

George Eliot's *Silas Marner* and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Grand Inquisitor* highlight the importance of community and relationships and what will happen if these relationships are never formed.

In *Silas Marner*, Silas forms many relationships with the good people of Lantern Yard, where he happily resided. He attended chapel and worked as a weaver. He had a lovely fiancée and a wonderful best friend. He trusted and loved unconditionally, to the point where he could not find fault in those who might hurt him. Silas' "expression of trusting simplicity" made him "defenseless" and "deer-like," much like a child who knows no fear of any adults. His best friend, William Dane, always has "narrow slanting eyes and compressed lips" hiding a "self-complacent suppression of inward triumph." (*Silas Marner*, pg. 16 [Nook]) While Silas stumbles, living through life humbly and simply, William Dane is ever-confident to the point of arrogance. Despite the oddity of such a friendship, Silas gives his whole self to it. He feels completely secure.

But when Silas begins experiencing his cataleptic episodes, William Dane does not comfort his friend or even agree with the other chapel members that the seizures are a "proof of divine favor:" instead, they "[look like] a visitation of Satan." (*Silas Marner*, pg. 17 [Nook]) Silas' trust is unshakeable. He believes in his relationships with God and people. He does not feel resentment towards William, but "only pain." He still considers William his friend.

So when the Deacon dies and the Deacon's gold is stolen, and Silas is subsequently blamed, he does not suspect his friend of treachery. He has complete faith in God and William. William's treachery and God's apparent treachery destroy Silas' soul. He can not function properly anymore. He goes to Raveloe, his "trust in God and man" shaken. The treachery is so foreign to what he could ever conceive—so different from his own "loving nature"—that Silas is in a state only a "little short of madnes." (*Silas Marner*, pg. 21 [Nook]) The Silas who loved is buried under the Silas who hurts.

Silas reacts to his hurt by first casting off all those he knows, all things familiar. Lantern Yard's God and Lantern Yard's men hurt Silas. Silas believed that by escaping Lantern Yard, so too would he escape God and men (*Silas Marner*, pg. 23 [Nook]). Upon entering Raveloe, Silas makes no friendships. His first action was to work at his loom, "like the spider...without reflection." Silas drowns his thoughts in repetitive actions because it is easier than facing the world and trying to start anew. His work becomes "an end in itself...to bridge over the loveless chasms of his life." (*Silas Marner*, pg. 23 [Nook]) It numbs his pain, but the pain still lingers. He has no purpose, nothing to live for. The pain simply waits.

It is not until Silas is paid for his work that he finds a new purpose in life. Silas "had seemed to love [money] little [when] every penny had its purpose...for he loved the *purpose*

then.” (*Silas Marner*, pg. 25 [Nook]) The money held no value except for what Silas could accomplish with it. In the small town of Raveloe, the money could not accomplish much, but it could fuel some “seeds of desire.” (*Silas Marner*, pg. 25 [Nook]) Instead of pouring his energies into meeting his neighbors and connecting with the people of Raveloe (which would require him to trust again, and therefore seemed impossible to Silas), he connected to the gold he earned. He gave each coin a consciousness. Each coin was a companion. Silas could *trust* the gold, because it was gold—while Silas may give it a consciousness, the gold could not act by itself. It could not hurt Silas like William, God, or even the people of Raveloe could. Silas is *safe* with the gold. He can live alone and unloved but never be hurt again.

Eliot mentions that when “wiser men [are] cut off from faith and love,” they act in much the same way as Silas. Except Silas’ solution—to hoard and love gold while avoiding all other relationships—is simple, because Silas is simple. Wiser men usually have “some erudite research, some ingenious project, or some well-knit theory.” (*Silas Marner*, pg. 28 [Nook]) Such is the case of the Grand Inquisitor.

The Grand Inquisitor hates God. He cannot reconcile the suffering of the world with who God is. He is not even willing to try. The Grand Inquisitor has elevated himself to the stature of God. He claims to have “corrected [His] work.” The Grand Inquisitor insists that for the past eight centuries the church and people of God have actually been working with the devil (*The Grand Inquisitor*, pg. 30). He claims that this is the kindest thing the church could do. The Grand Inquisitor believes that God’s respect for man—giving man free will—was a horrible decision. Man would have been better served, better loved, by “respecting him less” and “[asking] less of him.” (*The Grand Inquisitor*, pg. 29) Again and again, the Grand Inquisitor speaks of the wretchedness of man. Man is weak, vile, a rebel, a slave, an ant. When the Grand Inquisitor looks out upon the people of the world, he does not see people. He sees pitiful creatures not worthy of higher expectation. While the Grand Inquisitor wants to believe that expecting little is greater love, life experiences tell us that higher expectations show more love. Parents love their children unconditionally and have high expectations because they can see what a child *will become*. The Grand Inquisitor sees only the present and past, and so he cannot see the potential of man.

The Grand Inquisitor says all this about man, and thus must include himself. To mask his own feelings about himself, he pretends to know better than God, to truly understand human nature. He pretends that he is *not human*. Although Ivan never mentions how the Grand Inquisitor became who he is, this most likely all stemmed from when he first turned away from God. The Grand Inquisitor claims that he has “been in the wilderness...lived on roots and locusts...prized the freedom with which [God] has blessed men [and strove] to stand among [God’s] elect.” (*The Grand Inquisitor*, pg. 33) At this moment, the Grand Inquisitor had the opportunity to build a

relationship with God. But he “awakened and would not serve madness.” (*The Grand Inquisitor*, pg. 33) What did he “awaken” from? He looked at himself and realized his unworthiness. He realized that *he* was weak and vile. He could not bear himself to God, and realizing his own shortcomings, pushed both God and man away.

Without the love of man or God the Grand Inquisitor needed something to fill his heart. As Silas turned to his weaving and gold, so the Grand Inquisitor turned to rationalizing the real purpose of the church. He created a principle to govern his life and *make it okay* to be alone without anyone.

The Grand Inquisitor lives alone, has had no one to speak his mind to. When Jesus arrives it is the Grand Inquisitor’s chance to vent all of his frustration. When the Grand Inquisitor begins his rant, he tells Jesus not to speak. He thinks Jesus has done enough already (*The Grand Inquisitor*, pg. 24). He wants Jesus to listen to his rant because the Grand Inquisitor recognizes his need to speak his mind. Talking to a man, even if it is Jesus, is still easier than opening himself to a divine being and forming a real connection.

The Grand Inquisitor speaks of how horrible freedom is: that the people “will lay their freedom [down], and say... ‘Make us your slaves, but feed us.’” (*The Grand Inquisitor*, pg. 26) He claims that “nothing is more seductive for man than his freedom...but nothing is a greater cause of suffering.” (*The Grand Inquisitor*, pg. 27) He claims that man wants an authority over him, above all else. The Grand Inquisitor supplies this authority to the masses. But the need for authority also lives in the Grand Inquisitor. At the end of his tirade, he “longed for Him to say something, however bitter and terrible.” (*The Grand Inquisitor*, pg. 36) The Grand Inquisitor longed for the authority of God to validate the theory that has kept him going through the years.

When Jesus responds, though, it is not in words. That simple kiss is all that needed to be said. Jesus showed the love and expectation He still had for the Grand Inquisitor. This was a crossroads for the Grand Inquisitor. At this moment, he could have reopened his heart to God and the people of the world. Instead, he pushes Jesus and God away again. He shudders at the mere idea of having a relationship with God (*The Grand Inquisitor*, pg. 36). The Grand Inquisitor does not take the path to relationships, happiness, and love, but remains on his cold, calculating dystopian path. He will never see the good in people.

This fate awaits Silas Marner, should he continue to hold onto his gold and shut all people out. When Silas Marner unwittingly loses his gold to Dunstan Cass, his world is forced to open, albeit only slightly. In order to recover his gold he must rely on the people of Raveloe. Silas is forced outside his comfort zone without his gold. When the people of Raveloe are willing to help him, Silas’ tiny world expands ever so slightly. The difference is not discernible at first. Eliot remarks that “Our consciousness rarely registers the beginning of a growth within us...there have been many circulations of the sap before we detect the smallest sign of the bud.” (*Silas Marner*,

pg. 69 [Nook]) This small opening into the world did not ultimately restore Silas' faith in humanity or God, but it did relight a small flame. Silas simply wants his gold returned and to that end he must rely on the people. He has no intention of forming any connections with the people, he simply uses them as a means to an end. But the people of Raveloe become willing to connect with Silas, visiting him often. This paves the way for Silas to reach a real crossroads.

It is during a fit of catalepsy that Eppie stumbles into Silas' life. What had once been a sign of the devil became the herald of a blessing. His initial reaction—to care for the child and then eventually figure out where she came from—shows the effects the people of Raveloe have had on him. Silas may not be quick to connect the child's appearance with any outside forces, but he realizes that the child needs him and he takes care of her accordingly (*Silas Marner*, pg. 128 [Nook]). Finally, he finds the mother and rushes away to the Cass estate. *This* is Silas' crossroads: Mrs. Kimble offers to take little Eppie (*Silas Marner*, pg. 131 [Nook]). If she does, Silas continues his life, eventually perhaps hoarding away a new set of gold, but never really connecting with anyone. He will remain like the Grand Inquisitor (although not as egotistical as the Grand Inquisitor), and never find the happiness of true companionship again. If Mrs. Kimble does not take the child, then Silas has invited a new life into his own, and he can begin connecting with the world.

His motivations may be unclear. His immediate response to Mrs. Kimble is "It's come to me—I've a right to keep it." (*Silas Marner*, pg. 131 [Nook]) This is very possessive on the part of Silas, whose previous 7 years of experience only involve a relationship with gold, which he was very possessive of. But the desperation hidden in his soul for so many years has finally surfaced with this little girl, and with this little girl Silas can begin to change.

Silas is no longer focused on himself. Eppie comes first and foremost in his life. Eppie can only be taken care of if Silas connects with the people of Raveloe. Eppie is "drawing his hope and joy continually onward." (*Silas Marner*, pg. 150 [Nook]) Silas is "led away from threatening destruction." (*Silas Marner*, pg. 150 [Nook]) By raising Eppie, Silas learns to trust again. He lives a full, happy, and ever-changing life.

Connections and relationships with the people around you are by far the most important and essential part of a person's life. Without connections life is pain and sorrow. But every relationship has the ability to backfire. Relationships require giving as well as getting. When a relationship becomes hard or strained, what will you do? Will you be the Grand Inquisitor or Silas Marner? The Grand Inquisitor will never be hurt again, because there is no one to hurt him. But his life is lonely and devoid of love. Silas might be hurt again. There is no guarantee. But in his present moment he is blessed with love. He lives simply, day by day, and takes things as they come. It may be hard sometimes, but Silas will never regret his decision to allow Eppie into his life. The Grand Inquisitor may find a day when he regrets abandoning God and man. Eliot and

Dostoevsky advocate the same principle: it is better to love, live, and sometimes hurt, than to be alone.