

Silas Marner as Real Allegory

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Abstract

Silas Marner concludes the first phase of George Eliot's fiction. It is a short novel, or novella, of "old-fashioned village life" (*GEL*, III, 137). Although relatively short, this work of fiction has been highly praised as "a small miracle" (Allen 227) or "a charming minor-master piece" (Leavis 60) since it was published in 1861.

However, the traditional interpretation that the Silas story is "some kind of allegory" and the Godfrey story is "a piece of realistic fiction," and that these two different stories are "related in a parallel and complementary way" (Thale 65) is naïve and simplistic and would seem to narrow the reading of the fertile narrative world of *Silas Marner*. In *Silas Marner* allegory and realism are put not in a parallel or complementary way, but in a combined or integrated way. In other words, both allegorical and realistic elements are perceived in each plot, and both the Silas and Godfrey stories are more or less "real allegory," to use Courbet, the French realist painter's phrase.

The purpose of this thesis is to show that the narrative world of *Silas Marner* is a Courbetesque hybrid of realism and allegory, and to widen our perspective in reading this "charming minor masterpiece" as a whole.

Some principal elements of real allegory in *Silas Marner* may be discerned in appellation and the symbolism of plants.

Regarding appellations, Silas Marner, the main character of

the allegorical Silas story, is given not only a realistic and allegorical Christian name with pagan implications and Christian significance, but his surname Marner may be associated allegorically with the Ancient Mariner. On the other hands, in the realistic Godfrey story, the main character Godfrey and the secondary characters Dunstan and Squire Cass are named allegorically or quasi-allegorically on the basis of connotations and a kind of onomatopoeic toning. Eppie the mediator between the two stories has a hybrid name combining realism and allegory in that her name foreshadows her function as Silas's delight but also references common naming practices of the Dissenters. Appellations in *Silas Marner* indicate that both stories of the double plot are presented, to a considerable extent, as real allegories respectively.

As for plants, they indicate the seasons and the passing of time realistically and concretely, but some of them are used significantly as symbols, weaving a real allegory.

Considering that the lilac symbolises "Love's first emotions" in the language of flowers and that the laburnum is the traditional Easter flower, the "great lilacs" in "the old-fashioned gardens" symbolise the first love between Eppie and Aaron and celebrate their first-love marriage; in the same way, the "laburnums" stands for Easter and may be considered to celebrate not the resurrection of Christ, but the spiritual resurrection of Silas in the Raveloe village—his moral regeneration through love: his conversion from

“earnest belief through disbelief to a new . . . faith,” that is to say, a religion of humanity in essence.

In association with *hortus conclusus*, Eppie’s enclosed garden symbolises the spouse Eppie and praises her purity and innocence. Furthermore, the spring flowers in the enclosed garden which “shone with answering gladness” are interpreted as emblems of the fertility of the future in which the newly married couple and Silas will lead a happy life. Notably the lavender and the furze bush are more significant: the former symbolizes a marriage between Eppie and Aaron as well as the real father Godfrey, and the latter stands for Eppie’s mother Molly. That the lavender and the furze bush are planted coexistingly will suggest the eventual forgiveness and reconciliation of Eppie, Molly and Godfrey. Those plants contribute to realism and function as multiple symbols, weaving a real allegory in *Silas Marner*.

Thus allegory and realism in *Silas Marner* are presented, to a considerable extent, as a Courbetesque real allegory.

We treated the appellations of several important characters and the main plants in “the old-fashioned gardens” and in Eppie’s garden. Our analysis needs further research into other appellations of characters and place as well as the symbolism of the other plants to confirm *Silas Marner* as real allegory.

Introduction

George Eliot, the pseudonym of Mary Ann, or Marian, Evans (1819-80) was one of the most famous woman novelists of the Victorian era. She was born in Warwickshire on 22 November 1819. When she was 22 years old, she moved to the suburbs of Coventry with her father and became acquainted with Charles Bray who was a prosperous British ribbon manufacturer and progressive intellectual. This encounter deeply influenced her; she experienced her conversion or apostasy. In 1846, she issued her translation of Strauss's *The Life of Jesus*.

In 1850, after her father died, she moved to London and became an assistant editor of the *Westminster Review*. At that time she made the acquaintance of Herbert Spencer, who introduced her to George Henry Lewes. Though George Henry Lewes had a wife and children, he and George Eliot cohabited extra-maritally until his death. In 1854, she translated Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christenthums* (*The Essence of Christianity*).

At Lewes's suggestion, George Eliot began to write a work of fiction, "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton," which was published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1857, and which was released along with the other two stories in book form under the title *The Scenes of Clerical Life* in 1858. Her first book was well received, and she continued to publish popular novels for

the next eighteen years.

George Eliot's creative life falls into two phases: the first phase consists of *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858), *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), and *Silas Marner* (1861), all published between 1858 and 1860; the second phase comprises *Romola* (1863), *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866), *Middlemarch* (1871-72), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876) (Leavis 62; Allen 224, 227).

In her first phase Eliot wrote out of "her memories of childhood and youth"; they are filled with "the poignancy and charm of personal experience" and give us "in a mellow light" the rural or provincial Midlands of her young days (Leavis 46). In the second phase, the world of her fiction widens spatio-temporally and comes to encompass more intellectual and philosophical tendencies.

Silas Marner concludes the first phase of her fiction. It is a short novel, or novella, of "old-fashioned village life" (*GEL*, III, 137).¹ Although relatively short, this work of fiction is "in form the most perfect of all her novels (Cooper 20), and "as perfect as any prose fiction in the language" (Allen 227). Thus *Silas Marner* has been highly praised as a "minor masterpiece" (Haddakin 59) or "a small miracle" (Allen 227) since it was published in 1861.

An important, structural feature in *Silas Marner* is her first use of multiple plots, which all four novels of her second phase employ. *Silas Marner* belongs to the first phase in that it deals with English rural life; yet in structure it is similar to her later work in the use of multiple plots. In terms of literary material and

structure, this charming novella may be categorised as a transitional work between her first and second phases (Newton 126).

However, the use of multiple plots in *Silas Marner* is much simpler in comparison with that of *Middlemarch*. The former consists of a double plot: the Silas story and the Godfrey story, while the latter comprises a complicated set of “four plots of unequal emphasis: the life of Dorothea Brooke; the career of Tertius Lydgate; the courtship of Mary Garth by Fred Vincy; and the disgrace of Bulstrode” (*Middlemarch*). Thus the plot structure of *Silas Marner* is relatively simple, but the treatment of the double plot is artistic and noteworthy. The double plot in *Silas Marner* has been interpreted as consisting of two stories different in kind: the Silas story is “some kind of allegory or fairy-tale,” whereas the Godfrey story is “a piece of realistic fiction”; these two different stories are artistically “related in a parallel and complementary way” (Thale 59, 65)

Considering that allegory and realism are generally regarded as opposite literary genres, such a reading of the difference between the two stories may be acceptable, but in *Silas Marner* allegory and realism seem to be used more in a combined than a parallel way. The purpose of this thesis is to show that the narrative world of *Silas Marner* is a sort of integrated allegory and realism, that is, the so-called real allegory, and to widen our perspective in reading this “charming minor masterpiece” as a

whole (Leavis 60).

This thesis consists of three chapters. The first chapter addresses the double plot in *Silas Marner* and the conception of real allegory. The second and third chapters deal with *Silas Marner* as real allegory in the light of appellations and of the symbolism of plants respectively. In conclusion, our analysis is summarized and further research is suggested.

Chapter 1

The Double Plot in *Silas Marner* and the Conception of Real Allegory

1.1 The Double Plot

In George Eliot's letter to John Blackwood on 12 January 1861, she tells that the story of *Silas Marner* "came across my other plans by a sudden inspiration. . . . It is a story of old-fashioned village life, which has folded itself from the merest millet-seed of thought" (*GEL*, III, 371), and in her letter to John Blackwood on 24 February 1861, she also mentions that *Silas Marner* "came to me first of all, quite suddenly, as a sort of legendary tale, suggested by my recollection of having once, in early childhood, seen a linen-weaver with a bag on his back; as my mind dwelt on the subject, I became inclined to a more realistic treatment (*GEL*, III, 382).

Thus, the two elements of "a sort of legendary tale" and "a more realistic treatment" constitute *Silas Marner*, and it has been generally considered that each element corresponds to one of the double plot in *Silas Marner*. The Silas story is legendary or fairy-tale-like, serving as "a moral allegory" where "the symbols are the familiar ones of Christianity," referring to the two kinds of treasure—the gold and the golden-haired Eppie and conveying a moral message that the gold brings death, but its loss brings life (Thale 59).

Furthermore, on a deeper level, the Silas story is "a kind of

allegory of the intellectual movement of the age” that describes the religious crisis and conversion, expressed in Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1836) and J. S. Mill’s *Autobiography* (1873) and experienced by George Eliot herself—an allegory of the intellectual movement “from earnest belief through disbelief to a new, often secular, faith” (Thale 59-60; Willey 204-05). On the other hand, the Godfrey story is a realistic one in which Godfrey, not a villain but a weak-willed character, is represented in psychological detail, peculiar to George Eliot and he obviously belongs with Arthur Donnithorne in *Adam Bede* and Tito Melema in *Romola*, in “being struggling, erring human creatures” (*GEL*, III, 3).

It is true that a moral allegory and detailed psychological description—in other words, allegory and realism—are characteristic of this short novel, and that these two elements or plots are so successfully woven that we do not, as Jerome Thale observes, “feel any cleavage between the plots, as we do in *Daniel Deronda*” (Thale 59).

Yet the interpretation of the Silas story as “some kind of allegory” and the Godfrey story as “a piece of realistic fiction,” and the view that these two different stories are “related in a parallel and complementary way” (Thale 65) are simplistic and seem to narrow the reading of the fertile narrative world of *Silas Marner*. In *Silas Marner* allegory and realism are not arranged in a parallel or complementary way, but in a combined or integrated way. In other words, both allegorical and realistic elements may be

perceived in each plot, and both of the Silas and the Godfrey story are more or less “real allegory,” to use the phrase of Courbet, the French realist painter.

1.2 Real Allegory

In mid-nineteenth century Britain, realism became the main stream in art and literature. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the first appearance of realism in reference to art and literature is in Ruskin’s *Modern Painters*, vol. III (1856).¹ George Eliot reviewed this book in the *Westminster Review* (April 1856), expressing favourably that the “truth of infinite value that he teaches is *realism*—the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality” and she maintained that the “thorough acceptance of this doctrine would remould our life” (Eliot, “John Ruskin’s *Modern Painters*, vol. III” 368). Besides this, George Eliot herself proclaimed a famous realist manifesto in the seventeenth chapter of *Adam Bede*:

So I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things seem better than they were; dreading nothing, indeed, but falsity, which, in spite of one’s best efforts, there is reason to dread. Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult. (Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 160)²

In 1855 Gustave Courbet, the French realist painter (1819-77)

proclaimed the so-called realist manifesto in the catalogue of his own exhibition mounted in his Pavilion of Realism outside the 1855 Universal Exhibition:

I have studied the art of the ancients and the art of the moderns, avoiding any preconceived system and without prejudice. I no longer wanted to imitate the one than to copy the other; nor, furthermore, was it my intention to attain the trivial goal of "art for art's sake". . . . To know in order to do, that was my idea. To be in a position to translate the customs, the ideas, the appearance of my time, according to my own estimation; to be not only a painter, but a man as well; in short, to create living art—this is my goal. (*Courbet Speaks*)

Moreover, in 1861 Courbet stated his realism more clearly as follows:

[An artist must apply] his personal faculties to the ideas and the events of the times in which he lives. . . . [A]rt in painting should consist only of the representation of things which that are visible and tangible to the artist.

Every age should be represented only by its own artists, that is to say, by the artist who have lived in it. . . .

I also maintain that painting is an essentially concrete art form and can consist only of the representation of both real and existing things. . . . An

abstract object, not visible, nonexistent, is not within the domain of painting (*Letters of Gustave Courbet*).

His monumental masterpiece, *The Painter's Studio* (1854-55) was among the forty paintings exhibited in his Pavilion of Realism. This work was subtitled *A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of My Artistic and Moral Life* (Figure 1). The figures in the painting are realistic representations from “society at its best, its worst, and its average” (Nicolson 60); at the same time, they are “allegorical representations of various influences on Courbet’s artistic life” (*The Painter's Studio*).



Fig.1 Gustave Courbet, *Atelier du peintre. Allegorie réelle déterminant une phase de sept années de ma vie artistique* (*The Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of My*

Artistic and Moral Life, 1854-55). (The Painter's Studio)

To the right are a number of Paris elites, who “played a role in the development of Courbet’s career as an artist, or who inspired him in some way,” such as “the art critics Champfleury and Charles Baudelaire, the art collector Alfred Bruyas,” and “amateurs mondains” (*Gusrave Courbet*; Clark 168).

To the left are depicted “the figure of ultimate poverty who sits on the ground” beside Courbet’s canvas and “in the shadowy depths behind her are several other figures” such as “a priest, a prostitute, a grave digger and a merchant, who symbolise the exploitation of our poor humanity” (Clark 168).

In the foreground of the left side is a man with dogs, who is “an allegory of the then current French Emperor, Napoleon III, identified by his famous hunting dogs and twirled moustache.” By placing him on the left side, Courbet represents him as a criminal, suggesting that his ‘ownership’ of France is an illegal one” (*Gusrave Courbet*).

At the foot of the hunter are “a guitar, a dagger, a plumed hat, and a buckled shoe” which are a symbol of the death of the Romantic art movement. Also, a “lay figure” or “crucified figure” behind the easel and the skull on the “Journal des Débats” are a symbol of the death of the art of the Royal Academy of Art in France”; on the other hand, “a superb, unidealised nude model” is

interpreted “as Courbet’s Muse for Realism” (Nicolson 23-33, 36; Clark 168).

Thus the real and the symbolic are finely combined and interwoven in Courbet’s *The Painter’s Studio*; therefore, Courbet called this work “a real allegory,” that is, a hybrid of realism and allegory. Since allegory and realism are generally regarded as different genres, the term real allegory is something of oxymoron, but Courbet coined the term to designate his particular kind of realism or allegory.

Similarly allegory and realism in *Silas Marner* seem to be presented as a Courbetesque hybrid of realism and allegory, that is, real allegory. As mentioned above, the interpretation that the Silas story is allegorical and the Godfrey story is realistic, is naïve and simplistic; such an interpretation narrows the reading of the fertile narrative world of *Silas Marner*. In the following chapters we will investigate some elements of real allegory in *Silas Marner* in terms of appellation and of the symbolism of plants.

Chapter 2

Appellation

Appellation or naming is not only the way to distribute each character in the work but also has etymological or onomatopoeic meanings. In *Silas Marner*, appellation tells the reader the narrator/author's intentions regarding several important characters, and contributes significantly to characterisation.

2.1. Silas Marner

First of all, let us examine the title character, Silas Marner. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names*, "Silas" is "a shortened form of Latin *Silvarnus*, the name of the god of trees," and also "[the] person called *Silvanus* by St. Paul is usually identified with the *Silas* of Acts" (Withycombe 269).

Silas Marner, the weaver of Raveloe, was one of many "emigrants from the town into the country" (*SM* 4)¹. Before he came to the rural village of Raveloe in "the rich central plain" of "Merry England," (*SM* 4) he lived in "a big town" in "an unknown region called 'north'ard'" (*SM* 6, 81). That native town was "set within sight of widespread hillsides" in strong contrast to Raveloe, which was a "low, wooded region, where he felt hidden even from the heavens by the screening trees and hedgerows" (*SM* 14). Considering that Silas is "the name of the god of trees," the appellation of Silas implies that the "low, wooded region" of Raveloe

eventually should become his beloved homeland in place of his original north'ard hometown.

However, more interesting and significant is the historical fact that "Silas became fairly common in the 17th C, and continued to be used in Dissenting circles in the 18th and 19th C" (Withycombe 269).² In fact, Silas was a Primitive Methodist in its general sense (Higdon 53n4), filled with "the movement, the mental activity, and close fellowship" (*SM* 7) in a big northern town.

George Eliot must have adopted "Silas" as the name of the Dissenting protagonist of this novel on the basis of the above-mentioned historical facts. She was so bent on historical accuracy that she is even called "a novelist-historian" (Knoepflmacher 45n7). For instance, the historian E. P. Thompson acknowledges the historical accuracy with which Silas is depicted as the custom-weaver (Thompson 270), and F. R. Leavis praises "George Eliot's treatment of religion, and her insight into the crucial part played by non-conformist religion in early industrial civilization" (Leavis 61n1). As a given name used in Dissenting circles, Silas is a realistic appellation reflecting historical facts.

Taking into account the factors mentioned above, we may say that the given name Silas is allegorical and realistic in terms of the pagan God Sylvanus and of the companion of St. Paul respectively.

As for the surname, Marner means mariner, which suggests "the kinship with Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*" (Cottle 236; Knoepflmacher 233). In a way Silas becomes a wanderer and

experiences spiritual rebirth just like the Ancient Mariner. In this sense, the surname is allegorical.

2.2 Godfrey and Dunstan Cass

Godfrey is a compound of *Guda* (god) and *frithu* (peace); the name thus signifies God's peace (Withycombe 136; Young Lxvii). As U. C. Knoepflmacher points out, it can connote "the freedom granted by God," as well as "the desire to be free of God, or 'god-free'" (240n15).

In *Silas Marner* the latter connotation is more significant. Godfrey was a worshipper of "Favourable Chance" or "Blessed Chance" (*SM* 71, 72). He avoided facing his own problems such as his secret marriage and his love for Nancy; he often and often hoped for and depended on "some unforeseen turn of fortune, some favourable chance which would save him from unpleasant consequences" (*SM* 79). Sixteen years later, when he learned of the death of his brother Dunstan and the disclosure of his crime, he came to recognise that we can never be free of God and confessed the error of his past to Nancy: "Everything comes to light, Nancy, sooner or later. When God Almighty wills it, our secrets are found" (*SM* 157). Therefore the given name Godfrey is considered allegorical and ironic in that he could not eventually be free of God.

As for the secondary character Dunstan, this name is a compound of *dun* (hill) and *stan* (stone) (Withycombe 91), but in *Silas Marner* Dunstan seems to be of more importance in its

implication or connotation than in the etymological meaning, since Dustan suggests “dunce” (a dull, ignorant person) (Shiokawa 62). His behaviour was stupid: he “took one fence too many, and ‘staked’ his horse” (*SM* 33-34); he mistakenly fell into the stone-pit since his hands were full of the stolen money, and he could not resort to his whip and the hedgerow to show him the way in the rain and darkness (*SM* 38).

In the same way, the family name Cass implies “crass.”³ The Casses are, as Peter Mudford points out, crass in varying degrees: “the proud Squire” has an “illusion about his own superiority”; Dustan is “a spiteful, jeering fellow” and Godfrey shares “the moral turpitude and unimaginativeness of the gentry” (*SM* 22-23; Mudford xxv-xxvi). In the cases of Dunstan and Cass, they are thus allegorical on the basis of a kind of onomatopoeic toning.

Thus the main and secondary characters in the Godfrey story are given allegorical or quasi-allegorical names, which we are familiar with from eighteenth-century comedy and from the comedy of humours in sixteenth and seventeenth century England.

2.3 Eppie

Eppie serves an important role in linking the Silas and the Godfrey stories. Her appellation is a pet form of Hephzibah found in the Old Testament (Isaiah 62:4), as Silas explained to Dolly Winthrop in the novel. The “tramp’s child” was named after Silas’s mother and his sister (*SM* 188, 122). Hephzibah means “my

delight is in her" in Hebrew (Withycombe 150). The appellation of Eppie has been noted for Biblical allusion, with the allegorical meaning that she becomes a delight to Silas. Historically, however, it was the name, similar to Silas, which the Dissenters preferred; they were bent on christening with names appearing in the Bible, especially, the Old Testament (Dunkling 70).

The names of Silas and his sister suggest that Silas's parents were Dissenters; therefore, they named their son after the male name from the New Testament which the Dissenters preferred, and their daughter after the female name from the Old Testament which the Dissenters favoured; they naturally brought up their children in the Dissenting circle. Eppie is an allegorical name that foreshadows her function as Silas's delight, as well as a realistic one given in accordance with the customs of Dissenters. In this sense, the name of Eppie is a hybrid between realism and allegory—a real allegory.

The main character of the allegorical Silas story is given a realistic and allegorical Christian name with its pagan implication and Christian historicity, as well as an allegorical surname with the kinship with the Ancient Mariner. On the other hand, the main character Godfrey and the secondary characters Dunstan and Squire Cass in the realistic Godfrey story are given allegorical or quasi-allegorical names on the basis of their connotation and a kind of onomatopoeic toning. Eppie the mediator between the two stories has a hybrid name between realism and allegory. The

appellation in *Silas Marner* indicates that the two stories of the double plot are presented, to a considerable extent, as real allegories respectively.

Chapter 3

Symbolism of Plants

In *Silas Marner*, various plants contribute to realism. They represent the seasons and the passing of time realistically, as “the buttercups”(SM 124) in the meadow indicate the spring and early summer, and “the mistletoe-bough” in the White Parlour (SM 95), and “handsome branches of holly, yew, and laurel” (SM 93) in the wainscoted parlour at the Red House announce “the pre-eminently brilliant celebration” (SM 85) of the winter season.

3.1 Realism

In George Eliot’s first novel, *Adam Bede*, the story begins “on the eighteenth of June, in the year of our Lord 1799” (SM 6), and the specific dates and years are referred to over and over again in the novel, just as they are in *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), which augments a sense of reality and contributes to the effect of realism. In *Silas Marner*, however, the dates and years are not indicated so minutely as in *Adam Bede*. Nonetheless, the careful reader can infer fairly definite dates and years. At first, it is narrated in the opening scene that the principal story is set roughly “In the early years of this century” (SM 4), but as the story proceeds, the time is limited to “in those war times” (SM 5), that is, during the Napoleonic Wars, and finally it is suggested that the story is set towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars (roughly 1814) from a

historical reference to “the height of fashion, with the tightest skirts and the shortest waists” (*SM* 88; Oshima [2000] 151-52n4).

In the same way, the reader can infer quite closely the time of the year in which Eppie’s wedding was held, from the following description:

It was when the great lilacs and laburnums in the old-fashioned gardens showed their golden and purple wealth above the lichen-tinted walls, and when there were calves still young enough to want bucketfuls of fragrant milk. People were not so busy then as they must become when the full cheese-making and the mowing had set in; and besides, it was a time when a light bridal dress could be worn with comfort and seen to advantage. (*SM* 174)

Lilacs (Fig. 2) and laburnums (Fig. 3) were popular plants and they were willingly planted in the old-fashioned cottage gardens. It is said that they flourished in front of almost every cottage in English villages (Kato 315). The floral calendar shows that lilacs blooms during the late spring and early summer, and laburnums flower in the late spring (*An English & American Literary Calendar* 225, 231). According to the farming calendar, calves are born in April, and May is a season for milking and cheese-making; hay-making begins in late June (“May”; “June”). It follows then that Eppie wed in late April.

Thus the plants represent the season and the change of seasons realistically, as shown by the floral and farming calendar, but we might recognise that some of them are also being used significantly as symbols.



Fig. 2 Lilac (*Lilac*)



Fig. 3 Laburnum (*Laburnum*)

3.2 Symbolism

After the wedding was held at the church, the bridal group of Eppie and Aaron, Silas, Dolly Winthrop and her husband, walked across the churchyard and down the village, as they saw the

“golden” laburnums and “purple” lilacs “above the lichen-tinted walls” in the warm spring sunshine (*SM* 174). On the way Ben Winthrop joined the party of guests at the Rainbow, and the four united people of the bridal group were welcomed by the flowers of the garden at the Stone-pits. Within sight of them, Eppie says, “O father, what a pretty home ours is! I think nobody could be happier than we are” (*SM* 176), which concludes the story. As mentioned above, the “golden laburnums and purple lilacs show succinctly and realistically the old-fashioned cottage gardens” of Raveloe in the late spring season, but they seem to connote figurative meanings, given that the lilac symbolises “Love’s first emotions” in the language of flowers, and the laburnum is a traditional Easter flower (Ingram 114; Kato 315; *An English & American Literary Calendar* 225).

3.2.1 The Language of Flowers

The language of flowers, or floriography, appeared in early nineteenth-century France. The earliest language of flower books included *Abécédaire de Flore ou langage des fleurs* (1810) by B. Delachénaye and *Le langage des fleurs* (1819) by Charlotte de Latour (Seaton 68-70). In the 1820s the idea of the language of flowers reached England and from the 1830s on it was so popular in England that language of flower books appeared yearly¹; its popularity lasted until the 1880s (Seaton 80-84).

George Eliot herself was familiar from early on with the

language of flowers. Her friend Martha (or Patty) Jackson discovered *The Language of Flowers* in 1840. From it she adopted the name Ivy (constancy) and assigned Clematis (mental beauty) to George Eliot, while George Eliot in turn assigned Veronica (fidelity in friendship) to Maria Lewes, the gentle Evangelical teacher. Interestingly enough, these flower names were used in George Eliot's correspondence with them for more than a year (*GEL*, I, xlix).

The language of flowers was extremely familiar to many Victorians including George Eliot, so probably not a few readers in those days associated the flowers appearing in *Silas Marner* with the language of flowers. Eppie and Aaron were childhood friends; their marriage was a first-love marriage. The "great lilacs," which showed their "purple" wealth on the morning that Eppie was married, symbolise the first love between Eppie and Aaron and celebrate their first-love marriage as "a deep long-growing affection" (Hardy 19).

Late April falls within the Easter season. The laburnum is used as the Easter decoration. In this sense, the laburnum stands for the Easter, the Christian festival celebrating the resurrection of Christ. In *Silas Marner*, however, the "laburnums" in sight of the bridal group including Silas, are considered to celebrate not the resurrection of Christ, but the spiritual resurrection of Silas in the Raveloe village—his regeneration through love: his conversion from "earnest belief through disbelief to a new . . . faith," that is to say, a

religion of humanity in essence.

3.2.2 The Autumn

Silas Marner concludes with Eppie's garden, where "the flowers shone with answering gladness, as the four united people came, within sight of them" (*SM* 176). This garden is what Eppie wants very much in the autumn when it is sixteen years since Eppie came to the Stone-pits: "My little old daddy! I'm so glad. I don't think I shall want anything else when we've got a little garden" (*SM* 135).

The season autumn is important and symbolic. The autumn is the time of harvest. Significantly Silas and Godfrey reap the harvest of their respective lives in the autumn after sixteen years. Eppie suddenly appeared before Silas in the winter sixteen years ago. Eppie is as it were winter wheat. As the proverb goes, "As you sow, so shall you reap."² Sixteen years later, Eppie has grown up admirably; Silas and Godfrey oppose each other concerning the harvest of the winter wheat. It is not Godfrey the "real father" and her "lawful father" but Silas the "foster father" and "her old long-loved father" (*SM* 165, 166, 167) that Eppie chooses and accepts as her true father.

It was a literary convention established by that time as well as a traditional happy ending that a supposedly orphaned child should be restored eventually to her birthright of wealth and high-status, as in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* (1610). However,

Eppie refuses to accept the traditional principle of blood relationship or to be restored to her birthright. Instead she clings to the love of those who brought her up and makes her choice to stay among “the working-folks” whom she likes:

‘ . . . 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,’ . . . ‘I’m promised to marry a working-man, as ’ll live with father, and help me to take care of him.’ (168)

In short, she values her achieved status above ascribed status. Her creative choice of Silas and the working-folks makes Eppie a new and subversive type of “orphan” heroine (Hardy 17; Oshima [1999] 23, 24). In this respect, Eppie is not merely a Romantic, innocent child, but also a radically innovative heroine in nature.

3.2.3 Eppie’s Garden

As Michael Waters points out, “in Victorian fiction, the act of creating a garden is normally a gesture of commitment to a person, place and domestic futurity, particularly when it is undertaken with or for a loved partner” (235). For example, in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), the second-generation children, Hareton Earnshaw and the second Cathy construct their flower garden; it implies the desire for domesticity, and is “part of Cathy’s programme to socialize her husband” (Waters 237).

Based on Eppie’s request and Dolly’s advice, three people—the

young couple of Eppie and Aaron, and the elderly Silas—cooperate to create the cottage garden. This process of creating the garden overlaps the process by which Eppie, Aaron, and Silas strengthen the bond of love through mutual commitment, and thus prepare for domestic futurity. Therefore, the act of creating Eppie's garden implies the happiness of a new future home which the three are to create with the strengthened bond of love.

Eppie's completed garden is a kind of *hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden). It is "fenced with stones on two sides" and its front is "an open fence" (*SM* 176).

In western culture, the *hortus conclusus* is in reference to The *Song of Solomon*, which is "a romantic song between man and woman," and which is read "as an allegory of Christ and his 'bride', the Christian Church" (*Song of Solomon*). The *Song of Solomon* describes the *hortus conclusus* as follows:

A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut
up, a fountain sealed (*Hortus conclusus soror mea,*
sponsa, hortus conclusus, fons signatus)

Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant
fruits; camphire, with spikenard,
Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all
trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the
chief spices:

A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams
from Lebanon.

(Song Sol. 4:12-15: *Hotrus Conclusus*)

This enclosed garden, as “my sister, my spouse,” is traditionally associated with the Virgin Mary and symbolises her virginity and purity and innocence; it also invokes the image of the garden of Eden or Paradise before the Fall of Man.³

Considering these symbolism and cultural associations, Eppie’s enclosed garden, which welcomes the bridal group, symbolises the spouse Eppie and praises her purity and innocence. Furthermore, the spring flowers in the garden which “shone with answering gladness” through the open fence, are interpreted as emblems of the fertility of the future in which the newly married couple and Silas will lead a happy life filled with love.

It is also significant that the lavender (Fig. 4) from the Red House and the furze bush (Fig. 5) where Silas found Eppie’s mother Molly dead sixteen years ago are transplanted into the garden. It is late April in the spring season. The full-blown, yellow blossoms of the furze and the pale purple flowers of the lavender which are just coming into bloom, are among those flowers shining “with answering gladness.” As Kristin Brady points out, the furze bush is “conventionally associated with the fallen woman” (Brady 117). Since Molly was an opium addict—a kind of fallen woman, we may say that the furze bush, on which her corpse was found, symbolises Molly both as Eppie’s mother and as a fallen woman.

As for lavender, “it was traditional for the country man to plant a lavender-bed or hedge for his bride” (Leavis [1967] 263)

In this light, the lavender stands for a marriage between Eppie and Aaron, but it also symbolises Godfrey the real father in that lavender is “only in the gentlefolks’ gardens” (*SM* 135) in Raveloe and that it is transplanted from Godfrey’s house.⁴ So the lavender planted in Eppie’s garden will suggest “the eventual reconciliation of Godfrey Cass and his natural daughter” (Waters 235); in the same way, that the lavender is planted coexistingly together with the furze bush will betoken even the reconciliation of Godfrey and Molly.



Fig. 4 Lavender (*Lavender*)



Fig.5 Furze (*Ulex Eeuropaeus*)

Thus the eventual reconciliations of Godfrey, Molly and Eppie,

and therefore, the eventual forgiveness of Molly's and Godfrey's sins of omission—Molly's sin of abandonment of her duties as a mother owing to her addiction to opium, and Godfrey's sin of his secret marriage and abandonment of his duties as a father—are suggested through the lavender and the furze bush planted together in her garden. In this sense, Eppie's enclosed garden invokes a kind of recovered Paradise; the furze and lavender flowers shining "with answering gladness" represent reconciliation and forgiveness, showing symbolically both the deceased Mother and the absent real father celebrating the marriage and offering their silent congratulations.

As seen above, the plants in the "old fashioned gardens" and in Eppie's completed enclosed cottage garden, do not merely show the spring season concretely and realistically, but also symbolise the spiritual resurrection of Silas, and the eventual forgiveness and reconciliation of Eppie, Molly and Godfrey. These plants contribute to realism and function as multiple symbols, weaving a real allegory in *Silas Marner*.

Conclusion

Some principal elements of real allegory in *Silas Marner* are shown in appellations and the symbolism of plants.

Regarding appellations, Silas Marner, the main character of the allegorical Silas story, is given not only a realistic and allegorical Christian name with its pagan implication and Christian antecedents, but also as an allegorical surname in association with the Ancient Mariner. In the meantime, the main character Godfrey and the secondary characters Dunstan and Squire Cass in the realistic Godfrey story are named allegorically or quasi-allegorically on the basis of their name's connotations and a kind of onomatopoeic toning. Eppie the mediator between the two stories has a hybrid name partaking of both realism and allegory in that her name foreshadows her function as Silas's delight and references historical facts about the Dissenters. The appellation in *Silas Marner* indicates that the two stories of the double plot are presented, to a considerable extent, as real allegories.

As for plants, they represent realistically and concretely the seasons and the passing of time, but some of them are used significantly as symbols, weaving a real allegory.

Considering that the lilac symbolises "Love's first emotions" in the language of flowers and that the laburnum is the traditional Easter flower, the "great lilacs" in "the old-fashioned gardens" symbolise the first love between Eppie and Aaron and celebrate

their first-love marriage; in the same way, the “laburnums” stands for Easter and they may be considered as celebrating not the resurrection of Christ, but the spiritual resurrection of Silas in Raveloe village—his moral regeneration through love: his conversion from “earnest belief through disbelief to a new . . . faith”, that is to say a religion of humanity in essence.

In association with the *hortus conclusus*, Eppie’s enclosed garden symbolises Eppie as a spouse and praises her purity and innocence. Furthermore, the spring flowers in the enclosed garden which “shone with answering gladness” are interpreted as emblems of the fertility of the future in which the newly married couple and Silas will lead a happy life. Notably the lavender and the furze bush are more significant: the former symbolises the marriage between Eppie and Aaron as well as the real father Godfrey, and the latter stands for Eppie’s mother Molly. That the lavender and the furze bush are planted coexistingly will suggest the eventual forgiveness and reconciliation among Eppie, Molly and Godfrey. Those plants contribute to realism and function as multiple symbols, weaving a real allegory in *Silas Marner*.

The traditional interpretation that the Silas story as allegorical and the Godfrey story as realistic, is too simplistic. As our analysis indicates, allegory and realism in *Silas Marner* are presented, to a considerable extent, as a Courbetesque hybrid of realism and allegory, that is, real allegory.

We have treated the appellations of several important characters and the main plants in “the old-fashioned gardens” and in Eppie’s garden. Our analysis needs further research into the other characters and place names as well as the symbolism of the other plants in *Silas Marner* to confirm this short novel as real allegory.

Notes

Introduction

1 *The George Eliot Letters* (hereafter *GEL*), vol. III, p. 137.

Chapter 1

1 “realism” 3a:

Close resemblance to what is real; fidelity of representation, rendering the precise details of the real thing or scene. In reference to art and literature, sometimes used as a term of commendation, when precision and vividness of detail are regarded as a merit, and sometimes unfavourably contrasted with idealized description or representation. It has often been used with implication that the details are of an unpleasant or sordid character.

1856 Ruskin *Mod. Paint.* iv. viii. §8 (1883) III. 103 To try by startling realism to enforce the monstrosity that has no terror in itself. (“realism”, *OED*)

2 George Eliot was the first to proclaim a realist manifesto in novel, but in poetry Wordsworth made a kind of realist manifesto in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* as early as 1800 :

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a

selection of language really used by men (6)

Chapter 2

1 George Eliot, *Silas Marner* (hereafter *SM*), p. 4.

2 The protestant denominations rejected the authority of the Pope and put more emphasis of the teachings of the Bible, which had a profound effect on given names: “Names of saints fell out of favour, and . . . names appearing in the Bible came into fashion” (*Behind the Names : Protestant Reformation*).

3 According to *A Dictionary of Surnames*, Cass is a short form of Cassandra, the name (of uncertain, possibly non-Gk, origin) of ill-fated Trojan prophetess of classical legend (Hanks and Hodges 97).

Chapter 3

1 According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the first appearance of the phrase “the language of flowers” is in 1834.

2 This proverb is based on Gal. 6:7: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

3 Etymologically “paradise” means “enclosure” (“Paradise, n.,” *OED*).

4 This seems a little bit strange because lavender is one of the easiest plants to obtain in England in fact (Kato 315). Eliot changes this fact in her novel to let lavender function as a symbol of the upper class.

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Lavender 4 Dec.2016

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Appendix

Plants in *Silas Marner*

Plants	Chapter / page	Scene
herbs	chap.1 / p.7	And where did Master Marner get his knowledge of <u>herbs</u> from-and charms too, if he liked to give them away?
foxglove	chap.1 / p.8	He had inherited from his mother some acquaintance with medical herbs and their preparation—a little store of wisdom which she had imparted to him as a solemn bequest—but of late years he had had doubts about the lawfulness of applying this knowledge, believing that herbs could have no efficacy without prayer, and that prayer might suffice without herbs; so that the inherited delight he had in wandering in the fields in search of <u>foxglove</u> and <u>dandelion</u> and <u>coltsfoot</u> , began to wear to him the character of a temptation.
dandelion	chap.1 / p.8	
coltsfoot	chap.1 / p.8	
wild oats	chap.3 / p.23	sowing of something worse than <u>wild oats</u>

a new leaf	chap.3 / p.23	But if Mr Godfrey didn't turn over <u>a new leaf</u> , he might say 'Good-bye' to Miss Nancy Lammeter.
coppice	chap.4 / p.34	he walked as fast as he could to a <u>coppice</u> on his right hand
lavender	chap.11 / p.90	And it was really a pleasure-from the first opening of the bandbox, where
rose leaves	chap.11 / p.90	everything smelt of <u>lavender</u> and <u>rose-leaves</u> , to the clasping of the small coral necklace that fitted closely round her little white neck.
holly	chap.11 / p.93	Fresh and pleasant with handsome branches of <u>holly, yew, and laurel</u> from
yew	chap.11 / p.93	the abundant growths of the old garden
laurel	chap.11 / p.93	
furze bush	chap.12 / p.106	She sank down against a straggling <u>furz bush</u> , an easy pillow enough; and the bed of snow, too, was soft.
furze bushes	chap.12 / p.110	Bending forward, he could just discern the marks made by the little feet on the virgin snow, and he followed their track to <u>the furze bushes</u> .

furze	chap.12 / p.110	'Mammy!' the little one cried again and again, stretching itself forward so as almost to escape from Silas' s arm, before he himself was aware that there was something more than the bush before him- that there was an human body, with the head sunk low in <u>the furze</u> , and half-covered with the shaken snow.
(the summer-shed leaf)	chap.14 / p.118	seemed as trivial as <u>the summer-shed leaf</u>
(grass)	chap.14 / p.119	for the child'ull grow like <u>grass</u> i' May
(fresh-sprung herbs)	chap.14 / p.119	but clean and neat as <u>fresh-sprung herbs</u>
the once familiar herbs/the leaves	chap.14 / p.124	Silas began to look for <u>the once familiar herbs</u> again; and as <u>the leaves</u> , with their unchanged outline and markings, lay on his palm, there was a sense of crowding remembrances from which he turned away timidly, taking refuge in Eppie's little world, that lay lightly on his enfeebled spirit.
blossom	chap.16 / p.133	the freshest blossom of youth

double daisies	chap.16 / p.134	'I wish we had a little garden, father, with double daisies in, like Mrs Winthrop's,' said Eppie
rosemary	chap.16 / p.135	And I'll have a bit o' <u>rosemary, and bergamot, and thyme,</u> because they're so sweet-smelling, but there's no lavender only in the gentlefolk's gardens, I think.'
bergamot	chap.16 / p.135	
thyme	chap.16 / p.135	
lavender	chap.16 / p.135	
the furze bush	chap.16 / p.142	
The furze bush	chap.16 / p.142	<u>The furze bush</u> was there still; and this afternoon, when Eppie came out with Silas into the sunshine, it was the first object that arrested her eyes and thoughts.
the furze bush	chap.16 / p.143	'it wouldn't do to leave out <u>the furze bush</u> ; and there's nothing prettier to my thinking, when it's yallow with flowers.'
Lavender/	chap.17 /	the only prevailing scent is of <u>the</u>

	p.146	<u>lavender and rose-leaves</u> that fill the
rose-leaves	chap.17 / p.146	vases of Derbyshire spar.
(garden/gardening)	chap.19 / p.162	<p>‘Only <u>the garden</u>, father,’ said Eppie, blushing up to the ears the moment after.</p> <p>‘You love <u>a garden</u>, do you, my dear?’ said Nancy, thinking that this turn in the point of view might help her husband.</p> <p>‘We should agree in that: I give a deal of time to <u>the garden</u>.’</p> <p>‘Ah, there’s plenty of <u>gardening</u> at the Red house,’ said Godfrey, surprised at the difficulty he found in approaching a proposition which had seemed so easy to him in the distance.</p>
lilacs	conclusion / p.174	It was when the great <u>lilacs and</u>
Laburnums	conclusion / p.174	<u>laburnums</u> in the old-fashioned gardens showed their golden and purple wealth
(lichen)	conclusion / p.174	above the lichen-tinted walls, and when there were calves still young enough to want bucketfuls of fragrant milk.
lilac	conclusion / p.174	Happily the sunshine fell more warmly than usual on <u>the lilac</u> tufts the morning that Eppie was married, for her dress

		was a very light one.
(a lily)	conclusion / p.174	Seen at a little distance as she walked across the churchyard and down the village, she seemed to be attired in pure white, and her hair looked like the dash of gold on a <u>lily</u> .
the garden/ the flowers	conclusion / p.176	<u>The garden</u> was fenced with stones on two sides, but in front there was an open fence, through which <u>the flowers</u> shone with answering gladness, as the four united people came within sight of them.