

Adam's Mourning and the Herculean Task in *Adam Bede*

THIS PAPER EXPLORES and delineates the work of mourning as it is depicted in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*. Adam's robust and energetic work is reflected by Adam himself as he reminisces, reflects and articulates his transformative processes; by Elizabeth, his mother, as she reveals the complexity of the family dynamic; and by the collective community as it reacts to and offers commentary on the accidental drowning of the Bede family patriarch. To further illuminate the intricacies of this bereavement, this essay will consider the impact of Hetty's deception and the Captain's defection on Adam as his sorrow is further exacerbated and his resolve more vigorously challenged.

The relationship between Mary Ann Evans's grief at the death of her father, Robert Evans, and the creation of *Adam Bede*, as well as the connection between the author's mourning and that of her protagonist, will be explored, raising the issue of the links between the textual work of mourning and biography. The contributions of contemporary grief counsellors about the nature of healthy grief in relation to pathological grief speak directly to Adam's "case." In bringing their observations and prescriptions to bear upon the ambiguous nature of Adam's mourning, the evolution and resolution of Adam's sorrow will be examined more fully, resulting in a finer appreciation of the muscularity of his struggle.

George Eliot fashions a stalwart hero, moulds him out of the sturdy stuff of the Saxon peasantry, and sets him a task of Herculean proportions. His work is to mourn the father that he did not love and to mourn him with vigour. For Adam Bede, on finding his father's sodden body in the brook beneath the willow, is required to do combat; he is called to face whatever is base, whatever is ignoble in his soul, and to engage it. And it is upon this grim contest that the novel rests.¹

To Eliot the work of mourning is no light matter. It is through mourning that Adam learns to see himself with awe-full clarity and it is through grief that he is both cursed and blessed. For mourning, like the angel who comes to wrestle Jacob, bestows both a gift and a wound. The gift is conferred neither for passive enjoyment nor for solitary reflection. Like Jacob, Adam is expected to respond with energy and verve. Now that the veil has been lifted and Adam's sight has been rendered keen, the old terrain that he was wont to travel appears strangely altered. He must learn to negotiate his life's path anew pebble by irksome pebble. It is his work.

Neither must Adam neglect the wound for it is left to him to excavate its nethermost regions, to identify its core, and to dislodge the shrapnel that retards its healing.² The man is not meant to hide away and lick his wounds. He is called to action. If grief has laid its silver talents at his door, Adam will bury them at his peril. For it is not merely the relationship with his father, Thias, that he is called to tackle but also the hardness that will come to poison his perception of his beloved, Hetty, and later drive him to denounce his childhood friend and comrade, Captain Donnithorne.

But grief is more than gift, and it is more than process. Once neatly codified, it becomes chimeric. It is greater than the sum of its parts for Adam tells that "there's things go on in the soul, and times when feelings come into you like a rushing mighty wind, as the Scripture says, and part your life in two a'most, so as you look back on yourself as if you was somebody else" (177). As the tale is spun, mourning is productive—for Adam is not simply *made* giddy by emotion; he becomes, as he laments, a man who will never meet life again on the same terms. In latter days, when he encounters a yet more formidable adversary, we hear him cry, "God help me! I don't know whether I feel the same towards anybody: I seem as if I'd been measuring my work from a false line, and had got it all to measure over again" (306), and we know that he is one who has "not outlived his sorrow" (467-68). We perceive that mourning's task is to groom and to coach, and to mould and equip him for the soul-feat yet to come. Adam must prepare himself for metamorphosis—the heart of stone that now inhabits his breast must be rejected and routed out, and the heart of flesh, that he has caused of late to wither, must be nourished and cultivated so that it will grow and thrive and swell into that place.

We begin to see the protracted nature of Adam's mourning as we watch it meander through the hills and the hollows of his benighted life. And once introduced to the dimpled³ Hetty at work pressing her cheeses, to the trusted friend who will savage the maid and to Stoniton prison where Adam's heart will break at the news of Hetty's fate, we will comprehend the connection between Adam's early grief and the misfortunes yet to befall him. We will then return, in the fullness of this mourning circle, to the grove where Adam takes Arthur's soft white hand in his hearty grasp, and in forgiving, experiences the re-emergence of boyhood affection (451): "sorrow lives in us," claims the narrator, "as an indestructible force, only changing its form, as forces do, and passing from pain into sympathy" (468).

Having succeeded in persuading us to wind our collective heart strings around the wretched Adam, the narrator obliges us to watch the pain-filled progression of his ensuing metamorphosis. Knowing the intensity of feeling to which he thrills as the gentle maid of the Hall Farm links her trusting arm in his, we stand aghast as the "sweet odour" of Adam's affection (214-16) begins to reek and putrefy with the slow and tortuous apprehension of her treasonous behaviour. Not merely bereft at her loss, not merely wounded by her rejection, Adam contrives to turn his heart to stone. And here—impenetrable, adamant, immovable—he comes to rest. But here he will not stay for though he has cast her off, and shut up his heart against her, Adam cannot withstand the horrors of Hetty's abandonment at Stoniton prison. Becoming increasingly distraught at the spectre of her isolation and the torment of her execution, his tears begin to fall, and by virtue of his mourning, the man is granted a heart of flesh.

A similar metamorphosis plays itself out in Adam's rigid rejection of the Captain. Tenderness gives way to repulsion when Adam discovers the baseness of Arthur's behaviour towards Hetty in the wood and its terrible ramifications—for with mind unbalanced and heart broken, the simple maid decides to expose her babe to the elements. Adam is called, once again, to do battle with what is uncompromising and unmalleable in his nature, and it is only when—after the passage of time—he encounters a broken and contrite Arthur, and a haunted and chastened Arthur, that he allows himself to embrace, once more, the older and dearer affection that still lodges within his breast.

In plying her craft, Eliot frames the novel with Adam's illumination and binds it with the concrete stuff of grief. For it is the same Adam who, at the opening of the novel, stands at the water's edge with his mind rushing back over the past in a flood of relenting and pity that we meet again at the end (54). He has been moved to pity the young Arthur in the same way that he came to pity his father:

It's true what you say, sir: I'm hard—it's in my nature. I was too hard with my father, for doing wrong.... I've known what it is in my life to repent and feel it's too late: I felt I'd been too harsh to my father when he was gone from me—I feel it now, when I think of him. I've no right to be hard towards them as have done wrong and repent. (450)

And as if to underscore the muscularity of Adam's struggle, the narrator sees fit to interject: "Facile natures, whose emotions have little permanence, can hardly understand how much inward resistance he overcame before he rose from his seat and turned toward Arthur" to offer the hand of friendship (450).

What is characteristic of the mourning of Adam Bede is the protagonist's struggle with the hardness that is in his soul. It is a battle that Adam must fight again and again—for his impatience with those who are errant seems to rear its ugly head at every turn. The reader can but sympathize; surely he is provoked beyond bearing. Does not Hetty, the "pink and white" posey of Adam's fragile heart, demonstrate her inconstancy when she deserts her loyal swain without a backward glance? Does not the youthful Captain, the trusted friend of Adam's boyhood, prove himself immoral, self-centred, and woefully irresolute when he seduces the maid and decamps for parts unknown?

Adam is woefully beset by ambiguous relationships so that even his mourning is tainted. George Eliot fashions for Adam Bede a father figure who, though once a respected member of the Hayslope community, turns in his latter years to drink and debauchery. When his lifeless body is discovered beneath the willow, the reader assumes—along with the general population of Hayslope—that Thias has died "in his cups." The village mourns, not for the errant father, but for the beleaguered family who is, by all

accounts, "well rid." The wayward Thias has not only shamed the Bede name but also managed to undermine the family economy. When we first encounter Adam, we find him harried with fatigue and frustration but working, nonetheless, all through the night, to finish a coffin his father has promised for daybreak but not yet begun. We watch him simmer and seethe and work off his rage while Seth, not unsympathetic to Adam's bouts of righteous indignation, prays in the kitchen with Lisbeth for "the poor wandering father, and for those who were sorrowing for him at home" (47).

The ambiguity of the relationship is further compounded by the Bede matriarch who, though devoted to her darling Adam, still sees fit to upbraid him:

I know thee dost things as nobody else 'ud do, my lad. But thee't allays so hard upo' thy feyther, Adam. Thee think'st nothing too much to do for Seth: thee snapp'st me up if iver I find fault wi' th' lad. But thee't so angered wi' thy feyther, more nor wi' anybody else.

That's better than speaking soft, and letting things go the wrong way, I reckon, isn't it? If I wasn't sharp with him, he'd sell every bit o'stuff i' the yard, and spend it on drink. I know there's a duty to be done by my father, but it isn't my duty to encourage him in running headlong to ruin.... But leave me alone mother, and let me get on with my work. (42-43)

While Eliot characterizes Lisbeth as a whining, manipulative woman whose heart, nonetheless, is in the right place, the reader remains uncertain of her integrity. It is only when the evidence provided by the assorted denizens of Hayslope reveals a Thias who has "done little this ten year but make trouble for them as belonged to him," and is considered by the knowing Mrs. Poyser, at least, to be "better out o' the way nor in" that we come to appreciate the pain of Adam's position (94). For has not Thias been the cause of Adam's reluctance to ask for Hetty's hand? Has not Adam been forced to use his meagre earnings to pay for Seth's substitution in the army? Has he not been forced to buy the precious stock of wood that keeps the business thriving—the same wood that his father would sell for drink if Adam did

not remain wary? How, when he has been compelled to assume the position of family patriarch, can he begin to mourn a parent who is little more to him than a recalcitrant child?

There is biographical basis for the fictional depiction of life in the Bede cottage. In the Evans family, it was Mary Ann who was considered to be the recalcitrant child. Years before her father died, an "uneasy truce" was said to have obtained in the household (Adams 10) much like the truce that obtained in the Bede cottage before Thias met his death beneath the watery willow. Ambiguous familial relationships besieged Mary Ann as she grew into womanhood, asserted her independence, and lived to mourn the father she had once so vehemently defied. We can but wonder if the acute pain she experienced in her dealings with the unforgiving Robert Evans informed and shaped the torment she later visited on Adam, and if, in fact, the Herculean task she set Adam to perform was the one she could never, herself, master. Was she, in framing this pathetic tale, working out her own salvation?

We know from her letters to Miss Sara Hennel that while Mary Ann was gratified to find herself in the position of nurse to the dying Robert, she also found him to be a trying patient and confessed that she tried to "look amiable in spite of a constant tendency to look black; and speak gently though with a strong propensity to be snappish" (Paterson 26). Such peevish behaviour, brought on no doubt by worry and fatigue, does not—under normal circumstances—warrant self-reproach, but when our sensitivities are heightened by the death of a loved one, even imagined offenses loom larger than life, and we can only wonder if Mary Ann was given to self-castigation over such momentary lapses. Adam surely was.⁴

Yet we fail to appreciate the narrator's intent if we allow ourselves to dismiss, as of little moment, the propensity for self-reproach that bedevils Adam as he mourns. It is not meant to be taken as evidence of a mere passing fragility or an over-tender conscience. Eliot delineates with care and sensitivity the terrible tension that tears at Adam's internal equilibrium. It unfolds with painstaking clarity as the reader becomes privy to the intricacies of the father-son relationship, for we are told that Adam cannot forget "the night of shame and anguish when he first saw his father quite wild and foolish, shouting out fitfully among his drunken companions.... He had run away once when he was only eighteen, making his escape in the morning twilight" (49). He had returned just as quickly, however, after contemplating the

hardships to which he had, by his cowardly defection, consigned his mother and brother, and had come to the conclusion that even though his father would be a sore cross to bear for many a long year to come, he had the health and limbs and spirit to bear it (49-50). We learn as well that the Bede cottage, once a haven of harmony and bliss, came to harbour bitterness and suspicion, for as Adam wended his way homeward at eventide to the waiting Lisbeth who took such pleasure in his coming, he was heard of late to call in a fit of petulance and temper, "Where's father?" (201). Even the Rector, Mr. Irwine, seems to have the true measure of Thias Bede, for when he hears the news of his misadventure, we hear him exclaim: "Poor Old Thias!... I'm afraid the drink helped the brook to drown him. I should have been glad for the load to have been taken off my friend Adam's shoulders in a less painful way. The fine fellow has been propping up his father from ruin for the last five or six years" (62). It is clear that Thias's loss is seen rather as a blessing than as an occasion of deep sorrow for the Bede family. Sympathy obviously rests with Adam, not because he has been bereaved, but because he has carried an impossible load and borne it without complaint. The offer of solace, even from the rector, does not seem to be a priority. Adam, we observe, is made to wait while Irwine and Donnithorne take their luncheon in leisurely fashion and plan a detour to the Hall Farm so that Arthur can see his pups and peek in on Hetty, and so that Irwine can "have another look at the little Methodist who is staying there" (62). As we continue to eavesdrop, we find that the conversation soon shakes off its sombre tones and returns, without missing a beat, to its former note of jocularly.

Adam's equilibrium is not so easily restored, however, for the spectator can neither appreciate nor apprehend the task that this grieving son is obliged to undertake. It requires no effort, on the part of the observer, to dismiss Thias as the load that has been lifted, but Adam must yet reckon with the father who, in happier days, used to boast to his fellows about his little chap's "uncommon notion o' carpentering," the father that once made the wonderful pigeon-house at Broxton parsonage, the father whose side he once so proudly and affectionately ran beside (48-49). As the memories flow thick and fast, Adam's work is to acknowledge and redeem them as he grieves.

No evidence of this subterranean exertion appears visible either to the village or to the grieving son's more intimate comrades, for little is offered

to Adam by way of condolence. There is, in fact, a marked absence of anything resembling sympathy. Even though allusions are made to visits to the Bede household, the narrator does not make us privy to the conversations that ensue. It is assumed that Lisbeth will both require and welcome the tender ministrations of the gentle Dinah, but her sons, it seems, are left to their own devices.

The work of mourning, in this Victorian setting, appears to be the work of women—at least in its outward manifestations—as Dinah feels compelled to come to Lisbeth in her grief "in the place of a daughter" when she realizes that the widow is bereft, not only of a husband, but also of female kin (108). While Dinah proceeds to commiserate with Lisbeth and to busy herself about the kitchen, we note that both Seth and Adam are inwardly soothed by her presence. This seems to be a secret that we share with the omniscient narrator, however, for it becomes apparent that the male members of this grieving household are not to have their emotional needs pandered to in any overt fashion though we watch them wander listless and silent through the melancholy rooms of the now-wretched Bede family cottage.

We must not be misled at this point, however, by what appears to be the uninhibited keening of the women and the tight-lipped reserve of the men, for though the outward trappings suggest a rigidly gendered grief,⁵ Eliot has not merely sculpted an artless stereotype nor treated us to a Victorian "slice of life." The menfolk may appear to be resigned and the women inconsolable, but it is of no particular significance for we come later to appreciate that Adam's efforts at restraint are every bit as taxing as Lisbeth's outpourings. Adam, though we may not mark it, has already embarked upon the excavation of his soul; he is engaged in covert operations, and as readers we must not allow ourselves to be deceived by facile comparisons.

The general mood of the Hayslope community fails to alert us to Adam's true state. It appears to carry on in cheerful oblivion while volcanic activity erupts with regularity beneath his carefully controlled exterior. Neither, it seems, does the demeanour of those who would be wont to sympathize serve as a cue, for though the men of Hayslope touch their hats and stand respectfully by while Thias is laid to rest by the White Thorn, we soon learn that Bartle Massey—Adam's trusted friend and mentor—is conspicuous by his absence and that the young squire has taken himself off on a fishing trip. Even as Adam walks over to the night school to determine the reason

for Bartle's absence—and we note that it is Adam who feels the weight of this responsibility—the condolences he receives are noticeably restrained, if not curt. Ascertaining that it was the mere whelping of his bitch that kept Bartle away, Adam begins, "I was afraid you must be ill for the first time i' your life. And I was particular sorry not to have you at church yesterday." Bartle responds: "Ah, my boy, I know why, I know why.... You've had a rough bit o' road. But I'm hopes there are better times coming for you. I've got some news to tell you. But I must get my supper first, for I'm hungry, hungry. Sit down, sit down" (231). Thias's demise appears to be of so little moment that the subject is dismissed pre-emptively, and Bartle Massey, we suspect, harbours no suspicion of Adam's internal torment. As Adam continues to groan inwardly under the chafing burden of his grief, he does so in solitary fashion. It is only later, when Adam suffers the excruciation of Hetty's imprisonment, that Bartle emerges as loyal friend and comrade. But at this particular juncture, Adam knows no companion in his anguish, and we can but remember the tender solace offered to Lisbeth and mark the inequity.

It must be admitted that Lisbeth *invites* succour—her tears flowing without check and her plaints and cries seemingly unceasing while Adam, even as he tugs at the sodden body, remains mute, awe-struck. No clear sign of torment is visible save the dishevelled appearance and the oppressive weariness. He does not quarrel and challenge; he does not reminisce and upbraid. He does not, like his mother, find comfort in "Incessant movement, performing the initial duties to her dead with the awe and exactitude that belong to religious rites" (142). For Lisbeth brings out the little store of bleached linen which she had been holding in reserve for her own funeral, she being the eldest by two years, and noticing at the same moment a "long-neglected and unnoticeable rent in the checkered bit of bed curtain" begins to mend it, "for the moments were few and precious now in which she would be able to do the smallest office of respect or love for the corpse, to which in all her thoughts she attributed some consciousness." It seems, the narrator interjects, that "our dead are never dead to us until we have forgotten them" and Lisbeth is soothed by the belief that Thias, although he can be injured and wounded still can also know all her penitence, all her aching sense that the place he left is empty, and can feel all the kisses she bestows on the smallest relic of his presence (102). We are left in no confusion as to the state of Lisbeth's mind. She wears it openly. She keens, not in

ambiguity, but in simple heart-wrenching sorrow. For it was never Lisbeth who found it difficult to love the errant Thias. Her regrets, we observe, are irrational, fanciful and short-lived. She reproaches herself for lying snug abed while Thias lay struggling just outside her window, and she bewails the fact that she has been denied the chance to nurse him into a good and proper death. She also reflects affectionately that when "I'd gotten my old man I war worreted from morn till night" but "now he's gone, I'd be glad for the worst o'er again" (no).

Adam, in marked contrast, remains a closed book to those who both know and love him. His back remains confoundedly upright and his manner cool and deferential. The harried state soon passes—Adam turns his attentions once again to the Hall Farm and his precious Hetty and returns to work for he maintains that, "there's nothing but what's bearable as long as a man can work...the best o' working is, it gives you a grip hold o' things outside your own lot" (113). Adam appears, in fact, to return to normality—his self-recriminations at the river bed being nothing more than an aberration not to be repeated in saner moments. If Adam is undergoing inner turmoil, the narrator goes to great lengths to put us off the scent. Having briefly witnessed the macabre scene at the swollen brook, we find ourselves transported to the sleepy village of Hayslope where the narrator begins her introductions. She manages to draw our attention away from the mourning Bedes and into the elegant living room of Broxton Parsonage to meet the Rector, Adolphus Irwine, and the self-indulgent women who inhabit his world. We become captivated by his protégé, the dashing Donnithorne, and follow him gladly to the riotous Poyser household where the lovely Hetty flirts unabashedly in the cool redolence of the farm dairy. We are easily charmed by this vain little creature, and by the time we have been introduced to the young Methodist preacher, all memory of Thias's death and the family's sorrow has been lost to us. Before the action moves full circle and Dinah, learning of Lisbeth's loss, determines to visit her, we become privy once more to the romantic machinations of Hetty's girlish imagination and to the provoking irresolution of Arthur.

Even the funeral is eclipsed by the denizens of Hayslope who, like Hetty, treat the occasion more like a wedding than a funeral. The humour insinuated into the Sunday promenade by the antics of the precocious Totty and her rosy-cheeked brothers—dressed for the event in fustian tail coats and

knee-breeches—does not prepare us for the deep rumblings that are about to sound in Adam's simple soul.

It is at this sorrowing moment, nonetheless, with his emotions so keenly compromised by the proximity of his beloved Hetty, that we see the man begin to wrestle, and he wrestles in earnest in his grief work. While considerable time may seem to have elapsed for the reader, for Adam the death was but yesterday. With his voice so hemmed in that he cannot join in the strains of the funeral psalm, we watch Adam become increasingly overwrought because the "chief source of his trouble and vexation" is forever gone out of his reach and what has been broken can never, now, be mended. He regrets most deeply not having been able to "press his father's hand before their parting," and to say, "Father, you know it was all right between us; I never forgot what I owed you when I was a lad; you forgive me if I have been too hot and hasty now and then!" As the service progresses, Adam's thoughts continue to run on "what the old man's feelings had been in moments of humiliation, when he had held down his head before the rebukes of his son" (195). And the narrator sees fit to interject—if "when our indignation is borne in submissive silence, we are apt to feel twinges of doubt afterwards as to our own generosity, if not injustice; how much more when the object of our anger has gone into everlasting silence, and we have seen his face for the last time in the meekness of death!" (196). While Lisbeth placates herself with happy reminiscences that run on the affection her Thias showed while she, still but a girl-bride, lay weak and frail in childbed—reminiscences that bring her happiness, Adam continues to torture himself with scenes that occasion regret, as he reflects to himself,

Ah, I was always too hard.... It's a sore fault in me as I'm so hot and out of patience with people when they do wrong, and my heart gets shut up against 'em so as I can't bring myself to forgive' em. I see clear enough there's more pride nor love in my soul, for I could sooner make a thousand strokes with th' hammer for my father than bring myself to say a kind word to him. And there went plenty o' pride and temper to the strokes, as the devil will be having his finger in what we call our duties as well as our sins.... It seems to me now, if I was to find father at home to-night, I should behave different; but there's no knowing—perhaps nothing' ud be a lesson to us if it didn't come too late. It's

well we should feel as life's a reckoning we can't make twice over; there's no real making amends in this world, any more nor you can mend a wrong subtraction by doing your addition right. (196)

As the narrator observes, "This was the key-note to which Adam's thoughts had perpetually returned since his father's death, and the solemn wail of the funeral psalm was only an influence that brought back the old thoughts with stronger emphasis" (196). While Adam's inner deliberations appear, to the reader, to be both genuine and cathartic, they do not touch on what we know to be reality, for Adam—while excoriating his pride and confronting his "hardness"—does not allow himself to dwell on the fact that Thias was truly wayward. And Eliot, in her rendering of Adam's torment, does not permit a single drop of grace to cool his fevered brow. While the villagers file out of Hayslope church, some of them smiling and winking at their companions, and while the rector intones the "sublime words" of the final blessing—"The peace of God which passeth all understanding" (197), we watch the Bedes wind "their way down to the valley and up again to the old house, where a saddened memory had taken the place of a long, long anxiety—where Adam would never have to ask again as he entered, 'Where's father?'" (201), and in our mind's eye, we see him wince at the very thought.

At this point in Adam's mourning process it appears as though his grief, although still in its earliest stages, is tending towards pathology. Adam cannot rid himself of the notion that he has been too hard. He has begun to brood. We divine, as well, from a previous exchange with Lisbeth, that the Bede family has a dangerous dynamic at work for the narrator has allowed us, once again, to eavesdrop while Adam, thinking of nothing more than his mother's tender feelings, plans to have his father's coffin built in the village out of sight and sound of her hearing. When Lisbeth's learns of the plan, she is defiant: "Nay, my lad, nay...thee wotna let nobody make thy feyther's coffin but thysen?...! wonna ha' nobody to touch the coffin but thee." And as if to underscore her point, she persists: "Nay, nay...I'n set my heart on't as thee shall ma' they feyther's coffin.... Thee was often angered wi' they feyther when he war alive; thee must be the better to him now he's gone. He'd ha' thought nothin' on't for Seth to ma's coffin" (119). While Lisbeth dotes openly on her beloved Adam and considers Seth to be no more than a soft lad with his head "full of chapellin," it is Adam, nonetheless,

who is the target for her wrath (44). And if we were not made a party to much that goes on in the Bede household, it would be easy to misconstrue this interaction for Lisbeth is not dismissing Seth, not treating him as a nonentity, but chiding her *elder* son for his prodigality in matters of the heart, and it is on this same sad note that she persists in pricking him. Seth will continue to remain the one whose affections are taken for granted—the son who can be trampled upon without fear of reprisal or defection. It is Adam, the stalwart, Adam the outwardly upright who is being challenged, at this crucial juncture, to prove his familial affection. By Lisbeth's reckoning, it is time for him to atone. And we come to realize that it is she alone who can plumb his depths and find the canker in his soul.

If Adam is to remain resident in the Bede household, he will be accosted daily by Lisbeth's skilfully manipulative jibes. He will be made to flinch and to shrink as she probes and pokes, with neither conscience nor license, into the deepest and most vulnerable crevices of his wounded psyche. Adam, we perceive, will not be restored to balance and well-being by those who love him. Seth, though he reveres his elder brother to a fault, will dare to neither cross nor challenge him. And Lisbeth shows neither mercy nor good sense. This being his context, Adam would be placed in a high risk category by psychologists like Lewis R. Aiken who contends that when those who are grieving experience an acute lack of social and emotional support, they are more likely to find their mourning process tending towards pathology (249). Have we not already observed that the familiars of Hayslope both disregard and misread the significance of Adam's turmoil and choose to turn their attention to brighter and better things? On the one hand, Adam's grief is dismissed out of hand and on the other, it is complicated and exacerbated. If that were not enough to signal trouble, Aiken numbers accidental death and unresolved conflicts—including shame—amongst the chief factors that contribute to pathological grieving (249). Adam, we might conclude, has three serious strikes against him.

To further compound Adam's position, it must also be recognized that some grief counsellors place father-son relationships in a separate and distinct category when attempting to elucidate the many subtleties that pertain in the grieving process. In his work in *The Orphaned Adult: Confronting the Death of a Parent*, Rabbi Marc D. Angel places considerable emphasis on the final meeting—be it a deliberate farewell or a chance encounter—that occurs

between a parent and an adult child when death is imminent. The image of the last days becomes indelibly engraved on the memory particularly if the farewell has been a hostile or disturbing one and will not be dislodged until time has done its healing work. In his interviews with adult orphans, Rabbi Angel discovered that final words and gestures were reviewed over and over again apparently in the hope of eventually finding consolation: "Every detail," in fact, "seemed to have its own mysterious significance" (68). For those who were burdened, like Adam, with the unbearable guilt that had attached itself to last encounters, Rabbi Angel discovered that a "realistic approach" was the most efficacious—the "lifelong relationship between the parent and child," was to be considered "ultimately far more important than the short period preceding the parent's death" (68). The same raw memory that causes us to wince in the early days of our mourning has the potential to soothe and to heal and console when it is allowed to meander freely through the halcyon days of childhood affection and unencumbered love. And Adam, for all his agonies over the disturbing departure of Thias, for all his regrets over the humiliation he rained repeatedly upon the recalcitrant man-child that was his father, has already travelled this far in his journey. For has he not begun the difficult task of sorting through the past, both recent and distant, and has he not discovered the surprising joy of gentle juxtaposition? We may watch his tears burn hot and heavy at the galling memory of his recent hardness, but we are also made privy to his reminiscences—we are also permitted to watch him frolic in playful pride beside the man he once revered, the parent whose presence he once gloried in, and in our watching, we find hope.

But how are we to understand the guilt that still plagues him? Is Adam tending toward pathology or is he not? David Carroll, in his 1985 treatment of ambiguous grief, claims that "When we brood on what might have been, things get worse psychologically until we become enveloped in a cocoon of recriminations. "Guilt," he contends, "is one of the most insidious effects of grief." Admitting and venting one's anger towards the deceased serves as a "kind of purging mechanism" and is an integral part of the mourning process, especially if the relationship has been a troubled one (344-46). The type of idealization that Adam appears to be engaged in, that produces a "false all-positive portrait of the deceased" (346), will lead inevitably to

pathology and not, as we might hope, to health. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross claims that when a traumatic loss has not been fully faced up to and resolved, it can result in various forms of cancer, ulcerative colitis, and depression. "Working it through" is paramount in importance if the grieving one is to avoid later psychosomatic damage (47).

As an antidote, J. Wm. Worden suggests the "reality test": "An inability to face up to and deal with a high titre of ambivalence in one's relationship with the deceased inhibits grief and usually portends excessive amounts of anger and guilt which cause the survivor difficulty" (53). In his therapeutic approach, Worden sets up an empty chair in his office and invites the bereaved to talk directly to the deceased about their thoughts and feelings (74).

But Adam seems to need no intervention—no empty chair in the office—for his internal conversation with the poor drowned Thias has long since flowed without check. Just as the cadence of Joshua Rann's rendition of the psalm rose and fell: "Thou sweep's! us off with a flood: We vanish hence like dreams," so too did the son's outpourings (195).

Adam has made his peace with Thias. He has admitted his hardness, laid bare his soul, and asked for forgiveness. But is that enough? Has he not missed a crucial step? For Adam has not yet articulated Thias's failings. He has not vented. We have not heard him confront the wayward father—to his face—about the defection, the drunkenness, the thievery, the sloth. Worse still, Adam has maintained his guilty stance and guilt, we have been told, can lead to repressed anger and anger to depression and physical illness.

Had we not come upon Adam, in the early pages of the tale, seething against the reprobate that was his father, we might be tempted to entertain the notion that the Adam who later grieved Thias's grisly demise was indeed given to bouts of unhealthy, unhealing, idealization. But such is not the case. We have heard Adam vent, and we have watched him rage and once made privy to that painful scene, we will not forget.

George Eliot understood that engaging in idealization and entertaining feelings of guilt might actually, in circumstances such as Adam's, be both healthy and productive. If we do not allow such a process to take its natural course, if we enter the arena prematurely and declare it to be an unsound practise, if we consider that it is requisite rather to "work through" feelings of ambiguity, then we may well block or at worst disrupt the work of sorrow.

For it 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" (468).

The mourning that Eliot fashions for Adam falls like a grace-filled shower—the very moment Thias is plucked from the brook—annihilating in an instant all that had previously provoked Adam's indignation and imbuing him with pity and tenderness. It works to distill from the father-son relationship whatever, as the narrator of the Epistle to the Philippians suggests, was once true and honourable; whatever was right and pure; whatever was lovely and of good report; whatever was excellent and worthy of praise (ch. 4, v.8), and it enables Adam, as in former times, to dwell on these (117). Having eradicated all bile and bitterness, it serves to illuminate for the grieving son the poisoned part that he has come to play in the Bede family drama. In his retrospection, Adam becomes keenly sensitive to his pride, to his overweening sense of duty, and to his hardness. As the willow wand once rapped smartly at the door of Adam's workshop to alert him to the life and death struggle that was playing itself out in the swollen brook (50), so it raps now at the door of his soul. And this time Adam responds with alacrity, for mourning becomes a provocateur that catapults Adam into the subterranean depths of his being and demands excoriation and transformation.

We see Adam now in his "becoming." He has discovered that "by getting his heart strings bound round the weak and erring, so that he must share not only the outward consequence of their error, but their inward suffering," he can extend enough charity and patience towards his "stumbling falling companions" to enable him to walk with them in the "long and changeful journey" (204). It is with this end in mind that George Eliot has conceived the Herculean task. She believes that humankind must learn to accept and extend the hand of patience and good will towards those fellow mortals who can neither "straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people—amongst whom your life is passed—that it is needful you should tolerate, pity, and love." For these are the "real breathing men and women" of our world, and they can be either "chilled by your indifference or injured by your prejudice" or "cheered and helped onward by your fellow-feeling, your forbearance, your outspoken, brave justice" (172). These are the familiars of Hayslope, and indeed of the

Bede family. Although they may be "more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people,"—the narrator cries, "Bless us, things may be lovable that are not altogether handsome, I hope?" (172-73).

It is towards refinement of character and renewal of spirit that George Eliot impels her hero. Adam must come to recognize what is ignoble in his soul and work to purge and conquer it. The narrator reflects that

Deep, unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state. The yearning memories, the bitter regret, the agonised sympathy, the struggling appeals to the Invisible Right—all the intense emotions which had filled the days and nights of the past week, and were compressing themselves again like an eager crowd into the hours of this single morning, made Adam look back on all the previous years as if they had been a dim sleepy existence, and he had only now awaked to full consciousness. It seemed to him as if he had always before thought it a light thing that men should suffer; as if all that he had himself endured and called sorrow before, was only a moment's stroke that had never left a bruise. Doubtless a great anguish may do the work of years, and we may come out from that baptism of fire with a soul full of new awe and pity. (409-10)

It is not to forge a tougher, more resilient Adam that sorrow is at work, however. It is to forge an Adam who no longer walks so decidedly erect and with such surety of purpose, an Adam who now meanders slowly with his hands thrust into his side pockets and his eyes resting chiefly on the ground (446), an Adam who can no longer suppress a sob at the first approach of sympathy (384), for the products of Adam's mourning are a broken and a contrite heart and an increased capacity for love.

The Adam who is reputed to have a will as well as an arm of iron has used the metal's might against himself. It is not the narrator's intent to change the essence of Adam's character; though his heart strings have been more finely tuned, he remains a man of firm resolve: "for what have we got either inside or outside of us but what comes from God? If we've got a resolution to do right, he gave it to us, I reckon, first or last; but I see plain enough we shall never do it without resolution, and that's enough for me" (178). While

we note that Adam's reflections are framed, in this chapter, by a broader discussion of Christian theology, we recognize a complementary sentiment in Feuerbach's work on *The Essence of Christianity*—a text to which the author would have turned just as readily as to the Scriptures for instruction (Myers 25).⁶ Feuerbach asks rhetorically:

When love impels a man to suffer death even joyfully for the beloved one, is this death-conquering power his own individual power, or is it not rather the power of love?...When though sinkest into deep reflection, forgetting thyself and what is around thee, dost thou govern reason, or is it not reason which governs and absorbs thee? ...when thou suppresses a passion, renoucest a habit, in short, achievest a victory over thyself, is this victorious power thy own personal power, or is it not rather the energy of will, the force of morality, which seizes the mastery of thee, and fills thee with indignation against thyself and thy individual weaknesses? (4)

Surely Adam has been both governed and absorbed and has come to gain mastery over himself as his troubles have been compounded. He cries out to Bartle when on the day of Hetty's trial he learns that the Poyser family has deserted her: "They oughtn't to cast her off—her own flesh and blood. We hand folks over to God's mercy, and show none ourselves. I used to be hard sometimes; I'll never be hard again," and the narrator adds, "There was a decision in Adam's manner which would have prevented Bartle from opposing him, even if he wished to do so" (413).

Mourning has done its work. It has bestowed a gift and a wound. It has regenerated Adam and initiated him into a new state. He has evolved into compassion (Bonaparte 185). The mourning that began with Thias's drowning, that followed Adam like the solicitous hound of heaven through the fields and prisons and groves and great houses of Hayslope, has—even as the story draws to a close—yet to spend itself:

For Adam, though you see him quite master of himself, working hard and delighting in his work after his inborn inalienable nature, had not outlived his sorrow—had not felt it slip from him as a temporary burthen, and leave him the same man again. Do any of us? God forbid. It would

be a poor result of all our anguish and our wrestling, if we won nothing but our own selves at the end of it—if we could return to the same blind loves, the same self-confident blame, the same light thoughts of human suffering, the same frivolous gossip over blighted human lives, the same feeble sense of that Unknown towards which we have sent forth irrepressible cries in our loneliness. (467-68)

So it is with Adam who—after he has wrestled with the angel that is mourning—demands, like Jacob, a blessing, and so the son who once despised his father emerges from "that baptism of fire with a soul full of new awe and pity" (409), now supple in spirit and well endowed with love.

NOTES

1. An equally justifiable reading of the myth that lies concealed behind this tale is Knoepfelmacher's contention that the novel is Eliot's reinterpretation of the fallen and redeemed Adam of Milton's epic (qtd. in Johnstone 25). The Herculean parallel is meant to do nothing more than underscore the immensity, complexity and muscularity of Adam's tasks.
2. Given that Eliot has chosen to use metaphorical language in her depiction of Adam's mourning processes, I have chosen to echo these figures of speech in my attempts to delineate the protagonist's burgeoning self-awareness. The language of clinical psychology will also be employed when grief counsellors and therapists are included in the discussion as it pertains to Adam's prolonged sorrowing and struggle with guilt.
In reference to the "shrapnel" that Adam is taking, an assumption has been made that battle is already in progress before we turn the first page of *Adam Bede*. Johnstone contends that "By the time Adam's story opens, his shame has turned to rage which shows itself in his propensity for fighting and in his severity towards his father" (86).
In reference to the "core" of Adam's wound and his attempts to "excavate" this tender place, Staudacher has observed that "There is only one way to grieve. That way is to go through the core of grief. Only by experiencing the necessary emotional effects of your loved one's death is it possible for you to eventually resolve the loss" (qtd. in Dokai6i).
3. Hetty's "dimpled" countenance is of singular significance. Eliot, in introducing this youthful maid to the reader, takes pains to repeat such coquettish descriptors and has been much maligned by critics for her callous caricature of this vixen-child. For

our purposes, it is important simply to note that Hetty's inconstancy and self-absorption exacerbate and complicate Adam's grieving. In so doing, they also bestow a gift, for Adam is challenged to confront, once again, his hardness and to renew his efforts to dismantle and disarm it. For an expanded discussion on the nature of Eliot's caricature of Hetty see Johnstone 26ff.

4. For an expanded discussion on Mary Ann's volatile but affectionate relations with her father and their impact on the nature of her protracted mourning and resultant depression see Frederick

R. Karl, *George Eliot Voice of a Century: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995) 53-54; 96-101.

5. Eliot's insights into and observations of the gendered nature of grieving are to be commended. For a concise and pertinent depiction of the unique ways in which men and women mourn see Doka on "Masculine Grief" 161-71.
6. For a detailed account of Mary Ann's movement away from the Christian tradition, in which she was raised, and into secular humanism see Karl 48-64.