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## RELIGIOUS DOUBT IN GEORGE ELIOT'S NOVELS

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### Abstract

Religious uncertainty was viewed as terrible and wicked by all Victorians. They insisted that God was incomprehensible and impossible to prove throughout the century, but as time went on, their skepticism grew and they began to wonder more and more about the Christian faith in light of the idea of universalization. They also began to feel smothered by religion and restless. All around the country, people were moving about. The biblical account of creation raises questions. George Eliot is particularly interested in a religion that places a strong emphasis on human values rather than following the traditional orthodox model; this religion does not adhere to going to church or reading the bible. George Eliot was an outlier and an unorthodox novelist in the Victorian era. Poetry did not thrive as much during the Victorian era. Thomas Hardy, who insisted that God was an incomprehensible and illogical being throughout the century, transitioned from being a poet to a novelist while maintaining that God was both unfathomable and illogical. With the passage of time, the prose of John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, and Thomas Carlyle enriched the literature of this era. Questions arose regarding the Darwin theory of evolution, which caused confusion and a great deal of misunderstanding among people because it struck them as parallel with past recalls regarding creation from the Bible and new thoughts of direction. It gradually goes with the people changing thoughts. On some points this slowly cuts the roots deep rooted convictions.

Keywords- Religious, Victorian, God, Skepticism etc.

"The distinction between the 'heathen,' or philosophic and the Christian God- the non-human, or pantheistic, and the human, personal God- reduces itself only to the distinction between the understanding or reason and the heart of feelings." (Feuerbach 144)

Religious skepticism became a serious, pervasive problem in 19th-century Britain, and it also considerably increased cultural discourse and scientific behaviour, much like the nation's empire. These ideas muddled their reasoning and diverted their thoughts from rationalism to realism.

A new outlook on life emerged among people, causing upheavals in their thinking and filling the social environment with new eyes demanding answers to their numerous inquiries. There, where there was a tangle of religious and scientific thought, the influence of science steadily grew. A new wave that could be seen all over England was brought on by the wonder of science. Religious miracles, on the other hand, happened at a relatively slow rate. The popularity and attention of the rational intellect were rising. Whoever was in opposition now couldn't change. Because facts cannot be changed, individuals began to view their lives with fresh

outlooks and perspectives as a result of scientific awareness. Growing scientific advancements were giving human life a new dimension and level of comfort. But it never rejected the idea that there is a god. It also had a good impact on women's lives; even though they continued to wear veils, it diffused throughout their lives and gave them a fresh sense of self-assurance and assertiveness. Democracy provided people freedom in many different ways, and as scientific knowledge developed, everyone's outlook on life changed. Women now have the right to vote. The Victorian era was a time when tradition and modernity, Faith and spirituality, money and poverty were all sought to be balanced.

All Victorians thought that religious doubt was inherently sinful or tragic. In insisting that God was unknowable and unprovable, "Never has an age in history produced such a detailed literature of lost faith, or so many great men and women of religious temperament standing outside organized religion."

Over the course of the century, Victorians' attitudes towards religious belief and doubt evolved. We'll see the scope of their scepticism significantly broaden, from the Creation story, the Flood, and the possibility of miracles to the virgin birth, the resurrection of Christ, and, ultimately, the very existence of God. Victorians also developed an ethic of doubt—a philosophy of persistent uncertainty, where scepticism becomes welcome and creative, rather than intrusive.

The Victorian age thus had a large number of problems to face. In many, it was an age of progress of railway, buildings, steamships, reforms of all kinds but was also an age of doubt. There was too much poverty, too much injustice, too much ugliness and too little certainty about faith or morals, thus it became also an age of crusaders and reformers and theorists. (Wilson 235)

George Eliot was in a religious state of mind, an influence that she had taken from her Evangelical father and religious climate in the family. The fundamentals were laid quite early of a religious nature and "a creed dominating the whole life and compelling self-repression and self-devotion." (Bennet 6) Her life with Miss Lewis was filled in her

moral earnestness and intellectual fervour. She read the Essay of Lamb and Johnson's *Rasselas*. Later she once wrote to Miss Lewis how she could only sigh seeing persons bound in marriage ties that parted them from heaven and were so brittle as to be liable to be snapped under by every breeze. Those who took life as "Pilgrimage" and could both may be projects for earthly bliss and commune with God were certainly better.

The speech of the characters in the novel also shows the realism Eliot successfully injects into the religious life of normal, pious people living on the countryside just as Eliot did in her childhood. Adam Bede makes it clear that he believes that poor men such as himself and his friends are as close to God and as reverent as anyone else.

...There's the sperrit o' God in all things and all times- weekday as well as Sunday- and i' the quiet works and inventions, and i' the figuring and the mechanics. And God helps us with our headpieces and our hands as well as with our souls; and if a man does bits o' jobs out o' working hours- builds an oven for 's wife to save her from going to the bakehouse, or scrats at his bit o' garden and makes two potatoes grow instead of one, he's doing better, and he's just as near to God, as if he was running after some preacher and a-praying and a-groaning. (Eliot 7)

Adam demonstrates his conviction that God sees both the labouring and the rich man equally. At the same time, Eliot demonstrates that she is aware from her humble upbringing that the common, unassuming people feel that God is with them in all their work outside of church just as much as when they kneel to pray in church. That God is the same for everyone, not only the rich and elite of society, is the main message of Eliot's writing. Because of God's omnipresence, God loves everyone equally, regardless of how well-bred or wealthy they are.

Eliot believes that something else should be used in its place. She sends a message telling us to leave behind issues that religion cannot fix. Everyone ought to be occupied with their obligations and worries. In order to deal with challenges in life, George Eliot advocates meditation without self-

interest. He put his all into his work. Silas developed a relationship through working in Raveloe, whilst the other town considered him as guilty. Employment served as a means of erasing his past. He worked purely out of enjoyment and as a means of escape from his concerns. Antti Nuutila explains the religion in her article 'The Function of Religion in Silas Marner and The Slave' like that;

'There are two different societies depicted in the story, both of them Christian. The functions of a religious community are described from multiple angles. We are offered both an insider and outsider perspective. We are shown the effect of expulsion of a man from one religious' community, and of his later inclusion in another. Thematically the novel has a great deal to offer for a reading based on religious. Religion is like a house: a construct that holds people close to each other, allows them to live together comfortably and determines the specific form that a community takes."

Eliot places more focus on people than on religion. Silas Marner clarified the fundamentals of religion. Silas was subjected to isolation because of his lack of faith. It demonstrates the dual connecting and severing powers of religion. The degree of human collaboration would be far lower if there had been no religion. Moral principles derived from religion would not, however, be imposed on society. Spiritual awakening can be recognised as a part of religion. Including religion in laws will stop many immoral behaviours from occurring in society. In Raveloe, Silas ran into this circumstance frequently. People are transient, and the only things that are forever are religion and God. There are undoubtedly some negative effects, but they are not related to religion. It comes from superstitions in people's minds and their own minds. Individuals should develop their minds and organise them in accordance with the actual moral precepts of religion.

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