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**Women and Religion: a  
comparative study of *The  
Heart of Midlothian* and  
*Adam Bede***

**Relatrice**

Prof.ssa Emma Sdegno

**Correlatrice**

Prof.ssa Enrica Villari

**Laureando**

Francesco Biasutto

Matricola 887484

**Anno Accademico**

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## **Abstract**

*The Heart of Midlothian* and *Adam Bede* are two 19<sup>th</sup>-century novels that act as a window on Early and Late-Enlightenment Britain. Though different in genre and style, Walter Scott and George Eliot's works present a strong sense of realism that eventually resulted in many analogies. In the specific, this dissertation focuses on three main areas, namely religion, infanticides and heroism. Furthermore, great importance will be given to the evolution of women's empowerment through the characters of Jeanie Deans, Hetty Sorrel, Effie Deans and Dinah Morris, four sisters in time that embody the sufferings and hardships of women's life in a masculine bible-thumping society. In fact, despite their desire to rise above the condition imposed by their sex, none of these women will be entirely happy at the end of their storylines, let alone empowered. Finally, since both authors mingled with the philosophical ideas that were widespread at the time, concepts like freedom and sympathy will be crucial to the analysis of the abovementioned characters.



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## 1. Introduction to the thesis

Throughout history, women have always been considered less than men – in fiction as well as in reality –, and quite often their destiny was tragically sealed by something biased like religion. Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, British women had been living in a male-dominated world, where men were ready to risk their lives for their faith. The 17<sup>th</sup> century, in fact, featured the rise of the puritans, a civil war, and the issuing of the English Bill of Rights and the Act of Settlement: all moves designed to ensure a line of Protestant rulers that would last for centuries. While revolution ran rampant in England, women were more and more secluded to their roles within the household. However, during the Georgian era, early feminist movements rose and prospered at a time where all religious beliefs were questioned by Enlightenment philosophes. The long 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise and premature fall of women who, before they even knew it, were once again condemned to the house chores by a great revival of faith fostered by George Whitefield and the Wesley brothers. Things only got worse in Victorian England, where women were socially divided in two categories, and forced to behave according to a strict moral code imposed by a society of extremely religiously-devoted men. Prudishness, in fact, was one of the main features of the time, to the point that women were hardly ever allowed to have a say in anything; they only had to be good daughters, good wives, and one day, if they would fulfil their duties at best, good mothers. The Victorian society envisioned women as “angels in the house”, and if by any chance they were to commit sins and fall, like Eve did when she was tempted by the serpent, they would be excluded by society and isolated to a life of misery and sorrow. The harsh relationship between women and faith led to a long list of dramatic events in British history, included but not limited to infanticides. As a matter of fact, women often used to kill their babies to try to restore their reputation and erase the massive social stigma that weighted hard on their shoulders. Since its origin, literature has always tried to report history as accurately as possible, to the point that the earlier form of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century novel was the realist one. By the end of the century, the historical novel rose from the ashes of the gothic, and new authors like Scott, started to put female protagonists at the centre of their stories. In the following decades, fiction evolved once again, and by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the novel transformed into an instrument of social analysis, a way to criticize the world in which men and women were confined. Still, since female novelists were not entirely accepted by society, women were once again forced to hide behind the figure of a man. However, in this case, women only had to employ a male name to hide their identity and publish their works in periodicals, for it was the only way they had to make it as a writer. By considering everything

that has been mentioned thus far, I decided to focus on two of the most significant novels of 19<sup>th</sup>-century British literature, namely *The Heart of Midlothian* by Sir Walter Scott – the man who changed the meaning of the word “heroism” –, and *Adam Bede* by George Eliot – a non-conventional Victorian novelist criticized by both her family and society for her ideological, religious and social stands. Although these two masterpieces were written 40 years apart from one another, they still share several historical insights and common grounds which are pivotal for this study, like the theme of heroism and that of infanticides. Besides, both novels highlight the evolution of the relationship between women and religion in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain, which is all the more stressed by the design of the four female protagonists: Jeanie Deans, Hetty Sorrel, Effie Deans and Dinah Morris. These four “sisters in time” represent a long line of female heroines which was fundamental for the development of modern and contemporary fiction. Even though they all share different attitudes on religious matters, their voices and stories will forever remain permanent evidence of women condition during the long 18<sup>th</sup> century and the Victorian era. Furthermore, the fact that both authors decided to set their stories in a faraway past, emphasizes even more the evolution of women’s roles in society whilst underlining the historical background in which such an evolution took place. Since women and religion have always been connected to each other since Eve’s eviction from the garden of Eden, then perhaps it was Eve’s fall that kept women out of the sphere of heroism for so long. It is true, however, that during the Renaissance, Shakespeare revolutionized female characters in drama, but alas that only worked on paper. Reality, in fact, was way different, as V. Woolf imagined in the renowned excerpt of *A Room of One’s Own* called *If Shakespeare had a sister*:

It is unthinkable that any woman in Shakespeare’s day should have had Shakespeare’s genius [...] When, however, one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, of some mute and inglorious Jane Austen, some Emily Brontë who dashed her brains out on the moor or mopped and mowed about the highways crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to [...] [Furthermore] what is true [...] is that any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at (Woolf 2022:41).

Women, in both real life and fiction, have always been secondary characters. Though they might have seldom gained some recognition, even Shakespeare’s greatest female characters were always coupled up with a male counterpart: Juliet and Romeo, Lady Macbeth and Macbeth, Ophelia and Hamlet, Viola and Sebastian, and so on. Walter Scott was arguably one of the first authors who questioned that pattern, by placing Jeanie Deans, a female heroine, at

the centre of his universe. Though Richardson had tried to do the same with both Pamela and Clarissa a few decades before, he did not succeed in making them full-fledged heroines. Indeed, both characters were rather ladies in distress at the mercy of a male figure, whose abuses would eventually turn them into meek creatures, lacking that pioneering heroism which is so deeply embedded in the character of Jeanie Deans. Scott gave life to a long line of peasant heroines that continued to prosper in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with authors of the calibre of Elizabeth Gaskell, Thomas Hardy and, it goes without saying, George Eliot. In the Victorian Age, novels became a reaction against female repression, and authors gave a voice to their characters only to help them getting more space to express themselves within their universe. *Adam Bede* would never work without Hetty Sorrel, no matter if that title suggests that the protagonist of the story is a man. Likewise, in *The Heart of Midlothian*, the Porteous mob can only fade into the background when compared to Jeanie's world-stirring actions. In fact, though there are male characters in both novels, they mainly work as a supporting force to their female counterparts. In conclusion, Scott and Eliot wrote two extraordinary novels that contributed in changing women's roles in literature for good, and even though they might not be considered their most famous works, they surely are among the most noteworthy novels of modern British Literature for both their immersive realism and their extraordinary true-to-life characters.

## 1.1 A personal introduction

“Women and fiction” is a topic that has always interested me on a personal level. For some reasons, I have always preferred to read novels where the leading character was a woman, and this sentiment grew stronger on my second year of BA, when studying *Hamlet*. I clearly remember asking myself why did Shakespeare focus so much on the troubled mind of the young prince of Denmark, rather than on a fascinating and bewitching character like Ophelia. A few years later, I bumped into Mary Cowden Clarke's *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*, a collection of 15 novellas depicting the childhood of the Bard's greatest heroines from their birth to their very first words in their respective play. These stories can be read as either prequels, characters studies or even cautionary tales, and before I could even finish the book, I knew that was an area I wanted to explore more. That year, during the fall semester, I also started reading a new book for a 19<sup>th</sup>-century English Literature class, called *Waverley* by W. Scott. Though it was a genuine gripping story, it took me about two-to-three months to finish it; not because it was particularly hard or complicated, but because I could really relate to what the protagonist was going through, and needed to digest all the information at my own pace. Back then I was

passively accepting life to escape the reality of the pandemic; I was particularly puzzled about the future, like most of my peers, and could not find some comfort in my day-to-day activities. In fact, when I finally finished it, I was extremely disappointed because I could not really understand why did Edward need to settle for something so ordinary like a life with Rose, when he could have really made great things if he had only tried harder. Nor did I understand how could a hero be so easily-manipulated by his passions to ignore the consequences of his decisions on others. Though it was the right story to read in that specific time of my life, the idea I had about heroism was very far from the one Scott envisioned in his debut novel. Without losing heart, the following week I started reading *Adam Bede* by G. Eliot, and unexpectedly finished it all in a couple of days. Hetty Sorrel soon became one of my all-time favourite characters for both the way she was designed and the space she had conquered inside a story where the protagonist was supposed to be a man. And since she was the first character that struck me that hard since Ophelia, I decided to consider her as the main project for a dissertation proposal. The following summer featured many weeks of intense reading, trying to find some common grounds between novels and characters, and eventually I came across another novel by the “wizard of the North”. Like *Adam Bede*, *The Heart of Midlothian* was also based on real historical accounts, and though the language was harder than in *Waverley*, the similarities with Eliot’s debut novel were so many, that I decided that the next step was to zero in on religion to create a thread. What I noticed, in fact, was that the four female protagonists of the two novels at issue had a different attitude towards faith, and that sometimes religion was either the cause or the consequence of their actions. Besides, since religion became a game changer in both the rise of female heroism and in the evolution of early feminism, I decided to focus on the relationship between women and faith, by also making reference to the historical, philosophical and religious background of Great Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. In short, this dissertation aims to guide readers through the evolution of female empowerment in Georgian and Victorian England by presenting the stories of four female characters and their relationship with God.

## **1.2 Introduction to the chapters**

In the following chapter, I will describe the existent literature on the topic by starting from the rise of the novel and its development through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century in Britain. In the specific, I shall focus on the historical and on the realist novel, only to present the figures of Sir W. Scott and George Eliot, together with their respective masterpieces, namely *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Adam Bede*. The last section of Chapter 2 will also deal with the concept of



freedom, making reference to philosophers of the stature of Friedrich Hegel, with reference to Scott, and Søren Kierkegaard, as far as Eliot is concerned. In the third chapter, the analysis will move towards religion, by starting with the Great Revival of Faith during the Enlightenment. After presenting the relationship between identity and religion, together with Hume's and Smith's ideas on philosophical concepts such as empathy and sympathy, chapter three shall revolve around the evolution of the relationship between women and religion from Georgian to Victorian England, with references to the Latitudinarian and Methodist branch, the rise of consumerism during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and finally, infanticides. Chapter 4, on the other hand, will interpret all the information collected in the former sections, and introduce the thread which connects the four female characters under examination. Direct quotes will also be included in the analysis, together with a special mention to Susan Morgan's inspiring study called *Sisters in Time: Imagining Gender in 19<sup>th</sup>-century British Fiction*, for its vital contribution to the existing literature on "female heroism". Finally, Chapter 4 will also provide further references in support of the analysis and introduce some concepts that will be part of the conclusion.

### **1.3 Summary**

This work focuses on the analysis of two pivotal British novels of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Adam Bede*. In the following chapters, I will investigate on the main philosophical and religious ideas that were widespread at that time in Britain, only to conclude with the analysis of the four female protagonists. The next section shall begin with the rise of the novel and with a general overview on the evolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century prose fiction.

## **2. General overview of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century British Novel**

In the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the art of modern prose fiction developed in the British Isles, and it is of little debate that the one who made it spread so rapidly was none others than Daniel Defoe (Watt 1957). Back then, the population was ever-increasing, and after the Glorious Revolution (1688) and the Act of Union (1707) Britain was more prosperous than ever (Sanders 2004:280). Middlebrow readers were now part of Britain's literary audience, and Defoe's awareness on the matter made the novel grow in a prosperous literary and social environment. At first, the wind of change was fostered by many authors that followed Defoe's path, but left their own mark and legacy through their works. On the one hand, Jonathan Swift, a Scriblerian, master of satire and social criticism, who is mostly remembered today for the

ever-popular *Gulliver's Travels*. On the other one, Samuel Richardson, expert in the epistolary form of the novel, known through *Clarissa* and *Pamela; or, the virtue rewarded*, two studies on the condition of many women in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: miserable, pitiful, and wretched (Sanders 2004:311-319; Sabor in Keymer 2004:145). Nevertheless, the long 18<sup>th</sup> century made as many ground-breaking headways as setbacks in terms of women empowerment. For the most part, women were “either improperly or slightly educated” (Porter 2001:610), and the real aim of their academic record was to forge good daughters, good mothers and good wives; all ideals that later were channelled in the stereotypical image of the “Victorian Angel” (Young 1992). Though widely discriminated, women played vital roles in the Georgian public life, and rumour had it that British women “walked about freely, unveiled and for the most part unchaperoned to visit friends, the theatre and even the coffee house” (Porter 2001:618), thus asserting even more their alleged blessing. In literature, female authors started blossoming in the British soil, thus paving the way for bestselling novelists like Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood. Feminist writers and critics also started making their appearances following Locke’s principle of *Tabula Rasa* (Porter 2001:506). Since Locke believed that both men and women were born alike, various female writers built upon his ideas, advocating for equal education (Porter 2001:603). One of the most interesting voices was that of Mary Astell, who wondered: “if all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?” (Porter 2001:629). Astell, like other enlightened thinkers, urged for a better schooling system; nonetheless, critics responded by warning against female “over-education”, for “then the world would [have] be[en] deprived of its fairest ornament” (Porter 2001:636; OUP 2019). Proto-feminists’ rise was fostered by the development of the entertainment industry, but eventually stopped in the 1880s, when moralists warned that literary pleasures were dangerous for women, clinging on the fact that men did not want their brides to be well educated (Porter 2001). Although novels were key features of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, two were the subgenres that were mostly under the spotlight: the sentimental novel and gothic fiction. While the former focused on staging numerous scenes of distress to provoke a sympathetic response from the protagonist who witnessed (Brissenden 1974), the latter was more embedded in hyperbolic and dreamlike situations of mystery and terror (Richter 2016). Nevertheless, it is undeniable that, though different in themes and style, they did share some common grounds. In the specific, the three elements which are important to underline for this study are sympathy, suffering and the lack of happiness (Mullan 1990), which will all be covered properly in Chapter 3. Notwithstanding the English novel rises with Defoe, the long form of prose fiction dates back to the Alexandrian romances (I-III century AD), ancestors of 18<sup>th</sup>-century gothic fiction. Back then, plots were “built upon the separation of nobly-born

lovers who were subjected to tremendous dangers by natural disasters and human adversaries before being finally reunited” (Richter 2016:473). Though they were taken as models by both Shakespeare and Milton, during the Sentimental parabola (from Richardson to Fielding and Sterne) those romances went quickly out of fashion. Things only changed in the second half of the century, when authors started to set their stories in a past that leaned towards the Middle Ages, a cauldron of barbarity, lack of knowledge and civilization that inspired and seduced writers ever since the Renaissance (Watt in Keymer 2004:122; Richter 2016). Contrary to what one might think, however, the gothic style was first reappraised in architecture, and not in literature, with the figure of Horace Walpole. Walpole was an architect and antiquarian whose aim was to break with Neoclassicism by building the most anti-Palladian building that had ever existed. He was the first to employ the gothic style in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to refurnish his mansion, *Strawberry Hill*, and later became the first successful author of modern Gothic fiction with his ever-present masterpiece *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) (Richter 2016). Even though he inspired and paved the way for future generations of writers, before the end of the century, the enthusiasm for the medieval that had been going on for a generation withered, and “the Gothic monsters had to find an Otherwhen in which to operate” (Richter 2016:475). Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ann Radcliffe started publishing, and though she was neither an antiquarian like Walpole, nor a well-educated woman, she pushed the genre into a “neverland of vague otherness” (Richter 2016:476), where and when the drama of suffering could occur in its own terms. In short, she decided to set her novels in a faraway past like Walpole, but without making any references to what had historically happened. All these Gothic writers, however different, did share some common traits, from dreams to catharsis, and from settings to wonderful events. Yet, we can furtherly divide the gothic novel into two more subcategories, namely female gothic, when dealing with the unwarranted persecution of an innocent at the mercy of a powerful older man (similar to *Pamela*) and male gothic, or punitive tragedy (like *King Lear* or *Macbeth*) (Richter 2016). Albeit gothic fiction was highly popular and novel-reading was gendered female, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century moralists warned that the passion for literature was dangerous for women, for it indulged them in the pleasures of imagination. Eventually, publishers started preferring other forms of fiction in lieu of the gothic and its female readership, and with the historical novel on the rise, it was Sir Walter Scott who gave the final blow to Walpole and Radcliffe’s literary tradition (Richter 2016:487; Watt in Keymer 2004:131). Between the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, English writers were distinguished by a romantic attitude, and great importance was given to the role of active imagination, self-isolation and escapism in nature (Sanders 2004:362,363). Notwithstanding,

with the rise of the historical novel and the novel of manners, and hence, with authors like Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen, that attitude soon changed, and the genre soon became one of the most influential forms of fiction in the nineteenth century (Sutherland in Keymer 2004:244,245). Yet, it is necessary to highlight that the two abovementioned genres are very different from one another. The historical novel depicts the events in a real historical setting, with at least one historical character, whilst describing the mores and customs of the time (Maxwell 2012). Conversely, the novel of manners is dominated by the social customs, conventions and habits of a definite social class, where the mores of a specific group control all the characters (Sanders 2004:374). Albeit the former will be properly analysed in the following subchapter, it is necessary to underline the relevance of the latter in the development of novel writing. Just like Walter Scott to gothic novels, Jane Austen was the one who gave the fatal blow to sentimental fiction, by absorbing some of its strategies only to criticize the genre as a whole (Rivero 2019). Her books are considered as masterpieces of English literature worldwide, from the widely-famous *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) to the posthumous *Northanger Abbey* (1817). While sentimental novels often narrated the protagonist's journey, they also showed little-to-no interest in him or her reaching maturity and finding an active place in Society: the passage of time, in fact, only brought loss and changes for the worse (Brissenden 1974; Mullan 1988). However, in the 1800s, a new genre developed: the *Bildungsroman*, a form of fiction that portrayed the protagonist's journey from childhood to maturity, where at the end, he or she would occupy an active role in Society (Moretti 2000). Scott and Austen were well aware that the novel was evolving, and though it was still in its embryonic form, they managed to give their contribution to that new genre: with *Waverley* (1814) and with *Northanger Abbey* (1817) respectively. *Waverley* is the story of a young English gentleman who enrolls in the British army and leaves for Scotland in the years prior to the Jacobite Rebellion of 1746. There, he is seduced by the old Scottish traditions and values, and decides to betray his country and join the rebellion alongside the Highlands' clan chiefs. During the Battle of Culloden, however, he realizes what the real nature of war is and, after surviving that swift massacre, eventually comes back to England to live a way more ordinary life (Scott 2015). On the other hand, *Northanger Abbey* is the *Bildung* of Catherine Morgan, a 17-year-old anti-heroine who preferred spending her time reading gothic fiction by Ann Radcliffe rather than joining society (Austen 2006). Isolation and escapism were common themes at the beginning of the century, also thanks to Romanticism, and in fact, even though *Northanger Abbey* was published in 1817, Austen had already finished it in 1803. Furthermore, though written with more than 10-year difference between one another, both novels present two moments which are parallel in their protagonists' growth:

- “The romance of his life was ended, and his life has now commenced” (Scott 2015:312);
- “The visions of romance were over. Catherine was completely awakened” (Austen 2006:319).

Both authors portrayed the excesses of active imagination in their characters’ journey until the moment of translating their dreams in the context of contemporary life. The advent of the *Bildungsroman*, the rise of the historical novel, and the development of the novel of manners at the end of the sentimental parabola, were all elements that brought the novel, as a genre, closer and closer to reality, something that reached its climax in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, with George Eliot’s *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (Welsh in Levine & Henry 2019:68).

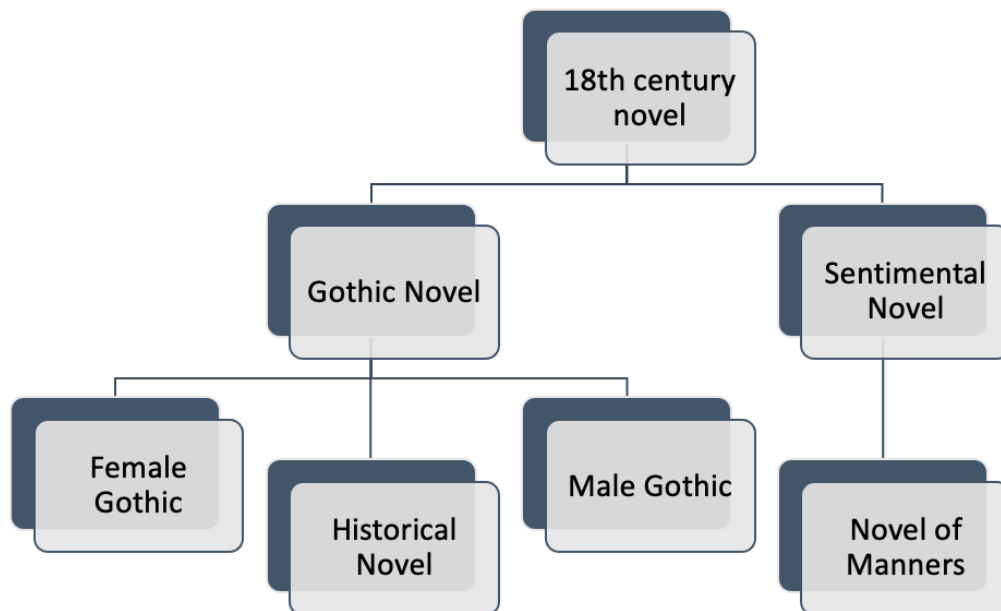


Table 2.1. The 18<sup>th</sup> century novel

However, how can one be sure that what is represented corresponds exactly to reality? To answer that question, one should dwell on the very meaning of the word “realism”. According to Ramon Fernandez, realism is the result of the clash between a narrative impulse, or *récit* (tale), and a scenic impulse, or *roman* (novel). Henry James defined these two impulses to be best represented by the two verbs “telling” and “showing”, with realism standing in the middle (Lubbock 2007, in Jameson 2015:21). Jameson then moved on analysing its features, saying that while the narrative impulse was a tripartite time based on past, present and future, the scenic impulse’s timing laws were dictated by what he defined as an eternal present, or a present of consciousness. Hence, by introducing the concept of time, one can no longer identify realism

as a mere clash between récit and roman, or telling versus showing, because realism can only be possible when the eternal present of the mind comes into contact with what we commonly call “destiny” (past/present/future) (Jameson 2015). Though George Eliot will be introduced later on in this chapter, it is important to observe that albeit she dove deep in the culture of realism, she was also criticized for not being entirely faithful to what realism really is (Myers 1978). Eliot lived in a period where morality and hypocrisy were two sides of the same coin, and where turpitude was quite often hidden behind other actions. Victorians were great moralists; they valued the possession of good manners, regular attendance at church, charitable activities, and at the same time exploited children, denied women’s rights, and masqueraded evil in everything they did, starting with their allegedly-harmless patriotic attitude (Young 1992). This polarity of both positive and negative features was given the name of ‘Victorian Compromise’ in 1913 by G. K. Chesterton. Since authors have always tried to mirror their reality through their works, it should not surprise, that Eliot, like other authors, tried to portray that polarity in her novels. Despite morality became paramount in her fiction, she was neither a moralist nor did she live by a strict code of values. Eventually, this caught the attention of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who harshly criticized both her lifestyle and her alleged realism, for she was the representative of an age where morality was well preached but not as well put into practice (Jameson 2015:120). Nevertheless, George Eliot was still very much appreciated by the Queen herself, who not only did suggest the reading of *Adam Bede* to her uncle, the King of Belgium, but in the 1860s even commissioned a couple of paintings that are still hanging in Buckingham Palace portraying two scenes of the above-mentioned novel: *Dinah preaching on the Common* and *Hetty Sorrel and Captain Donnithorne in Mrs Poyser’s dairy*, both by E. H. Corbould (1861). When Victoria was proclaimed Queen, in 1837, nobody knew exactly what to expect; after all, she was only 18, and Britain was going through a momentous evolution. Even so, she took the helm of a fragile country with a firm hand and turned the 64 years of her reign into an age of progress, political stability and notably an age of philanthropy, charity and social reforms (Sanders 2004). The latter, in particular, started some years before her crowning, in 1832, with the First Reform Bill, which aimed at clearing the system of rotten boroughs, which until the 1830s allowed many villages of the countryside to have more seats in Parliament than greater urbanized areas like London (Young 1992). Such reforms continued until the 1870s, where Britain finally reached the so-called “welfare state”, a system that granted healthcare to citizens and the possibility for children to access primary-level education (Harris 2004).

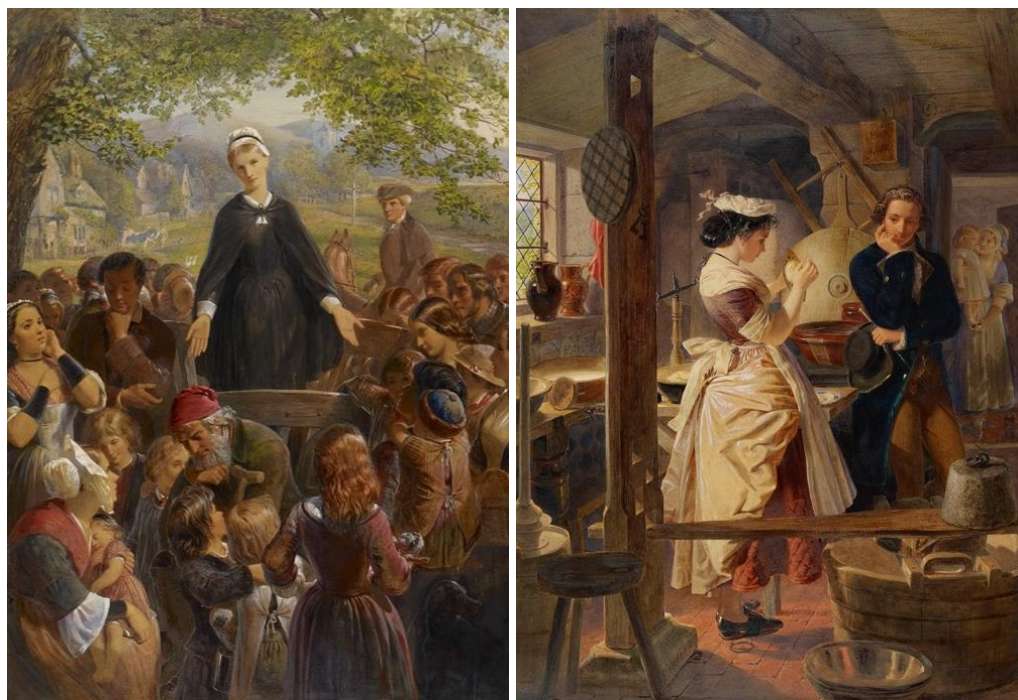


Figure 2.1. Painting from the Royal Collection Trust

Britain slowly became the most powerful Empire of the entire world, with colonies and settlements spread in all continents (Young 1992), and Victoria's leadership enhanced all the more that patriotic sentiment that was already in the air within the country. However, for as great of a time it was, those were also years of poverty, lack of hygiene, child labour, and social injustices: all things that the novelists denounced loudly in their works (Sanders 2004). With Queen Victoria, novels blossomed once again, though in a different way than before. Authors described society as they saw it, and therefore had both a great responsibility and a fundamental didactic and moral role – something the Victorians had at heart (Shattock 2010). Novels were being rediscovered within families, read aloud in front of the hearth, serialized and published in instalments within periodicals, and most importantly, women constituted a great percentage of writers. Sadly though, most of them chose to use a male pseudonym, for it was not always easy for them to publish. Women's novels were an exploration of the daily lives and values of the female population of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; something readers found very engaging because, since women had more time to spend at home than their husbands, they used to compose the majority of the reading public of that time (Shattock 2010). However, the early phase of the great age of the British novel started with a male author, Charles Dickens. Dickens was born in Portsmouth, in 1812, and even though he had the luxury to access primary education at an early age, after his father was sent to a debtor's prison, his family sent Charles to work within a

factory (Tomalin 2012). Once he came of age, he decided to move to London and started a career as a journalist. There, he first approached writing with the pseudonym “Boz” and then started publishing with his own name, denouncing the horrors that Victorian England reserved to children, in his works (Shattock 2010). His novels belong to a body of narrative also known as the “Condition-of-England novels” (Ratcliffe 2014) which sought to engage directly with the contemporary social and political issues to raise the collective awareness of the reading public and, in a way, illuminated the direction for 19<sup>th</sup>-century welfare reforms. Novels were considered both an analysis and a synthesis of social reality (Shattock 2010), but during the 1840s, British fiction evolved once again. From the social and humanitarian themes typical of the early years of Queen Victoria’s reign, Victorian fiction furtherly developed by mingling with previous literary traditions, namely romanticism and the gothic. In the mid-century phase, in fact, novels were no longer set in cities, but rather in rural provincial England; something which added an even more realistic trait to the narrative (Shattock 2010). Besides, in 1859, Charles Darwin published his ground-breaking scientific treatise *On the Origin of Species*, which forced a change even in terms of religion. Faith was no longer a bench mark, and doubt spread everywhere, both nationwide and internationally. It did not take long before Victorians begun wondering if their puritan attitude relied on solid bases, and eventually people started questioning even their own thinking (Young 1992). An example is George Eliot, who was born and raised in a low church Anglican family at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and who decided to move to London once she came of age (Levine & Henry 2019:xiv). There, she read Darwin, became an agnostic and eventually started a career in fiction, thus going against all the traditional values of the time. In London, she also fell in love with George Henry Lewes, a married man, and started living with him and his children. As a consequence, her entire family cut their relationship with her for nearly 30 years, and though she managed to reconcile with her brother Isaac, it was only after she married John Walter Cross in 1880, nearly one year before her death (Harris 2013). Ever since the industrial revolution, Britain never stopped improving in terms of science and technology; though, after nearly one century, progress was no longer seen in the same way as before (Shattock 2010). People tended to look at reality with a scientific look, and on approaching the 20<sup>th</sup> century, anyone in Britain could breathe a sense of dissatisfaction with the values of the age and a pessimistic feeling towards the future (Young 1992). In literature, Thomas Hardy tried to capture that anxiety in *Jude the Obscure* (1895); yet, as a *Bildungsroman*, the latter proved to be ineffective with those new attitudes, for the main character never succeeds in his *Bildung*, because of too wide a social gap between his condition as a stonemason and his academic dreams at Christminster to be fulfilled in one single



generation. Hardy pushed the genre too far, to breaking point, and created a setting (Wessex) where most characters are dominated by the so-called “modern vice of unrest”, where they either wonder aimlessly or remain still forever. Freedom was not an option (Villari 1990). If the 19<sup>th</sup> century started with the Romantics, who praised nature in a spiritual and even religious way, after decades of development and scientific progress, the very aim of late Victorian novelists was to make art triumph over nature (Sanders 2004:483,484). British Aestheticism was a literary movement that developed in the fin de siècle, influenced by French Decadent culture and authors like Joris-Karl Huysmans. The most representative author of this last phase of 19<sup>th</sup>-century British fiction is Oscar Wilde, who, however, only wrote one novel in his literary career, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1880). Even though Wilde did not portray the crisis of the *Bildungsroman* as Hardy did, he still conveyed a pessimistic view of society in his works. His aim was to write a novel that rejected the very form of the novel by speculating on different subjects mainly through dialogues. Such a device is called a “novel-essay”, and we can say that if the *Bildungsroman* – which was the symbolic form of a flourishing society –, was no longer possible at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Moretti 2000), then the novel-essay might as well be considered as the symbolic form of its crisis (Ercolino 2014).

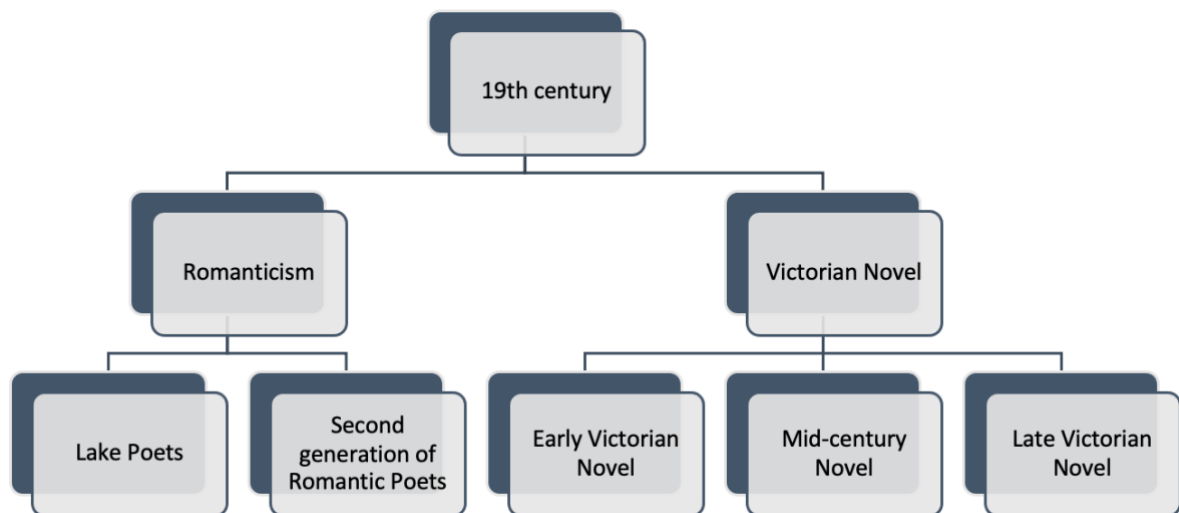


Table 2.2. Prose and poetry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

As this dissertation considers novels which were written and published in the years prior to and during the Reign of Queen Victoria, in the next section I shall resume the topic from the historical novel, by highlighting the circumstances under which it blossomed, and by presenting the man who made it glorious: Sir Walter Scott.

## 2.1 The Historical Novel

As already said, the historical novel is an evolution of gothic fiction, which first appeared at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century at about the time of Napoleon's collapse. Nonetheless, in the previous decades there were many novelists who published fiction with an historical focus and that could be identified as precursors of the genre. However, one would hardly find something that is historical, except for themes and customs, for both the characters' psychology and the manners depicted belonged to the writer's own days rather than to the historical period considered. One example is that very *Castle of Otranto* mentioned therein beforehand (Lukacs 1962:19). At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the United Kingdom, together with the entire European Continent, was going through great transformations. First of all, England was a post-revolutionary country that merged in 1707 with Scotland and in 1800 with Ireland; thus, **politically**, it was moving forward on that path of colonization that would eventually turn it into the greatest Empire of the entire world (Ramos 2018; Makdisi 1995). Secondly, the American Revolution brought a great depression into the kingdom of George III. Public debt was at its highest and the country was slowly modernizing thanks to the Industrial Revolution (Turchin 2012). Therefore, **economically**, the gap between the higher and lower classes was widening more and more within the country's borders (Lukacs 1962). Lastly, the backlash of the French Revolution hit harder than expected. Revolutionary patriotism came forth as a wind of change, and everywhere in Europe people were holding on to a sort of national rebirth. **Socially**, the entire continent was clinging on to ancient heroism and greatness because of the events that took place in France between July 1789 and May 1814. The French Revolution, together with the rise and fall of Napoleon, turned history into a "mass experience" (Lukacs 1962:23), and in Europe war became crucial, for it was the only thing that could make men "comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned" and "see in history something which deeply affects their daily lives and immediately concerns them" (Lukacs 1962:24). Therefore, not only did the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars lead to patriotism, but also to the flourishing of a national sensibility. As Lukacs points out in his *The Historical Novel*, "the appeal to national independence and national character is necessarily connected with a re-awakening of national history, with memories of the past, of past greatness, [and] of moments of national dishonour, whether this results in a progressive or reactionary ideology" (1962:25). As a consequence, human progress was no longer seen in the same way as in the Early Enlightenment – something limitless dictated by human reason (Porter 2001). Instead, now, "history itself is the bearer and realizer of human progress" (Lukacs 1962:27) and

therefore, human beings' historical awareness is what really makes a difference in the world history scenario. By analysing the events that took place on the European continent during the Enlightenment, if on the one hand, France went through a Revolution and witnessed the Rise and Fall of one of the most incredible characters in World's History, England was no less. Historical awareness was well established in the minds of the English for all the events that took place in and out of their country's borders in the previous century, starting from the Civil War (1642 – 1651). In fact, after 9 years of fighting, Parliament eventually managed to abolish the absolute rule of the monarch and to publicly try and execute king Charles I in front of a crowd (Sanders 2004). After that event, England's own system of government changed for the first time since the Norman conquest, and a Republic was formed under the name of Commonwealth of England, controlled and managed by the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell (Bennett 2006). After 10 years, however, Cromwell died and his son Richard took the reins of the country. Sadly, he did not live up to what the role demanded, and after only one year, Parliament called back for Charles II Stuart, son of the beheaded Charles I, thus re-introducing the Monarchy in England. When Charles II died, James II, a Catholic, was crowned king, and since that would have brought even more turmoil, Parliament eventually called for a Protestant, thus fanning the flame of the so-called Glorious (or Bloodless) Revolution (Sanders 2004). With the Holland rulers William III and Mary II, and with the issuing of the British Bill of Rights (1689) and later of the Act of Settlement (1707), England finally became the Constitutional Monarchy we all know today, and Parliament was ultimately given more power than the monarch (Morgan 2000). Because of all the uproar that emerged in the 1600s, England enjoyed a sort of stability that channelled this “newly-awoken historical feeling artistically into a broad, objective, epic form”: the historical novel (Lukacs 1962:32). By definition, an historical novel is a form of fiction that is set in a precise historical time, narrates the events that deal with at least one historical character and that aims at re-capturing the greatness of the past. Furthermore, the atmosphere portrayed is often romantic, generally characterized by heroism, honour, and loyalty; all values typical of the Middle-Ages (De Groot 2009). As mentioned in the previous section, although there were many precursors of the genre in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, like Walpole or Radcliffe, it is with Sir Walter Scott, that the historical novel took hold in Britain.

### 2.1.1 Walter Scott and *The Heart of Midlothian*

Walter Scott was born in Edinburgh in 1771 and he is widely considered the father of the modern historical novel. Being the son of a notorious lawyer, when he came of age, he decided to follow his father's footsteps, and in 1783, at the age of 12, he started to attend some classes at the University of Edinburgh. Though he later became a writer, the time he spent studying and doing his apprenticeship was fundamental, for it was in the mutation of laws that he saw the social mutation of his own country (Sutherland 1997). In fact, after the Act of Union (1707), Scotland started a process of fast modernization with England's shadow looming from afar, and in most of his literary works, Scott chose to represent the cultural clash and the Jacobite Rebellions that came forth as the main consequences of Scotland's annexation to the Kingdom of England (Makdisi 1995; Villari 1996; Porter 2001). After graduating from university in 1786, he started publishing his literary works anonymously and over the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, he began a cycle called *The Waverley Novels* (1814 – 1831), which include more than two dozen pieces of fiction. Although his novels were incredibly popular and strongly promoted back then, he only revealed his identity in 1827 (Cooney 1973). It was this very cycle, including masterpieces such as *Waverley* (1814), *Guy Mannering* (1815), *Rob Roy* (1817), and *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), that gave Scott the notoriety of founder of the genre. The early books from the collection, in particular, deal with the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Scottish history, and quite often is the story embedded with regional Scottish dialect, scenes of ordinary life, mores and traditions of the Highlands and very practical visions of the future. Contrariwise, his later novels are set in a time and place which are very far from 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain, and that include the Middle Ages and countries like France or Palestine (Villari 1996). In 1812, two years before the publication of *Waverley*, Scott moved to Abbotsford, a castle in the County of Roxburgh, where he lived until his last day, in 1832. In 1820, he was awarded with the title of Baronet, in London, by the then Prince Regent and future George IV, thus becoming Sir Walter Scott, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet – a title that died with his son's death in 1847 (Aspinall 1946). In spite of all the works he had published in his life, in his last years Scott went bankrupt and died owing money to people because of a major banking crisis that affected the entire country. However, since his novels kept selling even after 1832, all his debts were discharged shortly after his death (Sutherland 1997). Of all the novels that made Scott famous, *The Heart of Midlothian* is probably one of the most interesting ones, since both the historical background and the story of the Deans sisters are based on real-life accounts. In fact, the novel combines two narratives, both set in 1736. On the one hand, the story of Jeanie Deans, a Puritan girl whose religious rigorism was so well built

that she even refused to say lies to save her sister Effie's life. On the other one, the story of the Porteous riots in the prison of Old Tolbooth, also known as "the Heart of Midlothian" (Scott 2008:vii). *The Heart of Midlothian* is a four-volume novel that belongs to the second series of *Tales of my Landlord*, a subset of the *Waverley Novels* published in 1818 (Sutherland 1997). The book is pivotal in Scott's literary production for two main reasons. Not only does it introduce the author's first female protagonist, but also the first to come from the lower class: Jeanie Deans. In the early 1800s, Scott received a letter that informed him about the story of Helen Goldie of Dumfries (also known as Helen Walker), a Scottish woman who walked barefoot from Edinburgh to London to plead for her sister's life who at that moment was under arrest for infanticide. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the law was pretty harsh with women, for the number of cases of infanticides were quite high (Sauer 1978; Rigney 2004). In fact, if a woman were to be pregnant and did not seek for help to anyone, she "should in the case of [the child] being dead or missing be deemed guilty of its murder" (Scott 2008:xi). Since Jeanie was not capable to lie, she refused to say that her sister had asked for help during her pregnancy, thus bringing Effie in front of a Court of Law. Yet, since she also loved her sister dearly, she decided to walk down to London and ask for Royal Pardon to Queen Caroline, wife of King George II (Scott 2008). The story opens in the year 1736, when the city of Edinburgh witnessed the outburst of a riot over the execution of two smugglers, Andrew Wilson and Geordie Robertson. One week before the sentence was due to be carried out, they both were taken to Tolbooth Church, where Robertson managed to escape thanks to Wilson's help. Back then, executions were public spectacles, and on the day of Wilson's hanging, the mob demanded for his liberation, for they were moved by sympathy after the smuggler had helped his friend Robertson to escape (Scott 2008). Unfortunately, the Captain of the City Guards, John Porteous, felt differently about the matter, and first ordered Wilson's hanging, and then, since the situation with the mob was getting out of hand, ordered his soldiers to fire into the crowd, killing and injuring several people. Though Captain Porteous is initially charged for murder, at the very last moment his case gets postponed, and as a result, the abovementioned mob, led by George Staunton, stormed into the prison to lynch Porteous. While there, Staunton also tried to rescue his lover, Effie Deans, imprisoned for the alleged murder of her baby, who disappeared shortly after his alleged date of birth. Effie, however, refused to escape, for escaping would have admitted her own guilt, and to her lover's plea to flee, she uttered "better tyne life, since tint is gude fame" (tyne, tint; lose, lost) (Scott 2008:xi). In the background, there was a third character observing the poignant exchange of words between Effie and Staunton: Reuben Butler, a young minister who was in love with Effie's sister, Jeanie. Once out of Tolbooth, Butler told her all about Effie, thus

strengthening all the more Jeanie's belief that her sister was indeed innocent. In Volume 2, Scott narrates the events of Effie's trial, from her powerlessness in proving her innocence, to Jeanie's incapability of lying in Court to save her sister from certain death. Volume 3, instead, unravels the adventures of Jeanie from Edinburgh to London on her journey to Queen Caroline to beg a Royal Pardon. On her way South, Jeanie learns that her sister's baby had been kidnapped out of jealousy by Effie's midwife and her midwife's mother, and then escapes when these two attempted to murder her. At the same time, Butler managed to contact the Duke of Argyle to help Jeanie have an audience with Queen Caroline once the former would get to London. Once there, the Queen, touched by Jeanie's words, finally convinces King George II to grant the pardon, thus saving Effie's life for good (Scott 2008). Volume 4 portrays the double wedding of Jeanie and Butler, and Effie and Staunton; at the very last, Effie reveals that her son was not murdered, but sold, and that her lover's real identity was not that of George Staunton, but of Geordie Robertson, one of the two smugglers introduced in the first pages of the book. Although that would bring some sort of closure to the story, Effie's long-lost son finally comes back in the final pages of the novel as a violent criminal only to shot at his father before escaping to America. At the very end, Effie – now alone – decides to move to France and live in seclusion in a convent, “in the practice of the Roman Catholic religion” (Scott 2008:507).



Figure 2.2. *Jeanie Deans's visit to Effie Deans; a scene from Sir Walter Scott's The Heart of Midlothian* (Herdman 1873)

Finally, although the main themes of the novel will be properly analysed in the following chapters, they can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Religious rigorism and moral certitude, both embodied by the character of Jeanie (Rigney 2004);
2. Infanticide, a hot topic in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain, also at the centre of G. Eliot's *Adam Bede* (Sauer 1978; Ledwon 1996); and
3. Ancient Heroism and Jacobitism, paramount in most issues of the Waverley cycle (Villari 1996).

## 2.2 Realism

The urgency for realism in the development of the novel came forth in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the rise of journalism in Great Britain. Not only did the latter represent the main source of information, but it was also considered crucial for the education of an individual. In fact, back then, the idea was that writing had the power of moulding the mentality of a country (Watt 1957), and through realism, people could describe events that took place in real life in a very precise and detailed way. Eventually, writers gave birth to pieces of literary fiction, called realist novels, where the situations were described with a language that was simple enough to be understood, but at the same time elegant, ordered and precise; through such a device, in fact, readers were able to experience those genuine and tangible situations portrayed by the novelists (Spurr in Zwicker 1998:28). Historically, three were the main elements that favoured the rise of the realist novel:

- The rise of the middle class (merchants, traders, bankers, ...);
- The rise of empiricism and epistemology; and
- The emergence of the inner consciousness of men (the "I") (Doody in Zwicker 1998:62; Watt 1957).

Furthermore, in 1697, censorship was also abolished, and men of letters were finally free to express their own ideas. As a result, many periodicals emerged, including *The Tatler* (1709) and *The Spectator* (1711) (Sanders 2004:298,301). The main aim of these literary enterprises was to bring a revolution in the mind of the citizens: to inform and instruct, while at the same time create something that the reader could recognize as true, through:

- **Real characters and place:** men and women were introduced by their name, surname, social role and position; and
- **Time:** the reader had to be aware of the passing of time (chronological), and the most common way to represent it was through letters (epistolary novels, i.e., *Pamela*) (Sanders 2004; Watt 1957).

The first realist (and modern) novel is without a doubt *Robinson Crusoe*, by Daniel Defoe. The main character, Robinson, is a real man, living in a society where time and place are carefully described in details. Colors, noises, size, names, ... everything is characterized by long and precise descriptions, and all the events follow a chronological order and are narrated by Robinson in first person, for autobiography was a device used by authors to add credibility to their writing (Watt 1957). Nonetheless, even though the time, place and the events narrated were realistic, the novel still lacked psychological analysis and development; something that would be added by Laurence Sterne in his masterpiece *Tristram Shandy* (Sanders 2004:321). Sterne was in all respects a revolutionary author that emerged during the sentimental parabola in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. Contrariwise to all his predecessors (Defoe, Swift, Richardson, Fielding, etc.), Sterne did not to follow a chronological and regular narration. Instead, he told a story by proceeding by association of ideas (Hocutt 1998). Since he believed that the human mind was very complex, the task of the author was no less, and the result was a patchwork of apparently incoherent situations, descriptions and reflections with no chronological order whatsoever (Keymer 2009:2). Sterne is now widely acknowledged as a forerunner of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century British Modernism, which used the device of the Stream of Consciousness to open the gates of the human mind. If on the one hand, the former had tried to bring his 18<sup>th</sup>-century audience into the mind of his fictional characters, 20<sup>th</sup>-century Modernists considered the novel as an attempt to render the continuous flow of the mind with free images and association of ideas (Trotter in Levenson 2011:70-98). During the Victorian Age, many were the novelists who tried to portray realism in their stories; however, rather than representing the inner and sometimes troubled minds of the characters, those authors wanted to focus on the accuracy of the environment in which those characters were living. Novels, then, were a tool for writers to describe society as they saw it, and consequently denounce it; thus, the role they played in the Victorian social life, as mentioned in the previous section, was vital (Sanders 2004; Shattock 2010). Nevertheless, their realism differs according to the years and authors considered. Dickens, for example aimed at representing the wickedness and injustices of society, to raise the awareness of the failings of Victorians on the reading public (Shattock 2010). Then again, for the Brontë sisters, realism



was encapsulated in the Victorian values that sprung from the instances of ordinary life in 19<sup>th</sup>-century provincial England (Sanders 2004). Yet, there was one author whose realism went through harsh criticism, for it stood in between that Victorian Compromise that has already been discussed: George Eliot.

### **2.2.1 George Eliot and *Adam Bede***

George Eliot was born in 1819 in Arbury Farm, near the village of Chilvers Colton in Warwickshire. Although she was baptised with the name of Mary Ann Evans, she changed her name many times during her life. When she turned 17, her mother passed away, and the whole family decided to move to Coventry. Shortly afterwards, both her brother Isaac and her sister Chrissey got married and moved out, thus leaving Mary Ann as the mistress of the house. In Coventry, however, she became acquainted with three of the most influential people of her life: Cara Hennel, her sister Sara Sophia, and Cara's husband, Charles Bray: her beloved trio, as she liked to call them (Eliot 2010; Ashton 1996). With them, she started to become even more interested in participating actively in a circle of intellectuals with whom she could share her thoughts and ideas. Mary Ann was quite prodigious; not only did she study many languages, but she also spent quite a lot of time reading and studying theological works. Even if she did not know that at first, religion played a pivotal part in her life. However, the interest in science came first. By studying science, in fact, one can realize that everything is produced by a cause, which in turn produces some effects; hence, following this logic, everything in nature can be explained, even the influence of medical conditions on the human beings – something that goes against a religious view of life where man is at the centre of the universe (Eliot 2010; Postlethwaite in Levine & Henry 2019:98-117). In 1838, Charles Hennel, brother of Cara and Sara, published a book called *An Inquiry into the Origin of Christianity*, which had a fundamental influence on 19-year-old Mary Ann, slowly leading her towards agnosticism (Eliot 2010; Ashton 1996). In her late 20s, Mary Ann is in London, working as a translator, and slowly making her way up to that circle of literate people that she liked to surround herself with. She always had an interest towards writing, to the point that when she was little, her sister Chrissey brought home the well-acclaimed novel *Waverley* by Walter Scott for her to read; however, since she did not manage to finish it because her sister had to return it, she decided to write herself the finale (Twomey 2015:55). After her father's death in 1849, and after many journeys throughout the continent, Mary Ann first changed name to Marian, and then came back to London, starting off a new career in journalism at *The Westminster Review* – first as an editor,

and later as a writer (Ashton 1996). After some very unfortunate relationships, in 1853, Marian finally met the love of her life, George Henry Lewes, and in the following years (1854 – 1857) she made her debut as a writer. Lewes was an intellectual, like her, but he was also married to a beautiful woman called Agnes Jervis, with whom he had three children. Lewes and Agnes' marriage was open, and they both had lovers; consequently, he could not really file in for a divorce. Even though Marian and Lewes' union was real, formally, it was absolutely scandalous, and their bad reputation slowly led towards social isolation (Bodenheimer in Levine & Henry 2019:28; Ashton 1996). Marian was first banished by many circles in London, repudiated by her friends and if that was not enough, her siblings, too, started to detach from her. In 1857, Marian published her first stories with John Blackwood, one of the most influential publishers in Britain, under the title of *Scenes of Clerical Life*. At the same time, she started adopting a pen name, George Eliot, to protect herself from society. After a couple of years, she published her full-length novel, *Adam Bede*, which granted her both great success and good fame in the literary scene of mid-century Britain (Eliot 2010). After that, her sister Chrissey started once again a correspondence with Marian, and the two arranged a meeting in 1859. Sadly, Chrissey died on March 15 of that same year, without seeing her sister; and probably, it was out of that sadness, that Eliot wrote *The Lifted Veil* (Eliot 2010). On that same year, Marian decided to confess to her beloved trio who she really was, thus making her first step out of anonymity. Slowly, almost all the people that had abandoned her for her bad reputation as an adulteress, started to surround her once again, except for her brother Isaac. Marian's pen name brought her good fortune at first; yet, anonymity was a double-edge weapon in Victorian England. On the one hand, it protected and safeguarded her, for it was neither easy nor socially accepted for women to be writers (Levine & Henry 2019:xvi,4,5; Shattock 2010). On the other one, however, everywhere people were wondering who was the real author of *Adam Bede*, until a rumour spread, that a poor clergyman called Joseph Liggins was the real face behind the name George Eliot. If Marian had not claimed what was hers, she might have lost all the money she had earned with the sales of her novel. Hence, even though it was easier to have people believing that she was a man, and most importantly, to keep people unaware of her reputation as a scandalous woman, she decided to step out of anonymity and let the world know who George Eliot really was (Bodenheimer in Levine & Henry 2019:30,31; Ashton 1996). From that moment, her life changed completely, and she became one of the most successful and powerful British novelists of all time. In 1863, she moved in with Lewes, and started welcoming intellectuals from all over the country. Unfortunately, that light-hearted joy only lasted till November 1878, the year of Lewes's death. Even though that event left her with a huge void in

the chest, on May 6, 1880, she got married with a family friend, George Walter Cross, who was 20 years younger than her. With their union, her brother agreed to finally meet her for the first time after almost 30 years, few months before her death, in December 1880 at the age of 61 (Eliot 2010). In terms of realism, as hinted at in the previous section, George Eliot was harshly criticized by the German philosopher Nietzsche who believed that she was not faithful to what the reality of the time really was (Jameson 2015). On this matter, her famous image of “the great web of human actions” comes to mind (Rajan 2021). In fact, Eliot believed that one single action is the cause of many small movements which are necessary to produce a genuine effect. Historywise, it would indicate that many actions are necessary to produce an historical event; such as the reforms that led towards Welfare State, and serve as background in *Middlemarch* (1874) (Welsh in Levine & Henry 2019:68). Mary Ann believed that to the growing good of the world did contribute many single acts of worthiness, which are not even celebrated in history. Yet, by eliminating all that is evil, she altered reality, thus putting into question whether hers was really realism (Jameson 2015). One of the novels where this contradiction is under the spotlight is *Adam Bede*, which narrates the events revolving around the lives of different characters in the fictional community of the village of Hayslope in 1799. The main characters are Adam Bede, a 26-year-old carpenter; Hetty Sorrel, beautiful but with a heart of stone; Dinah Morris, a virtuous Methodist preacher and cousin of Hetty; and Captain Arthur Donnithorne, the young squire of the estate. Since the beginning of the novel, Adam is in love with Hetty, who in turn is attracted to Arthur. When Adam realizes that there is something going on between the two, he confronts the young squire and, after a quick fight, convinces him to leave Hayslope. Broken-hearted, Hetty decides to marry Adam, but before the wedding, she discovers to be pregnant. Out of desperation, she leaves in search of Arthur, and refuses to go back to the village on account of all the shame and ostracism she would have had to endure once there. After some time, Hetty finally delivers the baby, with no one around but for a woman met a little time before labour. However, instead of taking care of him, she decides to abandon the infant in a nearby field and escape. In the end, since she was hunted by the baby’s cry even from miles apart, she decided to go back, only to discover that the infant had already died of exposure, and to be caught and held for trial with the accuse of child murder (Eliot 2008; McDonagh 2001; Ledwon 1996; Leilei 2005). The news spread quickly and it did not take long for it to reach the village of Hayslope, where everyone promptly got ready for the hearing. Meanwhile, Dinah went looking for Hetty in prison, and promised that she would stay with her till the very end. Dinah’s compassion set ablaze Hetty’s heart of stone, who in turn, mortified, started her contrite confession. This episode, just like the one in *The Heart of Midlothian*, came from a real event

that Eliot was told by her Aunt Samuel when she was 17. Like Dinah, Aunt Samuel was a Methodist preacher who in the past had visited a child-murderer convict before her execution, and decided to stay and pray with her till her very last hour (Nestor 2002). Dinah's sympathy managed to get through that heart as hard as pebbles, and to bring forth the tears, which are the very representation of Hetty's feelings (Villari 2015). At the end of the novel, Hetty is sentenced to death, but before her hanging, Captain Donninthorne, who was back to Hayslope for his father's funeral, rushed to the hearing and convinced the court to exile Hetty, rather than murder her. In the last chapters, we are told that while Adam and Dinah slowly realized their mutual love and got married, Hetty was supposed to return to England on a ship, but tragically died on her way back. A possible interpretation which will be discussed in 4.2 is that Eliot wanted Hayslope to be an Eden-like community, and when Hetty made that one mistake that spread the seed of evil, she got rid of her, turning that small village into an Eden without Eve.



Figure 2.3. *Hetty Sorrel* (Collier 1894) Figure 2.4. *Dinah and Hetty in the Prison* (Small n.d.)

Just like *The Heart of Midlothian*, the main themes that *Adam Bede* deals with are:

1. Religion and the struggle for one's own identity, mainly embodied by Dinah (Stolpa 2002);
2. Infanticide, but in a different way compared to *The Heart of Midlothian* (McDonagh 2001; Ledwon 1996; Leilei 2005); and
3. Modern greatness and the great web of human actions, which are paramount in most Eliot's novels (Villari 2015; Rajan 2021).

### **2.3 Freedom in *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Adam Bede***

Many are the ideas that revolved around the concept of freedom during the Restoration and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Scholars, philosophers, and even theologians widely discussed on the subject, and eventually influenced the work of some of the greatest authors of the time, including Sir W. Scott and G. Eliot. This section aims to analyse freedom in the two novels at issue as a fundamental quality in terms of character development. Starting with *The Heart of Midlothian*, freedom is one of those features that seems to be completely missing in the story. On the one hand, there is Jeanie, a woman dominated by religion and apparently incapable of making her own choices, and on the other one, there is her sister Effie, who is held captive behind the bars of a prison, incapable of defending herself in front of a Court of Law (Scott 2008). However, freedom also makes reference to the historical context presented by Scott and to the work of a great 19<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher who speculated a lot on what History actually is. The German philosopher Friedrich Hegel, in fact, wrote that the human lives are just one great historical process that moves towards the realization of human freedom (Lukacs 1962). In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel deepened the issue and asserted that since reason governs the world, one can find reason in history, though it is a latent one; therefore, one can only comprehend it when "the fullness of history's work is finished" (Daniel 2007). In conclusion, although freedom seems to be absent in *The Heart of Midlothian*, it may also be that the circumstances demanded for its absence: by giving up freedom, both sisters managed to maintain their own identity, their own beliefs and their own dignity. And as a result, by giving up what seemed to be freedom, they reaffirmed themselves as individuals capable and free of making their own choices, but only at the very end of the story, when that "fullness of history's work" came full circle within the microcosm of Scott's fiction.



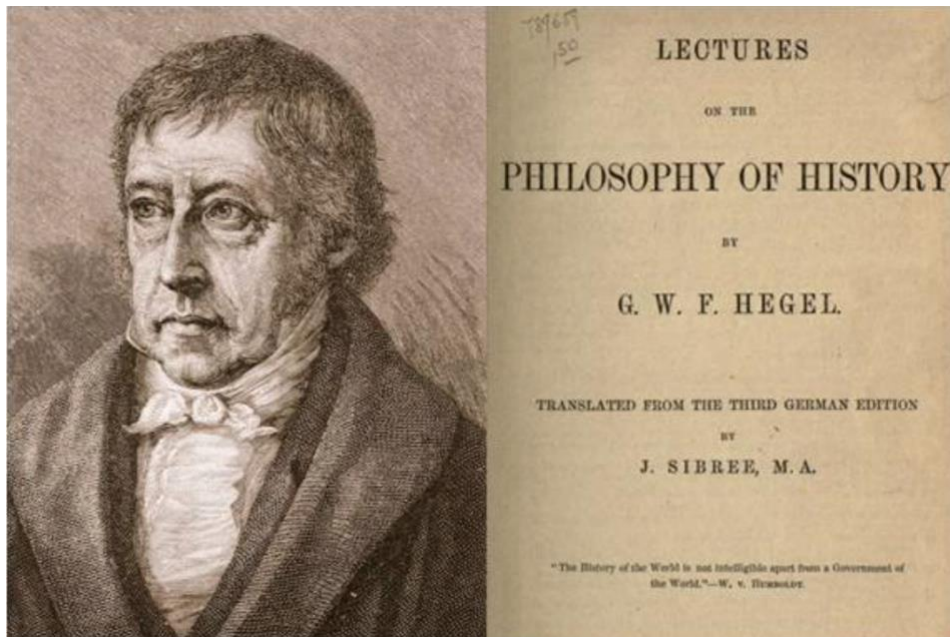


Figure 2.5. Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*

On the other hand, as far as *Adam Bede* is concerned, freedom is a concept that is more connected to the notion of greatness, and Eliot probably made reference to the work of another 19<sup>th</sup>-century author, namely Søren Kierkegaard. In 1843, the Danish philosopher published his first work called *Either/Or*, which focused on the ethical and aesthetical life of an individual (1987). Being *Adam Bede* a *Bildungsroman*, readers already know that towards the end of the book, the main character is supposed to enter adulthood, and to do so, the protagonist has to make some choices that would eventually shape his or her identity. The aesthetical life, as Kierkegaard says, “is not the evil, but neutrality” (1987); contrariwise, “the ethical life constitutes the choice” (1987) (Palmer 1981:98), and what you choose is less important than the fact that you choose. History, hence, represents the domain of the ethical, because history is what has already happened, and therefore it is not open to the domain of the possibility. Another way to see it, is that history is the domain of the tragic: one can enter the domain of the ethical by making a choice; yet, that choice could be wrong and lead to repentance, while if you never choose, you will never repent (Kierkegaard 1987). As humans, we know that we are not free, and this might lead to an extreme vision of life where there is no possibility of choice, and thus, no possibility of an ethical life. Although it is true that human beings are not free, and that their actions are very limited, when it comes to private life, there is a small margin where humans can exercise their free will, lead an ethical life and achieve [modern] “greatness” (Villari 2015). This, according to Eliot, corresponds to the great web of human actions (Rajan 2021).

## 2.4 Summary

This chapter presented an overview of British fiction between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, focusing on two of its most influential authors: Sir Walter Scott and Mary Ann Evans, together with their respective novels *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Adam Bede*. In Chapter 4, I shall analyse these novels and their pivotal female characters in more depth, while in the next chapter I shall discuss religion, women and sympathy so as to have a better understanding of their importance in the literary scenario of the Augustan and the Victorian Age.

## 3. A Great Revival of Faith

“No age, since the founding and forming of the Christian Church was ever like, in open avowed atheism, blasphemies, and heresies, to the age we now live in. No one in England believed any longer”, lamented Daniel Defoe in 1722 (Porter 2003:211). Many were the questions at the heart of enlightened thinking, and even though religion was being rationalized, rigorism still managed to survive. But in a different way. The 17<sup>th</sup> century was deeply shaped by the presence of Puritanism, a religious movement that sought to “purify” the Church of England from Roman Catholic rites and “corrupt” lifestyle. They condemned all forms of entertainment, and led a very strict moral and religious conduct, which they imposed on society through church reform. Besides, since they followed Calvin’s theory of Predestination, and therefore believed that God only chooses a very few people to save (the so-called “elects”), they wanted no scholar interpretation of the Scriptures and rejected the theory of free will (Acheson 2013). Puritans considered man as a perfect combination of hard work and discipline, and argued that life must be deeply influenced by religion. It should not surprise that their rise led to drastic social changes in England, including the abolition of ceremonies and the closing of theatres and taverns (Durstun & Eales 1996). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, things changed significantly. The Clergy would often attend public places, taverns and eating-houses, for not only did they focus on religion, but also made great achievements in other spheres, like Reverend Laurence Sterne in literature (Porter 2003:216). Religion was becoming more and more subjected to reason, and since reason, for most people, meant their own opinion, belief too became “a matter of private judgement” and “a matter of analysis and choice” (Porter 2003:215,216). Although 18<sup>th</sup>-century England lacked religious zeal, things began to change in the 1730s, with a man called George Whitefield. Whitefield was said to have experienced a sort of awakening when in college, and that sentiment later consolidated at Oxford, when he made the acquaintance of

the two brothers John and Charles Wesley, founders of the Methodist Church (Walsh 1993). Methodism originated as a sort of religious revival within the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Church of England, and its name came from the methodical approach believers had to their faith. Even though Methodists, under no circumstances wanted to break with the tradition, this soon proved impossible and eventually they became part of a separate branch of the Anglican Church (Abraham & Kirby 2009:177). Methodists were dissenters or nonconformists to the official religion of the United Kingdom. They preached outside of the Church, as one can read in *Adam Bede*, they were more socially committed and active than conformists (Stott 2005). In a certain sense, this social concern, was a remedy against a tendency to be zealous and concerned with all the theological questions that preoccupied the Calvinists.



Figure 3.1. *George Whitefield preaching in Bolton, June 1750* (Walley 1863)

Methodists had an idea of religion which is linked to duty and to good works; a religion which is sympathetic, and that should serve as both guidance and comfort. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, English Protestants identified themselves with different branches of the Church of England, and since there were different religions coexisting with one another, philosophers, led by Locke,



started advocating for a full-fledged Toleration Act (Porter 2003:230). Their first step was a letter published in 1689 by Locke himself; yet, the official Toleration Act was only issued in 1813, nearly 130 years later. While Voltaire believed that in England religions were many and all coexisted in peace (Porter 2003:231), “ecclesiastical courts still had the power of imprisoning for Atheism, blasphemy and heresy, and Parliament could order books to be burnt” (Porter 2003:230). Freedom and toleration were well advocated, but England still had a long way to go. Nonetheless, Methodism, together with all the other Protestant branches of the Anglican Church, helped revive religion both in the United Kingdom and overseas. In fact, at one point the Wesley brothers and Whitefield moved across the Atlantic only to be the catalysts of a broader phenomenon called “Great Awakening”, which emphasized concepts of Calvinism in both England and the colonies (Tracy 2019; Kidd 2014). The first Great Awakening started in the late 1720s, but in American History, the phenomenon repeated multiple times throughout the centuries, and only came to an end in the 1960-70s (Tracy 2019). Whitefield, in particular, covered 5,000 miles in only one year, preaching more than 350 times in front of common people, native Americans and even slaves. He was fundamental in the rediscovery and building of a religious identity in an Age where everything was questionable and the search for truth was mainly pursued through scientific discoveries. Nevertheless, since religion is a highly subjective concept, its impact on one’s own identity can vary. The next section, in fact, shall make reference to the identity theory and to Freud’s theory of the unconscious, before introducing Hume’s and Smith’s notions of Empathy and Sympathy.

### **3.1 Identity and religion**

In modern psychology, individuals are believed to possess as many identities as their roles in society demand. This is called “identity theory”, and studies the ways the individuals’ behaviours, thoughts and emotions cope with the society one lives in (Burke & Stets 2009:3). However, one might also argue that identity is only one, yet socially malleable, for when human beings experience, they grow, and while growing, they momentarily change their own shape: just like clay. As already mentioned, Locke published the theory of tabula rasa in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, asserting that it is through experience that we gain knowledge. Hence, through experience we build on our identity, and as a result, we change (Porter 2001:506). Yet, that change is not only social. Nowadays, in fact, individuals’ identities are commonly broken down in many ways according to the area of interest considered, including:

- Ethnicity (our ancestry);
- Nationality (our common land, history and values);
- Gender (our deep-seated felt sense of who we are); and
- Religion (our faith) (Joseph 2004; Jones 2016).

Starting from our culture and background, everything we learn throughout our early years mould our persona in ways we cannot even entirely comprehend. In fact, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Austrian neurologist and philosopher Sigmund Freud, father of psychoanalysis, postulated a theory which introduced the concept of “unconscious”, the “unfamiliar”, in contrast to the familiar experiences discussed by Locke (Tayler 1997). Freud hypothesized that the human brain is composed of three different systems that co-exist with one another:

- **Id**, which is the component responding to basic urges and desires (i.e., the personality of a child). It is not affected by reality or logic and only operates within the unconscious part of the mind;
- **Ego**, the section that mediates between the desires or impulses of the Id and the Superego; and
- **Superego**, which is the ethical component of our personality. It provides the moral conscience, the prohibitions, and also the ideals of a person; in short, it represents one’s idealized self-image (Rennison 2015).

If Freud believed that our experiences shape our identity and build on an ethical component called Superego, he also speculated that the latter was counterbalanced by basic primitive desires he called Id. The result of that confrontation is the Ego: a compromise that we, as individuals, adopt in reality (Rennison 2015), and which in the long run, shall build up on an individual’s identity, and shape his or her moral conscience. Therefore, what Locke believed to be true, was only the tip of the iceberg according to Freud (Tayler 1997). The compromise that we commonly make in our daily life is arguably altered when the two forces are not perfectly balanced. An alteration, in short, results when our moral conscience is deeply affected by some powerful force coming from a previous experience, and that eventually dominates on our primitive urges and desires. Sometimes, when that moral conscience is prevailing, we have the feeling that our own identity is changing. In practice, that might happen when all the choices we make are conditioned by one motive only – which could be our culture, our work, or even religion (Rennison 2015). In the specific, this dissertation aims at analysing

religion as a dominant factor in the construction of one's own identity in two pivotal novels of 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature, namely *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Adam Bede*. While this section shall provide the historical, philosophical and theological background in which those novels were conceived, Chapter 4 shall analyse the four main female characters under examination, in order to present an evolution of female heroism and empowerment within the framework of a society where religion dramatically affected women's lives. Overall, the factors that fanned the flame of religion revival during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century are many, but they will all be introduced in details in the following pages, starting from the development of Hume's and Smith's theories on empathy and sympathy.

### **3.2 Empathy and Sympathy**

Before presenting and analysing the abovementioned theories, I should first provide a definition for these two concepts. While empathy is a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect which can be provoked by hearing, reading and witnessing another's emotional state and condition (Keen 2007:4), sympathy is the understanding of and the reaction towards another human person's distress (Tear & Michalska 2010):

- Empathy = I feel what you feel (to feel with);
- Sympathy = I feel a supportive emotion about your feelings (to feel for) (Keen 2007:5)

Overtime, scholars have also discussed other forms of empathy and sympathy, such as:

- Emotional contagion = Transference of feelings (i.e., babies crying because of other babies' crying) (Keen 1997:4,5); and
- Mass Empathy = Massive events can evoke empathy and/or sympathy in a huge group of people (i.e., the Holocaust) (Keen 1997:23).

In recent years, researchers have discovered that not only does our capacity to feel empathy and/or sympathy depend on the time and place in which we live, but also on the social group that surrounds us (Keen 1997:18,19). However, while one can be highly empathic and be characterized by a great capacity to feel for others, there are people who can also be distinguished by the lack of both empathy and sympathy, which, in other words, results in either sociopathic behaviours (i.e., serial killers) or in some cases, autism (Keen 1997:9). While

discussing on the origin of empathy, the American psychologist and scholar Martin Hoffman speculated that the causes might vary. Empathy can be a) automatic, b) the result of a previous conditioning, c) triggered out of a direct association or d) can arise when an individual puts his or herself into someone else's shoes (Keen 1997:17). However, while there are no doubts whether human empathy involves feelings, there are contrasting points of view in academia as far as the role of cognition is concerned (Keen 1997). Back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Scottish philosopher David Hume published *The Treatise of Human Nature*, where he aimed to demonstrate that "reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will [...]" "It is passion that is absolutely primary", and therefore, "reason is the slave of passions" (Mullan 1988:18,19). Hume believed that everything starts with the senses, and considered feelings to be passions working mechanically within human beings. In fact, unlike Locke, Hume assumed that knowledge came from both external (sensations or impressions) and internal inputs (reflections), that generate ideas coming from either memory or imagination (MacNabb 2019). Since Hume conceived our reasoning as highly emotional, he believed passions to work as a contamination, for people do get contaminated by other people's feelings (Mullan 1988:24). Nonetheless, he did not consider empathy/sympathy to be one of them (Hume made no distinctions between the two) (Agosta 2011). Rather, he saw sympathy as an open window to the world: a mechanism of reception more than an action, and since sympathy deals with situations of distress, it lies at the very heart of communication. Sympathy creates a "we" out of a mass of individuals, and takes away the ground where Hobbes's theory on human nature was based, which hypothesized that man, if left in a state of nature, would have the tendency to suppress the others (Mullan 1988:24,25). In conclusion, Sympathy boosts our self-awareness, whilst infusing us with the passions of others (Mullan 1988:29), and Hume strongly believed that this "mobility of passions permits the communication upon which society is founded" (Mullan 1988:24), and that by understanding the affections of other individuals, we too can reproduce them (Mullan 1988:29). In opposition to Hume, 18<sup>th</sup>-century Scottish scholar Adam Smith took a different stand in the debate on sympathy. He analysed a standard communication between two interlocutors, called the two parties the agent – he or she who acts – and the spectator – he or she who judges the actions of an agent –, and stated that sympathy "operates only in the space of this distinction" and "only according to the stability of two positions which are, of course, neither equivalent nor opposite, for the 'spectator' must always 'know' more than the 'agent'" (Mullan 1988:27). Besides, "in certain cases, the superiority of the spectator is such as to allow sympathy to be a corrective rather than a reproductive mechanism" (Mullan 1988:27). In fact, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith asserted that in order to judge

ourselves, we must view the circumstances from the eyes of an impartial spectator, advocating that feelings can be regulated, and therefore going against Hume's most-famous "reason is the slave of passions". During the philosophical dispute over the definition of sympathy, the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of the novel of sensibility, which exploited readers' appetites for passions by assuming a pedagogical role (Keen 1997). Even though sentimental fiction has already been introduced in Chapter 2, it is important to emphasize what favoured its development, and therefore the preaching and ideas of the Cambridge Platonists, which brought forth 18<sup>th</sup>-century Latitudinarianism, a branch of the Anglican Church that supported Smith's stand on the regulation of feelings (De Bruyn 1981).

### **3.3 The Latitudinarian Church of England and the sentimental parabola**

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, philosophy was considered "the handmaid of theology", for thinkers devoted all their learning to religious and moral issues. Among them, there was a group called the Cambridge Platonists, associated to the University of Cambridge, which after the Civil War started defending the existence of God, speculating on the immortality of the soul and preaching for a new Christian ethical code of practice. The group included well-affirmed figures such as Henry More (1614 – 1687) and Ralph Cudworth (1617 – 1688), both fellows at Christ's College, Cambridge (Patrides 1980). Nonetheless, during the Restoration, religion was still a burning issue in Britain. The Church of England was no longer the sole path for a believer, and smaller Anglican branches started sprouting like mushrooms in the British soil, including Puritans, Arminians, Unitarians, etc.; each responding to different dogmas. As a result, after the Glorious Revolution (1688-9), a new theological branch emerged with the goal of finding some common grounds, like the Latitudinarians, a group that evolved out of the Cambridge Platonists (Spurr 2009). The Latitudinarians believed reason and faith to be compatible, for the human mind can reach moral ideas and religious foundation through reason. They also believed that the will is free and independent, which means that even though we gather all our knowledge through our senses, our will can go beyond them. They favoured a religion with the possibility for man to change and improve – a religion of tolerance –, and excluded all those religions which denied latitudes (Spurr 2009). In the specific, Latitudinarians were against Calvinism, for it both confined man to strict rules of obedience, and because it rejected the theory of free will in favour of the theory of predestination (Spurr 2009; Howe 2009). During the sentimental parabola, the Latitudinarian Church of England had a remarkable influence on the development of sentimental fiction. As a matter of fact, the former praised benevolence as a universal virtue,

and since Latitudinarians strongly believed in human beings' capacity to improve themselves, they were also convinced that while it is important to love God, it is far more important to extend love to all God's creatures, and therefore, to value empathy and sympathy above anything else (Spurr 2009). Unlike Puritans, Latitudinarians believed that benevolence is a natural feeling that prompts us to behave charitably towards others, and that religion should not be bound by rules. Hence, while Hobbes believed that man, if left to his natural instinct, would be selfish and have the tendency to suppress others, Latitudinarians were convinced that since we are naturally born with benevolence, then we are naturally good (Spurr 2009). In that regard, they also were supporters of the doctrine of Pelagius, who affirmed that it is not entirely true that we are born sinful, because there is a sparkle of good that lie in all of us; otherwise, there would be neither the possibility for salvation nor to exert our free will (Greene 1975). In conclusion, while Puritans believed human beings could only be happy when in front of God, Latitudinarians were convinced that doing good gives someone pleasure, for it is the highest form of earthly joy, and that by behaving well and regulating our passions, one can increase his or her morality (Spurr 2009). Thus, the religious revival of the Anglican Church had three fundamental figures: George Whitefield, on the one hand, and the Wesley brothers, on the other. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Latitudinarian Church was not the only branch of Anglicanism who praised for a religion of tolerance that aimed at man's self-improvement. Methodism, too, supported those ideals, and the next section shall focus on its status at the turn of the century, in the years in which *Adam Bede* is set.

### **3.4 The Methodist Movement at the turn of the century**

As mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 3, Methodism was one of the branches of the Anglican Church that emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. While at first it became popular during the great renewal of faith in the late Augustan Age, during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Methodism suffered a rise in institutionalism that slowly led to its long decline (Turner 1970). Even though Methodists did not want to be part of a separate branch of the Anglican religion, when they became acknowledged as such, they had to give up to certain privileges, such as being allowed to preach within the Church (Turner 1970). As a result, in a short time, they became famous for their open-air preaching, reaching crowds of hundreds, together with their unconventional approach to women in religion. As a matter of fact, men were not the only ones allowed to preach according to the Methodist's code. Women in the Ministry were quite popular at the turn of the century, as one can read in *Adam Bede*, and they even had authority in terms of Church

leadership (Abraham & Kirby 2009:163). Women were encouraged to testify their faith and exercise their sympathy to the most unfortunate ones, thus “extending the role of mothering beyond physical care” (Broyles 2008). Nonetheless, their role started to lose its importance as Methodist Churches became more structured, institutionalized and male dominated. Female preachers became less and less relevant in British society, and even the people within the community became sceptical towards their role (Eliot 2008). In *Adam Bede*, George Eliot wanted to portray those feelings, by setting the novel in the last few years in which women could legally preach in the Methodist Church. In fact, in July 1803, the annual conference of the Methodist clergy and lay-preachers decided that women should not be allowed to preach “unless [they] ha[d] an extraordinary call from God to speak in public” (Eliot 2008:655). If compared to conformists, Methodists were more socially active and committed to the duty they were preaching. In the novel, Dinah says multiple times that she cannot get married because she has a duty to all those poor and unfortunate souls that live outside Loamshire. The social concern, in a certain sense, was a remedy against a tendency to be zealous and overspiritual: an attitude that characterized other branches of non-conformists, like the Puritans. In fact, this is the main reason why Dinah is in open dialogue with Mr. Irwine, the parishioner of the village of Hayslope. Being the parson a Latitudinarian, not only is he more tolerant towards other dissenters, but he also believes in a religion which is sympathetic and connected to good works, just like Dinah. To further emphasize this concept, Eliot decided to balance the rich and fertile land of Loamshire, home to the village of Hayslope where most of the characters live, with the poor county of Stonyshire, “naked under the sky” and where “trees are few so that children might count them” (Creeger 1970). Most of the action takes place in the former, where prosperity is omnipresent, poverty is rare and exile, therefore, is considered as “the worst evil that can befall” on the characters (Creeger 1970). In many ways, Loamshire is a hungry land, because since its citizens never experienced privation or suffering, they can neither understand nor sympathize with poverty or ugliness. In fact, in *Adam Bede*, Eliot employs the character of Dinah to stress the symbolic relationship between those two counties. She is both a Methodist and an outsider to the people of Loamshire, even though she has a family attachment there, first with the Poysers and Hetty, and by the end of the novel, with Adam. Yet, the people of Hayslope do not trust her, because her position is ambiguous, as Creeger highlights (1970). Nonetheless, the stand taken by other characters also is, starting with that of Hetty Sorrel, cousin to Dinah and main female protagonist to the story. If Dinah dedicated her life to good works towards the poor people of Stonyshire, Hetty is the best representation of that hunger that revolved around Loamshire and that was part of a greater phenomenon of progressive acceleration that we may

refer to as a “crisis of abundance”. Such a phenomenon brought forth a strong material and cultural entropy towards the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that writers represented by emphasizing the extreme consequences of consumerism. Hunger, as Creeger (1970) emphasizes, can also be spiritual and lead to extreme and tragic consequences that became fundamental features of many female literary characters of 19<sup>th</sup>-century fiction. Yet, as this theme will be more thoroughly investigated in Chapter 3.6.2 and Chapter 4, I should first present the catalyst that led to this crisis, namely the rise of consumerism in Britain.

### **3.5 The rise of consumerism and the Industrial Revolution**

The 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a rise in population that brought forth a wind of change in Great Britain, which was particularly fostered by the rise of the middle class. As previously stated, the 18<sup>th</sup> century also marked the beginning of the entertainment industry, controlled by professional actors, theatre managers, journalists, and characterized by all sorts of sports and musical events. In short, the urban space soon became a sociocultural centre “designed for spending time and money on enjoyments” (Porter 2003:514,515). Leisure became the umpteenth market product: affordable enough for the population to exploit and fairly diversified for everyone to choose what best suited their taste. Food industry lowered the prices as well, and as Porter writes in one of his essays, “the pleasures of the table were washed down by those of the bottles”, thus underlining that “drinking was life’s second greatest pleasure” during the Age of Reason (2003:519). Yet, even though they were not aware of it, British citizens were enjoying a toxic life of excesses which by the end of the century would severely affect the lives of everyone. In terms of literature, authors were writing their novels realistically, to appeal the broadest segment on the market. Yet, even though the rise of the middle class triggered a rise in literacy, the language still had to be simple enough to be understood, otherwise people would have never bought their books. Contrariwise to the previous century, authors were no longer writing for the sole purpose of writing: they wanted to make a career out of their work, and rise socially. However, they were not the only ones to dream big: readers also wanted to improve their condition and have their name circulating among the members of the upper class; and in order to satisfy both needs, a new way of publishing developed, called subscription. With subscription, authors no longer had to collect money from one patron, but they went directly to their reading public to get funds. In turn, authors put the names of the sponsors in the final edition of their books, next to those of all the nobles and aristocrats who supported them, if



there were any (Clapp 1931). In time, that desire to advance socially affected all the other microspheres of society, and became a catalyst for the Industrial Revolution.



Figure 3.2. Interior of a London coffee-house.

The Industrial Revolution developed in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and it marked the passage from an agricultural society to an industrialized one. In less than 50 years, Britain became massively affected by the introduction of new machineries in factories, the expectation of better life conditions, the building of railways and steamships, and by the growth in importance of the middle-class (White 2009). Even though these were all pioneering steps forward, many were the setbacks that hit the country in the following century, including poverty, pollution, crime and the lack of hygiene (Young 1992). In literature, a “movement” emerged to counter the consequences of the Industrial Revolution, and since in reality the unity of the village was increasingly being replaced by that of the city, Romantics decided to put man’s escapism in nature at the centre of their writing. In particular, the first generation of romantic poets, namely Wordsworth and Coleridge (the Lake Poets), even decided to move upstate, to the Lake District, to compose their lyrics (Sanders 2004:338). Poets wanted to forget the corrupted elements of society, and by focusing their attention on sublime landscapes and on uncorrupted natural sceneries, they chose to mainly represent the side of nature which was far from that of everyday life. In fact, though they widely portrayed mountains, flowers and river

streams, they hardly ever discussed bogs or fens, nor did they talk about nature within urban areas. The Lake Poets advocated a return to an Eden-like world which was prior to the Industrial Revolution, and emphasized that the relationship between man and nature was changing (Garrard 2004). Ever since the Middle Ages, man believed God provided him with nature, so that he could exploit it. Overtime, Christianity has fostered that sentiment, and it slowly led to a mood of indifference towards natural exploitation, especially during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the beginning of the Victorian Age, that typical natural setting readers could find in Wordsworth's lyrics was replaced by the city: men could no longer escape in nature, but had to cope with a society that thrived for progress and where only a part of the population lived at ease (Sanders 2004:405). Consumerism emerged out of all the toxic addictions of the previous century, and was inevitably fostered by the Industrial Revolution. When society found its new dimension in the city, contradictions started to arise, and eventually conveyed in the following century in what Chesterton defined "Victorian Compromise".

### **3.6 The Victorian compromise**

There are different levels of reading, when it comes to the Victorian Age. While on the one hand it was an age of progress, stability and great social reforms, on the other one it was an age marked by poverty, injustice and social unrest (Sanders 2004:405; Young 1992). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, human achievements were moving at breakneck speed and the British Empire was becoming the greatest of all time. Yet, there was still a great division within society. Even though everyone could breathe an air of scientific revolution and progress, most of the poor were still living in slums, appalling areas where diseases and squalor were rampant. Furthermore, industrial work fostered pollution, which in turn caused disastrous effects on the health of the population; since health care was only introduced with the welfare state (1870s), the working conditions and the death rate of the population were brought at extremely high levels (Dyos 1967). In addition, although many great steps forward were made in terms of social security, with the building of police stations, prisons and boarding schools, law and order were still among the major concerns in the urban environment (Mitchell 1996). In terms of religion, Evangelicalism started to spread widely in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain, inspired by the preaching of both Whitefield and the Wesley brothers (Abraham & Kirby 2009:478,479). The two pillars of such a religion were the obedience to a strict moral code, and the dedication to humanitarian causes and social reforms (Haartman 2021). In the previous chapter I have mentioned that Victorians were great moralizers, and that they lived by a code of values that preached hard

work, respectability and charity. At the same time, however, the society in which they were living was flawed and rotten, for it rather ignored the problems affecting the most unfortunate and forgotten slice of population rather than solving them. This mixture of morality and hypocrisy, severity and conformity, social appearance and unproper behaviour, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century took the name of “Victorian Compromise”: an apparent solution given by British society to the many contrasts of that Age (Young 1992). A prime example was given by prostitution and gambling. What in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were popular and widely-accepted forms of public entertainment, in the Victorian Age were despicable habits that respectable people attended in secret, supported by the silence and inaction of police forces (Huggins 2000). Since respectability was at the centre of the Victorian family life, and featured regular attendance at Church, ownership of a house with a carriage and servants, and the possession of good manners, focusing on such infamous habits would have created a real scandal in the society of the time. In fact, at family level, husband and wife had different duties; yet, while the former maintained all his rights, freedom and power, the latter, regrettably, didn’t.

### 3.6.1 Women in the Victorian Age

At page 46, I mentioned how in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, British citizens were enjoying a toxic life of excesses that brought forth many changes within society, especially in terms of women. The post-censorship age led to an increasing number of productions of erotica, and in turn women soon became associated with pleasure. With prostitution on the rise, it did not take long for women to be widely discussed as sex objects (Porter 2003:607-639), and though they were slowly gaining power thanks to their new roles in society, some, like the Marquis de Sade, believed that the solution for women empowerment lied in their very sex (Airaksinen 1995). However, all that eccentricity and whimsical lifestyle eventually stopped, and with the Great Revival of Faith, religion ceased to be called into question. As a consequence, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, women suffered a ruthless backlash that slowly led to the idealization of motherhood and to the domestic doll’s house atmosphere typical of the Victorian Age (Porter 2003:560). In particular, the Victorian household revolved around two specific images:

- The family as a patriarchal unit, where man was the *pater familias* and represented the authority; and
- Women as good daughters, good wives and good mothers.

Under Queen Victoria, sexuality was generally repressed and prudery was overwhelming within society (Huggins 2000). By the end of the century, women became idealized as submissive figures within the house walls, and those who did not match society's standards were eventually isolated. In fact, all those women which were either adulteresses, unmarried mothers, or prostitutes were immediately condemned, emarginated, and labelled "Fallen Women", a term that refers to the loss of innocence and to the biblical and ill-fated fall of Eve. Curious that only few years before, prostitution and brothels were among the main assets of the newly-born entertainment industry, so much so that only in London there were more than 30,000 streetwalkers (Porter 2003:519). The term "Fallen Woman", however, also included all those women which were seduced – or sexually corrupted – by men above their station that had no interest in marrying them, such as Hetty Sorrel, in *Adam Bede* (Auerbach 1980). Yet, while the lower level of society was well-defined by the presence of such women, the Victorians preached a different ideal of womanhood. A good woman in Victorian society was obedient to her father, caring and thoughtful to her husband and a good mother to her children. Soon, society started to refer to such women as "Victorian Angels", or "Angels in the house" (Kühl 2016).



Figure 3.3. *Past and Present* (Egg 1858)

These two faces of womanhood were often represented in many artworks of the time, and an example is *Past and Present* by Augustus Egg (1858). With this triptych, the painter wanted to portray the harsh consequences of a wife's adultery in a middle-class Victorian family. The first picture, called *Misfortune*, represents the scene where the husband discovers his wife's infidelity. The aim was to represent the very moment of rupture of the bliss that once surrounded their domestic life, which is all the more reinforced by the picture hanging above the two children playing in the background: the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (Fowle 2000). The central piece, *Prayer*, portrays the repercussions of that adultery. The children that were once playing in the background of the room are older now, and the younger

is weeping on the lap of her elder sister, crying for the death of their father. Below the triptych there is also a note, saying “August the 4th - Have just heard that B— has been dead more than a fortnight, so his poor children have now lost both parents. I hear she was seen on Friday last near the Strand, evidently without a place to lay her head. What a fall hers has been!” (Fowle 2000). Finally, the last scene, *Despair*, is a reinforcement of that note, and portrays the fallen woman from beneath the Adelphi arches by the river Thames: away from both her children, and hopeless at the sight of the city (Fowle 2000). While there were many painters who tried to capture the real essence of those women, especially among the Pre-Raphaelites, there were also many novelists who attacked the harsh and oppressed conditions in which women were living (Nead 1984). Women were like birds trapped in a cage, incapable of escaping their own conditions and with only few arrows in their quiver. Even though they had to publish with a male pseudonym, many were the female novelists who sought empowerment in literature and tried to denounce women’s conditions with their pen. Among them, one cannot but mention the importance and relevance of Charlotte Brontë and her iconic *Jane Eyre*, a novel with one of the most symbolic and game-changing female characters of 19<sup>th</sup>-century British fiction, especially because of its pioneering statements in the matter of women empowerment. As far as the author is concerned, Charlotte is often considered a proto-feminist capable of describing women’s love, passions, torments and frustrations openly, in a time dominated by conventional morality, and where women had little-to-no power, let alone rights (Andrews 2016). In the novel, in fact, not only does Jane reject the Victorian ideal of womanhood with the words “I am not an angel”, but she also reasserts her condition by saying that she is “no bird; and [that] no net ensnares [her]”. She is “a free human being with an independent will” (Brontë 2007): a pretty bold statement if one considers the age in which it was written. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, society was changing. Social reforms were taking place all over Britain and women were openly fighting for empowerment with their ink and paper. The agricultural depression was bringing people closer to the city, as one can read in Hardy’s novels, and the population was then riding the wave of consumerism (Martell 2013). In the previous pages, I mentioned how sexual corruption caused many women to fall in the Victorian society; yet, at the bottom of that corruption there was also a deep desire to rise socially and improve one’s own condition. In other words, the corruption was not only carnal, but also materialistic and worldly, and sometimes the consequences of those dreams and aspirations were terrifying, as in the case of Effie Deans and Hetty Sorrel (D’Alfonso 2019).

### 3.6.2 Infanticides

According to Marx, poverty and consumption are two concepts that are strictly connected to one other, for they represent the ultimate causes for all real crisis in modern society (Landa 2018). The “crisis of abundance” which I introduced in 3.5, in fact, is closely related to the culture of consumerism which was typical in the early modern period and that eventually seduced a great number of Victorians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many novelists tried to portray that sentiment of crisis by denouncing the evils of a society which was rotten to the bone. Despite on one end society was sharply divided in wealthy respectable gentlemen and poor souls living in slums, consumerism soon became an obsession for people that belonged to all social classes and who lived in all corners of Great Britain (Richards 1990). Nevertheless, while it is easy to see this tendency in the city, it is even more striking when it hits ordinary men and women living in the countryside. With *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy probably wanted to attack this new tendency with the village of Trantridge and its toxic inhabitants. In fact, Trantridge is a place in Wessex that emerged with the culture of consumerism, and that is located next to the Chase, the most ancient wood in England where the protagonist, Tess, is raped by Alec, her in-law whose family had purchased the name “d’Urbervilles” to rise socially. While there are many levels of reading this passage, it is evident that not only did Hardy want to portray the physical rape of an innocent lowbrow woman by a member of the new aristocracy, but also the metaphorical rape of the ancient traditions of Britain by the new culture of consumerism. In this new cultural climate, there was little room left for purity and innocence, for corruption spread in all parts of the country in the guise of the desire to improve one’s condition. While nowadays this might sound as a fair ambition, back then the consequences hit harder than expected, and unfortunately, the ones who paid the most were often the little ones. Back in the Early Modern period, some children were so unwanted that infanticide became the most common form of murder in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Sadly, that trend continued until the Victorian Age, with little-to-no judicial action to contain the phenomenon. Many were the forms of murder, including poisoning through opium-based drugs, smothering in bed, deliberate neglect or abandonment and deliberate treatment (Sauer 1978). While figures highlight how infanticide was one of the most horrible and frequent causes of death in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were still many physicians who believed that “infanticide [was] a crime in this country rarely committed” (Sauer 1978). However popular this practice was, it was still listed as a crime that was punishable by death when detected. Yet, most times that did not happen, because women who committed such atrocities were often regarded as insane and therefore not responsible for their

actions (Sauer 1978). Furthermore, the law said that “if a woman secretly bore an illegitimate child which was later found dead, it was the woman's responsibility to prove her innocence, rather than the Crown's to prove her guilt”, a situation which is very similar to the case of Effie Deans in *The Heart of Midlothian*. Such unfair laws were replaced by more equitable acts only in 1803, which stated that the burden of proof was to fall on the Crown rather than the defendant (Sauer 1978). During the early years of Queen Victoria, rumour had it that the English would have soon rivalled the Chinese “in their callous attitude to infant life”, thus reasserting that infanticide was “par excellence the great social evil of [that age]” (Sauer 1978). Research has highlighted how most of those infants were illegitimate and were born to poor mothers that lived in seedy districts and in unsanitary conditions, with no real knowledge of proper techniques of child care (Sauer 1978). Besides, since single parenting was not well regarded by society, those who were already labelled as fallen women by the population, considered their child as a burden too heavy to bear, especially if they were intoxicated by that desire of improving their own condition. In Victorian society, single mothers were usually kicked out of their own house by their “respectable” parents, and most times, if they could not find a place to stay, they were likely to turning tricks in order to survive (Walkowitz 1983). Unfortunately, women’s jobs were few, and if one did not live up to the expectations of a prudish and puritan society, there were little-to-no chances for a woman to be hired somewhere respectable. Besides, if those women were to have babies or children, and no one to look after them, those poor souls were likely to be abandoned in workhouses or in the parish, in the hope someone will help them (Moorhead 2015). The world has always been hard on women, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were seen as both preys and predators, precisely due to their desire to rise socially (Startup 2000). As far as the former is concerned, the most iconic example is probably that of *Ruth* by Elizabeth Gaskell, a young orphan working in a sweatshop as a seamstress, who one day caught the eye of a young gentleman. Captivated by her beauty, Mr. Bellingham first offered her comfort when she lost her job, and then abandoned her shortly afterwards once he got what he wanted. Even though Ruth had a baby with a man above her status, she decided to keep it secret, and to tell the world she was a widow, because otherwise society would have labelled her as a fallen woman. Eventually, her secret is revealed and Ruth is marginalized by society, with the shock and embarrassment of Leonard, her illegitimate son. With nothing left to lose, Ruth decides to spend the rest of her life helping the most unfortunate people in society as a nurse, thus also restoring her relationship with her son, still devastated by her mother’s revelation. The story finally ends with Ruth’s death and funeral, following a terrible illness that she probably caught at work (Gaskell 2011). In the introduction to the novel, Dolin (2011, in



Gaskell 2011:xxvii) argues that Ruth had to die because there was no place in the fictional world she occupied for a person “with such unworldly charisma, such purity of soul, [and] such incorruptible rectitude”.



Figure 3.4. *The Outcast* (Redgrave 1851)

Contrariwise, the predator is best embodied by the character of Lydia Gwilt, in *Armada* by Wilkie Collins. In fact, not only is Lydia the villain of the story, but she is also a laudanum-addict bigamous fortune-hunter who is remembered by the general public of the time as one of the most despicable female characters ever written (Collins 2008). Particularly emblematic is also the case of Hetty Sorrel who, in a way, embodies both the role of a predator and that of a prey. Intoxicated by the desire of improving her own condition, Hetty seeks for and eventually gives in to the advances of Captain Donnithorne, a man who was significantly above her status. Yet, quite often the longing for a better life is much more tempting than the man who offers it. Due to a series of unfortunate circumstances, at the end of the novel Hetty will be abandoned by the man she loves and with a child in her womb to look after: a situation which she was not ready to address and which she could not discuss with anyone. Except for Dinah, whose sympathy was able to melt her heart hard as a pebble into tears of repentance (Eliot 2008).



### **3.7 Sympathy, suffering and the lack of happiness in *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Adam Bede***

As introduced in Chapter 2, when discussing the common grounds between the gothic and sentimental fiction, there are three elements that are crucial for this analysis, namely sympathy, suffering and the lack of happiness. And even though the two novels at issue are neither gothic nor sentimental pieces of literature, they still have common elements that resume both literary traditions. My research focuses on the common themes between *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Adam Bede* and on the four female characters under examination, in order to present an evolution of the relationship between women and religion in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. Therefore, Chapter 3 was necessary to present a) an overview of the impact that religion had during the Early and Late Enlightenment, b) the differences between Georgian and Victorian women, and c) the two concepts of sympathy and empathy which are imperative to understand the characters under assessment. In 3.2 I have defined sympathy as the understanding of and the reaction towards another human person's distress (Tear & Michalska 2010) maintaining that it differs from empathy because of a major distance between the two interlocutors ("to feel for" rather than "to feel with") (Keen 1997). Even though Hume suggested that sympathy creates a "we" out of a group of individuals (Mullan 1988:24,25), that does not mean that it happens all the time. Sympathy, in fact, can vary according to the person and the situation considered, and that highly depends on the way our identity is constructed. The two novels under examination are parallel when it comes to sympathy, for they both present situations and themes that have to do with characters whose identity is severely affected by religion, namely Jeanie and Dinah. Conversely, the latter are counterbalanced by two other female characters who in turn are defined by the lack – or the alleged lack – of sympathy: Hetty and Effie respectively. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Jeanie and Dinah, or that Hetty and Effie are thoroughly alike. They have common personal traits and deal with similar situations, and on a certain level they seem the echo of one another; yet, to quote Susan Morgan (1989), they might have been only "sisters in time" who happened to face similar situations to which they responded differently. In terms of suffering, all four characters share a life marked by pain, hardships, or misery. When Scott introduces Effie, he portrays her as a poor pagan woman who was in prison for a crime she did not commit. Although her baby was kidnapped shortly after birth, she was accused of infanticide because of the lack of evidence to support her cause. For most of the novel, Effie is waiting to get a conviction, but eventually her sister liberates her from the cold prison bars after discovering the truth about her lost child. Even

though the opening of the last volume resembled that of a happy ending, with the two sisters' double wedding, Effie and George's son finally makes an appearance in the story as a grown man, only to kill his father and escape to America. Suffering revolves around the character of Effie ever since the beginning, and yet it is very different from the misery that rotates around her sister. Jeanie, in fact, starts her journey bounded by a rigorism that was dictated by her unconditional devotion to God. Her religious identity prevents her from saving her sister's life at Court, and pushes her into a long march South, to plea Queen Caroline with a speech full of sympathy, only to save her sister Effie from certain death. Her misery lay in the hardships that accompany her life choices, and even though she manages to obtain a royal pardon, and succeeds in her heroic enterprise, Jeanie did not obtain everything with ease. Misery is ever-present in *The Heart of Midlothian*, especially when it comes to her character. Jeanie is the first peasant British heroine (Morgan 1989), a dynastic line that continued in 19<sup>th</sup>-century fiction with characters of the stature of Hetty Sorrel, and later on with Thomas Hardy's tragic little Tess. Though Hetty is the face and the heart of *Adam Bede*, one cannot say that she is heroic. Nor that she succeeds in her enterprise. Hers is the most ill-fated life among the four characters, for she only reaches happiness when she is with Arthur. For that reason, the Young Squire can be considered her forbidden fruit, for once she had a taste of it, she sealed her doom, just like Eve (Morgan 1989). Hetty is a typical Fallen woman that got cut out of Eliot's fictional world to make room for somebody more worthy and morally in line with the religious and moral principles that governed the Victorian era: her cousin Dinah Morris. Though Dinah is only one of the many faces of religion in *Adam Bede*, she is probably the most historically emblematic. She was a Methodist in a time where women were about to be excluded from the Ministry, and had to deal with crowds of distrustful men, together with zealous and overspiritual colleagues that were sceptical towards women authority within the Church (Collins 1996). Dinah dedicated her life to the poor souls in Stonyshire, away from the wealthy and fertile land of Loamshire, and was ready to give up her own happiness and future for the sake of her people. She is the most selfless person among the protagonists, and she demonstrates it in multiple occasions, especially when she turned down Adam's proposal and promise of a life in Loamshire because she had a duty to God. Her rigorism pushed her character to breaking point, so much so that she was ready to neglect her own happiness for the sake of religion. Similarly, Jeanie also went too far, for she almost lost her sister because she did not want to lose her moral integrity. All for the sake of religion. In that regard, Effie and Hetty's lack of happiness is also connected to religion, in some way. As far as the former is concerned, throughout the novel, the character of Effie goes through a metamorphosis, from a "pagan peasant with her grecian-shaped head" to

“a proper lady and a Catholic” (Morgan 1989:139). Religion probably appeared like a shelter to Effie, a safe place where she could find some rest after a life of misery and suffering. Yet, instead of turning to a Protestant branch of the Anglican Church, Effie converted to Catholicism, a choice that “aligns with the Catholic life of penance with both literal and figurative sterility” (Burstein 2021:170, in Barbeau 2021). On the other hand, Hetty never indulged in religious activities within the novel, and yet she is more and more often compared to Eve in literary criticism. Hetty had no interests in spiritual longings, for she only had eyes for worldly pursuits and in the one who embodied them. By starting off a relationship with Arthur, she became a sinner, and when she acknowledged to be pregnant, she became desperate and started to reach out for him to find a solution. She thus embarked on a desperate solitary journey without saying a word to her family, and by the end of the novel she even committed the most horrible act a mother could do: she abandoned her own child. As a result, Hetty is first exiled and then killed off by the author, thus leaving the village of Hayslope an Eden without Eve (Morgan 1989).

### **3.8 Summary**

This chapter presented a general overview of three pivotal elements for this dissertation, namely religion, women and sympathy in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. First of all, I introduced the religious background of the Augustan Age, only to present the impact that religion had and continues to have on an individual’s identity. Secondly, in order to introduce the Latitudinarian Church of England, I looked into two key philosophical concepts that are crucial for this study, namely sympathy and empathy. Then, I discussed the connection between the rise of the entertainment industry and the great religious revival of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and their consequences in the Victorian Age. Finally, the last section focuses on women during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and briefly examines the concepts of sympathy, suffering and the lack of happiness in the four female characters at issue. In the next Chapter I shall make a comparison between *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Adam Bede*, to build up a spectrum on the impact that religion had on the four female protagonists under consideration.

## 4. Sisters in Time

“The nineteenth century, the great age of the British novel, [was] also the age of the great heroines”, writes Susan Morgan at the beginning of her renowned book *Sisters in Time* (1989:4). Her investigation aims at analysing the reasons for what she defines a “great march” of female characters that run rampant in the years prior to and during the age of Queen Victoria. However, considering what has been said on Victorian women’s condition in the previous chapters, one cannot but ask “what in the culture enabled [those characters] to speak?” (Morgan 1989:10). It is a well-known fact that in the Victorian Age novelists employed female characters both to denounce women condition and to advocate for their empowerment. Throughout the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century, many were the female characters that remained well anchored to the minds of high and middlebrow Victorian readers, for either their background, or their qualities. Nevertheless, what those fictional women really had in common was their condition, and in the specific, their relation to history, which was “the [real] precondition for any social or individual progress” (Morgan 1989:17). George Eliot once wrote that a character is “a process and an unfolding”, regardless of its condition as male or female (Cohan 1985; Morgan 1989:17). Overtime, this male-female dichotomy has led our culture to conventionally label values, to the point that “love”, “friendship” and “gentleness” became associated to the feminine sphere, whereas “hate”, “aggression” and “rigor” were tagged as masculine. Notwithstanding the latter were overriding in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both culturally (little-to-no female empowerment) and politically (colonization), the former values were much more desirable for men and women alike, for they provided a safe net where human beings felt more comfortable. However, values should only be defined after their alleged power to create change, or “to make history” (Morgan 1989:17-19), and with all those fictional women on the rise, “feminine” soon ceased to be a synonym for “passive”. Albeit being considered as great sympathizers and helpless individuals, all those female fictional characters still managed to live up to the role they were playing and actively took control of their lives rather than passively endure the slings and arrows of time. Nineteenth-century women were desperately thriving for change, and they chose literature as the means to make their voices heard, probably inspired by Dickens and by the Condition-of-England novels. As a result, by the end of the century literature was no longer “the voice of the dominant masculine ideology” (Morgan 1989:9), and it could count a long list of female heroines designed by both male and female authors (Morgan 1989:20). Soon, values which were once considered feminine, no longer indicated a powerless or vulnerable creature, and “feminine heroism” became a key feature in male characters too (Morgan 1989:21). This

chapter shall begin by analysing Scott's and Eliot's exploration of "ancient heroism" and "modern greatness", only to present the four heroines under examination. As discussed in 2.1.1 and 2.2.1, during the Victorian age, literature witnessed a decline in heroism that favoured a far more ordinary and gender-neutral kind of bravery. In fact, writers were no longer interested in portraying that greatness that derived from historically significant deeds carried out by men, but instead they were keener on representing many single acts of worthiness that, if considered altogether, would create one significant historical change. That ancient form of heroism that Scott tried for so long to encapsulate in his novels was no longer possible, because the so-called hero turned out to be just as limited as any other human being. Therefore, if he were to perform a heroic act in the real world, that alone would also be limited. On the contrary, history demonstrated that small actions performed by a group of people all going in the same direction would genuinely contribute to change the world a little better. As far as fiction is concerned, this new modern greatness is all the more evident in George Eliot's works, and has later been labelled as "the great web of human actions" (Rajan 2021). Since one hero or heroine alone is no longer enough to create changes in the modern world, many actions are necessary to get into history. Previously, I mentioned how Walter Scott tried his best to convey ancient heroism in his novels; yet, he also provided evidence on the powerlessness of a single individual, starting with *Waverley*. The four female characters under examination undergo many struggles in their storylines, they make choices, live and even die because of the consequences of their actions (Morgan 1989:4). They are neither powerless nor passive, and albeit one of them, Jeanie Deans, embarked on a solitary enterprise, her heroic journey was not motivated by self-interest. Rather, when designing her character, Scott was investigating on the very meaning of the word "heroism" and on the feminine connotations that the term had in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. What he did, was turning "the true account of Helen Walker's journey" into a great novel "about making history through feminine heroism" (Morgan 1989:21). Not only is Jeanie Deans the first peasant heroine in British fiction, but she also embodies a new kind of heroism, one available to both genders that would later inspire the works of other novelists including but not limited to George Eliot (Morgan 1989:12). In 2.2.1, I mentioned how Eliot was so obsessed with *Waverley* that she decided to write herself the finale when her sister had to return it. Indeed, Evans worshipped the entirety of Scott's works with heartfelt admiration, to the point that it was "a personal grief, a heart-wound to [her] when [she] hear[d] a depreciating or slighting word about him" (Morgan 1989:8). Jeanie Deans's religious stance and heroic enterprise, together with Effie Deans's resilient attitude and religious fragility paved the way for Eliot's most memorable female characters, namely Hetty Sorrel and Dinah Morris. In some way, these fictional women can be

considered as sisters in time, for they share similar character traits, values and plotlines. In particular, what stands out the most is their approach to religion and society, which albeit similar, differs according to the character considered. In 3.1, I mentioned how individuals can modify their identities when they grow and enter into contact with different realities. In the specific, I argued that it is through experience that human beings grow and change according to what had affected them the most during their social evolution. Religion, as well as society, are two important drivers in an individual's life, for they shape one's identity in his or her early years. That was all the more emphasized in the centuries between the Civil War and the Victorian Age, due to the many changes that took place within the country. Although *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Adam Bede* were written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both authors decided to set their stories during the Early and Late Enlightenment, thus stressing and reporting the changes that were occurring all over England at the time. On the one hand, Scott decided to design a fervent puritan girl as the protagonist of his novel, at a time where religion was questioned by the majority of the population. Albeit Whitefield and Wesley were about to revive that sentiment both in Europe and overseas, the oppositional sides of the Deans sisters in terms of religion best encapsulate the air of doubt, instability and extremism one could breathe during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Contrariwise, Eliot decided to design two characters that suffered the consequences of that religious revival and rise of consumerism that took hold of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, while Dinah follows that religious thread started by Scott with the character of Jeanie, Hetty embodies the definition of metamorphosis introduced in 3.7 with Effie. By setting the story 60 years in the past, probably as a tribute to Scott's *Waverley* or Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Eliot managed to portray the consequences of 18<sup>th</sup>-century consumerism, which not only concerned an individual's relationship with God, but also one's own capacity to sympathize with others. Indeed, the most striking examples in terms of lack of sympathy in the two novels at issue, are the two cases of infanticide imbued in the narrative. As I mentioned in the previous chapters, aside from being one of the most recurring themes in 19<sup>th</sup>-century British fiction, infanticide is also one of the three main common grounds between these two fictional masterpieces, alongside heroism and religion. Yet, while in *The Heart of Midlothian* "the deed" is ever-present within the narration, Eliot almost treats it like a taboo, so much so that all the main events unfold unpredictably in book fifth of *Adam Bede*, more than halfway through the novel. Jeanie and Effie, just like Dinah and Hetty, stand out from that long "march" of 19<sup>th</sup>-century female heroines for the strong realism that surrounds them. Both Walter Scott and George Eliot managed to document the past of their own country and to fictionalize a series of events that got hold of the reader through that new sort of heroism. Masculine and feminine,

mobility and immobility, indifference and sympathy: these are the elements which will be covered in the following pages, together with each character's stance towards religion. The chapter shall now continue with an in-depth analysis of the characters, starting with the first peasant heroine of 19<sup>th</sup>-century British fiction: Jeanie Deans.

#### **4.1 Jeanie Deans – Religion or Love**

The rise of a new sort of heroism opened the gate for a fresh and new variety of heroes and heroines that became the emblem of 19<sup>th</sup>-century British literature. In fact, all the great novelists from the generation following Scott's, like Dickens or Gaskell, took up from "the wizard of the North" and shaped their characters after his (Morgan 1989:57,58), to the point that Charlotte Brontë even wrote "for fiction—read Scott alone; all novels after his are worthless" (Smith 1995). Scott's novels are about history, and it is common knowledge that the recorded chronicles of our past deal with the most masculine of men's activities: war (Morgan 1989:57). However, the focus of *The Heart of Midlothian* is different, to such an extent that it has been marked as an anomaly, "a thing apart in his oeuvre" (Morgan 1989:58). The protagonist is no longer male and passive, as in *Waverley*, and even though Jeanie is "the plainest, the plumpest, [and] the oldest" among Scott's lead characters, she is also "the most empowered to make changes in her world" (Morgan 1989:58). Why should the hero be a woman though? And "what happens to our understanding of the role of the hero when it is filled by Jeanie Deans?" (Morgan 1989:59). When reading the *Waverley* cycle, not only is it evident that most of Scott's heroes are passive, but also that while they are trying to recreate history "with their swords and their pens [...] women must wait" (Morgan 1989:57). An example is Rose Bradwardine, a simple-minded warm-hearted girl who first falls in love and then marries the passive Edward Waverley. According to Ernest Baker, the late-19<sup>th</sup>-century author and editor, lead characters are not necessarily the heroes, adding that in Scott, the latter "are merely persons to whom a lot of things happen" (Morgan 1989:59). Defenders of losing battles, they are so committed to their cause that anything else seems passive in comparison. Their power is also very fascinating, so much that it even seduces young men into reckless adventures, as it happens when Waverley becomes acquainted with Fergus (Morgan 1989:59). Eventually, that influence leads the protagonist towards a wavering path that Kierkegaard (1987) best defined as "aesthetical life", which I have already covered in 2.3. Nevertheless, that does not happen in *The Heart of Midlothian*. The hero, Jeanie Deans, is a woman. And she is also an active lead character who makes her own choices without being affected by others. She is courageous, she

is fierce, and she values religion above anything else. Even above love. According to both Lukacs and Daiches, Jeanie Deans is Scott's greatest character, for not only she demonstrates that heroism can exist in modern life, but also proves that greatness lies "in the unpretentious faith and courage of a humble Scots lass" (in Morgan 1989:73). Jeanie embodies a genuine nobility that sprang from the peasantry and reaches the highest of levels, and in the third volume, she officially becomes absorbed in that line of characters that contributed to the movement from "ancient heroism" to "modern greatness". And what certifies her new status is the greeting and the recognition she gets, when she makes the acquaintance of Queen Caroline. Jeanie reminds the Queen that all human beings must die eventually, and that when the moment comes, "the thoughts of what we have done for others can most sweeten our despair" (Morgan 1989:79; Wallace 2017).



Figure 4.1 *Jeanie Deans and Queen Caroline* (Leslie 1859)



Jeanie pleads for a kind of sisterhood that replaces the masculine idea of brotherhood that has always characterized English literature since Shakespeare's *Henry V*, or even earlier, with *Beowulf*. Yet, Jeanie and the Queen are not related. Nor do they occupy the same position in society. They are neither equal nor close enough to be considered as such. And even though they are not on the same level, Queen Caroline still recognizes this "humble Scots lass" as worthy of attention. At the same time, however, despite Jeanie's bond and obligation to her sister Effie lie at the centre of the plot, the Deans sisters are not full-blood siblings. Rather, they are half-sisters held together by a dominant father figure who affected their lives to the point that his presence is even felt by the Queen. In short, one can argue that the sisterhood Jeanie is pleading for, goes well beyond a person's blood ties, just as it rises above one's own social status (Morgan 1989:79). When Effie was sentenced guilty at her trial, she replied saying "God is mair mercifu' to us that we are to each other" (Scott 2008:239). According to Morgan (1989:79), these words express the "traditional masculine heroic perspective", and at the same time embody Effie's disillusionment towards the masculine society in which she was held captive. Heroism has always been gendered masculine, and yet such a statement is pronounced only few pages before Jeanie's decision to march South. Scott was setting the stage for a kind of heroism which was fairly new in literature. He wanted to demonstrate, through the character of Jeanie, that Effie is wrong, and that we can be more merciful to each other, whilst at the same time being true to who we really are (Morgan 1989:79). Scott extended the meaning of the word "heroism" to women, and not only is Jeanie free from the traditional muscular good-looking male heroic conventions, but she is also far from being sexualized as a heroine. She is "a short stocky freckled peasant", a description that rejects even more the "limited masculine notions of the heroic life" and embraces "more sisterly values" (Morgan 1989:81). Nevertheless, if on the one hand Scott might be identified as an unconscious feminist, on the other one, if that is the case, then our reading of Scott "has been unconsciously masculinist" (Morgan 1989:81). It is evident that our understanding of "heroism" changes when the heroine becomes the hero, and as the story of the Deans sisters suggests, the "progressive human community, as imaged in many nineteenth-century novels, may well be a sisterhood" (Morgan 1989:82). Unlike Scott's male heroes, like Edward Waverley or George Staunton, Jeanie never betrays her ethical values. She never wavers, she cannot lie and she "canna change right into wrang, or make true which is false" (Scott 2008:156). Jeanie is no chameleon, and she confirmed it when Staunton asked her to lie in front of the Court to have Effie's life spared. "It is not man I fear", she replied, but "the God, whose name I must call on to witness the truth of what I say, [since] he will know the falsehood" (Scott 2008:156). Although the general assumption is that Jeanie Deans does not

fit in the long list and patterns of Scott's heroic characters, the truth is that she proved her worth on multiple occasions. However, after a long analysis, Morgan suggests that the real reason why Jeanie followed her conscience, was "not because she fear[d] God but because she [did] not fear men" (1989:80). Jeanie's refusal to lie and her consequent decision to march South underline that the only thing that can be done to combat death "lies not in the stars, but in ourselves" (Morgan 1989:79). We must acknowledge our shared fate if we want to get rid of the despair that accompanies our mortal destiny, and even though we cannot choose how to die, we can still choose how to live. After all the events that take place in *The Heart of Midlothian*, the protagonist remains a zealous puritan woman who preferred to abide by the word of God than to save her sister's life with a simple lie. Jeanie chose religion over love, regardless of the outcome, and despite she marched south to plea for Effie's life, she still gave her contribution to her death sentence. "What signifies coming to greet ower me [...] when you have killed me? – killed me, when a word of your mouth would have saved me", said Effie when her sister came to visit her after the trial (Scott 2008:245). What if Jeanie decided to go to Queen Caroline to prove a point though? What if she wanted to demonstrate that a band of sisters is no different than any band of brothers? To Effie's question, Jeanie replied that "if a sister asks a sister's life on her bended knees, they will pardon her [...] and they will win a thousand hearts by it" (Scott 2008:245). Besides designing the first female heroine in British literature, Scott also bestowed her the power to evoke sympathy. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, sympathy is one of the main common grounds between the four characters at issue. Some may lack of it, while some have the capacity to arouse it. Jeanie, just like Dinah, is capable of melting the heart of stone of fellow characters, to such an extent that she even succeeds in saving her sister's life. Jeanie travels North to South and has the chance to see many wonderful places around her country. She realizes that the world is imperfect, and that so are the people who inhabit it. In the fourth volume, she decides to settle in the earthly paradise of the Isle of Roseneath with Butler, her suitor, where the two get married and have three children. Though it might appear as a satisfactory happy ending, there were "two things which particularly chequered Mrs Butler's happiness" (Scott 2008:449). The first one dealt with theological skirmishes between her father and her husband, which continued until 1751, when the former died. The second one, instead, concerned the prolonged lack of news of her sister Effie, who disappeared abroad with her husband Robertson. Jeanie admits that "without these [...] her life would have been but too happy", and that perhaps she needed "some crosses" as a reminder "that there was a better to come behind it" (Scott 2008:449). For his part, Scott never tried to hide the evil of the world, and even if at times it can be hard to distinguish right from wrong, at the end of the novel,

readers always have the bigger picture in front of them. Contrariwise, George Eliot envisioned a sort of heaven on earth dominated by a community of men where the evil was often in disguise (Morgan 1989:21). The analysis shall now continue with Hetty Sorrel, Hayslope's Eve, one of the greatest female characters of all time, and also the most emblematic "evil in disguise" in the fictional world of *Adam Bede*.

## 4.2 Hetty Sorrel – An Eden without Eve

In the previous chapter, I mentioned how the rise of consumerism brought forth many historical consequences in Britain: from the surge in popularity of the entertainment industry to the rise and fall of early feminism. It is highly possible, however, that the most significant outcome of the Enlightenment was the umpteenth downsizing of the image of the woman. In fact, at the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women's role in society mutated once again, and although there was a great slice of population who supported this new wave of puritanism, in literature many authors started to denounce that new social prudishness in their works. Soon, the novel became a synthesis of social reality, and a growing number of female characters started to arise from the ashes of Scott's and Austen's pioneering heroines. Thanks to them, the word "heroism" ceased to have only one meaning, and many were the offshoots that sprang from this new literary tradition. The hero was no longer the stereotypical strong and independent noble man. Nor was he able to go down in history all by himself. "Ancient heroism" did no longer work in literature because it could not exist in modern society anymore. Eventually, modern men and women discovered that greatness was not the result of one great action, but instead the consequence of many small steps taken by a great number of humble people all moving in the same direction (Villari 2015). Walter Scott gave life to a long line of peasant heroines that continued to shine bright in the Victorian Age with characters of the stature of Catherine Earnshaw, Tess Durbeyfield and most importantly Hetty Sorrel. However, notwithstanding Hetty's unequivocal roots, her rural identity is indeed debatable. Instead of accepting life for what it is, Hetty constantly daydreams on what the future might hold for her. She "is bored in her dairy and cares little for making cheese. She does not want to become precisely what Dinah, taking her place, will become, in that rosy future that ends the book" (Morgan 1989:142). Hetty wants something beyond that. All her fantasies, together with her hardness of heart, are a consequence of that rise of consumerism that I mentioned earlier, and to make it all the more evident, Eliot decided to dedicate a full chapter on that, called "Hetty's world" (Eliot 2008). Since the beginning of the novel, readers are aware that Adam is madly in love with Hetty; yet,

what they do not know is how she feels about it. “Hetty’s world” is crucial because here she admits that she would never think of marrying Adam, for he was too poor and had to take care of his family. She also asserts that if Adam had been rich and could have given her all the luxurious objects she could think of (i.e., white stockings, beautiful earrings, the Nottingham lace, etc.) then she would have loved him well enough to marry him (Eliot 2008:109). In the rural environment of Hayslope, Hetty resembles another character who was deeply affected by the seed of modern consumerism: Emma Bovary (Villari 2015). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, consumerism emerged in the most advanced European countries, like Britain and France, to such an extent that cities like London and Paris became centres of fashionable lives where people gave in to the tendency to buy attractive items and consumed more than they needed (Kwaas 2004). Emma Bovary is a modern consumerist living in Paris who has no money to pay for all the things she buys. Contrariwise, Hetty Sorrel lives in Hayslope and can only fantasize on the fancy life of the city. The seed of consumerism in *Adam Bede* did not stop in London, but it reached the countryside and brought forth an evil force that disrupted the peace and the harmony of rural Britain. Another common ground between Emma and Hetty is their lack of maternal feelings. Although the former does not kill her newborn, she is still utterly unfeeling towards her daughter in life. Emma is too focused on the acquisition of beautiful objects for herself, that she scarcely pays attention to the needs of little Berthe (Villari 2015). On the other hand, Hetty is presented from the start as a deeply unemotional person when it comes to children. Even before being pregnant, Eliot describes her as the living image of a tender mother who “would have been glad to hear that she should never see a child again”. Hetty strongly believed that children “were worse than the nasty little lambs that the shepherd was always bringing in to be taken special care of in lambing time; for the lambs were got rid of sooner or later” (Eliot 2008:169; Leilei 2005). By the end of the novel, Hetty will have a child but she will abandon him in the woods, out of fear; an action that will lead to her ill-fated trial and unexpected exile. Emma and Hetty are fallen women that were condemned by their love; the former judged for being a wife and an adulteress, and the latter because of an unexpected pregnancy out of wedlock. Their unlawful love fatally turned into a seed of a tragedy that would cause their fall and by the end of the novel, their solitary death. As explained in Chapter 3, fallen women were one of most widespread social issues affecting Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; yet, the comparison with Flaubert suggests that problem was not confined there. Another great and heart-rending representation of a fallen woman is also French, and it is contained in Victor Hugo’s masterpiece *Les Misérables*, published in 1862. Dealing with the events taking place in early 19<sup>th</sup>-century France, Hugo portrayed a great variety of characters that endured the

suffering, loss and devastation in a country that was desperate for social and political change (Metzidakis 1993). Among them, one cannot but sympathize with Fantine, a young Parisian who is first seduced and then abandoned by a rich student. Out of that relationship, Fantine bore a child, Cosette, but she is forced to abandon her in an inn in the suburbs of Paris because she needed to work. From that moment forward, Fantine becomes a victim of the circumstances and suffers the tortures of the damned. She first becomes a prostitute, then she gets raped in the street, and eventually she is forced to sell both her hair and her front teeth to gain some money for her little daughter. Before the end of the first half of the novel, Fantine dies of tuberculosis, unaware that all the money sent to keep her daughter alive, never reached Cosette (Hugo 2014). Hugo designed a character who, though tragic in her nature like Emma or Hetty, did not lack maternal feelings. Fantine wanted to live, and she wanted to protect her daughter, even if that meant death (Algazi 2002). As in *Madam Bovary*, Paris is a very different setting if compared to the village of Hayslope or the Isle of Roseneath. It is not an earthly paradise where a person only needs to abide to the rules of the community to live there. Evil is well-exposed in France, to the point that death and misery hunt the protagonists everywhere they go. Loamshire, on the other hand, resembles an idyllic place where characters can reach their happy endings. Despite that, Hetty, does not want to be tied to the obligations of a life in the village. And she definitely “cannot accept an earthly paradise that celebrates the Poyser farm as the good life and validates Mrs. Poyser as embodying the proper feminine role” (Morgan 1989:142). She spent so much time fantasizing on a new social condition that when she sees the chance to fulfil her dreams and escape reality, she does not hesitate in taking it. And yet, even though Arthur is there for her, Hetty “is allowed no right to him” (Morgan 1989:142). Nor can we readers hope that the two will eventually reach their happy ending. Imagining Hetty as Arthur’s wife is profoundly unrealistic, to such an extent that all leading members of the community cannot accept her attitude, and label it as sinful (Morgan 1989:148). To “save” her, Eliot decides to exile Hetty, rather than killing her right away, but even that shall prove to be as the umpteenth attack on Hayslope’s Eve by the pen of the author. In the Epilogue, in fact, readers understand that Hetty has lived through her suffering, only to die on her way home, on a ship returning to England right when her term of exile ended (Morgan 1989:138). Not only did Eliot decide to exile her, but she also wiped her out of the entire universe of *Adam Bede*. Just like Eve, Hetty was evicted from a paradise that the community was trying to protect at all costs. As Morgan writes, “returning to paradise may well mean returning without her, reaching a higher level of innocence that protects that achieved Eden from becoming the beginning of a new fall in a ceaseless cycle by replacing Eve with a less adventurous, less dangerous, partner” (1989:132).

Nonetheless, restoring paradise does not necessarily mean that all previous events will be forgotten. The village of Hayslope will be forever hunted by a ghostly presence that has been shut out of paradise; yet, to quote Wordsworth, “our sense of heaven in this world requires a sense of something missing” (Morgan 1989:139). Perhaps Adam’s happiness with Dinah can only exist because Hetty cannot be a part of it. Another way to put it is that Adam’s love for Dinah is the result of the deep sorrow he felt with the trial of Hetty (Morgan 1989:138). Just like Catherine Earnshaw metamorphosed in Cathy Linton, Hetty, “who could never have found fulfillment to her kind of dreams in that timber-yard, is replaced by the fair [and] pale Dinah” (Morgan 1989:139). Another analogy is with Effie Deans, in *The Heart of Midlothian*. Either by choice or by force, both women moved abroad at exactly the time where the other characters were trying to restore their own paradise. However, unlike Hetty, Effie did not die on her way home; every now and then, she came back as a living ghost in secret, or through the letters she sent to her sister (Morgan 1989:136). Although these characters might appear as simple sacrifices or excluded figures, they are indeed pivotal to the story, because “they measure the difference between what is and what might have been” if things had gone differently (Morgan 1989:139). Hetty, just like Effie and Catherine, is the symbol of a past that still haunts the future. However, since this future does not fulfil her dreams, what is the point of hunting it? *Adam Bede*, as the title suggests, narrates the Bildung of Adam, a narrow-hearted noble hero that learns to abandon his tendency to pass judgment for the sake of qualities like forgiveness, mercy and sympathy (Morgan 1989:132). Yet, despite Adam learns how to understand and sympathize with others, no one, not even Dinah, can really understand Hetty. Nor could anyone “go on living anywhere near her” after the sentence (Morgan 1989:148). Eliot morally condemns Hetty for her out-of-time daydreaming attitude throughout the entire novel in a way that only a handful of authors did before her (Morgan 1989:141). Even Walter Scott granted Effie a “lesser crime and a better fate” than the poor wanderer (Morgan 1989:38,141), so why did Eliot need to be so cruel towards one of her characters? Before answering this question, I should first briefly introduce another of the four women of this analysis, together with her relationship with Hetty Sorrel, her cousin Dinah Morris. Albeit thoroughly dedicated to her religious mission and confined for most of the story in Stonyshire, Dinah can still communicate with all the leading characters in the village of Hayslope, including Hetty. She is undoubtedly the most sympathetic soul in the entire male-dominated universe of *Adam Bede*, and in comparison, Hetty only represents an anomaly in Loamshire; something that no one can or even want to understand. Dinah never gave up on religion, and no matter how desperate was the situation, she never stopped praying for her cousin’s salvation. Yet, “there is no [...] religion

of humanity for a community that destroys Hetty Sorrel” (Morgan 1989:160), and if the members of the community were trying to break the cycle “through a new Eden without Eve”, they would eventually end up evicting themselves from paradise too. Heaven cannot be recovered after Eve has been excluded, and if there is no more paradise on this earth, then all characters are doomed to follow the same fate as Hetty (Morgan 1989:160). Religion is everywhere in *Adam Bede*, and yet throughout the novel there is little-to-no reference to Hetty’s relationship with God. Nor there is a place for her in the religious community of Loamshire. That same religion that gave comfort to the people of the village, perhaps would have never worked for Hetty Sorrel, for she has always been portrayed as someone more interested in worldly pursuits rather than spiritual matters (Chishti-Mujahid 2004). Yet, when Dinah goes to prison to give Hetty some comfort during her final hours, she somehow succeeds in making her heart – once as hard as a pebble – melt (Villari 2015). If compared to the three other characters at issue, Hetty is probably the least biased by religion. She is poles apart with Dinah and Jeanie, and though she is very similar to Effie, Hetty dies without being pardoned for her sins. She might have been forgiven if she had only died after the trial; however, Eliot had different plans. She decided to “save” Hetty, only to kill her off scene, alone, when she was about to be reunited with her beloved ones in England. Her plotline is interrupted in the exact moment when she was about to pay penance, with neither a chance for repentance, nor for forgiveness. The seed of evil hides well within the mind of Hetty, in a place where not even God can reach it. She is portrayed as sinful by nature, tempted by modern consumerism, in the same way that Eve was tempted by the serpent. Hetty wanted more than what Adam could give her. She wanted to rise socially and enjoy life in a land without God. But in a world where everyone’s life decisions involve a spiritual component, one cannot hope to live in sin and reach salvation without efforts. Since Hetty’s sin lies in her nature, it is God the one who must decide whether she shall be redeemed or die unforgiven; Hetty’s lack of faith, however, teased the author herself – the only real God that can exist in a fictional world. Throughout the novel, Eliot proved to be a merciless deity in the world of *Adam Bede*, acting decisively to protect the rural world she had created from the evil seed of modernity. She did not forgive Hetty Sorrel for her sins, and she condemned her severely in the same way that women were condemned by false male gods in society (Jackson 2000). George Eliot was a woman who published with a male pseudonym, and who – in her first attempt as a novelist – decided to play what in history has always been labelled a male role: God Almighty. Perhaps, she wanted to condemn gender stereotypes whilst at the same time representing the reality of women’s conditions in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. After all, George Eliot remained true to who she was all her life, and she has



always employed the most impudent tools to go against Victorian prudishness, from her unconventional relationship with Lewes, to her agnostic stand in the religious debate. In this regard, Hetty Sorrel was no different from her author. Nor did she differ from a hypothetical mid-century lowbrow Victorian woman; neither believed in God, and yet their lives would still be affected and condemned by their community's alleged social religiosity.



Figure 4.2. *Hetty and Dinah* (Tarrant n.d.)



Redemption and forgiveness do not really exist in *Adam Bede*. Religion is a mere social tool, employed in Loamshire as a means of social integration, and in Stonyshire, to provide some comfort to the poor. It does not grant forgiveness, and it surely cannot save a character, especially when paradise has already closed its gates. The analysis shall now continue with a character who also welcomed religion in her life to find some comfort, even though out of desperation. After losing her husband by the hand of her long-lost son, Effie Deans abandoned her faith, embraced Catholicism as her true religion, and battled to reopen the gates of her personal heaven. From a Protestant education to an apostasy; the next section shall discuss Effie Deans's religious identity and metamorphosis, by first presenting the character as a woman and as a mother.

### **4.3 Effie Deans – A quest for the gates of Heaven**

Modelled after Helen Walker's real sibling, Euphemia Deans (Effie) is one of the most fascinating and captivating characters in *The Heart of Midlothian*. Ever since her first appearance, she immediately became surrounded by a veil of mystery that both seduced and mesmerized the reading public of the time because of the strong realism that was embedded in her back story. In fact, Scott needed that air of authenticity to discuss themes like infanticides, pregnancy and women's role within society during the long 18<sup>th</sup> century; especially as far as Scotland is concerned. In the first pages of the novel, readers understand that Effie had a secret affair with a rebel leader called Geordie Robertson, that a baby was born out of that relationship and that she was momentarily in prison, waiting for her trial. As mentioned in 3.6.2, during the Early and Late Enlightenment, all those women who kept their pregnancy secret, could have been found guilty of infanticide if the child were to be found dead or missing (Sauer 1978). Since Effie was not married, and since her highly-religious father would have never accepted a child born out of wedlock, poor Euphemia never mentioned the pregnancy to anyone, and kept it a secret until after the delivery. Tragically though, as her son was kidnapped shortly after childbirth, and since she never mentioned the pregnancy to anyone, she was first arrested and then sentenced to public hanging for child murder. Eventually, thanks to the prone action and steadfast efforts of her sister Jeanie, Effie was released, and her verdict changed from public hanging to fourteen years of banishment (Clayton 1991). Just like Hetty Sorrel, Effie Deans abandons her Paradise as a punishment for her "crime"; and yet, unlike the former, she does not die by the hand of the author, but suffers the pains of Hell for the disappearance of her son. It is of little debate that Hetty and Effie share many common grounds and personality traits; and

yet, when it comes to motherhood, they could not be more different. Both women were socially guilty of bearing the child of a man who was above their league and with whom they were not married. On the one hand, there is Hetty, who ever since the beginning of the novel, demonstrated how much she rejected the idea of motherhood, by misbehaving and complaining whenever her three-year-old cousin Totty was around (Eliot 2008:286). Contrariwise, as far as Effie is concerned, Scott designed a character who was never even granted the possibility to act like a mother, no matter how much she wanted it. All through her pregnancy, Effie never talked about her child to anyone, out of fear, and when she finally delivered, the baby was kidnapped. As if that newly-formed frail state of mind was not enough, Effie was also plead guilty of infanticide and imprisoned shortly afterwards. Hetty's quest to find comfort in her lover's arms is not possible in *The Heart of Midlothian*. Effie cannot escape, she cannot physically move and look for help. She is like a helpless animal trapped in a cage; a victim of the circumstance, waiting for the sentence of her trial to change.



Figure 4.3. *The Trial of Effie Deans* (Lauder 1874)

In 3.7 I mentioned how all the four characters under examination are bound to misery and suffering, to the point that none of them reaches full happiness at the end of their stories. Effie, who loved Lord Staunton “as woman seldom loves” (Scott 2008:205), does marry him by the end of the novel (Morgan 1989:139). And yet, even though she married the love of her

youth, “her continuing unhappiness as an elegant lady [...] establishes a crucial insight”: all that glitter is not gold, and there are terrible “drawbacks to having one’s [own] dreams come true” (Morgan 1989:139). By resuming the parallelism with Eliot and Brontë, and on their characters coming back to Paradise in ghostly appearances, it would be evident why the latter decided to develop other “endings for their wayward women” (Morgan 1989:139). Probably, as Morgan suggests (1989:139), the most satisfying alternative is that of *Wuthering Heights*, though presented in supernatural attires. The ghostly form of Catherine, in fact, allows her to ultimately reach happiness with her beloved Heathcliff, “but only in an unearthly state” (Morgan 1989:139). Contrariwise, Effie, who succeeds in marrying George with fleshier fulfillment, is the finest example of how such an achievement can only lead to “isolation and death” (Morgan 1989:139). Despite the future of domestic peace in the Isle of Roseneath was never an option for Effie, even her own idea of happiness turned out to be a thorny path. Like Catherine Earnshaw and Hetty Sorrel, Effie is “the outsider’s judgment on the community” who reminds readers that “in the end we cannot neatly say that losses have compensation[s]” (Morgan 1989:139). In spite of all that, Effie can still be considered a heroine, because even though she may be passive and poles apart from the new pioneering sense of heroism, without her, Jeanie would have never been able to perform heroic deeds in the modern world. In that regard, she is also a fundamental component of that thread that goes from “ancient heroism” to “modern greatness”, her character might have inspired George Eliot in the design of Hetty Sorrel (Eliot 2008:xxi). Besides, in addition to the story that revolves around the infanticide and the inspiration that led both authors to base their novels on real accounts, Effie and Hetty are both sublime characters trapped in the body of a humble one; they could have become great, if their social position had been different. However, their dreams and aspiration, together with their beauty and attraction to luxurious objects and lifestyle, only paved the way for the unravelling of their tragedy. Effie and Hetty are characterized by a kind of beauty that deceives others and arouses sympathy even in the worst-case scenarios. It is evident whenever Adam speaks out his feelings for Hetty, and it is all the more evident when Scott describes Effie’s entrance at her trial, when “the usually belligerent (and not particularly religious) crowd reacts to Effie’s youth and beauty with ‘an universal murmur of compassion and sympathy’” (Goff 2006:83; Scott 2008:216). However, that deceit is not meant to last, because even if sympathy will initially save them from certain death, both young women will eventually be sentenced by the highest authority in their novel: the author. Nevertheless, beauty remains one of the most important elements of this analysis, for it might be the very reason why Scott and Eliot needed Effie and Hetty to be counterbalanced by two other characters, namely Jeanie and Dinah.

Indeed, not only are the latter characterized by a more loveable kind of beauty, but they are also the ones who are supposed to restore peace in their respective fictional worlds once the former characters are gone. In Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*, the narrator investigates on the effects of beauty, and just like Scott turned away from “ancient heroism” and sublime character, so did Eliot by turning

without shrinking, from cloud-born angels, from prophets, sibyls, and heroic warriors, to an old woman bending over her flower-pot, or eating her solitary dinner, while the noonday light, softened perhaps by a screen of leaves, falls on her mob-cap, and just touches the rim of her spinning-wheel, and her stone jug, and all those cheap common things which are the precious necessities of life to her (Eliot 2008:195).

Beauty, hence, comes from nature, and there is no doubt that Eliot learned the importance of celebrating it from her beloved Wordsworth (Pinney 1960; Powers 1971). Yet, in this passage, she is challenging, or even redefining the classical and traditional idea of beauty, whilst inviting readers to shift their attention from what is traditional and sensational to the appreciation of what is, instead, lovable. Beauty does come from the natural world, but with *Adam Bede*, Eliot asserts that she is more interested in a beauty that comes from within, and therefore in characters which are purer and more innocent than Hetty Sorrel and Effie Deans. For all the above-mentioned reasons, I believe it is no coincidence that the equilibrium in both novels is reached through religion. Dinah, like Jeanie, has a very strong religious identity, which can and does provide comfort to her non-religious counterpart. The scene of Hetty Sorrel in prison, with Dinah on her side, cannot but remind readers of another scene which, though written some 40 years earlier, can still serve as a parallel: that of Jeanie Deans visiting her sister Effie in prison. Like the little status-seeker of the village of Hayslope, Effie Deans is not really affected by something like religion. Indeed, though it is mentioned that she comes from a family of highly devout Presbyterians, Effie’s relationship with God is hardly ever under the spotlight in the novel. Unlike her sister, whose faith is so strong that it outshines any other form of moral judgment, Effie is more wavery, and looks at religion as a means of comfort; a way to lessen all the suffering she had to endure in life. Misery, in fact, can push a person down a path of indifference and passivity that one can hardly go back from. Although she is undoubtedly at the centre of *The Heart of Midlothian*, Effie is almost paralyzed, trapped in a novel which resembles her prison cell. At the end of Volume 3, Effie is finally granted a Royal Pardon and she is free to change her life for the better, thus finally fulfilling her teenage dreams to become a Lady. Yet, even after her eviction, Effie comes back to Scotland through letters, and writes to Jeanie “that her constant fear of exposure in the elevated circles she inhabit[ed] [wa]s like ‘pricking to

death with needles and pins””; and that whenever she heard other people telling her story she suffered “like an Indian at the stake”, smiling and applauding her torturers “while they [we]re rending h[er] fibres and boring h[er] eyes” (Monk 1994:299; Scott 2008:454).



Figure 4.4. *A prison scene with Jeanie and Effie Deans* (Rieder n.d.)

Unlike the first three volumes of *The Heart of Midlothian*, which present a democratical, juridical and monarchical judgement, the fourth volume deals with a more personal and intimate sentence (Monk 1994:289). “Hearth and home constitute the centre of power” in the last section of the novel, and therefore “punishment is [...] administered through familiar agencies” (Monk 1994:299). Jeanie’s domestic happiness torments the childless Effie, who “lost her only surviving offspring before her marriage due to her husband’s criminal activities” (Monk 1994:299). In the final volume, Lord Staunton “is punished for and by his own crimes – especially those against the family – when the outlaw part of his nature takes on an objective and embodied form” (Monk 1994:299); in other words, when his long-lost son metamorphosed into a wild bandit, like George once was, only to kill him before he could reach “Jeanie’s happy household” (Monk 1994:299). During his lifetime, Lord Staunton suffered quite a lot for the crimes he had committed when he was a bandit. Though he was never tried by an institutional form of legal power, George did start to practice the doctrine alongside Effie to atone for all his sins. In fact, when Jeanie undressed his dead body, she discovered “from the crucifix, the beads, and the shirt of hair which he wore next his person, that his sense of guilt had induced him to receive the dogmata of a religion which pretends, by the maceration of the body, to expiate the crimes of the soul” (Monk 1994:299; Scott 2008:501). Few chapters later, the narrator announces that while grieving for her husband’s death, Effie “betrayed the inward wound by retiring to the Continent and taking up her abode in the convent where she had received her education. She never took the veil, but lived and died in severe seclusion, and in the practice of the Roman Catholic religion, in all its formal observances, vigils, and austerities” (Scott 2008:507). As Monk (1994:299,300) suggests, “the carnal stringencies of Catholic disciplines [...] are stigmatized in the novel; but they are really only a more extreme and hieratic version of Jeanie’s Protestant regimen of the self [...]. Discipline in the domestic sphere takes over the function of the penal institution in Scott’s novel”, thus ultimately sealing Effie’s doom. From the lonely seclusion in a prison cell to a solitary confinement in a nun’s cell, Lady Staunton’s life has been thoroughly characterized by immobility, no matter where she was geographically based. Arguably, the only real movement she completes within *The Heart of Midlothian*, is her religious metamorphosis from a conveniently Protestant lassie to a highly committed Catholic devotee. Her quest for the gates of heaven is driven by a strong sense of guilt mixed with a yearning for peace. Religion, hence, is not a part of her identity, but is rather perceived as a form of self-punishment. While in the first three volumes characters were tried by an earthly form of judgement – such as a the democratical, judicial and monarchical –, the last section deals with a more personal, intimate and unearthly one, where only God has a say on people’s

destiny. Yet, as maintained in 4.2, the only God that can exist in a fictional world is the author, and if on the one hand Scott rejected the Presbyterian form of Calvinism, on the other one he widely demonstrated that he was an anti-Roman Catholic in his theology (French 1964). By standing in the middle of these two oppositional creeds, Scott projected in Effie the firm belief that back then “modern Catholics quite literally d[id] not understand their historical place” (Burstein 2021:171). Effie’s conversion is a symptom of a character who has spent too much time waiting, to such an extent that she does not even know where she belongs. Insecurity is only the umpteenth feature that emerged from her immobility, and that confirmed Effie as the exact opposite of her sister Jeanie: the former passive and vulnerable, and the latter active and courageous. Overall, beauty and religion are not only the two levels of reading when it comes to analysing Effie, but they are also two pivotal features that act as a bridge with the last character of this analysis, one who has already been introduced in 4.2 as the most sympathetic soul in the village of Hayslope and as the only one capable of making Hetty’s heart – once as hard as a pebble – melt (Villari 2015). Indeed, if Jeanie Deans has been analysed as a woman whose choice lied between religion or love, Dinah Morris will be studied as a woman who had the chance to live both things to the fullest – at least, until history got in the way. The final section of this chapter shall then focus on Dinah’s love for Adam and her struggle to find happiness by not giving up her religious duty, while also making reference to the historical changes that took place in Britain at the turn of the century and that have already been introduced in Chapter 2 and 3.

#### **4.4 Dinah Morris – Religion and Love**

Dinah Morris is the last piece of a puzzle where religion, heroism and empowerment come together in literature through the lives of four female characters. Dinah is a Methodist, a dissenter, and therefore she does not really belong to the traditional Church of England; nor is she allowed to preach within the Anglican Church (Stott 2005). She is very different from Mr. Irwine, representative of the Latitudinarian branch, and poles apart with Mr. Ryde, the parishioner who will replace the Rector of Broxton 20 years after the events of *Adam Bede*. The author designed the character of Dinah as particularly devoted to helping others, especially those poor souls who live in Snowfield, in the county of Stonyshire. As a Methodist, she was more socially concerned than other clergymen, and believed her life to be “too short, and God’s work is too great for [her] to think of making a home for [her]self in this world” (Eliot 2008:40). Though she cannot give up on the poors, she is more than prone to give up on her own happiness



just for the sake of her religious ideas, to the point that “whenever [she] tried to fix [her] mind on marriage [...] other thoughts always came in, [like] the times when [she’s] prayed by the sick and dying, and the happy hours [she] had preaching, when [her] heart was filled with love, and the World was given to [her] abundantly” (Eliot 2008:40). As one who has read the novel already knows, eventually Dinah will change her mind, but at least for the time being, I would say that she could not really turn a blind eye on the poors because she had no one else to look at. In the first section of the novel, Seth Bede, Adam’s brother, asks her hand in marriage, but though flattered, she still refuses because she had a religious duty she could not ignore. Though it is true that Seth was still very young and could not really understand the complexity behind a topic such as religion, it is also true that readers needed Dinah to turn down the proposal to understand how deep her religious roots run, and how dedicated she was to better the lives of others. In terms of faith, Dinah does go along well with Mr. Irwine, for they both share an idea of religion which is connected to good works and sympathy, and not to something strict and rigorous like the zealous Puritans (see 3.3. and 3.4). Furthermore, being the representative of a movement which was tolerant towards all other religious tendencies, Mr. Irwine had no enmity against Dinah whatsoever, even if there were people who preferred to go outside to hearing her preaching, instead of going to Church. In fact, Mr. Irwine, far from perceiving the young minister as a threat, reassured “her detractors that Methodists turned a certain local ‘wild, drunken rascal,’ who was prone to ‘neglecting his work and beating his wife,’ into a man who [was] ‘thrifty and decent’” (McConnell 2007:246; Eliot 2008:66). Although Eliot wanted to paint a picture of what Methodism looked like at the dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in rural England, she needed three characters to do so: first Seth Bede, to provide “an example of Methodism as it [was] lived-out”, and then both Dinah and Mr. Irwine to assess “the historical accuracy of such a portrait” (McConnell 2007:247). Nevertheless, Eliot still needed another figure to represent the reality of 19<sup>th</sup>-century religion in Britain; one that belonged to the new faith which was slowly and zealously domesticating the Church of England: Mr. Ryde, the new parishioner mentioned in Chapter 17. “In which the story pauses a little” is a very interesting section within the narrative, for it is an essayistic contribution where the author intervenes and discusses things with Adam. In narratological terms, there is no progression in the story; however, Eliot decided to use these few pages to state her poetics and write her manifesto. As a matter of fact, the word “poetics” indicates the declaration of what an artist’s project is about, while a manifesto states his or her intent whilst setting the principles he or she wants to follow (Sheppard 2014). In this section, the narrator also reports a dialogue she had with Adam in Old Age about religion, where he said that “[he’s] seen pretty clear, ever since [he] was a young un, as religion’s something



else besides notions. It isn't notions sets people doing the right thing – it's feelings" (Eliot 2008:198), and when it comes to Mr. Ryde, Adam admits that perhaps the new curate "meant right at bottom; but [...] was sourish-tempered, [...] and he wanted to be like my lord judge i' the parish, punishing folks for doing wrong" (Eliot 2008:198). Adam describes him as a person who was dogmatic and theoretical, false and hypocritical; a man who preached severe sermons whilst behaving in a way which was very far from being unobjectionable. Most importantly, Mr. Ryde is presented as a clergyman who was incapable to feeling sympathy towards other people, and who at the same time was ready to pass judgments on his fellow human beings. In short, "Mester Irwine was as different as could be" from him (Eliot 2008:198,199). The good old Rector of Broxton, in fact, was portrayed as a man who lacked any element of snobbishness and who acted like a gentleman to anyone; a man who never tried to play the emperor and who was always kind to his fellow citizens (Eliot 2008:197,198,199). Most importantly, as Eliot underlines, even though Mr. Irwine was not perfect, at least he was real; and he was far better than the ideal clergyman interpreted by Mr. Ryde – or at least he was better than what 19<sup>th</sup>-century readers thought real perfection was. According to Eliot, Mr. Irwine is perfect because he is a human and erroring; he is liable to make mistakes because human nature itself is imperfect. Mr. Ryde, on the other hand, preaches a strict life, and behaves in a very unstrict way. He pays less those who work for him, only to keep more of his income; "a sad mischief I've often seen with the poor curates jumping into a bit of a living all of a sudden" comments Adam (Eliot 2008:198). In this chapter, it is clear that Eliot is speaking through her protagonist but without giving her own opinion on the matter. She is learning from what Adam is saying, and at the same time, she is attacking intellectuals who are absorbed in abstract and theoretical questions, such as Calvinists and their doctrine of election. In fact, the very notion of election is very far from understanding human nature as something imperfect, as it would make someone closer to God than to one's fellow human beings. Nonetheless, puritans strongly believed their creed would make the world better, because since people cannot be sure whether they will be forgiven or not, they must behave rightly in life just to be sure (Hart 2013:16). Contrariwise, the traditional Anglican religion considered human nature as something imperfect, like Eliot did, and therefore provided a pardon to anyone who were to commit a sin and repent. However, if Eliot believed in the imperfect essence of human nature, how come did she not grand a pardon to Hetty Sorrel? Perhaps, as I said in 2.2.1 and 3.6.1, she wanted to condemn gender stereotypes whilst at the same time representing the reality of women's conditions in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain; however, there may be other reasons and I will cover them in the following pages, after analysing the relationship between Dinah, Hetty, and Adam. Overall, religion is a complex

issue, and in *Adam Bede*, Eliot wanted to focus on the relationship between religion and sympathy by placing Dinah in the middle of a religious spectrum with Mr. Irwine and Mr. Ryde at the antipodes. Sympathy is a key word in Eliot's life and aesthetic, and in *Adam Bede* it is clear that the author wanted to underline how the latter was deeply connected to a person's flaws (Eliot 2008:195). In fact, anyone who is far from perfection can understand better other people's feebleness and would be keener to comfort them rather than indulge in scoldings or punishments. As I mentioned in the previous section, and as it is reported in Chapter 17, Eliot painted directly from nature, and although it is true that beauty comes from natural elements, it is also true that the author was far more interested in less sensational and loveable characters, and in a beauty that comes from within, rather than in lofty and sublime subjects whose appearances seemed deceptively out of this world (Eliot 2008:195). When Marian was writing, the Flemish school of painting was a recurring theme in realist literature, and it was very common for realist writers to have as models the subjects of those 17<sup>th</sup>-century painters. Besides, in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was an intense and ongoing debate between the realist and the neoclassical school of painting over the use of the term "realism" connected to the world of literature and art (Gunn 1992). The subjects of these two schools were oppositional; if on the one hand, the Neoclassical painters focused on great and sublime characters, like *Napoleon crossing the Alps* by J.L. David (1801), on the other one, the Flemish school focused on more humble and loveable characters, such as the *young woman with a water jug*, by J. Vermeer (1664-65). Though Eliot belonged to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and was thus closer to the Neoclassical school, in *Adam Bede*, she publicly made a stand on that debate, writing that she actually found "a source of delicious sympathy in [the] faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence [...] than a life of pomp or of absolute indigence, of tragic suffering or of world-stirring actions" (Eliot 2008:195). Eliot believed that not only humble subjects were far more real than lofty ones, but she also implied that the ancient form of heroism was nothing but fake, and that she was happy to turn "without shrinking, from cloud-borne angels, from prophets, sibyls, and heroic warriors," to more humble and ordinary characters (Eliot 2008:195; Gunn 1992).



Figure 4.5. *Young woman with a water jug* (Vermeer 1664-5)

For all the above-mentioned reasons, I strongly believe it is no coincidence that the equilibrium between humble and lofty subjects is reached with Dinah, who is arguably the most significant character in the entire male-dominated universe of *Adam Bede*. Indeed, Dinah Morris – or perhaps I should say the character she embodies – is the very reason why George Eliot decided to write this novel in the first place. In Chapter 2, I stated that Dinah plays the part of Aunt Samuel, a Methodist preacher who listened to the confession of a child-murderer convict before her execution, and who decided to stay and pray with her till her very last hour (Nestor 2002). Like Eliot's aunt, Dinah is very sympathetic towards other characters, especially with the most unfortunate ones, and her attitude, together with her deep understanding of the human soul, underlines how mature, selfless and most importantly modern Dinah really is. For all these reasons, though Morgan (1989) insists that Hetty Sorrel is the real descendent of that line of heroines that started with Jeanie Deans, I personally believe that the real peasant heroine

of the novel, is indeed Dinah Morris. The main reason behind my statement is that Dinah, unlike Hetty, is very conscious of the complexity of life. She has always devoted herself to the poor people of Stonyshire, whose life conditions were far below poverty line and “where the trees [were] few, so that a child might count them” (Eliot 2008:40). She knows the hardships and the pain that come from such a life; and above all, she knows how important pain is for the development of our capacity to sympathize with others.



Figure 4.6. *Dinah preaching in Stonyshire* (Gregory 1890)

Likewise, Adam is also aware that life cannot be lived without pain, and ever since the beginning of the story, he is presented as a young narrow-minded hard worker who has already undergone too many struggles in his short life. Unlike Seth, who is tender-hearted and who sometimes acts as too young and naïve, Adam constantly feels family responsibility on his shoulders, especially after the passing of his drunkard father. Both Adam and Dinah understand that life can be cruel sometimes, and since they live at a time where new religious tendencies were leading men and women towards a life of rigor and zeal, their pursuit of duty led them towards different solutions. On one end, Adam became too self-righteous, stern or even austere, while Dinah, who was almost saint-like, gave in to a life of ascetism, the severe act of self-discipline which implied the denial of all pleasures (Blumberg 2009). At the end of their

Bildung, both protagonists understand the importance of feeling sympathy towards others, and at the same time, they find in each other a companion for life. Hetty's crime, hence, paved the way for Dinah's (and Adam's) happiness, and yet one question is still partly unanswered: why did Eliot need to be so cruel with Hetty Sorrel if she deeply believed in the imperfect essence of human nature? One hypothesis is that Eliot needed tragedy to emphasize Hetty's and Dinah's role within the novel, and in particular, the statement about beauty that she mentioned in her poetics. It is possible, in fact, that the deceiving nature of Hetty's beauty lies at the very core of her tragic nature, as I mentioned in 4.2; and if that is the case, then Hetty's vicious and dreamy attitude are only a consequence of her sensational appearances, for any place she appeared, every look was bent on her, starting from her own (Eliot 2008:91). "There are various orders of beauty [in nature]", comments Eliot, "but there is one [...] which seems made to turn heads not only of men, but of all intelligent mammals, even of women", and "Hetty Sorrel's was that sort of beauty" (Eliot 2008:91,80). Contrariwise, Dinah is presented as a very pale and ordinary woman, "with a small oval face [...] and an egg-like line of cheek and chin"; she had "a delicate nostril, and a low perpendicular brow [...] The hair was drawn straight back behind the ears, and covered [...] by a net Quaker cap" which did not increase her beauty at all; "it was one of those faces that make one think of white flowers with light touches of colour on their pure petals" (2008:27,28). Though she is also described as very pretty, she is definitely less sensational and astonishing than her cousin; and yet, since her beauty is natural – for it is even compared to pure white flowers –, the narrator calls her true and genuine, because her appearances do not corrupt other fellow humans... "falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult" (Eliot 2008:195). Dinah Morris, then, is the representative of an order of beauty which is supposed to cast a light of faith and hope on the dramatic events of the story, whilst at the same time acting as a bridge between the unfeeling Hetty Sorrel and the Eden-like community of the village of Hayslope. Another interpretation for the author's cruelty towards Hetty, however, may be that her modernity and hardness of heart might be connected to a more general and structural opposition within the novel; one between past and present. The poor wanderer, in fact, is a modern character who is closer to Eliot's present than to her own; at the same time, though, she is contemporaneous to a whole set of characters who are more connected to an earlier time. This contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous must be resolved somehow by the author, and perhaps, it is possible that Eliot might have deliberately intervened – once again – in the narration, only to tempt, evict, and finally erase Hetty Sorrel from her fictional universe, just to solve an anomaly she had created. In Book V, before the trial, Eliot finally describes the moment that inspired her to write the story of *Adam Bede*: Hetty's confession, a heart-breaking

dialogue that comes full circle with Aunt Samuel's story, and which echoes the two cousins' first close-up at the Poyser's. In Chapter XV, called "The Two Bed-Chambers", Hetty and Dinah are for the first time in a close and confined environment, which portrays their intimate routines before going to bed. On this occasion, Dinah warns Hetty that life will not always be easy, and that she should pin her hopes on religion now that she is happy and in good health, so that she could lean on God whenever she was going through more challenging times. In spite of her cousin's concern, Hetty becomes hysterical and "pushe[s] her away impatiently, [saying] with a childish sobbing voice – 'Don't talk to me so, Dinah. Why do you come to frighten me? I've never done anything to you. Why can't you let me be?'" (Eliot 2008:176). Months before her cousin's crime, Dinah was already worried about "Hetty's world", to the point that she tried to melt her heart before it reached breaking point. Even though that first attempt was unsuccessful, it still facilitated a number of rising actions that eventually exploded with the "climatic confession" behind the prison bars (Leilei 2005). Overall, Hetty and Dinah are oppositional characters; they are poles apart from one another; and yet, in spite of their differences, they are both loved by Adam. As a matter of fact, even though his love for Hetty was more of an obsession and only caused him pain, without it, his hardness would have never metamorphosed into tenderness, just like his severe sense of judgment would have never transformed into his capacity to feeling sympathy. Furthermore, when Hetty left, it was Dinah the one who helped Adam to recover, to the point that one year after Hetty's trial, he "had been getting more and more indulgent" towards others. The narrator said "it was [all] part of that growing tenderness which came from the sorrow at work within him". "For Adam [...] working hard and delighting in his work [...] had not outlived his sorrow"; besides, he believed "it would be a poor result of all our anguish and wrestling, if we won nothing but our selves at the end of it". "Let us rather be thankful", he says, "that our sorrow lives in us as an indestructible force, only changing its form, as forces do, and passing from pain into sympathy – the one poor word which includes all our best insight and our best love" (Eliot 2008:531,532). Although this transformation had not completely taken place in Adam, he was feeling a lot better without Hetty, so much so that he was even thinking about a future with Dinah, whom he placed "above all other friends in the world", and whom turned "the early days of gloom" into "soft moonlight" only by her presence (Eliot 2008:533). Unlike Jeanie, who had to choose between either religion or love, Dinah tried to embrace both options, at least until the Methodists Conference of 1803, where the members of the clergy decided that women should not be allowed to preach "unless [they] ha[d] an extraordinary call from God to speak in public" (Eliot 2008:655). Thus, though Dinah could still exercise her faith in public, she decided to make a step back and to embrace



the duties of the household (Eliot 2008:589). As Adam tells Seth in the Epilogue, “most o’ the women do more harm nor good with their preaching – they’ve not got Dinah’s gift nor her sperrit; and she’s seen that, and she thought it right to set th’ example o’ submitting, for she’s not held from other sorts o’ teaching” (Eliot 2008:589). Even if she voluntarily did it, it was still a tough bill to swallow. She could have been happy for the rest of her life if she had continued to preach; and yet, she chose to abandon her practice for a quiet life of domesticity with Adam. Her finale, though bitter, is still perfectly in line with Eliot’s declaration of poetics; and no matter if she did not reach full happiness in her life, she still managed to escape ascetism and to find someone who loved her and who could take good care of her, the way she has always done with others.



Figure 4.7. *Adam and Dinah* (Tarrant n.d.)

## 4.5 Summary

In Chapter 4, I presented all characters under examination by both resuming what has been said on women and religion, and by making reference to my main primary source, *Sisters in Time: Imagining Gender in 19<sup>th</sup>-century British Fiction* by Susan Morgan (1989). The following sections were then dedicated to each fictional woman, and include individual analysis together with cross references with other novels such as *Wuthering Heights* or *Les Misérables*. All characters have been discussed at length, and on multiple occasions, I found it more appropriate to quote directly from the book, for the benefit of the strong and vivid original phrasings. Finally, in the following Chapter I will draw some conclusions starting from the relationship between freedom, identity and religion that has been introduced in 2.3.

## 5. Conclusion

In Chapter 1, I stated the aim of this dissertation, that is analysing religion as a dominant factor in the construction of one's own identity in two pivotal novels of 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature, namely *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Adam Bede*. However, to analyse religion, one needs to investigate on many other subject areas which either act as a background or are strictly connected to the matter. While the former included the rise of the novel, from Defoe to Wilde, the evolution of religion, from the English Civil War to the Victorian Compromise, and the philosophical background, with ideas and theories of Hume and Smith, the latter mainly focused on women's headways and setbacks in terms of empowerment from the rise of consumerism to Victorian prudishness. Great importance was also given to the presentation of the two novels at issue, together with the analysis of the four main female protagonists, all to highlight the relationship between women and religion. In the specific, since both *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Adam Bede* focus on similar matters, the analysis also shed light on the movement from "ancient heroism" to "modern greatness", and from lofty and sublime character to more ordinary and humble figures. To help me, I thoroughly discussed the themes of "heroism", "consumerism", and "beauty", whilst presenting their connection with other features, such as "sympathy", "suffering", and the characters' "lack of happiness". Besides, the parallel between Effie/Hetty and Jeanie/Dinah was also supported by other female characters who shared some common traits with the former, and who helped in the analysis, such as Fantine, Ruth, Catherine Earnshaw, and Madam Bovary. Male figures were also crucial and helped drawing some conclusions, especially as far as the analysis of Effie and Dinah are concerned; among them, I



would like to underline Adam Bede, Lord Staunton, Mr. Irwine and Mr. Ryde. In 2.3 I also introduced two theories by Hegel and Kierkegaard to briefly discuss “freedom” as a fundamental quality in terms of character development. In particular, I mentioned how in *The Heart Midlothian* freedom seems to be completely missing in the story, whereas in *Adam Bede* it is an element strictly connected to the notion of greatness, thus stressing once again that movement away from “ancient heroism”. By interpreting Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* and Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or*, the results suggest that the notion of “freedom” can only be comprehended when a) “the fullness of history’s work” comes full circle within a certain story (Daniel 2007), and b) when characters make choices that allow them to enter the ethical life, where there is a small margin where humans can exercise their free will and achieve modern greatness (Villari 2015). In 3.1 I discussed the relationship between identity and religion, by presenting Freud’s theory of the unconscious. The Austrian neurologist and philosopher believed that our experiences shape our identity and build on an ethical component called Superego, that was at the same time counterbalanced by basic primitive desires he called Id. The result of that confrontation, as Freud suggests, is the Ego, which is the real compromise which we adopt in reality and that in the long run shall build up on an individual’s identity (Rennison 2015). Experiences, however, can disrupt that balance, lead to a crisis, and in time, even change our identity, and this dissertation aims at emphasizing religion as a decisive factor in moulding the identity of an individual or of a society by analysing the abovementioned female protagonists of the two stories at issue. In the specific, as I widely discussed in Chapter 4, Jeanie and Dinah are both extensively affected by their creed, to the point that they are willing to give up on their own happiness to stay true to who they really are. While the fervent puritan Jeanie refused to lie to save her sister from certain death, Dinah initially turned down Seth’s and Adam’s proposal because she did not want to walk away from her social duty in Stonyshire. Both characters are apparently free because they made a choice and they entered the ethical life, and though it is true that in *The Heart of Midlothian*, Jeanie carried out heroic actions on her own, she was still backed up by many who helped her getting a hearing with Queen Caroline, and freeing her sister from the cold bars of her prison cell. Similarly, even though Dinah did not embark on a world-stirring enterprise like the Scottish lass, she still managed to make choices that would bring her happiness, being supported by an entire community who learned to appreciate her and her work. And even if that bliss was abruptly stopped by the annual conference of the Methodist clergy and lay-preachers, Dinah still succeeded in creating a nest where she could breed her children with her beloved husband, thereby securing a backup plan that would grant her happiness. Religion and freedom are waging war at each other in these two

characters, both on an ethical and on a historical level. In fact, despite Jeanie and Dinah will ultimately reach their happy ending, their lives will still be thoroughly characterized by a latent unhappiness caused by either the impossibility to work, and therefore by a conscious regret (Dinah), or by a possibly unconscious one, brought forth by the acknowledgment of not having really saved anyone (Jeanie). As a matter of fact, on an ethical level, Jeanie admits – when lamenting the prolonged absence of her sister – that she needed “some crosses” in her life, as a reminder “that there was a better to come behind it” (Scott 2008:449). However, even though Jeanie has always acted making strong ideological stands, it is possible that she will be forever haunted by the thought that if she had lied in Court at the very beginning, destiny might have spared her sister a life of suffering and a forced separation from her beloved family. On the other hand, the characters of Hetty and Effie were not really affected by something like religion, but they were still victims of a society who was blindingly following the gospels, and who did not really understand anything that was out of their ordinary narrow-minded perspective. Those poor women were doomed to a life of misery and immobility, where the real prison bars were the pages of their respective novels. They were like birds in a cage, flapping their wings and feathers to be admired by bystanders, but while Hetty tried to escape with every possible means and eventually died trying, Effie gave up on her condition, and passively accepted a life of seclusion and misery, away from her family’s affections. Religion here is an obstacle to freedom, for it prevents them to reach full happiness; yet, at the same time, it is also possible that the authors wanted to emphasize that freedom works both sides. In fact, if Effie’s and Hetty’s lives were spared by a Court of Law, then their respective societies – who were on the frontline to combat the two outsiders – also needed to be freed; and through a joined action, they managed to evict the two sinners, in order to restore their peaceful Eden without any further rotten fruits. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, religion oppressed the lives of many men and women, it manipulated entire societies and became a real obstacle to people’s happiness and freedom. While it is true that experiences can mould our identity, and that religion can be a real source of comfort when the times are hard, there must always be a balance between our primitive impulses and our moral conscience when we make our choices, for they may always cause pain and suffering to others. Women and religion will forever remain a top concern in literature, as much as it still is in today’s societies. And for as long as there will be realities where women are oppressed and limited by masculine bible-thumbing ideologies, works like mine will continue to flourish, driven by a strong desire to raise awareness on the matter and to leave a contribution on the great web of human actions at work to make a positive change in today’s world.

## 5.1 Limitations of this study

This dissertation aims at exploring the differences and similarities between *The Heart of Midlothian* and *Adam Bede* by guiding readers through the evolution of female empowerment in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. In the specific, this study features an in-depth analysis of the four female protagonists by presenting both their heroic features and their relationship with God. Nevertheless, despite this investigation did not require any particular tool to collect the data, it still presents few limitations, especially as far as references are concerned. While Susan Morgan's study was extremely helpful in the analysis of Jeanie, Hetty and Dinah and, more in general, of Walter Scott and George Eliot, one cannot say the same about the character of Effie. Perhaps there are articles which analyse the two Deans sisters solely in terms of religion; yet, since both novels were published more than 150 years ago, and have been under the spotlight of literary criticism for slightly more than a century, those articles may have been included in issues which are not to be found as eBooks. Although that might have been a problem during the drafting of Chapter 4, I tried to compensate with both direct quotes and parallels with other characters, like Catherine Earnshaw from *Wuthering Heights*. Furthermore, though the existing literature on Effie can be considered adequate to carry out a critical analysis, most articles mention her to describe the double nature of her husband. And since this dissertation wants to emphasize the relationship between women and religion, I decided not to analyse Lord Staunton on purpose, with the exception of the final part of 4.3, when discussing the newly-weds' conversion to the Roman Catholic Religion. In fact, not only would George have overshadowed his wife, but he would also have altered the thread I had sought to create for the analysis of Effie, thus moving the attention toward a male leading character. Similarly, I chose not to present Adam in detail because even though the author put him at the centre of the story, I only wanted him to be a mere support for the analysis of Hetty and Dinah. In conclusion, in spite of these limitations, this study can still be considered a far-reaching comparative analysis of two of the most significant novels of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## 5.2 Areas of future research

Though this investigation may be exhaustive as far as the contents are concerned, I believe there are several ways to implement it with follow-up studies. To begin, future researchers or graduate students may concentrate on the theme of metamorphosis introduced in Chapter 3 by providing additional elements or adding characters to the analysis. By doing so,

they might parallel the four female protagonists at issue with others who were also designed by a contemporary Victorian novelist, such as Elizabeth Gaskell or Charlotte Brontë. In this regard, an interesting follow-up investigation would be on the differences and similarities between Hetty Sorrel and Ruth Hilton, two fallen women condemned by society; the former evicted from Paradise and the latter saved from an earthly Hell. Another input may be investigating on the evolution of the relationship between women and religion in the late Victorian era, through characters of the stature of Tess Durbeyfield by Thomas Hardy or Isabel Archer by Henry James. In addition, future studies might also combine the analysis on women and religion with an in-depth study on the theme of the paradise lost, which has already been presented in 4.2 and 4.3. In this respect, Tess and Isabel would be a perfect fit for future research because of the existing literature on both the Hardian metaphor of Egypt and the Promise Land (Villari 1990:58), and on the international theme so typical of Jamesian fiction (Moghadam & Wan Yahya 2014). Albeit there may be other areas that could be interesting to explore, I personally find the ones mentioned above as the most appealing and, most importantly, the most natural follow-up studies for this kind of investigation.

### **5.3 Final thoughts**

In the introduction, I mentioned the difficulties I had to face during the pandemic, and the personal struggles I had to address to overcome the passivity that had taken possession of me in the year 2020. What I did not say, however, is that two years ago I was a Bournemouth University graduate student, who was about to submit his final dissertation in destination marketing and management. Right before completing my long-desired MSc in Tourism, the world got hit by a huge pandemic and by a national lockdown. I was about to kick off a career in Britain, with great motivations and job offers, but then all those doors shut down and I had to return home empty handed. Somehow, that summer I found a job as an English tutor in my former high school, and I started to think about the idea of becoming a teacher; at least for the time being. To be frank, I have always loved English Literature, but I had never really thought about the idea of making a living out of it. Besides, I had to apply to a new MA, buy a whole lot of new books, go back to classes and more in general, start university once again for the third time. "It is never too late to be what you might have been", is one of the most famous aphorisms by George Eliot, and I remember that back then I was unconsciously telling myself that same thing to motivate myself in the application process. Today, I have just completed my first year as a full-fledged teacher, and I could not be more grateful. The past two years have

been a real challenge, but they have also been fundamental for my education, and most importantly, for my professional life. In a way, like Waverley, I also craved for something greater; a life of adventures away from that familiar routine that had weighted on my chest ever since middle school. And just like “heroism” changed and evolved from Sir Walter Scott to George Eliot, so did my dreams and aspirations, so much so that right now I could not imagine a better future for Waverley, than an ordinary life in a familiar environment with his beloved Rose by his side.



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