

Cultural Outlook of Literary Dialect in *Hard Times* and *Silas Marner*

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to help plug the oral utterance as it occurs in dialogue with the cultural impact in a given society, i.e. to explain the cultural significance of the variants and indicate how the use of dialect by humble characters can interpret a whole system of society mapped by Dickens and Eliot in *Hard Times* and *Silas Marner* respectively. Otherwise, the paper is designed to provide the type of speech community in *Hard Times* and *Silas Marner* besides the different cultural components of such communities that could the dialectal variables, used by the different characters in the novels, amply reflect through their speech. *Hard Times* and *Silas Marner* offer interesting raw material for literary dialect analysis, since each of dialect characters denotes a linguistic strategy to reflect cultural interpretation.

[Keywords: Dickens, Eliot, *Hard Times*, *Silas Marner*, dialogue, culture.]

Culture and Dialect in *Hard Times*

There is a flow of English culture in *Hard Times* to indicate awareness that economic events like Industrial Revolution and expansion of mining factories affected deeply the life of northerners. Had not known that some people localized in North England speaking correspondingly a dialect truly existed, English history would have been distorted or lacked important realistic events.

Working Class Culture

Dickens has been famous for representing working people who by the nineteenth century moved in the North of England into the textile and mining factories whose number increased by the Industrial Revolution and the factory system; this just render them "nearly all poor, of low social class, employed in one of two industries (textiles or mining), and of limited formal education. Dialect literatures evolved to meet the needs of these new urban-industrial populations" (Shorrocks 1999: 89).

This is exactly the portrait of Stephen Blackpool in *Hard Times*. Dickens was conscious that people like to read about themselves in their dialect to fulfill the meaning of group identity and autonomy; thus, he thinks that including a character like Stephen Blackpool in his novel may echo the voice of working classes.

Dickens purposes to use heavy dialect through Stephen not for comic effect or to share mere compassion with, but his goal was, rather, larger because he was conscious

of a rich Lancashire dialect literature evolving to represent a literature of the North of England with the aim to duplicate cultural identity, and group identity “something that went far beyond mere consolation and escapism, or the homely, the sentimental, and the comic” (Shorrocks 1999: 96). Dickens was good to stimulate the readers’ compassion in sharing or at least visualizing the working class life and in presenting a culture of industrialism he targets at exploring social class difference.

Industrial Culture

Though Dickens was born in Portsmouth, and grown up in small-town Kent, he has been “hailed as the first great English novelist of the city” (Eagleton 2005: 143) and this is important in the way he should imagine the world around him for literary purposes especially that in Dickens’s own time England knew radical changes from mainly rural to largely urban city. Being a London based-setting, his fictional attention derives from industrial workers and manufacturers except in *Hard Times* which is known as his only industrial novel where it becomes hard for Dickens to depict new standards of the natural especially that he is “severe on ‘unnatural’ behaviour” (Eagleton 2005: 147). It was difficult for Dickens to write *Hard Times* in the sense that “he portrays a world so thoroughly culturalized that it is hard to know by what ‘natural’ standards such ‘unnatural’ conduct can be judged” (idem).

Hard Times, in sum, is a social critique where “all things [are] compromised by industrial culture” (Childers 2001: 89). *Hard Times* is a report of an industrial-capitalist system represented through the snob Bounderby and the intellectual Gradgrind using a highly standard English fulfilling the norms of such standard but at the same time, such standards of language and system are interrupted by low variety of English performed in “the anarchic spontaneity of a circus” (Eagleton 2005: 158) of Sleary. This just interprets Dickens technique to juxtapose the ‘low’ with the ‘high; ‘the middle’ with ‘the working’; and ‘the serious’ with the ‘fantasy’. Dickens is aware that working at the circus is given to jobless people so he produces *Hard Times* to reduce culture to the “question of what to do with people when they aren’t at work” (Eagleton 2005: 158). Being industrial does not prevent the dialect from pervading in the whole novel for one should not “regard cities as any less ‘regional’ than other areas” (Snell 1998: 3). In this sense Lancashire dialect is classified as urban dialect mastered by northerners in England; the mill factories spread everywhere and motivate the creation of new jargon up to the new society as Claude Lévi-Strauss once wrote “to say language is to say society” (Duranti 1997: 337). It means that “government, workplaces, families and other institutions that make up societies rely on language to reproduce such institutions over time” (idem). Scholars have tightened the evidence for the relationship of dialect and society concerning new transformations through which Britain shifted to a large urban nation by the latter half of the nineteenth century. In this vein, Romaine states that “Britain became the first nation to have an industrial working class. Towns have typically attracted migrants from many rural areas,

who speak different languages and regional dialects...the rise of urbanization is connected with an increase in social stratification which is reflected in linguistic variation" (2000:65)

Indeed, *Hard Times* "stands as Dickens's contribution to the industrial fiction genre proper" (Childers 2001: 89). Opposing to a harsh snob industrial culture, Dickens idealized women in *Hard Times* because, in the main, Women are "the bearers of the novels positive values of compassion and imagination; 'culture' or 'creativity' are in this sense feminine qualities, in opposition to dominative masculinism of the industrial system" (Eagleton 1987: 309). The spirit of industry haunts the novel in depth mainly expressed through characters to be object of narrative observation. The culture of industry is significant within Dickens who deals with such issues reached in both middle and working classes lives to demonstrate the contrast between the two.

Popular Culture vs. High Culture

Hard Times is characterized by a mixed nature at language, dialect and culture; yet, Dickens displays "a morally serious content cast in the forms of popular entertainment" (Eagleton 1987: 292). The elements of popular culture are exposed through many characters mostly using the dialect presented firstly in Stephen "We should remember, moreover, that Dickens' novels counted in his day as popular culture and that not only their popularity but also their social influence was enormous. Another of *Hard Times*' morals is spoken (in Dickens' attempt at a Lancashire dialect) by powerloom operator Stephen Blackpool" (Neumann 1999: 62). Stephen in being a powerloom operator at Bounderby's factory paves the way to explicate an opposing relationship of employer and employee out of which evolves two distinct cultures. The former relates to high culture supposed to be conventional and correct while the latter copes with popular culture denied by the opposite culture and falsely misjudged as broken and illegal. Romaine (1982) thinks that "if speech is stratified by social class in ways partly beyond the speaker's awareness and control, it also provides a rich resource for displaying adherence to the norms of the vernacular culture" (Edward 1999: 66). Popular culture is also represented through Sleary at circus for "it is not accidental that popular culture actually figures directly in the book itself, in the carnivalesque shape of Sleary's circus" (Eagleton 1987: 292). It is not, as well as, for nonsense that Dickens again opposes Sleary and his staff with unrelated culture presented in Bounderby the owner of factories and Gradgrind the teacher of facts. Actually, cultural clashes demystify openly that *Hard Times* is an exposé in popular culture trying to survive in the presence of high culture clearly detected through the language diversity from very standard to very nonstandard "stylistically, the book veers from high moral sermonizing to thick local dialect, from Bounderby's phoney bluffness to Sleary's tiresome lisp, deploying a whole range of rhetoric" (Eagleton 1987:292). Another example presented by Dickens to intensify cultural differences in *Hard Times* is interaction of Bounderby with Stephen

when each of them uses the language he knows i.e. Stephen uses dialect because he misuses the standard that Bounderby masters; but one problematical issue raises in this vein, Bounderby responds correctly to Stephen's dialectal utterances which insinuates that the former understands the dialect but sticks to the standard; this, in a way, interprets cultural disruption "it is now recognized that the lines between Cultivated, Common, and Folk Speech cannot be sharply drawn and that those who commonly employ Cultivated and Common speech patterns use their regional dialect on occasion and are seldom confused by local patterns of Folk Speech even if they only infrequently or never use them" (Richmond 1972: 149). Social class differences interpret cultural contrast in the patterning of speech; they are, however, insufficient speech repertoires acquired beyond cities and local communities, melting naive unschooled groups with malicious educated ones. Accordingly, culture and dialect remain 'critical' enough to explore in different domains of literature and linguistics as shown in the following Graph



Culture and Dialect in *Hard Times*

Dickens seeks to present an English culture with all its real components on the grounds of England. Eliot attempts the same will differently in all her novels namely in *Silas Marner*.

Culture and Dialect in *Silas Marner*

Eliot soberly documented about elements of Midlands culture in rural areas which was not the worry of Dickens who was "equally remote from the rural domain of a George Eliot" (Eagleton 2005: 143). She was not concerned with the follies of the city

since the countryside was mainly her interest especially in her first four novels among which *Silas Marner* was crucially exceptional where in it she “layered upon a quiet but insistent nostalgia for times that are not infused by the spirit of industry” (Childers 2001: 91). Eliot selects a rural setting to present an exposé in social relations thought to be less unsettled and more natural than the ones in an industrial life “in a small, close-knit rural community of the kind...Eliot depicts, our everyday familiarity with other means we can see our way round them, imagine their lives as a whole, in a way that the city makes much less easy” (Eagleton 2005: 146). Eliot seems close to the ethic of rural life where a rich provincial life is presented in *Silas Marner*.

Elements of Folklore in *Silas Marner*

Strong nostalgic motives mixed with patriotism towards the birth-region are promptly brought up in Eliot’s writing of *Silas Marner*. A mere collection of cultural knowledge of traditional folklore elements- also called, in this scope of this paper, popular or provincial culture. In this sense, “Eliot revisiting of her rural past is not a retreat from her contemporary world, but a way of engaging with it more deeply” (Eagleton 2005:178). Eliot writes down an oral tradition collected from the tongues of villagers in times she was a little girl. She succeeds to recall them in *Silas Marner* where she echoes the mute voice of popular culture because “folklore in literature may be consistently transmuted from its oral form” (Dorson 1972: 471), to be ink on paper signed by grand authors in being attached to their culture and in transmitting it to the outsiders.

As for the use of dialect and folklore, Eliot refers to dialect when the users of folklore are the folks but when she, herself, was obliged to introduce some elements of such culture she uses the standard but always shaping a folk belief. This mainly refers to the fact that “dialect has not been associated with one vague assemblage of persons, the “masses”, the “folk”, the “peasantry”, the “common people”, as has often folklore in general. We have anchored it to specific periods. Our vague conception of the folk, folk song, folklore in general should be delimited, as for dialect, this especially when the question of folk origins as well as folk preservation is brought up” (Pound 1945). Eliot has not opted for total use of dialect at the usage of folklore, disagreeing with Botkin who “once emphasized this when he pointed out that all oral tradition is necessarily regional or group lore, a generalization too often overlooked” (idem).

Idioms and Proverbs

Godfrey uses a well known idiomatic expression in English culture when saying: “but it’ll perhaps rain cats and dogs tomorrow” (Chapter 3). It is an indicator used by Eliot to revive idioms and proverbs in *Silas Marner*. Another example of idiomatic expression typically midland presented by Mr Macey who answers a disturbing address by claiming: “I’m no wise a man to speak out of my place. As the psalm says- I know

what's right, nor only so, but also practice what I know" (Chapter 6). Also in a celebration when Solomon presents a prelude to show reverence to the gentlemen and particularly Mr. Lammeter who thanks him but confirms that it was enough through the expression "that's over the hills and far away" (chapter 11), repeating that his father used to tell him that.

The very significant use of idioms and proverbs lies in Dolly's expression about Eppie, the baby who creeps to Silas's cottage, as "a little starved robin" (chapter 14); Leavis (1985: 262) comments: "George Eliot's intention then is to recall a habit, well known at least to herself, which makes Eppie's entry into Silas's cottage seem of the same natural order as a robin's in the snowy weather, that is, not a miracle but one of those mysteries, like the robin's inexplicable bond with man, of which life is made up- as Dolly goes on to suggest in words whose idiom and rhythm suggest Bible and Prayer-book sanctions. There is plenty of evidence of commonly known words in the novel that has become popular and this is a highly creative verbal activity to demonstrate that oral speech endowed in the mouths of the folks is tainted in their minds, as says Greenough in this context "there are those with which we become acquainted in ordinary conversation, - which we learn, that is to say from the members of our own family and from our familiar associates, and which we should know and use even if we could not read or write...Such words may be called 'popular'" (2000:19). Popular words can be good script for learned favourable songs by ordinary people.

Popular Songs

Eliot, as many of us, frequently reminds childhood songs learnt at fun. In *Silas Marner* she presents a song famous in the village called 'Red Rovier' sung to the squire, on which Ben Winthrop comments "it's nat'ral gift" (chapter 6). Eliot purposes to show that music in the village is natural since originally it is popular. Though, it is usually thought that folklore should have its start from the ignorant folks and their peculiar speech but this fact is often overlooked because as says Pound (1945): "folklore and folk song and the peculiarities of folk speech or dialect start in many ways, from many sources, among many classes, and in many region, and they should no longer be defined by hypothetical anonymous beginnings among the lowly". Indeed, Eliot aims at tracing the gifts mastered by her folks even if by presenting a famous old song of Red Rovier because her intention was to present favourite themes by these folks "an orientating of our reading toward the ordinary and commonplace which dictated and continues to dictate the terms of Silas Marner's reception. In all we are seeing a typical effort to naturalize the literary: to foreground texts about ordinary people, texts owned by ordinary people, and the fictional modes favoured by ordinary people themselves" (Holland 2000:121). Music and songs are not the only preferred themes folks stick to; they also tackle diverse matters that may seem awful but they dare to speak about like the belief in haunted places and ghosts.

Superstitions and Ghosts

Eliot includes a long discussion between the men at the Rainbow during which they deal with subject of Ghosts. The men look harassed by such scarring ghosts usually found in empty and dark places. Firstly the shadow of ghost is represented in *Silas Marner* when he approached the hidden door by seats and all the men thought him the ghost "every man present...had an impression that he saw, not Silas Marner in the flesh, but an apparition" (Chapter7). The farrier was against the idea of ghosts challenging them in saying "if ghos'es want me to believe in 'em, let 'em leave off skulking I' dark and I'lone places let 'em come where there's company and candles" (Chapter6). To engrave the belief that ghosts are part of Raveloers' folk culture, Eliot speaks in the name of Macey the tailor that the farrier was ignorant not to believe in the existence of ghosts in saying "'as if gho'es 'ud to be believed in by anybody so ignorant!' said Macey, in deep disgust at the farrier's crass incompetence to apprehend the conditions of ghostly phenomena" (idem). Eliot tries to explicate through the conversation of the men at the pub that the degree of belief in ghosts was very strong "the men argue over whether the Warrens' stables are haunted. Not everyone in the pub believes in ghosts – the farrier, Mr. Dowlas, is as you'd expect a skeptic. But this lively debate suggests that plenty people in Raveloe do believe in ghosts. Belligerently, the farrier dares any ghost to come stand inside" (Hughes 1985:51)

Another point in the novel that reveals superstition is the coming of Cliff owner of horses from London, to settle in the village and all that he possesses as stables are suspected to be haunted, "Cliff was rumored to have a relationship with Devil (much as Silas is supposed to)" (Hughes 1985:51). Eliot, herself, in the beginning induces the reader that the novel is an evocation folk and superstitious belief when she utterly mentions in the introduction of chapter one that "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 peddler or the knife-grinder". Superstitious beliefs hang around in *Silas Marner* to vary the bulk of such provincial culture which, also, includes varied traditions that Raveloers have been accustomed to do.

Customs and Traditions

One of the sweetest ways to celebrate wedding is to offer violet flowers to the bride. That is what Aaron intends through soiling different flowers that smell nice when Eppie encourages Silas to have the same near them gardened with rosemary, bergamot and thyme except for the lavender which is planted "only in the gentlefolks' gardens" (Chapter 16). Eppie desires to complete her home by a garden, Aaron in love with Eppie rushes to bring the lavender Eppie longs for "it was traditional for the countryman to plant a lavender-bed or –hedge for his bride. The lavender, being needed to scent the bed-linen, as thus a proper loving attention expected by custom... the garden of love is very common in folk-songs, and both the Paradise Garden and the rich meaning of the

popular Harvest Festival were well known of course to a church-going people (and to a country girl like George Eliot)" (Leavis 1985:263). Eliot highlights other customs as weekly going to the church which anyone misleading it, may be punished as happens to Silas when he was stolen, Dolly preaches him to go to church so that it protects him from ill doings and wrong doers, "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" (chapter 10). Eliot likes to distill for readers the mentality of villagers though she confesses it is hard to do "there is nothing so difficult to a cultivated intellect as to enter into the mental states of the ignorant and uninformed...in the progress towards clear conceptions of any kind, the vestiges of the confused notions they replace are trodden out, the memory of our first feeble intellectual life is as irrecoverable and obscure as that of our physical birth. Insight into the past conditions even of our own minds is one of the rarest acquisitions of reflection. (Hale 1998:xix). Even though she strives to embody such traditions since they are "cultural continuity embodied in a massive complex of evolving social attitudes, beliefs, conventions, and institutions rooted in the experience of the past and exerting an orienting and normative influence on the present". (Webster's Third New International Dictionary 1981).

Besides all the elements of folklore aforementioned, one is as vital as they are in the lives of Raveloers which is cure from diseases through herbal and traditional ways that are preferred to doctors and their prescribed drugs.

Folk Medicine

Eliot explicitly declares the reliance of villagers on traditional ways of remedy. This is why and since the death of the old wise woman, Raveloe village had regretted her depart by remorse feeling of loss and lacking to her efficient ways of cure "the Wise Woman at Tarley died; and she had charms as well as 'stuff': everybody went to her when their children had fits" (chapter 2). The woman relies on modest ways as to mutter some words to herself, "so that you couldn't hear what they were, and if she tied a bit of red thread round the child's toe the while, it would keep off the water in the head" (idem).

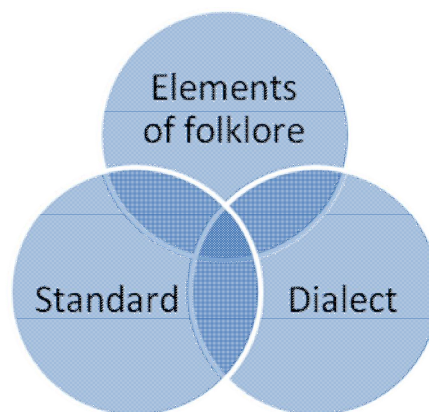
Evidently, Raveloers seek someone to replace the wise woman by any way; coincidentally, when Marner knows that the cobbler's wife suffers from the same symptoms of his mother's he promises her to bring her a preparation of foxglove that brought relief up to his own experience with his mother. Abruptly again the diseased woman is cured which quickens the rumour to spread in the village which hails Silas a better than Doctor Kimble. Children in *Silas Marner*, said Eliot (Chapter one) "had perhaps, heard their fathers and mothers hint that Silas Marner could cure folks' rheumatism if he had a mind, and add, still more darkly, that if you could only speak the devil fair enough, he might save you the cost of the doctor". As much Raveloers were

believers in folk medicine they were as well as good listeners to stories told with enjoyment and enthusiastic imagination.

Stories

Eliot illustrated the novel with different stories main of all is the story repeated many times in the village but always appreciated to be heard again. The company focuses attention with Macey the tailor who narrates the story of the Lammeter and his coming to Raveloe as happens with Silas: an alien from remote area, he told them that Lammeter came with good sheep and he “know’d the rights and customs o’ things” continuing to trace the Lammeter tree family in a way that make all people connected with the past as comments the narrator in *Silas Marner* (chapter 6) “every one of Mr Macey’s audience had heard this story many times, but it was listened to as if it had been a favourite tune, and at certain points the puffing of the pipes was momentarily suspended, that the listeners might give their whole minds to the expected words”. Macey adds also the story of Cliff and his ambition to be member of the upper class through rejecting one of the rituals of the community by changing his activity of a tailor which casts him to be a gentleman. The conversation in chapter 6/7 suggests diversity in dialect and elements of folklore that embellish the novel to suit the norms of rural area reflected in popular culture, “the ability to narrate anecdotes re-creating one’s personal experiences, i.e. what Labov calls natural narratives...involves a great deal of creative talent and linguistic skill” (Watts 1981: 20)

Most of these elements have been presented by dialect characters that are more attached to such provincial culture than the gentry in *Silas Marner* to express their attachment to their folklore through the use of standard and dialect that intersect at use in the novel as shows the Graph:



Culture and Dialect in *Silas Marner*

As a matter of fact, Dickens and Eliot rather borrowed and not invented the dialectal variables, their objective was not to duplicate an accurate record of regional speech but relate literary dialect with socio-cultural position of characters to reveal their social status through the use of distinctive linguistic variables. This is why we find it vital to close the remainder of this chapter by a comparison between the use of literary dialect between Dickens and Eliot.

To be different, Dickens and Eliot's use of dialect, just sustains the research with different perspectives of dealing with dialect issue in the novel. Still, being on agreement with other issues strengthens the importance of including dialect in novels, falsely supposed to be, totally written in Standard English. Dickens and Eliot have been aware that dialect does not devalue the novel just as it does not lessen from the importance of the standard.

The function of literary dialect in the Standard English novel encompasses the cultural specter. Accordingly, there is an implementation of culture in the novels reflecting a working-class knowledge in contrast with highly prestigious one; but the two types express an industrial culture in *Hard Times* whereas in *Silas Marner* folks duplicate a rich illustrative folklore of distinct elements through stories, songs, idioms and superstitions intentionally included by Eliot to echo the voices of the country folks' mentality in the rural areas of the Midlands.

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