

Contrast the fulfilment silas gets from parenthood

Literature



**ASSIGN
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Silas Marner by George Eliot is set in the beginning of the 19th century. It is about a linen-weaver that moves to a village called Raveloe after his friend from a strict religious sect in Lantern Yard betrays him. In Raveloe, Marner wallows in misery and his obsessive greed for gold. Meanwhile Godfrey and Dunsey Cass, sons of the Squire of the village, are in trouble. Dunsey blackmails Godfrey by threatening to reveal to his father about Godfrey's secret, opium addict, wife, unless he helps him to raise the money that he owes.

After a bit of bad luck, concerning one last attempt to obtain the money, Dunsey robs Silas Marner of his beloved fortune. This is a great turning point in Marner's life as his distressed state after the robbery results in the villagers feeling pity and compassion towards him, and for the first time in 15 years he is included in everyday village life. Dunsey disappears after the theft and his body is discovered, along with the gold, many years later at the bottom of a quarry.

A short time after Marner's tragic experience Godfrey's illegitimate wife collapses and dies on her way to revealing their child to the Squire. The child crawls into Marner's cottage, and when he finds her dead mother, he takes her in, naming her Eppie. Eppie has an incredible effect on Marner's life. He emerges from his life as a lonely hermit, and engrosses himself in village life, regaining his trust in God and other people. Sixteen years later Godfrey and Nancy are married and are without children.

Godfrey uncovers his secret about him being Eppie's father and they try to adopt her, but she refuses, preferring to remain with Silas. The book follows

three stages of Marner's life and the transformations in him due to Eppie. He morphed from a 'young man of exemplary life and ardent faith' to a man with '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', and finally into a kindly 'exceptional person, whose claims on neighbourly help were not to be matched in Raveloe'.

In this essay I will compare and contrast Marner in these three stages of his life and look at the fulfilment he gets from parenthood, his earlier religious faith and miserliness. Silas Marner is set during the period of the Industrial Revolution, but Raveloe is such a secluded village, 'a barren parish lying on the outskirts of civilisation' that it is not effected, and the Revolution is hardly referred to. The only time that it is really mentioned, along with the building of great industrial towns and factories, is when Silas revisits Lantern Yard with Eppie.

Silas was 'bewildered by the changes thirty years had brought over his native place', and it is described as 'a dark ugly place... worse than the Workhouse', and a 'large factory' had been built in place of Lantern Yard. Raveloe is described in great detail so you have a very clear image of the villagers and where they live. It is a typical village before the Industrial Revolution 'nestled in a snug well-wooded hollow, quite an hour's journey on horseback from any turnpike.' When Silas adopts Eppie he experiences a connection, as he has never felt before.

His love for her is so immense that he feels 'satisfied' and has a 'sense of presiding goodness and the human trust, which comes with all pure peace

and joy'. He is able to reflect upon his past and 'by seeking what was needful for Eppie, he had himself come to appropriate forms of custom and belief which were the mould of Raveloe life'. The presence of a child changes Silas, both physically and mentally. His eyes have 'a less vague, more answering look', and often goes 'strolling out'.

He is a very considerate, unselfish person who cares for nothing but Eppie's happiness - 'and should you like that, Eppie? Through his generous acts and dedicated work with Eppie he gains respect and friendship from the whole community. 'I was first to say there was o harm in you... and I was first to say you'd get your money back. And it's nothing but rightful as you should'. Eliot writes very moral novels and, as in *Silas Marner*, the good are often rewarded while the evil are punished. Therefore, thanks to his essentially good being, Silas earns the return of his gold, an improved cottage and happiness and love from Eppie.

He had 'brought a blessing on himself by acting like a father to a lone motherless child. ' Eppie sums up his later life in Raveloe perfectly by saying - 'nobody could be happier than we are. ' In the early stages of Marner's life he obtained fulfilment from God. He belonged to a strict religious cult and was 'regarded as a shining instance of youthful piety'. He was very naive and had a self-denying life, which revolved around his religion. He believed that he had found trust and faith in both God and his fellow brethren.

There was 'an expression of trusting simplicity in Marner's face, heightened by that absence of special observation, that defenceless, deer-like gaze which belongs to large prominent eyes'. He was naive and vulnerable to

such an extreme extent that the betrayal by his friend William Dane, and by God failing to clear him of the charges of which he was innocent, caused to go out with 'despair in his soul' and a 'shaken trust in God and man'. The difference between this life and Marner's later life with Eppie is striking.

In Lantern Yard he focuses entirely on God and believes that he has found ultimate happiness, because he knows no other life. 'We are apt to think it inevitable that a man in Marner's position should have begun to question the validity of an appeal to the divine judgement by drawing lots; but to him this would have been an effect of independent thought such as he had never known'. However he does not know how it really feels to be loved and trusted because he is betrayed by the closest people in his life, due to jealousy.

In Raveloe he experiences this for the first time when he adopts Eppie, making him realise that there is more to life than 'the movement, the mental activity, and the close friendship... incorporated in a narrow religious sect'. The contrasts are accentuated towards the end of the novel when Silas takes Eppie to see Lantern Yard. He expressed his preference to his current life over his old one by saying - 'I should like to talk to him about the religion o' this countryside'. It is symbolic how the religious sect has disappeared into a 'dark, ugly place'.

Silas realises that maybe it was meant to be that he be falsely accused, or he would not live such a fulfilled life with Eppie in Raveloe. 'Since the time the child was sent to me and I've come to love her as myself, I've had light enough to trusten by'. After Marner left Lantern Yard and before he found

Eppie, he lived as a hermit for a period of 15 years. He was so depressed by his traumatic experience at Lantern Yard that 'the little light he possessed spread its beam so narrowly, that frustrated belief was a curtain broad enough to create for him the blackness of night'.

He slowly withdrew himself from all social company and became a miser. Strangely, as he sank into his monotonous life as a weaver (his life became reduced 'to the unquestioning activity of a spinning insect'), he became oddly satisfied and fulfilled. Silas became obsessed with accumulating money and it became such a desire that he worked incredibly long hours to compulsively obtain gold. He stores it away and counted it lovingly each night. It became the one true object of his life and he forged a secluded happiness, hiding from his painful past.

He lived with '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'. He was numb and mechanical, never allowing any emotion or people in his life. It was a very unhealthy state of mind and was probably the worse stage of his life. In Lantern Yard he had had great intentions and worshipped God, encouraging him to be a good honest man, although he was too trusting and later realised he was never truly happy. In Raveloe however he worshipped gold, until Eppie and the villagers helped him to break free from its spell.

It wasn't until then that he got everything he could want in life - love, friendship, comfort and happiness. It is at this stage in his existence that he has ultimate fulfilment. George Eliot uses language very effectively to

contrast volume two, about Marner's life with Eppie, with earlier life. The use of contrast is a common technique throughout the book. When describing settings she creates strong juxtapositions between Lantern Yard and Raveloe. 'O, what a dark ugly place... How it hides the sky! It's worse than the Workhouse. I'm glad you don't live in this town now' is a statement made by Eppie when they return to Lantern Yard.

Eliot provides an extreme contrast to this when she describes Raveloe. 'It was an important looking village, with a fine old church and large churchyard, with well-walled orchards and ornamental weathercocks'. This is a comforting, homely image in comparison to the cold, heartless location of Lantern Yard. Eliot also uses this skill to contrast Silas's emotions when he lived alone as a miser with his emotions at the end of the novel. Before 'he sat in his loneliness by his dull fire, he leaned his elbows on his knees, and clasped his head with his hands, and moaned very low.

This creates a moving image of a very unhappy man, quite different from the happy, contented man we see later in the novel - 'the mild passive happiness of love-crowned age in his face'. Eliot uses a fair amount of imagery to portray the difference in Marner and his life between volumes 1 and 2. One example of this is her use of weather. During Marner's period as a hermit, when Dunstan robs him, there is 'rain and darkness', symbolising evil and depression. 'Happily the sunshine fell more warmly than usual' on the morning Eppie is married though. The sunshine and light represent the faith and contentment that Silas now feels.