

THEMATIC AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF GEORGE ELIOT'S SELECT NOVELS: A STUDY

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Abstract

George Eliot was a famous English poet, journalist and novelist during the Victorian era. Her real name was Mary Ann Evans and her pen name was George Eliot. She has written seven novels, poetry and has done translations. This paper will analyse the thematic and cultural aspects in six of the following novels of George Eliot- Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe, Felix Holt, the Radical, Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life and Daniel Deronda. George Eliot's first novel was Adam Bede, which was published in 1859. Adam Bede deals primarily with the story of Hetty Sorrel. She commits child murder. It is a historical novel. Characters include Adam Bede, a carpenter, Hetty Sorrel, the girl that Adam desires to marry, Arthur Donnithorne, Dinah Morris who is a Methodist preacher and also Hetty's cousin, and others. George Eliot's second novel was The Mill on the Floss, published in 1860. Maggie Tulliver and Tom Tulliver are siblings. The novel revolves around their lives. Bessy Tulliver and Jeremy Tulliver are their parents. Philip Wakem, Stephen Guest are important characters. The siblings drown towards the ending of the novel. George Eliot's third novel was Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe (1861). It is set in Raveloe, and the protagonist is a weaver. Due to a wrong accusation of theft, he leaves Lantern Yard and settles in Raveloe. He mostly isolates himself from the community. The story deals with the slow integration of Silas Marner back into the community. George Eliot's fifth novel Felix Holt, the Radical (1866) is set around the time of the Reform Act 1832. Characters include Felix Holt who is a watchmaker, Harold Transome who is a rich landowner, Esther Lyon, Matthew Jeremy, Maurice Christian among others. George Eliot's sixth novel was Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life (1871). Middlemarch is a fictional place. Themes related to politics, religion and marriage are discussed in the novel. Characters include Dorothea Brooke who is an intelligent and rich woman, Tertius Lydgate who is a doctor, Rev. Edward Casaubon who is a clergyman, Mary Garth, Arthur Brooke among others. George Eliot's seventh novel was Daniel Deronda (1876). The novel speaks about Jewish Zionism. Daniel Deronda, the protagonist was raised by Sir Hugo Mallinger. Characters include Daniel Deronda, Gwendolen Harleth who is a beautiful woman in an unhappy marriage, Mirah Lapidoth who is saved from committing suicide by the protagonist, Maria Alcharisi who is the protagonist's mother and an opera singer, among other characters. This paper looks at thematic and cultural aspects in the above mentioned novels.

Keywords: George Eliot, Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe, Felix Holt, the Radical, Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life, Daniel Deronda.

INTRODUCTION

George Eliot is a widely known Victorian era writer. Mary Ann Evans was her real name. She has written poetry, novels and has also done translations. This paper analyses the thematic and cultural aspects in six of her select novels- Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe, Felix Holt, the Radical, Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life and Daniel Deronda.

ANALYSIS

Adam Bede

Adam Bede is one of George Eliot's novels that focuses on the life of a young girl, Hetty Sorrel. She is extremely beautiful and therefore has a lot of suitors. The protagonist of the novel, Adam Bede also courts her. He is an honest, hard-working carpenter. Dinah Morris is the cousin of Hetty Sorrel. She is a Methodist preacher.

Dinah is a humble and pious woman. Hetty falls in love with Arthur Donnithorne, a rich man. He is the grandson of Squire Donnithorne. Hetty later becomes pregnant with Arthur's child. Afraid of being ostracised by the community since she is not married, she abandons the child who later dies. Hetty is arrested for child murder.

When Arthur learns about the news, he gets the sentence reduced from hanging to transportation. The theme of religion is seen in the novel. Dinah is a very devout woman who is often preaching. Victorian era gave a lot of importance to religion. At various instances in the novel, Dinah Morris is shown praising God and preaching. Several people listen to her preaching. She later marries Adam. Another theme is the deceptive nature of appearances.

The love of a mother is also portrayed. Lisbeth is Adam's mother. Immaturity of Hetty Sorrel and Arthur Donnithorne and the heavy price that the characters pay for their actions is also seen. During the Victorian age, having a child out of wedlock was frowned upon. Such

women were ostracised by society and led unhappy lives.

The Mill on the Floss

The Mill on the Floss is one of George Eliot's novels that has two siblings at its focus. The siblings are Tom Tulliver and Maggie Tulliver. Their parents are Jeremy Tulliver and Bessy Tulliver. The siblings grow up near River Floss. River Floss is a fictional river.

Maggie Tulliver is a nine-year-old young girl. Maggie Tulliver is shown to be quite intelligent. However, tragically, her intelligence is seldom encouraged. Due to financial troubles, Maggie's brother, Tom leaves his education and joins the business to help his family. The father of the siblings later dies in the novel.

Towards the end, the river floods. The boat capsizes and Tom and Maggie drown. The love between siblings and family is a major theme in the novel. The hardworking nature of Tom Tulliver and his maturity is also depicted.

The roles prescribed to women can be closely analysed in the text. Maggie Tulliver is a very intelligent girl. But her intelligence isn't encouraged by the other characters in the novel. During the Victorian Age, the intellectual world was believed to belong to men only. Education for women was not encouraged. Women had to be submissive, graceful and her main role was to take care of her husband and children.

Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe

Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe is another novel by George Eliot which tells the story of a linen weaver. He initially lives at Lantern Yard. He is a good samaritan. He is then wrongly accused of stealing money from the church. This incident causes Silas to lose his faith in people as well as religion. His fiancée also leaves him.

Silas therefore moves away and decides to stay at Raveloe. At Raveloe, he focuses on his work of weaving and earns gold coins. Later, he meets a child whose mother, Molly has

passed away. He names the child as Eppie and decides to raise her.

This act of raising Eppie acts as a pivotal force for Silas slowly getting back into being one among the community. Loneliness is an important theme in the novel. Silas resorts to a lonely life because his faith in people and relationships have been broken because of the events that occurred in Lantern Yard that included being betrayed by a friend.

Love is a central theme in the novel. Silas's love for Eppie reveals his tender heart to the other inhabitants of Raveloe. Before Eppie's arrival into the life of Silas, he was isolated and didn't have much of a relationship with the community. Her arrival transforms his life completely. Thus love is a major and very important theme in the novel.

The Victorian age that saw the rapid growth of industrialisation is also seen in the novel as portrayed through the description of the factory in Lantern Yard towards the end.

Felix Holt: The Radical

Felix Holt, The Radical is a novel by George Eliot that is set during the time of the First Reform Act 1832. An election occurs in the novel. Harold Transome contests the election. He is a landowner and a wealthy man. The novel is set in the English Midlands in the Treby community. The Treby community is a fictional one.

Harold Transome's family members usually contested as a Tory. Harold, however, contests as a Radical. This causes resentment towards Harold. Felix Holt is a watchmaker and his character is in direct contrast to that of Harold Transome's.

Politics is the central theme of the work. Morality also plays a crucial role. Esther Lyon, who is a teacher, is revealed to be the stepdaughter of Rev. Lyon. Felix Holt falls in love with her. Harold Transome also courts her because she is the real heir to the Transome estate. Esther Lyon, in the end, chooses to marry Felix. The Reform Act 1832 has great significance in politics.

Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life

Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life is a novel by George Eliot that is set in Middlemarch, a fictional town. The Reform Act 1832 is spoken about in the text. The most important characters are Dorothea Brooke and Tertius Lydgate. Dorothea Brooke is nineteen years old. She is an orphan. Celia is her younger sister. Dorothea is quite devout. She is a rich and intelligent woman. Tertius is a young doctor and is extremely talented.

Marriage is an important theme in the novel. Victorian Era deemed utmost importance to marriage. The novel deals predominantly with various relationships. Politics also plays a role, as does education. The novel focuses on class differences. Gender roles were enforced very strictly during the Victorian Era, as seen in the novel. The Reform Act 1832 has great political significance in history.

Daniel Deronda

Daniel Deronda is another novel by George Eliot that shows the lives of Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen Harleth. Gwendolen Harleth belongs to a rich family. She is shown to be selfish. Her family soon faces financial difficulties. At the beginning of the novel, Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen Harleth meet in Leubronn. It is a fictional town set in Germany.

Daniel Deronda is a kind-hearted young man. He was raised by Sir Hugo Mallinger, a wealthy man. Sir Hugo Mallinger had loved Daniel Deronda's mother, Maria Alcharisi, an opera singer and thus had agreed to raise Daniel for her.

Daniel Deronda saves Mirah Lapidoth, a young Jewish woman who tries to commit suicide by drowning. She is a singer. Gwendolen Harleth marries Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt in order to save herself from poverty and faces an unhappy marriage. Her husband later dies. Daniel Deronda falls in love with Mirah.

Marriage is an important theme in the novel. During the Victorian Era, women did not have many opportunities to earn money and had to

marry well for a financially secure future. Religion features a lot in the novel. Ideas related to Zionism are discussed. Zionism is a movement that wants the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Thus numerous themes are seen in George Eliot's novels that succeed in creating great works of literature.

CONCLUSION

Thus various themes are propagated in George Eliot's novels that succeed in holding the reader's attention. Realism is often encountered in George Eliot's works as the writer makes sure to add layers of realism in her work.

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