

"silas marner" essay essay sample



“ Silas Marner” Essay Essay Sample

The novel “ Silas Marner” is set between the years 1790 and 1820 and was written during the reign of Queen Victoria. It focuses on the duty of a parent, which was very important at that time. Families were being split up due to the Industrial Revolution.

The Victorians valued duty highly and Eliot, the author of the novel, looks at the idea of good parents being rewarded and bad parents being punished. Godfrey Cass is a bad parent thus he loses his only child, a daughter called Hephzibah (or Eppie), to a lower-class citizen, for example.

In order to highlight the effects of parenting, Eliot includes contrasting parents in her novel. Silas Marner’s parenting skills contrast with the aforementioned, Godfrey Cass. Silas adopted Godfrey’s child and he raised her well; he will now have someone to care for him in his old age.

Other techniques used are symbolism and pathetic fallacy, which are used to help correct the reader’s feelings towards the characters to the way Eliot wants them to be. Pathetic fallacy is where the weather reflects the mood of characters. For example, towards the end of the novel, two of the characters marry and the weather is sunny because the occasion is happy.

Romanticism is a key idea in the novel: all the children are born innocent and pure and they remain that way unless their parents or society change them.

Eliot is an Omniscient Narrator. This means that she inputs her opinion on events to direct the reader to support her point of view; this is that people who look after their children well are thoughtful and will be eventually

rewarded and those who parent badly are bad-spirited and callous characters. The term comes from the word omniscience meaning infinite knowledge, which comes from Medieval Latin, *omniscientia*, from *omni-* (all) and *-scientia* (knowledge), from which we get the word science.

Bad parenting was being introduced into society at the time the novel was written due to the Industrial Revolution. Many a family was moving away from their home villages to the cities and both communities and families were breaking up. Eliot's novel comes in response to this and informs the reader that parenting is still an important part of life; she also warns of what happens when parental duties are neglected.

Godfrey Cass is a parent and his poor parenting cost him his child.

Godfrey was brought up in "The Red House" - red symbolising anger and danger. His father "[liked] to spend his time in the parlour" which is the pub, away from his children so Godfrey was neglected as a child. The neglect of a child, even subtly, in the Romantic's eye, is not a way for a child's purity to be kept intact. Therefore, Godfrey having no good example of how to live and parent, became impure and a bad parent; his impurity is depicted later on when Godfrey severely hurts his child's feelings with no justification.

Godfrey's father came across as "a tall, stout man ... the knit brow and rather hard glance" obviously scared Godfrey as between the two "there was never a pleasant morning greeting." He has not learnt the value of the family unit which he will need to apply in future life.

Thus, Godfrey lets the mother look after his child despite the fact that she is addicted to "the demon opium ... to whom she was enslaved body and soul". Godfrey knows that it is a bad thing to let a person controlled by the ultimate devil look after a child, but not only does he ignore the child and not try to save it, despite the fact that it is well within his humanly power, he feeds the addiction on the basis that no-one knows of his marriage to a lower class. This is an excellent example of his selfishness and his will to leave his life to Favourable Chance, the god of all people "who follow their own devices" instead of "obeying a law they believe in." People without laws are bad people who do not have boundaries - only evil can result from this.

Ergo, when things are left to chance, regardless of how well things are to begin with, unfavourable things will result. In her omniscient narration, Eliot explains that "the evil principle deprecated [prayed against] in that religion is the orderly sequence by which the seed brings forth a crop after its kind," and in doing so she describes that the religion, Chance, delivers something. Although she never states what this "crop" is, it is easy to discern that the crop will be evil from previous explanations in the paragraph, "left him forsake a decent craft" that she is against Chance thus this new crop will be bad. Furthermore, Eliot wrote about the Romantics and religious people that believe all is natural is good and defying God is blasphemous; if someone creates a new crop then it is against nature and is imitating God and therefore sacrilegious. In Eliot's eyes this is inexplicably wrong and as the novel is, in some respects, a moral fable where the good are rewarded and the bad are punished, anyone who leaves things to Chance (namely Godfrey), who blasphemes, will be castigated.

To put Godfrey in an even worse situation, he has failed to acknowledge his duty as a parent. When Molly Farren, Godfrey's wife, died due to an opium addiction, Silas decided to adopt Eppie, Godfrey's child. Godfrey paid a visit to Silas to talk about the adoption; as Silas opened the door to talk to him, the young child is in Silas' arms and looked at him. She "could make no visible audible claim on its [Eppie's] father [Godfrey] ... looked up at Godfrey without any uneasiness or sign of recognition" and in doing so proves to the reader that his dearth of parenting skills means that not even his child recognised him; she simply saw him as a stranger and not a parent. Any baby or child would instantly recognise its father with an obvious sign (like a smile or hug), neither of which Eppie gave because Godfrey was barely around her, "he had not seen the child for months past", and when he was, he was doing nothing fatherly like playing with her; fathers are there forever for a child, unless they unexpectedly demise, even a young child like Eppie knows that.

Godfrey, however, acknowledged his child because, "the father [he] felt a strange mixture of feelings, a conflict of regret and joy." Any caring father would not regret their child turning up. It is obviously a strong feeling of regret that he feels because there is enough of it to conflict with joy and Eliot deliberately placed regret first in the list of the two feeling he felt to show that that is what he felt first and foremost. A father should not regret his child turning up but rather enjoy the time that he can now spend with her.

However, Godfrey could be feeling regret for another reason, not regret that the child is alive. He could have seen the innocently beautiful face of his child and regret not spending time with Eppie when she was younger; such a

feeling would easily be brought on if his child stares at him without recognition. Although Godfrey appears to be mean and selfish most of the time, there could be an unavailing tender heart within him. He is evidently a weak character who tends not to show true feelings and showing affection for an anonymous baby brought up by a drug addict would not be very masculine and might appear weird in the eyes of others.

Either way, Godfrey quickly asked if Silas would take Hephzibah to the parish or the workhouse. The workhouses were places where very poor people could work in exchange for free food and accommodation. The conditions were deliberately made to be extremely harsh so that idle poor people would not rely on them; the working hours were long, at about 10 per day. By entering a workhouse a pauper was assumed to have forfeited responsibility for his children. Godfrey knew that if he could find a way for her to become a worker in a workhouse, he could cease his duties over her (not that he did them anyway), he would never see her again but she would die a ghastly death. Evidently, he was still prepared to see her go there.

Although, Godfrey did have some reluctance to let her go there as he tried to speak, " as indifferently as he could." Nonetheless, his reputation was more important to him and he had to keep all emotion he felt for Eppie a secret otherwise it would have become prominent that the child was his, which he did not want under any circumstances. Despite the fact that he had strong feelings for his child, he was not acting upon them.

Godfrey's conscience did bother him enough that he needed to soothe it, which he did by asking Silas to " let me [Godfrey] give it something towards

finding it clothes." He did. He "found half-a-guinea and thrust it into Silas' hand". Clearly, he did not want to give Silas the money because he thrust it into his hand; he was still not listening to his conscience, he was just trying to get rid of it. He still did not care for his child.

By suggesting that his own child was to be sent to the workhouse and paying money to compensate for not being with her, he was being a callous parent. A caring parent would never dream of sending their child into the workhouse - the lowest of all working conditions. Neither would he have an opium-addict in charge of her; it was the "demon Opium to whom she was enslaved."

None of these things is at present doing harm to Godfrey and things were going all too well for him. Eliot uses her powers as an Omniscient Narrator to remind the reader that he is making bad decisions. She tells the reader that, "when we are treated well, we naturally begin to think that we are not altogether unmeritorious." This means that if things go well for us, we think that, regardless of how badly we are treating others, there is nothing wrong with what we are doing.

Eliot then goes on to say, "that the father would be much happier without the child." She is being sarcastic to try and make us see things from her point of view. By being sarcastic, the reader sees how stupid Godfrey's ideas were and how ludicrous his method of thinking was in a very strong way; a child is never happy without her father. The reader also hates Godfrey as a character further because he is not concerned with the child's feelings and that Eliot's narration gives him no sympathy. As the readers' thoughts and opinions are guided by Eliot, naturally they have no sympathy for his either.

This is also an example of Godfrey's selfish way; he is thinking of himself and not for his poor, disowned child.

Nancy, the woman that Godfrey has been trying to impress throughout the novel, weds Godfrey and they try for children multiple times. They are unsuccessful and Godfrey now needed a child to look after. He suggested to Nancy about adopting Eppie off Silas but "the adopted child, she [Nancy] was convinced, would never turned out well" because "To adopt a child because one had been denied to you, was to try and choose your lot in spite of Providence [the acceptance God as the guider of human destiny]." If Godfrey were to tell Nancy about Eppie being his daughter, she would have tried to adopt her, but he does not want to tell her that as he fears that it will upset her.

When Dunstan Cass, Godfrey's brother, was found in the stone-pits after decades of being declared missing, Godfrey knew he must tell Nancy. A secret was revealed when Dunstan's body was found which was that he took Silas' gold. He realised that "when God Almighty wills it, our secrets are revealed" - he was scared that his secret about his daughter, Hephzibah would be revealed after his death. He would rather tell her now himself so as not to dishonour his name after his death.

Because Nancy had been told that Godfrey's is now the father of the child Silas adopted, she insisted that, "it's your [Godfrey's] duty to acknowledge her and provide for her" which was very ironic as for the past 18 years, Godfrey had failed to do every parental duty but now when things were not going his way, he insisted on doing it. This was very selfish, which is not

what a good parent who adheres to their duty is. He was still not a good parent, he just pretended to be. Godfrey utilised this as a reason when he interviewed Eppie about adopting her, saying that " she [Eppie] is my [Godfrey's] own child" and that " It's my duty"; this is ironic for the same reason.

When Silas denied the request to let Godfrey adopt Eppie, he " thinks Silas might look at the thing more reasonably" when it was clearly Godfrey who was the unreasonable one! He was walking into Silas' cottage and trying to take his adopted daughter who he has lived with all his life. Godfrey had no recognition for the strong father-daughter bonds that may have formed with them, furthermore proving that he had no idea how to parent and what was involved in it. It also " seemed to him that the weaver was rather selfish" which, for the same reason, is inexplicably ironic.

To offend both Silas' and Eppie's feelings even more, Godfrey said severely, " she may marry some low-working man." Silas Marner is a weaver and this would be considered an undesirable job and Eppie was in love with Aaron Winthrop who is of the same class as her (a low class). Godfrey had proven once again that he had not the skills required to be a parent - even when he wanted a child the most (thus he should have felt that he had to be as nice to Eppie as he could be) he insulted Eppie's beloved adopter, Silas, Eppie and her boyfriend in one remark.

After trying to take Eppie off Silas and seeing how painful it would be if they were to be parted, Godfrey finally realised that " I [Godfrey] must do what I can do for her [Eppie] in the state of life she chooses." He was finally

thinking for others and recovering from what his terrible upbringing had taught him and he was now doing what righteousness teaches him. He has finally said no and " with a keen decisiveness of tone." He is being strong and going against what other people around him (namely Nancy) say. He has realised what is wrong.

Rather than just saying the right thing this time, he acted upon it by deciding not to tell Eppie that the innocent childhood pictures of her mother were false and that her mother was a hideous drug-addict. He thought, " where would be the good to anybody?"

Godfrey was, however, for the most part of his life a bad parent and he has been punished by losing the only child he has to a weaver. He is now childless.

Parts of the novel are a moral fable and parts are realistic because Godfrey was punished by having no children and Silas Marner and Eppie were rewarded: Silas adopts a beautiful, female child who will look after him in his old age and Eppie gets a loving husband - they marry on a sunny day. Dolly, who helped integrate Silas into the community, from what we can tell, receives the same fate as Silas.

Howbeit, not everyone got rewarded and punished justifiably. Nancy does not have any children at all, despite the fact she was a lovely woman. She may have attempted to take Eppie off Silas but she was trying to get Godfrey to do his parental duties, which is the right thing to do. Mr Lammeter, Nancy's father, would have loved to have been a grandfather but never

became one; Priscilla, his other daughter, did not marry at all. Eliot is saying that life is not always fair but parenting is nonetheless an important job.