Chapter One

Introduction

Morality and Moral Values

Morality is a word that is not used very much, at least not without some qualification. People do sometimes talk about Christian morality, Nazi morality, or about the morality of the Greeks, but they seldom talk simply about morality all by itself. Consistent with this way of talking, many anthropologists used to claim that morality, like law, applies only within a society. They claimed that morality refers to that code of conduct that is put forward by a society. However, even in small homogeneous societies that have no written language, distinctions are made among morality, etiquette, law, and religion. So, even for these anthropologists morality does not often refer to every code of conduct put forward by a society.

To take morality to refer to an actually existing code of conduct put forward by a society results in a denial that there is a universal morality, one that applies to all human beings. Recently, some have taken morality, or a close anticipation, to be present among groups of non-human animals, primarily other primates but not limited to them. Morality has also been taken to refer to any code of conduct that a person or group takes as most important.

Among those who use morality normatively, different specifications of the conditions under which all rational persons would put forward a code of conduct result in different kinds of moral theories. Moral theories claim to put forward an account of morality that provides a guide to all rational beings, independent of whether these beings have any characteristics of human beings. Other moral theories claim that morality applies only to rational beings that have what they regard as the essential features of human beings. To claim that morality in the normative sense does

not have any referent is to claim that there is no code of conduct that, under any plausible specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational persons, and results in one form of moral skepticism.

What morality refers to when used in the descriptive sense does not have most of the important features of what morality refers to when used in the normative sense. Further, accepting a descriptive definition of morality need have no implications about how a person should behave. Accepting a normative definition of morality commits a person to regarding some behavior as immoral, perhaps even behavior that he is tempted to perform. When morality is used simply to refer to a code of conduct put forward by any actual group, including a society, whether or not it is distinguished from etiquette, law, and religion, then it is being used in a descriptive sense. It is also being used in the descriptive sense when it refers to important attitudes of individuals. A society might have a morality that takes accepting the traditions and customs of the society, including accepting authority and emphasizing loyalty to the group, as more important than avoiding and preventing harm. It is possible for a society to regard morality as being concerned primarily with practices that minimize the harms that all human beings can suffer, but all actual moralities seem to include more than this in their morality.

Morality describes the principles that govern our behavior. Without these principles in place, societies cannot survive for long. In today's world, morality is frequently thought of as belonging to a particular religious point of view, but by definition, we see that this is not the case. Everyone adheres to a moral doctrine of some kind. Moral values are the standards of good and evil, which govern an individual's behavior and choices. Individual's morals may derive from society and

government, religion, or self. When moral values derive from society and government they, of necessity, may change as the laws and morals of the society change.

Religion is another source of moral values. Most religions have built-in lists of do’s and don’ts, a set of codes by which its adherents should live. Individuals who are followers of a particular religion will generally make a show of following that religion’s behavioral code. It is interesting to note that these codes may widely vary; a person whose religion provides for polygamy will experience no guilt at having more than one spouse while adherents to other religions feel they must remain monogamous.

Christianity goes beyond all other religions in that it is more than just a system of do’s and don’ts; it is a relationship with the living God through His Son, Jesus Christ. A Christian’s set of moral values go beyond society’s mores and selfish instincts. Christians ideally behave correctly because they love God and want to please Him. This is at once a high calling and a low position. It is a high calling because God has required that all who love Him should keep His commandments; therefore it is an act of obedience. It is a low position because we must totally deny our own will to do what pleases the Lord. Christ Jesus as He lived His life on earth is our supreme example; if we pattern our behavior after Him then our lives are most valuable.

A plethora of social movements concerned with improving public morals co-existed with a class system that permitted harsh living conditions for many. The apparent contradiction between the widespread cultivation of an outward appearance of dignity and restraint and the prevalence of social phenomena that included prostitution and child-labor were two sides of the same coin: various social reform movements and high principles arose from attempts to improve the harsh conditions.

The term Victorian has acquired a range of co-optations, including that of a particularly strict set of moral standards, which are often applied hypocritically. This stems from the image of Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert, perhaps even more so – as innocents, unaware of the private habits of many of her respectable subjects; this particularly relates to their sex lives. This image is mistaken: Victoria's attitude toward sexual morality was a consequence of her knowledge of the corrosive effect of the loose morals of the aristocracy in earlier reigns upon the public's respect for the nobility and the Crown.

Making of a Novelist

Mary Ann Evans (22 November 1819 – 22 December 1880), better known by her pen name George Eliot, was an English novelist. She was one of the leading writers of the Victorian era. Her novels, largely set in provincial England, are well known for their realism and psychological perspectivity.

Female authors published freely under their own names, but Eliot wanted to ensure that she was not seen as merely a writer of romances. An additional factor may have been a desire to shield her private life from public scrutiny and to prevent scandals attending her relationship with the married George Henry Lewes. Angelique Richardson adds that, "As the New Woman entered culture and fiction with a bang in the last decades of the nineteenth century, so interest in her is burgeoning among literary historians and critics in the last years of our own" (146).

Silas Marner was Eliot's third novel and is among the best known of her works. Many of the novel's themes and concerns stem from Eliot's own life experiences. Silas's loss of religious faith recalls Eliot's own struggle with her faith, and the novel's setting in the vanishing English countryside reflects Eliot's concern about England fast becoming industrialized and impersonal. The novel's concern with

class and family can likewise be linked back to Eliot's own life. The voice of the novel's narrator can thus, to some extent, be seen as Eliot's own voice—one tinged with slight condescension, but fond of the setting and thoroughly empathetic with the characters. Though *Silas Marner* is, in a sense, a very personal novel for Eliot, its treatment of the themes of faith, family, and class has nonetheless given it universal appeal, especially at the time of publication, when English society and institutions were undergoing rapid change.

Evans became acquainted with intellectuals in Coventry who broadened her mind beyond a provincial perspective. Through her new associations, she traveled to Geneva and then to London, where she worked as a freelance writer. In London she met George Lewes, who became her husband in all but the legal sense—a true legal marriage was impossible, as Lewes already had an estranged wife. At this point in her life Evans was still primarily interested in philosophy, but Lewes persuaded her to turn her hand to fiction instead. The publication of her first collection of stories in 1857, under the male pseudonym of George Eliot, brought immediate acclaim from critics as prestigious as Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray, as well as much speculation about the identity of the mysterious George Eliot. After the publication of her next book and first novel, *Adam Bede,* a number of impostors claimed authorship. In response, Evans asserted herself as the true author, causing quite a stir in a society that still regarded women as incapable of serious writing. Lewes died in 1878, and in 1880 Evans married a banker named John Walter Cross, who was twenty-one years her junior. She died the same year.

Eliot wrote the novels *Adam Bede* (1859) and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) before publishing *Silas Marner* (1861), the tale of a lonely, miserly village weaver transformed by the love of his adopted daughter. Eliot is best known, however, for

Middlemarch (1871–1872). Subtitled “A Study in Provincial Life,” this lengthy work tells the story of a small English village and its inhabitants, centering on the idealistic and self-sacrificing Dorothea Brooke.

Eliot’s novels are deeply philosophical. In exploring the inner workings of her characters and their relationship to their environment, she drew on influences that included the English poet William Wordsworth, the Italian poet Dante, the English art critic John Ruskin, and the Portuguese-Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza, whose work Eliot translated into English. The philosophical concerns and references found in her novels—and the refusal to provide the requisite happy ending—struck some contemporary critics as unbecoming in a lady novelist. Eliot’s detailed and insightful psychological portrayals of her characters, as well as her exploration of the complex ways these characters confront moral dilemmas, decisively broke from the plot-driven domestic melodrama that had previously served as the standard for the Victorian novel. Eliot’s break from tradition inspired the modern novel and inspired numerous future authors, among them Henry James, who admired Eliot.

Silas Marner took five months to write. It was written between September of 1860 and March 1861. She told her publisher, John Blackwood, in January 1861 about her idea of writing the novel. She wrote that it was a story of old-fashioned village life, which has unfolded itself from the merest millet seed of thought. On 24 February 1861, she said that it came to her first of all, quite suddenly, as a sort of legendary tale, suggested by her recollection of having once, in early childhood, seen a linen-weaver with a bag on his back; but as her mind dwelt on the subject, she became inclined to a more realistic treatment of it.

When the book was originally published, Victorian critics were often impressed by what they felt was psychological complexity and authenticity with

which Eliot presented as *Silas Marner's* rural, uneducated thoughts. Richard Hutton in *The Economist*, called the novel the most intellectual as well as graphic picture of the most unintellectual social life which has been known in England during the last fifty years. Several editions of *Silas* appeared during the author's life. Three significant versions of the novel were published during Eliot's lifetime. The first edition appeared in April 1861, in one volume. The second edition, one volume, was required later in the same year for which Eliot made careful correcting. The third edition was needed in 1863. The cheap edition of 1868 was printed from plates of this third edition so that it has no textual significance.

The last important version, the Cabinet edition of 1878, combined two short stories, *The Lifted Veil* and *Brother Jacob* to form one novel in Eliot's collected works. It was the last edition to be reviewed and corrected by Eliot. She paid little attention to this novel due to Lewe's illness that later resulted in his death. The Cabinet edition had thirty-five substantial changes and at least ninety changes in accidentals. The thirty-five substantial changes were mostly the removal of unnecessary commas.

She lost her Christian faith not long before October 1843. *Silas Marner* was recommended in a school edition in 1903 for its-tender religious charm. However, religious people use tales of morality to teach religion and about being good. Some think that Titus Burckhardt shows, in *Sacred Art*, how creation of the universe was frequently represented through art of weaving. In 1978 the Anaheim Union High School District in California banned *Silas Marner*. Mr. Grim, Head of English at Union High School of California said that they banned George Eliot's *Silas Marner* as it was the only way to get students to read the damned thing. Before banning it only one person in the class had bothered to read it all the way through. But within weeks

of banning it every last one of his students knew it by heart. Some other critics have looked at the novel from the perspective of author's autobiography. In this connection Peggy Fitzhugh Johnstone remarks:

> Biographic evidence, along with evidence derived from the patterns in her early fiction, suggests that through writing *Silas Marner* Eliot was working through losses of her own intense sadness during and before the writing of the short novel went beyond any discomfort over her equivocal marital state, and beyond any sense of dislocation brought on her household moves. (75)

Silas Marner is a weaver who lives in remote village called Raveloe. The people of the town make fun of him. He moved to the village because he was falsely accused of murdering and looting a deacon. His friend William Dane accused him. His fiancée, Sarah, breaks off their engagement and marries William eventually. He starts caring more about gold from his weaving than about God and society. He is robbed. Nancy Lammeter is walking in the snow and she collapses and dies. Her daughter wanders into Silas's cottage. He thinks that the girl is his dead sister who has come back to life. The child is Godfrey's, but he will not admit it is his. The villagers are content to hear that Silas adopts the child. The bad thoughts of Silas fade since he is doing something good. He names the child Hepzibah (Eppie) after his dead sister. Godfrey Cass is secretly married to Molly Farren who is addicted to opium. Godfrey and Nancy are childless, and Godfrey's suggestion to adopt Eppie is rejected by Nancy, who believes that if they could not physically produce a child, they should not adopt one. Marner seems like a changed man ever since Eppie came into his life. The story continues on about how she grew up and what happened then.

The novel deals with good people being rewarded and sinners not being rewarded. Many critics believe the novel to be a religious one. Godfrey lies to Nancy and denies being a father. He later has to say he is childless against his will. Dunstan robs Silas's money but cannot enjoy it. Dunstan, who likes seeing the misfortunes of others, drowns and no one found his remains for years. Silas becomes happy in life because he took care of the child. Kate E. Brown comments on the length of *Silas Marner* and questions:

> Why, given the length of George Eliot's other novels, is *Silas Marner* so short? Why does it cover so extended a period of time only to absent what would seem to be the novel's moral center, the sixteenth years of Eppie's childhood? Why does Eliot anchor a fairy tale plot in the specific historical period of the Napoleonic Wars, when we cannot finally correlate historical and narrative events? (222)

Silas Marner depicts the decline of moral values of the people and their emphasis on consumerism, materialism and selfishness.

In the context of Victorian society, the decline in moral values refers to the decrease in the quality of good and right behavior of the people. This decline was mostly caused by the onset of industrialization. George Eliot's novel *Silas Marner* deals with the moral corruption of the characters. The title character is a victim of moral decay. He is wrongly blamed when the money disappears from the Deacon's bed. On the other hand Squire Cass is the greatest man in Raveloe. His eldest son Godfrey marries a poor woman and betrays her. His brother Dunstan blackmails his brother to keep the matter a secret from his father. He also goes to the house of Silas Marner and steals the money he had earned. Godfrey marries again. Robbery, betrayal in marriage, lust for money and the suffering of innocent people highlights the impact

of industrialization on the values of people. This kind of moral corruption among people is due to the evils of industrial development. They started paying more attention to material gains and pleasure without caring for moral virtues.

Nothing characterizes Victorian society so much as its quest for self-definition. The sixty-three years of Victoria's reign were marked by momentous and intimidating social changes, startling inventions, prodigious energies. The rapid succession of events produced wild prosperity and unthinkable poverty, humane reforms and flagrant exploitation, immense ambitions and devastating doubts. Between 1800 and 1850 the population doubled from nine to eighteen million, and Britain became the richest country on earth, the first urban, industrial society in history. For some, it was a period of great achievement, deep faith, indisputable progress. For others, it was 'an age of destruction,' religious collapse, vicious profiteering and decline in the moral values of people. It was an age of transition.

The literature of the period is embedded in the social reality of the time. Victorian literature gives us insights into the changes sweeping across the then transitional society. A study of George Eliot's *Silas Marner* has enabled me to understand the changes taking place during Victorian period and the impact of those changes on the behavior of the people. This research has been a great help in understanding the impact of industrialization on the moral behavior of the people of that time.

How Eliot administers doses of moral castigation and approbation, not the logic of liability that underwrites it, has been the focus of critical debate. Critics tend to identify two separate, and seemingly incompatible, projects at work in this novel. First, a realistic depiction of the chain of cause and effect within a social community, and second, the representation of a moral system that sees beyond the external world

of cause and effect in order to identify and punish the perpetrators of wrongdoing. Accordingly, critics have poured their energy into reconciling Eliot's moral commitments with her deterministic or realistic ones. For those concerned with Eliot's desire to depict a world rigorously regulated by laws of cause and effect, the imposition of a moral order at the end of the novel seems to fly in the face of the realistic project. For those who argue that Eliot was first and foremost a moral didacticism, realism seems to be only an inhibiting or inadequate tool in her venture to describe transcendent moral truths. Both approaches, however ultimately require the assimilation of one concern to the other, either morality becomes a product of the realistic project, or realism looks likes a way to reinforce Eliot's belief in a pre-existing moral structure. Talking about the religious perspective in *Silas Marner*, John Bennet views:

> The community of Raveloe is confined, spiritually and intellectually within the narrow limits of early nineteenth century village life the Christian observation baptism, Sabbath keeping and occasional communion are accepted within the community as semi-magical rites or as pious customs. (134)

Though different critics have commented on the novel from their different view points, none of them has yet studied it in the light of the decline of moral values in *Silas Marner*. Therefore, the present dissertation research aims at researching the issue of decline of value in the novel. Talking about betrayal in the novel, Ann Burns writes:

> This 19th-century classic, is a tale of betrayal, gold, and love, encased in the elegant symmetrical structure so popular in traditional English fiction, featuring Marner, the weaver, who is framed for theft by his

> best friend and becomes a recluse, focusing his strong affections only on the store of golden coins he receives in payment for his work. (170)

George Eliot's *Silas Marner* has been interpreted variously from different perspectives and view points. Some critics have seen autobiographical elements of Eliot in it. Some others have studied it from religious angle. *Silas Marner* as a literary text can prompt diverse interpretation. A single research cannot do justice to the richness of the text. Therefore, the present dissertation will be limited to an analysis of decline of moral values in the text.

The primary source of observation and analysis will be the text itself. A comprehensive study of the text will be carried out. Relevant historical documents bearing on the issue of industrialization will be consulted. For secondary sources, available critical reading and evaluation from authentic sources on the text and George Eliot will be thoroughly studied.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Analysis

Social Changes in Victorian Period

The Victorian era of the United Kingdom marked the height of the British Industrial Revolution and the apex of the British Empire. The period of Queen Victoria's rule between 1837 and 1901 actually begins with the passage of the Reform Act 1832.

Queen Victoria had the longest reign in British history, and the cultural, political, economic, industrial and scientific changes that occurred during her reign were remarkable. When Victoria ascended to the throne, Britain was essentially agrarian and rural; upon her death, the country was highly industrialized and connected by an expansive railway network. The first decade of Victoria's reign witnessed a series of epidemics, crop failures and economic collapses. There were riots over enfranchisement and the repeal of the Corn Laws, which had been established to protect British agriculture during the Napoleonic Wars in the early part of the 19th century.

Discoveries by Charles Lyell and Charles Darwin began to examine centuries of assumptions about man and the world, about science and history, and finally, about religion and philosophy. As the country grew increasingly connected by an expansive network of railway lines, small, previously isolated communities were exposed and entire economies shifted as cities became more and more accessible.

The mid-Victorian period also witnessed significant social changes; an evangelical revival occurred alongside a series of legal changes in women's rights. While women were not enfranchised during the Victorian period, they did gain the legal right to their property upon marriage through the Married Women's Property

Act, the right to divorce, and the right to fight for custody of their children upon separation.

The period is often characterized as a long period of peace and economic, colonial and industrial consolidation, temporarily disrupted by the Crimean War. Domestically, the agenda was increasingly liberal with a number of shifts in the direction of gradual political reform and the widening of the franchise.

The inescapable sense of newness resulted in a deep interest in the relationship between modernity and cultural continuities. Gothic Revival architecture became increasingly significant in the period, leading to the Battle of the Styles between Gothic and Classical ideals. Charles Barry's architecture for the new Palace of Westminster, which had been badly damaged in an 1834 fire, built on the medieval style of Westminster hall, the surviving part of the building. It constructed a narrative of cultural continuity, set in opposition to the violent disjunctions of Revolutionary France, a comparison common to the period, as expressed in Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution: A History* and Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. Gothic was also supported by the critic John Ruskin, who argued that it epitomized communal and inclusive social values, as opposed to classicism, which he considered to epitomize mechanical standardization.

The middle of the century saw The Great Exhibition of 1851, the first World's Fair and showcased the greatest innovations of the century. At its centre was The Crystal Palace, an enormous, modular glass and iron structure – the first of its kind. It was condemned by Ruskin as the very model of mechanical dehumanization in design, but later came to be presented as the prototype of Modern architecture. The emergence of photography, which was showcased at the Great Exhibition, resulted in significant changes in Victorian art. John Everett Millais was influenced by

photography as were other Pre-Raphaelite artists. It later became associated with the Impressionistic and Social Realist techniques that would dominate the later years of the period.

Prior to the industrial Revolution, Britain had a very rigid social structure consisting of three distinct classes: the Church and aristocracy, the middle class, and the working poorer class.

The top class was known as the aristocracy. It included the Church and nobility and had great power and wealth. This class consisted of about two percent of the population, who were born into nobility and who owned the majority of the land. It included the royal family, lords spiritual and temporal, the clergy, great officers of state, and those above the degree of baronet. These people were privileged and avoided taxes.

The middle class consisted of the bourgeoisie- the middle working class. It was made up of factory owners, bankers, shopkeepers, merchants, lawyers, engineers, businessmen, traders, and other professionals. These people could be sometimes extremely rich, but in normal circumstances they were not privileged, and they especially resented this. There was a very large gap between the middle class and the lower class.

The British lower class was divided into two sections namely the working class (laborers), and the Poor, those who were not working, or not working regularly, and were receiving public charity. The lower class contained men, women, and children performing many types of labor, including factory work, seam stressing, chimney sweeping, mining, and other jobs. Both the poorer class and middle class had to endure a large burden of tax. This third class consisted of about eighty five percent of the population but owned less than fifty percent of the land.

Industrialization changed the class structure dramatically in the late 18th century. Hostility was created between the upper and lower classes. As a result of industrialization, there was huge boost of the middle and working class. As the Industrial Revolution progressed there was further social division. Capitalists, for example, employed industrial workers, who were one component of the working classes, but beneath the industrial workers was a submerged “under class” sometimes referred to as the “sunken people” which lived in poverty. The under class were more susceptible to exploitation and were therefore exploited.

The government consisted of a constitutional monarchy headed by Queen Victoria. Only the royalty could rule. Other politicians came from the aristocracy. The system was criticized by many as being in favor of the upper classes, and during the late 18th century, philosophers and writers began to question the social status of the nobility.

In an unpredictable, tumultuous era, the stern, staid figure of Queen Victoria came to represent stability and continuity. The adjective ‘Victorian’ was first used in 1851 to celebrate the nation’s mounting pride in its institutions and commercial success. During the seven decades of her rule, Victoria’s, calm profile, stamped on currency and displayed in offices and outposts from London to Bombay, presided over the expansion of Britain into the world’s greatest empire.

Victoria stood not only for England and Empire, but also for Duty, Family and especially, propriety. But although she was presented as the ultimate role model, Victoria herself could not escape the contradictions of her era. On the one hand, Victorian society was phenomenally energetic, dedicated to the Gospel of Work and driven by a solemn sense of duty to the Public Good. Yet the fabled self-confidence of this overachieving society often rings hollow. Their literature conveys an uneasy

sense that their obsession with work was in part a deliberate distraction, as if Victorians were discharging public responsibilities in order to ease nagging doubts about their religious faith, about changing gender roles about the moral quandaries of class privilege and imperial rule. The Industrial Revolution shifted power from the landed aristocracy toward an insecure, expanding middle class of businessmen and professionals, impoverishing millions of once-ruler laborers along the way.

Industrialization and Morality Decline

The Industrial Revolution was a major shift of technological, socio-economic, and cultural conditions that occurred in the late 18th century and early 19th century in some Western countries. It began in Britain and spread throughout the world, a process that continues as industrialization. The onset of the Industrial Revolution marked a major turning point in human social history, comparable to the invention of farming or the rise of the first city-states; almost every aspect of daily life and human society is, eventually, in some way influenced.

In the latter half of the 1700s, the manual labor based economy of the Kingdom of Great Britain began to be replaced by one dominated by industry and the manufacture of machinery. It started with the mechanization of the textile industries, the development of iron-making techniques and the increased use of refined coal. Once started it spread. Trade expansion was enabled by the introduction of canals, improved roads and railways. The introduction of steam power (fuelled primarily by coal) and powered machinery (mainly in textile manufacturing) underpinned the dramatic increases in production capacity. The development of all-metal machine tools in the first two decades of the 19th century facilitated the manufacture of more production machines for manufacturing in other industries. The effects spread

throughout Western Europe and North America during the 19th century, eventually affecting most of the world. The impact of this change on society was enormous.

The first Industrial Revolution merged into the Second Industrial Revolution around 1850, when technological and economic progress gained momentum with the development of steam-powered ships, railways, and later in the nineteenth century with the internal combustion engine and electrical power generation.

Industrialization led to the creation of the factory. Arguably the first was John Lombe's water-powered silk mill at Derby was operational by 1721. However, the rise of the factory came somewhat later when cotton spinning was mechanized.

The factory system was largely responsible for the rise of the modern city, as workers migrated into the cities in search of employment in the factories. Nowhere was this better illustrated than the mills and associated industries of Manchester, nicknamed Cottonopolis, and arguably the world's first industrial city. For much of the 19th century, production was done in small mills, which were typically powered by water and built to serve local needs. Later each mill would have its own steam engine and a tall chimney to give an efficient draft through its boiler.

In other industries the transition to factory production followed a slightly different course. In 1746, an integrated brass mill was working at Warmley near Bristol. Raw material went in at one end, was smelted into brass and was turned into pans, pins, wire, and other goods. Housing was provided for workers on site.

Living conditions during the Industrial Revolution varied from the splendor of the homes of the owners to the squalor of the lives of the workers. Poor people lived in very small houses in cramped streets. These homes would share toilet facilities, have open sewers and would be at risk of damp. Disease was spread through a contaminated water supply. Conditions did improve during the 19th century as public

health acts were introduced covering things such as sewage, hygiene and making some boundaries upon the construction of homes. Not everybody lived in homes like these. The Industrial Revolution created a larger middle class of professionals such as lawyers and doctors. The conditions for the poor improved over the course of the 19th century because of government and local plans which led to cities becoming cleaner places, but life had not been easy for the poor before Industrialization. However, as a result of the Revolution, huge numbers of the working class died due to disease spreading through the cramped living conditions. Chest diseases from the mines, cholera from polluted water and typhoid were also extremely common, as was smallpox. Accidents in factories with child and female workers were regular.

Impact on Moral Values of the Victorian People

Victorian morality is a distillation of the moral views of people living at the time of Queen Victoria (reigned 1837-1901) in particular, and to the moral climate of Great Britain throughout the 19th century in general. It is not tied to this historical period and can describe any set of values that espouses sexual repression, low tolerance of crime, and a strong social ethic. Due to the prominence of the British Empire, many of these values were spread across the world.

Kate E. Brown writes about morality in the novel when she says:

> The novel insistently maintains that moral action depends on answering them properly, that morality is, in fact, function of temporality, defined as a disposition towards an experience of time, a characteristics tense. Perhaps not surprisingly, *Silas Marner* associates the capacity for moral action with a disposition towards the present tense, as the only tense in which action of any kind can take place. This

> is also to make a claim for the body as the ground of meaning and therefore also of morality. (225)

The term Victorian has acquired a range of co-optations, including that of a particularly strict set of moral standards, which are often applied hypocritically. This stems from the image of Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert, perhaps even more so – as innocents, unaware of the private habits of many of her respectable subjects; this particularly relates to their sex lives. This image is mistaken: Victoria's attitude toward sexual morality was a consequence of her knowledge of the corrosive effect of the loose morals of the aristocracy in earlier reigns upon the public's respect for the nobility and the Crown.

Two hundred years earlier the Puritan republican movement, which led to the installment of Oliver Cromwell, had temporarily overthrown the British monarchy. During England's years as a republic, the law imposed a strict moral code on the people even abolishing Christmas as too indulgent of the sensual pleasures.

When the monarchy was restored, a period of loose living and debauchery appeared to be a reaction to the earlier repression. The two social forces of Puritanism and libertinism continued to motivate the collective psyche of Great Britain from the restoration onward. This was particularly significant in the public perceptions of the later Hanoverian monarchs who immediately preceded Queen Victoria. For instance, her uncle George IV was commonly perceived as a pleasure-seeking playboy, whose conduct in office was the cause of much scandal.

By the time of Victoria, the interplay between high cultured morals and low vulgarity was thoroughly embedded in British culture. Victorian prudery sometimes went so far as to deem it improper to say "leg" in mixed company; instead, the preferred euphemism "limb" was used. Those going for a swim in the sea at the beach

would use a bathing machine. However, historians Peter Gay and Michael Mason both point out that we often confuse Victorian etiquette for a lack of knowledge. For example, despite the use of the bathing machine, it was also possible to see people bathing nude.

Verbal or written communication of emotion or sexual feelings was also often proscribed so people instead used the language of flowers. However they also wrote explicit erotica. Victorian erotica also survives in private letters archived in museums and even in a study of women's orgasms.

Victoria ascended to the throne in 1837, only four years after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. The anti-slavery movement had campaigned for years to achieve the ban, succeeding with a partial abolition in 1807 and the full ban on slave trade, but not slave ownership, in 1833. It had taken so long because the anti-slavery morality was pitted against a powerful capitalist element in the empire which claimed that their businesses would be destroyed if they were not permitted to exploit slave labor.

In Victoria's time the British Royal Navy patrolled the Atlantic Ocean, stopping any ships that it suspected of trading African slaves to the Americas and freeing any slaves found. The British had set up a Crown Colony in West Africa—Sierra Leone—and transported freed slaves there. Freed slaves from Nova Scotia founded and named the capital of Sierra Leone "Freetown". Thus, when Victoria became Queen the British occupied a high moral ground as the nation that stood for freedom and decency. Many people living at that time argued that the living conditions of workers in English factories seemed worse than those endured by some slaves.

In the same way, throughout the Victorian Era, movements for justice, freedom and other strong moral values opposed greed, exploitation and cynicism. The writings of Charles Dickens in particular observed and recorded these conditions. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel's carried out much of their analysis of capitalism in and as a reaction to Victorian Britain.

Chapter Three

Decline of Moral Values in *Silas Marner*: A Textual Analysis

The novel opens in the English countryside "in the days when the spinning-wheels hummed busily in the farmhouses"(5). In this era one would occasionally encounter weavers-typically pale, thin men who looked like "the remnants of a disinherited race" – beside the hearty peasants who worked in the fields. Because they possessed a special skill and typically had emigrated from larger towns, weavers were invariably outsiders to the peasants among whom they lived. The peasants were superstitious people, often suspicious of both "cleverness" and the world beyond their immediate experience. Thus, the weavers lived isolated lives and often developed the eccentric habits that result from loneliness.

> To the peasants of old times, the world outside their own direct experience was a reason of vagueness and mystery: to which untravelled thought a state of wondering was a conception as dim as the winter life of the swallows that came back with the spring; and even a settler if he came from distant parts, harly ever ceased to be viewed with a ramnant of distrust, which would have prevented any surprise if a long course of inoffensive conduct on his part had ended in the commission of a crime. (6)

The novel is set in the earlier years of the 19th century. Silas Marner is a weaver in a small religious community, Lantern Yard. He is also a highly thought of member of a dissenting chapel. Silas is engaged to a female member of the church and thinks that his future happiness is assured. However, due to the betrayal of a fellow parishioner, who blames him for a theft that he did not commit, Silas is expelled from

the congregation. He finds out later that his former fiancée married the man who had betrayed him.

Later on, he settles near the village of Raveloe, where he lives as a recluse who exists only for work and his precious hoard of money until that money is stolen by Dunstan Cass, a dissolute son of Squire Cass, the town's leading landowner. The loss of his gold drives Silas into a deep gloom, although a number of the villagers endeavor to help him.

Soon, however, an orphaned child comes to Raveloe. Silas decides to keep the child and names it Eppie, after his deceased sister Hephzibah. Eppie changes his life completely. Symbolically, Silas loses his material gold to theft only to have it replaced by the golden-haired Eppie. Later in the book, the gold is found and restored. Eppie grows up to be the pride of the town and to have a very strong bond with Silas, who through her has found inclusion in the town. Later, the childless Godfrey and Nancy Cass arrive at Silas' door, revealing the truth about Eppie's family and asking that Silas give Eppie up to their care. However, the decision falls to Eppie, who has no desire to be raised as a gentlemen's daughter if it means forsaking Silas. At the end, Eppie marries a local boy, Aaron, son of Dolly Winthrop, and both of them move into Silas' newly enlarged house, courtesy of Godfrey, “They had also ample leisure to talk of Silas Marner’s strange history, and arrive by due degrees at the conclusion that he had brought a blessing on himself by acting like a father to a lone motherless child” (239).

That we are to find merit in this theory is implied by the novel’s title: *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe*. What makes this title surprising is its linking of two characteristics, occupation and residence, that the novel opens by describing as mutually exclusive. Silas Marner merits a story precisely because, as a weaver, he is

not ‘of Raveloe.’ He is, rather, one of the ‘wandering men’ who cannot be said to be ‘of’ anywhere at all, who are ‘intermittent and occasional’ – dislocated in time as well as space- and who are ‘to the last regarded as alien by their rustic neighbors’ (51, 52). The narrative thus opens by denying the very possibility of the assimilating plot its title chains, and this denial would seem to be guaranteed by the misshaping effects of the weaver’s craft upon his body, which mark him as foreign to the outdoor culture of rural life. And if all weavers are ‘intermittent and occasional,’ Silas Marner would seem to exaggerate this general tendency, for he wanders loose not only from his birthplace and then from the Calvinist community of Lantern Yard, but even from his own body.

Reflection of Transition in Silas Marner

Silas is a weaver, deliberately set across the stereotype of the woman weaving, which, though it may have derived from social practice in ancient Greece, certainly did not correspond to conditions after the onset of the industrial revolution in England. ‘The fates at their weaving’ was a familiar literary trope, but home-weaving was already largely a thing of the past at the time George Eliot wrote and was no longer a woman’s occupation.

> The questionable sound of Silas’s loom, so unlike the natural cheerful trotting of the winnowing-machine, or the simpler rhythm of the flail, had a half-fearfull facination for the Raveloe boys who would often leave of their nutting to peep in at the window of the stone cottage, counter balancing a certain awe at the mysterious action of the loom, by a pleasant sense of scornfull superiority, drawn from the mokery of its alternating noises, along with the bent, tread-mill attitude of the weaver. (7)

For most critics, it stands apart from her other novels in the perceived thinness of its characterizations, the arbitrariness of its plot (which often partakes of the miraculous), and the simplicity of its conclusion. The story is by no means a fantasy, but a compact and serious work, wherein the issues of class, industrialization, and religion are realistically addressed in the context of the author's time through a series of contradictory parallels. Through both the structure and content of the novel, Eliot refutes the common belief of the latter 19th century that membership in the upper classes indicated moral superiority makes the implicit argument that industrialization dehumanizes and alienates workers, and suggests a "religion of humanity" founded on community as a substitute for the failure of organized religion.

The novel's main body of action takes place at the turn of the 19th century. However, the history goes back briefly to the 1780's to fill in the reasons Silas Marner moves to the provincial, isolated community, located in the English Midlands, from an industrial town in the north. Thus, the novel is set during what Marx identified as the time of transition from a feudal system of industry, with artisan guilds, to a manufacturing system. One learns Silas is a weaver and has been since a young man. A weaver at this time is an independent artisan who either works for himself and carries his spinning wheel and supplies on his back, if traveling from town or who works in conjunction with other weavers, if settled in a stable community, and works often a combination of the two.

"The lots declared that Silas Marner was guilty. He was solemnly suspended from church-membership, and called upon to render up the stolen money: only on confession, as the sign of repentance, could he be received once more within the fold of the church" (18). Silas was engaged to be married to a female member of the church and thought his future happiness assured. However, due to the betrayal of a

fellow parishioner, who blamed him for a theft he did not commit, Silas was expelled from the congregation and he finds out later that his former fiancée married the man who had betrayed him.

> The second day he took refuge from benumbing unbelief, by getting into his loom and working away as usual; and before many hours were past, the minister and one of the deacons came to him with the message from Sarah, that she held her engagement to him at an end. Silas received the message mutely, and then turned away from the messengers to work at his loom again. In little more than a month from that time, Sarah was married to William Dane. (19)

Bereft and disillusioned, Silas comes to Raveloe and settles, though for fifteen years he had as little as possible to do with the community. His lonely exclusion from any community contributes to an obsession with money, and as the years progress, he amasses a horde that is his only pleasure. However, at the commencement of the story, he is robbed by a son of Squire Case, the town's leading land owner (though Silas doesn't know the identity of the robber), and Silas' despair precipitate him into seeking help from the villagers.

> But while opinion concerning him had remained nearly stationary, and his days habits had presented scarcely any visible change, Marner's inward life had been a history and a metamorphosis, as that of every fervid nature must be when it has fled, or been condemned to solitude. (11)

This begins a slow reintegration into his society for Silas that is accelerated by his finding an apparently abandoned infant girl at his door a few weeks later " 'Why, you'd better leave the child here, then, Master Marner,' said good natured Mrs.

Kimble, hesitating, however, to take those dingy clothes into contact with her own ornamented satin bodice. ‘I’ll tell one o’the girls to fetch it’ ‘No-no-I can’t part with it, I can’t let it go,’ said Silas, abruptly. ‘Ifs comes to me-I’ve a right to keep it’” (154). The readers know, however, that the child is the unacknowledged daughter of another of the Squire’s sons, who keeps his marriage a secret because the child’s mother is of a lower class and is an opium addict. When Silas decides to keep the child, Godfrey Cass, the child’s real father, recognizes her as his own, but does not acknowledge her because the mother’s unexpected death then frees him to marry a prominent young woman of his own class.

> The story then jumps to around 1815, when the girl, Eppie, is grown and about to marry. Godfrey Cass has married the girl of his choice but their marriage is childless. In the meantime, Godfrey’s brother, who stole Silas’ money, and who has been missing since the theft, is found dead at the bottom of a local swamp when it is drained and Silas’s money recovered. Finally, in an attempt to rectify his “moral misjudgments,” Godfrey Cass goes to Silas and Eppie and admits he is Eppie’s father and offers her his home and affection, as well as the advantages of his class. Eppie, however, rejects him in favor of the father who raised her and the novel ends with Eppie’s marriage to a local boy of the working class. “‘O father,’ said Eppie, ‘what a pretty home ours is! I think nobody would be happier than we are.’” (240)

The most prominent structural feature of the novel is its dual story line. Silas’ story, is kept entirely separate from the relating of Godfrey Cass’ story, i.e., his secret marriage, second marriage, etc., until the climax of the novel when Eppie must choose between the father who reared her and her biological father. Not only do the dual

story lines structurally mirror class divisions, but Eppie's choice between Silas Marner and Godfrey Cass at the conclusion symbolizes a moral choice between the values purveyed by each.

Another formal device to stir sympathy for the peasantry is the fact that the gentry are not even introduced until well into the story, leading the reader to identify with Silas and those of his own class first. In addition, the working class/peasantry, the title character of Marner being the most prominent, are portrayed in a favorable light, whereas the landed gentry are unanimously cast unsympathetically.

> Marner was highly thought of in that little hidden world, known to itself s the church assembling in Lantern Yard; he was believed to be young man of exemplary life and ardent faith; and a peculiar interest had been centered in him. (120)

The picture that emerges of this leading family of the community is one of laziness, wasted, and moral bankruptcy. It is also significant that the author does not allow these characters to go unpunished. Dunstan drowns in the swamp immediately following his theft, and Godfrey pays the price of childlessness in his marriage for refusing to acknowledge Eppie as his daughter. In contrast, the portrayal of the working class is extremely sympathetic. Silas is portrayed as a Quiet, unassuming man with a "loving nature" (61), and the other prominent villagers, like Dolly Winthrop and Mr. Macey, are highlighted by the charity and fellowship they extend to Silas and Eppie, and to others of the community in need.

Because Silas chooses to adopt Eppie, when her own father, Godfrey does not, Silas is rewarded by love and community support, and the recovery of his gold. Eppie's final choice to stay with Silas and marry someone of her own class is the final, ironical statement of the greater morality of the working class and is a

simultaneous rejection of the bourgeois passion to rise socially. In her treatment of class in this novel, George Eliot decisively refutes the assumption that morality is related in any way to class, whether in the form of the common and long-held belief that "noble" blood meant noble character or expressed in the attempts of some to use Darwin's recently published theories in a social context to justify class distinctions. This novel makes clear that the only distinctions between classes are economic and there is no moral justification for such divisions.

The second set of parallel but opposing worlds dealt with in the novel is that between the industrial urban centers and rural, agrarian communities. Though Silas is "self-employed," professional weaving was a product of the growing, mass industrialization of textiles as opposed to former, local production. To the people of Raveloe, professional weaving was an alien way of working.

The novel shows an understanding of how mechanization imposes on the worker in that Silas is described as working in his loom, not on it, which eventually turns him into a component of the machine. The years of weaving have given his body a bent treadmill attitude and have ruined his eyesight. His appearance of physical deformity generates suspicion in the people of Raveloe who recognize the difference between mechanical aids and mechanized industry. The machine is their servant. This comparison clearly highlights the dehumanization of machine toil. Silas no longer looks "human" because of the kind of work he does.

> Strangely Marner's face and figure shrank and bent themselves into a constant mechanical relation to the objects of his life, so that he produced the same sort of impression as a handle or a crooked tube which has no meaning standing apart. The prominent eyes that used to look trusting dreamy, now looked as if they had been made to see only

> one kind of theme that was very small like tiny grain, for which they hunted everywhere: and he was so withered and yellow, that, though he was not yet forty, the children always called him 'Old Master Marner'. (27)

Silas Marner focuses on 19th century England as a time of transition: political power moved from a dominant landowner class to a dominant bourgeois class, agrarian economies were replaced by urban industrialization, and Christianity became increasingly diluted and secular. All of these transitions were largely complete by the end of the century, yet many like George Eliot recognized that much was being lost. The fact that Silas must leave the city and the growing fanaticism of religious frenzy and physically return to a rural, older way of life to maintain his humanity indicates that the pace of transition, and the modes of transition, were extremely harmful for many. However, the fact that Silas is permanently deformed foretells that industrialization would be an increasingly deforming fact of life.

The novel is realistic in that it not only demonstrates the alienating effects of industrialization and urban life. The petty bourgeois landowning class while asserting the value of rural, communal life that need not be religious to be virtuous, but it deals with these issues together because they did, in fact, historically work in conjunction. The formal aspects of a dual story line and juxtaposed settings serve the content by bringing these tensions into even sharper relief. Thus, the novel both highlights the major cultural transitions and contradictions of its own time and prophetically pinpoints the forces of class, capitalist industry, and Protestantism as the forces that would change the face and nature of future society.

It is, of course, significant that the narrator has just compared Marner to a broken-off piece of machinery, a mere extension of his loom, "a handle or a crooked

tube, which has no meaning standing apart" (69). In context, this image serves as a critique of mechanized labor, which subordinates the worker to the machine, alienating his intelligence and deforming his body. At the same time, the comparison of worker to broken handle explicitly invites us to compare Silas to his shattered pot, thus reinforcing the point made through Godfrey Cass's loveless marriage, that forms devoid of animating feeling or use cannot be perpetuated without making the past into a kind of "dead hand," clutching at and blighting the present.

Moreover, such a protraction of the past disables the body as an instrument of pleasure or expressiveness: from the sensitive body whose palm can register and appreciate the curve of a well-made handle, Silas is reduced by loss to the unfeeling handle itself. The mutual embedding of labor and mourning in the figure of the weaver establishes mechanization as a cause for grief-as-interregnum. In so doing, it also suggests the extent to which such an interregnum will become, in Silas Marner, a historical condition rather than a personal grief.

The "little incident" of the shattered pot thus suggests what is at stake for Eliot in a meditation on mourning. The incident makes plain that grievous loss devalues the mourner's body and renders it belated. Further, it attaches this experience of time alienated from the body to historical movements in particular, the mechanization and commodification of labor that would seem to exceed the recuperative possibilities of mourning as an inner work of remembrance.

Behavior and Moral Values of the Characters in *Silas Marner*

Silas Marner is a fable about a society in a time of change. George Eliot located her tale quite explicitly in the context of the social transformation from the traditional, aristocratic society to the modern one. Her first two chapters picture the traditional community of Raveloe in the last years of the Napoleonic wars, perhaps

between 1813 and 1815, when high wartime agricultural prices had made the district prosperous, and thereby supported the patriarchal predominance of the local landowners like Squire Cass.

With the end of the war and the decline in agricultural prices, accompanied by continued improvements in transportation, the patriarchal authority of the landed gentry declined, and middle-class public opinion began to prevail. Godfrey and Nancy have become merely “Mr. and Mrs. Cass” – “ and higher title has died away” (179). When Silas takes Eppie on a visit to the northern town from which he had journeyed some thirty years earlier, he discovers that it has become a factory town, with its former artisans replaced by an industrial proletariat. The decline of the traditional community, Eliot appears to suggest, has made possible Eppie’s spirited choice of merit over blood.

Eppie rejects the traditional code of blood in favor of a modern one of deed. She turns aside Godfrey’s natural claim on her by virtue of birth in favor of Marner’s earned merit as a loving father. Cass has an obligation toward Eppie, as a daughter, for whose existence he is responsible, but Eppie owes none to him merely because of blood relationship. “ ‘You won’t be giving me away, father,’ she had said before they went to church; ‘you’ll only be taking Aaron to be a son to you’” (238). Her moral obligation, founded upon feeling, not “ lawful” right, is to Silas (219). She marries the young gardener who has long loved her, rejecting the possibility of a husband more suited to the status she might now enjoy.

> Happily the sunshine fell more warmly than usual on the lilac tufts the morning that Eppie was married, for her dress was a very light one. She had often thought, though with a feeling of renunciation, that the perfection of a wedding-dress would be a white cotton, with the tiniest

> pink sprig at wide intervals; so that when Mrs. Godfrey Cass begged to provide one, and asked Eppie to choose what it should be, previous meditation had enabled her to give a decided answer at once. (237)

Blood itself plays an ambiguous role in this novel, as it does in other works of Eliot. Nancy's father, whose own father had come to Raveloe from somewhere in the north, is quite different in appearance from the general run of Midlands farmers. He finds this distinction "in accordance with a favorite saying of his own, that 'breed was stronger than pasture'" (121). Victorian liberals, in contrast, were apt to stress pasture over breed, environment rather than heredity. This was the new society's reply to the conservative insistence, like that of the conventional romantic novel, that blood would tell.

Yet the narrator pictures Eppie as startlingly different from the peasant girls of the village, for she is a lady in appearance and manner. The narrator describes Eppie's "delicate prettiness." While Silas tells her , "You're delicate made. My dear" and notes that she needs to have somebody to work for her (184). Later Godfrey reminds Marner that Eppie was " not fit for any hardships: she doesn't look like a strapping girl come of working parents" (225), and tells Nancy that there was not " such a pretty little girl any where else in the parish, or one fitter for the station we could give her" (205). Of course, romantic convention also played a part in Eliot's decision to portray Eppie as delicately pretty. *Silas Marner* embodies an interesting departure from Eliot's championing of the modern ethos, her elevation of feeling over reason. Eppie's feelings concerning her foster father overwhelm whatever practical reasons might attract her to consider Godfrey's offer.

Despite her adoption of elements of the modern, Eliot stressed the virtues of traction. She pictured Marner as loving "the old brick hearth as he had loved his own

brown pot": "The gods of the hearth exist for us still," she declared; " and let all new faith be tolerant of the fetishism, lest it bruise its own roots." Marner tries to secure "a consciousness of unity between his past and present" (184), and Eliot made a similar effort. Eliot joined Scott and Dickens in rejecting the prosaic, commonsensical aspirations of a commercial society, with its separation of individuals from traditional communal ties. The love of Eppie replaces Marner's preoccupation with accumulation and restores him to the fellowship of Gemeinschaft.

Silas is a solitary weaver who, at the time we meet him, is about thirty-nine years old and has been living in the English countryside village of Raveloe for fifteen years. "In the early years of this century, such a linen-weaver, named Silas Marner, worked at his vocation in stone cottage that stood among the nutty hedgerows near the village of Raveloe, and not far from the edge of a deserted stone-pit"(6). Silas is reclusive and his neighbors in Raveloe regard him with a mixture of suspicion and curiosity. He spends all day working at his loom and has never made an effort to get know any of the villagers. Silas's physical appearance is odd: he is bent from his work at the loom has, strange and frightening eyes, and generally looks much older than his years.

Despite his antisocial behavior, however, Silas is at heart a deeply kind and honest person. At no point in the novel does Silas do or say anything remotely malicious and strangely for a miser, he is not even particularly selfish. Silas's love of money is merely the product of spiritual desolation, and his hidden capacity for love and sacrifice manifests itself when he takes in and raises Eppie. The weaver's bent shoulder and white hair give him almost the look of advanced age. Though he is not more than five-and-fifty; but there is the freshest blossom of youth close by his side-a

blond dimpled girl of eighteen who has vainly tried to chastise curly auburn hair into smoothness under her brown bonnet. (182)

Silas's outsider status makes him the focal point for the themes of community, religion, and family as an out cast who eventually becomes Raveloe's most exemplary citizen, Silas serves as a study in the relationship between the individual and the community. His loss and subsequent rediscovery of faith demonstrate both the difficulty and the solace that religious belief can bring. Additionally, the unlikely domestic life that Silas creates with Eppie presents an unconventional but powerful portrait of family and the home.

Eppie represents for Silas the, "endless claims and ever-growing desires"(175), that the coins could not evoke. Silas immediately recognizes that a child, unlike coins, requires a great deal of material and emotional care. Because she entails an entirely new economy of changing needs and desires, Eppie draws Silas into the world of human relations while simultaneously clarifying for him the importance of economic relations. Or, more specifically, she draws those two realms together in Silas's mind so that he can experience their interdependence. Once, affection is brought into contact with material need, it is possible for Silas to see the two as a working economy: needs will be met and then more needs will arise. Work, as well as the product of work, becomes a process within this need-based economy, not simply a need unto itself.

When Eppie appears to "replace" Silas's gold, it looks as though Silas is finally given an equivalent that emphasizes the individuality or particularity Silas has been attributing to the coins. Eppie is the unborn child brought to fruition. Her uniqueness is more plainly evident to the Raveloe community than was the distinct quality of Silas's coins, and thus his attachment to her seems more comprehensibly

social. The transformation of gold to girl has been generally regarded as a vehicle for returning Silas to the community by transferring his love of money into paternal love. Rather than losing sight of economic profit, the arrival of Eppie reinforces the desire to make money. Affective and economic motives merge in a way that seems mutually beneficial.

> It was nothing but right a man should be looked on and helped by those who could afford it, when he had brought up an orphan child, and been father and mother to her-and had lost his money too, so as he had nothing but what he worked for by week by week, and when the weaving was going down to- for there was less and less flax spun- and Master Marner was non so young. Nobody was jealous of the weaver, for he was regarded as an exceptional person, whose claims on neighbourly help were not to be matched in Raveloe. (186)

Godfrey is the eldest son of Squire Cass and the heir to the Cass estate. He is a good-natured young man, but weak-willed and usually unable to think of much beyond his immediate material comfort. As a young man he married an opium addict, Molly Farren, with whom he had a daughter. This secret marriage and Godfrey's handling of it demonstrate the mixture of guilt and moral cowardice that keep him paralyzed for much of the novel. Godfrey consented to the marriage largely out of guilt and keeps the marriage secret because he knows his father will disown him if it ever comes to light. "Godfrey's mind was too full of Nancy Lammeter's looks and behavior, too full of the exasperation against himself and his lot, which the sight of her always produced in him, for him to give much thought to Wildfire, or to the probabilities of Dunstan's conduct" (80).

The matter of moral character as a relationship characterize as he is by the failed aspiration to turn a better fellow. Godfrey yearns to escape contingency. Godfrey aspires to a realm of morality beyond the "mud and slime" of his present indulgences, a realm he envisions as "the green banks where it was easy to step firmly, a place of industry, sobriety, and peace" (81). He imagines morality as a bodily performance that is disciplined, responsive to external standard of meaning, yet also pleasurable, self-expressive and immediate. As he understands it, morality is exceedingly difficult to practice, beset as it is by chance temptations, yet once achieved it constitutes a realm immune from those same temptations. Like man another Victorian male protagonist, Godfrey sustains this contradiction by idealizing the domestic as that realm of immunity. He fixes on Nancy Lammeter as the woman who "would be his wife, and would make home lovely to him . . . and it would be easy, when she was always near, to shake off those foolish habits that were no pleasures, but only a feverish way of annulling vacancy" (80-81).

The error of Godfrey's logic becomes still clearer in his present actions. Devoulty as he yearns for the moral life, envisioned as an experience of the body. Godfrey binds himself to the mud and slime committing the dual error of imperegnating and marrying the barmaid Molly Farren. We must see these actions as issuing directly from his understanding of morality and the faulty temporal disposition underlying it. Envisioning the moral life as a place beyond contingency, Godfrey turns the paradox of Raveloe wisdom-the experience of an eternal present that relies on a radical temporality-into a contradiction: he privileges the body and the present moment in the past or the future. The result is a temporal gap between feeling and form. Godfrey finds himself practicing a kind of reverse opportunism, invariably succumbing to the temptation nearest at hand and most at odds with his hopes for the

future. That which he seeks to value the body and the present moment as the grounds of moral behavior-become that which he degrades and by which he is degraded.

It is important to appreciate that Godfrey's errors take the form not only of unmarried sex but also of unloving marriage. Godfrey's marriage, however, constitutes a species not of moral laxity but of moral "self-indulgence". Godfrey commits an act he finds distasteful because it is consistent with his sense of morality and his aspiration to be a morally decent fellow. Though he despises the women he has impregnated, he still marries her. Godfrey becomes the novel's version of illicit sexuality. In so becoming, he constitutes a critique of his own, highly conventional moral code, with its vision of morality as beyond contingency.

Despite his physically powerfully powerful presence, Godfrey is generally passive. In this respect he is similar to Silas. However, Godfrey’s passivity is different from Silas’s, as his endless waffling and indecisiveness stem entirely from selfishness. Godfrey is subject to constant blackmail from Dunsey, who knows of Godfrey’s secret marriage, and Godfrey is finally freed of his malicious brother simply by an accident.

While Godfrey is at the dance, his wife Molly is approaching Raveloe on foot with their baby daughter in her arms. Godfrey has told Molly that he would rather die than acknowledge her as his wife. She knows there is a dance being held at the Red house and plans to crash the party in order to get revenge against Godfrey. Moll is addicted to opium and knows that this, not Godfrey, is the primary reason for her troubles, but she also resents Godfrey's wealth and comfort and believes that he should support her. He is delivered from Molly in a similarly fortuitous way, when Molly freezes to death while en route to Raveloe to expose their marriage to Godfrey’s family. Molly has been walking since morning, and, as evening falls, she

begins to tire in the snow and cold. To comfort herself, she takes a draft of opium. The drug makes her drowsy, and after a while she passes out by the side of the road, still holding the child.

Godfrey insists on accompanying the doctor, Mr. Kimble to Silas's cottage, and they pick up Dolly along the way to serve as a nurse. Godfrey waits outside the cottage in agony, realizing that if Molly is dead he is free to marry Nancy, but that if Molly lives he has to confess everything. When Kimble comes out, he declares that the woman has been dead for hours. Godfrey insists on seeing her, claiming to Kimble that he had seen a woman of a similar description the day before. As he verifies that the woman is in fact Molly, Godfrey sees Silas holding the child and asks him if he intends to take the child to the parish. Silas replies that he wants to keep her, since both he and she area alone. Godfrey gives Silas money to buy clothes for the little girl, and then hurries to catch up with Mr. Kimble. Godfrey tells Kimble that the dead woman is not the woman he saw before. "'I want to look at her,' said Godfrey. 'I think I saw such a woman yesterday. I'll overtake you in a minute or two'" (157).

Even Godfrey’s eventual confession to Nancy is motivated simply by his fright after the discovery of Dunsey’s remains. This confession comes years too late – by the time Godfrey is finally ready to take responsibility for Eppie, who has already accepted Silas as her father and does not want to replace him in her life. “He told himself that the time would come when he might do something towards furthering the welfare of his daughter without incurring suspicion. Was he very uneasy in the meantime at his inability to give his daughter her birthright?” (178).

Nancy is the pretty, caring and stubborn young lady whom Godfrey pursued and then married. Like Godfrey, Nancy comes from a family that is wealthy by Raveloe standards. However, her father unlike Squire Cass, is a man who values

moral rectitude, thrift, and hard work. Nancy has inherited these strict values and looks disapprovingly on what she sees as Godfrey's weakness of character. She is, however, exhilarated by Godfrey's attention, in part because of the status he embodies.

Nancy lives her life according to an inflexible code of behavior and belief. She seems to have already decided how she feels about every question that might come up in her life, not necessarily on the basis of any reason or thought, but simply because anything else would represent a sort of weakness in her own eyes. When Nancy is younger, this "code" of hers demands that she and her sister dress alike on formal occasions. When she is older, Nancy's code forbids her to adopt a child, as in her mind such an action represents a defiance of God's plan. Nancy is neither well educated nor particularly curious, and her code marks her as just as much a product of Raveloe's isolation and rusticity as Dolly Winthrop. Nancy is, however, a genuinely kind and caring person, as evidenced by her forgiveness of Godfrey after his confession.

> 'Nancy,' said Godfrey, slowly, 'when I married you, I hid something from you- something I ought to have told you. That woman Marner found dead in the snow – Eppie's mother – that wretched woman – was my wife: Eppie is my child'. (215)

Silas Marner as a Reflection of Moral Values

First and foremost, the drama of Silas's cultural assimilation is framed in terms of geographical displacement. Silas's participation in Lantern Yard life was so locally oriented that he had not even contemplated the differences (in community and custom) that could be encountered outside of his own little world. This wrenching of

Silas from his home precipitates not just a crisis of social identity but also a crisis of self-identity:

> And Raveloe was village where many of the old echoes lingered, not drowned by new voices. Not that it was one of those barren parishes lying on the outskirts of civilization-inhabited by meager sheep and thinly-scattered shepherds: on the contrary, it lay in the rich central plain of what we are pleased to call Merry England, and held farms which, speaking from a spiritual point of view, paid highly-desirable tithes. (8)

Even people whose lives have been made various by hearing, sometimes find it hard to keep a fast hold on their habitual views of life, on their faith in the invisible, nay, on the sense that their past joys and sorrows are a real experience, when they are suddenly transported to a new land, where the beings around them know nothing of their history, and share none of their ideas—where their mother earth shows another lap, and human life had other forms than those on which their souls have been nourished. Minds that have been unhinged from their old faith and love, have perhaps sought this lethean influence of exile, in which the past becomes dreamy because its symbols have all vanished, and the present too is dreamy because it is linked with no memories.

> And poor Silas was vaguely conscious of something not unlike the feeling of primitive men, when they fled thus, in fear or in sullenness, from the face of an unpropitious deity. It seemed to him that the Power he had vainly trusted in among the streets and at the prayer-meetings, was very far away from this land in which he had taken refuse, where

> men lived in careless abundance, knowing and needing nothing of that trust, which, for him, had been turned to bitterness. (21)

The register of natural history that Eliot evokes in this passage emphasizes the sense of nativeness people have to their communities and the influence of environment on development. This crucial connection between place and person with a history. Eliot also emphasizes that the “natural” quality of this connection is historical, subject to intended or unintended change.

The link between people and their geographic origin might be arbitrary, but it is also necessary, because it provides a context within which individuals can understand themselves. The sense of continuity a person maintains through various contexts is tantamount to what Eliot labels “faith in the invisible.” That is , without other people around to reinforce your history and to remind you that your actions and feelings “belong” to you, it is possible to fall into a realm of unaccountability that threatens to disrupt the coherent status of the individual person.

Before Silas came to Raveloe, he lives in a town to the north, where he was thought of a young man "of exemplary life and ardent faith." Silas's best friends at that time was William Dane—a seemingly equally devout but arrogant young man. One night Silas stayed up to watch over the senior deacon of-Lantern yard, who was sick. Waiting for William to come in to relieve him at the end of his shift, Silas suddenly realized that it was nearly dawn, the deacon had stopped breathing, and William and the other church members accused Silas of stealing the church's money from the deacon's room.

Silas's pocketknife turned up in the bureau where the money had been stored, and the empty money bag was later found in Silas's dwelling. Silas expected God to clear him of the crime, but when the church members drew lots, Silas was determined

guilty and excommunicated. Sarah called their engagement off. Crushed, Silas maintained that the last time he used his knife was in William's presence and that he did not remember putting it back in his pocket afterward. To the horror of the church, Silas angrily renounced his religious faith. Soon thereafter, William married Sarah and Silas left town.

> Poor Marner went out with that despair in his soul- that shaken trust in God and man, which is little short of madness to a loving nature. In the bitterness of his wounded spirit, he said to himself, ‘She will cast me off too.’ And he reflected that, if she did not believe the testimony against him, her whole faith must be upset as his was. (18)

Deprived of a geographical referent for his identity, Silas re-creates that contextualizing relationship with his loom and his work: “Strangely Marner’s face and figure shrank and bent themselves into a constant mechanical relation to the objects of life, so that he produced the same sort of impression as a handle or a crooked tube, which had no meaning standing apart”(69). This passage bears a striking resemblance to the mechanical descriptions where Silas’s mechanized life seems unproductive because it is completely isolated from an external social system.

His life and his work are a “ mere pulsation” marked by the repetitious activity of the loom and the accumulation of coins. In such an extreme care, mechanical production ceases to bear any concrete relationship to the rest of the world; it is only a formal exercise. Silas’s weaving, never seems to entangle him in the external world of social relations and obligations; it causes the accumulation of coins, at which point the process comes to an end or is merely repeated. What happens to the cloth after it leaves Silas’s hands seems to have no repercussions. Work neither engages Silas with

the marketplace nor does it draw him into social relations, making Silas look like a mere repository for the coins that mark his labor.

When Silas rejects his former beliefs, he begins to idolize his money to fill the void. Money allows Silas to once again worship something, but without involving other human being. When he is banished from his church, he casts away his desire for human fellowship and finds a new source of fulfillment in his gold coins. Silas's mechanical aptitude and worship of money can be seen a representative of the imminent onset of industrialization, a historical phenomenon that uprooted many people from their villages and tore apart the communities that had previously connected working-class people to one another "the commodification of labor" tended to debumanize workers as they came to be defined solely in terms of the monetary value produced by their labor, rather than by their place in a local economy.

Silas's existence has become as mechanized as any factory worker's. Silas's labor holds no significance for him except as a means to collect more of the money he loves. he does not view his work as a contribution to the community or as something in which to take pride. Bereft of connections of other human beings, Silas attributes human qualities to his money, admiring the faces on the coins as if they were friends.

> The silver bore no large proportion in amount to the gold, because the long pieces of linen which formed his chief work were always partly paid for in gold, and out of the silver he supplied his own bodily wants, choosing always the shillings and sixpences to spend in this way. He loved the guineas best, but he would not change the silver – the crown and half-crown that were his own earnings, begotten by his labor; he loved them all. (29)

If Silas's theory of monetary value does not resemble a standard capitalist perspective, it does resemble a sort of social theory. To each of his guineas, Silas forms an attachment that resembles paternal regard: "He began to think it was conscious of him, as his loom was, and he would on no account have exchanged those coins, which had become his familiars, for other coins with unknown faces" (68). The consciousness that Silas imparts to the coins allows him to imagine himself as part of a group of beings.

So, while Silas's work severs him from the world of social interaction, the product of that work allows him to mimic social relations. Silas's hoarding, therefore, does not derive primarily from a desire to monopolize economic power, as the Raveloe community interprets his refusal to either spend money or interact with the townspeople; instead, Silas develops an affective attachment to his own labor in the form of money, which in turn translates into a pseudo-social connection.

> He spread them out in heaps and bathed his hands in them; then he counted them and set them up in regular piles, and felt their rounded outline between his thumb and fingers, and thought fondly of the guineas that were only half-earned by the work in his loom, as if they had been unborn children. (29)

In conflating social and economic relations, Silas confounds the distinction between a pre-modern attitude towards work as a "way of life" and a modern attitude wherein profit-motive and commercialism supplant family and emotion (105,103). Eliot stresses that Silas's weaving takes the form of piecework that he in turn sells to the villagers; thus, there is no enactment of the Marxist scenario of alienation from one's own labor.

In this pre-industrial world, Silas retains control of the means of production as well as his own labor. Rather, Silas's difficulty seems to lie in the fact that he cannot alienate himself from the profits of his labor. His proprietorship or custodial relationship to these "unborn children" produces an attachment that bars him from engaging fully with a commodity culture. In effect, Silas produces an alternate community or more specifically, a family in which he is the guardian/father to the coins.

The economic bond forged between Silas and the Raveloe community is not a sufficient basis for the feeling of " commonness" necessary to endow Silas with a sense of social belonging. For Eliot, economic common interest does not generate identity or allegiance amongst a group and thus taken alone does not provide a valid template for social organization. Sials is not a " citizen" of Raveloe: he does not participate in the lengthy debates at the Rainbow, not does he attend the annual dance. In other words, his division from the community arises most importantly out of a disconnection from the community's historical self-consciousness.

The feedback loop – in which Silas weaves and accumulates the coins—bars him from even contemplating the historical: he neither sees himself as a being who exists over time and whose actions refer back to himself, nor does he sees the world around him as providing a context for his changing self. So, even though Silas eschews the larger community, he does not reject the idea of community wholesale. Rather, he lacks an historical sense of self that would give him entrance into the social world of mutual obligation.

Conclusion

Decline of Morality and Moral Values

The supposed conflict between morality and causality in Eliot's early work as indicative of her desire to portray a social world in which individuals both help to constitute and are answerable to the standards of the group. Ideally, for Eliot, the causal and the moral would be synonymous. Barring that possibility, she recognizes that it is necessary to have some way of reconciling the individual's sense of right and wrong with an overarching method for judging action. Particularly in her early fiction, we see Eliot endeavoring to develop a theory of the social individual that withstands her concomitant endorsement of what we might call "pluralist" and "universalist" conceptions of morality – that is, judging individuals according to the standards of the group versus a single comprehensive standard.

Silas Marner consists of two separate stories, those of Silas himself and of Godfrey Cass. These two stories, which are given equal weight in the novel, interlock briefly but crucially, at the climax of the novel, the two worlds of the novel confront each other. The protagonists, conscious of their past defeats and triumphs, vehemently debate the ownership of Eppie which they both now recognize to be crucial. Godfrey and Nancy first say they would like to adopt Eppie in order to 'make a lady of her'.

Through raising Eppie, Silas too undergoes the process of recognizing the value of his position within the Raveloe community. He experiences this new form of identification not as his assimilation or absorption into a natural social and economic order but rather as a decision to make a place for oneself and to have that place acknowledged by others. The story thereby allows Silas finally to belong within his new context without destroying either the community's sense of order or the individual's sense of a coherent identity. This process of conscious identification with

a group suggests that adoption is as crucial a social tool as adaptation—that is, self-conscious as opposed to externally-imposed change. Adoption recasts persons into new communities or even new universes of experience. So, when Silas determines that it will be necessary to school Eppie in the ways and customs of her community, this acquired adaptation stems not form any new-found belief in the village's mores but rather from a practical decisional about integrating Eppie into her new situation.

Likewise, resistance to adoption is most evident in the case of Nancy Lammeter, Godfrey Cass's wife. Although she and Godfrey cannot have children of their own, Nancy adamantly refuses to entertain adoption as an alternative. Her opposition to the practice derives from her belief that consciously adding a person to a family usurps the power of providence. For her, the self-conscious aspect of adoption disturbs a natural design by which people are placed in the appropriate context and, presumably, given the appropriate name. familial ties precede, or give rise to, social ones; but Nancy argues, social exigencies should not influence a notion of family. Nancy's privileging of the visibility of familial ties is exemplified in her concern that she and her sister do not look alike. As a remedy, Nancy insists that they both wear the same dresses in order to make them "look like sisters" (148).

Nancy's objection to adoption is not limited to this insistence on the rigid structure of familial relations. She also applies her theory to thought itself. For Nancy, personal opinion and belief are as intrinsically linked to individuals as family members. And, like children, beliefs cannot be exchanged for someone else's or altered for an unexpected occasion.

Nancy treats her thoughts as Silas once treated his coins – as a type of inalienable property, at once unique and interchangeable. It is not the "basis" or logic of the opinions that guides Nancy's actions but rather the logic of belief itself.

Commitments, having been made, cannot be undone and, thus, Nancy develops her " unalterable little code" by which she acts and judges actions.

Eliot's early novels rarely have been read as engaged in "modern" processes of political or social identity formation. Critics generally have looked to later novels, such as Middlemarch and more recently Daniel Deronda, as exemplifying the contradictions and difficulties associated with "modern" identity. Because of their pastoral and historically – removed settings, Silas Marner has been read as reflections on the past or as sites for waging a critique of the present but rarely as actually engaging the question of modern social and political relations. To challenge this view is not to deny that Eliot was deeply interested in questions of history and the past, but rather to point out the ways in which we have underestimated Eliot's investment in developing models of social identity that work hand-in-hand with the goals of liberal politics. Bringing Eliot's early novels into closer focus and recognizing their close association of social and political identities, transforms her critical trajectory. The division between the pastoral and the political novels disintegrates and gives the question of social identity purchase on the problem of politics. While Silas Marner may not be the forerunner of the cosmopolite, his cultivation of social differences would make him a surprisingly good candidate for today's "global village."

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