

**“George Eliot’s Depiction of the Child in “*Silas Marner*” (1861)”****Khabur Wsu Wsu**Department of English Language, Faculty of Arts, Soran University, Soran,  
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**ABSTRACT**

George Eliot (1819-1880) was a major Victorian novelist who paid attention to important social issues. In “: *Silas Marner: the Weaver of Raveloe*” (1861) , she addresses the problem of parentless children, embodied in the depiction of Eppie, who is Silas Marner’s adopted daughter, but actually the biological daughter of Molly Farren, who is married in secret to Godfrey Cass. The novel traces more than sixteen years of Eppie’s life, making the book seem like a detailed depiction of the image of the child. This paper will examine George Eliot’s representation of the child from these viewpoints: education, family life, parenthood, livelihood, psychological issues, and maturity through the lens of Social Psychology by Sigmund Freud. Moreover, this research is conducted to explore the way Eliot represented the female child, and to prove that she was a committed novelist who sought to instruct not only to entertain the reading public. In her own way, George Eliot demanded that the children had to be protected. Despite all the superficial strength and glories of Britain, it was a weak and vulnerable country from the inside because children were unprotected and defenceless by the British system. Finally, the research delves into the social and the familial life of the Orphaned Eppie who was raised by her adoptive parent Mr. Silas Marner, along with presenting a realistic image of the female child in the Victorian Era by George Eliot.

## **1. Introduction**

The conditions of children were not always ideal throughout the social history of humanity. A part from a few English novels such as Tom Jones (1749) by Henry Fielding, children did not have a considerable position in English literature until the beginnings of the nineteenth century. Most notably with the establishment of factories and the creation of a new industrious era, several significant writers started including children in their fictions, most specifically in sympathy with their subordinate and pitiful status in English society. (Jones, 1948).

At start, the different approaches to the meaning of childhood and their position in English literature is discussed. According to a thesis in Masaryk University entitled “Approaches to Childhood in Novels by Charles Dickens” by Daniela Němcová, the notion of childhood had constantly been changing over the passage of time as well as its methods of identification or perception of the childhood. There were several approaches to the study of childhood which Němcová had outlined in reference to the book “The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800” by Lawrence Stone.

Němcová determined Christianity’s viewpoint on children’s nature in the nineteenth century as the first and the most significant opinion about children. Němcová supported his view by referring to Stone’s book on children. It was stated that the Christians believed that a child’s soul is innately sinful. Therefore, the only solution provided was having a ruthless control over them by their families and schoolmasters. In this case, oppression was used as a means for forbidding the child to commit any wrongdoing. Following it, comes the environmental approach to children, which according to Stone replaced the Christian viewpoint prior to the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, environmentalists claimed that child’s nature is shaped by the lifetime experiences, called the experiment tabula rasa. (Němcová, 2011)

Finally, the book entitled “Family and Fictions” outlines the utopianism viewpoint on the child nature. To the Utopianists, children are born innocent and good, but their community and social experiences corrupt their good nature. Later, several thinkers including Jan Jack Rousseau developed this ideology on the purity of the child’s nature. For instance, on the concept of “the Natural Child”, Rousseau’s point of view is defined as: “He considered the child to be born in a state of virtue, easily corrupted

by the unwise actions of parents and educators. For Rousseau, the child needed to develop rational thought through interaction with nature.” (Gamble & Tucker, 2001, p. 5)

The approaches followed by the authors mentioned above range from Christian ethics perspective to social psychology, to Marxist enquiries into social injustice. The discussion of child related issues in literature has links with Christian ethics, social problems, and psychological issues. Therefore, the best approach to act upon and apply is to be guided by social psychology.

Equally important, when it comes to the role and the importance of children in reality or in fiction, Němcová states that children were not given any serious attention or they were not considered a separate group in the society before. Whereas only in dressing, prior to the seventeenth century, children were not socially separated from the adults. They were expected to behave and dress similar to adults. Meanwhile, in the seventeenth century, a good number of children from middle and upper class families were dressed in different children clothes that distinguished them from adults. However, this modern dressing style was only applied to the boys, while girls of upper and middle class families were dressed with mature women clothes like before. Most importantly, all the children of lower classes were dressed poorly and similarly in both genders.

Obviously, Daniela Němcová stresses the fact that the seventeenth century contributed greatly in improving children’s situations in certain aspects. Yet, Němcová acknowledges the fact the most important developments of children’s conditions can be attributed to eighteenth century in England. This advancement can be spotted only on social and literary arenas. Socially, the family bond between children and their parents started to get strong. For example, for the first time in history, children began to call their parents mom and dad instead of master. Additionally, mothers in upper and middle class families started to treat their children more affectionately. While the lower class families barely gave any warm attention to their children. This was most probably due to their miserable living conditions. Whereas literarily, only with few exceptions for the purpose of a motif, children were not given any specific role or any unique representation in English literature prior to eighteenth century. It was only in

the eighteenth century, several writers started producing literary texts on a hero child. (Němcová, 2011)

When it comes to the examination of children's literature and their importance in the Victorian Era, Heba Sulaiman Mejbil discussed the image of children in literature in the introductory chapter in her thesis. In the first chapter of the work, the author discusses how the concept of childhood is portrayed in the Victorian Literature. At the start, Heba Sulaiman states that in the eighteenth century England, a huge number of children were dead and childbirth rates highly decreased, which lead to further devaluation of children. Whereas according to Heba, it was only in the nineteenth century that a child was looked at as a valuable human being with desires by the parents as well as the childhood age was separated from adulthood. She further adds that children literature in the nineteenth century was mainly a response or a reform against the socially stratified society of the era and the huge social gap between the children of lower and upper class families. The consistent efforts of the authors to ameliorate the children's living and social conditions in this era resulted in bringing about certain positive changes, including the Education Act in 1870 that validated education for every child in the society.

Another significant point of this chapter would be the author's remarks on the important role of children's literature in teaching and shaping the child's personality and thoughts. Firstly, Heba argues that children literature is supposed to be directly related to the issues and concerns of children in their society. Secondly, its main function should be either to teach a child a particular style of thinking, or addressing their problems in the society along with providing a suitable solution for them. As she states, "Authors of children's literature usually select topics that suit the interests of children. This is due to that the fact that the main purpose of children's literature is to teach the child a typical style of thinking and acting." (Suliman Mejbil, 2021, P. 1\_2)

Although the Victorian era is considered the golden age for the children literature and the general increase in its readership, Heba does not deny the dark sides of this era as well. As in this century, with the establishment of the new industrial era, a huge number of children were forced to labour for excessive hours and six days in a week.

Most of these children were from poor backgrounds and below the age of seven. Hence, the Victorian Era is often characterised hugely by its authors interests to write for the future and the wellbeing of children at that time. A great number of novels were written to address the child's issues and fight to change their vulnerable positions in society, especially Charles Dickens novels.

George Eliot (1819-1880) was one of the major Victorian novelists who focused on real social issues. "Silas Marner: the Weaver of Raveloe" (1861) is one of her works inspired by life on the countryside, a setting, in which she could work with much attention, paid to the essence of human nature and human relations; without getting too much involved with the subsiding distractions of urban citizen's daily unending troublesome issues. In "Silas Marner", George Eliot was able to explore the inner meanings of childhood and parenthood, raising her voice as a social reformer, calling for attention to be paid to parentless children. She chooses the most helpless characters as the heroes of her novelistic drama; a parentless infant girl called Eppie, and a stranger to the place, an alien weaver called Silas Marner, who lost everything he owned. It is this issue that the present paper engages with: the representation of the helpless child in "Silas Marner".

Children are an important part of daily life. Children are important members in society, but they hardly appear in English literature in any significant way before the 19th century, or the works written by William Blake (1757-1827) and William Wordsworth (1770-1850). These two authors included children in a number of their poems. Likewise, Charles Dickens (1812-1870) wrote several novels to pay attention to the painful and oppressive children in London during the Victorian age, which were novels based on his own unhappy and uncomfortable childhood. George Elliot was much different in "Silas Marner". She focused on the rural town life and paid much attention to a very little and helpless female child. In her *Women and Fiction*, Patricia Stubbs calls the Bronte sisters, Mrs. Gaskell, William Makepeace Thackeray, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot major Victorian novelists with "consciousness", "Critical insights", "forming.... on important tradition of dissent". for the reason that they, as major Victorian novelists, are known for "their refusal to accept the dishonest and misleading representation of women". (Stubbs, 1979, p. 27) Further, Eliot explored

and affected the Greyzone of children's life, unheard of in Dicken's novels. This paper concentrates on the depiction of the child in "Silas Marner". George Eliot draws a memorable picture of the little child and her elderly carer. Eliot provides the readers with the physical description of the characters involved. She goes beyond that to describe the action, the attitude, and the behaviors of the dramatis personae involved, including the inner thoughts of their minds, the reactions to their relationships, and the overall significance of the message Eliot communicated.

## **2. Discussion and Analysis**

### **2.1 Education in "Silas Marner"**

The conditions for education in England developed belatedly in comparison with most of the Western European Countries. It is significant to note that the education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century England was a highly defective education. The poor people did not receive any formal education. The only schooling they were provided was the Sunday gatherings in church. Moreover, getting a proper education was mostly for the aristocratic people. The general conditions for the schooling of the impoverished children at that time were not ideal since they barely received any education. It was not until 1880 that education became compulsory for the children to get enrolled in primary school at the age of five. It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that the children could proceed their education beyond the primary schools.

Additionally, the education of children in the Victorian era differed greatly between the children of rich and poor families. As for the children of the wealthy families, schooling was among the most significant matters that took the interest of their parents. They were getting the best education at that time, which comprised varied genres including literature, music and history. Most often boys were home-schooled with a private tutor until the age of ten. They would later be enrolled in private schools by their parents. The girls in those wealthy families continued their education at home. The children of lower classes had been workers in factories without getting any education. (Zinkina, Korotayev, & Andreev, 2016)

Therefore, one can argue that even in the early twentieth century, England could not provide a proper educational environment. According to Eric J. Hobsbawm and Chris

Wrigley: “In 1897 less than seven percent of the grammar-school pupils came from the working class. The British therefore entered the twentieth century and the age of modern science and technology as a spectacularly ill-educated people.” (Hobsbawm & Wrigley, 1999, p. 147). Adding to that, Professor George P. Landow stated this phenomenon in his article entitled *A Critical View of British Public Schools*. Landow argues that the English society was incapable of realising how important the science and technology were due to paying a little attention to the value of schooling. Therefore, the public education did not help the improvement of literature and art in general at the Victorian Era. Since the most prominent English writers including George Eliot got their education at home in the Victorian Era. (Landow, 2019)

Similarly, it can be seen in the novel that general schooling circumstances in the nineteenth century can be largely reflected in Eliot’s child protagonist, Eppie Marner. Since the formal education was flawed and improper, family education came as a replacement. Eppie was home-schooled and she was able to read and write from the early age. Eppie is a purely passionate and wise character as the novel shows it in the actions. The lifelong incidents and her family companionship helped in giving her the wisdom and the experience. Significantly, Rita S. Bubis, in her research project on the figure of the child, stated that both Silas Marner and Dolly take a purely humble care of Eppie. However, their opinions might have differed while educating Eppie and correcting her mischievous behaviours. Dolly preferred punishing Eppie sometimes, Silas tended to encourage and tolerate with Eppie alongside giving her his best wisdom; believing that these incidents would help her journey of self-discovery and maturity. (Bubis, 1983) As Silas states: “If she makes me a bit o’ trouble, I can bear it. And she’s got no tricks but what she’ll grow out of” (Eliot, 2016, p. 134)

Another key point regarding the education status in the nineteenth century could be that the best writers of the era indeed got educated at home. They were not enrolled in any public schools or general formal education. The most important authors, include Harrison Ainsworth, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Elizabeth and Robert Browning, Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Rudyard Kipling, George Macdonald, John Stuart Mill, John Henry Cardinal Newman, Walter Pater, and John Ruskin, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and Oscar Wilde. (Landow, 2019)



Finally, as there is no obvious reference from the novel to the school education of the protagonist Child Eppie, one can presume from the nineteenth century education status that she got her education at home from her family; and more specific from her beloved father Silas Marner. His hard life and social experiences had facilitated in providing Eppie a proper education and skills.

## **2.2 The Family Life in “Silas Marner”**

Eppie is the only child in her family and she lives with her foster father Silas Marner since she was only two years old. Fate drove her to him after the death of her drug-addicted mother Molly in a snow accident. She does not have any siblings. Her biological father “Godfrey Cass” refuses to take care of her even after he finds her with Silas after the incident. Silas found the child at a miserable point in his life when all his piled up gold had been stolen from him. As we can see from the incidents of the novel, the moment Silas finds the two years old Eppie in her dead mother’s arms at his cottage doorstep, he thinks as if his long awaited gold were restored to him. Moreover, Eppie as a child in this novel, can be seen as George Eliot’s representation of “the meaning and implication for a woman of a marriage which is seriously wrong, and where there is no possibility of escape or even temporary comfort in the support of friends or any wider community.” (Stubbs, 1979, p. 27) Eppie’s mother went through a totally wrong marriage because of her substance addiction. The consequences of this failed marriage are social as well as psychological, as will be clear from the events narrated in the novel.

In addition, after finding Eppie at the New Year’s Eve, when Silas seeks out help from a doctor for the dead woman, he is being asked to give up on Eppie. The reader immediately feels a fatherly bond in his response as he says, “No-no-I can’t part with it, I can’t let it go,” said Silas, abruptly. “It’s come to me- I’ve the right to keep it” (Eliot, 2016, P. 216) During Eppie’s childhood, she made a purely strong connection with her foster father. As the days passed, his love for her increased and she became the most important person he knew in the world. As Eliot calls it ‘The tender and peculiar love with which Silas had reared her in almost inseparable companionship with himself...’(Eliot, 2016, p. 149)



Meantime, she loved him as much as he loved her. She turned him from an old, lonely, isolated man to a tremendously happy man. As Silas speaks of the tremendous impact, she had on his life “Eh my precious child, the blessing was mine. If you haven’t been sent to save me, I should ha’ gone to the grave in my misery” (Eliot, 2016) Nevertheless, Eppie’s biological parents are Godfrey Cass and Molly Farren. As she grew up, her real father appears and makes a claim to have her back. Silas agrees to let Eppie decide for herself whether she wants to stay with him or abandon her carer for her biological father. Silas says, “I’ll say no more. Let it be as you will. Speak to the child. I’ll hinder nothing.” (Eliot, 2016, P. 174)

Conversely, Eppie chooses to stay with Silas Marner and she is actually happy in her life with a man whom she called father for her entire life. Eppie refuses to leave her foster parent Silas whom she adores and respects unconditionally. She refuses their claim by saying, “We’ve been used to be happy together every day, and I can’t think o’ no happiness without him.” (Eliot, 2016, P. 206) Moreover, George Eliot was able to remember that Victorian fiction had to be realistic. In *Women and Fiction*, Patricia Stubbs states “But George Eliot’s moral philosophy, more especially her ultimate belief in the complete moral autonomy of the individual and her commitment to the notion of duty, conflicts, with her radical understanding of the frustrations which society imposes on its female members. It leads, among other things, to a series inability to extend her sympathy to women who are not able to meet the heavy demands of her moral imperatives,” (Stubbs, 1979, p. 34) This quotation proves to us that George Eliot equally addresses the social aspect with the psychological aspect. Even though she is supposed to take side with women in her fiction, Eliot is unable to sympathize with Eppie’s biological parents.

The American historian Nancy Henry describes Eppie’s decision as faithful and pure by claiming “she proves pure and devoted to her father, growing up to fall in love with a local boy and remaining un-tempted by the advantages that her biological Father Godfrey offers her if she will only live with him and his wife.” (Henry, 2015, p. 129)

As it is observed from the novel, Eppie had lived an immensely happy family life. She was the only child in her family who was cared for and loved unconditionally. Her decision to stay with her father Silas had the greatest impact on changing Silas and

his life for the better and forever. As Silas expresses his enormous joy and satisfaction with Eppie's decision and says, "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; and, now she says she'll never leave me, I think I shall trusten till I die." (Eliot, 2016, P.182)

Barbara Prentis in her book *The Bronte sisters and George Eliot* explains this purpose. She states that the whole message of the figure of the child by Eliot is portrayed in the character of Eppie Cass. In her choice to stay with Silas and to reject the luxury and pleasure of life as the squire's daughter, Eppie asserts her faithfulness to the humble world that Silas provided for her. Barbara assumes that, "It is a gesture that carries her from childhood into maturity in an unbroken flight, and provides George Eliot with her perfect demonstration of 'pure, natural human relations.'" (Prentis, 1988, p. 35)

In conclusion, one can observe that the normal situation of the family life in the nineteenth century was to live with their parents. In the case of Eppie, the child is actually not living with her real parents or with both parents. The only father that Eppie has got is a good man who is not her biological father. This means that the old family ties are changing. There is a new kind of family life based on care and love rather than on biological parenthood. This new family is also a family, but different from the old one. As it can be witnessed in the novel that there is only one parent to play the role of mother and father at the same time. This parent is also genetically and gender-wise unconnected with the child. The parent is male but the baby is female. Consequently, George Eliot indicates that the new world is distinct from the bygone days. This family life of Eliot's protagonist child indicates the change in the true meaning of family and marks the beginning of traditional family disintegration.

### **2.3 Parenthood in "Silas Marner"**

In an interesting article entitled "Distant Fathers: Disjointed World of George Eliot", Jabeen and Naiyin clearly demonstrate the idea of how the concept of fatherhood is portrayed by George Eliot. Tahira Jabeen explains the role of a father in the industrial nineteenth century. She states that according to the nineteenth century morality and values, the role of a father was best determined as being the source of income,

guidance and protection to his family. According to Jabeen, Eliot had probably intended to show the juxtaposition of fatherhood among the highest and the lowest classes of families in the Victorian Era. The author made this illustration in the figure of the father in two significant characters from the novel; they are the irresponsible father Squire Cass from the highest class, and the responsible and caring father Silas Marner from the lowest cast (Jabeen & Naiyin, 2014, p. 115\_116).

On the one hand, it is evident from the novel that Mr. Squire Cass belongs to the highest class of the society as he owns a mansion and possesses a good amount of fortune from the lands and tenants he owns. He is the head of the biggest family in the Raveleo. Despite being a highly capable man financially, he is an irresponsible and a carefree father. Mr. Cass seems to care least about educating his two sons. He has two sons, Godfrey and Dunstan. Godfrey is a morally corrupt man abandoning his wife Molly Farren and giving up his newly born daughter Eppie. The latter is the younger son of Mr Cass and he is a dishonest man with a corrupt reputation, who continuously threatens his only brother Godfrey for exposing his secret marriage and therefore manipulates him as much as he can. Therefore, according to the Victorian standards of fatherhood, Mr. Cass proves to be a careless father who cares least about guiding and protecting his children. Despite being in the highest position of Raveleo community, he is more of a provider than a caring father or a responsible parent.

On the other hand, Silas Marner belongs to the lowest cast of his society, dwelling in a plain cottage and living on his weaving job. As we can see from the novel, he is demonstrated as a responsible and caring father. Although Silas was not the biological father of Eppie, he devoted his all life for educating and raising his child Eppie with affection and protection. Eliot acknowledges Silas as the best father in Raveloe community as she states “a father very close to her, who loved her better than any real fathers in the village seemed to love their daughters” (Eliot, 2016, 147)

Thus, one can argue that the juxtaposition of various parental images side by side, from the highest to the lowest in the Raveloe community represents Eliot’s conception on the nineteenth century class moralities; in relation to the status of families. According to Marianne Novy in her elaborated essay *Imagining Adoption: Essays on Literature and Culture*, “Eliot uses adoption in part to protest the class

divide in England”. Moreover, Novy emphasized particularly the importance of adoption in Eliot’s novels. As adoption was not legally permissible by government of English society at that time, this form of literature was striking and unfamiliar for the Victorian readers. Further, despite being Eppie’s foster parent, Silas is portrayed by Eliot as the perfect father in the novel to resist the controversies and prejudices of the English people against adoption. Therefore, Marianne argued that along with criticizing the family images among different classes of England society, the novel also serves as a social commentary on the true definition of natural familial relationships; by the representation of Silas as the most devoted and patient father. As in a descriptive letter to the novel publisher, Eliot writes, “the remedial influences of pure, natural human relations”. (Novy, 2011, p. 53\_55) Further, it can be observed from the novel that Eliot demonstrated more than one case of parenthood and it is there purposefully and intentionally by the author. As stated above, the most significant parents are Mr. Squire Cass, the father of Godfrey and Dunstan, and Silas Marner the father the only parent to Eppie. Another example of a good parent is probably Dolly Winthrop, the mother of Aaron. Although she is uneducated and poor, she is classified as the most compassionate and the wisest woman character in the novel. She plays the perfect mother in the tale. Dolly continuously gives Silas instructions regarding parenthood and how to deal with Eppie’s sensitive behaviours in her early age. For instance, Dolly’s role was described by *The Saturday Review* as:

“The job’s comforter is succeeded by a real comforter\_ by a motherly, patient, humble-minded woman. Dolly Winthrop, with her quaint kindness, her simple piety, and her good sense, is as touching and at the same time as amusing a character as George Eliot has drawn.” (Parker and Son, 1871, P. 370)

Equally significant parents in the novel are probably Godfrey Cass and Nancy Lammeter. Godfrey is sometimes marked out as a contrasting father to Silas. He is a hesitant and fluctuating character who passes out the chance to raise his only child

when he realises that his wife has just passed away. After having a long childless marriage with Nancy, he seeks reuniting with Eppie when sixteen years have passed on the day that Silas had found her. He eventually fails having her back since Eppie cherishes her father Silas more than anything else in the world. She refuses Godfrey's request and states in the presence of her biological father:

“...And he says he'd nobody in the world till I was sent to him, and he'd have nothing when I was gone. And he's took care of me and loved me from the first, and I'll cleave to him as long as he lives, and nobody shall ever come between him and me.” (Eliot, 2016, p. 206)

The last parent to be discussed is Mr Lammeter, the father of Nancy and Priscilla. Similar to Godfrey Cass and Mr. Squire Cass, Mr. Lammeter is a wealthy and well to do man, yet he is a morally boastful and uncompromising person. Hence, one can observe from the novel that since Eliot demonstrated more than one case of parenthood in different social classes in the novel, Silas Marner is arguably presented in contrast to or in combination with the other parents. She is making a balance by giving the reader more than one parent from both genders and opposing classes. Finally, it can be argued that if the parents' income is good and their livelihood is financially satisfactory, the parenthood might be careless and defective. When there is a struggling father like Silas, the result will most likely be reliable children. As the labourer who really works hard to look after his child would be Dolly looking after Aaron and Silas Marner looking after Eppie. Similar to Mr. Squire Cass, Mr. Lammeter is the most important man in the town; he raised his two sons in a faulty and unreliable manner.

#### **2.4 Livelihood**

The nineteenth century witnessed a remarkable technological development that led to the improvement of its economic status. The progress in technology included engineering prowess, especially in communications and transportation. It had made Great Britain the leading industrial power and trading nation in the world at the time. Additionally, the economic status of Britain during the nineteenth century was

arguably one of the most visible and distinct features in the history of civilization (Wengenroth, 2000, P. 1).

As during the Victorian Era, England witnessed a remarkable increase in manufacturing production through the implementation of machinery, the improvement of old technical processes and the invention of new ones; alongside the new means of transportation and communication. Nonetheless, housing and living conditions for working classes in the city and the countryside remained highly disagreeable at that age. Since Britain in the nineteenth century experienced a massive increase in population accompanied by rapid urbanization spurred by the Industrial Revolution. (práce, 2016) Kellow Chesney described the living conditions as: “Hideous slums, some of them acres wide, some no more than crannies of obscure misery, Make up a substantial part of the metropolis ... In big, once handsome houses, thirty or more People of all ages may inhabit a single room,” (Kellow Chesney, 1970, p. 4)

Relatively, it can be observed from the novel that Silas Marner teaches its readers that happiness cannot be only achieved through wealth and materialism. Family ties and values are way more important to a person. Meanwhile, Silas Marner’s behaviors indicate the fact that he is a good and caring person. Instead of being a greedy wealthy man, he chooses to care for his family and friends. Unlike Godfrey Cass, Silas also has a distinct perspective for life; he is satisfied by love and tenderness of his surroundings. Additionally, Silas Marner lives in an impoverished housing situation due to being in a lower social cast. He lost all his money in a robbery. He lives on his weaving job in a cottage. Yet, Silas has an intimate relationship with his family and friends, and he is not depressed by being poor or being materialistic. He thinks of Eppie as the most valuable being in the world. Silas believes that she is the true fortune in his life. Even when his gold was recently robbed from him by Dunstan, the event shattered his world. Since as a result of the robbery, he lost his faith in religion and he abandoned the city immediately. However, the moment he found Eppie on his doorstep later, he thought it was God’s compensation for him. George Eliot describes Silas’s thoughts at that moment as:

“thought and feeling were so confused within him, that if he had tried to give them utterance, he could have only said that the child was come instead of the gold – that the gold had turned into the child” (Eliot, 2016, P.120) At the same time, although Eppie had grown up in a weaver’s cottage and with the working class people, she was truly satisfied and happy with her life. She adored her father Silas more than anything else in the world. As Eliot states: “There was love between him and the child that blent them into one, and there was love between the child and the world.” (Eliot, 2016, P.195)

This quote clearly demonstrates the affectionate relationship between Eppie and Silas Marner, along with stating the fact that she truly loved the world she was living in. Adding to that, there is a significant event in the novel, which can genuinely prove Eppie’s satisfaction with her life. The incident is when Eppie’s biological father Godfrey Cass, who is from a wealthy background asks Eppie to depart from Silas and live with him. He tries to persuade Eppie by offering her a luxurious life and living the rest of her life like an upper class woman. She directly refuses his offer by saying:

“I can’t think o’ no other home. I wasn’t brought up to be a lady, and I can’t turn my mind to it. I like the working-folks, and their victuals, and their ways. And,” she ended passionately, while the tears fell, “I’m promised to marry a working-man, as’ll live with father, and help me to take care of him.” (Eliot, 2016, P. 177)

Eppie affirms that although she had lived with poor people, she is satisfied and used to their customs. For Eppie, taking care of her foster father is her biggest responsibility in life. Therefore, she had promised to marry a working person to carry out this duty. Equally important, one cannot forget Silas’s attitude when he was perhaps about to forsake his most valuable treasure in life. Although he was numb and collapsed inside, he was ready to give up on Eppie for the sake of her future wellbeing. Even when Eppie had made her decision to stay with him, Silas asked her to think twice because she will be living the rest of her life with the working class people. Silas states:

“But you must make sure, Eppie,” said Silas, in a low voice—“you must make sure as you won’t ever be sorry, because you’ve made your choice



to stay among poor folks, and with poor clothes and things, when you might ha' had everything o' the best." (Eliot, 2016, P. 178)

Finally, the reader can learn from these working class characters that happiness and wellbeing are not class based. Emotions and pure family ties can provide the ultimate comfort in life to a person. The actions and attitudes of these working class people indicated that they have no valuable properties; they take pride in their warm and affectionate relationships. This also demonstrates that these peasants have the capability to appreciate and celebrate what they have, whereas the wealthy upper cast people have no limits for their ceaseless demands.

### **2.5 Psychological issues in "Silas Marner"**

It is important to note from the actions of the novel, Eppie is a happy girl who has no psychological diseases. This means that George Eliot believes that it does not matter even if you miss your biological father since you are raised in the right environment. It is of no significance whether your mother and father are your biological blood ties or otherwise. The proof is that the girl has no psychological issues, no complexities and no psychological diseases. Meantime, Eppie had good self-confidence and she is immensely psychologically happy that she did not find it important to go back to her biological parents at all.

Moreover, this psychological health meant that she is also behaviourally acceptable. Although this is not narrated in the novel, it is illuminated by the actions of the story where the village people respected Eppie and realised that there is nothing wrong with her family upbringing. Another focal point is that even though her father was adoptive father, he was her mom and dad at the same time. Psychologically, he did a truly great job that he did not make his adopted daughter as if she missed or lacked anything really. Since money was not important for that matter, he gave her security, love and respect. In addition, these elements are truly significant for the psychologically healthy people; social acceptance and acceptability.

To illustrate more, Marianne Novy who was a professor of English literature in Pittsburgh University and adoptee herself, has a popular book entitled *Reading Adoption: Family and Difference in Fiction and Drama*. She emphasized particularly

the nature and purposes of adoption in literature. Novy stated that the existence of a good number of novels thematising adoption in the Victorian Era is a distinctive feature to that age since there was no legal statement or official law from the government legitimating adopting children at that time. Secondly, neither the authors who wrote about adoptive parents were adopted in their real life, nor the readers who read such novels. Therefore, reading and dealing with adoption was greatly an imaginative and unrealistic phenomenon (Novy, 2005). Following that, another significant aspect that Novy concentrated on was the autobiographical elements in *Silas Marner* in relation to adoption. The author explains that writing this masterpiece about an adopted child being genuinely adored by her non-biological father sprang from Eliot's own experience as a mother to her stepson Charles. As when Eliot started her relationship with G.H. Lewis out of wedlock, Lewis's oldest son Charles wrote her a letter addressing her as "mother". At that time, Eliot was forty years old similar age to Silas when he embraced Eppie. Novy adds that Eliot was truly a compassionate and devoted mother who sacrificed her willingness to live in country for the sake of her stepson who preferred to live in a town near his workplace. Eliot's real life experiences and her tendency to parent her three stepsons definitely pushed her to quit working on her current novel *Romola* and started writing *Silas Marner*. Rosemarie Bodenheimer acknowledges this fact and says:

"Her focus on children brought up by substitute parents, and her privileging of fostering over kinship, was a dominant feature of her imagination from 1860 to the end of her career; the experience of her stepsons gave her the authority for those imagined lives." (Novy, 2005, p. 124)

It is also essential to acknowledge the outstanding study about adoption conducted on an international scale carried out by Gretchen Miller Wrobel and Elsbeth Neil. The book is entitled *International Advances in Adoption Research for Practice*. Although the study content is truly rich and it is collected in a cross-cultural and documental method, the researcher aims to focus on the psychological aspect of the adoptees and the way adoption was portrayed in nineteenth century literature. According to the two authors Wrobel and Neil, a number of factors contribute to the positivity of adoption and the psychological well-being of the adopted children. The factors

include the sense of being appreciated and loved at early age by parents, the psychological health that was provided under the care of the foster parents and the unforgettable childhood memories outweigh the thoughts about biological roots or blood parents or relatives. Further, the two authors outline other positive features that carry more significance and consideration to the adoptees. As they state:

“But in terms of thinking about home and safety, love and understanding, comfort and familiarity, the social ties of early, sensitive caregiving, at least from the perspective of the adopted child, appear to outbid those of biology.” (Wrobel & Neil, 2009, p. 11)

The last striking point is to note that George Eliot frequently repeated the discussed idea here and there in additional stories. The act of writing about adopted children or foster parents became one of the predominant features of nineteenth century fiction themes. Although none of those writers were adoptees, they encouraged and gracefully drew an affectionate bond between non-biological family members and portrayed the real blood ties as harsh and irresponsible. Further, a significant comparison of this idea would be by the incidents of *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. It is when Pip complaining that his elder sister beat him, when she said that she raised them by the hand, he always thought that she would beat him with her hand. Instead, pip loved Gargery, who was his brother in law and not biologically related to him at all. Joe Gargery was far better than Pip’s elder sister was. Pip lost both parents; they died earlier in the plague.

Finally, the discussion leads to the proof that there was a growing interest in the change of traditional parenthood in the British society in the nineteenth century. Since by tradition, mothers and fathers ought to have biological blood ties to the child. George Eliot demonstrates that one can be a truly good parent even though they are not biologically connected to the child.

## **2.6 Maturity**

Obviously, giving a universally accepted definition to the concept of maturity would be relatively difficult as there is not any definite and applicable age for any individual to become a mature so far. Although research and scientists may vary in their

determination of maturity standards, there are a number of common characteristics that all may share. Therefore, before analysing the maturity of Eppie, it would be best to shed light on the concept of maturity and how it was defined or analysed by scholars.

First, maturity is explained by Hammad Ansari as taking rational decisions and seeing the advantages and disadvantages of everything ahead of you. Further, he states that despite the fact that science determined that at the age of twenty-five, the individual's mind grows properly, which he calls the process of "brain development", he confirms that this brain development is not as the same as maturity. He claims that there are no globally accepted codes for gaining maturity, since life experiences and additional knowledge would continue to affect shaping the personality and the decision-making process among the individuals. Ansari did not specify any particular age where a person reaches the maturity level but purely identifies it as subjective; he determined a couple of traits that affect the shaping of a mature personality. He states, "Maturity is subjective, and it depends on many things like your friend circle, social environment, at what age you were burdened by responsibilities. " (Ansari, 2021)

On the other hand, there are scholars who promoted a criterion for an individual to reach the maturity level. As revealed by Kantamneni Radhakrishnamurthy in his book *Success 2020*, in which he established the success agenda and professionally examined the fundamental stages of success. Further, Radhakrishnamurthy scientifically explained that people reach the maturity level when they complete five maturity types in their lives including intellectual, chronological, emotional, philosophical, social and physical maturity. He defined each of the six characteristics, there are a number of points he particularly emphasized on for an individual to become a mature person. According to the author, the mature people should be intellectual and patient. They ought to be decision-makers and socially acceptable individuals. A mature person takes rational decisions without being affected by any kind of emotions. Meanwhile, the philosophical maturity as expressed by Radhakrishnamurthy is best clarified as certain philosophical values including the

friends circle, family, religious beliefs, and the way of living should be in accounting with one's society standards (Kantamneni Radhakrishnamurthy, 2013, p. 4).

As opinions presented in this respect vary, one can understand that they tend to share certain characteristics for explaining maturity including, being socially acceptable, and taking independent decisions without considering any emotional influences, along with being rational and harmless towards her surroundings. Correspondingly, according to *A Dictionary of Psychology* by James Drever, maturation is "in general biology, the attainment of maturity, or the completion of growth; in psychology, rather the process of growth and development itself, as contrasted with the learning process." (Drever, 1952, p. 162) In view of that, considering the events of the novel and taking into account the personality traits of Eppie, the readers can comprehend that Eliot drew a truly mature personality to Eppie. Moreover, it can be understood from the text that the maturity in Eliot's masterpiece refers to that Eliot wants to tell us that the girl Eppie, who was raised by her adoptive father was a wise, an intelligent and a lovable person socially and around the place she was living. Further, she did not commit anything reckless or thoughtless; had she behaved in neither a rash nor irresponsible manner. Maturity is the eventually demonstrated socially and psychologically. It has very little to do with chronological time or long years of age. Dunstan is immature even though he is a man, a husband, and a father. Eppie is a little child but seems to be more mature than her biological family taken altogether. Moreover, George Eliot was able to handle social and psychological issues equally well in her books. Eppie's family life did not meet the demands of the social life of the nuclear Victorian families, but she was psychologically happy in her new family life. In this regard, Patricia Stubbs states "George Eliot's novels [tend] towards a workable compromise between the characters and their world, a compromise which is always at the expense of the individual, not the society or the group." (Stubbs, 1979, p. 36) Despite being adopted by an adoptive father who was not her biological parents, her actions and the incidents of the novels would further confirm Eppie's maturity. Therefore, it can be argued that George Eliot was trying to fight a battle against the controversies of her age and contradict the conservative Victorian family system. Eliot wanted to prove that it does not matter whether your parents are biologically

connected to you or they are foster, they can raise up a psychologically healthy child and grow her into being a mature personality. Accordingly, socially acceptable Silas Marner represents the image of how a mature father should look like, as he took the loss of all his money and the loss of his best friend stoically and he did not react violently. Despite being heartbroken and desperate, Silas took one of the wisest decisions by accepting what happened and he did not rebel against the circumstances that occurred.

The reasonable definition to maturity is acting in a sensible and acceptable manner. It is a question of making balance and how many people accept or perceive you as a wise and peaceful person. At the same time, Silas did not raise his adopted daughter to go against or react violently to phenomena which they cannot change in life. This definitely reflects her maturity. Eppie is an intelligent, an admirable and a good decision maker. For instance, when her biological father Godfrey Cass suddenly appears and asks her to abandon the home of the poor weaver and decide to live the rest of her life like a lady. Eppie does not react thoughtlessly or in a rash manner. At this point, although Silas's world was about to shatter in thinking about what if his precious daughter is separated from him, he chose to give his daughter the complete freedom to decide about the coming stages of her life. At last, regardless of any emotions towards her biological father, she decided to refuse Godfrey's offer and stay with the one whom she had been calling father her entire life.

Another essential criterion for maturity might be the socio-psychological definition of maturity. The sociological and psychological standard for maturity is the ratio between how many people accept that person and how many people reject that person, along with being responsible and socially tolerable. Neither Eppie, nor her foster father turn out to be irresponsible, harmful or unacceptable by the Ravaloe community. Therefore, according to the socio-psychological criteria, neither Eppie nor her father are castaways by their community. On the contrary, the hierarchs in the novel make felonies and create trouble to their surroundings and their society. They break the law in one way or the other. Therefore, we can understand from the incidents and the characters of the novel that George Eliot regarded maturity as an independent individual trait and not as a class-oriented subject.

As it has been observed, George Eliot was different from the rest of the nineteenth century writers. The difference is that she wanted to change the reality and the environment or the status quo. Relatedly, one of the big initiatives was to focus on the human bond and not the biological bond. This novel shows that George Eliot tells us that it is not sufficient for you to be a parent simply because you have blood ties to the child, it is much deeper than that. As illustrated in the prior sections, Eppie is well aware that Silas Marner is not her biological father. Also, Silas knows that she is not his biological daughter. Yet, Silas plays the role of both parents to Eppie despite the fact that he is not even from the same village where Eppie lived. He came from another place and he is unrelated to the hero child in every way. Therefore, one of the biggest conclusions might be that George Eliot in her way; wanted to change the old system, which was a child should be biologically related to the parent and from their parent's own kith and kin. In the novel, Eppie is not only unrelated biologically to her father, also later in her maturity, she rejects to live with her biological father. That is indeed, one of the revolutionary changes Eliot claimed to make in the Victorian era.

Last and not least, if we link the condition of Eppie and Silas Marner to Eliot's real life, Silas Marner was forty years old when he adopted Eppie. A similar age to Elliot herself when she started fostering her stepson Charles. Similarly, when Silas found the little child in front of his cottage door in his forty years age, it was the similar year to Eliot when Charles called her mother for the first time. (Novy, 2011, p. 36) Eliot loved Lewis's three children like her own children and she was not their biological mother. It is noteworthy to compare Eliot's life to the incidents of the novel. Elliot was performing the role of the Foster mother to the children of the man whom she lived with as a partner. They did not get married technically because his wife was still alive. The man was called Dr. Lewis and he was separate from his lawful wife. Instead, Dr Lewis and George Eliot decided to live with each other out of wedlock and they went against the strict Victorian marriage controversies.

Moreover, here is the evolutionary change. Another interesting fact about George Eliot might be that she did not suggest anything in her fiction that she did not practise in her real life. Therefore, this could be the reason that George Eliot was able to make



the novel story look genuinely convincing to the readers. Furthermore, Eliot was rebelling against the old system and the traditional way of thinking in the nineteenth century society; and that is exactly what she was doing in her literature. At last, she did not pause the novel in the childhood age. She let the readers see the child is growing up to maturity. Eliot presented the child to the readers when she was really a child at only two years of age. Whereas by the end, the reader can see the child grow into a mature lady and gets married. She is psychologically healthy and happy with her family, which is a dynamic movement in the text and a good example of maturity. It could be concluded that maturity goes beyond age. Eppie is a child, but she is more mature than her biological parents and grandparents.

### **3. Conclusion**

In conclusion, George Eliot's interest in the child is not an isolated phenomenon from what was in practice by the major novelists in the nineteenth century who also included children in their works. George Eliot was different because her focus was on the female child, and she also avoided the melodramatic presentation of the child in "Silas Marner". The case of Eppie in other novelist's hands could have changed into a sentimental melodramatic narrative, but George Eliot makes sure that her presentation may encourage the reading public to think away from their safety zone. The image of the child presented in this book, is in a real sense a microcosm of the children's world in the nineteenth century without looking at the dark-side. George Eliot is in no need to provoke into anxiety the reading public. It is enough to show that this girl named Eppie is parentless. It is enough that by the mere chance she was saved from getting lost. So, it is in a sense, a microcosm of the children's world in the nineteenth century. George Eliot's role is simply to call people's attention to the vulnerable children. Certainly, it is novels like "Silas Marner" which must have helped to form the public opinion regarding the laws, the rules and the regulations concerning children. Finally, Eliot in this novel proves herself to be a committed and a responsible writer.

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## ویناکردنی جۆرج ئیلیۆت بۆ مندال له "سیلاس مارنەر" (1861)

پوخته:

جۆرج ئیلیۆت (1819-1880) رۆمانووسێکی گه‌وره‌ی سه‌رده‌می فیکتۆریا بوو که بایه‌خی به کیشه‌ کۆمه‌لایه‌تیه‌ گرنه‌گه‌کان داوه. له "سیلاس مارنەر: وه‌یفه‌ر وۆف راقیلۆ" (1861)، ئەو باس له کیشه‌ی منداله‌ بێ دایک و بێ باوکه‌کان ده‌کات، که له وینه‌ی ئیبی کچی به‌خپۆکراوی سیلاس مارنەر به‌رجه‌سته‌ بووه، به‌لام له راستیدا کچه‌ بایۆلۆجیه‌که‌ی مۆلی فارینه‌ که به‌ نه‌ینی هاوسه‌رگیری له‌گه‌ڵ گۆدفری کاس کردوووه. ئەم رۆمانه‌ زیاتر له شانزه‌ ساڵ له ژیا‌نی ئیبیدا ده‌گیرێته‌وه و وا له کتیبه‌که‌ ده‌کات که وه‌ک وینه‌یه‌کی وردی ژیا‌نی مندالێک ده‌رکه‌وێت. ئەم لیکۆلینه‌وه‌یه‌ بیروبو‌چوونی جۆرج ئیلیۆت بۆ مندال رۆون ده‌کاته‌وه له‌م رۆانگه‌یا‌نه‌وه‌: په‌روه‌رده، ژیا‌نی خیزان، دایک و باوکا‌به‌تی، بزێوی، کیشه‌ ده‌روونیه‌کان و بێگه‌یشتن له‌ رێگه‌ی تیۆری سایکۆلۆژی کۆمه‌لایه‌تی سیگمۆند فروید.

له گه ل ئه وهش، ئه م تووژينه وهيه بو شيكرده وهى شيوازى نيشاندانى مندا ل ئه نجام دراوه له لايهن ئيلوت وه بو سه لماندى ئه وهى كه رومانووسىكى خو ته رختكه ر بوه كه هه ولى داوه نه ك ته نها بو دلخوشكردى خوينه ره كان به لكو بو ئاراسته كردن و پينووينى كردنيان. جورج ئيليو ت به شيوازى خو داواى پاراستنى مندا له كانى كرد. سه ره راي ئه وه موو ده سه لاته روو كه شى و شكودارييهى به ريتانيا له ناخه وه ولا تيكي لاواز بوو چونكه مندا ل له لايهن رژيمي به ريتانيا وه بن به رگرى بوو و بن هيز بوو. له كو تايدا، ئه م تووژينه وهيه قوول ده بيته وه له ژيانى كو مه لا يه تى و خيزانى ئيبى كه به خيو اكراره و په روه ده كراوه له لايهن باوكى سيلاس مارنر وه، له گه ل ييشكه شكردى تابلويه كى واقيعيانه ي ژيانى مندا لى كچ له سه رده مى فيكتوريا له لايهن ئيليو ته وه.

### تمثيل جورج إليوت للطفل في "سيلاس مارنر" (1861)

#### الملخص:

كانت جورج إليوت (1819-1880) روائية فيكتوريا عظيمة اهتمت بالقضايا الاجتماعية المهمة. في "سيلاس مارنر: ويفر رافيلو" (1861)، تتناول مشكلة الأطفال الذين لا آباء لهم، والتي تجسد في تصوير إيبى، وهي ابنة سيلاس مارنر بالتبني، ولكنها في الواقع الابنة البيولوجية لمولي فارين، المتزوجة سرا من جودفري كاس. تتبع الرواية أكثر من ستة عشر عاما من حياة إيبى، مما يجعل الكتاب يبدو وكأنه تصوير مفصل لصورة الطفل. سيحلل هذا البحث تمثيل جورج إليوت للطفل من وجهات النظر هذه: التعليم، والحياة الأسرية، والأبوة، وسبل العيش، والقضايا النفسية، والنضج من خلال نظرية علم النفس الاجتماعي لسيغموند فرويد. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تم إجراء هذا البحث لاستكشاف الطريقة التي مثلت بها إليوت الطفلة، ولإثبات أنها كانت روائية ملتزمة سعت إلى توجيه جمهور القراءة وليس فقط للترفيههم. بطريقتها الخاصة، طالبت جورج إليوت بحماية الأطفال. على الرغم من كل القوة السطحية وأمجاد بريطانيا، فقد كانت دولة ضعيفة من الداخل لأن الطفل كان بلا حماية من قبل النظام البريطاني. أخيرا، يتعمق هذا البحث في الحياة الاجتماعية والعائلية ل إيبى التي نشأت على يد والدها بالتبني السيد سيلاس مارنر، إلى جانب تقديم صورة واقعية للطفلة الأنثى في العصر الفيكتوري من قبل جورج إليوت.