http://dergikaradeniz.com
KARADENİZ Uluslararası Bilimsel Dergi

Yıl / Year / Год: 2024 Received: Apr 24, 2024
Sayı / Issue / Номер: 62 Accepted: May 25, 2024

Research Article

BETTING, SELF-TRANSFORMATION AND SINFUL RESPECTABILITY: PARADOXICAL RELIGIOUSNESS IN *SILAS MARNER*

BAHİS, KİŞİSEL DÖNÜŞÜM VE GÜNAHKÂR SAYGINLIK: *SİLAS MARNER* ROMANINDA PARADOKSAL DİNDARLIK

СТАВКИ, САМО-ПРЕОБРАЖЕНИЕ И ГРЕХОВНАЯ РЕСПЕКТАБЕЛЬНОСТЬ: ПАРАДОКСАЛЬНАЯ РЕЛИГИОЗНОСТЬ В "САЙЛАСЕ МАРНЕРЕ"

Ömer ÖĞÜNÇ*

ABSTRACT

One of the leading authors of the Victorian era with her important novels well known for realistic depictions of the nineteenth-century English society and providing an insight into the psychology of her characters, George Eliot (1819-1880) focuses on social arena in the early decades of the era with *Silas Marner* (1861) that juxtaposes a lower-class protagonist with middle class norms and represents a highly controversial account of religious and social interaction. Eliot's *Silas Marner* is preceded by *Adam Bede* (1860) and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), both of which are masterpieces for Victorian novel, and it is one of the lesser works due to its popularity back in the day. However, the novel invites a critical analysis due to the representation of the dynamics between religious faith and devotion to ethics resulting from the infamous decision and the fate that befalls on the protagonist Silas. *Silas Marner* marks a controversial point in the understanding of Victorian religiousness due to the protagonist's association of faith with the result of his betting. Therefore, the novel is analysed as an account of paradoxical middle-class values based on the dichotomy between the highly promoted religious understanding and the infamous fate of Silas following his adherence to social and religious teachings. Through social criticism, the aim of this study is to demonstrate that the notions of individuality and individual's happiness traditionally represented in Victorian fiction have been deceptive and misleading from the beginning of the industrial era.

Keywords: *Silas Marner*, betting, religiousness, respectability, incompatibility, George Eliot.

* **ORCID:** 0000-0001-6787-4106, Doç. Dr., Aksaray Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü, omer_ogunc@hotmail.com

Kaynak Gösterim / Citation / Цитата: Öğünç, Ö. (2024). BETTING, SELF-TRANSFORMATION AND SINFUL RESPECTABILITY: PARADOXICAL RELIGIOUSNESS IN SILAS MARNER. *Karadeniz Uluslararası Bilimsel Dergi* (62), 1-14. DOI: 10.17498/kdeniz.1472790

ÖZ

On dokuzuncu yüzyıl İngiliz toplumunun gerçekçi betimlemeleriyle bilinen önemli romanları sayesinde Viktorya çağının önde gelen yazarlarından birisi olan ve yarattığı karakterlerin psikolojik durumuna dair güçlü bir sezgi sunan George Eliot (1819–1880), alt sınıftan gelen bir başkahramanı orta sınıf kurallarıyla karşılaştıran ve dini ve sosyal etkileşimi konu alan oldukça tartışmalı bir anlatımı içeren *Silas Marner* (1861) başlıklı romanı ile çağın erken dönemlerindeki sosyal ortam üzerine odaklanır. Eliot'ın *Silas Marner* romanı, her ikisi de Viktorya dönemi romanının başyapıtlarından sayılan *Adam Bede* (1860) ve *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) başlıklı romanlarını takip eder ve zamanında sahip olduğu okur beğenisinden dolayı daha az önem atfedilen eserlerden birisi durumundadır. Fakat bu roman dini inanç ile ahlaki değerlere bağlılık arasındaki dinamiklerin sunumu nedeniyle eleştirel bir incelemeyi hak etmektedir. Ortaya koyulan bu tartışmada, başkahraman Silas'ın başına gelen kader ve uğursuz karar verme sürecinden kaynaklanan olaylar önem taşımaktadır. Bu çalışmanın yaklaşımına göre *Silas Marner* romanı, başkahraman dini inançlarını oynadığı bahsin sonucuyla bağdaştırdığı için Viktorya dönemi dindarlık anlayışında tartışmalı bir noktayı işaret etmektedir. Bu bakımdan roman, sosyal ve dini öğretilere bağlılığının sonucunda Silas'ın yaşadığı uğursuz kader ve epey övülen dini anlayış arasındaki karşıtlığa dayanarak orta sınıf değerlerinin mantığa aykırı görünen bir anlatısı olarak incelenmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, sosyal eleştiri yöntemini kullanarak Viktorya dönemi kurgularında geleneksel olarak sunulan bireysellik ve bireyin mutluluğu kavramlarının sanayileşme sürecinin en başından itibaren aldatıcı ve yanıltıcı olduğunu ortaya koymaktır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Silas Marner*, bahis, dindarlık, saygınlık, tezat, George Eliot.

АННОТАЦИЯ

Благодаря своим важным романам Джордж Элиот (1819–1880), известный как один из ведущих писателей викторианской эпохи, предлагавший чёткое представление о психологическом состоянии своих персонажей и описывающий реалистические взгляды английского общества девятнадцатого века, сравнивает главного героя из низшего класса с правилами слоя среднего класса, а также их религиозным и социальным взаимодействием. Он, в своем романе "Сайлас Марнер" (1861), сосредотачивается на социальную среду в ранние периоды той эпохи. В романе содержатся весьма противоречивые повествования по поводу указанной эпохи. Роман Элиота "Сайлас Марнер" следует за его же романами "Адам Беде" (1860) и "Мельница на Флоссе" (1860), которые считаются шедеврами викторианского периода. "Сайлас Марнер" является произведением, которому придавался меньшее значение из-за того, что читатель ценил его. Однако, этот роман заслуживает критического рассмотрения, поскольку в нём представлена динамика между верой и приверженностью моральным ценностям. В дискуссии придаётся значение к судьбе, постигшая главного героя Сайласа и событиям, ставшими результатом его зловещих решений. В данном исследовании показано, как в романе "Сайлас Марнер" указывается на спорный момент в понимании религиозности викторианского периода, поскольку главный герой связывает свои религиозные убеждения с исходом сделанного им лжи. В этом отношении в романе рассматривается противоречивое повествование о ценностях среднего класса, основанное на контрасте между злополучной судьбой Сайласа в результате его приверженности к социальным и религиозным учениям и высоко оценённым религиозным пониманиям. Цель данного исследования – с помощью метода социальной критики выявить, что концепции индивидуальности и индивидуального счастья, традиционно представленные в

викторианской художественной литературе, обманчивы и вводят в заблуждение с самого начала процесса индустриализации.
Ключевые слова: Сайлас Марнер, пари, благочестие, достоинство, контраст, Джордж Элиот.

Introduction

While depicting the story of a weaver from Raveloe, George Eliot brings forth a revolutionary change into the Victorian novel. Despite numerous Victorian novelists without excluding herself who deal with social, economic, industrial, religious and political problems of the era, Eliot turns back to the early nineteenth century even before the industrial revolution began to influence English society with all its due consequences. One reason for this decision may be her dissatisfaction with the structure of her earlier novel, *The Mill on the Floss*, since "she felt that the first part of the novel had carried her away and that she had not let herself room to develop the second part in such a detailed way" (Jones, 1970: 31). Due to that dissatisfaction, there was "the triumph of economy and impersonality that is *Silas Marner*" (Jones, 1970 p. 31). The novel differs from previous ones not only with the author's intention, but also with its unusual setting and juxtapositions left back in the past, ambiguous characterization created within these settings and comparisons. In fact, it can be argued that it even signifies the end of the first period in Eliot's "creative activity" (Bennett, 1966 p. 131). In a similar vein, F. R. Leavis depicts the novel as "a charming minor masterpiece" which is evidently "a moral fable" (1970 p. 60). Accordingly, this study asserts that George Eliot is actually yearning for a schedule of events very far away from the mid-Victorian period while it examines *Silas Marner* as a novel handling early Victorian culture, lifestyle, conditions as well as problems in a rural setting that is contrasted with an industrial town together with its inhabitants and their particular values representative of social classes, essentially denoting the impact of the middle class.

Starting with a thematic analysis of the novel focusing on the protagonist's dilemma resulting from his adversities, this study focuses on the highly strict religious discourse that harnesses the protagonist and reveals that *Silas Marner* represents hypocrisy through religious faith. According to this study, in the tension between the individual and Victorian society, Silas Marner is paradoxically suffering from his unquestioning submission to social norms despite promises of respectability, morality and religiousness depending on the individual's conformity to social norms which is symbolised by Silas's devout acquiescence to religious teachings. Through the perspective of social criticism, the novel's representation of the individual is questioned to illustrate that Victorian society indeed fails to grant happiness, comfort, peace and tranquillity no matter how hard the individual struggles to fulfil social expectations. Hence, this study argues that social promises of bliss to the individual on condition of willing submission have been futile right from the beginning of the industrial era.

Structural Layout

The main theme in *Silas Marner* is built upon the contrast between two distinct places that differ from each other with all their pertinent characteristics. The opening pages of the novel take the reader to the protagonist Silas Marner's new home, which is the village of Raveloe. The initial depiction of this village has nothing to do with the mid-century cities or towns experiencing the impact resulting from social effects of the industrial revolution. Squeezed in the countryside, isolated from all the influences of the

modern or industrial world, the village of Raveloe promises an unexpected and surprising plotline around the protagonist Silas and contemporary readers of Eliot.

> In the days when the spinning-wheels hummed busily in the farmhouses – and even great ladies, clothed in silk and thread-lace, had their toy spinning-wheels of polished oak – there might be seen in districts far away among the lanes, or deep in the bosom of the hills, certain pallid undersized men, who, by the side of the brawny country-folk, looked like the remnants of a disinherited race (Eliot, 1999 p. 3).

The first impression in this depiction is the timeline from the perspective of a Victorian reader. The manual spinning-wheels show that Eliot has taken the readers before the days of industrial revolution. Clearly, mass production in textile products and factories, indeed mills as they were called then, have not become an indispensable aspect of Victorian daily life, yet. Moreover, the railway also has not appeared on the stage of history. These people, remnants of a disinherited race, therefore, do not have any connection with the external world in the sense that it is meant by the contemporaries of George Eliot and current developments produced by the agenda of industrialisation. As Allen states, "so strong is the evocation of remoteness, even of something like the timelessness of fairyland that it comes as a shock to realize that the action narrated took place in a generation that ended within only a few years of the author's birth" (Allen, 1967 pp. 119-120). This remote period is guessed to be nearly "thirty years on the very eve of the Victorian Age" (Allen, 1967 p. 120). Thus, the setting of the novel ironically refers to a period "as irretrievably in the past as Shakespeare's England" (Allen, 1967 p. 120). The relevance of this statement becomes much more obvious especially when the representations in the novel are compared to those that focus on social problems in later decades of the Victorian era. Social circumstances in the early nineteenth century are as distant as the Elizabethan Age when looked back from the mid-Victorian period in which Eliot published her novels. In a critical approach, this decision to set the novel in a familiar, yet distant time, enables the representation of social issues to be set at liberty. Hence, Silas's misfortunes and moral conflicts resulting from religious interpretations can be objectively analysed in the light of freedom from present concerns.

In addition to this introduction about the socio-cultural and economic background, the novel rests on the realistic depiction of circumstances that are peculiar to the timeline represented via early Victorian norms. Such descriptions as these disclose daily reality in a fictional account for the inhabitants of the village of Raveloe and its inhabitants:

> The shepherd himself, though he had good reason to believe that the bag held nothing but flaxen thread, or else the long rolls of strong linen spun from that thread, was not quite sure that this trade of weaving, indispensable though it was, could be carried on entirely without the help of the Evil One. In that far-off time superstition clung easily round every person or thing that was at all unwonted, or even intermittent and occasional merely, like the visits of the pedlar or the knife-grinder (Eliot, 1999 p. 3).

This extract provides a deeper look into the inner dynamics of the Raveloe society. The sheepdog barks at Silas at this instant because he is still a foreigner to this land and the community, which means that people know almost nothing about him. Due to strong local ties and connections, human lives are based on small places while anonymity is not a matter of choice. As Thomson touches upon, "intimations of the occult aroused by the dog's barking at the silhouette against a wintry sunset are dispelled by the prosaic interpretation" (1965 p. 72). Due to traditional portrayal of rural people, the unknown and the uncanny are easily associated with evil forces. So, Silas's trade is associated with evil since they do not

understand his profession. Because of its geographical position, the village is still primitive in terms of its lifestyle. The village is still far away from the modern world symbolised by the arrival of the railway that will bring modernity and open the doors to the outside world. Until then, Raveloe's fate is attached to the unsolved mysteries of the countryside back in the pre-industrial decades. Allen states that "when the Duke of Wellington attended the opening of the new Manchester and Liverpool Railway in September 1830, he witnessed an event as important in its own way as the Battle of Waterloo, which he had won fifteen years before" (1967 p. 120). The railway therefore was "the conquest of time and parochialism" (1967 p. 120). Without it, the village is devoid of all the qualities of modern lifestyle. Hence Silas will continue to be seen as the embodiment of the devil. The other point as regards the communal values in this quotation is the influence of superstitions since these inhabitants have not yet achieved skills of reasonable thinking and they lack the ability to question, whereas they just believe in rumours spread around by unidentified sources. Silas's work with his loom turns him into a strange figure for the villagers and this makes him "an object of superstitious fear" (Allen, 1967 p. 121). In this village, "we are still in the presence of the magical, but the magical mediated for us by the superstition of the villagers, for whom magic is still a reality" (Allen, 1967 p. 121). The backwardness in every aspect beginning with the intellectual capacity dominates people's perspicacity and thus limits their perception. Having described how natives of Raveloe treat a stranger, the novel puts forward social and emotional as well as psychological charges that are noteworthy for their growing impact in religiosity of the society matching Silas's attitude at that moment of rapture in the plot structure resulting from his religious belief.

Moreover, the community formed by village people is reminiscent of an old social formation predating times of industrialisation. As if depicting some ancient primitive society, *Silas Marner* exposes social agenda and communal life in a questioning approach from the perspective of mid-Victorian normalcy. Clearly, this rural community has turned inward due to the enclosed lifestyle that has continued for a very long time. Unidentified wanderers were sources of mystery, and they were approached with caution in this time of transition from an agricultural to an industrial social order.

> To the peasants of old times, the world outside their own direct experience was a region of vagueness and mystery: to their untravelled thought a state of wandering was a conception as dim as the winter life of the swallows that came back with the spring; and even a settler, if he came from distant parts, hardly ever ceased to be viewed with a remnant of distrust (Eliot, 1999 p. 3).

This feeling of distrust and association of the outsiders with evil results from the limited space of movement since the means for communication have not developed yet. It seems as if this small community were acting like living in another age. Under these circumstances, the people stick to each other and try to protect the status quo in order to prevent external threats on their lifestyle, which is definitely contrary to the modern norms in Eliot's time. With the industrial revolution that arrived by the railway, villages like Raveloe "the tempo of whose existence had remained almost unchanged for centuries" had to disappear (Allen, 1967 p. 120). As a result, "by 1860, the story of Silas Marner would have been impossible, for the very naivety of the characters – villagers, gentry and Marner alike – and their rusticity would have been impossible" (Allen, 1967 p. 120). Different from the protagonists in early and mid-Victorian period novels who had the endless ambition to struggle against social norms, fight back to hardships and maintain their ambition to raise on the social scale, Silas Marner has surrendered himself to an isolated life in a highly conservative village community thinking about a safe haven remote from the perils of a larger town and enjoying a kind of solitude attempting to find joy on his own. That rather

bleak portrait of the protagonist illustrates a highly problematic state of mind for the protagonist himself. Furthermore, his conflict with the social environment both in this rather new setting and especially the one before coming here prevails the structure of events to enable a critical reading of his position. As it is clear in the novel, Silas is, above all, a very despondent character because of how he was treated apparently by the society and by God, relinquishing his belief in both.

The drastic shift between these two eras must be related to the turn George Eliot's literary career was taking between the novels she wrote at the time. Indeed, *Silas Marner* marks a crucial stage in the framework that can account for the development of Eliot's literary voice. Eliot was obviously fed up with social agenda of the industrial society and intellectual requirements and expectations from ordinary people, even like Silas. In an attempt to overcome social restrictions and intellectual longing for personal development, Eliot escapes mid-Victorian conditions by means of the novel and creates a fictional setting that enables their criticism. For this purpose, she writes in her journal on 28 November 1860 as follows:

> Since I last wrote in this journal, I have suffered much from physical weakness, accompanied with mental depression. The loss of the country has seemed very bitter to me and my want of health and strength has prevented me from working much – still worse, has made me despair of working well again… I am engaged now in writing a story – the idea of which came to me after our arrival in this house and which has thrust itself between me and the other book I was meditating (qtd. in Bennett, 1966 p. 133).

As this confession puts it most demonstratively, Eliot really gets bored with her work, life and social environment in a pessimistic psychosis. Thus, the shift towards a rural setting seems to be an opportunity to escape from the harsh conditions of the real world similar to the literary works encountered in the Romantic Movement. Removing herself and characters from the mid-nineteenth century back to an earlier period, Eliot takes all her readers to the pastoral ideal represented in the village of Raveloe. At least, Silas hopes to find such an ideal by taking refuge there. However, the experience is actually very different from the idealisations of a dream world, which exposes the problematic aspects of social norms based on religious conceptions characterised in the protagonist.

To comprehend thoroughly Silas's transition to this current state in Raveloe and to explain the role of his religious idealism based on his social supervision, Lantern Yard, the other setting of the novel, must be analysed in a critical stance. Silas's personal development, his social status, and his religious perceptions in accordance with them are all related to this town which is associated with an earlier stage of industrial progress in the Victorian era. For the purpose of juxtaposing these settings and their influence on the protagonist, the narrator in *Silas Marner* presents an evidently obvious comparison between them as follows:

> His life, before he came to Raveloe, had been filled with the movement, the mental activity, and the close fellowship, which, in that day as in this, marked the life of an artisan early incorporated in a narrow religious sect, where the poorest layman has the chance of distinguishing himself by gifts of speech, and has, at the very least, the weight of a silent voter in the government of his community (Eliot, 1999 p. 7).

In this setting, Silas leads a sedentary life devoted to faith and humility for the sake of establishing a respectable status for himself. In one incident, he exaggerated his manners so much that he was "mistaken for death" in a religious session (Eliot, 1999 p. 7). In comparison to the former social setting in which Silas finds himself because of his

surrender, Eliot presents this community in Lantern Yard in exchange for a big industrial town which involves up-to-date developments and more open-minded people. In this urban setting, Silas has a modern life in mid-Victorian standards that enable him to maintain his occupation as a weaver, have interaction with other people and lead a faithful life. As Jones comments on,

> Silas has himself been a member of an urban community; he has been driven out of it, as an innocent man may be driven out of any society in which a less innocent man may seek his own advantage at his own expense, but it has been a real community in which an individual had his place and could form and establish his own identity (1970 p. 36).

Metaphorically speaking, Silas's new life in a small village may be likened to a travel back in time for the protagonist. Although H. G. Wells has not written *The Time Machine* yet, Eliot takes readers on a time travel within the novel and shows the contrast between the urban, industrial, capitalist, intellectual, individualized Lantern Yard and the rural, backward, static, pastoral Raveloe. The contrast between these two settings is the reason for Silas's painful suffering in social isolation. In a critical approach to Victorian social perceptions in an industrial setting, *Silas Marner* can be considered a narrative of personal suffering because of firm belief and devout submission to established social norms. Social norms depending on resolute religious interpretations lie at the core of Silas's conflict with his environment since social control is prominently inescapable for him.

The Controversy in the Individual's Bliss: Silas's Disappointment and Disillusionment despite His Conformity

In the light of this analysis, suffering and estrangement caused by Silas's disappointment and disillusionment as a member of Victorian society can be more clearly addressed to expose the problem in the social sphere. Because of his being a stranger and a weaver, he is alienated from the society and made to live in isolation. As a source of fear for both children who watch him at his loom and adults who are afraid of talking to him due to his association with a form of sorcery, Silas "at the outset gives the impression of a presence, not of an individualized personality" (Milner, 1966 p. 718). At this point, going back to his Lantern Yard days shows that he was not so happy there either. A brief outlook onto his life shows that,

> Silas is equipped with a history of alienation that reaches much further back than his arrival in Raveloe. His whole life has been a series of disconnection. An orphaned impoverished artisan pent in a squalid alley in the heart of a Northern industrial town, his opportunities for social participation have been restricted to a Dissenting sect splintered off by its narrow principles from both the religious Establishment and the surrounding secular world. Even within this tight brotherhood, Silas becomes separated from his fellows by unaccountable fits, which he refuses to exploit to his advantage (Thomson, 1965 p. 75).

Thus, it may be asserted that because of his poor education and ignorance of human nature, he loses all his friendships, fellowships, love affair, faith in divine justice, home and native town; so that he has nothing left before coming to Raveloe. Because of his close friend's blame on Silas, he is labelled as a thief, indeed a convict, in the eyes of people and left alone. Moreover, he loses his lover whom he was planning to marry since he also lost his social status as a respectable man. Ultimately, and most problematically for this study, he loses his faith in God upon this betrayal: "*You* [William Dane] stole the money and you have woven a plot to lay the sin at my door. But you may prosper, for all that" (Eliot, 1999 p. 11). As stated, after this incident he has no place in Lantern Yard and

makes his way to Raveloe where he is alienated once again due to his situation as a stranger. Thus, Victorian society does not keep promises of happiness and respectability to the individual, illustrated by Silas's fate through his submission.

Drawing Lots in Social Realism

Readers of *Silas Marner* must have realised in their experience what may be the only turning point in the experiences of the protagonist. The only decision of Silas in the novel – to go to trial before he is found guilty – matches with strong religious beliefs supported by social conditions. In the novel as a whole, Silas is characterised as a man of indecision living in a paradigmatic existence equivalent to nineteenth-century panorama in which understanding of chance and betting are seen as a reaction to the growing influence of scientific thinking and reasoning. In response to accusations of theft against himself, Silas simply says, "I am sore stricken; I can say nothing. God will clear me" (Eliot, 1999 p. 11). This statement of acquittal and inner relief deep down in his conscience form a contrasting image of social circumstances based on reasoning, progress and mindful thinking. Silas makes a deliberate and courageous decision as regards his fate and his judgement as opposed to accusations. His decision suddenly gives up on all ideals that underlie social norms of the industrial Victorian society and deconstructs the dominant perceptions that are very well established by the time of George Eliot. As it is indicated by the narrator, "any resort to legal measure for ascertaining the culprit was contrary to the principles of the Church: prosecution was held by them to be forbidden to Christians, even if there had been a case in which there was no scandal to the community" (Eliot, 1999 p. 11). The normative religious solution and attempts of the community to find the truth – the one, only and absolute truth – requires the act of drawing lots, or simply putting it, betting on the will of God for the poor followers. The process of drawing lots is delineated as follows:

> The resolution can be a ground of surprise only to those who are unacquainted with that obscure religious life which has gone on in the alleys of our towns. Silas knelt with his brethren, relying on his own innocence being certified by immediate divine interference, but feeling that there was sorrow and mourning behind for him even then – that his trust in man had been cruelly bruised (Eliot, 1999 p. 11).

Then, the verdict is announced: "The lots declared that Silas Marner was guilty" (Eliot, 1999 p. 11). Despite his devout religious belief and absolute trust in God, Silas is totally destroyed along with his disappointment in mankind and disillusionment by divine disgrace. His final exclamations in this urban community state that "there is no just God that governs the earth righteously, but a God of lies, that bears witness against the innocent" (Eliot, 1999 p. 11). As the novel brings together realism and predictions together, a highly spiritual vision is intermingled with a sense of religious and social reality. While there is condemnation of the spiritual stance adopted by Silas, the text strictly reveals the paradoxical perception of justice through betting or drawing lots. As Neill argues, "*Silas Marner*, a very different kind of novel, might be read as a story about the problem of representing consciousness with little-to-no capacity for imaginative reach and where the unknown shapes and dominates nearly all cognitive events" (2008 p. 940). Pioneered by the protagonist Silas, these representative characters of the novel actually lead unaware lives embedded in their loss of affection and unhappiness culminating in a sort of loneliness and isolation. The typical symbol of this community is disclosed as Silas, who has to leave the town because of his fate. More importantly for the critical perspective of this study, a legal

case is concluded as a result of betting on God's will in Victorian era as it is narrated in a novel that presumably adheres to social realism as the narrative technique.

A closer look into this matter represented through Silas's despair in the face of social and religious norms actually shows the problem that is already imminent in the mid-Victorian society by the 1860s. On the one hand, Victorians believed in scientology and supremacy of reasoning in the solution of all social conflicts. The backbone of Victorian society was considered to be the notion of progress which was enabled by a harmonious union of social elements. Respectability and morality were supporting arches for this social structure. On the other hand, Victorians suffered from the lurking menace of the near past that still supported ideas and beliefs emanating from superstition and the uncanny. In an age of reasonable accounting for all phenomena, religion was frequently a matter of debate when it came to justifying religious arguments. Due to the period covered in it, *Silas Marner* just fits into an intermediary position between these apparently controversial ways of thinking and living. As Neill argues, the novel "brings together the primitive subject matter of the darkened regions of consciousness with the exceptional narrative intuition and intellect that can illuminate narrow mental and social landscapes" (2008 p. 941). Social networks had lost their dynamism and creativity empowered by the ideal of progress by the time when George Eliot published her novels. The constant shifts between the need to justify reasons of events and sudden appearances or disappearances of characters can be pointed towards this dichotomy in a similar manner. The coexistence of mystery and reason appears as a problematic unity in the narrative.

The solution to this fundamental difference is presented in the form of the protagonist drawing lots on God's will, which is highly ironic and superficial for the text. As this study deals with the controversial solution, it must also be touched upon that "even in the world of 1860s religiosity, there was a good deal of deliberate hypocrisy" (Huggins, 2000 p. 587). Because of middle-class obsession with respectability, all social contexts were organised in accordance with the need to justify public behaviour in a supportive, improving and morally as well as spiritually elevating tone. Just as middle classes appropriated their behaviour into formidable morality, the lower and working classes were expected to follow the similar pioneering role models. However, the outcome was quite terrible for people of lower strata since they simply lacked means and manners to comply with middle-class ideals. Emphasising the urban industrial zone in the formation of social order and its understanding as the culminating point of reference for later decades of the nineteenth-century England, Croll comments as follows: "Such understanding was charged with notions regarding culture and civilisation. By the later years of the century, this preoccupation with the town and city resurfaced in the cult of the civic as local elites celebrated the urban through the elaboration of all manners of rituals, symbols and representations" (1999 p. 252). The civic space centred on the city, thus, was built upon middle class ideals that put forward respectability and morality in harmony with a strong sense of religious belief. Moreover, these norms were characteristic for upper and lower classes too. The latter were imposed on these normative values for self-development. As Thompson explains, "in such a view the success of social control in taming and civilizing the working classes in mould shaped to fit the needs of bourgeois society must take its place alongside the iron disciplines of wage labour, […] as a key factor in the shaping of modern society" (1981 p. 189). As a result of the conflict between the middle class and the lower class, common Victorian values were called appropriate for all these communities regardless of their social status. Accordingly, Thompson further argues that "it allows little for the possibility that the working classes themselves generated their own values and attitudes suited to the requirements of life in an industrial society and imposed their own

forms on middle-class institutions" (1981 p. 189). The outcome of this contest and rivalry reveals itself in the form of dominant social values imposed on all social classes. Thus, Silas, a man of lower class, finds himself kneeling in front of his brethren to be judged righteously while he is at the same time drawing lots.

In the light of this social scene, the protagonist Silas Marner's failure and gradual decline in a strict religious and social discourse is approved by Victorian society in a quite paradoxical manner, which is indeed the subject of this critical analysis. While all later events seem to emanate from the initial act of drawing lots to decide the guilty, the reasoning behind this incident is not clearly expressed in any way. Therefore, Silas's whole social and religious vision from his punishment and its adjustment to his self-deprecatory and strongly encouraging ethics in an infamous drawing lots on divine justice and unquestionable belief in social ways can be considered as a response to the challenges and inherent paradoxes in Victorian society's eventual confrontation with reason and superstition, in addition to an intense conflict between logic and delusion, which creates an unstable and perilous proceeding of events for the narrative structure and characters beginning with Silas. Because of the text's sudden and unexpected adherence to betting as a judicial solution and leaving all the rest to chance, these social ideals are undermined on the point of their supremacy at various points linked to dominant Victorian values. The strong external challenge posed on Silas through the power of social acquiescence to religious practice turns into an ontological problem for the self since Silas is no longer capable of preparing himself, predicting his lot, and facing the strenuous life that awaits him in the future. In other words, the superstitious overcomes the reasonable in a challenging and absolutely paradoxical manner. For Silas, the greatest question is about himself, in that who he transforms into against his will and his earlier plans evolves into the other, the product of sheer determination created by social conditions. The novel, hence, does not compromise the flow of events in the plot structure to compensate for Silas's lot.

Accordingly, Silas begins to hoard his gold for a course of fifteen years in response to a chain of unreasonable events. Then, when his gold is stolen in Raveloe where he has been leading a peaceful life for a very long time, his first interaction with the community begins albeit unwillingly. Later, he adopts Eppie and, in consequence, his sociability increases to the extent that the society accepts him with the little girl's influence. Therefore, he turns out to be the only character who experiences change in his personal attitude and social condition. For this transition between different social positions, Wiesenfarth states, "from trusting and loving he becomes miserly; from miserly he becomes trusting and loving again. His character develops in an A-B-A movement, his first phase making possible his last and his middle phase showing a perversion of love and trust" (1970 p. 228). In this vicious cycle, Silas makes peace and eventually seems to reunite with the society. In fact, Eliot also states that "*Silas Marner* sets – or is intended to set – in a strong light the remedial influences of pure, natural human relations" (qtd. in Wiesenfarth, 1970 p. 227). This state of being true to social circumstances brings integration into the social structure once again and puts an end to personal alienation. Yet, the critique of social order leading to Silas's catastrophic fate is still unaccountable. Paradoxical aspects of Victorian society on the dichotomy between reason and superstition are left bare, which leads to the conclusion that the fate of protagonist in social realist tradition will inevitably produce such miserable repercussions.

In this process, Eppie's role is quite important in that she functions like a bridge between Silas and the society in Raveloe. Although she is herself not wanted by her father Godfrey, she finds parental love and care in Silas. During the period between the theft of gold and Eppie's adoption, the natives of Raveloe, among whom Dolly comes to the

foreground, insist on Silas's being a devout Christian by attending Church services. In that respect, Dolly calls out to Silas to find the faith he lost in the past. She urges him to adopt religious manners as a submissive person once again, which will bring peace and comfort to his mind. This sincere call for Silas's adoption of religious manners again does not change anything in his behaviour due to his disillusionment with such arguments about submission:

> Well, Master Marner, it's niver too late to turn over a new leaf, and if you've niver had no church, there's no telling the good it'll do you. For I feel so set up and comfortable as niver was, when I've been and heard the prayers, and the singing to the praise and glory o' God, […] I feel as I can put up wi' it, for I've looked for help i' the right quarter, and gev myself up to Them as we must all give ourselves up to at the last (Eliot, 1999 p. 72).

In addition to her personal relief due to a religious lifestyle, Dolly puts emphasis on exemplary figures in the community to support her convincing tone towards Silas (Eliot, 1999 p. 72). This urge on Silas at an instant when his blasphemy due to the unjust treatment of God is aggravated by his stolen gold does not seem to make any sense for him. For this reason, the narrator's comment can be called a confession to the striking complex of affairs as follows:

> Poor Dolly's exposition of her simple Raveloe theology fell rather unmeaningly on Silas's ears, for there was no word in it that could rouse a memory of what he had known as religion, and his comprehension was quite baffled by the plural pronoun, which was no heresy of Dolly's, but only her way of avoiding a presumptuous familiarity (Eliot, 1999 p. 72).

This realist depiction regarding human relationships in Raveloe may also be considered as another aspect of the conflict between Silas and the rural community. Their religious views do not conform to each other, which makes Silas look awkward after such a long time.

Since Silas is thoroughly disappointed with society and representative figures of social norms and teachings, he seems to disregard all these calls for him. However, a personal relationship between Silas and Eppie has a transformative power to contend Silas's decisive attitude and results in his sociability. This time, Silas interacts with the community based on his personal reasons about Eppie rather than conforming to social expectations. Hence, the previous headstrong man changes when the little girl is included in the affairs and gives up his claims taking responsibility on him. Although Dolly's theology is still unintelligible for Silas, "now she can appeal not only to Silas's own need but to his obligations to the child. […] [Her urging] lies in her concern for the child and for Silas, and in her willingness to teach Silas what he must do in order to give the child the best he can. […] He is eager to do for Eppie what he was earlier uninterested in doing for himself" (Jones, 1970 p. 39). About this matter, it may be argued that the feeling of responsibility, especially that of a child, makes the protagonist comply with social expectations. Despite his previous meaningless life in which he lost everything, Eppie turns out to be his new hope and possible gain to struggle for in this life. Accordingly, Dunham believes that "Eppie's role remains that of a *dea ex machine* [*sic*] with considerable allegorical import, but with little real substance" (1976 p. 645). Still, she triggers all the humanly relationships in Silas's life even just with her simple existence as a little ineffective baby. About Eppie, Bennett also claims that "we must believe – and the author beguiles into belief if we will allow her –that the golden-haired baby leaves the dead mother at a point just near enough to Silas's cottage for it to totter into it and so be found, a living substitute for the lost golden hoard" (1966 p. 132). After all, Eppie plays a vital role in bringing Silas's human nature

back to the surface again as she grows into a very beautiful young lady. Although Silas was initially taken by the society as a presence rather than an individual or a human being, Jones states that "the tale is to be about his recovery of his inheritance – his inheritance as a man, a social being" (Jones, 1970 p. 36). Hence, he turns out be a member of the society after all the struggles he must be involved id. Instead of Victorian social values and ideals, Eppie's role cannot be denied in Silas's social rebirth despite being a little insignificant girl. This could be considered a harsh criticism on Victorians who are always troubled with finding solutions to social conflicts.

Furthermore, an overview of the novel's epilogue shows that an alternative mode of living, morality and respectability is just possible based on the human element. As Allen states, "besides the delineation of country life and humor and of a world gone forever, there is something else in *Silas Marner* – the moral which is, in a sense, the spine" (1967 p. 127). In this respect, Silas and Godfrey are interconnected with Eppie's introduction into the novel. While Godfrey marries Nance after her mother's death, Silas reunites with the society as a member. However, the ending and Eppie's reaction juxtapose these two men based on reason on a personal level. In this respect, "Marner is the unwitting agent of Cass's redemption, just as Cass's behaviour is the unwitting cause of Marner's rebirth" (Allen, 1967 p. 127). In this plot structure, Eliot states that "the Nemesis is a very mild one. Favourable chance is the god of all men who follow their own devices instead of obeying a law they believe in…. The evil principle deprecated in that religion is the orderly sequence by which the seed brings forth a crop after its kind" (qtd. in Allen, 1967 p. 127). Because of this point in the author's mind, retribution is for the guilty and Godfrey is punished when his daughter rejects him as her father and chooses to continue her life next to Silas. Thus, Silas's rebirth plays a dominant role in the narrative and concludes the novel independent from all social anxieties that have shaped his reactions so far.

Before Silas's circumstances are finally established, he pays a visit to his old hometown Lantern Yard to see how he is remembered there. The impression on Eppie and the current state of his old house are quite familiar with the depictions in most mid-Victorian novels set in industrial areas affected by rapid changes in production methods:

> 'It's gone, child,' he said, at last, in strong agitation—'Lantern Yard's gone. It must ha' been here, because here's the house with the o'erhanging window--I know that--it's just the same; but they've made this new opening; and see that big factory! It's all gone--chapel and all (Eliot, 1999 pp. 154-155).

Clearly, all his past embedded in his memories remembered by Silas have been destroyed with the advance of industrialization and he does no longer have a past to go back and prove his innocence. As Eppie finds it "a dark ugly place" supporting Silas's observation, there is nothing left behind for Silas's horrible memories associated with this place anymore (Eliot, 1999 p. 154). There is only future to be lived with her adopted daughter Eppie and the new community in Raveloe. As Koopman touches upon, "the idea of freedom as self-transformation can be understood as a response to some of the most knotted problems of moral modernity: the difficulty of indecision, the dissemination of probabilities and the unavoidability of chance" (2016 p. 48). Moreover, the industrial revolution, though still very far away from Raveloe, has for a long while started to show its initial effects by means of the factory in this extract and change for English society has already started despite Silas's escape to Raveloe from bourgeois values.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study claims that Silas's story full of severance, loss, alienation and being accused of crimes he did not commit, comes to an end with moral lessons in a

paradoxical state of affairs, because Victorian society does not grant happiness to a member despite his complete adoption of social values in a submissive manner. It is evidently revealed that Silas's mournful and desolate condition is the result of Victorian social structure that creates ideals and values which must be followed for no obvious cause to the benefit of the individual. Some mistakes are rectified in Silas's case by means of a personal account, different from other characters like Godfrey and his brother Dunsey. However, the morals and compromise with the society are praised in a Victorian manner to provide a happy ending for the novel, whereas there is no nostalgia in the narrative yearning for a lost and forgotten past. By means of the comparison between rural and urban settings and their communities and social lives, an account of deficiencies presents the condition of the protagonist as he unfortunately suffers from unquestioning social norms and religious practices. The practice of drawing lots in search for justice and as a proof for submission to social expectations prove completely wrong while it leads to a catastrophic ending for the individual like Silas. In addition to being unreasonable and unlawful, the practice undermines core values of Victorian society resulting in overwhelming destruction. Despite Eliot's attempts in the rest of the novel to alleviate for this weak plot twist that challenges Victorian ideals, the status of the individual character is once put in an undesirable paradox. The new social order is built upon values that are highly idealised by the Victorians, whereas this incident is incongruous with firm notions that describe the era. The sudden twist of events in the narrative structure is the reason for undermining Victorian ideals. Silas is certainly doomed because he listens to social appeals and conforms to expectations in social and religious practices, which is unacceptable for Victorians who undoubtedly believe that submission to social norms and authority of rules will bring happiness for all members of the community. Despite his silent submission till the moment of awakening, Silas cannot escape the outcome of leaving his fate to betting. In a controversial manner, divine grace and justice are linked to an act of betting, which is paradoxical to middle class values of morality and respectability. The demise of the individual is just looked over by the urban and industrial community. Although there is a fictional offer in the form of a solution to Silas's suffering, the act of injustice through social and religious justification is left without social notice and care.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, W. (1967). *George Eliot.* New York: Collier Books.

Auster, H. (1970). *Local Habitations: Regionalism in the Early Novels of George Eliot.* Massachusetts: Harvard UP.

Bennett, J. (1966). *George Eliot: Her Mind and Her Art.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Croll, A. (1999). Street disorder, surveillance and shame: regulating behaviour in the public spaces of the late Victorian British town. *Social History*, 24, 3 (Oct.), 250-268.

Dunham, R. H. (1976). Silas Marner and the Wordsworthian child. *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 16, 4 (Autumn), 645–659.

Eliot, G. (1999). *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe.* London: Wordsworth Classics.

Huggins, M. J. (2000). More sinful pleasures? Leisure, respectability and the male middle classes in Victorian England. *Journal of Social History*, 33, 3 (Spring), 585-600.

Jones, R. T. (1970). *George Eliot.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Koopman, C. (2016). Transforming the self amidst the challenges of chance. *Diacritics*, 44, 4, 40-65.

Leavis, F. R. (1970). *The Great Tradition.* Harmondsworth: Pelican.

Milner, I. (1966). Structure and quality in Silas Marner. *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 6,4 (Autumn), 717–729.

Neill, A. (2008). The primitive mind of *Silas Marner*. *ELH*,75, 4 (Winter), 939-962.
Thompson, F. M. L. (1981). Social control in Victorian Britain. *The Economic History Review*, 34, 2 (May), 189-208.
Thomson, F. C. (1965). The theme of alienation in *Silas Marner*. *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 20, 1 (June), 69–84.
Wiesenfarth, J. (1970). Demythologizing Silas Marner. *ELH*, 37, 2 (June), 226–244