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Seeing Beyond the Conclusion of Silas Marner

Eppie had a larger garden than she had ever expected there now; and in other ways there had been alterations at the expense of Mr Cass, the landlord, to suit Silas's larger family. For he and Eppie had declared that they would rather stay at the Stone-pits than go to any new home. The garden was fenced with stones on two sides, but in the front there was an open fence, through which the flowers shone with answering gladness, as the four united people came within sight of them.

'Oh Father,' said Eppie, 'what a pretty home ours is! I think nobody could be happier than we are' (183).

The concluding paragraph of George Eliot's novel, Silas Marner, works as an endpoint to the narrative, but does not completely encapsulate it within its own limits. The temporal progression of the narrative may reach its end, but within this end are invisible openings through which the future might grow. Both the content with which the narrator describes the final scene and the syntactic structure in which the content is presented comment on the boundaries that remain unseen by the Raveloe community.

The choice to present a "Conclusion" outside the series of chapters emphasizes its difference from the rest of the novel: the "Conclusion" reaches beyond being defined by a corresponding "part" and "number" like the rest of the chapters of the novel. This alone produces the effect of an implied importance and highlights the expectation of winding-up all of the narrative threads that have been left hanging. Further, as the conclusion approaches its own conclusion, the reader grows correspondingly more eager for closure: it is the point at which the narrator departs from its subjects and the point at which the reader departs from the narrator's account of them.

The label of the final chapter as a conclusion is a device motivated by the attention drawn to this very anticipation for closure: the reader is following the present stream of description while also experiencing, as Silas experiences after he loses his gold, a "...double presence of an inexplicable surprise and a hurrying influx of memories" (111), or as Eppie experiences when she discovers the her relationship to Godfrey, a "...[darting] backward in conjectures, and forward in previsions of what

this ... implied” (171). The double presence of the reader, both in the present flow of language and in the backwards conjectures to fill the language with meaning, points to Eliot's realist method. By this point in the novel, the reader has grown to such a familiarity with the community of Raveloe so as to fill the language with “...all the essential facts in the existence and relations of the ...” Raveloe community (*Natural History of German Life* 260). However, the images that Eliot chooses to portray the final scene defy the closure the reader seeks—though the various threads intertwine to create the final picture, darting back to their roots suggests that there is much left unsaid.

Just as Eppie often discusses her desire for a garden and forms “expectations” for how her desire will materialize, the reader too comes to form certain expectations of how Eppie's garden should have been constructed: the reader's influx of memories suggests that the garden should be “like Mrs. Winthrop's” (138), contain “some soil from Mr. Cass's garden” (139), include the “furze bush” (147), have a fence built with stones from the Stone-pit (147), and have been constructed by Aaron, Silas, and Eppie. The garden, with its manifold content, injected with the reader's memories associated with each of its elements, and thus contiguous to the history of each character who had a hand in creating it, serves as a metonymy for the Raveloe community: the reader's expectations are invested in more than the simple development of the plants in the garden, but in the development of the characters to which the garden is connected.

The garden does not fit within these expectations, however, but bursts through them into a “...larger garden than she had ever expected...” (183): no matter what mental picture the reader could have potentially formed of the garden, the garden that the narrator presents is necessarily larger, containing more than any combination of the elements above. The abundance of the garden is not directly attributed to anything or anyone in particular, but only indirectly implied by the semicolon and the conjunction “and,” creating a strong connection to the second sentence and hinting that the garden fits into the category of “...alterations at the expense of Mr Cass, the landlord...” (183).

All of the memories that form the reader's expectation of what should be included in the garden

have been altered by the landlord to be larger than possibly expected. However, the landlord does not directly perform the alterations: the passive voice, both textually and physically distancing the landlord, and changing the name of Godfrey, all suggest a hierarchical distance of Godfrey from the community of Raveloe. The passive voice denies Godfrey's action in any of the alterations, which is further emphasized by the information that he gave his *expense*, but not his actual labor to the alterations. The placement of the landlord in a separate sentence, albeit connected by a semicolon, as well as the knowledge that he "...had gone away..." (183), also embody the distance that Godfrey still maintains from the community of Raveloe. Finally, the name with which the reader has identified Godfrey throughout the novel is replaced by the titles of both "Mr Cass" and "the landlord," which not only disconnects Godfrey from his familiar name, thus creating a block between the reader's "double presence," but also marks him as within a class above the rest of the characters. The title of "landlord" has a particular relevance to the image of the garden as well: not only does Godfrey reconfigure the size of the garden, but positions himself in power over it, "lording" over the "land," in which the garden sets its roots.

Mr Cass is thus the hidden agent that has determined the range of the garden: the text also illustrates this graphically by the order of the final paragraph of the concluding chapter as mirroring the order of the concluding chapter as a whole. Like the fence partially surrounding the garden, the concluding paragraph is fenced on two sides temporal walls, whose spacial correspondents appear at the top and bottom of the paragraph. The paragraph both begins and ends by describing Eppie's garden, beginning by remarking that "Eppie had a ... garden..." (183) and ending by remarking that "...the four people came within sight of [the flowers]" (183). These walls also mirror the temporal walls of the chapter as a whole: the first paragraph of the chapter the narrator's remark that "...the great lilacs and laburnums in the old-fashioned gardens showed their golden and purple wealth above the lichen-tinted walls..." (181) creates the first temporal wall at the beginning of the chapter that is completed by the second temporal wall of the concluding paragraph. In both cases, the reader's

“double presence” is mobilized in a more limited context to dart backward to the respective first wall, which is in both cases connected to “wealth” and “expense” and then forward to the respective second wall, which is in both cases connected to the community of Raveloe, the “four united people.”

There is, however, one line that overcomes the graphical walls, the very last line of the novel. On the surface, Eppie's exclamation seems to be uplifting, but collapses under its own weight to show the limits that still remain encircling the Raveloe community. The first weakness of Eppie's exclamation is the uncertainty suggested by the use of the modal auxiliary “could,” which is used to talk about possibilities of the past and consequentially doesn't say anything about Eppie's present, but rather suggests a vague possibility that “nobody in the past was happier than we are in the present.” Secondly, Eppie frames this vague possibility as a clause dependent on the main clause, “I think.” If it is the case that Eppie *thinks* that “nobody could be happier than we are,” then it might be the limit by which she defines her happiness that causes her to suggest its relatively superior position to the vague possibility that “nobody in the past was happier than we are in the present.” And finally, the limits of Eppie's thoughts are drawn out by her aesthetic judgment of the “prettiness” of their home, which immediately precedes Eppie's idea of happiness. From Eppie's progression of thought, Eliot systematically inverts the prettiness and happiness: from the sight of the flowers springs Eppie's judgment of the prettiness of their home, which leads to the boundaries of what Eppie considers to be the highest amount of happiness, which in turn is based on Eppie's relation of their present happiness to what might have been in the past. Taking into account the significance of the image of the garden as a metonymy for the community of Raveloe and also taking into account the “landlord” as being in a concealed position of power so as to alter the garden and circumscribe it with limits, Eppie's judgment of the prettiness of the flowers of the garden shining through their fence shows her blindness to her own captivity.

Eliot does leave an opening, however, through which the “four united people” might escape the fence through which their own representations are enclosed. The only opening that Eliot allows is the

potential for the characters to recognize themselves within the image of the garden: the “open fence” through which the flowers are shining and the position of the characters “within sight” of them, allows the potential for the characters to reinterpret themselves; however, though this potential is offered, Eliot leaves Eppie to misinterpret the garden, but entices the reader to see the walls, both visible and invisible, in which the Raveloe community is contained and to do so by means of an awareness of the working of the double presence of thoughts and memories within an anticipation for closure.