

Silas marner and the necessity of human relationships



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Human beings do not thrive in solitude. Every hero has a supporting team, and every protagonist must maintain a close group of allies in order to ever truly succeed. George Eliot's *Silas Marner* furthers this idea that, although there is evil in the world, intimate human relationships are capable of creating happiness in the midst of brokenness.

As demonstrated by Silas and his isolation from the community of Raveloe, those who lack human relationships suffer great adverse effects. For instance, as stated by Durham in his article "Silas Marner and the Wordsworthian Child", "[Silas] endures a fifteen-year period of spiritual numbness and indifference which George Eliot characterizes as a condition of rootlessness, specifically a psychic fragmentation, a loss of awareness of his personal past." Silas refuses to acknowledge his past and the people who were involved in it. From friends who betrayed him to authority figures who banished him, it seems as if every relationship in Silas's life has crumbled before him. He's afraid to acknowledge that brokenness and he is even more afraid to begin new relationships in the community of Raveloe. As a result of this refusal, his life becomes dull, dark, and largely meaningless. Silas "hated the idea of the past; there was nothing that called out his love and fellowship toward the strangers he had come against; and the future was all dark" (15). The people of his past damaged him deeply: they forced him to draw the conclusion that there was no being in this world or any other who held any love for him. For the fifteen years that he has been residing in Raveloe, Silas has refused to believe in the necessity of loving others or being loved himself. He has turned everyone away and has accepted a life of quiet and bitter solitude, barely surviving and living for only one thing: his

gold. Pieces of gold; however, make for poor company, and every “ livelong day he sat in his loom, his ear filled with its monotony, his eyes bent close down on the slow growth of sameness in this brownish web” (20). Life simply drags on for Silas, devoid of happiness, meaning, or light. Every day is the same dull routine, and every day he becomes more and more withered and hopeless, becoming more like an insect and less like a human. Silas begins to lose everything as he remains trapped in the idea of an evil and loveless world, of a world where people disappoint and where God holds no special concern for his creations. The past is painful and the future is hopeless, and the only thing that Silas can do about it is to weave in monotony and live for the moments when his gold will ease his pain. Because of such extreme isolation, the villagers in Raveloe regard Silas with a “ mixture of contemptuous pity, dread, and suspicion” (40). After all his years of solitude, he has pushed every last person away; he has committed himself to a life utterly devoid of human relationships. Yet although Silas believes that living alone is best, he begins to feel a sense of warmth as he bursts into the Rainbow on the night of the robbery. Despite his greatest efforts to tell himself how unnecessary human relations are, he begins to find comfort in the community at the moment when he needs it most.

As Silas loses his gold and receives Eppie instead, he demonstrates how the presence of another human being causes integration within a community. For instance, as stated by Ermarth in his description of Silas’s life after finding Eppie, “ the remainder of Silas’s story mainly concerns his difficulties in raising the child he calls Eppie, and the necessity, brought on him by her surprising infant habits, for more recourse to his neighbours for advice.” As

Silas begins to open himself up to the idea of raising a child, he is almost forced into becoming friendlier with his neighbors in Raveloe. His chief concern is doing right by Eppie and raising her in the best possible way, and he realizes that this can only be achieved through the help of others. Thus, not only does Silas gain happiness as a result of the child who has entered his life, he also finds fulfillment in being part of a community, as brought on by his love for another. As Silas continues to care for Eppie, “ there was no repulsion around him now, either young or old; for the little child had come to link him once more with the whole world” (129). Silas’s life is radically changed by the appearance of a child who seems to take some of the darkness out of this world. Eppie gives him a reason to live and to find love once again. She brought him joy in more ways than one, by integrating him into a supportive community and by giving him something to love and care for. Before Eppie, Silas would not even entertain the idea of attending the church or getting to know his neighbors. However, in Silas’s determination to give the child everything that she needed, both Eppie and Silas were baptized and truly welcomed into the community. “ On this occasion Silas, making himself as clean and tidy as he could, appeared for the first time within the church, and shared in the observances held sacred by his neighbours” (123). Doing such a thing had been the farthest thought from Silas’s mind during the time of his life when he was still cynical of human relationships and angry at a God who didn’t love him. Yet at the arrival of Eppie, he hardly hesitates to appear at the church. Thus Eppie “ created fresh and fresh links between his life and the lives from which he had hitherto shrunk continually into narrower isolation” (123). She is a blessing to his life and the sole reason why he was pulled out of his misery and

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darkness. Eppie forced him out of his shell and was the direct cause of an integration that never would have happened without her.

Finally, Silas finds his joy and fulfillment as the result of raising a child and becoming part of a greater community. For instance, as explained by Auster, “ the community remains essentially the same, but the author now provides it with an opportunity to demonstrate its humanity, good will, and potential for genuine sociability, which serve to soften, if not erase, our awareness of its crudeness...his participation in social intercourse humanizes him” (Auster 3). Although the basic structure in the community has not changed, Silas’s role in it has. Instead of doing his best to avoid all relations with Raveloe, he has become an active member in it and reaps the benefits because of it. He’s no longer insect-like or miserable, with his gold as his only friend. He has been ushered into the community by Eppie and begins to understand that such loving relationships can take the sting out of the darkness in the world. As Silas is considering Eppie, he states that “ There’s good i’ this world—I’ve a feeling o’ that now; and it makes a man feel as there’s a good more nor he can see, i’ spite o’ the trouble and the wickedness. That drawing o’ the lots is dark; but the child was sent to me: there’s dealings with us—there’s dealings” (141). Instead of focusing on the injustices that have happened to him in the past, Silas focuses on the potential for light in his future. There is evil and there is good in the world, and the outlook that Silas takes changes everything. Because he found so much love in his heart for Eppie, Silas’s entire reality shifts from one of despair to one of hope. He becomes a member of the community, a smaller part of a larger whole, and finally finds his salvation because of it. As he is talking to Eppie, he says, “

Eh, my precious child, the blessing was mine. If you hadn't been sent to save me, I should ha' gone to the grave in my misery...our life is wonderful" (160). Everything about Silas has changed, and he knows it. He recognizes just how miserable he was before he began forging human relationships and before he accepted the true necessity of loving another person. His entire existence was dark and lonely, and he was left with nothing more than his negative outlook and stubborn determination to stick to the idea that there is no light in the world. Yet Eppie took away all of that pain and ushered in the type of hope that can only be the cause of an intimate human relationship. Silas has a renewed hope in the world around him and finally comes back to the idea that there is a supernatural being above who cares for him and who loves him. As he is considering the blessing that Eppie has been in his life, he states, " since the child was sent to me and I've come to love her as myself, I've had light enough to trusten by; and now she says she'll never leave me, I think I shall trusten till I die" (173). The strength of Eppie's love has created true and genuine joy in Silas's life. He is finally capable of trusting a community once again, and he is able to return to the idea that there is a greater and loving power that is watching over him. Instead of being confined to the monotonous misery that was his reality for fifteen years, Silas finds comfort and delight in a child who has changed everything for him.

There is certainly darkness in the world, but the presence of intimate human relationships makes such a darkness seem insignificant at times. The power of love will always trump the power of evil, and the support that a community can bring to a lonely person's life is unparalleled by any other

force. With the advent of new relationships and new reasons to love, the pain suddenly transforms into potential and happiness. A close community of supportive neighbors and friends is capable of transforming entire outlooks on life. These are the themes that dominate *Silas Marner*, a novel defined by a view of human nature that is fundamentally optimistic. Instead of looking for the bad, people begin to actively search for the good. Instead of focusing on the evil, they rejoice in the light.

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