

## Redemption and Regeneration of Characters in George Eliot's *Silas Marner* in Relation to Michel Foucault's Theory of Power

**Sweety Samariyal. A.**

Assistant Professor

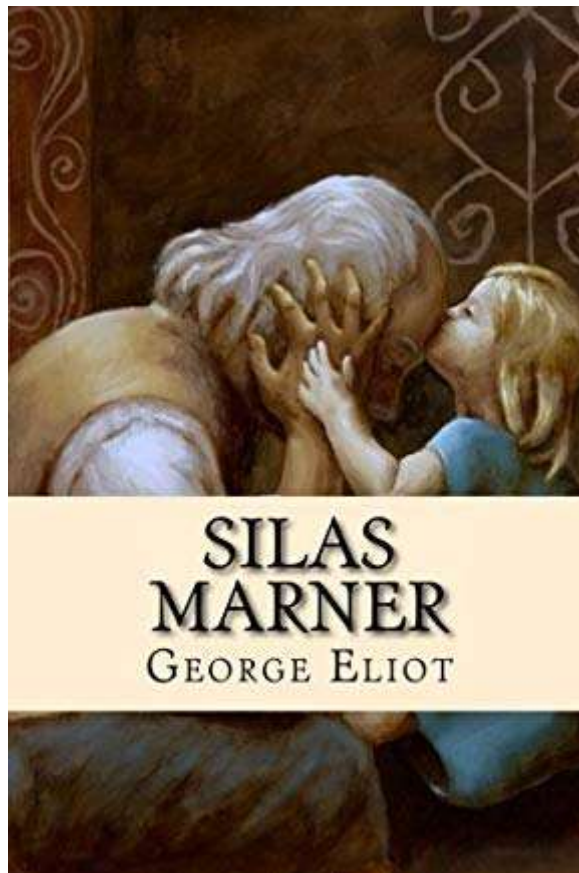
Department of English

Hindusthan College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore

[sweetysamaria1995@gmail.com](mailto:sweetysamaria1995@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

This paper aims to bring out the fact that the characteristics in humans change over a time period. The change could be towards the better or the worst based on the situations they come

across in life and their perception it. "Every man is the painter and sculptor of his own life". George Eliot believed in this and her characters are created and built based upon this reality.

Eliot explores the themes of individualism, destiny and redemption. The protagonist Silas Marner was a man who had found love and had dreamt of all happiness in his life ahead. Soon his dreams got shattered after the false accusations upon him over the theft of the Deacon's money. His own friend whom he had trusted so much heartlessly blamed him and held the hands of his beloved girl. This made Marner lose all his faith upon love and companionship. He preferred a lonely life at Raveloe, weaving and making gold for himself. But life changed him after the entry of Eppie. His perceptions and behavior changed and thus he regenerated into a new being.

Dunstan Cass who appears to be an irresponsible man having dumped Molly and abandoned his little child, who also plays love games with Nancy keeping many secrets from her and marries her only later does he realize his follies after life puts him into traumatic situations. His own daughter being raised by an old man with so much of love provokes the fatherly affections in him and brings in guilt. After all these sufferings and realizations, he regenerates into a renewed man by the end of the novel.

Similarly, many characters undergo change. They are thus redeemed towards the better.

This paper on the other side aims to bring out the importance of money in the Victorian Era to establish power in society. This power over money can be attributed to Michel Foucault's "Theory of Power".

**Keywords:** *Silas Marner*, Theory of Power, Michel Foucault, Money as power, Redemption and Renewal

In the novel *Silas Marner*, the characters display both change and constancy, and this makes them recognizably the same person but with various positivities in them. The characters do not merely change but they develop. The characters do not change on the whole, but one would very well observe the striking characteristics that tend to portray them as a renewed personality. The major characters who seem to undergo this evolution are Silas Marner, the protagonist and Godfrey Cass.

Silas has a good friend in the church, William Dane. Silas is also engaged to a woman named Sarah, a young servant-woman. And everyone believed that Master Marner earned a large sum of money that he saved in a secret place.

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Sweetey Samariyal. A.

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Thus, the man has remained the same for all the years until he has confronted the turning point in his life. The senior deacon was ill, and Silas frequently took his turn of night-watching with William. The next morning, he was strangely questioned and was asked to confess his sin. Silas was perplexed and once he realized that he was being suspected for the deacon's lost money, he trembled. He put his faith upon God and was mute until his only hope William Dane, showed up. Silas asks him if he had ever known him steal or tell a lie. Dane's response bewilders Marner. "Brother, said William, how do I know what you may have done in the secret chambers of your heart, to give Satan an advantage over you?" (George Eliot, 1861, 20).

For a man who had no people to call a family, to cherish his happiness, to crave for his longings, to cry out his sorrows, these words from the only friend whom he thought he had, is never an easy thing. Sooner Silas also realizes that the knife wasn't with him but with Dane. The lots were drawn, and it declared Silas Marner guilty. He was suspended from the church. He has soon realized that Dane had betrayed him he blasphemies. He had lost his trust in God and says, "There is no just God that governs the earth righteously, but a God of lies, that bears witness against the innocent" (George Eliot, 1861, 21).

The accusations were too much to handle. "Poor Marner went out with despair in his soul-that shaken trust in God and man, which is little short of madness to a loving nature" (George Eliot, 1861, 21). Sarah too had left him as he expected to. What pricked him more was the message that Sarah was married to William Dane. These misfortunate events make him depart from the town forever. Thus, Marner exiles.

The second chapter does present Marner with some changes which are a result of the severe impacts of his previous livelihood. Silas was like an alien in the midst of the neighboring peasants. He feels like God has deserted him. He is a loner, and this isolation was something that he chose for himself. He hated the reminiscence of his past.

There was nothing that called out his love and fellowship toward the strangers he had come amongst; and the future was all dark, for there was no Unseen Love that cared for him. Thought was arrested by utter bewilderment. (George Eliot, 1861, 29)

He worked in his loom for long hours. Continuous hard work makes Silas a rich man. He earns more money than he has ever had in his life. He cured people of illness and this made them curious about his powers if they were associated with witchcraft. "About this time an incident happened which seemed to open a possibility of some fellowship with his neighbors" (George Eliot, 1861, 29).

It is fifteen years after Silas moved to Raveloe. Silas's gold starts to seem powerfully interesting to the Squire's son, Dunstan Cass who while passing by the stone-cottage of Silas decides to ask him for his money by the name of insurance and savings but discovering that Silas isn't home, Dunsey steals it and vanishes. Dunsey appears in chapter 4 after which he remains unknown of his existence until the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter.

Marner's loss of gold, is not easily accepted by him. It takes time for him to accept the fact that he has been robbed. His power that he thought he possessed was now gone forever.

The man who lived in solitude found relief in none other than his gold and having lost it he felt he had lost everything and that there was nothing left to lose anymore. This state of uncertainty of Marner brought an enlightenment while the little baby came crawling at his door. The beautiful golden curls of the child glittered by the furnace making Marner feel that his gold was lying right before him. He felt like his own little sister who had died while he was a young boy, had come to him from the afterlife. Later did he realize that it was a gift sent by God. After the coming of Eppie into his life, things were all positive to Marner. "For the little child had come to link him once more with the whole world" (George Eliot, 1861, 185).

Part 2 of the novel opens with the life of Marner along with his beautiful grown up, eighteen-year-old Eppie. There is regeneration in the appearance of Marner and his character as well. He seems to communicate quite a lot with Eppie, as before he was a man of few words. He smokes pipe which was believed to be good for 'fits' as suggested by Dr. Kimble. Silas who blasphemed was now regular to church. He was a happy man after all his past adversities, that he had patiently overcome.

Nobody was jealous of the weaver, for he was regarded as an exceptional person, whose claims on neighborly help were not to be matched in Raveloe. Any superstition that remained concerning him had taken an entirely new color. (George Eliot, 1861, 197)

He cherished his present life which was a revival to him. Eppie's talk, her gestures of love towards him, made him happier than ever. He felt so much renewed and it was a sense of relief living the joyous simple life. The regeneration of Marner was not an immediate one. It took him years to realize the goodness of life after facing its harsh realities. His introverted nature was gradually undergoing change. Marner feels relieved and redeemed as well after he gets his lost gold. Until then he never thought he would get it back. But life was surprising him with all happiness. Silas then wants to return to Lantern Yard along with Eppie, to see if anything has come up to show that he was innocent. The false accusations over him, had always been a

heaviness in his heart for years. Things aren't the same at Lantern Yard. Like how people had regenerated over years, so has the places too. Silas's hometown had changed into a big manufacturing city. He didn't find any old friends, but the place was strange to him. The Prison Street stood bleak and grim, recalling him of the past. They return to their home, Raveloe.

The next character who undergoes regeneration in the novel is Godfrey Cass, eldest son of the greatest man in Raveloe. He lived in a large Red house and is introduced to be a good-natured young man by the narrator. This credit was just by the comparison with his brother Dunstan Cass, who was an extravagant. Godfrey is in love with Nancy Lammeter, who is also interested in him but is doubtful of his dedication towards her.

Godfrey's secret marriage to another woman of lower status is a shock to the readers who think, his love for Nancy is genuine. His love is genuine and what prevents him from confidently wooing her, was this big mistake of his past that he had committed without fearing the future consequences. This has always pricked him. Fearing that Nancy would reject him, he kept the secret from her and what would be even worse was that his father would disinherit him. Godfrey often fears that his secret would come to light and that he should confess to his father beforehand.

Crisis arise, while Godfrey's secretly married wife, Molly, is heading into Raveloe along with her 2-year-old child, with revenge in her mind. While Molly kept constantly insisting him, to disclose their relationship to his family, Godfrey had told her that he would rather die than acknowledge her as his wife. This caused great agony in her and she had become addict to opium.

Despite the cold winter evening, Molly walks through the snow fall with her child. Molly gets tempted, she takes opium and sits down under a hedge and falls asleep. Her little child awakes to find her mother motionless. Its attention goes towards a light at a distance and it walks towards the stone-cottage thereby reaching Silas Marner.

When Marner brings the child, to the Red House, Godfrey is shocked. And on further enquiry, Marner tells about the woman he found lying under the hedge. Godfrey's cold-heartedness is revealed at this instance. He wishes her to be dead. Adding to this, he fails to open up, that he was the child's father. He was never ready to acknowledge the dead woman as his wife nor the abandoned child as his daughter. He never felt responsible for the child. His fear of status and reputation resulted in an unforgivable sin. The villagers gave the poor lady a pauper's burial and the child was taken up by Marner. Godfrey never seemed to be guilty of all these events.

Godfrey felt a great throb: there was one terror in his mind at that moment: it was, that the woman might not be dead. That was an evil terror-an ugly inmate to have found a nestling place in Godfrey's kindly disposition. (George Eliot, 1861, 164)

But he regenerates from this stage. The mistakes of his life never leave him free. It haunts him day by day. While he watches his own daughter taken in charge by a poor old man, whom his daughter had become fond of, bewilders him. He is never the same old careless Godfrey. Soon after he is married to Nancy, not much longer after all such crucial incidents, he feels transformed. He is much interested in watching his daughter Eppie grow up, as he thinks about her a lot, but still keeps it within himself and stays a little away from her to prevent suspicion by others.

He felt a reformed man, delivered from temptation; and the vision of his future life seemed to him as a promised land for which he had no cause to fight. He saw himself with all his happiness centered on his own hearth. (George Eliot, 1861, 189)

Thus, the characters show enormous change towards the better in the passage of time and this redemption and regeneration creates a good impact upon the readers towards the closing of the novel for the pleasantness it brings in their minds after all crucial adversities settling down.

### **Money and Power**

Now, I would like to focus on the importance of money-making and using money as an object to establish power in the society. The famous French philosopher and social theorist, Michel Foucault's 'Theory of Power' can be attributed to the importance of money-making for the urge of power in the society. Foucault's theories primarily address the relationship between power and knowledge, as how they are used as a form of social control through societal institutions. 'Foucault uses the term power/knowledge to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and truth. He is one of the few writers on power who recognize that power is not just a negative, coercive or repressive thing that forces us to do things against our wishes, but can also be a necessary, productive and positive force in society.

Power is also a major source of social discipline and conformity. Foucault pointed to a new kind of 'disciplinary power' that could be observed in the administrative systems and social services, such as prisons, schools and mental asylums. Their systems of surveillance and assessment no longer required force or violence, as people learned to discipline themselves and



behave in expected ways. The prison, and its panoptic architecture, was for Foucault a perfect example of these new technologies of power.’

Eliot demonstrates the Cass family as the richest of the communities of Raveloe. The large Red House owned by the greatest man Squire Cass, had a flight of stone steps in front and high stables behind exposing the luxury. His sons are dependent on him and the character of Dunstan, is depicted as an extravagant who violates ethical value of money. Not knowing of its worth as he was always dependent on his father, Dunstan very easily runs off with Silas’s gold without having a second thought over the consequences. But the fact that the vice will definitely be punished becomes a live example after we discover that he hadn’t utilized the robbed gold but immediately fell into the pits and died.

On the other hand, Silas Marner who is of a lower class in the community shows much value towards money and hoards it without any future plans. Having lost his faith upon human companionship, after his exile he never socialized with people. His loom was the place that he spent most of his time and by his continuous work he had earned a large sum of money. He was getting rich. He never had an idea of how to spend it but focused in saving the guineas and cherished the sight of them spread before him every evening. He loved to watch his piles of gold after which he puts them back into the bag and covers sand over it. “And it would be pleasant to see them on the table before him as he ate his unwonted feast. For joy is the best of wine and Silas’s guineas were a golden wine of that sort” (George Eliot, 1861, 63).

When a man has nothing to treasure or own but just a pile of gold, losing it all of a sudden would be the worst thing that could happen. His sweat, his effort, his possession that was never to be shared with anyone. Discovering that he had been robbed of the money, he gets into depression.

The sight of the empty hole made his heart leap violently, but the belief that his gold was gone could not come at once-only terror, and an eager effort to put an end to the terror. He passed his empty hand all about the hole. (George Eliot, 1861, 63)

But Marner who had lost his treasure, his only happiness, is devastated and would never reconcile by the neighbors’ consolation. He had no Christmas, for him the only thing on mind was the return of his money. “Formerly, his heart had been as a locked casket with its treasure inside; but now the casket was empty, and the lock was broken” (George Eliot, 1861, 117).

Later, Godfrey utilizes the power of his money, to directly claim over Eppie, saying that he owned everything that could keep her rich and luxurious. He used this power, of money over the idea of adopting Eppie. But when the girl, strongly denies his materialistic offer and chooses to stay with the affectionate poor genuine father, Godfrey's pride is shattered. He repents, and realizes money was nothing in front of true human relations that were too sensitive to be broken.

The entry of Eppie into the life of Marner, was a revelation to himself. His notion about money had changed. He treasured Eppie, more than his lost money. As he regenerated through the course of the novel, his lust for accumulation of money too had faded away and Marner had started to optimistically view on life and value human relations and the existence of God. This state of him, remained stable even after his lost money was restored.

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