

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Decadence refers to a personal trait and much more commonly to a state of a society. In a person, or used to describe a person's lifestyle, it describes a lack of moral and intellectual discipline. In a society, it describes corrosive decline due to a perceived erosion of necessary moral traditions. But a society that discards unnecessary and outmoded values would not be considered decadent.

Decadent societies are often prosperous but usually have severe social and economic inequality, to such a degree that the upper class becomes either complacent or greedy, while the lower classes become hopeless and apathetic. The middle class may exhibit either one or both patterns, or it may vanish entirely. Societies that persist in a state of decadence may become unable or unwilling to commit to their own upkeep and fall into decline.

George Eliot's *Silas Marner* which is subtitled *The Weaver of Raveloe* reflects the decadent life and society of the nineteenth century England in the background of Raveloe and Lantern Yard. Published in 1861, the novel is set in between the growing industrial urban centers of the nineteenth century and the relatively untouched rural agrarian communities. England at that time was in the phase of transition: political power moved from dominant landowner class to a dominant bourgeois class, agrarian economies were replaced by urban industrialization, and Christianity became increasingly diluted and secular. This was also the period of the growth of professional weaving due to mass industrialization of textiles as opposed to former local production.

This transformation from a primitive rural society to an urban industrialized society brought about a change in the thoughts and beliefs of the people. They became

increasingly attracted towards material possession and their interest in moral and spiritual beliefs seemed gradually diminishing. People eventually turned into a component of machine, working for long hours. Due to excessive long and dull working hours, they eventually excluded themselves from community lives. Their gradual alienation from society, contributed to an obsession of wealth and material possession.

Silas, the central character of the novel is presented as the most affected character due to the transformation of society from rural agrarian to urban industrialized. Silas is betrayed by his most trusted friend William Dane for the sake of money. He is accused of theft, and the drawing of lots in the church declares him guilty even though he is innocent. His fiancée gets it hard to believe his innocence and later marries William Dane. This incident leads him to a self imposed isolation; he leaves Lantern Yard and settles in Raveloe with hardly any connection to other human beings. His lonely settlement contributes to an obsession with money, and as the years progress, he amasses a horde of gold that is his only pleasure.

Similarly, other characters are also affected by this transformation of society. The picture that emerges of the leading family of the community is of laziness, complacency, greed and selfishness. Squire Cass is shown to be a typical of his class; he hopes the war with France continues because he is making money due to the resultant high prices. His sons are also shown as lacking social and moral values. Godfrey Cass, the elder son of the Cass family, has made a hasty marriage with a woman of poor reputation and refuses to acknowledge his own daughter Eppie. Dunstan, the younger son of squire, is blackmailing Godfrey to keep their father from knowing about the secret marriage. He also steals the horde of gold from Silas cottage.

George Eliot was the pseudonym of Mary Ann Evans, born in 1819 in a country estate of her father at Nuneaton, Warwickshire, England. The plains and hedges of her native region furnish the setting of many of her novels, including *Silas Marner*. She spent the first thirty years of her life in the Midland countryside, “the rich central plain of what we are pleased to call Merry England” (5), as she calls it in *Silas Marner* when she describes the setting for the imaginary village of Raveloe.

Her first published work was a translation of *Das Leben Jesu* (The Life of Jesus) by the German theologian David Strauss. She has written articles and reviews for periodicals, mostly for the *Westminster Review*. Her career as a writer of fiction began with the publication of *Scenes of Clerical Life* in 1857 under the pseudonym of George Eliot.

Eliot’s writing is divided into two different phases of her career—the early phase and the latter phase. The groups of novels that make up her early phase of writing are *Silas Marner*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Adam Bede*. In these novels she makes use of childhood recollections and the rural world Eliot knew in Warwickshire. F.R. Leavis notes in *The Great Tradition*:

[...] George Eliot who writes out of her memories of childhood and youth, renders the poignancy and charm of personal experience, and give us, in a mellow light, the England of her young days, and of the days then still alive in family tradition. Her classics are *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*. (33)

The latter phase of her writings include: *Romola*, *Felix Holt*, *The Spanish Gypsy*, *The Legend of Jubal and Other Poems*, *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, and *Middlemarch*.

Eliot's novels are deeply philosophical in exploring the inner workings of her character and their relationship to their environment. The philosophical concerns and references found in her and her refusal to provide the requisite happy ending—struck some contemporary critics as unbecoming in a lady novelist.

Eliot's detailed and insightful psychological portrayal 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.

Eliot 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.

A child, more than all other gifts  
That earth can offer to declining man  
Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts.

These three lines from Wordsworth's poem *Michael* are printed on the title page of her novel *Silas Marner*.

Referring to Eliot's letters, Tim Dolin, in *Authors in Context: George Eliot*, says that Eliot's fiction is a set of experiments in life. Her novel has a purpose of imparting moral education to the readers. She says:

Yet in calling her fiction 'a set of experiments in life' through which to see and help others to see, Eliot is indicating that it intersects with science in other more fundamental ways than its scientific metaphors and language. The whole process of moral education is an empirical—a scientific—process, Eliot seems to imply, in the very fact of being

based in experience; and when that process is traced through the medium of narrative fiction, the methods of experimental science become essential. (191)

Eliot is highly praised for her literary achievement, at the same time she is referred as a moral guide. Citing to Bernard Semmel, Josephine McDonagh, describes the prestige of Eliot in her book *Writers and Their Works: George Eliot*:

However, Eliot gained not only literary acclaim; she also accrued considerable moral prestige. As Bernard Semmel notes in *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance* (1994), in her own lifetime Eliot came to occupy the revered position of a moral guide within a period of changing religious and social views. (2)

It is true that Eliot gained reputation as a champion of realistic novel, because most of her works presents the nostalgic view of disappearing England. But to regard Eliot only as a nostalgic writer is to undermine her excellence. Eliot does not simply write about the static society, but examines the process of social and cultural change within a community. Josephine McDonagh says:

[...] she has chosen historical moments not because they are static and stable, but, on the contrary, because they are pivotal ones: moments at which changes in the organization of commerce, or the law, or developments in science and technology take place, or at which the political structure of the entire nation is on the brink of change, [...]

Eliot's novels tell stories not of static and unchanging societies, but of societies in the midst of change. In particular she focuses on processes of uneven development, in which advances in science and technology, for instance, or in individual development brought about

through education, cannot immediately be incorporated within existing society. (7)

*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. The novel's setting in the vanishing English countryside reflects Eliot's concern that England was fast becoming industrialized and impersonal. The novel's concern with class and family can likewise be linked back to Eliot's own life.

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 its publication, when English society and institutions were undergoing rapid change.

### **Review of Literature**

George Eliot's *Silas Marner* has attracted many critics since its first publication in 1861. This novel gained instant popularity and was acclaimed as one of the best of her works. Although *Silas Marner* is in simple narrative form, it covers wide aspects of the society. The early nineteenth century setting reflects the transitional phase of the English socio-political scenario, the class based society, change in the way of life of the individuals and religious beliefs—makes *Silas Marner* an all encompassing novel. Critics from different field of study have their own interpretations on the novel.

Some of the critics celebrate religious reading of the novel. In *George Eliot: Her Mind and Her Art*, Joan Bennett writes:

The community of Raveloe is confined, spiritually and intellectually, within the narrow bounds of early nineteenth-century village life. The

Christian observances, baptism, Sabbath-keeping and occasional communion are accepted within the community as semi-magical rites or as pious customs. (134)

Some critics search for the autobiographical patterns in *Silas Marner*. Among them Peggy Fitzhugh Johnstone notes that many features of this novel reflect George Eliot's own sense of grief at various calamities suffered by her own family. In his book *The Transformation of Rage: Mourning and Creativity in George Eliot's Fiction*, he notes:

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. Her "intense sadness" before and during the writing of the short novel went beyond any discomfort over her "equivocal marital state," and beyond any sense of dislocation brought on her by her household moves. (75)

Shally Shuttleworth views the physical and emotional isolation of Silas. She says Silas's social experience has been that of disruption, discontinuity and the ever increasing isolation. Shuttleworth further views in her essay "Fairy Tale or Science? Physiological Psychology in *Silas Marner*":

Physiological psychology allows George Eliot to explore the disjunction between Silas's experience and that of the surrounding village. The physical terms in fact reinforce the moral point of his social isolation. Ultimately, however, George Eliot employs the unified vocabulary of social and psychological analysis to reaffirm the ideals of organic continuity. (279-281)

Rosemary Ashton examines the influence of William Wordsworth in George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, for its simple progress of plot and the joy of nature presented within the novel. In the book *George Eliot*, Ashton examines:

The Wordsworthian influence merges, in the simple progress of plot, with that of Feuerbach's religion of humanity. Silas Marner, the embittered lonely weaver, loses his gold and finds a golden-haired child, Eppie; the child forces him to forge links with the community and reestablishes his contact with external nature; she 'warmed him into joy because she had joy'. Though Silas has lost his religious belief, he submits to the dominant religion of Raveloe—a mixture of primitive superstition and kind of practical wisdom—for the child's sake. (48-49)

In the book *George Eliot*, A.E.S. Viner refers to *Silas Marner* as a realistic fable—a story full of impossibilities of plot but also of realistic touches in the description of landscape and character. He says:

The mere skeleton of the plot is filled with impossibilities: Eppie's mother's death just in front of Silas's cottage; Silas's cataleptic attack just at the moment when he was looking out of the door, so that the child entered without his seeing her, etc. The reality lies in the way in which George Eliot has planted the improbabilities of the plot in the firm soil of convincing natural surroundings, so that the reader accepts the coincidences without question. (58-61)

Alan W. Bellringer finds that the authority of land ownership is harshly presented in *Silas Marner* as compared to *Adam Bede*. He also says that the weakness



of men at the Red House is due to the lack of female presence in the family. He notes these in his book *George Eliot*:

The exercise of authority based on land-ownership is noted with much harsher sarcasm in *Silas Marner* than in *Adam Bede*. The whole Cass family is sharply portrayed. The men's weaknesses are traced in an inner and outer cause, the lack of a presiding female presence at the Red House and their unchallenged assumption of superiority, with resulting casualness, indecisiveness and treachery. (65)

K. M. Newton views that Eliot presented Raveloe as the clearest example of organic society. The values and traditions of this community helped him overcome the alienation that he suffered. In his book, *George Eliot: Romantic Humanist: A Study of the Philosophical Structure of Her Novels*, Newton says:

Raveloe in *Silas Marner* is the clearest example of an organic society in any of George Eliot's works. It is really the community of Raveloe that is the center of the novel, since it is the acceptance of its way of life, its values and traditions, which cures Silas Marner of the alienation he suffers as a result of the breakdown of the rigid form of Christianity in which he had formerly believed. Raveloe is an example of pre-industrialized organic community, it has preserved close links with the past, which means that mystery and superstition form part of its way of life. (84)

## **Victorian Era: An Overview**

The Victorian era, commonly used to refer to the period of Queen Victoria's rule between 1837 and 1901, marked the height of the British Industrial Revolution and the apex of the British Empire. The socio-cultural, political, economic and scientific changes that occurred during this period are remarkable. The rural agrarian countryside of England dramatically changed to the urban industrialized cities, with newer inventions and scientific discoveries. A sense of newness, and a deep interest in the relation between modernity and cultural continuities resulted among the peoples.

The social changes during the Victorian era were wide-ranging and fundamental leaving their mark not only upon Britain but upon much of the world which was under Britain's influence during the nineteenth century. It can even be argued that these changes eclipsed the massive shifts in society during the twentieth century; certainly many of the developments of the twentieth century have their roots in the nineteenth century.

The pace of industrialization and progress in scientific techniques has turned man from spiritual to material being. Material possession has become first priority, and peoples are eager to earn for themselves. The advent of newer machines and techniques is the remarkable feature of this age. William J. Long further notes in his book, *English Literature: Its History and its Significance for the Life of the English-Speaking World*:

[...] the Victorian Age is especially remarkable because of its rapid progress in all the arts and sciences and in mechanical inventions. A glance at any record of the industrial achievements of the nineteenth century will show how vast they are, [...] the list of inventions, from spinning looms to steamboats, and from matches to electric lights. All

these material things, as well as the growth of education, have their influence upon the life of people. (454)

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 class. The top class was known as aristocracy. It included the Church and nobility and who owned the majority of land. It included the royal family, lords, great officers of state, and those above the degree of baronet. These peoples were privileged and avoided taxes. The middle class or the bourgeoisie was made up of factory owners, bankers, shopkeepers, lawyers, traders, and other professionals. These people could be sometimes extremely rich, but in normal circumstances they were not privileged. The working class consisted of the men and women performing different types of labor, including factory work, chimney sweeping, mining and other tough jobs. Both the poor and the middle class had to endure a large burden of taxes.

The image of nineteenth century emerged as a period of great opportunity for man of energy and skill. The impetus of Industrial Revolution had already occurred, and as a result of this, there was a huge boost of the middle and working class. The revolution led to the rise of railways across the country and great leaps forward in engineering. By 1850 half of the country's former peasants were squashed into the cities. The growth of industry, the building boom, the swift spread of the railways changed the character of Britain too rapidly to understand. The railways moved goods, foods and people faster than canals or horse drawn wagons. They were the greatest factor in transforming Britain into an industrial nation. The increased scale of industry and overseas trade, together with the expansion of empire fuelled the proliferation of commerce and finance such as banks, shipping and railways.

Small towns were overtaken by growing industries to become uncoordinated and sprawling industrial dwelling areas. Millions of workers lived in slums or in vacated old decaying upper class houses. The occupants of slums had no sanitation, no water supply, no paved streets, no schools, no law and order, and no decent food and clothing. They had to walk miles to mill or factory where they did their work. The brutal degrading conditions were so awful that drunkenness and opium taking was usual as their home life had so little to offer. William J. Long notes, “[...] men, women, and little children in the mines and factories were victims of a more terrible industrial and social slavery” (453). Even though Britain’s material progress took a forward leap in the Victorian era, the conditions of the working class people did not improve.

## CHAPTER II

### NEW HISTORICISM

New Historicism is a theory applied to literature that suggests literature must be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. This theory arose in the 1980s, with Stephen Greenblatt as its main proponent and gained popularity in the 1990s. It came as an opposition to formalism and New Criticism, which laid emphasis on form and content, reading the text completely in isolation from the historical context. New Historicism has a neutral approach to historical events, and is sensitive towards different culture

New Historicism is an approach to literary criticism and literary theory based on the premises that a literary work should be considered a product of the time, place, and circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated creation. It had its roots in a reaction to the “New Criticism” of formal analysis of works of literature, which was seen by a new generation of professional readers as taking place in a vacuum.

The formalist and the New Critics ignored the historical and cultural conditions while analyzing a literary text. But in opposition to these tendencies New Historicists gave equal weight to both the text and the historical context in analyzing a literary text. It involves a parallel study of both literary and non-literary text, usually of the same historical period. In his essay titled “The New Historicism”, Dwight W. Hoover says:

The principles of the New Historicism are strongly opposed to the view that the study of literature should be done independently of social and political contexts. Instead, these historicists believe literature is

part of the historical process and should participate “in the political management of reality.” (361)

The New Historicism as by general agreement the movement has come to be called, is unified by its disdain for literary formalism. Specially, the leaders of this movement describe themselves as unhappy with the exclusion of social and political circumstances, that is, the “context” from the interpretation of literary works. They are impatient with the settled view that a poem is self-contained object, a verbal icon, a logical core surrounded by a texture of irrelevance.

New Historicism is a mode of analysis that sees history as a form of writing, discourse or language. This theory abandons any notion of history as an imitation of events in the world or a reflection of external reality. Instead, it regards history as a species of narrative with gaps or ruptures between epistemes—the modes of thought and the ways of knowing that characterize a given historical moment. In his essay “The New Historicism”, Dwight W. Hoover says, “New Historicism argues that there is no universal meaning or truth in history and that the meaning imputed to history reflects power relations at the time of writing as well as the time of the events’ occurrence” (356).

New Historicism rejects the traditional historicist notion of continuity, progress and underlying historical unit. It also rejects the notion that a text is self sufficient for literary criticism. Instead, it makes a parallel study of history giving equal emphasis to both the genres.

The New Historicists raise the issue of the experience of the group of people who have been ignored, under-represented, or misrepresented by traditional history. They question how the literary texts function as part of a continuum with other historical and cultural texts of the same period. They also question how the texts

promote ideologies that support or undermine the prevailing power structures of the time and place in which it was written or interpreted.

New Historicists tend to concentrate on those at the top of the social hierarchy, that is—the church, the monarchy, and the upper-classes, it draws on the disciplines of political science, government, and anthropology. They are interested in the questions of circulation, negotiation, profit and exchange. That is, they see how the activities that purport to be above the market, including literature, are in fact informed by the values of that market. However, New Historicists take this position further by then claiming that all cultural activities may be considered as equally important texts for historical analysis.

New historicism is also more specifically concerned with the questions of power and culture. It is concerned with the social, political and the cultural institutions that produce discourse by the use of power. The New Historicists look more specifically at forces of containment and the ways hegemonic forces consolidate the status quo. Geoffrey Galt Harpham argues in his essay “Foucault and the New Historicism”:

The paradoxical circumstance of trying to control the uncontrollable is played out in the New Historicism, whose central, internal theoretical debate reproduces the question of “containment” or “subversion”: the New Historicism insistently raises the question of whether dominant forces in culture are essentially totalizing, producing their own pre-co-opted subversions, or whether culture’s power is incomplete and vulnerable to genuine destabilization. (360)

The French philosophical historian Michel Foucault brought together incidents and phenomena from areas normally seen as unconnected, encouraging New

Historicists to redefine the boundaries to historical inquiry and evolutionary process, a continuous development towards present. No historical event for Foucault, has a single cause, rather each event is tied into vast web of economic, social and political factors. History is not a set of fixed objective facts, but like the literature with which it interacts, that a text, whether it is literary or social is a discourse which reflects an external reality.

History is itself a text with accounts of various different events, the relation of history to literature is not merely that of a background source and the primary source of analysis. The historical documents and other non-literary texts are themselves subject to close analysis for the proper interpretation of a text. New Historicism aim simultaneously to understand the work through its historical context, and to understand cultural and intellectual history through literature which documents the new discipline of the history of ideas.

New Historicist scholars begin their analysis of literary texts by attempting to look at other texts—both literary and non-literary, to which a literate public had access at the time of writing, and what the author of the original text himself might have read. Its purpose, however, is not to derive the direct source of a text, as the New Critics did, but to understand the relationship between a text and the political, social and economic circumstances in which it originated. Lois Tyson differentiates the New Historicism from traditional historicism:

[...] the questions asked by traditional historians and by new historicists are quite different, [...]. Traditional historians ask, “What happened?” and “What does the event tell us about history?” In contrast, new historicists ask, “How has the event been interpreted?” and “What do the interpretations tell us about the interpreters?” (278)



Both these histories are based on very different views of what history is and how we can know it. For the traditional historians, history is a series of events that have a linear and causal relationship but the new historicists argue that history is not a series of events and it is difficult to produce reliable interpretations about history.

New historicism does not limit itself only to literary matters but deals in extra-literary matters such as letters or any other written or digital documents. It brings all literary and non-literary materials for the proper understanding of text in relation to the socio-economic conditions of the period. In their book *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, Wilfred L. Guerin and others states that “As a return to historical scholarship, new historicism concerns itself with extraliterary matters—letters, diaries, films, paintings, medical treatises—looking to reveal opposing historical tensions in a text” (283).

New Historicists suggest that all levels of society share in the circulation of power through the production and distribution of the most elementary cultural and social “texts.” Considering the economic conditions of the people, there are three different classes of people—the proletariat, the bourgeoisie, and the aristocrat. The proletariat refers to the lower or working class and the bourgeoisie refers to the middle classes; the aristocratic class is a residual throw-back to an earlier stage of economic development—feudalism. New Historicism seemed almost designed to methodize the socio-political interpretation of literature. In his essay “New Historicisms”, Louis Montrose asserts:

What have often been taken to be self-contained aesthetic and academic issues are being reunderstood as inextricably linked to other social discourses, practices, and institutions; and such overdetermined and unstable linkages are apprehended as constitutive of the

ideological field within which individual subjectives and collective structures are mutually shaped. (392)

New Historicism seeks to find meaning in a text by considering the work within the framework of the prevailing ideas and assumptions of its historical era. New Historicists concern themselves with the political function of literature and with the concept of power, the intricate means by which cultures produce and reproduce themselves. These critics focus on revealing the historically specific model of truth and authority reflected in a given work. “Truth” here is not the indelible truth but a cultural construct.

The New Historicists are against single and monolithic history. In fact, they consider different aspects of history for the proper interpretation of a text. They reject the western tendency to write history from the top to bottom and in grand narrative strokes, which we find in political history. New Historicists are interested at the moments of rupture in grand narratives to examine how forces of rebellion are still able to be co-opted by the powers. Lois Tyson writes:

New historicists [...] don't believe we have clear access to any but the most basic facts of history. [...] our understanding of what such facts mean, of how they fit within the complex web of competing ideologies and conflicting social, political, and cultural agendas of the time and place in which they occurred is, for the new historicists, strictly a matter of interpretation, not fact. (279)

“Historicity of Text” and “Textuality of History” are the catch-phrases of New Historicists. All texts may be examined for their historicity, just as any historical phenomenon can be analyzed much as one would analyze a literary text. For example we may analyze not only the literary texts but Madonna videos or films related to

Nazi atrocities. The New Historicists take this percept much further by examining the import of what might be considered rather minor and unimportant daily facts and events, for example, the cultural and socio-political import of miniature portrait in Renaissance England.

For the New Historicists, history is not a mere chronicle of facts and events, but rather a complex description of human reality and evolution of preconceived notions. Literary works may or may not tell us about various factual aspects of the world from which they emerge, but they will tell us about prevailing ways of thinking at the time: ideas of social organization, prejudices, taboos etc. They are concerned with ideological products or cultural constructs which are formations of any era. In the book *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide*, Lois Tyson Says:

[...] our *subjectivity*, or selfhood, is shaped by and shapes the culture into which we were born. For most new historicists, our individual identity is not merely a product of society. Neither is it merely a product of our own individual will and desire. Instead, individual identity and its cultural milieu inhabit, reflect, and define each other. Their relationship is mutually constitutive (they create each other) and dynamically unstable. (280)

They see how the literary texts add to our understanding of the ways in which literary and non-literary discourses have influenced and competed with one another at specific historical moments. For them, Contexts are themselves texts; and do not simply make up a background.

So, the New Historicists, insisting that ideology manifests itself in literary productions and discourse, interest themselves in the interpretative constructions

which the members of a society or culture apply to their experience. Lois Tyson argues in his essay “New Historical and Cultural Criticism”:

[...] history cannot be understood simply as a linear progression of events. At any given point in history, any given culture may be progressing in some areas and regressing in others. [...] history isn't an orderly parade into a continually improving future [...]. Its more like an improvised dance consisting of an infinite variety of steps, following any new route at any given moment, and having no particular goal or destination. (280)

Since historical accounts are texts and must be evaluated as such, and since, by extension, history itself is a large amorphous text consisting of various and often disparate accounts, the relation of history to literature changes radically in New Historicism.

The New Historicists are against the “Elizabethan worldview” or “Victorian frame of mind”. New historicists refuse, the idea of an “Elizabethan worldview” or a “Victorian frame of mind,” and have often tried to show instead how structures of power ultimately reabsorb opposition and dissent, thus giving the appearance of a homogenous or totalized society.

Most of the times, the task of the New Historicists is taken to be similar to that of the Marxist critics. First, to call into question the traditional view of literature as an autonomous realm of discourse with its own problems, forms, principles, activities, and then to dissolve the literary text into social and political context from which it issued. In fact, the New Historicism tries explicitly to solve the theoretical difficulty in Marxist criticism of relating the cultural super-structure to the material base. Its claim to newness might be put in terms of its claim to having solved that problem.

The New Historicist conception of ideology is not that of Marx, but rather that of the French structuralist Marxist Louis Althusser, though in plain fact, the New Historicists seem more directly influenced by expositors of Marxist doctrine like Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton than by Althusser. Finally, in its general orientation toward scholarship and historical research the New Historicism is heavily influenced by Michel Foucault.

Though the influence of Foucault is a generalized one—it permeates the New Historicist conception of history as a succession of epistemes or structures of thought that shape everyone and everything within a culture. This is no more than to say that Foucault has provided New Historicism with their own epistemes, but their work cannot really be said to extend or elaborate upon Foucault's. Louis Montrose in his essay "New Historicisms" says:

Foucault's flexible conception of power relations may accommodate local instances of a subversion that is produced for containment, but it also acknowledges revolutionary social transformations and other possible modalities of power and resistance. [...] Thus one need look no further than Foucault's own work for confirmation of the hopeless inadequacy of subversion-containment as an explanatory model for the dynamism and specificity of relations of power [...] (404)

New Historicism evaluates how a work of literature is influenced by the time in which it was produced. It also examines the social sphere in which the author moved, the psychological background of the author, the books and theories that may have influenced the author, and any other factors which influenced the work of the art.

New Historicism acknowledges that any criticism of a work is necessarily tinged with critic's beliefs, social structure and so on. Most New Historicists may

begin a critical reading of a novel by explaining themselves, their backgrounds, and their prejudices. Both the work and the reader are corrupted by everything that has influenced them. New Historicism thus represents a significant change from previous critical theories like New Criticism, because its main focus is to look at things outside of the work, instead of reading the text as a thing apart from the author.

The New Historicism has its own peculiar vocabulary. It often uses the terms: texts, context, discourse, canon etc. In his essay “The New Historicism”, Dwight W. Hoover describe:

The New Historicism comes with a peculiar vocabulary of its own.

Among the concepts which have had wide currency lately in literary studies and which have entered into discussions of American history are those of context, text, deconstruction, canon, audience reception theory and discourse. (356)

Geoffrey Galt Harpman in his essay “Foucault and the New Historicism” notes a consensus between all the parties that oppose to New Historicism. Citing to Catherine Gallagher he writes, “[...] Gallagher notes a suspicious-looking consensus between all the parties that recently have attacked the New Historicism: liberal humanists, deconstructionists, and Marxists all hold that literature is destabilizing, that it shakes us up and disturbs our moral equilibrium” (367).

### **Foucault's Discourse, Power and Society**

Foucault is one of the major influences of the New Historicism. He criticized the institution of medical practices in his works, *Madness and Civilization* and *The Birth of the Clinic*. He also analyzed how the modern world controls the peoples through the use of power. Society manipulates power in the form of language and the established institutions like hospitals, prisons, education, and knowledge etc. to maintain control over its people. M.A.R. Habib in an essay *New Historicism* in the book *A History of Literary Criticism: From Plato to the Present* explains:

[...] Foucault criticized the institution of medical practice in his first two publications, [...] the central theme of most of Foucault's works was the methods with which modern civilization creates and controls human subjects, through institutions such as hospitals, prisons, education and knowledge; corollary to these investigations was Foucault's examination of power, its execution and distribution. (766)

Later in an essay, *What is an Author?* Foucault questions the concept of authorship. He opines that a work of art is not solely the product of the author's ideas and feelings; rather a text is influenced by the culture and society in which the author lives. The text is also influenced by the socio-political and economic conditions of the period when it was produced. This idea was taken up by New Historicist, Habib further explains:

Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" (1969) questions and examines the concept of authorship and, in insights that were taken up by the New Historicism, argued that analysis of literary texts could not be restricted to these texts themselves or to their author's psychology and

background; rather, the larger contexts and cultural conventions in which texts were produced needed to be considered.(766)

In every society there is a system and an individual is a part of that system. So, Foucault focuses on the collective power rather than the power of an individual. A society is formed of many individuals and this society possesses a certain knowledge, which it uses to form a system. By using this knowledge, the society produces discourse (speeches, books, newspapers etc). Discourse consists of representations, power and truth. Power is circulated through different forms of representations. Such power which is represented creates the truth, which becomes truth to everyone under the system. Foucault explains in “Truth and Power”:

‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements.

‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A ‘regime’ of truth. (1145)

According to Foucault, truth is a social construct and it is intertwined with power. Every society creates a regime of truth that suits the beliefs, values and mores of that particular society. He further says that there is no universal truth and, the so-called ultimate truth is the construct of the political and economic forces that command the majority of power within the society.

Truth is not always constant, as soon as the system of the society changes, the truth also changes. The power is generated in the society by producing the discourses and by constructing the truths. This power is not the power of domination rather it’s the power of creativity within the society. Power is possessed by every individual



within the system. Foucault says there is equality in terms of power distribution and his power works in a horizontal way. Power is accepted in the society which is the outcome of the constructed truths. Power is exercised with a series of aims and objectives, and there is also the necessity of resisting the power. This resistance helps to change the truth and power when the system of a society changes.

Foucault believes that the seemingly chaotic occurrences of history are conflicts of power. He says that the study of history is based on the model of language that focuses on meaning. The traditional historians ignore the events that do not fit the beautiful structure of the society that they present. Hence, he prefers genealogy as effective history. In an essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, Foucault says:

A genealogy of values, morality, asceticism, and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for their “origins,” will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history. On the contrary, it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will be scrupulously attentive to their petty malice; it will await their emergence, once unmasked, as the face of the other. (274)

He suggests genealogy as an alternative to the traditional study of history. The genealogical study that covers all aspects of the society without class biasness, and other forms of discrimination.

Although the term power seems as if it should be self-explanatory, it has in fact been inflected by its re-definition in the work of an important precursor for New Historicism: Michel Foucault. Foucault argues that power is not merely physical force but a pervasive human dynamic determining our relationships to others. One need only think of how one acts differently the moment someone enters a room in which one had previously been alone. Power is not necessarily bad, since it can also be

productive. In his essay *Truth and Power*, Foucault says, “[...] along with a handful of others, has at his disposal, whether in the service of the State or against it, powers which can either benefit or irrevocably destroy life” (1143).

For example, we may be willing to assign to certain people the power to organize an activity because we know they are capable of helping us actually accomplish the task at hand. We could also say that power is essential to a just society; all people exert a certain power over us insofar as we defer to their needs and desires. Power also refers to the ways in which a dominant group exerts its influence over others. Though this hegemonic power may at some point rely on the threat of punishment, it does not necessarily rely on actual physical enforcement on a day-to-day basis.

### CHAPTER III

#### LOSS OF SOCIAL VALUES

*Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe* published in 1861 by George Eliot is a compact and serious work wherein the issues of class, industrialization, and religion are realistically addressed in the context of the author's time. The novel's main body of action takes place at the turn of the nineteenth century in the English rural community of Raveloe. However, the story goes back briefly to the 1780s to fill in the reasons Silas Marner moves to provincial, isolated community located in the English Midlands, from an industrial town in the North.

Eliot evokes the pastoral English countryside of the early nineteenth century, emphasizing Raveloe's distance from large towns and even large roads, an isolation that keeps the town mostly ignorant of the intellectual currents of the its own time. R.T. Jones notes in the introduction of *Silas Marner*, "[...] this novel which generally keeps so close to the realities of life, and is so firmly anchored in historical reality, now suggests to us that a human life may be shaped by a plan" (introduction xii). The characters belief system is distant and alien to us.

This distance is temporal as much as it is spatial. Intervening between the era in which the novel is set and the era in which it is written is the Industrial Revolution. This industrialization dramatically transformed England from a society of farms and villages to one of factories and cities. Eliot is therefore describing a lost world, and part of her purpose in the novel is to evoke what she feels has been lost. Bernard Semmel in his book *George Eliot and the Politics of National Inheritance* says that, "Silas Marner is a fable about a society in a time of change" (24).

The central character of the novel Silas Marner is a weaver and has been since a young man. A weaver at this time is an independent artisan who either works for

himself or works in conjunction with other weavers. These weavers carry their spinning wheel and other supplies on their back, and travel from one place to another in regard of their work.

### **Growing Industrial Urban Centers**

In England, the industrial revolution was leading to many changes in the way in which people worked and lived. More and more working people were leaving the countryside to find work in factories and were crowding into hastily built towns and cities. In these towns and cities, the conditions of the people were often squalid and the way of life monotonous and alien. The peoples living there are cut – off from their fellows and from the inherited wisdom of the countryside.

In the early nineteenth century, a person's village or town was all important, providing the sole source of material and emotional support. They lived in a community which provided its member with a structured sense of identity. Tim Dolin notes Eliot's view about society in *Authors in Context: George Eliot*:

Society, in Eliot's view, existed not primarily as a compact made between members of an economic state, nor as a system or structure explicable through social or statistical analysis, but as the totality of felt relationships that individuals shared with those around them. The effective nature of those ties was critical: where the intellect urged progress, the feelings urged caution and the preservation of continuity with the past. (111-112)

George Eliot fears that the new generation of men who were growing up in the industrial town would lose sight of the values that had been tried and tested by generations. Silas had almost forgotten the healing virtues of the countryside herbs which his mother had taught him.

The novel goes parallel with the two opposing worlds—the growing industrial urban centers of the early nineteenth century and the relatively untouched 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 and these weavers looked like the remains of some abandoned race. The narrator says:

[...] there might be seen, in districts far away among the lanes, or deep in the bosom of the hills, certain pallid undersized men, who, by the side of the brawny country-folk, looked like the remnants of a disinherited race. [...] No one knew where wandering men had their homes or their origin; and how was a man to be explained unless you at least knew somebody who knew his father and mother? (1)

These weavers who emigrated from the larger towns looked typically pale and thin beside the hearty peasants who worked in the fields. The peasants were superstitious people, often suspicious of the world beyond their immediate experience. These weavers possessed a special skill and were invariably outsiders to the peasants among whom they lived. Thus, they lived isolated lives and often developed the eccentric habits that result from loneliness.

The story is set during the time of transition—agrarian economy was replaced by urban industrialization, political power moved from feudal lords to the dominant land owning class and, Christianity became increasingly diluted and secular. Tim Dolin describes the period of change in the society and religion in the book *Authors in Context: George Eliot*:

This was a period of intense and turbulent disputation and upheaval in religion, a period in which matters of private belief had a critical impact on wider public social institutions and practices—both religious institutions and practices and beyond. The cultural authority of religion was under siege. (67)

Silas, who has migrated from Lantern Yard, the industrial town in the north brings with him the seeds of industrialization in Raveloe. He settles there as a professional weaver and works for others in exchange of money. He has 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 progresses, he amasses a horde of gold that is his only pleasure. “[...] Silas Marner had lived in this solitude, his guineas rising in the iron pot, and his life narrowing and hardening itself more and more into a mere pulsation of desire and satisfaction that had no relation to any other being” (17).

Though Silas’s collection of money was purposeless, it nonetheless had given him purpose in life and satisfied his need for connection and meaning. Bereft of connections to other human beings, Silas attributes human qualities to his money, admiring the faces on the coins as if they were friends.

Silas becomes the portrait of the dehumanizing effects of commodified labor. His mechanical way of life and his worship of money serve as a harbinger of industrialization for sleepy Raveloe. Silas position and ties to particular places are eliminated to create a vast, mobile labor force. He is disconnected to the community and his humanity is degraded to the status of a mere machine. “His life had reduced itself to the mere functions of weaving and hoarding” (17). The narrator states that Silas has shrunk and bent to fit to his loom—so much so that he looks like a part of

the loom. “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” (17).

Silas is described as shrunken to fit to his loom, so much so that he looks like a part of it, and the narrator compares him to his working tools, which has no meaning in isolation. Similarly Silas’s labor holds no significance for him except as a means to collect more of the money he loves.

The prominent eyes that used to look trusting and dreamy, now looked as if they had been made to see only one kind of thing 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.’ (17)

Silas is prematurely aged, “withered and yellow” (17). His eyesight has been damaged by constant work and cannot see the things that are far away. His ability to see only the guineas, for which his eyes “hunted everywhere” (17), shows the money-obsessed, narrow-mindedness into which Silas has fallen. He can see only one kind of thing, that is, gold, in everything he does. His money is the only thing that gives meaning to his life.

Silas spends all day working at his loom and has never made an effort to get to know any of the villagers. Tim Dolin, in *Authors in Context: George Eliot* notes the fear of social critics that “society would become synonymous with the market” (131). Dolin further notes that, “[...] hard work, prudent investment, and the acquisition of wealth were valid expressions of human progress, but the pursuit of wealth degraded

and dehumanized individuals—and it was very strongly felt among the leading social and cultural critics” (131).

Silas’s rejection of community coincides with his loss of faith, and thus, in a sense, his faith in his fellow man has died along with his faith in God. When Silas rejects his former beliefs, he begins to idolize his money to fill the void. This spiritually impoverished worship only reinforces his isolation. Money allows Silas to once again worship something, but without involving other human beings. When he is banished from his church, he casts away his desire for human fellowship and finds a new source of fulfillment in gold coins.

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. Eliot focuses on familial and social life for the regeneration of an individual. Josephine McDonagh notes the metaphorical use of family by Eliot. In her book *Writers and their Works: George Eliot*, McDonagh notes:

Here we see a literalizing of the metaphorical uses of the family that we have observed elsewhere in Eliot’s work. In *Silas Marner*, for instance, the ‘overwrought’ and nervous body of Silas is ‘refreshed’ by a figurative, rather than a sexual, regeneration within the family. [...] it is the very physical process of reproduction that brings about a social regeneration. (60)

The theft of Silas’s gold forces him to involve himself in the life of the town. This is the second theft that is encountered so far in the novel. The original theft,



which drove Silas out of Lantern yard, made him an outcast from his tight-knit community and deprived him of any faith except in money. The second theft, Dunsey's, eventually reverses both of these effects. The narrator says, "His gold, as he hung over it and saw it grow, gathered his power of loving together into a hard isolation like its own" (36). Its loss makes Silas venture out into the community to ask for help. The narrator further states:

He turned, and tottered towards his loom, and got the seat where he worked, instinctively seeking this as the strongest assurance of reality.

[...] the idea of a thief began to present itself, and he entertained it eagerly, because a thief might be caught and made to restore the gold.

The thought brought some new strength with it, and he started from his loom to the door. (37)

### **Decadence in the Cass family**

Like most of the nineteenth century English society, Raveloe is organized along strict lines of social hierarchy. The Casses are at the top of the social order, while Silas, an outsider is at its base. Squire Cass, who lives in the large Red House is acknowledged as the greatest man in Raveloe. The narrator puts it as:

THE GREATEST MAN in Raveloe was Squire Cass, who lived in the large red house, with the handsome flight of stone steps in front and the high stables behind it, nearly opposite the church. He was only one among several landed parishioners, but he alone was honoured with the title of Squire. (19)

As the story progresses, we soon discover that Squire Cass, the greatest man in Raveloe is not great in real sense. The Squire is complacent, lazy, arrogant, and not particularly bright, having spent his life—merely by good fortune of birth—as the

biggest fish in a very small pond. He did not have as much money as he once did and has spoiled his sons, not out of affection, but simply out of neglect. The narrator says:

Raveloe was not a place where moral consensus was severe, but it was thought a weakness in the Squire that he had kept all his sons at home in idleness; and though some licence was to be allowed to young men whose fathers could afford it, people shook their heads at the courses of the second son, Dunstan, commonly called Dunsey Cass, whose taste for swopping and betting might turn out to be sowing of something worse than wild oats. (20)

The Squire boasts on the property that he has inherited; he reacts angrily to his son, when Godfrey informs him the death of Wildfire, “There’s my grandfather had his stables full o’ horses, and kept a good house too, and in worse times, by what I can make out; and so might I, if I hadn’t four good-for-nothing fellows to hang on me like horse-leeches” (61).

As the Squire is lazy and self-satisfied, his sons too lack the prospect of good nature and responsible persons. The Squire is the only role model Godfrey has had while growing up, and Godfrey’s shortcomings can be seen as stemming at least in part from his father. The eldest son of Squire, Godfrey Cass hastily marries an opium addicted Molley 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 keeps him paralyzed throughout the story. He is unable to think much beyond his immediate material comfort and keeps the marriage secret because he knows his father will disown him if it ever comes to light. At the same time he is subject to constant blackmail from Dunsey his brother, who knows of Godfrey’s secret marriage. Godfrey’s position is presented by the narrator as:

His natural irresolution and moral cowardice were exaggerated by a position in which dreaded consequences seemed to press equally on all sides, and his irritation had no sooner provoked him to defy Dunstan and anticipate all possible betrayals, than the miseries he must bring on himself by such a step seemed more unendurable to him than the present evil. (24)

Godfrey has told Molly that “he would sooner die than acknowledge her as his wife” (92-93). Molly 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. Carrying her child in her arms, Molly begins her journey to Raveloe on New Year’s Eve to revenge her husband. “*He* was well off; and if she had her rights she would be well off too. The belief that he repented his marriage, and suffered from it, only aggravated her vindictiveness” (93). But on the way she begins to tire in the snow and cold, and takes a draft of opium to comfort herself, which ultimately takes her life. The golden-haired child toddles through the hearth in Silas’s nearby cottage.

It is clear that Godfrey is not directly responsible for Molly’s death, but his desperate desire that Molly not survive is horrifyingly cruel and selfish. The narrator notes Godfrey’s fear and anxiety, while he stands outside Silas’s cottage:

He walked up and down [...]. Deeper down, and half smothered by passionate desire and dread, there was the sense that he ought not be waiting on these alternatives; that he ought to accept the consequences of his deeds, own the miserable wife, and fulfil the claims of the helpless child. (101)

Though Godfrey despises the woman he has impregnated, he still marries her. Willing neither to abandon Molly nor to live with her as his wife, Godfrey contrives instead to extend and occupy the temporal gap between act and consequence.

Eliot presents Godfrey's cruelty as the natural result of his dishonesty and cowardice. This selfishness is simply the result of Godfrey being a man whose happiness hangs on duplicity, who repeatedly shirks the demands of his conscience. He fears, if Molly survives he will be disowned by his father and at the same time he could not win Nancy Lammetter's heart, whom he has been eyeing since long time.

'Is she dead?' said the voice that predominated over every other within him. 'If she is, I may marry Nancy; and then I shall be a good fellow in future, and have no secrets, and the child – shall be taken care of somehow.' But across that vision came the other possibility – 'She may live, and then it's all up with me.' (101)

Godfrey usually means well, but is unwilling to make sacrifices for what he knows to be right. At this point he finds himself actually hoping that Molly die, his thoughts have become truly horrible and cruel.

Dunstan Cass, the younger brother of Godfrey who is popularly called Dunsey, is cruel, lazy and unscrupulous. He loves gambling, drinking and hanging around with friends of similar interest. He constantly blackmails Godfrey, when he is in need of money, and threatens to expose Godfrey's secret marriage to their father. In a hot debate to repay the hundred pounds, which Godfrey lent to his brother, Dunsey refuses to pay back and instead threatens him:

I might get you turned out of house and home, and cut off with a shilling any day. I might tell the Squire how his handsome son was married to that nice young woman, Molly Farren, and was very

unhappy because he couldn't live with his drunken wife, and I would slip into your place as comfortable as could be. (22)

Dunsey suggests that Godfrey sell his prized horse, Wildfire. "[...] I advise you to let *me* sell Wildfire. I'd ride him to the hunt tomorrow for you, with pleasure" (24). Godfrey agrees to this, preferring his currently comfortable existence to the certain embarrassment that would result from revealing his secret marriage.

[...] he was mastered by another sort of fear, which was fed by feelings stronger even than his resentment. When he spoke again, it was in a half-conciliatory tone.

'Well, you mean no nonsense about the horse, eh? You'll sell him all fair, and hand over the money? If you don't, you know, everything'll go to smash, for I've got nothing else to trust to. (25)

The next morning, Dunsey arranges Wildfire's sale but decides not to deliver the horse right away. Instead, he takes part in the hunt and, enjoying the prospect of jumping fences to show off the horse. However, he jumps one fence too many, and Wildfire gets impaled on a stake and dies. "[...] poor Wildfire, unconscious of his price, turned on his flank, and painfully panted his last" (30). On his way back to home, Dunsey plans to persuade Silas to ask for a loan. "The idea of Marner's money kept growing in vividness, now the want of it had become immediate" (31). He reaches Silas cottage and finding no one there; he steals the bags of gold and flees into darkness. Dunstan is an opportunist similar to William Dane who conspired against Silas Marner. Kate E. Brown compares these two characters in her essay "Loss, Revelry, and the Temporal Measures of Silas Marner: Performance, Regret, Recollection". She says:

Constantly shedding the past in their opportunistic disposition toward the future, Dunstan and Dane are in some sense self-eradicated, in the literal sense of being cut off from their roots. Embracing contingency so as to triumph over it, they claim liberation both from the body and from time itself, from the constraints imposed on individual will by the sheer fact of being born in a preexisting world and a mortal body.

(228)

Eliot, through the portrayal of Godfrey and Dunstan as wealthy, selfish scoundrels who try to use one another and others to their personal advantage, asserts that the upper class has damaged society. While the Cass family, thinking that their wealth gives them undue privilege and rights to property and people seem incredibly egocentric. Silas representing the lower class is seen as a humble victim of class bias. Godfrey claims Eppie, “‘but I have claim on you, Eppie – the strongest of all claims. It is my duty, Marnier, to own Eppie as my child, and provide for her. She is my own child – her mother was my wife. I have a natural claim on her that must stand before every other’” (147).

Dunsey’s theft bridges not only a narrative distance, but also a social distance. By juxtaposing the wealthy Cass family with the humble Silas, Eliot focuses our attention on the sharp differences in social class within the village of Raveloe. In the nineteenth century, as throughout most of British history, the class system was predominant reality of village life. The class to which one belonged not only defined one’s social interactions, but also shaped one’s values and view of the world. Tim Dolin writes in the book *Authors in Context: George Eliot*:

It is already evident that British society during Eliot’s lifetime was class-based, and that the age of reform was the age of the middle

classes [...]. Rich and poor had existed side by side, of course, since the very beginning of human society, and social inequality was especially pronounced in pre-industrial Britain. (57)

Godfrey's need for money leads Dunsey to Silas's door. This theft, sets in motion the action of the entire novel, upsetting the monotony of Silas's life and eventually bringing him forcefully into life of his surrounding community.

The character who comes nearest to questioning the system of hereditary privilege is Aaron. When Eppie wishes to have lavender in her planned garden at the stone pit, she thinks, "but there's no lavender only in the gentlefolks' gardens" (121). Aaron says that he throws away the cut slips of lavender plants while gardening at the Red House. This fact sets him thinking about the more equal distribution of goods in society, "It's what I think to myself sometimes, as there need nobody run short o' victuals if the land was made the most on, and there was never a morsel but what could find its way to a mouth" (121-122).

For Silas, labor has come to mean nothing more than a way to collect gold coins. But for the Casses, labor is a completely foreign concept altogether. When Godfrey needs money, not one of the schemes that occur to Dunsey is rooted in the idea of earning money through toil R.T. Jones says:

The coins are, of course, quite literally tokens of Marner's economic relationship with the people of Raveloe, so they do represent the fact that he does, even at that stage, have a real function in the community and a connection with it, [...] the coins like the broken jug that Marner mends and keeps although it is no longer useful, serve to keep his affections alive (though dormant) during his period of isolation.

(Introduction xi)

As a landowner, Squire Cass makes a living not from his own labor but from the rents he collects from his tenants for the right to work in his land. This life of ease is especially embodied by Dunsey, who spends his time swapping animals and betting, and who delights in selling his brother's horse.

Thus, all the members of this gentry family are morally coward and their only interest lies on monetary benefit. This change in the attitude of peoples can be related to the coming of industrialization, which was slowly showing its impact on this Midlands of England. The norms and values of the past were set aside and peoples began to think of self interest than of communal interest. Things such as friendship, knowledge, women, etc. are understood only in terms of their monetary value. In this way, they are no longer treated as things with intrinsic worth but as commodities. They are valued extrinsically, that is, only in terms of money.

### **Silas Isolation**

Eliot explores aspects of the relations between individual and the society they live in. Through both the structure and content of the novel, she refutes the common belief of the later nineteenth century that membership in the upper classes indicated moral superiority. She makes the implicit argument that industrialization dehumanizes and alienates workers, and suggests a religion of humanity. William J. Long notes in his book *English Literature: Its History and its Significance for the Life of the English-Speaking World*:

Though profoundly religious at heart, she was largely occupied by the scientific spirit of the age; and finding no religious creed or political system satisfactory, she fell back upon duty as the supreme law of life. All her novels aim, first to show in individuals the play of universal



moral forces, and second to establish the moral law as the basis of human society. (505)

Dolly Winthrop and Nancy Lammeter reflect Eliot's view of the religion of humanity in the novel. Dolly provides a simple, compelling portrait of religious faith. Dolly is illiterate, "I can't read 'em myself" (70), but her faith in God provides not only an incentive to do good work herself, but also a trust that others in the community will do their part. She holds to a distinctly community-oriented faith and encourages Silas to attend church:

[...] this blessed Christmas as is ever coming, if you was to take your dinner to the bakehus, and go to church, and see the holly and yew, and hear the anthim, and then take the sacramen', you'd be a deal the better, and you'd know which end you stood on, and you could put your trust i' Them as knows better nor we do, seein' you'd ha' done what it lies on us all to do.' (71)

Later, while Silas adopts Eppie, Dolly helps him rear the child. She provides Silas with the shoes and garments that her son, Aaron, wore five years back. She suggests Silas not to spend money on baby-clothes, "'Eh, Master Marner,' said Dolly, 'there's no call to buy, no more nor a pair o' shoes; for I've got the little petticoats as Aaron wore five years ago, and it's ill spending the money on them baby-clothes, for the child'll grow like grass i' May, bless it – that it will'" (104).

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 she lives her life according to an inflexible code of behavior and belief.

The story goes fifteen years back to fill in the reasons Silas came to Raveloe. Before he migrated to Raveloe, he was a respected member of his community of Lantern Yard, a town in the northern part of England. He had a very close friend named William Dane and the town folks regarded them as David and Jonathan. The narrator describes:

Among the members of his church there was one young man, a little older than himself, with whom he had long lived in such close friendship that it was the custom of their Lantern Yard brethren to call them David and Jonathan. The real name of the friend was William Dane [...]. (8)

But their relationship of soul and body does not last longer. William Dane conspires against him to gain the money of the church and probably to win Sarah's heart with whom Silas was engaged. The senior deacon of the church was seriously ill, and being a childless widower, he was attended day and night by other members of the church. It was Silas' turn that night while the bag of money is lost from the deacon's drawer.

William Dane accuses Silas of stealing the money and is supported by the minister and other members of the church, because there was no one else to be doubted. This shows the selfishness and unfaithfulness among the fellow peoples. The desire for money arose with growing industrialization in Lantern Yard, people wanted to get monetary benefit by any means. It reflects the loss of cultural and religious harmony, which is found in the rural agrarian community.

Silas' pocket knife was found as a proof in the bureau by the departed deacon's bedside and bag of money removed. A search was made in Silas's chamber where William Dane finds that bag empty, tucked behind the chest of drawers. Later the

church members resolved on praying and drawing lots. Silas was hopeful that God will clear him, “I am sore stricken; I can say nothing. God will clear me” (11). But the lots declared him guilty. Now, his faith in both man and God are shaken, he moves towards William Dane and declares:

The last time I remember using my knife, was when I took it out to cut a strap for you. I don't remember putting it back in my pocket again. *You* stole the money, and you have woven a plot to lay the sin at my door. But you may prosper, for all that: there is no just God that governs the earth righteously, but a God of lies, that bears witness against the innocent. (11)

Silas had no other option but to accept the charges against him. Because he knew that he cannot disobey the decision made by the ministers of the church. Lantern yard being community of faith, held together by narrow religious belief, church functioned as the predominant social organization.

This incident leads him away from his own community and resolves to live in isolation. He settles in a stone cottage near the edge of a stone-pit in Raveloe. He lived a lonely life with hardly any human contact except his customers. His lonely accommodation contributes to an obsession with money, and as the years passed he amassed a horde of gold which was his only pleasure. Silas yearning for money grew more and more due to his isolation as Joan Bennett notes in his book *George Eliot: Her Mind and Her Art*:

He is sundered from the community in which he was rooted and deprived at one blow of his faith in man and God—for his guilt had been ‘proved’ by the simple method of drawing lots and as he and his co-religionists believed that the divine hand would point out the sinner.

Isolated from his kind, he goes to live among strangers, and gives his heart to the lonely accumulation of gold. (131)

### **Silas's Return to Community Life**

The appearance of the little girl on Silas's hearth at once fills him with a sense of loss and resumes his process of reentering the community. R.T Jones notes in the introduction of *Silas Marner* that, "The transfer of his affections to a human being is brought about by two events: the theft of the gold, and the arrival of the child who becomes Eppie" (Introduction xi). At first Silas mistakes the little girl for his gold, which was previously the central driving force of his life. The narrator says:

Gold - his own gold – brought back to him as mysteriously as it had been taken away! He felt his heart begin to beat violently, and for a few moments he was unable to stretch out his hand and grasp the restored treasure. The heap of gold seemed to glow and get larger beneath his agitated gaze. (96)

Through Eppie, Silas is reconnected to the community because of the townspeople's commitment to help him raise her rightly. The standard of the countryside is closely founded on a communal mentality peculiar to a rural way of life where cooperation, rather than competition, is fostered.

Much of the significance of the novel turns on the contrast between the gold and his adopted daughter Eppie as successive centers of Silas's life. In the simplest terms, the gold isolated Silas, whereas Eppie brings him into cordial contact with the community. The child is like the angels who in ages of religious belief, led men away from threatening destruction toward a calm and bright land. Josephine McDonagh notes in her book *Writers and Their Works: George Eliot*, "The plot tells the story of Silas's adaptation to and gradual incorporation into his new environment, brought

about through the arrival of the golden-haired child, Eppie, and the constitution of his ‘family’” (54-55).

The girl’s arrival links the event to the two earlier turning points in Silas’s life—his expulsion from his religious sect and the theft of his gold. A key symbolic difference between Dunsey’s visit and the little girl’s, however, is that Silas opens the door himself this time. Silas was once a man obsessed with isolation—closing his shutters, locking his doors, and viewing his customers as nothing more than a means to acquire more money. In opening his door, Silas symbolically opens himself up to the outside world from which he has lived apart for so long. The narrator describes the reason why Silas keeps his door open:

During the last few weeks, since he had lost his money, he had contracted the habit of opening his door and looking out from time to time, as if he thought that his money might be somehow coming back to him, or that some trace, some news of it, might be mysteriously on the road, and be caught by the listening ear or the straining eye. (95)

Silas continues to associate Eppie with his gold and believes, in a vague way, that his gold has somehow turned to her. The fact that Silas equates Eppie with the gold indicates that she has effectively replaced his gold as the object of his affections. When Mrs. Kimble suggests Silas to leave the girl at the Red House, Silas refuses to do so. “No – no – I can’t part with it, I can’t let it go,” said Silas, abruptly. ‘It’s come to me – I’ve a right to keep it’ (99).

Eppie becomes a bridge between Silas and the rest of the world, “the little child had come to link him once more with the whole world” (114), whereas the gold isolated him from the community. Not only does she return his affection in a way that

his guineas never could, but her desire and curiosity about the world ignite similar feelings in Silas. The narrator contrasts Eppie with Silas's lost gold:

Unlike the gold which needed nothing, and must be worshipped in close-locked solitude – which was hidden away from the daylight, was deaf to the song of birds, and started to no human tones – Eppie was a creature of endless claims and ever-growing desires, seeking and loving sunshine, and living sounds, and living movements; making trial of everything, with trust in new joy, and stirring the human kindness in all eyes that looked on her. (109)

After sixteen years of Eppie's adoption by Silas, his transition into the community is complete and, now he is a full member of Raveloe community. He became closer to everyone in the parish and helped them in need. "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" (123).

By this time in the novel, Godfrey confesses his past life to Nancy. And as they do not have any children, they decide to claim Eppie. "But we can take Eppie now," Godfrey says to his wife, "I won't mind the world knowing at last" (143). Godfrey explains that since they have no children, they would like Eppie to come and live with them as their daughter. He assumes that Silas would like to see Eppie in advantageous position, and promises that Silas will be provided for himself. Eppie sees that Silas is distressed, though Silas tells her to do as she chooses. But Eppie refuses to go with them:

She dropped a low curtsy, first to Mrs Cass and then to Mr Cass, and said; 'Thank you, ma'am – thank you, sir. But I can't leave my father, nor own anybody nearer than him. And I don't want to be a lady –

thank you all the same' (here Eppie dropped another curtsy). ' I couldn't give up the folks I've been used to.' (146)

The confrontation between Silas and the Cases over their claims to Eppie is partly a conflict of class. However, Silas and Eppie's simple assertion of family easily wins out. The Cases' assumptions of upper-class superiority and the importance of blood relations are no match for Silas's simple emotion and moral certitude.

When Silas and Eppie visit Lantern Yard, they find it is the opposite of Raveloe in more than one sense. Silas finds it a frightening and unrecognizable place. "Silas, bewildered by the changes thirty years had brought over his native place" (153). The chapel and graveyard have completely disappeared, and no one in the town remembers anything about the way things once were:

'It's gone, child,' he said, at last, in strong agitation – 'Lantern Yard's gone. It must ha' been here, because here's the house with the o'erhanging window – I know that – it's just the same; but they've made this new opening; and see that big factory! It's all gone – chapel and all.' (155)

Unlike Raveloe, where nothing ever goes away, in the larger town we see that people and places can disappear without a trace. The transitory nature of Lantern Yard is partly a function of its size, but is also tied to industrialization. A factory, after all replaces Lantern Yard's chapel. The sky is smoggy and the place dark and ugly which irritates Eppie, "'O, what a dark and ugly place!' said Eppie. 'How it hides the sky! It's worse than the workhouse. I'm glad you don't live in this town now, father. Is Lantern Yard like this street?'" (154)

The novel highlights the major cultural transitions and contradictions of its own time and pinpoints the forces of class and capitalistic industry that would change

the nature of future society. It demonstrates the alienating effects of industrialization and urban life, while asserting the value of rural, communal life. The urban industrial life is subject to change and extinction while the rural agrarian community remains unchanging and permanent. Josephine McDonagh, notes in her book *Writers and Their Works: George Eliot*:

Curiously, and somewhat anachronistically, urban society and industrial or mechanized processes that are subject to change and extinction, while Raveloe, by contrast, is presented as a permanent, unchanging environment. By the end of the narrative, Lantern Yard is indeed ‘extinct’: when Silas returns there at the end of the of the novel to clear his name of the crime of which he was wrongly accused, the place has disappeared without trace, replaced by the architecture of yet newer forms of industrial production, the factory. (55)

The tall buildings that Silas and Eppie pass on their way through the town, with their gloomy doorways filled with “sallow, begrimed face[s]” (154), contrast with the rural, outdoorsy life of Raveloe. The industrial landscape of the larger town—frightening, destructive, and dehumanizing has wiped out memory and history.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

Eliot's *Silas Marner* reveals the decadence of social values in the early nineteenth century English society. It reflects a lack of moral and intellectual discipline. It focuses on the life of a solitary linen-weaver, displaced from his religious sect, to show the effect of growing industrialization in the lives of individuals.

The transition from the rural agrarian society to the unbound urban industrialization swept away the communal ties of the earlier societies. Peoples worked for several hours in pursuit of monetary gain. They remained alienated from their own community that provided them with a structured sense of identity. Laziness, complacency, greed and selfishness have taken the place of the earlier organic community. The community of Lantern Yard was rapidly growing towards industrialization while Raveloe comparatively remained untouched with the currents of time.

Eliot, in *Silas Marner* presents different characters to show the dehumanizing effects of industrialization. The selfish William Dane webs treachery against his own friend Marner. Godfrey Cass shows the guilt and moral cowardice in not acknowledging his own daughter. Blackmailing his own brother and stealing away the weaver's money, Eliot presents the cruel and unscrupulous nature of Dunstan Cass.

Squire Cass, rich and a man of higher social status in the class-based social structure, wishes the Napoleonic wars continue because he is making money out of it due to the price hike. It shows that the Squire is self-satisfied and irresponsible towards the society. Silas Marner gives his heart in lonely accumulation of gold and does not bother to know any of the villagers.

There is a decline in the necessary moral traditions of Raveloe. It reflects the loss of moral and social values of the society that were transformed from generations. The study closely observes the vanishing English countryside and that England was fast becoming industrialized and impersonal. The religious faith and the religion of humanity have withered away in the flow of time. Memory and history are no longer vivid and the only image that remains is of destructive and dehumanizing industrial landscape that Silas and Eppie find at the Lantern Yard.

Through presenting the idea of home, family, and nature, Eliot constructs a complex argument about the superiority of an organic society over the new forms of society brought about by industrialization and economic expansion.

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