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British Studies ID 282

“The Classes of Ravaloe”

26th October 1998

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In the isolated English village of Ravaloe in George Eliot's *Silas Marner* four distinct classes are readily apparent: the land-owning Cass family, the clergy and the doctor, the farmers, and outsiders. The variance in the classes and the relations between them as the most important aspect of Ravaloe life because it provides a framework for understanding the behaviour of its villagers.

Cass is not the only landowner in the village, but he is the only who leases land is therefore the only person eligible in the eyes of the town to be called Squire. The Cass family is the most important family in Ravaloe society. It is a great honour to be invited to their New Year's Eve party, and the Squire is among those that Silas Marner wishes to notify of the robbery. The Cass family views itself as being superior over other villagers: Godfrey believes that Marner will gladly give up Eppie because the Cass family is superior.

The parish Rector and Doctor Kimble occupy the second level of the village hierarchy. Both are present at Squire Cass' New Year's Eve party. The title of doctor is hereditary in Ravaloe and is always bestowed on a Kimble.

The third level—the farmers—look up to the higher classes with great respect. When there is an important occurrence in Ravaloe life, such as the robbery, they immediately contact someone in a higher position in the community.

The class system is based on the way life has been for the centuries, and they do not understand the ways of outsiders. This ignorance causes the villagers to see Marner as being inferior and a threat to the rest of the village.

The class system of Ravaloe is deep-rooted and not easily changed: they will not accept a new doctor, and no one knows what to think of Marner. The respect that the farmers have for the skilled villagers and that Cass family is important to the understanding of events in the book.