this section of *The Mill on the Floss*. Tom perceives it to be his duty to carry out his father's wishes whilst he is laid up, unwell. In addition, as the acting head of the household, he is acting on his father's behalf, ensuring that his aunt is protected, despite financial difficulties. Both men in this short narrative have approached Mrs Moss with great kindness and affection. Such affection is reciprocated in Mrs Moss's response to Tom's statement, as she 'took Tom's hand [and spoke] with choked voice.' (203). The response is one of kindly affection towards Tom's actions on his father's behalf. She outwardly shows warmth by reaching out and taking Tom's hand whilst she spoke to him, expressively giving thanks for his kindness towards her and her own family. This is further emphasised by the words that she speaks, swearing that she will repay the loan: 'You'll never be the poorer for this, my dear boy, if there's a God above; and if the money's wanted for your father, Moss and me 'ull pay it, the same as if there was ever such security.' (203) Tom's Aunt Moss stands by her own obligation, as Mr Tulliver showed her great kindness in lending the money in the first place. Mrs Moss's actions allude to the concept of *storge* – showing 'kindly affection' through her obligation to her brother in times of trouble, and it is clear to the reader that she has both sympathy for her nephew and niece, in addition to having their best interests at heart. She is both financially and emotionally repaying her brother like for like, providing for her kin when her brother cannot.

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[39] Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (London: Praeger, 2007), p .97.

The Significance of the Family Bible: Feud, Obligation and Allegiance

The Tulliver family's concept of familial love does not extend beyond their own bloodline. In striking contrast to the representation of familial love through the narratives of the Tulliver and Deane families, the dynamic between the Tulliver and Wakem families contradicts the Christian concept of *storg*e, or any action that is kind or affectionate. Friendship and familiarity quickly turns to hatred and feud. Although not related by blood, Mr Wakem and Mr Tulliver are 'kindred' to one another, insofar as they are in business. Their endeavour turns sour after Mr Tulliver falls on hard times and Mr Wakem buys the mill that once belonged to the Tulliver family through a lawsuit. Mr Tulliver blames Mr Wakem for his demise and seeks retribution for the perceived wrongs inflicted on his family. He seems to embody some of the core socioeconomic ideas of his generation: focussed on covenantal promises, and cooperative approaches to business and the economy,`[…] includ[ing] within itself a wealth of `unconscious co-operation."[40] When such a cooperative understanding is broken, all decorum and familial ties are also broken. Mr Tulliver incites his children, Tom and Maggie, to never have anything to do with the Wakem family and to uphold his stance on the family. The building feud between the Wakems and the Tullivers is seen in the third book, entitled 'The Downfall', where any concept of *storg*e turns to a bitter feud. Mr Tulliver utilises the love and obligation expressed by his children to continue the feud between the families.

The feud between the Tullivers and the Wakems is crucial in understanding the contrast of the bonds of family and hatred towards those who break such oaths. Through the narrative of 'The Downfall', readers witness the result of the lawsuit and the eventual loss of the Tulliver mill to Mr Wakem, rendering Mr Tulliver unwell due to the stress from reading a financially devastating letter and falling from his horse (184). Tom and Maggie are sent for and taken out of school to help with the running of the household and the business. The incident had made Mr Tulliver vulnerable, and in want of familial affection from his daughter, Maggie: '[…] in that simple, primitive love which knits us to the beings who have been nearest to us, in the times of helplessness or of anguish.' (185) Strongly echoing the type of love, alluding to *storge*, difficult times

[40] Hilton, *The Age of Atonement,* p. 53.

have drawn Maggie and her father together. Maggie demonstrates a kindly affection towards her father through 'that simple, primitive love' and her bond with her father in his time of need mirrors the biblical vision of familial love. It becomes increasingly apparent that, at the beginning of the third book, 'The Downfall,' a narrative is created that establishes a sense of grief and loss over the family wealth and position (190-193). This loss soon turns to unbridled anger from Mr Tulliver's perspective, directed toward Mr Wakem through the language of revenge:

> He took it all as part of his daughter's goodness, which made his misfortunes the sadder to him because they damaged her chance in life. In a mind charged with an eager purpose and an unsatisfied vindictiveness, there is no room for new feelings: Mr Tulliver did not want a spiritual consolation – he wanted to shake off the degradation of debt, and to have his revenge. (273)

Considering Maggie's actions, Mr Tulliver feels his humiliation and sadness more profoundly and is keen to have his revenge. This is not just for his own satisfaction, but for the protection of his family and Maggie herself. Despite the apparent hostility of this section of the story, Mr Tulliver can be viewed as protecting his family despite unsettling circumstances. He wishes to repay his losses to the family and though seeking revenge, he is acting for their betterment. The method and venom, however, through which this is conducted is detrimental to the dynamic of the Tulliver family and turns the obligation of the younger generation towards their father into a commandment: as represented in the episode ending in bad feeling between the Tulliver and Wakem families being placed in writing in the Family Bible.

Understanding familial love through the lens of obligation and allegiance is crucial in interpreting the narrative of the Tulliver family. Although obligation and allegiance can be understood through a secular framework, I am applying them using a theological lens as attitudes to familial love are shaped by shared values traditionally rooted in biblical ideas. The Tulliver Family Bible, containing stories of family, love and obligation, is used not only as a holy book to be read and to take example from but also to swear allegiance to Mr Tulliver, the father and head of the household. Through utilising the Family Bible, Eliot is alluding to the prominent stories within, depicting Christian attitudes towards familial love and allegiance.

The Family Bible is the object on which members of the Tulliver Family swear allegiance, binding them together through oath. In interpreting allegiance and obligation as indicators of Christian familial love, an Old Testament view of *storge* is suggested, building an unbreakable bond of allegiance between father and children. In Eliot's narrative, the Family Bible is important, both ethically and theologically. This is in no small part due to how it is utilised by members of the Tulliver family. Not only is it the holy book, but it is also an object of significance, where matters of family importance are written into its covers and family allegiances are sworn on over it. The Family Bible becomes a motif in *The Mill on The Floss*, signifying not only the family's allegiance to Christianity, but their allegiance and obligation towards each other. Through scrutinising allegiance in the Tulliver family as an act of *storge*, the Family Bible acts as a site of such family commitment, bonding family members in promise and obligation.

In Victorian times, the Family Bible was a form of home worship and religious education in a domestic setting. The Family Bible, however, ceased to be a book just for daily worship. Although worship continued to be the main use of such volumes, some editions included family trees in the front section of the book to be filled in by individual families, emphasising the importance of allegiance to one's family. Mark Noll addresses some of the other uses of the large, domestic volumes:

> The large folio Bibles […] came to function as all-purpose mini libraries with their maps, gazetteers, chronologies, pronouncing guides, theological treatises, capsule oriental histories, illustrations […], genealogical charts, concordances, and more.[41]

Other editions included copperplate prints depicting family life, and these served as idealised models for the Victorian, nuclear family, representing roles within the family and appealing to women in the home with, as Mary Wilson Carpenter observes, '[publishers adding] Bible illustrations and making other alterations to the Family Bible format in an apparent attempt to appeal to feminine customers.'[42] Making the holy

[41] Mark A. Noll, 'The Bible and Scriptural Interpretation' in *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century,* ed. by Timothy Larsen and Michael Ledger-Lomas (Oxford: OUP, 2017), pp.317-346, (p. 326).

[42] Mary Wilson Carpenter, *Imperial Bibles, Domestic Bodies: Women, Sexuality and Religion in the Victorian Market*, (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2003), xxi.

book appealing for the whole Victorian family, Family Bibles became increasingly popular as providing guidance for domestic life. In *The Mill on the Floss*, the use of the Family Bible exemplifies its centrality in the home, and its presence in domestic spiritual life.

The focus on the Family Bible, and its arguable defacement in the *Mill on the Floss,* goes against its intended use in Victorian domestic life. Contemporary reviews of the novel, such as the one in the American publication, *The Southern Literary Messenger* in October 1860. addressed reader's concern over the representation of the Bible. 'The novel seemed especially disrespectful to the Bible. Maggie sought consolation in Thomas à Kempis, Dr Kenn never mentioned it, and Mr Tulliver desecrated it.'[43] Mr Tulliver's 'desecration' of the Family Bible involved writing a dedication on its title page, one which cemented the family feud between the Tullivers and the Wakems. (248-249) A dedication written in a Family Bible usually contained loving statements towards family members, or a family tree. To write a dedication that focusses on a family feud, therefore, serves as a misuse of the original purpose of the holy book. Through addressing the uses and misuses of the Tulliver Family Bible in *The Mill on the Floss*, I question familial obligation in Tulliver family relations, and whether this is to protect the respectability and order of the family or to preserve a grudge against another family. In so doing, I will bring in the biblical interpretation of familial love, of parents and children, and of siblings, and present *storge* as a problematic narrative for addressing family feuds and reconciliation.

In *The Mill on the Floss*, the Family Bible features in times of hardship and its presence is firmly established in the Tulliver household. The sacred volume, however, is marked by a family feud through the inscription on the inside cover. Such a 'mark' is both literal and figurative, as the Family Bible becomes testament to the Tulliver's feud against the Wakem family (248-9). Eliot alludes to biblical stories in her narrative concerning the feud and the writing of the vendetta against the Wakems that ultimately takes place. The noting of the feud against the Wakems suggests that more than one generation is to be involved in this feud and the actions of Mr Tulliver allude to biblical teachings of children paying for their fathers' sins. Such references are made

[43] George V. Griffith, 'George Eliot, Realism, and the American Press, 1858—1881', *American Periodicals*, 9, (1999), 36-54, (p. 41).

in the Old Testament and involve Hebrew tribal practice regarding the family.[44] The language used in the King James Bible indicates the hereditary nature of inheriting the sins or doings of one's father in the following ways: as 'Walking in all the sins of his father' (1 Kings 15:3), or as heeding to the 'iniquities of their fathers' (Nehemiah 9:2, Daniel 9:16). For the Tulliver family, the 'inequities' of their father are marked down in remembrance of the feud which Mr Tulliver feels must continue. The Tulliver children are expected to act upon their own father's inequities and the sense of injustice that he feels in the loss of the mill. The marking down of such an instruction for his descendants to follow therefore ensures a dark and lasting promise that his offspring must uphold for the sake of their father.

Mr Tulliver's sense of failure in losing the mill only contributes to his sense of necessity in gaining the allegiance of his children, rather than focussing on any affectionate bond felt towards them. His authoritarian attitude towards family members negates the concept of *storge*, felt through altruism or self-sacrifice. Instead, he requires that his children sacrifice any affection that they may have felt towards the Wakems, to show their allegiance towards him. Mr Tulliver's expression of authority as head of the household is also suggestive of biblical stories, such as that of Abraham and Issac. Such autocratic behaviour manifests itself in what is written into the pages of the Tulliver Family Bible. Like Issac, Tom pledges his allegiance to his father by an act of sacrifice but instead of laying down his own life, he lays down his allegiance in writing. Tom is not giving up his life for the love of God, however, he is merely sacrificing a part of his own self to carry out his father's wishes. In the book of the novel entitled 'The Downfall', the injustice that Mr Tulliver feels towards the Wakems reaches a climax. Frustrated by the financial situation that he finds himself in, due to his insolvency, Mr Tulliver orders his son to remember the pain that the Wakems had caused the family: 'And you mind this, Tom, you never forgive him, neither, if you mean to be my son […] Now write – write it I' the Bible.' (248) Maggie is disturbed by what she witnesses between her father and brother and she entreats their good nature in a manner which also alludes to the Bible: 'It's wicked to curse and bear

[44] "Family" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume II: D-G*, ed. by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) pp. 761-769, (p. 761).

malice.' (248) Her language alludes to the book of Isaiah, 'For wickedness burneth as the fire' (Isaiah 9:18). Maggie's comment is significant to her own spiritual journey toward being able to love her family better, and through learning of the example of Christ, which involves true and intended kindness and *storge*. For Maggie such 'malice' goes against what she intrinsically feels humans should express towards one another. But for Dwight H. Purdy, the phrase 'bear malice' alludes to another biblical reference entirely, that 'Tulliver […] exactly emulates David'.'[45] In his study of biblical allusions, he refers to what David says to his son, Solomon, ' Thou hast with thee Shimei […]which cursed me with a grievous curse […] hold him not guiltless; for thou art a wise man and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him […] (1Kings 2:8-9). The inscription in the Tulliver Family Bible is comparable to this story of David, Purdy suggests, for 'just as David, despite a vow with the Lord, bids his son to do what he cannot, so Tulliver bids Tom to make lawyer Wakem "feel" his revenge, inscribing it in the Bible.'[46]

Conflicting strands of familial narrative aid Eliot in creating a scene where no party feels comfortable marking the Family Bible, Tom asking: 'What am I to write, father?' […] with a gloomy submission.' (249). Maggie and Tom's worries ignored, their father instructs Tom:

> Write as your father, Edward Tulliver, took service under John Wakem, the man as had helped to ruin him, because I'd promised my wife to make what amends I could for her trouble, and because I wanted to die in th' old place, where I was born and my father was born. Put that I' the right words — you know how —and then write, as I don't forgive Wakem for all that; and for I'll serve him honest, I wish evil may befall him. Write that. (249)

Through the action of writing in the Family Bible, Tom is complicit in his father's feud with the Wakems. He may be reluctant to write the claim but he does the deed and he reads it back to his father. The true significance of this episode, however, is that Mr Tulliver instructs Tom to write his own part in the feud: '[…] write as you'll

[45] Dwight H. Purdy, 'The Wit of Biblical Allusion in "The Mill on the Floss"', *Studies in Philosophy*, 102, 2 (2005), 233-246, (p. 236).

[46] Purdy, 'The Wit of Biblical Allusion in "The Mill on the Floss"', 233-246 (p. 236).

remember what Wakem's done to your father, and you'll make him and his feel it whenever the day comes. And sign your name Thomas Tulliver'. The act of writing his own position in the family feud, coupled with signing his name, ensures that the Bible is a site of written oath and ensures that the dispute continues through the next generation. Through his act of obligation to his family and through adhering to his father's wishes and legacy, Tom pledges his allegiance to the family cause and vows to reclaim the mill and repay his father's debts. (287). The other instance in the novel where the Family Bible is used as a tool to prove allegiance and dedication to the Tulliver family is when Tom wishes to bend the will of Maggie, so she agrees to never meeting with Phillip Wakem again. In the book titled, 'Wheat and Tares', Tom discovers Maggie and Phillip's friendship and their secret meetings and vows to put an end to it. Tom threatens to tell his father of their friendship, and expose Maggie as a 'deceitful daughter':

> '[…] either you vow solemnly to me, with your hand on my father's Bible, that you will never have another meeting or speak another word in private with Philip Wakem, or you refuse, and I tell my father everything.' (317)

Tom is concerned that Maggie is bringing shame to her family and disobeying her father. Maggie now faces a situation where she feels compelled to sacrifice her happiness in her friendship and meetings with Phillip, to be a better and more dutiful daughter to her father. Tom forces her to swear on the Bible, as he believes her to be untrustworthy: 'There is no consistency in you. Put your hand on this Bible and say, "I renounce all private speech and intercourse with Philip Wakem from this time forth.'" (318) Maggie does as Tom requires, through love of her father and not wanting to bring 'vexation upon him' (318). When Maggie has placed her hand on the Bible, and repeated the promise, she and Tom meet with Phillip to announce that he and Maggie are not to see each other. Maggie is pledging her vow to her family and its figurehead, her father, to prove her allegiance and her place as a dutiful daughter. Through her own sacrifice, she is preserving the interests of her own family.

Although Maggie and Tom have different ideas of familial love and obligation, they both are implicit in the act of swearing allegiance to the Tulliver family. For Tom, the most loving thing to do is to show obligation and allegiance to his family, by writing

what his father instructs in the Bible and carrying out that obligation to the letter. Maggie, through her friendship with Philip Wakem, is prepared to forgive those involved with the family feud but is also strongly aware of her obligation to her family: 'I don't need to swear on the Bible to bind me.' (317) Maggie does as she is instructed to do by Tom but only for the sake of the love and kindness she has for her father.

Does such a literal use of the Family Bible to pledge allegiance lend itself to *storge*? It is true that allegiance and obligation indicate a strong bond to the family that is written down, sworn upon and carried out in deed. As a marker for family lineage, in addition to its main purpose, the Family Bible in *The Mill on the Floss* is a literary representation of allegiance and family obligation. This transcends generations and acts as an heirloom, enforcing familial promises for seemingly decades to come. Such allegiance demonstrates acts of love, particularly from Tom Tulliver, whose idea of obligation is equal to showing affection and support for his family: an act of *storge*, written down as a commandment to follow. For Maggie, however the concept of allegiance is less clear- cut. It is only through Tom discovering her friendship with Philip Wakem that an intervention for what Tom perceives to be for the good of the family takes place. Such an intervention reinforces the idea of allegiance to Maggie's family but stresses the importance of loyalty to her father. Maggie loves her father and willingly sacrifices her own happiness to ensure his. Through an act of *storge*, of 'loving kindness' toward her father and his reputation, Maggie plays her part in ensuring familial cohesion and allegiance.

Conclusion

When viewed through the lens of Christian love, *The Mill on the Floss* provides a reimagining of family allegiances and obligations through a series of textual episodes that are resonant of *storge*. For members of the Tulliver family, self-sacrifice becomes a motif for accepting familial obligations and for demonstrating love for one's family. This is particularly true of Maggie Tulliver, whose narrative is a Christian-inspired approach to modifying her own behavior towards her family. It is through the constant reading of Thomas à Kempis in her teenage years, that she realises her 'place' in the family. Maggie tries to implement an attitude that fits into her brother's vision for her as a

good, dutiful daughter and sister. It is the influence of Maggie's theological reading that shapes and determines her journey in her young adult life and her reaction towards other family members, especially her brother.

Christian love, therefore, is a constant underlying factor in determining familial relationships in the novel. The influence of à Kempis and the negation of the self through an extreme form of altruism, which Blumberg refers to as 'maximalist altruism,' is what causes Maggie to attempt to alter her demeanour towards family members.[47] The narrative once again turns to reference Maggie reading à Kempis, as:

> The words that were marked by the quiet hand in the little old book that she had long ago learned by heart, rushed even to her lips, and found a vent for themselves in a low murmur that was quite lost in the loud driving of the rain against the window and the loud moan and the roar of the wind: 'I have received the Cross, I have received it from Thy hand; I will bear it, and bear it till death, as Thou hast laid it upon me.' (477)

Maggie's reflection on à Kempis and 'the quiet hand,' are representative of memorised words that are subsequently thrown against the noise of the driving rain and the wind of the storm: markers of the impending flood. Through the words that Maggie recites, she is demonstrating motifs of self-sacrifice, in the carrying of the cross. Eliot, through addressing this directly is indicating that Maggie is yet to make the ultimate self-sacrifice, an act made in the image of Christ. Such overt allusions to the act of self-sacrifice serve to highlight the dark side of love, with Maggie 'bearing the Cross', a symbol of the ultimate sacrifice that Christ made for humanity. (477) Maggie, through following the altruistic 'way of the Cross' in à Kempis's work, also makes the ultimate act of self-sacrifice in the final throws of the novel. Through her altruism, Maggie demonstrates the ultimate act love towards her family, in line with theological interpretations of not only *storge*, but *agape* in its purest, yet darkest form. Through internalising her thoughts and emotions, she can become placid and neutral towards the actions of her brother. The narrative's allusion to her sacrifice and final narrative, however, frames Maggie's altruism as a destructive force. Like the raging storm, Maggie is waiting in the wings for the final act.

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[47] Blumberg, *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in Mid-Century Novels,* p. 11.

In the closing narrative of *The Mill on the Floss*, Tom still refuses to accept his sister after her disgraceful elopement with Steven Guest. He sees Maggie's actions as not only shameful to her but as a direct attack on the Tulliver family:

> "You have disgraced us all. You have disgraced my father's name. You have been a curse to your best friends. You have been base - deceitful; no motives are strong enough to restrain you. I wash my hands of you for ever. You don't belong to me." (448)

For Tom, Maggie has broken her allegiances to him and the family. He is casting her out: 'I wash my hands of you forever'. Although the earlier narrative was concerned with her never seeing Philip Wakem again, as a matter of family loyalty and love, Tom is repulsed by what he perceives to be a repeat in Maggie's wilful behaviour, stating 'no motives are strong enough to restrain you.' Maggie is accused of dishonouring her father's memory, her friendships, and her wider family. Finally, Tom disassociates himself with his sister, in a seemingly final outpouring, crying 'you don't belong to me.' Rejected by the brother whom she wants so badly to be reconciled with, Maggie is made the pariah once more. Maggie's own personal work to love her family better is brought to nought.

Reconciliation does, however, come to Maggie in the crush of the flood, closing the tumultuous narrative. Maggie, rowing up in her small boat, to rescue Tom from the family mill, is filled with a sense of love and calm, as her brother accepts her help. Reconciliation and love are resurgent in the final narrative scores, a literary crescendo ending the quarrels, feuds, and dishonour. All that is left for Maggie at the end are the memories of a happy relationship with her brother in childhood:

> Vaguely, Maggie felt this: in the strong resurgent love towards her brother that swept away all the later impressions of hard, cruel offence and misunderstanding, and left only the deep, underlying unshakable memories of early union. (480)

The love for her brother overrides the trauma she had felt at Tom's rejection of her and washing his hands of her. Maggie finally experiences a sense of *storge*- her envisioning of family, as her final thoughts are filled with the love for her brother. Love is abundant in the final passages of the novel for Maggie: the love for her brother and

their shared bond that had diminished in their adolescence was once again felt. No longer an outsider to her family, Maggie is accepted. Her acceptance, however, is only achieved through her self-sacrifice. In her act of martyrdom, Maggie highlights the effects of *storge*. This is something that Eliot makes implicit in the violent denouncement. Maggie may have achieved peace through sacrificing herself body and soul, but she is not wholly forgiven by her brother, the person from whom she most desired to be absolved. Both Christ-like and selfless, Maggie provides the reader with a feminine portrayal of Christ- through whom *storge*, and the connotations of affection and obligation wash away to reveal a stark, true presence of love through compassion and self-sacrifice. In Maggie's final scene, the reader is drawn to her renewed image of love – a *storge* not borne from affection and obligation, but one that is created through her altruism and sacrifice.

4: *Agape* and Reciprocity in *Silas Marner*

In *Silas Marner*, Eliot domesticates Christian narratives by translating the concept of unconditional love into a community-based setting, no longer dependent on organised Christian churchgoing. Love is central to understanding Christianity; as Werner G. Jeanrond declares: 'Love is at the centre of the Christian faith […]and is able to transform lives.'[1] I am interested in demonstrating how the transformative nature of love that humanity shares is based on *agape*. *Agape* is shown to humans through God's unconditional love for humanity, which is then replicated by human actions. In focusing on agape, I demonstrate how, for Eliot, God's love is replicated in the interactions of her characters as they strive to achieve the love that Christ had for humanity. The impact of human love and its power to be 'able to transform lives', I argue, is the underlying and forgotten foundation of Eliot's stories. This *agape*-like concern with love in the community is central to the plot of *Silas Marner*. In developing an account of love that avoids the extremes of individualism and a Utilitarian emphasis on the needs of the community, Eliot's understanding of love in *Silas Marner* is thoroughly relational and situational. The meaning of love is not fixed or absolute, but, rather, is shaped by the experiences of individuals living in the community of Raveloe.

Agape refers to the unconditional love that God has for humanity and, in turn, human beings are called to show that love to one another. Humanity's affection for one another has the power to be unconditional, but only if humans can be receptive of such a love. *Agape* is the ideal that humanity can strive towards, imitating the love that Christ had for mankind. Eliot, through her story lines, domesticates such acts of *agape,* demonstrating how small acts of love can lead to human aspirations of achieving an unconditional love. The narrative of *Silas Marner* exemplifies small acts of love, and these help welcome the figure of the outsider into a new community. Instances of self-sacrifice also have a part to play in the representation of *agape* as, through acts of kindness, these characters serve and assist others. Acts of *agape* require a sympathetic response. Such a response allows humans to realise the ideal of an unconditional love.

[1] Werner G. Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love* (London: Continuum Books, 2010), xi.

Acting on the love felt through sympathy enables humans to identify with the plight of others, through a shared human experience that is reciprocal in nature. Such a sympathetic response is generated through a dialogue, requiring participants to listen and to respond.

The use of dialogue in the novel is important in the reader's understanding of how love is communicated. Raymond Chapman explains that: 'dialogue serves to develop the plot […] It may give narrative information in the guise of speech to break up the continuous flow of objective storytelling.'[2] In Eliot's narrative, dialogue is used to communicate her plot surrounding the love that humans share for one another and is indicative of a reciprocal love between humans. *Agape* is a universal love, following the example of Christ that humans can aspire to achieve through acts of kindness, devotion and sympathy. Such a love, 'made manifest in one's unselfish love for others' is the love that is suggested by Eliot throughout *Silas Marner*. In this chapter, I evaluate how the 'good words' of kindness and sympathy are received in the novel, and how they are indicative of *agape.*

Silas Marner is a tale of a dissenter in a new community, who has been ousted from his home. The character of Silas is an outsider and is not used to the sort of hospitality that is shown to him by members of the Raveloe community such as Mr Macey and Dolly Winthrop. Members of the parish attempt to make Silas welcome, but this is often to no avail as he is not receptive to their kindness or hospitable acts. Only by becoming receptive to such kindness, or acts of love, does Silas come to be comfortable and feel at home in Raveloe. The event that paves the way to Silas's receptivity is the appearance of Eppie in his home one stormy and wintery night. Seeing the small child sparks childhood memories for Silas of warmth, acceptance, and love. Eppie's 'blond curls' remind him of his young sister, and he fancies she has 'come back to him in a dream'.[3] The appearance of Eppie at Silas's 'warm hearth' (98) makes Silas suppose it was a dream. This dream-like sequence 'stirred fibres' within him:

[2] Raymond Chapman, *Forms of Speech in Victorian Fiction*: *Studies in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Literature* (London: Longman Publishing,1994), p. 1.

[3] George Eliot, *Silas Marner*, Juliette Atkinson, ed. (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, OUP, 2017), p. 99. All further mentions of the novel will be in brackets in the main body of the text.

> He had a dreamy feeling that this child was somehow a message come to him from that far-off life: it stirred fibres that had never been moved in Raveloe – old quiverings of tenderness – old impressions of awe at the presentiment of some Power presiding over his life; for his imagination had not yet extricated itself from the sense of mystery in the child's sudden presence , and had formed no conjectures of ordinary natural means by which the event could be brought about. (100)

The stirring of 'fibres' indicates Silas's capacity for love; even in this seemingly miraculous event of Eppie appearing by his hearthside, his heart has been regenerated. Eppie is also a 'message' from his life before, representative of his sister. Such 'stirring[s]' indicate a memory of love and devotion, caught up in a vision of golden curls. Silas is presented with a human being, suddenly implanted into his living space. This child needs its own home and hearth, and Marner shares his homes accordingly. Through acts of sharing and reciprocity, Silas becomes more open to receiving love and shows affection by sharing his house and caring for Eppie. Silas resolves to find her mother, but instead finds her 'body, with the head sunken low in the furze, and half covered with the shaken snow.' (101) His role is now to find the love in his heart to share his space with the child and devote his life to raising her.

Through his encounter with Eppie, Silas proves able to both to receive and give love. This is not the kind of affection or obligation one has for blood relations — not *storge*, but rather *agape*. Eppie is a stranger to Silas yet he loves her anyway. This demonstrates great kindness, revealing the unconditional nature of his love. Silas's love involves self-sacrifice, taking in a child that is not his own and raising her by himself, through an active devotion. Such an active expression of love indicates that Eliot domesticates *agape* for consideration in a narrative of home and hearth. Eppie, in return shows Silas love, caring for her 'father', and reciprocating his practical acts of love. Eppie, for Silas, is the reason why he loves, and how he can put love back out in the community of Raveloe. The concept of *agape* as a reciprocated act in the novel will be revisited in my concluding remarks as I examine Silas and Eppie's relationship, and reveal how, for some, *agape* can only be achieved through reciprocal acts of love.

One way love is communicated and received in the novel is through the act of storytelling, mirroring the message of scripture. Memorisation of the Bible and

knowledge of it, without the necessity of being literate, is emphasised further in the narrative of *Silas Marner*. The recitation of stories and parables helped Christian believers in Victorian Britain understand the Bible. Timothy Larsen's work on the Bible in the Victorian age examines how Christian traditions interpret the Bible. Larsen stresses that 'the extent of the Bible's dominance, presence and reach has to be encountered in the specifics of Victorian lives to be grasped fully.'[4] Eliot, through her narrative suggests the Bible's presence and reach through the dialogue of her characters. This presence also conveys the centrality and importance of love in the Bible.

When Dolly and Silas discuss the Bible and its interpretation of different traditions, they refer to the reception of 'good words'. The tale's interest in good words encourages readers to think about how the message of scripture was received differently by believers. Silas is a dissenter at the beginning of the novel, but the community of Raveloe makes it their mission to accept him into their Anglican community. Through describing Raveloe as Anglican, I am highlighting the narrative significance of the fictional parish community as a village community, which has the local church as its spiritual and cultural hub. The community of Raveloe does not explicitly seek to engage Marner in points of doctrine but express their faith through welcoming him into their village. Dolly questions Marner's interpretation of the Bible in Chapter 16:

> 'And yourn's the same Bible, you're sure o' that, Master Marner -- the Bible as you brought wi' you from that country -- it's the same as what they've got at church, and what Eppie's a-learning to read in? 'Yes,' said Silas, 'every bit the same; and there's drawing o' lots in the Bible, mind you,' he added in a lower tone. 'O dear, dear,' said Dolly in a grieved voice[…] She was silent for some minutes; at last she said =- 'There's wise folks, happen, as know how it all is; the parson knows, I'll be bound; but it takes big words to tell them things, and such as poor folks can't make out much on. I can never rightly know the meaning o' what I hear at church, only a bit here and there, but I know it's good words -- I do […]' (127)

[4] Timothy Larsen, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), p. 1.

The importance of understanding scripture presented here is two-fold: not only does this passage point to the role of orality in Dolly's vague understanding of scripture (`but I know it's good words -- I do'), it draws out the representation of dissenting traditions in *Silas Marner* ('And yourn's the same Bible […]?'). Good words, when received, inspire good actions. Small, 'good', acts of love work towards *agape*, and so, interpreting the Sermon as 'good words,' enables Dolly to put that message into practice. The 'good words' are received by Dolly and are then replicated through her good works, her small acts of love. Dolly, as such, welcomes Silas into Raveloe, visiting him with her son and feeding him cakes. Dolly's illiteracy illustrates that an individual does not have to be literate to understand the 'good words' of scripture as they are passed down through the oral and aural activity occurring in the delivery of a sermon.

Whilst indicating Dolly's kindly actions and highlighting differing interpretations of the Bible, the passage in Chapter 16 (127) also raises questions about the accessibility of the Bible. The printing boom of scripture and devotional texts in the mid-nineteenth century meant that Christian volumes were readily available for use in the community and home environments.[5] Scripture became an essential tool for understanding Christian values and was no longer the sole domain of the clergy. Laypeople could access core Christian teachings and communicate the life of Jesus amongst themselves. Theological love, but more specifically agape, is communicated in a social environment, through reading and open discussion, in the emerging arena of domesticated reading. *Agape* is a significant example of such love as it is the ideal, universal love that humans can aspire to achieve.

The Role of Storytelling in the Communication of *Agape* in *Silas Marner*

Eliot draws on Christian ideas of love throughout the dialogue in *Silas Marner*. This is particularly apparent when the novel considers storytelling in daily village life, the memorisation of scripture, and the accessibility of Christian teachings regardless of literacy. Practical applications of scripture are in the background of day-to-day

[5] See Mary Wilson Carpenter, *Imperial Bibles, Domestic Bodies: Women, Sexuality and Religion in the Victorian Market* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003).

communal life in Raveloe, highlighting the centrality of an accessible approach to Christian teachings. For example, when Dolly points out to Silas that 'Folks of your old country niver saying prayers by heart nor saying them out of a book', she reminds him of his past experiences of religion and contrasts these with her own experiences of communal worship and memorisation of biblical stories (128). Through referencing differing methods of communicating God's word, Eliot not only references the importance of spoken dialogue, but shows readers how discussion is crucial to *agape*. Spoken dialogue is important in my reading of the novel, as *agape* and the indication of such a love requires a response. Love is a reciprocal emotion. In *Silas Marner*, the spoken word communicates both God's love for humankind and the capacity of humans to demonstrate such love towards one another.

Storytelling in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was not reliant on written communication, as written passages were memorised or learnt by heart to pass on to others. In her study of the memorisation of poetry in the nineteenth century, Catherine Robson claims that '[…] the outward expression of lines committed to heart was […] an essentially oral and aural event'.[6] The act of reciting aloud ensures that the account is not only committed to the memory of the speaker but also to those who listen, allowing the story to be accessible. The practice of reading out loud, therefore, not only ensured passages could be committed to memory but also ensured many people could enjoy prose and novels. Chapman indicates the popularity of reading aloud in the nineteenth century:

> Reading aloud was popular, both in family circles and among groups of the less privileged who would jointly buy the new serial part of a novel and get one of their more educated members to read them.[7]

Chapman suggests that reading aloud helped those who were not able to read to experience the stories in popular print. Increasing literacy levels during the nineteenth century also ensured that sixty per cent of English men and forty per cent of English

[6] Catherine Robson, *Heartbeats: Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem* (Woodstock, Oxfordshire: Princeton University press, 2012), p. 8.

[7] Chapman, *Forms of Speech in Victorian Fiction,* p. 5.

women were able to read and write.[8] For much of the population, a spoken delivery and subsequent understanding of the words ensured that texts were accessible. This accessibility was part of people realising that good, selfless actions were not dependant on literacy.

For Eliot, memorisation also becomes a part of storytelling in Raveloe. This can be seen predominantly through the characterisation of Mr Macey. Mr Macey paraphrases the Psalms to inform his actions following Silas's robbery: 'I'm no wise a man to speak out of my place. As the Psalm says: I know what's right, nor only so, but also practice what I know'. (41) Mr Macey's paraphrasing is reflective of Psalm 119:66-68, regarding good judgement, despite previous transgressions: 'Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.' (Psalm 119: 66-67). The key point of the excerpt from Psalm 119, however, is the recognition and declaration of the goodness of God: 'Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.' (Psalm 119:68). Mr Macey's memorised knowledge centres around the example of God. He is reciting his knowledge of scripture as a reminder that he should turn his words into actions. Moreover, he uses the passage to communicate Christian teachings, utilising an 'oral and aural event' through his committal to memory of the text and through others listening to his speech.[9] Mr Macey ensures that he responds to the community in the local tavern, to those who are wanting to listen, and give a reply. Through the narrative of discussions in the Rainbow Tavern, the reader can experience the event of storytelling, highlighting the importance of both memorisation and recitation in the rural community of Raveloe. The narrative focus on the plight of the outsider and Raveloe's welcoming of Silas is suggestive of small, kind acts that domesticate *agape*. Through her narrative, Eliot highlights a divine and selfless love, the love of humankind.

A domestic setting can also encourage individualistic interpretation of texts, and a spontaneity of thought. Lori Branch's work on sentiment and secularism focusses on the spontaneity of individuals in the eighteenth century. She argues that there is a

[8] David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730's to the 1980's* (London: Routledge,1989), p. 29.

[9] Robson, *Heartbeats: Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem,* p. 8.

cultural shift of rituals representative of traditional religion, providing an emerging love for spontaneity in British culture in the eighteenth century:

> The story of spontaneity – and of ritual's decline – I have come to argue, is the story of the secularisation of goodness, but one that is not so smooth or evenly placed as has been supposed. It is the story of seventeenth and eighteenth-century English men and women coming to understand goodness less in the traditionally religious terms […] and more within the logic and language of an increasingly empirical and economic rationality and in the forms of the expanding print marketplace […].[10]

This 'cultural shift' is due to the eighteenth century's focus on the religious makeup of Britain, including the emergence of the Methodist and Baptist movements, who eventually formed faiths separate from the Church of England.[11] Branch stresses that traditional rituals are then replaced by the invention of new ones in the long eighteenth century, as '[t]he ideology of spontaneity[…] is marked[…] not just by the displacement of traditional rituals, but by the invention of new ones necessary for maintaining a sense of freshness and felt certainty.'[12] Branch's assertion that the ideology of spontaneity leads to the creation of new rituals allows for fresh perspectives of the divine and individual interpretations. Branch's main line of argument centres on the concept that 'prayer and love emerge as the recurring sticking points in the ideology of spontaneity'. Both prayer and love as acts of devotion, Branch explains, are aspects of devotional life that do not readily change.[13] Dissenting from Branch's claims, my reading of love is that it is not a 'sticking point' for spontaneity. Love can involve spontaneity: a person's will or desire, driven by inward thoughts of love. Spontaneity of thought ensures that love, and in particular, *agape* is put into action, as it requires selflessness. Acts of love, therefore, allow for spontaneity but they must also involve factors such as reciprocity and communication.

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[10] Lori Branch, *Rituals of Spontaneity: Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Wordsworth* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006), p. 4.

[11] See Timothy Larsen and Michael Ledger-Lomas eds. *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford: OUP, 2017).

[12] Branch, *Rituals of Spontaneity: Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Wordsworth,* p. 6.

[13] Ibid, p. 14.

The fiction of Eliot is overtly inspired by her philosophical understanding of the way in which Christianity influences humanity. Her interpretation of Feuerbach demonstrates how she understood how the philosopher highlights the centrality of love in understanding humanity: 'Man exists to think, to love, to will.'[14] Thought, love and the will (desire) are all concepts that are tied to one another. Inward thought leads to acts of love that are all dependent on the will of the individual. As love is intrinsic to human nature, Feuerbach continues:

> Reason. Will. Love, are not powers which man possesses […] 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.[15]

Through identifying love as one of 'the constituent elements of [human] nature', Feuerbach indicates that love is an intrinsic part of human nature. This intrinsic capacity for love, which Feuerbach argues is a power beyond the control of humanity, is also a 'divine, absolute power' to which humans can pose 'no resistance'. Feuerbach's remark on the divine in his outline in the role of love in human interaction is suggestive of Christian interpretations of love. Love, as a central aspect of human interaction, I claim, is suggestive of *agape*: a love that is not only universal but requires a sympathetic response from other humans. *Agape* is the ideal, universal love that humans aspire to achieve, through small acts towards others. These acts are selfless and often involve self-sacrifice. Acts of kindness in *Silas Marner* provide a domesticated window through which the reader can grasp glimmers of universal love. The human-centric nature of *agape* that is addressed throughout the chapter is a love that is universal in nature but requires a response. *Agape* is a universal love, and the 'perfect' aspirations of such a love (see Matthew 5:38) has its limitations — that of human capabilities for such a love. *Agape* is an ideal, and selfless actions are often hard to realise.

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[14] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans.by George Eliot (London: Harper and Row publishers, 1957), p. 3.

[15] Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity,* p. 3.

Models of sympathy are used by Eliot in the tale of *Silas Marner*. Such models reflect a human-centred love that requires a response involving dialogue. My evaluation of Eliot's sympathetic response builds upon the work of Rae Greiner, Cristina Richieri Griffin and Kristen Pond.[16] Greiner suggests that Eliot teaches us lessons through the example of characters, 'whom she feels no sympathy with herself, and ordinarily the reader would not sympathise with'.[17] I suggest that characters such as Silas are not figures with whom the reader would normally identify but the reader's sympathy is aided by the response of other characters such as Mr Macey. Griffin interprets the role of Feuerbach in Eliot's narrative and states how sympathy is humanity's driving emotion, '[…] vital to her overarching project of evoking sympathetic knowledge.'[18] Such knowledge, I contend, occurs not through a universal, selfless love for others but through the sympathetic response that such acts provoke. Pond argues that sympathy is central to Eliot's human-centric narrative: 'Sympathy, Eliot claimed, was the centrally human act that formed her whole response in writing.'[19] It is the act of sympathy, being 'centrally human', that evokes the philosophy of Feuerbach, suggesting an underlying Christian theology of love. I deviate from Pond's discussion of Feuerbachian sympathy as, although I agree that sympathy is 'centrally human,' I demonstrate how that sympathy then drives acts of love (*agape*) between humans.

The work of the theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) addresses the concepts of speech, proclamation, and verbalisation within Christian belief. In a 1934 essay entitled 'How Does God Speak to us through the Bible?', Bultmann emphasises the importance of address and the act of listening: `For what God says to us through the Bible is in the form of address. It can only be listened to, not examined.'[20] Here,

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[16] See: Rae Greiner, 'Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot and the Realist Novel' *Narrative*, 1,3 (2009) 291-311, Cristina Richieri Griffin, 'George Eliot's Feuerbach: Senses, Sympathy, Omniscience, and Secularism.', *ELH*, 84,2 (2017), 475-502, and Pond, Kristen A., 'Bearing Witness in Silas Marner: George Eliot's Experiment in Sympathy', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 41 (2013), 691-709.

[17] Greiner, 'Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot and the Realist Novel', 291-311 (p .300).

[18] Griffin, 'George Eliot's Feuerbach: Senses, Sympathy, Omniscience, and Secularism', 475-502 (p. 495).

[19] Kristen A. Pond, 'Bearing Witness in Silas Marner: George Eliot's Experiment in Sympathy', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 41 (2013), 691-709 (p. 693).

[20] `How Does God Speak to us through the Bible?' pp.166-170 in Schuber M. Ogden trans. *Existence and faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), p. 166. [22] Ogden trans., *Existence and faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann,* p. 167.

Bultmann emphasises the particular importance of listening to an address: 'How should we listen? Unless we find the true answer, we cannot help those who ask in doubt, sceptics or seekers, how God speaks.'[22] Bultmann hints that the answer to the question is that listening may not be an absolute: rather, it is unique to each person. Crucially, Bultmann concludes his short essay by linking the importance of listening to God's address to our readiness, as humans to love, through submitting to God:

> The readiness to submit one's whole life to God's word, to hear God's word ever again, is at the same time the readiness to love. When God's word frees us from ourselves, and makes us into new beings through his love, it sets us free to love others.[21]

The act of listening to God's proclamation through the Bible, Bultmann suggests, indicates humanity's `readiness to love'. He suggests that through God's word, humans can be free, and through the proclamation of His love, humans can then love each other. Bultmann's emphasis on the communication of love through God's word can also draw attention to *agape* and its communication. Through God's loving example, and through the proclamation of words, humans are 'free to love others', just in the way that has been exemplified through the Bible, through Jesus' example of love: *agape*. Bultmann argues that humans have the freedom to love others. He contends that through God's word, humanity is made free from its own selfish viewpoints. Such a selfless love, I argue, is a demonstration of *agape,* a love that Bultman establishes humans are given freely by God through proclamation.

Depicting her characters accurately through their speech, Eliot can convey the communication of important morals and ethics of the age. Such communication of maxims includes Christian love, charity, neighbourly-love, and love from the divine. Of most importance, however, is the communication of *agape*. Eliot, through her written narrative, alludes to the verbal communication of *agape via* the interactions between her characters in *Silas Marner*. For example, in Chapter Ten, a conversation between Mr Macey and Silas takes places concerning the robbery of Silas's accumulated gold. Mr Macey visits Silas to offer some comfort and through his address, assuring Silas that he believes he is telling the truth about the robbery and what has occurred:

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[21] Ogden trans., *Existence and faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann,* p. 170.

> `And so Marner, […] my advice is, as you keep up your sperrits; for as for thinking you're a deep un, and ha' got more inside you nor 'ull bear daylight, I'm not of that opinion at all, and so I tell the neighbours […].' […] he had a sense that the old man meant to be good natured and neighbourly; but the kindness fell on him as sunshine falls on the wretched – he had no heart to taste it, and felt that it was very far off him. 'Come, Master Marner, have you nothing to say to that?' […] 'Oh,' said Marner, slowly, shaking his head between his hands, 'I thank you – thank you – kindly.' (69-70)

Mr Macey indicates that he does not think Silas to be a deep, dark character with anything to hide, and 'so [he] tells the neighbours.' Through wanting Silas to keep his 'sperrits' up, he is alluding to the fact that he means well, indicated by the storyline that follows. It is unfortunate that Silas is not in the frame of mind to receive the positive or welcoming efforts of others. Mr Macey, through his interaction with Silas, forces him to realise that he is not likely to be as 'neighbourly'. The passage alludes to neighbourly love and affection, demonstrated by Mr Macey's visitation and kind words. Such kindness comes at a time for Silas when he is not ready to receive it. *Agape* is demonstrated to Silas, but he is not open to the love shown towards him by his new neighbours. Mr Macey's visitation is a demonstration of neighbourly love and affection, a pre-requisite of *agape.* Eliot alludes to Christian teachings on neighbourly love and affection through dialogue such as this in her narrative, despite Silas not feeling as neighbourly in return. Eliot can domesticate the progression of affection into *agape* through the kind acts of other characters. Through the actions of those such as Mr Macey, key Christian beliefs regarding the neighbour and fellow feeling are evoked by Eliot's narrative of community, although they may not be directly referred to.

The Rainbow Tavern: A Symbol of Human love

The Rainbow Tavern is at the heart of the Raveloe community. The space and platform that the tavern provides is suggestive of both a town hall and church hall; where the men of Raveloe can air their concerns and listen to others with sympathy and

compassion. A site of community cohesion, as Efraim Sicher and Rae Greiner have identified,[22] the Rainbow Tavern is an example of Eliot's handling of sympathy in the wider community, drawing the people of Raveloe together and opening a space for communication and acknowledgement. I build upon the arguments presented by both Greiner and Sicher to re-examine the scene not just through a theological lens but also to assess the role that love has in the rainbow tavern.

The space of the tavern becomes a metaphorical church, where concerns of the 'heart' and the 'sperrit' can be aired. The space is primarily a secular one, however, framing the scene theologically assists with determining the nature of the love displayed by the men for one another, mimicking the actions one usually finds within the Church. In the space of the tavern, stories can be voiced, and the communication and receiving of stories is theological in overtone. United, the men congregate in the Rainbow Tavern and the telling of their struggles echo the notion of men sharing stories of compassion and scripture in a church community. Men gathered in the tavern can communicate with one another in an open and welcoming environment which lends itself to sympathetic understanding. The setting also draws the men together in acts of unconditional love. The acts of speaking and listening ensure that the men strive together towards the exchange of *agape.* Such communication aids in breaking down barriers that the men have towards one another. The men sacrifice their time to listen to the stories of others and then put their sympathetic views into action by also sharing their own experiences.

When faced with the appearance of Silas in the tavern for the first time, such displays of sympathetic listening help to break down barriers between the regulars and the stranger. Silas's sudden appearance was, indeed, an almost ghostly sight. For a moment, the men and Silas are stunned, and no words are spoken, as the men abruptly turn to face the spectre:

> The long pipes gave a simultaneous movement, like the antenna of startled insects, and every man present, not excepting even the sceptical farrier, had an impression he saw, not Marner in the flesh, but an apparition. (48)

[22] See Efraim Sicher, 'George Eliot's "Glue Test": Language, Law and Legitimacy in "Silas Marner", *The Modern Language Review*, 94 (1999), 11-21 and Rae Greiner, 'Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot and the Realist Novel' *Narrative*, 1,3 (2009), 291-311.

Silas, through his sudden and ghost-like appearance had caught the attention of all in the tavern, men who were engaged to listen to his plight, as the landlord welcomed him in `under the habitual sense that he was bound to keep his house open to all company' (49). The men were engaged by Silas's initial presence, and were now a captive audience to hear him air his loss: that of his money.

Eliot's situating of the tavern as a receptive and open communal space, however, also alludes to a human-centric universalism. Through human interaction and sympathy, many Christians believe we come to know the example and divine love of Christ, which is alluded to by Eliot under the 'bow' of the Tavern. Moreover, the welcoming of Silas into the scene presents the reader with a sense that the love that the others feel towards Silas is that of *agape*: accepting him without prior condition. 'The transient fears of the company were now forgotten in their strong curiosity, and all faces were turned towards Silas […]' (50) The men in the tavern are soon curious of Silas's plight and receptive to his story. It is this receptiveness and understanding that enables agape to be put into action. My focus on *agape* when addressing the scene in the Rainbow Tavern is not on the reciprocal love between God and humans but rather the *agape* expressed between the men at the Tavern. Such expressions of *agape* are based on the renewed commandment that Jesus gave to his disciples: 'A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.' (John 13:34) A reciprocal love is at the centre of all such interactions, the basis of which is the pure, unconditional love of *agape*. Silas can open up to a receptive audience at the tavern and feels that he will be understood and sympathised with:

> This strangely novel situation of opening his trouble to his Raveloe neighbours, of sitting in the warmth of a hearth not his own and feeling the presence of faces and voices which were his nearest promise of help, had doubtless influence on Marner, in spite of his passionate pre-occupation with his loss. (50)

For Silas, a comfortable space in which to share his story emerges, in a 'warmth of a hearth not his own'. Such physical warmth is alluded to in the receptiveness of those around him to hear his plight, through an act of love: that of *agape*. Silas, a stranger to

Raveloe is made to feel welcome, and he understands that his story will both be listened to and received. In the Gospels, in addition to being encouraged to 'love thy neighbour' (Matthew 5:43), Jesus' disciples are compelled to 'Love your enemies' (Matthew 5:44). Christians perceive that they should follow the way of Christ, just as his disciples did. Those within the religious community spread messages of love that Christians have come to know as *agape*. *Agape* is the divine love between God and humanity, that is then replicated between humans, in line with Jesus' teachings.

Greiner suggests in her study of sympathy in the realist novel that Eliot teaches us lessons through the example of characters, which she feels no sympathy with herself, and ordinarily the reader would not sympathise with.[23] Mr Macey and Silas are not characters with whom the reader would normally sympathise. The role of sympathy is central in understanding the scene in the Rainbow Tavern, as sympathetic acts of speaking and listening link the men together in an act of love: the communication of *agape*. Mr Macey is an upstanding man of the community, and Dolly suggests he knows all things good and that what he doesn't know isn't worth knowing. (Ch.13). Silas, the reclusive outsider to the community of the Rainbow Tavern, is given an opportunity to air his concerns over the robbery of his hard-earned gold (Ch.7) to an audience who up until the event would only hear of him through hearsay. Invoking sympathy for those whom we would not normally be inclined to feel sympathy, Eliot invites us to use our compassion toward others to be able to imagine and understand their plight. Through a renewed reading of openness and hospitality in the Rainbow Tavern scenes, therefore, we are invited to imagine the social space of the tavern as a site that alludes to *agape*- God's love for humanity.

The significance of covenant in the expression of love is prevalent is some narrative strands of Eliot's novels. A covenant, or a promise, between God and humanity is suggested within the Rainbow Tavern. The covenant's significance is also highlighted by Sicher, as he explores the importance of the name of the Rainbow Tavern, which is 'a name suggestive of the biblical covenant and the Christian prefigurement that situates grace in Nature […]'[24] The covenant which Sicher alludes

[23] Greiner, 'Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot and the Realist Novel', 291-311, (p. 300).

[24] Sicher, 'George Eliot's "Glue Test", 11-21, (p. 11).

to is that of the promise made by God to humankind that He would care for the Earth and humanity.[25] 'And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.' (Genesis 9:16). It is God's covenant, therefore, that has underpinned the human understanding of a spoken and written contract, as not only a promise, but a declaration of love. Eliot alludes to the issue of 'covenants' through the narrative of the Rainbow Tavern. The testimony that Silas gives to the men encourages a selfless act from Mr Dowlas, the veterinarian, who goes with Silas to attempt to retrieve his stolen gold, and to ascertain who stole it. Eliot, in her careful naming of the tavern, not only draws attention to Victorian tropes of God and Nature, but she also seeks to allude to a love and covenant between men. Through her narrative, Eliot seemingly draws together members of the community in a cohesive fashion. As Sicher observes, '[t]he entire chapter consists of the conversation among the villagers in the pub on diverse topics […]'[26] Eliot is alluding to a covenant that is human-centric, rather than one that is representative of humanity's bond to an elusive and distant creator God.

Chapter seven sets up the Rainbow Tavern as a place where the landlord welcomes all into a space of listening and reciprocity. The tavern becomes an arena where concerns can be aired and acts of unselfish love through listening and responding allow for *agape* to emerge. The role of the landlord ensures that a space is created for all to air their concerns, old faces and new. 'The landlord […] was bound to keep his house open to all company […]' (49) This is representative of a tradition of openness. The Landlord also encourages Silas to speak about his trauma: 'if you've got any information to lay, speak it out sensible, and show us you're in your right mind, if you expect anyone to listen to you.' (49) The landlord ensures the provision of a platform for open communication The provision of such a platform is also an act of love, of *agape*. There is an audience, willing to listen in Eliot's Rainbow Tavern and this

[25] **Covenant:** God's commitment of himself to Israel and all humankind, particularly involving the calling of people into relationship with himself; sometimes distinguished into the old and new covenants (the contents of the Old and New Testaments). *Silas Marner*, ed. by Gunton, Glossary xiv.

[26] Sicher, 'George Eliot's "Glue Test", 11-21, (p. 11).

leads to a sympathetic understanding of the stranger, as strangers can imagine Silas's plight.

Sympathy helps the reader to understand how humanity expresses love, particularly *agape*. Kristen Pond's theory of the community, centred on the concept of sympathy for the outsider, leads the twenty-first century individual to examine "the face" of the stranger and come to know their narrative. Pond argues that identifying interruptions in *Silas Marner* questions the efficacy of sympathy that is dependent on identification with the subject. Put simply, Pond suggests that a person does not need to know another human being to be able to identify with their plight: 'Sympathy, Eliot claimed, was the centrally human act that formed her whole response in writing.'[27] Sympathy is thus central in human interactions, Pond deduces from her evaluation of Eliot's fiction. Taking Pond's point as inspiration, I see sympathy as also being a marker in human acts of love, and specifically regarding *agape*. Pond's argument continues, indicating the importance of an open arena where the receiving of other's stories can result in an act of sympathetic understanding, not dissimilar to *agape*. How *agape* differs to sympathy, however, is that the former allows for a selfless act: a response, driven by love. It is acting on our feelings of sympathy, that Eliot sees as being "centrally human". If read from a Christian perspective, the act of love driven by sympathy is also implicit in the human nature of Christ. The act of sympathy is also reflective of *agape*, and the aspiration to achieve a Christ-like love. Christ is alluded to as an example of humanity. In discussing the nature of Christ, here, in relation to sympathy, I am arguing that it is Christ's teachings on love that are replicated through not only his teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, but through the interaction taking place in the Rainbow Tavern. Such a love is described at the end of the Sermon the Mount as being 'perfect': 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' (Matthew 5: 48) Perfection, through acts of love, is the goal expressed through the Sermon on the Mount, but a goal is exactly what it is. The aim is for perfection, but this is not delivered among humans.

The scene in the Rainbow Tavern is thus central to understanding how the others in the community can come to know Silas, as the outsider and feel sympathy for

[27] Kristen Pond, 'Bearing Witness in Silas Marner: George Eliot's Experiment in Sympathy', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 41 (2013), 691-709, (p. 693).

his plight. (Ch 7,48-53) Through relating his experiences to a curious audience, Silas can communicate his experience of being robbed and unconsciously invokes sympathy for his cause. Pond argues that the 'human nature of his confession means that those who observe his speech, come to feel sympathy with his position.'[28] Silas is perceived to be coming from a place of vulnerability, as he speaks about losing his riches, earned through his livelihood and toil. Eliot expresses the feeling of acceptance of Silas, 'Of sitting in the warmth of the hearth not his own' (50), alluding once again to the concept of *agape,* the 'warmth' of not only the hearth but of love and acceptance. He is appealing for help from 'strangers' in the community, in order that they can recognise him. The account parallels the themes underpinning the teachings of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, displaying notions of compassion, through sympathetic understanding, and above all: love. Compassion and understanding are alluded to by the encouragement to walk with the stranger: 'And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.' (Matthew 5:41) The metaphorical journey of walking alongside someone is conveyed through Eliot's description of a community that hears and relates to Silas's plight. Allegory is used in the passage from Matthew 5, and highlights the communication between the men, to better understand the stranger. The community is 'going a mile' together: on the way to expressing love, expressing *agape*.

Eliot focussed on the goodness of humanity. Peter Hodgson argues that '[Eliot demonstrates] what should rule our lives is a trust in the ultimate power of goodness.'[29] I draw from Hodgson's argument, suggesting that not only does Eliot stress the power of goodness but she also seeks to translate Jesus' teachings of love into the human world. Goodness, as explored in other areas of this chapter, is indicative of performances of love: acting on good thoughts. Love provides an action and *agape* requires a show of unselfishness. Goodness may be the motivation, but love is putting such a incentive in action. Eliot's notions of human compassion would be based upon Jesus' teachings of compassion towards strangers, 'Love one another, as I have loved you.' (John 13: 34). Such love is a compassionate love for each other, for

[28] Pond, 'Bearing Witness in Silas Marner: George Eliot's Experiment in Sympathy, 691-709, (p. 694).

[29] Peter C. Hodgson, *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot: The Mystery Beneath the Real,* (London: SCM press, 2001), p. 78.

those other to yourself, a love and care indeed towards those who are not your friends or family, or towards whom you do not relate. In short; a human-centric reflection of *agape*: Jesus' universal love for humanity.

Through the plot surrounding the Rainbow Tavern, Eliot turns our attention from biblical covenants to the promises between people. Such promises, through the scene at the Rainbow Tavern, are suggestive of *agape, of welcoming* the outsider. Placing sympathy at the centre of the 'human covenant', the narrative alludes to Jesus' teaching; 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.' (Luke10: 27). These examples of Jesus' new commandments from the Sermon on the Mount illustrate the centrality of love in Christian practice. Not only should Jesus' example be followed ('Love one another as I have loved you'), we should be sympathetic to those other to ourselves, and come to love our neighbours, come to love those in the community with whom we spend our time. The abundance of these teachings in Victorian culture and within religious communities would have been obvious to Eliot. Sicher hints that Eliot may have been demonstrating the commandment of Jesus, that to love your neighbour as yourself, 'posits an ethics of difference between self and Other in which neither may be denied.'[30] For Sicher, Eliot demonstrates that there is a difference between self and Other, and that they must coexist. In short, Sicher is arguing that we can have sympathy towards, and relate to, strangers. I maintain that acting on our sympathy for the stranger is also reflective of *agape*, and an openness to love those whom we are yet to get to know. But an openness to such a love is merely a starting point. Such claims that sympathy helps us to relate to the stranger are indeed true, but there is a difference in relating to the stranger and acting on such thoughts, through kind words and behaviour. *Agape* requires a response: an action that progresses from the feelings of sympathy. Sympathy is our emotions and thoughts: love drives those thoughts into a practical result.

Eliot seeks to address the importance of theological love, through the process of witnessing and understanding. Through Jesus' example, therefore, Christians can sympathise and keep company with those that are Other to them. For Eliot, however,

[30] Sicher, 'George Eliot's "Glue Test", 11-21, (p. 20).

this act is performed through civilization and through understanding each other through humanistic terms. Through allusions to piety, Scripture, and humanity, she champions the human nature of the Christian religion, a concept central to all branches and denominations. Eliot, once again alluding to the universal nature of a human-centric *agape,* evokes the philosophy of Feuerbach, as '[he] believed that the real object of human piety should be humankind […]'[31] In *Silas Marner*, the universal nature of love is manifested through human piety, a love for humankind that echoes the teachings and example of Christ.

Dolly Winthrop and the Domestication of *Agape.*

Small acts of *agape* continue to be a focal point in the communication and reciprocity of love in *Silas Marner*. This is, as stated in the chapter introduction, owes much to the domestication of kindness shown by the villagers of Raveloe to Silas, the outsider. Dolly Winthrop, Silas's neighbour is no exception. In the Victorian age, small communities became institutions for learning scripture, sermons, and Christian prose. A domesticated setting helped to communicate Christian teachings, the example of Jesus, and, ultimately, I contend, Christian love. Domestic theological study is a method of spoken and written communication, enabling teachings of theological love to be accessible to all members of the community, through the actions of reading, listening, and reciting. Those unable to read the text of the Bible or biblical commentary could still experience and gain knowledge of teachings through hearing another individual reciting them. The act of recitation is important in community settings, as biblical stories continue to be communicated through speech. Recitation ensures that storytelling continues to be accessible in a domestic group setting. Memorisation of biblical stories and parables would let all in the community benefit, as literacy would not be necessary to access the stories read out by other members of the group, in what Catherine Robson states is an 'Oral and Aural event'.[32] *Silas Marner* presents us

[31] Van A. Harvey, *Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p. 115.

[32] Robson, *Heartbeats: Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem*, p. 8.

with a narrative where literacy is not necessary in the human communication of God's love, humans communicating love towards one another. This is addressed by Eliot in her portrayal of Dolly and Silas's neighbourly friendship, particularly Silas's response to Dolly's acts of sympathetic kindness.

As explored in the chapter's introduction, Eliot highlights the changing theological landscape in Britain, and how common ground can be shared through the message of the Bible and scripture - through 'good words'. Dolly and Silas's relationship to each other in the novel serves to make this point explicit through the scene where Dolly presents Silas with cakes. Leslie Stevenson suggests the presence of *agape* at this point in the text, seeing the presentation of cakes as an act of love. This reinforces my overarching thesis that small, domesticated acts of kindness demonstrate *agape* - particularly towards a stranger in the community. [33] Dolly's demonstrations of love towards Silas are also reflective of the turn to 'feminine' aspects of Christian compassion and love, through living out attributes of Christ's nature. Her acts of *agape*- of unconditional love, can be seen to hold strong ties with the concept of *caritas*, closely examined in the previous chapter on *Adam Bede*. Gail Turley Houston suggests that acts of *caritas* are 'essentially feminine'. Moreover, Turley Houston goes on to conclude that: 'Eliot also accepts that feeling and suffering are necessary to deepen human knowledge, hermeneutic insight, and charity so that humanity can move from solipsism toward the communal.'[34] Dolly's welcoming of the outsider, Silas, moves towards a feminine representation of theological aspects of love — moving away from self- centeredness and towards a communal stance.

The I.H.S. Dolly and Silas observe stamped in the cakes illustrates the significance of sharing theological common ground eloquently. Although the characters do not understand the meaning of the stamped letters, they do have an intrinsic understanding of their meaning: that of the message and the love of Christ (72). Moreover, no one seems to be aware of the meaning of the letters, as Dolly expresses:

[33] See Leslie Stevenson, 'Atonement in Theology and Literature', *Philosophy and Literature* (39(1), 2015), 47-63, (p. 47). I refer to Stevenson's work further in my subsequent discussion.

[34] Gail Turley Houston, *Victorian Women Writers, Radical Grandmothers, and the Gendering of God*. (Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2012), p. 142.

> 'There's letters pricked on 'em', said Dolly, 'I can't read 'em myself, and there's nobody, not Mr Macey himself, rightly knows what they mean; but they've a good meaning, for they're the same as on the pulpit-cloth at church.' (72).

The fact that Dolly is illiterate is of no hindrance to her expression of neighbourly love and her devotion towards Silas in the novel. Dolly presents Silas with cakes stamped with the initials I.H.S. a Christogram denoting the first three letters of the Latin name of Jesus. [35] In addition to the letters being theologically significant, Dolly also indicates that the letters are representative of 'good' and that she means the stamped cakes to welcome Silas. It is worth noting that the letters are also 'the same as on the pulpit cloth at church'. The Pulpit is where sermons are delivered, and the word of God and the Church communicated. Of relevance is that the pulpit is traditionally where the Gospel or 'Good News' is read to the congregation, and the central message of the Gospel: that of Jesus' love is communicated. What is also unusual about the scene, is that although Silas is literate and can read the Christogram, he has no point of social or theological reference to be able to decipher the meaning of the letters. They are an antiquated reference to traditional Christianity that is no longer relevant to the Raveloe community: 'Silas was as unable to interpret the letters as Dolly[...]' (73). The letters in the Christogram are representative of the Greek language but are then translated into Latin. Latin is the traditional language of the Roman Catholic and High Anglican traditions, prevalent prior to the Protestant reformation of the sixteenth century and the subsequent popularist evangelical movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[36] The initials of Christ, implicit in the Christogram I.H.S, are suggestive of the eating of 'good words', a different approach to the exploration of 'good words' and 'good actions' earlier in the chapter. The eating of 'good words', however, takes on a deeper theological meaning intrinsically linked to Christ and the ritual of the Eucharist. In the Bible, the eating of words alludes to the story highlighted

[35] I.H.S, as defined in *The Oxford English Dictionary* < https://www-oedcom.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/91271?redirectedFrom=I.H.S#eid> [accessed 31/10/19] (An abbreviation of) Jesus; in later use chiefly as a symbolic or ornamental monogram. Also as a modifier.

[36] See the Introduction in Timothy Larsen and Michael Ledger-Lomas eds., *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions: Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: OUP, 2017).

in the book of Jeremiah. Here, Jeremiah refers to praising God through eating His words: 'Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by your name, O Lord God of hosts.' (Jeremiah 15.16) The action of 'eating' would suggest a figurative devouring of the words of God, a spiritual consumption. Such imagery is also suggested in Eliot's narrative, through the stamping of the Christogram on the cakes that Dolly has baked for Silas.

The Christogram is representative of Christ and, through eating the words, representative of him, a symbol of Christ is also consumed. Kimo Reader suggests the importance of 'logophagia (the act of word-eating)' and of symbols representative of Christ in nineteenth-century verse.[37] Reader draws the readers' attention to the physicality of communication and the incarnation of words through the example of Emily Dickinson's prose: 'By calling attention to the physical medium of her communications […], Dickinson demonstrates her attentiveness to the "embodiment" of holy language.'[38] Using Reader's analysis as a template, the cakes that Dolly brings to Silas with the Christogram embedded in them, present a physical, symbol of Christ. The I.H.S. in the cakes become a form of incarnation, and the act of logophagia — in this instance, the eating of the cakes with the Christogram on it, can be seen as almost eucharistic in nature. The differences between the cakes that Dolly brings for Silas and the bread and wine at the Eucharist, however, is within the ritualistic aspect of Christian worship. Through eating the cakes, Dolly and Silas are not taking part in the Eucharist (conducted by a member of clergy). Instead, they are eating a symbol of Christ: a reminder of the Eucharist, remembering Christ's sacrifice as the ultimate act of love. Moreover, the I.H.S. is an embodiment of 'holy language' impressed into the cakes, a physical manifestation of the historical influence of Christianity on the village of Raveloe. So, although Dolly merely knows the Christogram is representative of 'good words', eating such a cake impressed with the words has greater theological

[37] Kimo Reader, 'The Word Made Flesh Writ Edible: Emily Dickinson's Micro-Eucharist of Crumb and Berry', *Christianity and Literature*, (66 (3), 2017), 520-533, (p. 523).

[38] Reader, 'The Word Made Flesh Writ Edible: Emily Dickinson's Micro-Eucharist of Crumb and Berry', 520-533, (p. 525).

significance. It is as if the cake becomes a physical reminder of the symbolic meaning of the bread in the Eucharist: that of Christ's body - 'which is given for you'.[39]

Through the scene where Dolly gives Marner the cakes, Stevenson highlights the importance of love in drawing out Martner's emotions, which is an observation I also make with regards to the importance of *agape* in the novel. Writing about atonement in theology and literature, Stevenson alludes to C. S Lewis' 'distinction of four loves', to place `love rather than justice or punishment' in theology and atonement.[40] In his analysis, Stevenson utilises the love and compassion of Dolly in *Silas Marner*:

> Silas is led out of his lonely, miserly existence by love. The first attempts by the villagers to console him for the loss of his money and suggest a change of life are well-meaning but not very effective: Mr. Macey gruffly advises him to start coming to church, and so does Mrs. Winthrop, though, more sympathetically, visiting Silas with cakes and her young son Aaron. […] Dolly awakens gratitude in Silas, giving generously of her practical knowledge. So here is a case of antecedent love: someone giving up something, even if only her time.[41]

Dolly, through her 'antecedent love', or rather, a pre-emptive form of kindness and compassion, in presenting the cakes, is showing the love that the community displays towards Silas, even if it falls on deaf ears. Coupled with the loving intention to do a kind thing for her neighbour, Dolly's cakes are suggestive of *agape,* a love that Silas attempts to respond to, through communicating his experiences. But — the letters also hold no literal meaning for him. Stevenson concludes his article by addressing the human expressions of *agape*:

> Dolly Winthrop (and even Mr. Macey in his limited way) offer it to Silas after his great loss […] *Agape* should include the unattractive, the diseased, the

[39] See Church of England Holy Communion Service: The Eucharistic Prayer 'Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/holy-communion-serviceworship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/holy-communion-service#mm7d> [Accessed 21/12/2023]

[40] Stevenson, 'Atonement in Theology and Literature', 47-63, (p. 47).

[41] Ibid, 47-63, (pp. 48-9).

> disabled, the tiresome, the neurotic, the senile, the outcast, the foreigner, and the criminal (as the stories of Jesus show). It goes beyond "mere" morality […] it implies understanding and compassion, and practical help where possible.[42]

Dolly is expressing *agape* towards Silas through her actions during the whole novel. This is first indicated to readers in the cake-giving scene, welcoming (a rather unreceptive) Marner into the Raveloe parish community. Silas is 'the outcast, the foreigner', and through her 'understanding, compassion and practical help', Dolly puts *agape* at the fore of her narrative through her 'antecedent love'. Dolly's 'practical help' is the factor that changes the story's outlook to one of sympathy and compassion, or *agape*, putting others before herself, and not being discriminatory with her acts of love.

Silas and Dolly's is a relationship that exemplifies *agape.* Dolly demonstrates warmth and affection towards Silas, as her neighbour and indicates the centrality that neighbourly love and compassion have in putting *agape* into action. Eliot also alludes to the fact that Dolly is part of the oral and aural tradition of storytelling, highlighting her illiteracy but portraying it in a way that does not hinder her understanding. In this setting, others can attempt to explain to her the meaning of the letters. Her husband, Ben, has read the letters out to her on many occasions, just as his mother had also printed on the cakes, and read to him:

> Ben says, ever since he was a little 'un and his mother used to put it on the cakes […] 'Ben's read 'em to me many and many a time, but they slip out o' my mind again; the more's the pity, for they're good letters, else they wouldn't be in the church.' (73)

Dolly is aware of the significance of the letters, but only up to a point. Eliot draws the reader's attention to the fact that her husband has helped her to understand what the letters are, and what they mean. Through her story line she conveys that literacy is not necessary for the communication of love. With regards to Ben and Dolly, the message of 'goodness' is within the letters but Dolly has failed to memorise the letters and so also their meaning. The allusion to the storytelling tradition in passing on the message

[42] Stevenson, 'Atonement in Theology and Literature', 47-63, (p. 62).

of God's love is also implicit in this short section, as Ben's mother also used to stamp the letters of the cake and had communicated what the letters were to Ben. It is Dolly's recollection that the letters are important, rather than the meaning of the letters, that is of most significance in the passage. Eliot, through her description of the stamped cakes has placed the communication of *agape* in the domestic sphere, through highlighting storytelling as part of daily provincial life. The communication of God's love that is to be reciprocated among humans is not just for Church. Communicating love, but most crucially, *agape* is also a domestic action: indicating more broadly the love shared between neighbours, friends, and spouses.

Conclusion

Through exploring dialogue in *Silas Marner*, Christian love is depicted through kindness and sympathy, and these are suggestive of *agape*. My assessment of *agape* in the narrative of *Silas Marner sees* it as a love that requires a sympathetic response, a reciprocation of loving kindness through Eliot's dialogue. The narrative highlights the necessity of kindness and the love of humanity throughout, culminating in the marriage reception of Silas's adopted daughter Eppie in the conclusion of the novel, where the community is congregated in the yard of the Rainbow Tavern. I define the tavern as the seat of agape in the Raveloe community. The whole of Raveloe, at the novel's close, is gathered under the sign of the rainbow, a motif of God's first covenant with humankind. At the close of the novel, the focus on the communication of *agape* is still embedded in the narratives of Dolly, Silas and Mr Macey as the following passage suggests:

> Dolly Winthrop was the first to divine that old Mr Macey, who had been set in his armchair outside his own door, would expect some special notice as they passed, since he was too old to be at the wedding-feast. 'Mr Macey's looking for a word from us,' said Dolly; 'he'll hurt if we pass him and say nothing – and him so racked with rheumatiz.' So, they turned aside to shake hands with the old man. He had looked forward to the occasion and had his

> premeditated speech. 'Well, master Marner,' he said, in a voice that quavered a good deal, 'I've lived to see my words come true. I was the first to say there was no harm in you, though your looks might be again' you; and I was the first to say you'd get your money back. And it's nothing but rightful that you should […]' (160)

The final exchange between Mr Macey and Silas summarises the expression of a Christian love within the community of Raveloe, bringing Silas, the outsider into the fold. Sealed with the shaking of hands, the bringing together of individuals is suggestive of a form of *agape* in action. This is an act of universal love that, in turn, requires a sympathetic response. The display of sympathy is one that is reciprocal, as Dolly and Silas see and sympathise with the plight of the old Mr Macey and try to notice him and listen to his 'premeditated speech'. A considered response to Silas and his place in the community, Mr Macey's storyline once again suggests the kindness of a universal love, that of *agape*. Such prevalence of sympathy and kindness in Eliot's narrative is indicative of Feuerbachian humanistic love: one that reflects its centrality in Christian teaching. Through the normalisation of Christian narratives, and their portrayal of theological love in the community, Eliot has cemented concepts of *agape* in the minds and hearts of the reader. She has interpreted a Feuerbachian divine love in humanistic terms, presenting a theory that is deeply rooted in Christian interpretations of love. *Agape* is the perfect, universal love but it has its limitation: that of human nature. *Agape* is the ideal that humanity nevertheless strives for, the 'perfect' love (Matthew 5:48), the love of Jesus mirrored in humanity. Only through following the example of Christ can humans hope to achieve *agape*: as the ideal, truly universal love. Because both Mr Macey and Dolly did not get a response from Silas at the beginning of the novel, they persevered until love 'warmed his heart'. Such warmth, for Silas was not brought by Dolly or Mr Macey, but was eventually found in an altogether unexpected source.

Although I have examined the narratives of Dolly, Silas and Mr Macey in depth, it is the relationship that Silas has with his adoptive daughter, Eppie, that enables him to experience love, and to also enact it:

> It was an influence which must gather force with every new year: the tones that stirred Silas's heart grew articulate and called for more distinct answers;

> shapes and sounds grew clear for Eppie's eyes and ears, and there was more that 'Dad-dad' was imperatively required to notice and account for. (114)

Through the narrative strand of adoption and the overwhelming loving act of raising a daughter that is not his own, the portrayal of Silas and Eppie's relationship is one that explores and expands the bounds of *agape*. Their relationship serves as an ultimate response to Christian love in the community. This is, in part attributed to the accounts of both Silas and Eppie as being initial outsiders to the community of Raveloe. Silas's story also indicates that it is through the actions of his adoptive daughter that his place is cemented in the community, displaying an *agape* that goes beyond the theological as a universal love. Theirs is a bond that Eliot centralises in her narrative and, through communicating acts of love, suggestive of *agape* throughout Eppie's upbringing, the stage is set for a relationship that demonstrates the term.

5: Re-Examining Desire and *Eros* through the 'many Theresa's' of *Middlemarch*

The meaning of 'love' in *Middlemarch* (1871) is understood variously by those who work in nineteenth century studies. Contributions to the topic often focus on the meaning of desire and sexuality, with desire frequently been read with reference to the role of marriage in the nineteenth century. For those writing on the centrality of the marriage plot such as Rachel Ablow and Talia Schaffer, and indeed to those whose work focusses on romantic friendship and same-sex relations such as Carolyn Oulton, marriage is pivotal to complex Victorian novels.[1] In addition to examining the conventional use of the marriage plot, my own focus in this chapter examines different avenues of romantic narratives. In doing so, I examine a relatively underrepresented element of *Middlemarch*: erotic desire, or *eros,* and how Eliot utilises differing concepts of the erotic. Thinking about the role of *eros* for relationships in the novel reveals the subtleties of Eliot's engagement with romantic love and sheds light on the multitude of human associations in *Middlemarch*. Such relationships are not all romantic: some pertain to friendships and familial bonds rather than being strictly limited to romantic interactions and marriage. In all cases, though, *eros* plays an important role in Eliot's novel.

Throughout the chapter, I will refer to the term *eros* when examining aspects of the erotic and desire. *Eros* is usually applied in relation to sexual or romantic love, but I contend that the term requires re-examination to include other modes of desire such as the means of financial independence, the yearning for travel, and the want to be a better friend or sister. In the Greek classical tradition, *eros* refers to the name of the god of love, associated with earthly desires and sexual relations. Through the ages, *eros* has come to be a shorthand terminology for romantic and sexual love, and often is utilised to refer to sexual acts, rather than denoting a platonic relationship. Through

[1] See Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Redwood, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), Talia Schaffer, *Romance's Rival: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: OUP, 2016) and Carolyn Oulton, *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007).

re-examining the erotic in *Middlemarch*, we are invited to perceive romantic love in numerous ways, not just physical. Eliot invites us to reconsider *eros*, not through sexual relations alone but rather through a plethora of bodily, cognitive, and spiritual engagements.

My focus for re-examining desire in the novel is theological, building upon recent work on desire and the self. As Sarah Coakley suggests in her extensive works on concepts of femininity, the trinity and the self, a (Christian) theological and spiritual framework long since forgotten may prove a useful method for encapsulating a plethora of desires. Human wants and needs are not all sexual but all of them relate to love. Coakley considers the theological meaning of 'desire' and links it to theological applications of *eros* from the Middle Ages. For the twenty-first century person, she suggests, desire 'has become so heavily sexualised in the modern, post-Freudian period as to render its connection with other desires (including the desire for God) obscure and puzzling.'[2] She indicates that any other implications of the meaning of desire, other than the overtly sexual or romantic are almost unheard of, or at least confusing. Coakley goes on to outline the work of Gregory of Nyssa (335- 395), 'the fourth-century Greek theologian who features large' in her reasoning.[3] He had, she continues:

> […] the (to us) strange insight that desire relates crucially to what might be called the 'glue' of society. The 'erotic' desire that initially draws partners together sexually has to also last long enough, and to be so refined in God, as to render back to society what originally gave those partners the possibility of mutual joy: that means (beyond the immediate project of child-rearing and family) service to the poor and the outcast, attention to the frail and the orphans, a consideration of the fruit of the Earth and its limitations, a vision of the whole in which all play their part, both sacrificially and joyously.[4]

Desire, as the 'glue of society' ensures that readers examine the concept of *eros* in a new way. Desire is not just about erotic, sexual notions: it is about the inward feelings

[2] Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 4.

[3] Ibid, p. 6.

[4] Ibid, p. 6.

that drive humans to do good for others. A renewed interpretation of the teachings of Gregory of Nyssa provides the twenty-first century audience with a theological understanding of erotic love, surpassing the common Christian conception that the purpose of erotic love is primarily for child-rearing. *Eros*, for Gregory of Nyssa requires a more worldly and cultural awareness of the individual. It is the action of 'giving back', repurposing the love felt for one another as a couple into the wider Christian community, that provides more substance to erotic desires. *Eros* is not just for the bedroom.

Coakley continues to debunk any misunderstandings of the erotic by explicitly stating her own position as being 'a tether of connected desires'.[5] These include humanity's physical desires for food and drink, and more spiritual desires such as comfort and intimacy. Interestingly, she also relates the erotic to the desire for 'power, pleasure, money, relaxation, rest, etc., as well as physical sex'.[6] Desires, she indicates, come with a caveat: 'confusion, sin or excess in any one of these areas will tend inexorably to cause trouble in the others.'[6] The broader theological understanding of desire presented to the reader through Coakley's multi-faceted view of desire also forces an individual to face the problems of excess and the struggle to find a balance. Coakley, quite rightly, points out that any excess or unbalance in any one of these connected desires, 'causes trouble' and a state of confusion, and throws the human state of well-being into disarray. Managing desires becomes a balancing act: an emotional and spiritual tight rope walk, on which the individual struggles to stay upright. Such balancing acts are experienced differently by everyone, and this plays out in Eliot's narrative in *Middlemarch*.

The prelude of *Middlemarch* sets the scene of desire for the rest of the novel, and this is also the observation of many who work on *Middlemarch* such as Jill Matus, Hilary Fraser, and David Kurnick. Although the work of Matus and Fraser builds upon

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[5] Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God*, p. 8.

[6] Ibid, p. 8.

[7] See Jill Matus, 'St Teresa, Hysteria and Middlemarch', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*,1,2, (1990), 215-240; Hilary Fraser, 'St. Theresa, St. Dorothea, and Miss Brooke in Middlemarch', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 40,4 (1986), 400-411; and David Kurnick, 'An Erotics of Detachment: "Middlemarch" and Novel-Reading as Critical Practice', *ELH*, 74,3 (2007), 583-608.

the importance of St Theresa of Avilla (1515-1582) in setting the narrative scene in *Middlemarch*, they do not focus on love and the erotic. I examine the role of the erotic and desire, not only regarding St Theresa of Avilla, but how desire is then reconfigured through female characters in *Middlemarch*.[7] Through this chapter, I will analyse the importance of re-reading the erotic through the Christian thought presented by Sarah Coakley, as 'a tether of connected desires.' I will also utilise David Kurnick's theory of an erotics of detachment, a structure that would enable the Victorians to find the erotic in non-physical desire.[8] Kurnick's argument is non-theological but his unpacking of eroticism in the novel aids in our understanding of *eros*, albeit through a different scholarly lens to the one I am using here.

Through his study, Kurnick depicts the tensions between intellect and desire in the nineteenth-century novel. He highlights the incompatibility of knowledge and desire, whilst drawing attention to the anti-corporeal portrayal of knowledge in the prelude to Eliot's novel. The purpose of Kurnick's engagement with eroticism in *Middlemarch* is: 'To confront a strain of erotophobia that has been oddly persistent in literary criticisms' conception of its own object.'[9] Kurnick re-examines the novel through eroticism, which has been largely absent in literary criticism, and frames his argument through erotic detachment: a process through which Victorians would find eroticism more palatable — even, he argues, desirable. This is what Michael Mason refers to as 'anti-sensual attitudes', which he attributes to a variety of secular and theological movements such as those headed by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), and by the Church of England.[10] That is to say, desire is not (and should not) just be about sexual feeling. Eroticism in *Middlemarch*, for Kurnick, requires whole-person involvement from the characters, including compulsions of the flesh, the pursuit of freedom, and desire-fuelled repetition of events. Kurnick's analysis presents the erotic as not just compulsions of the flesh, but in terms of other drives, such as the cerebral need for freedom, and the irrational nature of the mind. I intend to build upon

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[8] See David Kurnick, 'An Erotics of Detachment: "Middlemarch" and Novel- Reading as Critical Practice', *ELH*, 74,3 (2007), 583-608.

[9] Ibid, 583-608 (p. 585).

[10] See Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), p. 3.

Kurnick's argument and examine the importance of differing avenues of desire, whilst also re-examining the need to engage with the spiritual pursuits of the characters in *Middlemarch*.

Like others before me, I wish to begin my study of *Middlemarch* with the mention of St Theresa of Avila (1515-1581) in the 'Prelude', which serves to form the lens through which the reader accesses the novel.[11] The 'Prelude' addresses Dorothea, the novel's protagonist in the same space as St Theresa[12] and sets the scene for the pursual of desire within the novel. I propose that the impact of the opening motif is not only one that seeks to pre-determine the personal journeys of the fictional women of *Middlemarch* but provides us with a theological starting point, re-examining the role of love and marriage within the novel. Through my theologically inspired reading of *eros* in *Middlemarch*, the significance of the mention of St Theresa at the novel's beginning is paramount to how the reader continues to perceive love in the narrative. Eliot alludes to Theresa's personal journey, signifying not only a response to her religious experiences, but also setting a theological (but more specifically Christian) undertone to the plot of *Middlemarch*. The focus on feminine aspects of theological experience also links to the turn to viewing Christ-like qualities as womanly modes of feeling and acting. Motifs of sympathy, Rebecca Styler explains, signified a maternal divine image 'in both its ethical and ontological sense […] divine motherhood emphasised compassion at the heart of the godhead and as an ethical ideal for humanity.'[13]The feminine becomes irretrievably linked with core Christian teachings of virtue and compassion, represented through the life and teachings of Christ in the Victorian age. Such a feminine representation of the Madonna is de-sexualized, and desires, therefore, must be linked to other feminine divine pursuits (such as compassion), in place of a sexualised erotic approach.

[11] I have chosen to spell Theresa with a 'h', as Eliot does. Many prefer to spell her name as Teresa, in line with the Spanish spelling. Sometimes, when citing others, therefore, the name may be spelt differently to the main body of my text.

[12] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, David Carroll, ed. (Oxford: Oxfords World's Classics, OUP, 1996), p. 3. All future mentions of the text will be given in brackets within the main body of the chapter.

[13] Rebecca Styler, *The Maternal image of God in Victorian Literature* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2024), p. 2.

When we look to *Middlemarch*, the link between the erotic or *eros* and St Theresa has not been explicitly made by many of those writing on the topic. The critical focus in the past has been Theresa and her 'passionate, ideal nature', without much investigation into the complex web of her desires (3). Such observations extend beyond literary circles, and few working on the theology of St Theresa examine erotic aspects of her religious experience. Carter Lindberg, in in his introduction to his work on a Western Christian approach to love, however, looks to the overtly passionate nature of St Theresa's religious experiences:

> […] she wrote of the divine madness that overcame her when pierced by the arrows of God her Lover: 'The pain was so great that I screamed aloud; but at the same time, I felt such infinite sweetness that I wished the pain to last forever.'[14]

Through Lindberg's interpretation of Theresa's religious experience as 'divine madness', we are introduced to phallic divine imagery. Theresa writes of being pierced by God's arrow, and her simultaneous pain and 'infinite sweetness', and that she 'wished the pain to last forever'. Here, physical descriptions of Theresa's religious and mystical experience metaphorically convey her spiritual agony and ecstasy towards God, whom Lindberg describes in this scenario as being her 'lover'.[15] Although metaphysical experiences of God are depicted in St Theresa's writing, strong links can be made to other aspects of love, particularly *eros*.[16] Theresa's passion and ecstasy are symbolic of the love she holds for God: as agonising and simultaneously beautiful as those felt towards a lover. But God is not Theresa's lover — rather her ecstasy is felt through a different form of desire. Theresa's ecstasy is religious in its fervour, a display of desire and passion for the Lord. In essence, Theresa's passion is desexualised, rather

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[14] Carter Lindberg, *Love: A Brief History through Western Christianity* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2008), p. 4.

[15] Lindberg, *Love: A Brief History through Western Christianity*, p. 4.

[16] By using the term 'metaphysical', I am inferring that it relates to the following definition laid out by OED: *Oxford English Dictionary* (online) < https://www-oedhttps://www-oed-com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/117349?redirectedFrom=metaphysicalcom.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/117349?redirectedFrom=metaphysical#eid> [Accessed 22/11/21].

II. Other senses relating more generally to things which are immaterial, imaginary, preternatural, or supernatural.

than de-sensualised. In the narrative of *Middlemarch*, the example of St Theresa, and the desires and passions that drove her, portray desire very generally. It is not just a sexually erotic desire, as one would feel for a lover, but rather a myriad of passionate driving forces, leading 'latter-day Theresa's' on their narrative journey (3).

The scholarly focus on the motif of St Theresa and the failed journeys of 'Latter-day Theresas' has solely been in relation to Dorothea (3). This particular focus on Dorothea may be a semantic error because Eliot's utilisation of the plural 'Latter day Theresas' is significant (3). I suggest that a focus on other female characters in the novel is required, to fully identify motifs of the erotic and *eros* in *Middlemarch*. Moreover, the example in the *Prelude* of St Theresa can be utilised to present different modes of *eros*, different aspects of love. Other women's stories in *Middlemarch*, therefore, are significant in understanding a renewed approach to the erotic, in addition to theological and literary connotations of *eros*. Dorothea is the first figure of desire within the narrative itself and, as such, any assessment of desire in *Middlemarch* and the erotic should begin with her.

Setting the Erotic Scene in *Middlemarch*: Dorothea and Unfulfilled Desire

Desire in *Middlemarch* is often synonymous with the personal journey of Dorothea or rather how her desires remain unfulfilled. Those writing on the theme of desire in Eliot, from Dorothea Barrett in the 1980s and 1990s to David Kurnick in the 2000s, and Daniel Wright in the 2010s have commented on Dorothea and her unfulfilled aspirations and ambitions. Some, such as Barrett, link her plight with St Theresa of Avilla as depicted in the Prelude (3), and the 'relinquishing of saintliness […] this [...] seem[ing] to parallel Dorothea's career'.[17] The early comparison to St Theresa acts as a marker for her narrative; and, as Barrett proposes, Dorothea's story 'suggests the relinquishing of vocation and the settling for something unspectacular but

[17] Dorothea Barrett, *Vocation and Desire: George Eliot's Heroines*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1989), p. 125.

comfortable.'[18] It is with the account of unfulfillment, or simply 'settling' that the twenty-first century critique concerns itself. David Kurnick positions Dorothea as 'the most poignant of Eliot's failed heroines, […] perhaps because her story is on the face of it a happy one.'[19] The protagonist's story is seemingly happy but her own desires remain largely unfulfilled. Kurnick points to her eventual match with Will Ladislaw, that it 'may be part of her problem: her romantic satisfaction, Eliot suggests, is an index of her intellectual failure.'[20] Dorothea's intellectual desires elude her and through the eventual pursuing of her romantic needs, she has 'settled' for amorous love rather than academic fulfilment.

Building upon the work of Kurnick, Daniel Wright suggests in *Bad Logic* (2018) that erotic desire in Eliot's novels requires further examination: with a particular emphasis on Eliot's situating of ethical knowledge. Unlike Kurnick, who investigates an erotics of detachment through reading, Wright suggests that 'in Eliot's fiction erotic desire aims for a kind of miry depth of situated ethical knowledge.'[21] It is the 'miry depth' of erotic desire, Wright continues, that ensures differing concepts 'mess together' throughout Eliot's narrative.[22] In the case of Dorothea, however, Wright alludes to varying concepts of desire blending together in her storyline from the very beginning. He summarises her tale of desire neatly: 'Dorothea's […] "blending" of love with wisdom, the erotic with the rational, is understood by the narrator as a failing, or at least as a kind of "dim" naïveté.'[23] In the first three books of the novel, Dorothea's desires appear to be directed through her intellectual aspirations, manifested through her assisting her husband in his study. For example, when Ladislaw suggests to her that Casaubon should employ a secretary, Dorothea responds: 'I should have no happiness if I did not help him in his work […] the only thing I desire is to help him more.' (342)

[18] Barrett, *Vocation and Desire: George Eliot's Heroines,* p.126.

[19] Kurnick, 'An Erotics of Detachment', 583-608, (p. 584).

[20] Ibid, 583-608, (p. 584).

[21] Daniel Wright, 'George Eliot's Vagueness' in *Bad Logic: Reasoning about Desire in the Victorian Novel* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), pp.106-141 (p. 113).

[22] Ibid, p. 129.

[23] Ibid, p. 130.

Her ultimate passion is to assist her husband — one which she is restricted from, as he resists her intellectual engagement.

From her failed pursuit of intellectual desire and knowledge through her union with Casaubon, to giving way to the more irrational romantic desires in her love for Ladislaw, Dorothea swaps her own happiness and for the emotional warmth of a loving bond. Her sister Celia even teases her that she is prone to self-mortification at a dinner party with Sir James, tauntingly saying: 'She likes giving up' (17). Ironically, this comedic jibe sets the (erotic) scene for Dorothea. She concedes that she may not get exactly all that she desires. Ultimately, Dorothea unwittingly gives up the vocation of the pursuit of knowledge in her marriage to Casaubon and settles for her other desires: those of a warm, loving relationship and contentment:

> It was another or rather a fuller sort of companionship that poor Dorothea was hungering for, and the hunger had grown from the perpetual effort demanded by her married life. She was always trying to be what her husband wished, and never able to repose on his delight in what she was. The thing that she liked, that she spontaneously cared to have, seemed to be always excluded from her life; for if it was only granted and not shared by her husband it might as well have been denied. (446)

Her marriage to Casaubon did not fulfil all of Dorothea's desires. She wanted to make a difference and assist him in his research, but she eventually gives up on this pursuit and thinks carefully about her role within her marriage. *Eros*, for Dorothea lies in the pursuit of knowledge, and her need to share such information with her husband. If she puts forth any of her own knowledge or opinions on a topic, she is excluded from the intellectual conversation and thus excluded from developing her love of wisdom.

Dorothea's passion for knowledge might seem her most overriding desire but it is her affection towards Ladislaw that is her most passionate struggle: sparking an inward debate of knowledge versus instinct. Her fast-building and overwhelming passion for Ladislaw wins out in the battle of her inward desires: 'Resistance to unjust dispraise had mingled with her feeling for him from the very first, and now in the rebound of her heart after the anguish the resistance was stronger than ever' (758). Eventually, after being separated from each other following Casaubon's death, the two

are reunited (after a misreading on Dorothea's part of Ladislaw's feelings toward Rosamond). Ladislaw and Dorothea sit in an intense silence gazing at each other, whilst the darkened clouds loom overhead. As Ladislaw is about to leave, Dorothea blurts out: 'Oh I cannot bear it, my heart will break' (762). They both successfully, at least in part, communicate their passion for one another, culminating in a non-conventional marriage-plot. Dorothea dismisses any previously felt ambition in favour of her overwhelming desire for Ladislaw.

The absence of her vocation of knowledge and study, however, is problematic as Dorothea relinquishes her aspirations. This concept of relinquishment requires further consideration as Barrett eloquently argues: 'Because Dorothea's problem is the absence of vocation, that negative space must be defined, investigated, understood by reference to the positive forms that surround it.'[24] Through the suppression of her overriding desire, Dorothea looks to the negative space in her life, and begins to fill the void with lesser desires. In the sections that follow, I will address the erotic journeys of other female characters in *Middlemarch* and look at how their desires are met, or indeed, unfulfilled throughout, as alternative 'modern-day Theresas' (3) of the narrative.

Celia's 'Supporting' Narrative: an *Eros* of Compassion

The focus of much scholarship on *Middlemarch,* as suggested in the opening section, is Dorothea Brooke's narrative and the desire for knowledge that often eludes her. There is good reason for this. Eliot's narrator tells us that Dorothea: 'was usually spoken of as being remarkably clever, but with the addition that her sister Celia had more common-sense' (7). These observations are echoed by other characters, with Casaubon noting: 'Miss Brooke was certainly very naïve, with all her alleged cleverness. Celia, whose mind had never been thought too powerful, saw the emptiness of other people's pretensions much more readily' (59). David Kurnick sees Dorothea as 'a promiscuous pursuer of social knowledge, a kind of erotically impelled researcher', a

[24] Barrett, *Vocation and Desire: George Eliot's Heroines,* p. 131.

knowledge that the more worldly-wise Celia already possesses.[25] I agree that the pursuit of social knowledge is central to Eliot's novel, but if this is so then more critical attention needs to be paid to Celia, who already possesses such knowledge and expresses it through forms of desire that are rarely explored. My focus is on how Celia desires to relieve the burdens of her sister, as well as building a stable life for her own emerging family.

In the case of Celia, desire is conveyed through her common sense. One reason why Celia is sometimes ignored in criticism on *Middlemarch* is that she is a secondary character with a supporting role. However, through her 'supporting role' the novel thickens our understanding of what the relationship between desire and knowledge might involve. The type of desire that Celia embodies is worth examining because it both connects with and departs from recent work on the importance of desire in Eliot's novel. Daniel Wright recognises, like Kurnick, that there is a strong relationship between novelistic eroticism and social understanding, and that through the `miry depth(s)' of ethical knowledge, rather than a detached, more observational view, we can gain a better understanding of erotic desire. In a chapter on 'George Eliot's Vagueness', Wright expresses how a language of vagueness expresses aspirations and erotic meaning in Eliot's novels. Wright argues that desire, for Eliot, is attached to an ethical model, rather than providing a detached model for critique. Building upon Kurnick's critique of Eliot's work, Wright suggests that, in addition to considering the detached view of the narrator, we should consider the ethical meaning behind Eliot's stories to better understand how she situates desire in her novels. I agree that the 'situated ethical knowledge' of Eliot's fiction is important, but my point of departure is the need to think about Celia as a way of acknowledging the theological contribution to this sort of knowledge. Focusing on Celia's storyline, I will consider desire as a directive to do good and aid others through the premise of love, and more specifically the type of love associated with desire: that of *eros*.

Through her extensive work on Christian theology, desire and the self, Sarah Coakley demonstrates the importance of divine desire — one in which the sole focus

[25] Kurnick, 'An Erotics of Detachment', 583-608, (p. 587).

is not sexual want, but rather a plethora of pursuits.[26] She argues that from a redefined theological viewpoint, desire:

> […] is the constellating category of selfhood, the ineradicable root of the human longing for God. To uncover this root and give it theological valence, is to be forced to an equally radical rethinking of contemporary presumptions about sexuality, gender and selfhood.[27]

In describing desire as 'the ineradicable root of the human longing for God', Coakley stresses its centrality in the human experience and that it is also, theologically speaking, inextricably tied to God and the search for God (or knowledge of God). This understanding invites a radical re-ordering of the way twenty-first century audiences approach the topic of desire, linking it back to the theological concerns at the heart of my thesis discussion.

The exploration of female desire in the novel is important in framing a complex understanding of *eros*. Given that sexual desire appears not to be a driving force in Celia's narrative, it may seem odd to think about her in such terms. But desire is integral to Celia's narrative journey. By examining different avenues of aspiration in her narrative, Eliot explores a theological account of desire which is easily missed when desire is thought about as a purely sexual matter. Desire, Coakley suggests, is a whole-body transformative experience; one that is spiritual, embodied, and divine.[28] In this reading, desire is represented as a whole-body experience, not just a physical sensation of pleasure but rather a deeper representation of negative and positive wants. The point is one that Kurnick seeks to introduce when he suggests that 'we should recognise that ambitions are often most keenly felt as compulsions of the flesh – that the pursuit of the freedom from personalism must, to be meaningful, involve the whole person, ardently.'[29] Yet whereas Kurnick develops this line of thought without

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[26] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013). See also Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[27] Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self*, p. 26.

[28] Coakley also regards Teresa of Avilla as part of her work, but utilises her in relation to John of the Cross and the appropriation of religious experiences and beliefs in prayer- not in the discussion of desire and *eros* (see *The New Asceticism*, pp. 119-122).

[29] Kurnick, 'An Erotics of Detachment', 583-608, (p. 603).

theological reference, Coakley draws on the Christian tradition to show how desire or *eros* affects the whole person, not just physically or mentally.

But there are limits to how desire is communicated. As Wright concludes, Eliot understands the limitations of narrative to 'register the sheer difficulty of the kind of self-understanding required to give erotic life a meaningful shape.'[30] He is stating that there is a barrier to recognising desire and eroticism fully in Eliot's narrative, and that is the inability 'to speak about erotic feeling as a "lasting companion" to reason, a "sharer in thoughts."'.[31] For Wright, erotic desire does not equate to reason, whereas the erotic, for Kurnick and Coakley, is meaningful because it involves the whole person. Eliot conveys a plethora of desires: such personal aspirations are continually battled against through a longing for the larger common good. These are desires shared by both Dorothea and Celia in *Middlemarch*.

For Celia, desire is important and something that should be expressed. Her narrative focusses on formulating, speaking, and putting her aspirations into action: her desire to marry someone like Sir James, her desire to be a good and helpful sister, her desire to give good advice, and her desire for a family. Here, the reading of *eros* symbolises something other than sexual desire for not only Dorothea, but also Celia, tying in with the later theological observations of Sarah Coakley. Celia longs for a family of her own, but her desire to nurture and build on her relationship with Dorothea surpasses that desire. *Eros*, for Celia, is the desire to be the centre of a family, the wish to bring about positive change not only for her husband but for her sister. Celia's desire to aid Dorothea is tied to Dorothea's need for escape, following discomfort in her marriage:

> There was no refuge now from spiritual emptiness and discontent, and Dorothea had to bear her bad mood, as she would have borne a headache. (446)

Celia, for Dorothea, provides sanctuary from 'spiritual emptiness and discontent', and the narrative surrounding the sisters evolves through Celia's ability to support and aid her sister. Wright mentions Celia in one of his observations, in a supporting role to

[30] Wright, *Bad Logic: Reasoning about Desire in the Victorian Novel,* p. 134.

[31] Ibid, p. 134.

her sister. In the scene described, Dorothea is struggling with a vague 'mob' of emotions, upon mistakenly assuming Ladislaw and Rosamond have shared a moment of 'illicit intimacy':

> When her sister Celia asks what's vexing her, she replies, 'Oh, all the troubles of all people on the face of the earth' (776), turning the vague 'indefinable movements' of emotion toward an equally indefinable generality (672).[32]

In Wright's analysis, Celia supports Dorothea by asking what makes her so angry. Celia is met with a vague and hyperbolic response, her emotions remaining unordered. It is my observation that Celia is trying to ground Dorothea by asking her what the matter is and to explain her vexation. In relation to Wright's argument surrounding the same extract, Dorothea's inflated response would indicate that she is not yet ready on an emotional level to be consoled by Celia. This is something that Dorothea achieves later in the narrative, however, utilising the stabilising presence of her sister as comfort. Celia becomes Dorothea's object of desire: not in a sexually erotic sense, but as a sounding platform to express her needs and to overthrow her rejected desires connected with Casaubon.

Celia's desire to assist her sister is best conveyed by symbolism in a later scene of the narrative, following Casaubon's death. Dorothea finds solace in staying with Celia at Freshitt Hall, and Celia attempts to calm Dorothea in her widowhood and distract her from her grief until the time comes to manage the estate. Eliot utilises the language of flowers and their symbolism to convey Celia's role:

> Every morning now, she sat with Celia in the prettiest of upstairs sitting rooms, opening into a small conservatory – Celia all in white and lavender like a bunch of mixed violets, […] (457)

The language of flowers became a significant method for written communication for women, who could code meaning into the narrative; as Molly Engelhart writes, : 'practitioners of the language of flowers – written primarily for and by women – celebrated uncertainty and relied on floral codes to curtail knowing in order to extend

[32] See Wright, *Bad Logic: Reasoning about Desire in the Victorian Novel,* p. 131.

the realm of play.'[33] The significance of Celia being described as a 'bunch of mixed violets' in this instance is also indicative of Eliot's secure knowledge and application of the language of flowers. As Engelhardt writes, 'Eliot realised the limitations of human observation and recognised that all language is saturated with metaphor […]'[34] The choice of the mixed violet metaphor is a complex one, drawing from Anglo-Catholic accounts of the Virgin Mary and her Gardens, and from popularised versions of the Victorian Language of Flowers.[35] Theologically, not only are violets indicative of the humility of the Virgin Mary but they also denote the Annunciation, symbolically accompanying the Angel Gabriel to announce the coming of Christ. Such complex and deep connotations of the Language of Flowers is represented through Eliot's portrayal of Celia in one brief reference to a 'bunch of mixed violets.'

The floral code used to depict Celia sets the tone of the scene and expresses her desire to console and help Dorothea. Her devotion and purity would be in the minds of contemporary Victorian readers. This is because many readers in the Victorian age would be versed in the coded narrative of flowers. The connection between motherhood and wisdom is also addressed in the narrative: 'Since Celia's baby was born, she had a new sense of her mental solidity and calm wisdom. It seemed clear that where there was a baby, things were right enough […]'. The symbol of motherhood and the calmness that it symbolises is also a reference to the Madonna. The 'mixed' nature of the violets, and Eliot's decision to use this word highlights the uncertain and anxious nature of the arrangement: Dorothea does not know what to do with herself in widowhood and Celia attempts to console her, whilst imparting some difficult news about Casaubon's will (459-60).

It is evident that Celia desires to assist Dorothea and is devoted to her recovery and consolation. However, Celia also navigates her vexation at Dorothea's sorrow, knowing what she cannot:

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[33] Molly Engelhardt, 'The Language of Flowers in the Victorian Knowledge Age', *Victoriographies* 3.2 (2013): 136–160 (p. 136).

[34] Engelhardt, 'The Language of Flowers in the Victorian Knowledge Age', 136–160, (p. 150).

[35] See Rachel Fulton, 'The Virgin in the Garden, or Why Flowers Make Better Prayers', *Spiritus*, 4,1 (Spring 2004): 1-23, (p. 1). Fulton goes on to discuss at length the significance of the rose and lily as being symbolic of the Virgin Mary but mentions the significance of the 'violet of humility'.

> Dorothea sat by in her widow's dress, with an expression that rather provoked Celia, as being much too sad; […] when a husband had been so dull and troublesome while he lived, and besides that had – well, well! Sir James, of course had told Celia everything, with a strong representation how important it was that Dorothea should not know it sooner than was inevitable. (457)

Through her desire to console her sister and aid her in her sorrow, Celia is also provoked through Dorothea's countenance and actions but perseveres with her mission to do good by her sister. She openly states her irritation when Dorothea asks to be driven to Lowick to look over the affairs: 'you have a wrong notion in your head as usual, Dodo — I can see that, it vexes me' (458), but then takes time to explain to Dorothea the situation that had been kept from her:

> 'I can see what you are thinking of as well as can be, Dodo,' said Celia. 'You are wanting to find out if there is anything uncomfortable for you to do now, only because Mr Casaubon wished it. As if you had not been uncomfortable enough before.[…] And I had better tell you, to prepare you […] he has made a codicil to his will, to say the property was all to go away from you married – I mean […] but if you were to marry Mr Ladislaw, not anybody else,'[…]The blood rushed to Dorothea's face and neck painfully. But Celia was administering what she thought a sobering dose of fact. It was taking up notions that had done Dodo's health so much harm. (459)

In imparting the truth of the matter to her sister, Celia also expresses her concern for Dorothea regarding her marriage to Causabon: 'As if you had not been uncomfortable enough before.' In expressing the truth to Dorothea, Celia is expressing her love, concern and devotion, mirroring the imagery of the violet, a coded expression of love and devotion. Such an expression of devotion also reflects Celia's desire to assist, her longing for family devotion. As Sarah Coakley argues, *eros* is not always about sexual desire. It is about a desire to do good to others, a desire for love beyond boundaries, and, moreover, a desire that involves a whole-person approach, spiritually, mentally and physically.[36]

[36] See Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, p. 4. I refer to this material earlier in the chapter.

Celia's role in consoling her newly widowed sister is ultimately recognised by Dorothea: 'I am much happier at Freshitt with Celia. I shall be able to think better about what should be done at Lowick by looking at it from a distance […]' (462). Celia's presence does practical good for Dorothea, whilst at the same time her own desires are realised, consolidating her importance and necessity as part of the family unit, imparting her wisdom and innate knowledge of her sister to her, and providing comfort in her expression of truth. Celia also can express truthfully her feelings about Casaubon to Dorothea, that he '[…] was spiteful. I never did like him, and James never did […] and now he has behaved in this way.' (461) In providing a platform for honesty and consolation, the scene in chapter fifty also expresses Celia's desire to utilise her knowledge of her sister to comfort and protect her: 'Celia felt her advantage and was determined to use it. None of them knew Dodo as well as she did or knew how to manage her.' (458) Ultimately, it is Celia's intuitive knowledge and understanding of her sister that enables her to help Dorothea, through an expression of love. Celia's erotic desire is communicated and is ultimately achieved. For Dorothea, however, Celia's truthful actions express and reiterate the importance of a family connection, expressing *storge*: a love conveyed through familial affection.

Celia's provision of much-needed comfort for Dorothea, however, soon becomes stale, and 'after three months, Freshitt had become rather oppressive' (503).

Figure 1: Joseph Severn 17931879, The Mystic Marriage of St Catherine, Ruskin and the Old Masters, 2009©The Ruskin Library, Lancaster.

Eliot's narrative turns to religious connotations to represent Dorothea's unease, describing Dorothea at Freshitt as 'sit[ting] like a model for Saint Catherine, looking rapturously over Celia's baby' (503). Attention to the theological is drawn out again through this connotation to Celia as a Madonna figure, with Dorothea in her imagined role as Saint Catherine, watching over the mother and baby. In art, St Catherine is often depicted as watching the Madonna and infant: observing the Christian narratives of St Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380). Eliot, through referring to Dorothea as 'sitting like St Catherine,' alludes to a person sitting for an artist's impression, which would bring images such as *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* [Figure 1] to the mind of Victorian readers. Building upon her previous visual symbolism of violets (violets being one of the flowers associated with the Madonna), Eliot frames another image in the mind of the readers: that of sitting for a portrait. This application of a visual image through description ensures that readers experience a theological framework for both Dorothea, Saint Catherine, and Celia as the Madonna figure. Grazia Mangano Ragazzi states that, from a Roman Catholic point of view, 'Catherine's spirituality has its roots in the virtuous life and in obedience to the truth, which God has revealed to man and imprinted in his heart.'[37] The search for the truth not only resonates with Dorothea's character but also for her quest for desire. Meanwhile, Celia's desire for motherhood and to keep her family close to her, whilst echoing theological representations of the Madonna, is pictorially characterised through Eliot's description of Dorotha watching over Celia's baby, as Saint Catherine is also depicted through numerous theological images and works. Saint Catherine also is described as 'a mystic […] known for ecstasies and revelations, [who] put discretion […] at the core of her spirituality, thus becoming a real lover of the truth and a teacher of true freedom.'[38] In contrast, Celia, the matronly figure, is almost at odds with this concept of the watchful truth-seeker, being described as `the matron' (769).

Celia is eager to comprehend her life's desires: *eros*, for her, playing out in not a sexual way, but rather through her ambitions for a family. Dorothea, in contrast to her

[37] Grazia Mangano Ragazzi, 'St. Catherine of Siena: Discretion/Prudence as the Foundation of True Freedom', *The Catholic Social Science Review*, 24 (2019): 119–129, (p. 122).

[38] Grazia Mangano Ragazzi, 'St. Catherine of Siena: Discretion/Prudence as the Foundation of True Freedom', 119–129, (p. 119).

sister, is just beginning to realise her own desires in life after the passing of Casaubon and is now confident to do so without the aid and sanctuary of her sister's company. She makes the decision to return to Lowick and manage the estate, and so Celia's once comforting and truthful presence turns to quiet judgement when she discovers Dorothea is returning to Lowick: 'Celia raised her eyebrows with disappointment, and in her quiet unemphatic way shot a needle-arrow of sarcasm' (503). Celia's desire and purpose as a loving sister is now void, as she had aligned her desires to those of her sister. She has served Dorothea as a comforter and confidante, and now her mission has ended and the closeness she felt in understanding and consoling her sister also draws to a close.

Nevertheless, Celia does attempt to continue to 'influence Dorothea's mind', as she 'naturally felt more able to advise her childless sister' (769). In discovering her relationship with Ladislaw, Celia tries to dissuade Dorothea from embarking on any adventure that would cause harm. Her sister is determined to marry Will Ladislaw, however, a fact communicated in a tone 'that Celia had long learned to recognise' (770). Celia concedes to Dorothea, negating the sisterly influence that she once had over her. To add to Celia's concerns over Dorothea's new marriage, she is moving far away, and so with Dorothea's discovery of freedom, Celia's world of desires is made smaller by her departure from Middlemarch. Celia is already mourning the impeding loss of her sister and is concerned that she will not be able to see her. This uncertainty is reconciled in the *Finale* of the novel, as Sir James consents to 'a reconciliation with Dorothea and her husband' (784). The final statement concerning the reunion of the two sisters is as follows: 'Where women love each other, men learn to smother their mutual dislike' (784). Celia's love for Dorothea remains throughout, even though her desire to be a full and influential part in her life is, in the end, unfulfilled. *Eros*, for Celia, is something that is recognised but fleeting. She has her needs and desires met, but only by degrees.

Playing a Part: Rosamond Vincy's Erotic Journey

The theme of having one's desires met but only to a certain extent, is also prominent in other strands of the story in *Middlemarch*, such as that of Rosamond Vincy. Rosamond, I believe, is often mis-read as a selfish and one-dimensional character. Although her narrative of desire is very different from that of Celia Brooke, their ambitions relate to each other in the sense that they are only realised by degrees. Through my exploration of Rosamond's erotic journey, I explore the notion that conflict in her interwebbing 'mess' of desires forces her to act out the part of a beautiful woman. Her role in the storyline masks her true ambitions and myriad desires that are connected primarily with Tertius Lydgate.

Rosamond Vincy is often read as being a self-centred social climber, who follows her own desires and aspirations in *Middlemarch*, particularly those relating to social standing. This observation is made by Hodgson, among others. He introduces her as being 'extraordinarily self-centred and accomplished at getting her own way'.[39] My analysis of Rosamond is recuperative and dissents from much of what the narrative voice suggests her to be: vapid, selfish and morally limited. I stress that the representation of Rosamond as a morally-weak social-climber is a veneer that masks her desires but more importantly the anguish felt when she cannot fully achieve her ambitions. It is true that Rosamond's storyline presents her as an ambitious young woman and she stands up to her father, insisting that she will wed Lydgate: 'I never give up anything that I choose to do' (329). Her union goes against the wishes of her father, who feels that he has wasted his efforts in his daughter: 'What have you had such an education for, if you are to go and marry a poor man? It is a cruel thing for a father to see' (332). Her father's reaction, rather than cementing the reader's suspicions that Rosamond is marrying Lydgate for wealth, serves to highlight that she is marrying him to execute her own ambition: to be free of the town of Middlemarch. In the same section of the tale, however, it becomes clear that Lydgate sees Rosamond as his own possession: someone who will comply with his wishes and his way of life. The concept that Lydgate sees Rosamond as his property is evidenced prior to their union

[39] Peter C. Hodgson, *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot: The Mystery beneath the Real* (London: SCM Press, 2001), p. 113.

in his rejection of her father's demands, especially when he states: 'You are of age — and I claim you as mine' (329). Lydgate's reactions when Rosamond goes horse-riding, during a visit to visiting his uncle on their wedding-tour, further serves to highlight his view that Rosamond should be the compliant doting wife: 'Lydgate was more than hurt - he was utterly confounded that she had risked herself on a strange horse without referring the matter to his wish' (548). He is afraid that Rosamond will not make the wise wife that he desired her to become, as the narrative voice concerning Lydgate suggests:

> There was gathering within him an amazed sense of his powerlessness over Rosamond. His superior knowledge and mental force, instead of being, as he imagined, a shrine to consult on all occasions, was simply set aside on every practical question. He had regarded Rosamond's cleverness as precisely of the receptive kind which became a woman. He was now beginning to find out what that cleverness was- what was the shape into which it had run as into a close network- aloof and independent. […] Lydgate was astounded to find in numberless trifling matters, as well as in this last serious case of the riding, that affection did not make her compliant.' (549-550)

It is precisely Rosamond's wilful nature that does not make her compliant. She does not bend to every wish and whim of her husband. Instead, she holds her own ambitions, independent from those of her husband. Lydgate underestimates both her intelligence and her independence. He is not the first man to do so, as her father behaves in a similar way throughout her upbringing, sending her off to school so she could marry a rich man. Far from providing her with a sense of autonomy and liberation, Rosamond finds herself with a controlling husband who will not let her do what she desires.

Dismissing Rosamond's desires as self-serving does not do justice to the complexity of her character and the range of desires that shape her actions. Rosamond's web of desires includes a desire for travel, and, ultimately, a desire for freedom, away from the confines of the town. Desire, for Rosamond is complex, as her attraction towards Tertius Lydgate suggests. Like Rosamond, Lydgate represents someone with ambition, a character who wants more than Middlemarch can offer. He

is an intelligent young man, who is not from the town: a doctor no less, who is of good social standing and of a steady income and this is what attracts Rosamond to him. In Rosamond's narrative, *eros* presents itself in the desire for freedom from the perceived constraints of Middlemarch. For Rosamond, Lydgate represents someone who is different from the people of the town: she 'was tired of the faces and figures she had always been used to' (89). Lydgate is new, dashing, confident and different from those that she had known when young. Rosamond wishes to escape the narrow social confines of Middlemarch and longs to journey to other places. Lydgate provides an opportunity for her to alleviate the monotony of her upbringing.

More traditional, sexual connotations of *eros* can also be used as a lens through which to follow Rosamond's journey of desire. Daniel Wright situates her impulses alongside 'a more reflective and strategic interest that he [Lydgate] is a "man of family."'[40] Rosamond hopes for a familial life of her own, away from the suffocating environment provided by her parents and this opportunity is too good to pass up. Rosamond has deep feelings of affection towards Lydgate: a desire to build a family and home away from the confines of the town. Such notions of erotic desire as being romantic, therefore, only serve to situate Rosamond's desires up to point. It becomes clear from the outset that Rosamond has complex desires that do not comply with traditional notions of the erotic, and they extend far beyond her initial desire for Lydgate. The webbing of such desires, however, begin in her irrepressible love of Lydgate.

Rosamond's narrative has an erotic undercurrent that requires further scrutiny. Her education at Mrs Lemon's and knowledge of French Literature, in particular what was written '[earlier] than Racine', stirs erotic notions within her (410). Such a fantasy involves women who 'even after marriage, might take conquests and enslave men' (410). Rosamond attributes her lapse into the fantastical to having too much time on her hands: 'with a woman's whole mind and day to work on.' She inwardly remarks: 'How delightful to make captives from the throne of marriage with a husband as crown-prince by your side […]' (410). The realisation that she could take a lover other than her husband and the suggestion of inter-marital affairs at this point in the

[40] Wright, *Bad Logic: Reasoning about Desire in the Victorian Novel*, p. 129.

narrative serves to highlight Rosamond's underlying unhappiness. Rather than her mind being fixed on the notion of taking a lover, the fantasy of an affair offers an escape. The fantasy comes to an abrupt end, however, as the narrator insists: 'But Rosamond's romance turned at present chiefly on her crown-prince, and it was enough to enjoy his assured subjection' (410). Rosamond's lover is none other than her own husband, and although she dabbles in a sexually erotic fantasy, her desires are firmly directed towards Lydgate.

Although Rosamond's desires often involve sexual erotic love, they are entangled with other passions. In her narrative, erotic love is muddied with other motivations, recalling Wright's suggestion that desire is: 'our various passions messing together.'[41] Desires are not simplistic, as Wright notes, and are often entangled with many other passions. Cravings are often mixed up with other things, muddying the true feelings and thoughts of the individual. What, then, can be done to begin to untangle such desires from the mess? Wright suggests that such passions should be shared with others, which enables the 'airing [of] such desires at a 'common table.'[42] This analogy is particularly relevant, as the imagery of different desires 'mess[ing] together' as part of a 'common store' best describes the erotic undercurrent of *Middlemarch*.[43] Wright's comparison prompts the reader to regard Rosamond's complex desires further at a 'common table.'[44]

If we, the reader, can understand different concepts of desire presented through Rosamond's narrative, we can cease to view her as being selfish. Rosamond's complex desires are vividly laid out in the text itself. She upholds the notion that it is always better to be from a good stock, and have a good reputation as a family, 'It always makes a difference, though, to be of good family', said Rosamond, with a tone of decision which showed that she might have been happier if she had not been the daughter of a Middlemarch manufacturer' (92). Unhappy with her own position as 'the daughter of a Middlemarch manufacturer', Rosamond is tired of acting the part in the town's society. The passage also is indicative of Rosamond's keen desire to move away

[41] Wright, *Bad Logic: Reasoning about Desire in the Victorian Novel,* p. 130.

[42] Ibid, p. 130.

[43] Ibid, p. 130.

[44] Ibid, p. 130.

from Middlemarch, and her socially climbing, 'new money' family. I am not the first to appreciate that Rosamond's emotions and desires are complex, but few scholars have gone on to explore how Rosamond's 'acting out' masks the flux and complexity of desires bubbling within her. Molly Engelhardt, through exploring the language of flowers, addresses the complex nature of Rosamond's desires that are masked beneath a veneer of beauty:

> Eliot names Miss Vincy Rosamond (rose/love of the world), and the name fits the character: Rosamond is like a rose – beautiful, the object of desire – but her driving ambition and what fuels her attachment to Lydgate is her desire to travel and see the world. If Lydgate had paid attention to […] names in the lexicon of the language of flowers and their associated meanings, he would have […] spent more time analysing and deciphering the comments and behaviours of this seemingly superficial, but actually quite complex woman.[45]

Through her emphasis on the emblematic importance of flowers in literature, Engelhardt addresses the importance of names in Eliot's narrative and shows how the connotations associated which such names do not necessarily match the character in question. Unlike her namesake, the rose, Rosamond's complexities of desire far outweigh her beauty.

Rosamond's narrative presents a constant flux of desires: a desire to travel away from Middlemarch, a desire to have the love of a lifetime with Lydgate, and a desire not to be necessarily judged by her good looks. Such ambitions evoke Daniel's Wright's association that desires 'mess together': entangling themselves in this instance in Rosamond.[46] Her ambitions are also reflective of Coakley's description of the erotic as 'a tether of connected desires'[47], but significantly highlight the problematic nature of entangled desires: 'excess in any one of these areas will tend inexorably to cause trouble in the others.'[48] Rosamond's life is one of excess: extreme beauty acted out and upon by herself, an disproportionate need to be free of Middlemarch, and finally an

[45] Engelhardt, 'The Language of Flowers in the Victorian Knowledge Age', 136–160, (pp. 151-2).

[46] Wright, *Bad Logic: Reasoning about Desire in the Victorian Novel*, p. 130.

[47] Coakley, *The New Asceticism,* p. 8.

[48] Ibid, p. 8.

excessive desire to be loved for herself. Such excesses ultimately throw her marriage out of kilter as Lydgate also engages in excesses: mainly unnecessary spending beyond his own (and his wife's) means, to sustain his marriage.

Rosamond's desires, ultimately, like her physical being, are seemingly confined in Middlemarch with little opportunity to escape the physical and mental space that is holding her tight. Another spanner in the love-works of her marriage, however, is that Lydgate is in debt, as Mr Vincy observes: 'I can see Lydgate is making a mess of his practice, and getting into debt too, by what I hear. I shall have Rosamond coming to me with a pretty tale one of these days. But they'll get no money from me' (535). Trapped financially and geographically, Rosamond's ambition is repressed. Later in the narrative, when discussing a newly engaged couple, she alludes to her own feelings of entrapment, 'the terribly inflexible relation of marriage had lost its charm of encouraging delightful dreams' (621). What freedom she wished to gain, was taken away through the inflexibility of her marriage and the discoveries that she desired to make never materialised. For Rosamond the union of marriage brings uncertainty and instability, where her desires remain unfulfilled. Her journey of *eros* never fully materialises.

An 'ordinary sinner'? Mary Garth's Pragmatic Desires

For Rosamond's childhood companion, Mary Garth, however, there appears to be scope for the fulfilment of desire. Her ambitions are not sexually erotic but derive from a sense of emotional stability built with Rosamond's brother, Fred. A web of interconnected desires emerges in her narrative, as she is driven by the search for stability: through work, building a relationship with Fred and achieving financial independence. In Mary's story, physical descriptions are overtly at odds with her own demeanour. Like Rosamond, she uses her physical appearance to mask her ambitions. A peripheral character in *Middlemarch*'s plot, Mary is often overlooked in literary debate, a myriad of desires driving her own narrative journey, which require further examination.

The importance of Mary Garth's narrative in *Middlemarch* remains largely underexplored. As Nicole Coonrant observes: 'no one bothers about Mary. Is she so plain that we fail to notice her?'[49] Building upon Coonrant's observations about Mary Garth and through linking such observations to the pursuit of desire, I will demonstrate how 'plain' Mary is the unexplored key to Eliot's narrative of *eros* and suggest how her ambitions may yet be fulfilled. Desire, for Mary, takes on a practical and pragmatic role. She longs to be recognised and respected, and to have a companion equal to her affections. For Mary, desire is not sexual but is a combination of a myriad of other factors. As Daniel Wright questions in *Bad Logic*: 'How, indeed, does a novel represent in concrete terms those troublesome borderline cases of psychic life in which erotic impulse and reasoned ethical reflection seem difficult to disentangle?'[50] For Mary, an outlying character in *Middlemarch*, aspirations are often depicted as a reasoned reflection which are very much tangled up with her immediate reflexes: often of vexation or frustration. Her dissatisfaction is gradually alleviated through her long-standing relationship and companionship with Fred Vincy, a constant in Mary's storyline. The relationship results in a behind-the-scenes marriage alluded to in the *Finale* of the novel. And for this, the reader is grateful, as Ariana Reilly Codr writes:

> In cases where the marriage itself is shadowed by a whisper of something like disappointment (Dorothea's marriage to Will Ladislaw, for instance), minor characters who orient differently may be, when present, even more welcome […] In wise and subtle manipulations of plot and character like these, the nineteenth-century novel shows its readers the same compassionate sympathy it counsels.[51]

The eventual marriage of Mary Garth to Fred Vincy serves, therefore, to offset the failed marriage plots of the novel and shows the readers 'the same, compassionate sympathy it counsels.' The contrast of Mary's narrative to those unhappy endings is

[49] Nicole Coonradt, 'Writing Mary Garth: Locating Middle ground Among Female Characters', *George Eliot -George Henry Lewes Studies*, 62/63 (Sep 2012), 16- 33, (p. 18).

[50] Wright, *Bad Logic: Reasoning about Desire in the Victorian Novel*, p. 129.

[51] Ariana Reilly Codr, 'After Ever After: The Marriage Plot's Farewell to Its Reader', *New Literary History*, (2019): 197–218, (p. 216).

also observed by Coonradt, who suggests that Mary goes against the grain of societal tropes in Middlemarch:

> In a novel concerned variously with both marriage and figurative language, in Eliot's Mary Garth we read the marriage of the oppositional societal types in both Dorothea and Rosamond, where a 'new Theresa' may indeed have a hand in reform, especially in her unacknowledged role as a writer.[52]

Mary's happy ending, therefore, is largely brought about by pursuing her own senses and desires, not just through her marriage to Fred Vincy. Her own desires eventually aid her in becoming a 'New Theresa': one who is published of her own accord and through her own determination.

In Mary's tale, close bonds with the Vincy family serve as windows of insight on her own desires and ambitions. Rosamond and Mary share a close bond: `they had many memories in common and liked very well to talk in private' (101). Unlike the socially adept Rosamond, her long-standing and closest friend since childhood, Mary is not concerned with looks and appearance and 'high society' but rather a person's demeanour and soul. This stems from the influence of her parents, as alluded to by the positive narrative surrounding the Garth family: '[they] are all presented in a favourable light by the narrator throughout the novel. They are […] never prone to gossip – […] being especially significant in a loose-lipped community like Middlemarch.'[53] This characteristic that surrounds the Garth family is of particular significance and, as Jennifer Judge suggests, it influences Mary's demeanour:

> Enacting Eliot's ideal of the mild, humorous satirist, Mary Garth, alongside the narrator, gently ridicules human egoism in her "study of provincial life" […] Importantly […] her habitual sympathy prevents her from Juvenalian pessimism: "Her shrewdness had a streak of satiric bitterness continually renewed and never carried utterly out of sight, except by a strong current of

[52] Coonradt, 'Writing Mary Garth: Locating Middle ground Among Female Characters', 16- 33, (p. 16).

[53] Ibid,16- 33, (p. 18).

> gratitude towards [others]" (227, 104—05) […] Mary uses sympathy both to refine her satire and to save her character from feminist misanthropy.[54]

As Coonradt also suggests, Mary's satire alludes to Eliot's narrative of 'wit and wisdom - a sign of intelligence.'[55] In the sub-narrative of the plot, apparently in the shadows of Dorothea and Rosamond, Mary is markedly different from the other female characters of Middlemarch. Mary is cut from a different narrative cloth. Her storyline displays not only her wit and wisdom, but also her desires for equality in relationships, and eventually her needs, culminating in the publication of her own children's story (779).

Mary Garth's appearance reflects her inward self. She is described as having 'the aspect of an ordinary sinner' but 'her curly black hair was rough and stubborn' (104). The descriptions of Mary are dense in this section of the narrative and require unpacking to ascertain their true significance. Having the 'aspect of an ordinary sinner', for instance, draws upon more than one connotation. The description could refer to her plain appearance, which is commented on in the same space by Eliot, but it also highlights a theological connection to Mary Garth herself, as being not only an ordinary person, but perhaps an ordinary Christian, or more specifically one who is aware of her strengths and weaknesses, her 'virtues […] temptations and vices' (104). Mary wears a headscarf, covering most of her unruly dark hair. This is not only an indication of modesty but again serves a subtle theological nod to the covering of hair in the temple or Church as a sign of humility and purity. Mary's 'rough and stubborn' nature, therefore, is veiled behind a headscarf (104). Such allusion to veiling one's rough or course nature marks Mary out as being different to her peers within the narrative, but is also misleading as it is juxtaposed by the description of her demeanour. The plot describes Mary's temperament as particularly open:

> She neither tried to create illusions, nor indulged in them for her own behoof, and when she was in a good mood she had humour enough in her to laugh at herself. (104)

[54] Jennifer Judge, 'The Gendering of Habit in George Eliot's "Middlemarch"', *Victorian Review*, 39,1 (Spring 2013), 158-181, (p. 169).

[55] Coonradt, 'Writing Mary Garth: Locating Middle ground Among Female Characters', 16-33, (p. 19).

Although a physical precursor would suggest Mary Garth as being a rough young woman, her inward virtues suggest a plainness that is refreshing and truthful. She is not 'indulged' and has a sense of humour that stands firm when she is in a good mood. Mary, in short, is as plain and truthful as her appearance would initially suggest.

Mary's truthfulness, however, becomes a double-edged sword. She doesn't appear to suffer fools gladly. For instance, when Rosamond asks her what she had been doing lately, she answers: 'Oh, minding the house […] pretending to be amiable and contented – learning to have a bad opinion of everybody' (105). Through observing life at the house, Mary learns to observe the people for whom she cares, and in so doing observes the negative aspects of humanity in addition to the good. In serving, Mary also obtains an objectiveness that enables her to see things as they are – through a realistic lens. She would also be privy to the private conversations and actions of others and would be in the unique position of not taking part in the conversation but rather overhearing it, and often people's true reflections. Mary, as a result, is quick to learn the ways of the world and the opinions of others.

Rather than chasing young men or seeking out marriage, Mary occupies herself with employment: a desire to keep busy and to be useful. When work opportunities dwindle, she resolves to teach at the school at York (374). Although teaching is not a passion of Mary's, she recognises that she has a natural ability for it, but is ultimately not prepared to take up the role. Coonradt suggests that, 'Perhaps it is not only that Mary wishes not to teach, but that she wishes even less to be forced into teaching', indicating the negative opinions of governesses in the Victorian era. Coonradt concludes that this is 'another firm move on Mary's part and not what society tells her to be'.[56] In the end, Mary does not take the position: she instead stays with Mrs Farebrother, the vicar's mother, and becomes close to the Farebrothers, as good family friends. Mr Farebrother reflects on Mary's natural ability to teach children, towards the narrative's end, remarking that:

> 'A delightful young woman is Miss Garth,' said Mr Farebrother, […] 'I like her countenance. We must not always ask for beauty, when a good God has seen

[56] Coonradt, 'Writing Mary Garth: Locating Middle ground Among Female Characters', 16- 33 (p. 26).

> fit to make an excellent woman without it. I put good manners first, and Miss Garth will know how to conduct herself in any station.' (605)

Well-mannered, and able to turn her hand to hard work that she may not necessarily enjoy, Mary Garth puts her own ambitions on hold to allow others to follow theirs. This seems to echo Coakley's theological observation based on the teachings of Gregory of Nyssa, that humanity's erotic desires are the key to giving back to the community- the glue of society.[57] Mary's pragmatic nature ensures that her advice is followed by those close to her, such as Fred and Rosamond Vincy.

Fred and Mary share a special bond; one that has existed since their early childhood. Mary's narrative of *eros*, therefore, is largely conveyed through her bond with Fred Vincy, having been part of her life from an early age. The pair have a lifelong fondness, often coming to the defence of the other if they feel that they have been wronged. Rosamond accuses Mary of always siding with Fred: 'You always take Fred's part' (107). Throughout their narrative, a theological undertone is present, often clouding or hindering the progression of their relationship, as Fred is looking to become a clergyman. Mary and Rosamond discuss Fred's suitability for the clergy: Rosamond becoming vexed that Fred is not taking his theological studies seriously. As Fred has vowed to not be a vicar, Mary believes he is in the right, prompting a response from Rosamond: 'How can you say he is quite right, Mary? I thought you had more sense of religion' (107). When questioned by Rosamond as to why she always takes Fred's part, she responds, 'well, he always takes mine' (108).

Mary strongly hints at her affection for Fred throughout, although in her practical way, she does not often speak of love. During one private conversation about the nature of love and marriage, Fred observes: 'You know better, Mary. Women don't love men for their goodness', with Mary responding, 'Perhaps not. But if they love them, they never think them bad' (129). Mary is very fond of Fred, as were her parents and family. Such fondness is almost familial, representative of another type of theological love, *storge:* and there are markers of kindness and affection throughout their relationship. For Fred, though, there was a long-standing desire to marry Mary: 'Fred at six years old thought her the nicest girl in the world, making her his wife

[57] See Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, p. 6.

which he had cut from an umbrella' (21). Fred later reminds Mary of this, when declaring his long-standing love for her (543).

Mary's desire, and ultimately *eros*, is firmly connected with forgiveness and this is particularly the case with how she views Fred. After he finds himself in debt and requesting money from Mary and her parents, Fred is convinced that Mary hates him: 'I know you will never think well of me anymore. You will think me a liar' (237). Mary expresses her displeasure at Fred putting the financial security of her family at stake, quipping: 'Should you think all that pleasant enough if I forgave you?' (237). The language of capital and monetary loss permeates the scene and the resulting narrative, as Mary, through talking with Fred, ultimately hints at her forgiveness of him: 'And with so much good in your disposition, Fred, you might be worth a great deal' (240). Mary links financial worth with spiritual work, referring to the good in Fred's disposition. Fred may be egotistical, but he is not unkind and gradually comes to understand the pain and damage that his youthful actions have had on those close to him. The constant affections that Mary (sometimes unknowingly) held for Fred, therefore, are indicative of a practical and pragmatic form of desire. For Mary, *eros* is rooted in the need to be financially and emotionally stable: a partnership in which the combination of the two parties would ensure an equal amount of support in a potential marriage.

A marriage between Fred and Mary eventually occurs behind the scenes of the story, being mentioned only in the *Finale* of the novel. This is significant in the narrative of *Middlemarch*, as it is an unconventional marriage plot. Eliot challenges the nature and purpose of a marriage: reimagining it not as a romanticised gesture but an act of kindness, affection and partnership. This echoes Christian concepts of the purpose of earthly love and devotion: partnership, companionship, and ultimately child-rearing (781). Peter Hodgson states that in the *Finale*, Fred and Mary 'achieved a solid mutual happiness in marriage.' Hodgson continues 'Mary wrote a little book for the boys that was well-received.'[58] Here, Hodgson alludes to Mary being an author although he states that she wrote solely for her sons, and not to fulfil her own ambition to be an author.

In the *Finale*, Mary's role as an eventual mother is addressed, writing a 'little book for her boys' (779). Mary, although not forthcoming as a teacher to her three

[58] Hodgson, *Theology in the Fiction of George Eliot,* p. 118.

boys, is regarded with fondness by her sons, as 'they were quite forward enough when they went to school; perhaps because they had liked nothing so much as well as being with their mother' (781). Mary continues to pursue love practically, teaching her sons to be confident and forthright and to follow their own ambitions. Mary's ability to publish, fulfilling her own literary desires, is not to be overlooked; as Coonradt remarks:

> Perhaps the most important and overlooked aspect of Mary's "Excellence" and noteworthy intelligence is the fact that she ends up writing and publishing. […] Eliot quietly offers us Mary, who like herself, takes up the pen in a male-dominated world of letters.[59]

Coonradt does not go on to discuss the fact that the people of Middlemarch were quick to attribute the writing of the book to the university-educated Fred. This is also an important consideration when regarding the short scene explaining that Mary's work had been published by the local publisher. People generally have trouble assuming that a woman has written a book or publication: 'letters' were automatically attributed to men. Coonradt suggests in the conclusion of her paper that Mary Garth reflects Eliot's own experience, not just her given name of Mary Ann[60], the significance of which is drawn together in the *Finale*. Through her domestic methods and her own attributes, Mary does achieve the object of her own desires, after all, representing one of the 'Many Theresas' (3) of *Middlemarch*. 'Mary can be thought of as a New Theresa for her participation in reforming "an imperfect social state."'[61] *Eros* is drawn out pragmatically through Mary's storyline and cements the idea that love between partners is not just romantic but practical, forgiving, and full of compromises.

[59] Coonradt, 'Writing Mary Garth: Locating Middle ground Among Female Characters', 16- 33, (pp. 23-24).

[60] Ibid,16-33, (p. 26).

[61] Ibid, 16-33, (p. 27).

Conclusion

As we read through the *Finale*, a conclusion is drawn for the heroines of *Middlemarch*. The reader is offered a sense of closure and a chance to reflect on whether character's desires have been met. As to the 'Many Theresa's' (3) of *Middlemarch*: the reader is left to question whether the journey of their own desires is ultimately one of disappointment and unfulfillment. As the concluding narrative itself points out:

> Some set out, like Crusaders of old, with a glorious equipment of hope and enthusiasm, and get broken by the way, wanting patience with each other and the world. (778)

Even at the novel's epilogue, there is some sense that ambitions are met, but only to a point and the 'equipment of hope and enthusiasm' has worn thin. It is evident that the town of Middlemarch is unable to fulfil the many female desires: only some aspirations are achieved in the novel, and perhaps the best readers can anticipate is a sense of balance in their pursuits. Some may consider that the *Finale* provides a 'happy' ending, but I would suggest that 'comfortable' is a better adjective to describe the situations of characters such as Dorothea, Celia, Rosamond, and Mary.

How exactly do the women end up with *comfortable* situations? What I mean in my application of the term *comfortable* is that a sense of balance in each character's pursuit of *eros* is met. My use of *comfortable* echoes Sarah Coakley's message that if any one of our desires reaches an imbalance, then it causes us problems.[62] This may not necessarily be the fulfilment that the character initially wishes for, nor indeed the reader. Dorothea 'settles' down and makes a life for herself with her new husband Will Ladislaw but is in regular correspondence with her uncle and her sister, and they visit regularly (782-3). Dorothea and Will are comfortable and are 'bound to each other by a love stronger than any impulses which could have marred it' (782). Contented and mutually supporting of one another, the pair are living comfortably, even if Dorothea's true passion — the thirst for knowledge — was set aside to make way for her new life. Mary Garth and Fred Vincy remain together after a tumultuous courtship, with Fred crediting Farebrother as the person who brought him and Mary

[62] See Coakley, *The New Asceticism,* p. 8.

together. Theirs was a contented ending, as 'these two […] achieved a solid mutual happiness' (778). A solid sense of happiness or contentment is perhaps the best outcome that ordinary people can hope to achieve. For Rosamond, her story continues to be one of many peaking and troughing desires, that plateau somewhat throughout her marriage. Lydgate, however, 'died when he was only fifty', (781) and Rosamond finds that she re-marries contentedly. This time, she marries 'an elderly and wealthy physician, who took kindly to her four children' (781) and is treated well without the uncertainty of her previous marriage. She still resides in Middlemarch, however, but no longer feels the need to escape its confines: she finally has a sense of calm in her married life.

Celia, unlike the other women, has a final tale that is an extension of that we are introduced to in the main text of *Middlemarch*. She remains married to Sir James and lives in contentment. Arguably, therefore, Celia's aspirations are the ones that are met most completely, and she sees more of her beloved sister and her new husband. Her desires are elevated in the *Finale*, when she is given news that her sister has had a son (783). She begs Sir James to go and see the child, and he agrees, ensuring that all parties are reconciled, despite his misgivings about Ladislaw. This reconciliation fulfils Celia's most overwhelming desire: for her family to be close and involved in her sister's contentment. For Celia, it truly is a very happy ending, firmly fixed in her 'supporting' role of others.

Eros, and what it means theologically by the close of the novel, is different to what it means at its opening. The *Prelude* alludes to intense feelings of eros, spirituality, and the plight of St Theresa: whereas the *Finale* addresses a calmer sense of the erotic. *Eros* is managed and achieved through degrees in the character's day-to-day lives:

> A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming conventual life […] but we insignificant people, with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas, some of which may provide a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we know. (784)

Theologically, this encapsulates not only the possibility and the need for sacrifice, but also a 'mess' of desires, as Wright would put it, addressing a plethora of connected

ambitions, and aspirations.[63] The teachings of Gregory of Nyssa are still relevant when examining *eros* theologically and Sarah Coakley is correct to reintroduce these to a modern audience. Such a shift in the focus and purpose of desire allows the reader to consider *eros* in a new way and apply it to the twenty-first century audience as 'insignificant people'. Coakley maintains that humanity, through its acts and words, can put erotic desire to use, giving back to the community, requiring a sort of self-sacrifice.[64] An understanding of how desire can be encountered theologically, therefore, results in a renewed understanding of the erotic and what it means for the spiritual strands of each characters' narrative: their journey of *eros*. Erotic desire is no longer just a pursuit for the bedroom: it sits within the web of intermingled desires, guiding individual journeys, which ultimately lead to good deeds. *Middlemarch* becomes a microcosm for addressing ambitions and their imbalances. Through the many narratives presented by Eliot, the reader can glimpse aspects of their own ambitions and look to the unfulfillment of their own erotic journeys.

The role of theological love in re-imagining desire and ambition, although not overtly stated by Eliot, becomes the background framework through which the readership views the `message of her novels'. Through acts of kindness, compassion, hospitality and even ambitions, Eliot's narratives present the reader with not only a renewed understanding of *eros* but the myriad meanings and applications of love. What is love? Love, for Eliot, is meaningless unless it is put forth in actions. Whether by accident or design, Eliot's narratives link with Christian connotations of love. Theologically, love is compassion, kindness, sacrifice – all linked irretrievably to the divine. *Agape* must be replicated in humanity for this highest, universal love to ever be achieved. For *agape* to be achieved fully, however, it must be expressed through humanity's actions towards one another, human desires must materialise. *Eros*, and the action of giving back through the love experienced in relationships, helps to pave the way to a universal love and the sacrifice of selfishness. The ultimate love can only ever be achieved through degrees, because although the reader is human, as Eliot continually demonstrates, they are not divine. Christians can follow the way of Christ

[63] Wright, *Bad Logic: Reasoning about Desire in the Victorian Novel*, p. 130.

[64] Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, p.6. See Gregory of Nyssa's assertion that our desires are the "glue of society", as we give back into society through our erotic desires.

but cannot ever fully achieve the love of Jesus. For it is only Christ who is both fully human and divine.

6: Conclusion - Towards a Renewed View of the Role of Theological Love in Eliot's Novels

This thesis has explored the treatment of love in Eliot's novels through a specific Christian lens. The Greek terms, *philia*, *storge*, *eros*, and *agape* have been examined along with the Latin term, *caritas,* to identify different types of love and show how that love is expressed on a human level. Studying these forms of love in the works of Eliot reveals how she conveys the lives of 'ordinary Christians' in her fiction. Through the thesis, I have not just made a claim about why readers should pay attention to the theological strands of love, but, rather, shown how expressions of kindness, sympathy and compassion are irretrievably linked to Christian ideas about the expression of love. Such expressions of love must involve action, bringing Christian ideals to fruition. Eliot's novels aid the reader to identify with and recognise such forms of love through a domesticated backdrop, emphasising the importance of lived religious experience. The meaning of love in Eliot's writing is shaped by individual circumstances, and her treatment of love is relational and situational. As I have argued, this approach can be seen as a continuation and development of the Christian tradition. Eliot is a theological nominalist rather than a theological realist, but this does not mean her work constitutes a break with Christianity.

One consequence of Eliot's particular Christian inheritance is her opposition to consequentialist ethics. Exploring this opposition, Patrick Fessebecker considers the concept of akrasia, the failure to act as one thinks is right.[1] Eliot's novels are full of characters who do the wrong thing. As Fessenbecker explains:

> Eliot's thinking about akrasia and its causes is not an isolated project, but part of a broader analysis of the structure of the self closely connected to her overall thinking about the nature of sympathy and the process of moral deliberation.[2]

[1] See Patrick Fessenbecker, 'The Fragility of Rationality: George Eliot on Akrasia and the Law of Consequences', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 29.2 (2021), 275–91, (p. 276).

[2] Fessenbecker, 'The Fragility of Rationality: George Eliot on Akrasia and the Law of Consequences', 275–91, (p. 277).

Eliot's views on sympathy and the 'process of moral deliberation' were of particular note 'at the beginning of her novelistic career.'[3] The novels *Adam Bede*, *Silas Marner* and *Romola* all contain versions of akrastic problems. In *Silas Marner*, ' […] in the character of Godfrey Cass, Eliot shows us one key akratic action, [..]and the life-changing consequences that follow.'[4] *Adam Bede* and *Romola* both then build on this premise: '*Adam Bede* shows how the rational capacity in question is really the ability to sympathise with others, and *Romola* shows how consequentialist action without sympathy makes akrasia particularly likely.'[5] In short, Eliot is demonstrating the negative impact that a lack of sympathy perpetuates. To conclude his point about the significance of akrasia in Eliot's earlier fiction, Fessenbecker summarises that: 'What the akratic agents who suffer from the law of consequences ultimately demonstrate, then, is the kind of irrational heteronomy that comes with a selfish failure to sympathize with others.'[6]

Eliot's opposition to consequentialism can be traced to her anti-utilitarian approach and disagreement with the thinking of John Stuart Mill (1806-73). Mill 'was the dominant figure of mid-Victorian moral philosophy and intellectual life, and the figure against whom Eliot developed much of her thought.'[7] Eliot had a unique analysis of 'the moral psychology involved, in which the calculation of probable consequences actively hinders moral awareness.'[8] The argument of this thesis has also served to highlight Eliot's analysis that such a consequentialist approach impedes moral awareness and actions. Eliot objects 'to the basic art of deciding what to do by comparing the contributions to overall welfare made by various alternatives.'[9] By focussing on the collective good, the benefit for the individual or smaller groups of individuals falls away and a light cannot be shone on all the moral implications of a given situation. For Eliot, the best course of action is to consider others through sympathy, altruism, but above all through acts of love. These attributes necessitate the

[3] Fessenbecker, 'The Fragility of Rationality: George Eliot on Akrasia and the Law of Consequences', 275–291, (p. 277).

[4] Ibid, 275–291, (p. 277).

[5] Ibid, 275–291, (p. 277).

[6] Ibid, 275–291, (p. 277).

[7] Ibid, 275–291, (p. 285).

[8] Ibid, 275–291, (p. 285).

[9] Ibid, 275–291, (p. 289).

ability to empathise 'selflessly with other people, a capacity that makes it possible for us to look past the distraction and impulse and act on the basis of goals that genuinely matter.'[10] To act selflessly is the ultimate expression of *agape*.

Love can be expressed through acts of kindness and compassion towards others. 'Loves' such as *philia*, *caritas*, and *storge* highlight the importance of kindness as an indicator of such love. An act of kindness is not necessarily synonymous with the word 'love' but it does indicate that love is present through human interaction. Compassion goes beyond mere kindness, as it involves acts of sympathy, and empathetic feelings towards others. These actions reflect elements of the ideal, unconditional love that *agape* describes, and Eliot explores the complex nature of these elements through her narratives. Humans can feel sympathy for others, but it is only through putting such emotions into action that the other person can respond to acts of sympathy towards them.

Acts of sympathy and fellow feeling are strongly expressed through the storyline of *Adam Bede*. In particular, the narrative of Dinah Morris highlights the very human manifestations of *philia* and *caritas*, through an overtly theological lens. Dinah pulls the attention of the reader towards God's love by putting the teachings of Jesus into action. Through indicating the very human nature of Christ, Dinah also alludes to how humans should act toward one another through an exulted form of love, exemplified in Christ. The community of Hayslope, when read through a Christian theological lens, displays numerous aspects of *philia* and *caritas*. Through fellow-feeling and acts of fellowship, the community are not only accepting of Dinah as an outsider (both geographical and theological) but encourage her to engage sympathetically with the community. Dinah's sympathy is exemplified in the narrative through her pastoral care.

Dinah's approach is also reflective of what Jeff Keuss refers to as 'the face of Christ.' Keuss's work focuses on the embodiment of Christ-like qualities through literary representation. Following on from Keuss's work, my thesis has highlighted recent work on theological symbolism and embodiment in literature, with an emphasis on the Victorian turn to a feminine view of God. Christ-like virtues of sympathy and compassion became synonymous with feminine attributes in Eliot's novels, as Gail

[10] Fessenbecker, 'The Fragility of Rationality: George Eliot on Akrasia and the Law of Consequences', 275–291, (p. 289).

Turley Houston stresses. A human-centric view of Christian virtues is continually at the fore of Eliot's novel communities, and this links back to a Feuerbachian influence. Houston writes: 'Viewing love as the premier emotion, she [Eliot] concludes that *caritas* is "essentially feminine" and that any belief in love must acknowledge that the highest form of godhood was feminine.'[11] *Caritas*, and the loving action of charity are central in Eliot's fiction, and viewing these attributes not only as essentially human but also as essentially feminine, assists the reader in relating to Eliot's female characters - in particular Dinah Morris.

It is Dinah who comforts Lisbeth Bede in her grief, and ensures that her sons, Seth and Adam are also spiritually well. Dinah takes care of her own aunt who resides in the village and looks out for Hetty, a younger cousin who often finds herself in some sort of trouble. By the time the novel draws to its conclusion, Dinah's pastoral aptitude is pushed to its limits, as she attempts to spiritually console an incarcerated Hetty. My theory surrounding *philia,* drawing upon the argument of Hauerwas and Coles indicates the centrality of immanence for Eliot's fiction and the importance of a God who is involved in everyday life. This is especially true in the case of Dinah. My argument in the chapter on *Adam Bede* also expanded on Marilyn Orr's observation that Eliot conveyed personal messages of love and charity in her narratives. Through acts of *caritas*, and through almost universal and unbiased acts of compassion, Dinah attempts to make the emotionally broken Hetty a spiritual whole: at one with herself, ready to meet her maker, as her death sentence is carried out. Dinah does not fully achieve her goal of consoling Hetty, but she does spark within Hetty an understanding of the love that is felt for her, prompting her to sacrifice her physical body to find absolution for her infanticide. Hetty's realisation of the love expressed towards her indicates the validity of examining love theologically — that love is reciprocal and requires a response. Dinah's acts of sympathy and love ultimately lead the reader towards a selfless compassion that appreciates the value of visiting and consoling the prisoner. Ultimately, Hetty is not hanged but deported to Australia, and there remains hope for her at the novel's close: the hope of a new start, a chance to be born again into a new country and new life. Sympathy involves recognising pain and suffering in others, relating it back to an event in our own, lived experience. Love, such as that

[11] Gail Turley Houston, *Victorian Women Writers, Radical Grandmothers, and the Gendering of God*. (Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2012), p. 123.

demonstrated through acts of *philia* and *caritas,* enables the reader to recognise acts of sympathy and understanding as acts of love. Such actions require a receptive response, and in a number of texts Eliot is interested in exploring what happens when this sort of reaction is absent.

As my analysis of passages in *Silas Marner* has suggested, *agape* goes beyond mere obligation to welcome an outsider. Not only is *agape* an act of kindness and compassion but it is also an act of the deepest form of love. Such an action involves an element of self-sacrifice and selflessness to better understand, and, more importantly, for the act of love to be received by the outsider. Silas only understood love in the deepest sense of the act, through being able to be receptive of selfless acts of kindness from characters such as Dolly and Mr Macey. Ultimately, it takes the love exemplified by his adoptive daughter, Eppie, for Silas to realise the overwhelming power of the *agape* he had experienced in the Raveloe community.

The argument of my second chapter built upon the work of Catherine Robson by considering the importance of recitation and the spoken word in storytelling. My position is that oral storytelling provided a space through which small acts of love could be received by the outsider (through listening and responding). Examining the storytelling tradition through the lens of nineteenth-century domestic readership ensured that the concepts of 'goodness' and 'good deeds', posited by Lori Branch, were further explored theologically. This was in no small part due to the nineteenth-century readership adapting and changing in a domestic setting where theological works were readily engaged with.[12] Examining love through the specific lens of *agape*, enables the reader to engage with the concept of hospitality towards an outsider and welcome the stranger.

The most exulted love in the Christian tradition, *agape*, involves an act of self-sacrifice to show how compassion can be put into action, and how humans can aspire to a universal love. Such an example was provided through the reception of Silas as the 'stranger' in the Rainbow Tavern. In this part of my discussion, I built upon the work of Rae Greiner and Kristen Pond, examining the role of sympathy in *Silas Marner* and its relation to acts of Christian love. As humans, we all have the capacity to put love into action through being hospitable towards strangers, but it requires an involvement of

[12] See David Bebbington's perspectives on Evangelical culture and its values, discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5 of this thesis.

self: a strong commitment to demonstrate *agape* love. The role of covenants and promises was also addressed under the 'bow' of the tavern. Building upon the observations of Efraim Sicher, I demonstrated how a covenant could be re-examined to show *agape* among humans. For *agape* to be realised, an act of selflessness is required: an individual needs to sacrifice a part of their own selfishness to recognise the 'other.' In the Rainbow Tavern: this meant listening and receiving the story of others and acting upon the sympathy felt towards the stranger.

Through the windows of insight that the thesis has opened, it is clear that acts of love cannot simply be acts of obligation. The analysis surrounding the family narratives in *The Mill on the Floss*, in particular, question whether familial love (*storge*) is carried out through obligation to one's family. What this chapter ultimately concluded, is that *storge* is not only carried out through acts of kindly affection (following St Paul's teaching in his letters to the Romans), but that it often involves a promise or covenant.

In my third chapter, I discussed and expanded theories of lineage and obligation in nineteenth-century Britain as expounded by such as Boyd Hilton, Sophie Gilmartin and Rosemary O'Day, Maggie's contemplation that she should practice patience and be kind to her family, all of whom love her, leads her not only to act on the basis of her sympathetic nature, but on the basis of the kindness she finds within herself: towards a more loving outcome. At the novel's close, the reader is drawn to an explicit act of self-sacrifice when the Floss floods unexpectedly. Maggie expresses her love to her brother, Tom, who is caught in the flood alongside her. Through the episode, she sacrifices herself for the possibility that Tom may live, to inherit the family mill, but also to take care of their mother and aunts. Love, as this thesis has examined, involves acts of self-sacrifice. Acts of love are shown to be painful and difficult, exposing that even the most exulted forms of love have their human limitations and occasionally point to our own mortality. The darker side of love was examined in the thesis. In the context of *The Mill on the Floss*, we might think about the novel's tumultuous end and its notes of self-sacrifice. By undergoing a transformation, and living the Way of the Cross, Maggie's altruism leads her to make the ultimate sacrifice - that of herself - to find absolution in the eyes of Christ.

A Christian understanding of *eros* has also provided a renewed reading of desire in M*iddlemarch.* In such a reimagining of the erotic, my analysis utilised medieval Christian concepts of *eros*, penned by Gregory of Nyssa. Following the work of

modern theologian Sarah Coakley on desire and concepts of the self, I explained how desire involves a worldly and cultural awareness of the individual. *Eros* not only involves inward desire, but that desire being put into action, and back into the world. The expression of *eros*, as demonstrated through the example Coakley utilises of Gregory of Nyssa, is a reconfiguration of *eros* as the diversion of our own desires and ambitions. The love felt by married couples is repurposed and, through acts of selflessness, such love is then 'given back' to the community. In *Middlemarch*, alternative avenues of desire are shown through not only Dorothea, the novel's protagonist, but also through Celia Brooke, Rosamond Vincy and Mary Garth. The chapter on *eros* focusses on the underlying desires of such female characters. The concepts of desire and *eros* are framed theologically in the opening of the novel through the mention and exploration of Saint Theresa of Avilla, who had ecstatic visons of God and Christ and was filled with the desire to put love into action.

For Mary Garth, the desire for family, and to teach her children, was her driving force. Mary was even able to write a children's book. For others, such as Rosamond, their desires were fulfilled, but only to an extent, exposing the limitations of *eros*. Rosamond had always desired to leave Middlemarch. Unfortunately, her new husband needed to reside in the village for his new job as the local doctor, marginalising her need to move away. Rosamond chooses to move away herself, freeing herself from her marriage, and from the confines of her home village. She remarries and has children of her own, fulfilling most of what she desired, away from the confines of 'narrow' society. Celia, on the other hand, desires to be a good sister to Dorothea in her times of trouble, truly putting her love and desire into the world. However, Ceilia can only achieve this to an extent. Although Dorothea likes the company of her sister and baby nephew, she cannot confide in Celia, nor seek sanctuary in her company. She is not receptive to the love that Celia is giving to her, so Celia's desires are unfulfilled, being unable to fully assist her sister. Even when reimagined, *eros* cannot be fully achieved if there is no reciprocity.

Exploring Microcosms of Eliot's Remaining Novels: How Can Aspects of Theological Love be Further Explored?

As this thesis addresses, Eliot's discussions of the theological in her novel universe demand further attention, particularly those strands pertaining to the expression of love. An interest in theological love permeates all of Eliot's novels, including those I have not discussed in this thesis. Eliot's historical novel *Romola* (1863) explores the titular character's conversion experience to Christianity, her eventual loss of faith in individuals who inspired her conversion, and eventually with the concept of religion. *Romola* is a novel which sees the protagonist hold a deep love of humanity, which is then turned on its head. Through falling upon hard times, Romola seeks solace in her Godfather, Savonarola's order, the Frate. This fall involves, as Ariana Reilly suggests in her study on sympathy in *Romola*, a focus on the process of conversion, both to and from Christianity.[13] It is the anti-conversion experience, however, that pertains particularly to the expression of love in humanity and is viewed through a theological lens. The loss of faith is shown to be painful, especially when it comes to the perceived loss of Christian values and feelings within Romola. As Reilly continues:

> Where she once saw a deep love of humanity behind Savonarola's "striving after the renovation of the Church and the world," she now sees his professions as the "striving after a mere name" that tells "no more than the title of a book" (587). The title, of course, is both The Holy Bible and The Life and Adventures of Girolamo Savonarola, because, for her, they are one and the same. The values of Christianity have become indistinguishable from their human representative, and they share in the shame of his hypocritical egoism. Romola's disillusionment takes the form not of seeing something behind the veil, but of seeing nothing behind it.[14]

Seeing nothing behind the veil of faith is troubling, as Reilly explains. The Bible is reduced to a title - a series of deeds that are conducted in name only. The 'deep love

[13] See Ariana Reilly, 'Always Sympathize! Surface Reading, Affect, and George Eliot's Romola', *Victorian Studies*, 55.4 (2013), 629–46, (p. 635).

[14] Reilly, 'Always Sympathize! Surface Reading, Affect, and George Eliot's Romola', 629–646, (p. 637).

of humanity' that Romola once saw in both the Bible and Savonarola's works has lost all valid meaning for her and the result is that she loses all sense of her newly-constructed self.

This 'painful ease with which Romola moves from losing her faith in Savonarola, to losing her faith in religion, and finally losing faith in herself', Reilly points out, 'interests Eliot a great deal.'[15] Reilly uses a passage of Eliot's narration in *Romola*, to further demonstrate how the text muses on the connection between faith in others and faith in ourselves. I also hold the passage to have much significance regarding love, and the human capacity for love, and the devastating effect this has when it is suddenly taken away:

> No one who has ever known what it is thus to lose faith in a fellow man whom he has profoundly loved and reverenced, will lightly say that the shock can leave the faith in the Invisible Goodness unshaken. With the sinking of high human trust, the dignity of life sinks too; we cease to believe in our own better self, since that also is part of the common nature which is degraded in our thought; and all the finer impulses of the soul are dulled. Had not she had her sorrows too? And few had cared for her, while she had cared for many. She had done enough; she had striven after the impossible and was weary of this stifling crowded life. She longed for that repose in mere sensation.[16]

Love and reverence, and the profound loss of both these attributes, are central to the passage. They result not only in the loss of love in humanity but also leave 'faith in the invisible goodness shaken.' As Romola's trust in humanity is lost, so is her sense of human dignity. Although she loved and cared for many, she was often not rewarded with that same human kindness. For Romola, then, the love she felt from Savonarola and his religious order, was very real, and the crushing and sudden loss of this love shook her to her core. If we are without love, this strand of Romola's tale is suggesting, we are also without 'invisible goodness'. In short, without love we are brought to nothing.

In *Felix Holt, The Radical* (1866), the reader is exposed to a different type of sympathetic love, emerging from class, suffrage and emergence of truth. The novel has

[15] Reilly, 'Always Sympathize! Surface Reading, Affect, and George Eliot's Romola', 629–646, (p. 637).

[16] George Eliot, *Romola*, ed. by Andrew Brown (Oxford: OUP The Clarendon Edition of the Novels of George Eliot, 1993), pp. 508-9

been described as one that 'often seems at odds with itself', as the plights of the working and middle-classes are scrutinised.[17] The novel primarily focuses on the dichotomy of the working and middle classes but examining narrative strands involving sympathy can aid in exploring the extent to which love can overcome social and class boundaries. To this end, the storyline surrounding Esther and Felix serves to provide insights into not only class, but sympathy, kindness and love. Esther, like many of Eliot's female protagonists, begins the novel as self-serving and social climbing (like Rosamond Vincy in *Middlemarch* and Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda*), but undergoes a sympathetic transformation, as Susan Zlotnick observes:

> By beginning the novel in a state of egoism and moving toward sympathy, Esther undergoes the transformation that characterizes many of Eliot's heroines. However, to be "in complete sympathy" with Felix demands that Esther give birth (as both "painful effort" and "conceive" imply) to a new self with a "mental condition" that forgoes the self-consciousness of gentility and embraces the reparative double consciousness of Eliotic sympathy.[18]

It is through Esther's 'painful effort' that she is reborn sympathetically and forgoes 'the self-consciousness of gentility'. Zlotnick continues to highlight the importance of class divisions and points to Eliot's use of metaphor to convey the harm caused by immediate gratification in *Felix Holt*. 'Sugar functions as a key metaphor for the harm gentility and suffrage inflict on the social body because, like sugar, they offer immediate gratification but no long-term sustenance.'[19] Esther comes to realise this through her own transformative story, and her awareness of the harm caused by gentility to the working classes increases. Esther comes to value virtue over wealth, and 'Sympathy replaces gentility as the gold standard by which Esther comes to judge people'[20] Esther's sympathy and love for Felix is exemplified through the narrative of the trial:

> When a woman feels purely and nobly, that ardor of hers which breaks through formulas too rigorously urged on men by daily practical needs, makes

[17] Susan Zlotnick, 'Class Affect and the Victorian Novelist: George Eliot's Gentility and the Origins of Sympathy in Felix Holt', *Victorian Review*, 47.1 (2021), 115–133, (p. 116).

[18] Susan Zlotnick, 'Class Affect and the Victorian Novelist: George Eliot's Gentility and the Origins of Sympathy in Felix Holt', 115–133, (p. 125).

[19] Ibid, 115–133, (p. 120).

[20] Ibid, 115–133, (p. 128).

> one of her most precious influences […] the man she loved was her hero; […] her woman's passion and her reverence for rarest goodness rushed together in an undivided current. And to-day they were making one danger, one terror, one irresistible impulse for her heart. Her feelings were growing into a necessity for action, rather than a resolve to act.[21]

Felix's cause has urged Esther, through her love and admiration of him, to necessitate action. Her feelings of love cause her to act, ultimately taking up a life with him. Esther abandons her middle-class life of luxuries, in favour of a life with Felix - a true partnership as equals. As Zlotnick concludes: 'the novel leads Esther away from her shallow desires for base luxuries and toward an elevated life of love and service with Felix.'[22] The ending of *Felix Holt* is bitter-sweet, however, as Esther discovers that life with Felix is just as lack-lustre as the life that she escapes in the first place: 'her Prince Charming is charmless and life in the palace is dull afterall.'[23] Not unlike the 'many Theresa's' of *Middlemarch*, Esther discovers that her desires are fulfilled, but only to a point. No amount of sympathy or love can aid her in the pursuit of her ultimate desires. Her love for the pursuit of truth and happiness turned out to be nothing but dull in the end.

Eliot's final full novel examines concepts of desire, but above all, love, through a broader spiritual lens, incorporating both Jewish and Christian spiritualties and traditions. *Daniel Deronda* (1876) explores the complexity of human emotions and human identity. The novel posits existential questions surrounding Daniel's heritage, bloodline, and characteristics as an adult man, coming of age. Not merely a bildungsroman, *Daniel Deronda* dares to ask deeper questions of spiritual and theological kinship, acting as the crescendo of Eliot's narratives of human sympathy. Empathy and kindness are essential concepts within the novel, but the narrative is steeped in theological references that ultimately link many of the kind acts (particularly those of Daniel) with a deeper understanding of sympathy as a symbol of love. For

[21] George Eliot, *Felix Holt, the Radical* (London: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), Kindle ebook, p. 234.

[22] Zlotnick, 'Class Affect and the Victorian Novelist: George Eliot's Gentility and the Origins of Sympathy in Felix Holt', 115–133, (p. 125).

[23] Ibid, 115–133, (p. 129).

instance, in an overtly theological reference in the last third of the novel, Mordecai addresses the anticipation he has for seeing his friend Daniel again:

> The promise of seeing him again is like the bow in the cloud to me', continued Mordecai, looking at Hans; 'and to you, also it must be a gladness. For who has two friends like him? [24]

The inclusion of the 'bow' in Mordecai's explanation of his friendship with Deronda brings to light, once again, the importance of covenant in the bonds of love. Mordecai not only refers to the 'bow' but also to the 'promise of seeing him [Daniel] again'. The 'bow' is synonymous with a symbol of a covenant, or a promise. The rainbow in the sky is representative of God's promise to humanity in the story of Noah and the Ark (Genesis 9:13): 'I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.' Alluding to the 'bow', Mordecai ties God's covenant to his friendship with Deronda. Mordecai is looking forward to meeting Daniel, asking 'who has two friends like him?' Mordecai relishes not only his friendship with Daniel, but also Daniel's friendship with Hans. For Mordecai, love not only entails acts of kindness but also contains a more spiritual element, expressed through the promise of the 'bow'. Acts of love are stressed throughout this novel, from the talk of a singular and universal love that humanity can aspire towards to the way in which Daniel demonstrates the need for sacrifice in an act of love when he promises to help Mordecai with his plight.

In *Daniel Deronda*, concepts of compassion, desire and ultimately, love are thrown into sharp focus repeatedly. Such notions pave the way for a reimagined view of how Eliot frames not only her narrative motifs of sympathy and kindness, but how she frames theological aspects of her novel universe through a spiritual lens. Recent work on *Daniel Deronda*, particularly on the portrayal of sympathy and hospitality, aids us in questioning the role that dynamic sympathy plays in the novel. Carolyn Burdett, for example has examined the dynamics of sympathy and antipathy in the novel: ' I argue,' she writes, '[…] that Eliot is indeed forced to rethink the moral and psychological sympathy she did so much to promote in the 1850s and that sympathy is

[24] George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, Graham Handley and K.M. Newton, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Oxford World's Classics, 2014), p. 615.

not abandoned but is instead reconfigured in relation to its twin, antipathy.'[25] Readdressing sympathy with regards to antipathy forces us to engage with *Deronda* in a new way, seeing that sympathy not only has its limitations but, through giving way to antipathy, is a barrier to love

Final Remarks

My thesis has examined the concept of love through a specific Christian theological lens. The empathy, compassion and acts of self-sacrifice conveyed through Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* offer just one example. By exploring the limitations of love, as well as its successes, Eliot's narrative communities serve as a reminder that humanity and its capacity for love is not perfect. Ultimately, Eliot's novels guide the reader to understand on a deeper level the limits of a human's life on earth. One individual's limitations can fuel another's desires, expressing love in individualistic and specific ways. This is particularly the case when marginal characters, such as Rosamond Vincy and Mary Garth are considered. Through exploring the desires of such characters, a renewed way of examining love is uncovered — often leading to a cause that is far bigger than the individual. At the centre of the cause is love. A love of family, a love of friendship, a love that is almost boundless. Human limitations, however, lie within human corporality: the barrier to our spiritual desires.

[25] Carolyn Burdett, 'Sympathy-Antipathy in Daniel Deronda', 19: *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 29 (2020), https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.1983.

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