

2015 specification
First exams in 2017

George Eliot's *Silas Marner*

GCSE Study Guide

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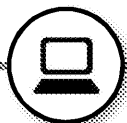
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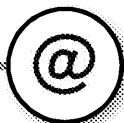


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Teacher's Introduction

This guide is an in-depth exploration of *Silas Marner*, accessible to both pupils and teachers and aimed at developing the analytical skills necessary to literary criticism. It begins with a chapter-by-chapter guide which will help pupils to gain a comprehensive understanding of the significance of narrative events. Detailed criticism explores the techniques used throughout the novel and the development of characters, settings and themes. There is also a discussion of wider ideas and messages in the text and the social context which will help pupils to relate the events in the novel to significant historical changes from this period. Throughout the guide there are opportunities for pupils to engage with the text through active tasks, discussions and practice questions. There is also extensive guidance on what to look for from pupils' responses. *Silas Marner* is a wonderful book which gives a real insight into nineteenth-century life. This guide will help pupils to gain a greater understanding of the importance of this period to our culture and literary heritage.

The guide is made up of the following sections:

- A summary of the **Plot**.
- A **Chapter-by-Chapter** in depth textual analysis with a variety of discussion points, activities and practice questions.
- Sections on **Characterisation** and **Relationship Analysis** which provide detailed analysis of the characters and their interactions.
- A **Relationship Mind Map** which is a visual overview of how the characters relate to each other.
- A section exploring the **Setting**.
- An in-depth analysis of the **Themes**.
- An overview of **Ideas and Messages** which are explored in the text.
- A section on **The Writer's Use of Language** including analysis of **Form** and **Structure**.
- An outline of the **Context** of the novel.
- A useful **Glossary of Key Terms**.

How to Use this Guide

This guide was designed to support the teaching of *Silas Marner* by George Eliot, in accordance with the new GCSE English Literature specification (2015 for examination in 2017). Therefore it has been written to address the Assessment Objectives for English Literature as outlined by both the Edexcel, WJEC and Eduqas Exam Boards.

Assessment Objectives and Tasks

Throughout the guide there is a range of different activities which support these Assessment Objectives. The activities include paired or group discussion tasks, Active Tasks which can be completed individually or as a group and practice questions.

Edition of the Text

Throughout the guide I have referenced the Penguin Classics Edition of *Silas Marner* first published in 2003. ISBN: 978-0-14-143975-4

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Assessment Objectives

- ✓ Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response and use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations. **(AO1)**
- ✓ Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate. **(AO2)**
- ✓ Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written. **(AO3)**
- ✓ Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation. **(AO4)**

Remember!

Always check the exam board website for new information, including changes to the specification and sample assessment material.

Key Features of the Guide	AO	Section
Significant events and developments in <i>Silas Marner</i>	1	Plot Summary
Visual overview of relationships in the novel and how they develop.	1	Relationships Mind Map
Detailed chapter-by-chapter analyses including literary techniques, key events, development of character and themes and important quotations.	1, 2 and 3	Chapter-by-Chapter Analysis
In depth character analysis and exploration of the relationship between characters.	1	Characterisation and Relationships Analysis
Analysis of the significance of the setting.	1	Setting
Analysis of George Eliot's writing style, structure and form and how this affects the reader.	2	The Writer's Use of Language
Examination of the themes, ideas and messages that reoccur throughout the novel.	1, 2 and 3	Themes and Ideas and Messages
A guide to the historical and social context.	3	Context
A definition of key literary terms.	4	Glossary

Please note that AO4 will be assessed throughout when answering practice questions.

Key for Using this Resource

Key Terms:

This box indicates a definition of key literary terms used in the guide.

Active Learning Task

This box describes activities for the students to engage in to enhance their understanding of the text.

Discuss...

This box provides stimulus for a group or paired discussion of a key aspect of the text.

Exam Tip

This box provides guidance for the students on how to answer the practice questions, including key sections of the text to refer to and important literary features to analyse.

Practice Question

This box includes a practice question to test students' knowledge of the text.

Specification Information

This resource has been designed to meet the specifications of the Edexcel and Eduqas Exam Boards.

Assessment Objectives

AO1	Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal responseuse textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations
AO2	Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.
AO3	Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.
AO4	Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Exam Board Specifications

Edexcel IETO

Component 2: '19th-century Novel and Poetry since 1789'. Total percentage of GCSE: 50%.

Exam written paper. Closed book. Duration: 2 hours 15 minutes.

Section A: '19th-century Novel'. Students will answer ONE two-part essay question exploring an extract and the whole text (*Silas Marner*). Extract approximately 400 words.

Marks total: 80. Section A: 40 marks. Percentage of GCSE: 25%.

Assessment Objectives assessed in Section A: AO1 and AO2.

Eduqas

Component 2: 'Post-1914 Prose/Drama, 19th Century Prose and Unseen Poetry'. Total percentage of GCSE: 60%.

Exam written paper. Closed book. Duration: 2 hours 30 minutes.

Section B: '19th Century Prose'. Students will answer ONE source-based question on a nineteenth-century prose text (*Silas Marner*).

Marks total: 120. Section B: 40 marks. Percentage of GCSE: 20%.

Assessment Objectives assessed in Section B: AO1, AO2 and AO3.

WJEC

Component 2b: 'Contemporary Drama and English/ Welsh/Irish Literary Heritage Prose'. Total percentage of GCSE: 40%

Exam written paper: Closed book. Duration 2 hours

Marks total: 158 Section B: 60 Percentage of GCSE: 20%

Assessment Objectives assessed in Section B: AO1, AO2 and AO4.

Plot Summary

The plot of *Silas Marner* explores key changes in the title character's life which have an impact on the local community. It follows the lives of two very different characters: honest Godfrey Cass, who becomes trapped in a web of deceit trying to escape from the consequences of his actions, and Silas Marner, who is set in the country village of Raveloe where Silas works as a weaver and Godfrey is a wealthy landowner (the Squire).

Silas is an outsider in the village, respected for his work but looked on as 'odd' and has isolated himself from the community because he was exiled from his former home of St. Ives for theft. Feeling bitter, rejected and lost in this new place so different from his hometown, he becomes a loner who lives for his work. His one companion and consolation is the gold which he has hidden away; this gold becomes the main object of his life.

Godfrey Cass, on the other hand, has lived a life of leisure and weak morality. He marries a beautiful heiress, Molly, but then discovers that she is addicted to drink and laudanum (opium). His younger brother Dunstan knows about the marriage and tries to blackmail him for money. Godfrey is tormented by the knowledge that he cannot marry his true love (Nancy) and too cowardly to confess this terrible mistake to his father.

Their stories are brought together first of all when Dunstan, seeing Silas' deserted cottage and remembering rumours of his wealth, creeps in and steals Silas' gold. Silas discovers the loss of the gold and is heartbroken. Nobody suspects Dunstan (who has vanished), but the villagers become more sympathetic towards Silas and less fearful.

On the night of the New Year's Eve Ball Silas and Godfrey's worlds are brought together when Godfrey's estranged wife, Molly, dies. Molly is determined to seek vengeance on Godfrey for abandoning her and tries to walk to the Squire's house, but is overcome by the effects of the drug, lies down and eventually freezes to death. Attracted by the firelight, her two-year-old child wanders off. The child, who suffers from catalepsy (which can cause trances), is unaware of her entrance into the cottage and that his gold has been returned, but he soon realises that it is a child's hair. He decides to keep the child to console him for the injustice he has suffered and loss of his gold. Silas is overjoyed.

Godfrey is at first terrified that Molly will revive and his past actions will be discovered, but when it is not the case he decides not to claim his child and to keep his secret. In this way he convinces himself that the child will be well looked after and that he will contribute to the village. He will be able to raise a new family with his true love.

The story then skips 16 years. Godfrey's daughter Eppie is now a young woman and has been brought up by Silas. She has embraced Silas when he decided to bring her up, but they are now at the heart of the village. Godfrey and Nancy are together but have had no children. Nancy refused to consider adopting Eppie because she felt that it would be wrong. Godfrey is dissatisfied with life without a child.

In a dramatic turn of events, Dunstan's body and the stolen gold are discovered in Silas' cottage. Shocked by the discovery, Godfrey at last confesses his marriage to his father. Both resolve to try to adopt Eppie, convinced that she would be willing to exchange her 'superior' standard of living they could offer. However, Eppie holds Silas and her life dear and is not tempted away. She passionately declares her allegiance to Silas and her wish to stay with him. This includes marrying a working-class gardener. Godfrey has to reconcile himself to making up for his rejection and never having children of his own. Silas and Eppie continue their life at the centre of the village community and the heart of a loving family.

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Chapter One

Summary

The story begins by creating a picture of a rural community before industrialisation focuses in on the village of Raveloe and the character of Silas Marner whose mysterious appearance and unwillingness to take part in daily village life has contributed to his isolation in the past where he was a member of a religious sect. She describes how betrayal by his friends led him to everything he knew to settle in Raveloe.

Analysis

Eliot begins by setting her novel firmly in the past. Phrases such as 'In the days' (p. 5) and 'In that far-off time' (p. 5) are reminiscent of the fairy-tale beginning 'Once upon a time...'. This emphasises the gap between Silas Marner's time and the present. The tone of the chapter is gentle and humorous. She speaks in an authoritative tone about the views of 'the peasants of old times' (p. 5), but also seeks to explain those views humorously. The novel is written as an omniscient third person narrative which allows Eliot to take a bird's eye view of events, presenting the views of characters who may find it difficult to express their own.

Silas Marner's Present

Eliot quickly moves from the overview to focus in on a particular weaver, Silas Marner. The villagers see Silas now, starting with the village boys who come to stare and run away. His appearance with his short-sighted stare is off-putting, but it is his disinclination for rumour to grow. The villagers are frightened of his understanding of herbs, which saves Sally Oates from the brink of death. They are also afraid of the strange 'fits' that he has, which is a catalepsy which causes the body to shut down as if asleep until it passes. This is not understood. It seemed to indicate that the soul had left his body, which inspired fear. However, Silas' trade gives him a position of value in the community and prevents him from being isolated. He has lived in Raveloe he is tolerated and left alone. The only change that occurs is that he grows about his wealth.

Silas Marner's Past

In the final part of the chapter the omniscient narration allows Eliot to go back to events in Silas' past before he comes to Raveloe. This is a crucial part of the story because it explains his wish for isolation and his distrust of others. As a member of a religious Calvinistic sect, Silas played an important part in a small, enclosed community. He was engaged to be married and had a close friend, William Dane, whom he looked on as a brother. Dane uses Silas' catalepsy to steal money and then blame the theft on his friend. Dane's betrayal of Silas is possible because outside of the community there is no one to defend him. It seems to him that God is turning against him when the drawing of lots proves him to be a thief. At this time, certain religious practices would use the method of drawing lots to determine guilt. This happened in the Bible¹ to apparently prove Silas' guilt. He loses faith in his love (as his fiancée, Annie, and God. Eliot distinguishes between faith and hope while at the same time explaining that for Silas this would be 'an effort of independence never known' (p. 14). Unable to separate religious practice from belief or false friendships, Silas turns his back on society and God. His journey to Raveloe and his isolation is part of a self-imposed exile from his painful past.

Active Learning Task

How would using the first person change the way characters are created? Try rewriting the scene between Marner and the village boys from a boy's perspective OR the drawing of lots to determine guilt. Compare the differences between your account and Eliot's.

¹ See note 23 to Chapter 1 (p. 185) for the Biblical precedence.

Chapter Two

Summary

This chapter charts Silas' arrival in Raveloe and the life he has lived for the past 15 years. It provides a picture of Silas' feelings when arriving in Raveloe, which to him seemed like a difficult change. He is absorbed in weaving as a way of coping with this change. His one connection with the community, Sally Oates, leads to further isolation when the community misunderstands his power and his complaints. In his loneliness Silas turns to the gold he has earned through weaving as his only source of love.

Analysis

In the first part of the chapter Eliot uses imagery to effectively illustrate the shock Silas feels when he comes to Raveloe. She states that 'less educated people who have experienced disillusionment can hardly imagine his feelings as: 'Nothing could be more unlike the life he had known in the widespread hillsides, than the life in this wooded region, where he felt hidden even by the trees and hedgerows. There was nothing here, when he rose in the deep morning, but a dewy brambled and rank tufted grass, that seemed to have any relation with that life which had opened to him the altar-place of high dispensations.' (p. 15) The very isolation of Raveloe prevents Silas from seeing the heavens. In this rich, luscious country-side he is unable to see the faith that governed his life in Lantern Yard, it has been muffled by the trees and the life is therefore not attractive to him because it lacks the 'well-known figures' and voices of the 'unquestioned doctrine' and the minutiae of the congregation's behaviour which testified to 'God's kingdom upon earth' (p. 15). In this way, Eliot contrasts a vivid picture of the life in Raveloe with the clear picture of Silas' fervent religious life. By leaving Lantern Yard Silas has also left the centre of his life. Instead, the very richness of Raveloe with its 'orchards and meadows' where the men are 'lounging at their own doors in service-time' (p. 16) instead of working, indicates a world far removed from his own past life, where religion is no longer a central part of life.

While it is understandable that to begin with Silas should hide away from this strange world and do nothing but weave, Eliot explains his continuing to do so by describing his encounter with Sally Oates. Here the superstitions of village life at first make Silas popular, as the villagers anxiously come to him to heal them. However, Silas' honesty prevents him from profiting from this. Eliot states that Silas 'had never known an impulse towards falsity' (pp. 18–19) and this total honesty is a key aspect of his character.² So Silas' one connection between his past and the community (Sally Oates reminded him of his mother) led to further alienation from the villagers who now see his 'power' as harmful: 'no one believed him when he said he knew no charms and could work no cures, and every man and woman who had an accident or a new attack after applying to him set the misfortune down to Master Marner's ill-will and the evil influence of his presence' (p. 19).

The last part of the chapter describes in vivid detail how Silas falls in love with his gold. He begins to spend but to look at lovingly, becomes his only companion. It is his only companion and his focus leads to 'his life narrowing and becoming itself more and more into a mere possession of gold, a satisfaction that had no room for any other being' (p. 20). By seeking isolation and weaving, Silas has re-created the life of his life and even become physically shrunken and aged. He ends with Eliot referring to 'a second great change' (p. 21) that will reunite Silas with the community and hinted bring him back to a fuller life again.

Practice Question: Textual Analysis.

Look at the passage on pp. 19–20 from 'Gradually the guineas...' to 'a balloon journey'. What techniques does Eliot use to help the reader to understand the growth of Silas' obsessive love of gold?

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² See *Characterisation* p. 29



Chapter Three

Summary

Here Eliot moves the focus from the poor inhabitants of Raveloe to the Squire and describes the relative viewpoints of the rich and poor residents at that time and character, she moves on to focus on the next generation. Godfrey and his brother and reveal a web of deceit which threatens to ruin Godfrey. Dunstan enjoys using his brother while Godfrey looks to the future, hoping for a miraculous solution to his problems.

Analysis

Moving from Silas' viewpoint to that of the main landowners in Raveloe provides just to contrast the lives of the rich and the poor, but also to contrast honesty and duplicity. It is clear from the start that the comforts of life that the Squire's family happiness is a constant theme. Even in Eliot's general statements about the rich she as things that 'mysteriously in respectable families' (p. 23) hinting that the 'good for you'. She also makes it clear that there was no questioning of the status quo, 'they were entirely in the right of it to lead a jolly life' (p. 23) and were happy with the situation. Questioning whether the rich were happier, Eliot also makes it clear that their position was not questioned.

Godfrey and Dunstan

The general opinion of Raveloe residents is used to introduce Dunstan and Godfrey. His mother's death and the Squire's bad parenting are highlighted immediately prior to the residents are very unimpressed with Dunstan, but hold out more hope for the 'fine' Godfrey Cass. Here 'open-faced' indicates an open and honest nature, but this is of concern. So in the first part of this chapter Eliot again uses the omniscient viewpoint of Raveloe, but by contrast in the second half for the first time she allows her character to speak.

As soon as Godfrey and Dunstan begin their conversation it is clear that their relationship is dishonest. Godfrey has taken rent money from a tenant to give to his brother and Dunstan revels in his brother's discomfort and uses the situation to his advantage. The money was blackmail to stop Dunstan revealing the truth about Godfrey's secret. The enmity between the brothers is obvious and there is clearly no help that can be expected. It is likely to disinherit both sons if the truth were known.

Godfrey is persuaded to give his horse to his brother to sell because of a lack of money and moral strength. His marriage to Molly is presented as an example of moral weakness, 'an ugly story of low passion, delusion and waking from delusion' (p. 31) which has blighted his chances of a happy marriage to a suitable wife. Molly is characterised as a drunkard and laudanum addict; at this stage she is 'repelled unsympathetically'.⁵ Instead Eliot dwells on Godfrey's dilemma – to confess and deprive himself of money and with no way of making a living; or to hope for 'deliverance' (p. 32). Forced into deceit by the horror of the consequences of telling the truth Godfrey 'was fast becoming a bitter man, visited by cruel wishes' (p. 32) which seems to confirm the concerns of the Raveloe villagers.

Act...
This...
who...
were...
the...
chose...
who...

Discuss...

What are the advantages of being open rather than omniscient in the relationship between Godfrey and Dunstan?

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³ For more about Eliot's views on the rich and poor see 'Class and Social Position' in *Ideas*

⁴ See 'Parenting' in *Themes* p. 46

⁵ See *Characterisation* p. 36 for more about Molly's character development

Chapter Four

Summary

The story follows Dunstan Cass who first goes hunting and arranges the sale of his brother's horse, only to fatally injure it. However, Dunstan has an alternative plan, catching sight of Silas' cottage and remembering tales of Silas' money he plans to manipulate Silas into 'lending' Godfrey the money. While walking home he comes across Silas' cottage and finding it empty discovers the hiding place of the gold. Overcome with greed, he steals Silas' gold.

Analysis

This chapter is written from the perspective of Dunstan Cass. This allows Eliot to present his thoughts and feelings in the way that his response to events steers him from the possibility of tricking Silas, to stealing the money. Dunstan's character is clearly revealed through his actions and reflections. The technique of omniscient narration allows Eliot to change perspective, to see Dunstan as others see him and then to return to exploring his thoughts and feelings.

Money and Power

Dunstan sees Silas' isolated cottage as an opportunity to 'frighten or persuade' (p. 34) the weaver into lending him money. However, his decision to continue with the hunt rather than tell his brother about this opportunity shows the power over others that Dunstan seeks. He wants Godfrey to be in his power and have a horse to sell. These impulses lead him to the hunt. There he invents a story to deceive a horse, but the potential buyers are not deceived. Instead of taking the prudent option of his luck and continue with the hunt.

His confidence in his ability is shown to be misplaced when his horse is killed. It is 'a glory' (p. 36) which leads to the accident. The loss of the horse and potential income witnessed his humiliation and he still has the plan to exploit Silas as a back-up option.

Dunstan's groundless self-confidence soon rises again at the thought of frightening Silas. When he comes across the cottage again, the opportunity to start the process is too good to refuse. He is surprised at finding the cottage empty and unlocked. He goes on to describe how money starts to grow and possess him. He persuades himself that Silas is dead. However: "'Where is the money?' now took such entire possession of him as to make death was not a certainty.' (p. 39). Here the desire for something to happen becomes the act and the conviction that he will get away with it. However, when he finds the cottage empty he is haunted by the fear that Silas will return. The chapter ends as Dunstan 'steps' (p. 40) a symbolic representation of his journey from blackmail and manipulation.



Practice Question

Compare the differences between the poor characters and the rich characters described in the first four chapters of the novel?



Exam Tip

Think about the key elements that make up character: honesty, greed, selfishness, relationships between the characters. Look also at the techniques that portray characters: style of narration, use of direct speech and appeals.

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Chapter Five

Summary

Silas returns to his cottage and discovers that his gold is not there. After searching his cottage from top to bottom he has to accept that the money is missing. He is at first frightened at the thought that some unknown power has chosen to punish him, but then decides that it must be theft. He is quick to identify a possible culprit and rushes to the Rainbow Inn to seek help from the villagers.

Analysis

Eliot returns to omniscient to describe Silas' return to the cottage. She explains how habit has made the idea of theft, or an abrupt change in his circumstances inconceivable to Silas. The image of the miner who believes that he is in no danger because he never has been before, in spite of the roof caving in, is a powerful one. It allows the reader to draw the parallel with Silas' world that is about to collapse around him.

Eliot minutely describes all of Silas' actions as he discovers that the money is missing. His fruitless search culminates in 'a wild ringing scream, a cry of desolation' (pp. 43–44) which relieves the 'maddening pressure of the truth' (p. 44). The loss of the money is more than a financial blow, it is losing the last love in his life. As it says earlier in the chapter 'His gold, as he hung over it and saw it grow, gathered his power of loving together into a hard isolation like its own.' (pp. 42–43). He turns to his loom to seek solace which helps him return to reality and think up a plausible solution to his problems. By finding a real potential culprit (Jem Rodney the poacher) Silas first of all conforms to the behaviour of the other villagers who are quick to make judgments based only on suspicion. However, Silas is not seeking punishment or revenge, he just desperately wants his money back and he turns to this imaginary solution as if it were already proven. Here there is another parallel with Dunstan Cass, who imagines Silas is dead in order to justify taking the money.



Discussion

Compare Eliot's themes between Silas' consequences

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Chapter Six

Summary

In this chapter Eliot moves the scene to the Rainbow Inn and describes the normal social interaction of the Raveloe villagers. The 'gentry' are absent, so the main participants are skilled tradesmen, like the tailor and the farrier. The conversation is argumentative and ranges from the family history of the Lammeters to whether or not ghosts exist.

Analysis

Here Eliot apparently takes a break from the main storyline to depict the community which Silas has been isolated from. The reason for this is first of all to relieve the tension. Having carefully built up the reader's identification with Silas and understanding of the devastation that the theft will cause him, Eliot now chooses to step away from the story. She moves to the perspective of the other villagers and thus widens the reader's perspective again beyond Silas' suffering. However distressing the theft is, there is a world beyond Silas' misery.

It also gives her the opportunity to show the villagers as they really are. Previously, she has used omniscient narration to present their collective views. Now we see them as individuals and hear what they actually say. It is clear that minor disagreement and trivial arguments form the main part of their interaction. In other words, they enjoy squabbling. However it is also clear that there is a rigid hierarchy and certain unfortunate individuals (like Mr Tookey the deputy clerk) will be put in their place.

The conversation introduces and establishes the Lammeter family as respectable and key to the stability of the area. This helps to confirm Nancy's suitability as a wife for Godfrey. The Lammeters are content to remain as they are. Mr Lammeter makes attempts to try to make himself a gentleman end in the death of his son and made be supporting the fixing of positions in society.⁶ Lastly, the villagers debate the existence of a world beyond physical perception. While this is done humorously it does parallel the theme of the book – does God exist and if so how should He be worshipped?⁷

Active Learning
What do you think
would think of
Dunstan Cass?
these two where

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⁶ For more about position in society and Nancy's suitability as a wife see 'Class and Social Position' in *Ideas and Messages* p. 50

⁷ See 'Religious Ideology' in *Ideas and Messages* p. 50

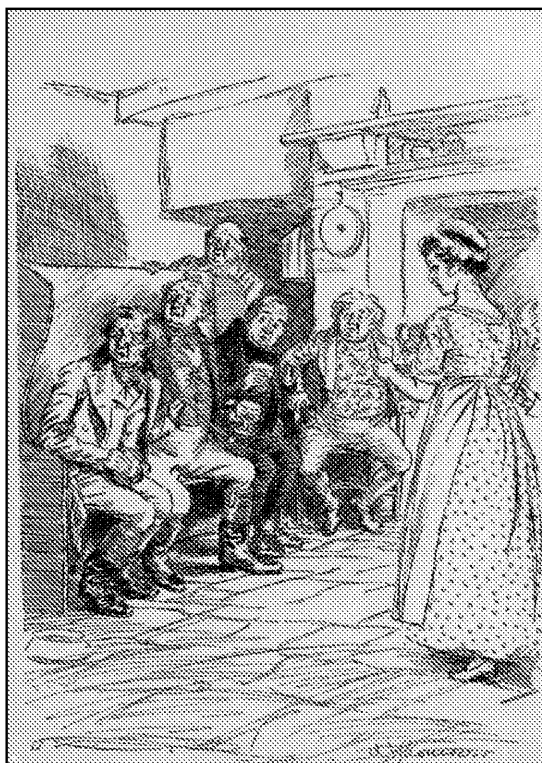
Chapter Seven

Summary

Silas arrives at The Rainbow and tells the villagers of his theft. They are suspicious of him as a ghost and is behaving erratically, but soon believe his story. Silas accuses Jem Rodney of the theft when he realises there is no proof. His distress makes him an object of compassion and the villagers agree to help him to investigate further.

Analysis

Silas enters the Inn like a ghost. It takes some time for him to speak and for the villagers to realise that he is the victim of theft, not a madman or a spirit. In fact, Silas' distressed state does much to banish the previous superstitions which have surrounded him. The villagers begin to realise that he is just a man, although they may still have been the work of a madman. Silas is comforted by sharing his troubles with the villagers, but is still unaware of this. Eliot draws an analogy with the unseen beginning of plant growth to explain his lack of perception.



Discuss

Is the theft of the gold a good thing for Silas Marner? Eliot's view of the text supports this.

Silas accuses Jem Rodney of the theft, but he couldn't be responsible. The accusation is stirred and 'With a new and strange to him as everything else' (pp. 57–58) he looks Jem in the eye. In this way, the theft has forced him to look at the world in a new way. In turn this has triggered a memory of his past feelings. Mr Dowlas, the real explanation to devilry for the theft, moves the focus away from the village. A plan is formed to welcome an unknown scapegoat to the community. A plan is formed to deal with the inevitable disagreements about the theft.

Active Learning Task

In these three chapters Eliot makes use of many analogies and list as many analogies as you can find. What other devices could you use to make the story more effective? What other devices could you use to make the story more effective?

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Eliot returns to Godfrey Cass' perspective after describing the way in which rumour spreads the news of the theft of Silas' money. A travelling pedlar is a convenient scapegoat, whose villainy is confirmed by the villager's recollection. Godfrey soon loses interest in the theft amid growing concern for his horse and to Dunstan. He discovers that the horse has died and tries to convince himself to move on. However, after waking in the night full of dread at the consequences, he convinces himself that his course of action is to keep quiet.

Nobody appears to have any suspicion of Dr. Godfrey's secret. His brother who is now dreading his return. When his brother has been killed, Godfrey feels that he will be forced to confess. Eliot describes Godfrey's thoughts as he weighs between possible courses of action. Godfrey decides to "pretend to be a good fellow," ... "but I'm not short somewhere." (p. 65). It is knowing what

struggles with. At the end of the chapter it becomes clear that he lacks the moral courage to stand up to his father, instead he will tell more lies, again in the hope that somehow 'everything might blow over' (p. 67). It is also clear that he can expect no sympathy from his father, at best the Squire might try to cover things up to save his pride. The Squire is likened to a volcano, blowing up and then hardening his heart. His treatment of his tenants echoes his behaviour to his children and Eliot makes it clear that this faulty parenthood is partly to 'blame' for Godfrey's weaknesses.⁸

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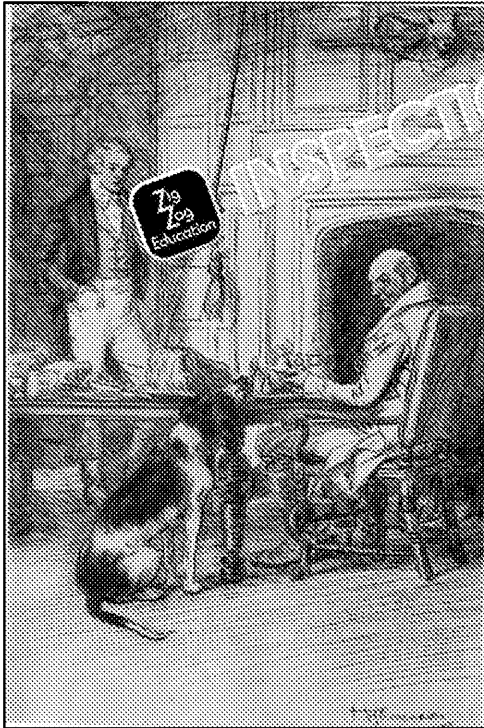
⁸ See 'Parenting' in *Themes* p. 46

Chapter Nine

Summary

In this chapter Godfrey confesses to embezzlement, but does not inform the Squire of the tenancy money to give to his brother. From the conversation it is clear that there is a distance between father and son. The Squire is acute enough to work out that Dunstan was blackmailing Godfrey's interest in finding out more. He turns his interest to promoting Godfrey's marriage with alarm.

Analysis



Eliot uses the conversation between father and son to show the distance in their relationship. There is a distance in their relationship; however, in a closer relationship, this distance would more likely be used as well. This distance is a previous impression that the Squire was not aware of his son's predicament. Certainly he shows that Godfrey does confess to. The killing of the money cause the Squire to turn 'poor' and threaten to turn him out of the house.

Eliot also uses this conversation to reflect on the Squire's parenthood. Godfrey himself senses that the Squire has not been kind, and had a vague idea that the Squire would have checked his own errand with him. He will' (p. 71). In other words, the absence of the Squire to Godfrey's moral weakness and led to the Squire prevents him from taking an action to correct his estate, thus increasing his idleness. The Squire's shortcomings in himself, but puts the blame on Godfrey's shally' (p. 72) character which he appears to be.

He concurs with Godfrey in seeing Nancy as a suitable wife and then puts himself in a position of pretending that he does not want that which he desires most. It is interesting to note that he is large and to mislead his father rather than to tell outright lies. Eliot states that 'Godfrey is not brave enough to tell the truth. He is left therefore to reflect on the situation and to rescue. Eliot ends the chapter by describing situations where people turn to chance instead of obeying a law they believe in' (p. 73). Here Eliot thinks of chance as a religion because it seems to support their wishes, while being against 'a law they believe in' (p. 73). It is interesting to note that she does not say that the Christian God, (as this would contradict her own beliefs) but she does make it simply a way of justifying wrong actions. In this way, although she shows sympathy for Godfrey's predicament she also makes it very clear that he is in the wrong.

Active Learning Task: What have you learned about the Squire's parenting? How much of an effect does his behaviour have on Godfrey's? Write an analysis of the effect of the Squire's parenting on Godfrey's inability to confess the truth.

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⁹ For more information on George Eliot's beliefs please see *The Writer's Life* p. 56

Chapter Ten

Summary

Starting with a general analysis of the lack of progress in investigating the theft and Dunstan Cass, Eliot moves to focus in on the effect of the theft on Silas. To all intents and purposes, Silas has been bereaved. His only love has been taken away from him and he is reduced to a state of despair. He can do nothing but moan quietly. However, Silas' loss has brought him closer to the villagers. They do not sympathise with him, but feel sorry for him instead. In particular, Dolly Winthrop tries to comfort him, which she believes is essential to his future wellbeing. But Silas continues to embrace his isolation. Christmas is a lonely Christmas alone, grieving. At the end of the chapter Godfrey's Christmas is described as a time of festivities and his hopes for dancing with Nancy on New Year's Eve, he can't stop coming out.

Analysis

The general picture of the events described in the first part of the chapter provides a solid perspective on Silas' loss and Godfrey's guilt. For the villagers, the theft is a minor inconvenience and the anticipation of Christmas soon eclipses recent events. However, when the story changes focus back to Silas' perspective it is clear that he is barely surviving the loss of the money. Eliot describes his grief as akin to those who have been bereaved. In the evenings he 'sat in his loneliness by his dull fire, he leaned his elbows on his knees, and clasped his head with his hands, and moaned very low – not as one who seeks to be heard' (p. 77). The prospect of earning more money is meaningless because it is not making money he loves, but the coins themselves, which are gone now.

Silas' misfortune and grief are obvious to the community and they banish any superstitious fears which had surrounded the weaver. The community now tries to help Silas, by giving him food and talking to him of his misfortunes. They cannot understand the meaning of his loss and so are inclined to belittle it and attribute it to a punishment for not attending church. Mr Macey's strictures are typical of the advice Silas receives – pull himself together and start again. His words have no meaning as they refer to matters outwith his experience. Similarly, going to church would help him to recover, finds no echo in his heart. Silas cannot go to chapel with Dolly's description of church.¹⁰ The neighbours approach Silas in vain, leaving him in isolation.

In the last part of the chapter the story moves to Godfrey's Christmas celebrations. Dunstan's absence shows how little anyone cared about him. Would this be the same for Silas? The description of Christmas at The Red House is one of cheer without any true joy. It is the fight between Anxiety and Reckless Hope in Godfrey's mind. The thought of being with her and perhaps dancing with her is enough to dampen but not banish his anxiety. The chapter ends with Silas having no hope for the future and Godfrey again pinning all his hopes on Dunstan.

¹⁰ See 'Religious Ideology' in *Ideas and Messages* p. 48

Chapter Eleven

Summary

In this chapter Nancy is introduced as the focus moves to the New Year's Eve Ball with that of the other ladies attending the ball and the Squire and his relatives. The chapter as they watch and make comments on the festivities. At the end of the chapter Godfrey gives a caution to the wind and makes his feelings known to Nancy.

Analysis

From the start Nancy is described as beautiful, but also completely lacking in vanity. It is also clear that she has a strong moral sense and high standards: 'Did he suppose that Miss Nancy Lammeter was to be won by any man, squire or no squire, who had led a life like this?' (p. 89). She obviously has feelings for Godfrey, but she is determined not to marry him who falls short of her expectations.

The other guests at the ball provide a contrast to Nancy. The Miss Gunns are presented as followers of fashion with no good taste and Mrs Osgood, her aunt, is old fashioned and prim. Eliot emphasises Nancy's purity and wholesomeness in the description, everything has a place and everything is in its place. Moreover, Nancy is not ashamed of her domestic virtues, or her countrified accent which shocks the Miss Gunns. Her lack of education is likewise not seen as a disadvantage as: 'she had the essential attributes of a lady – high veracity, delicate honour in her dealings, deference to others, and refined personal habits' (p. 93). Here honesty is cited as an essential ladylike quality. However, Eliot does make one criticism; she states that: 'she was slightly proud and exacting, and as constant in her affection towards a baseless opinion as towards an erring lover' (p. 93). Nancy, therefore, has strong opinions of her position in society and a high regard for her own opinions, even when they have been proved to be false.

The final contrasting character to Nancy to arrive is her sister Priscilla. She is neither beautiful nor ladylike and cares little about both. Priscilla brings humour to the situation and also further illustrates Nancy's character when she describes how Nancy insists that they dress alike. 'It'll be fine fun to see how you'll master your husband and never raise your voice above the singing o' a kettle all the while.' (p. 95). It is evident that Nancy has a strong character and is morally upright, thus making her the ideal partner for Godfrey.

The next part of the story describes the interaction between the dignitaries of the Squire and Mr Lammeter. The Squire clearly signals his approval of Nancy, putting her to dance. The focus then moves to the onlookers who are watching the dance, stressed, although they react in two minds about Godfrey. Moving back to the opportunity for Godfrey to reveal his true feelings. Although she tries not to be indifferent, Godfrey allows himself to: 'get as much out of this joy as he could of the morrow' (p. 106).



Exam Tip

Think about the techniques used to present the characters – omniscient narrative, views of others. Look at the use of analogies, imagery and rhetorical questions. Look at the judgments Eliot makes about other characters and how this reflects Silas Marner. Remember to use quotations from the text to support your answer.

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Chapter Twelve

Summary

This chapter is the turning point of the novel, the crisis which brings Silas and Gold. Silas does not realise this yet. Godfrey's hidden wife Molly makes the journey to London seeking revenge against the husband who rejected her. Overcome by the effects of snow and loses consciousness. Her child, attracted by the firelight from Silas' open weaver's cottage and falls asleep in front of the fire. Silas comes out of a cataleptic fit, the gold has returned. When he realises that it is a child, his first instinct is to care for the discovery of Molly's body.

Analysis

The abrupt transition from the frivolity of the New Year's Eve Ball and Molly's painful journey to London makes Molly a more sympathetic character. Godfrey is dancing the night away while she is forced to trudge slowly through the snow in rags, carrying her child. Until this point there has been no mention of a child. Godfrey's rejection of the child as well as the mother would certainly make him more blameworthy to modern readers. However, in the Victorian period the situation would be less clear cut. Godfrey could not acknowledge the child without facing social ruin and risking expulsion from his family. Likewise, the child would be seen as partly tainted by the sins of her parents. The idea of taking her away from her mother and raising her in the Squire's household would have been unthinkable, while that mother still lived.

Molly's journey is presented sympathetically, however Eliot makes it clear that Molly's main cause of her misery. In this miserable state the strongest impulse left is the journey on New Year's Eve was a premeditated act of vengeance, which she had planned. Godfrey, in a fit of passion, had told her that he would sooner die than acknowledge her. Godfrey's rejection would bring about his downfall, but only if Molly resists the urge to follow her course, she is not able to do in spite of 'the lingering mother's tenderness' (p. 107) for her child. However in the fight between opium and motherly love, opium wins and she falls down in the cold snow and never gets up again.

Molly's last act is to cling to the child in her arms and in so doing saves her from death. When that grip loosens she wakes and catches sight of the light from Silas' cottage. She crawls to the fireside and goes back to sleep. Silas, in the grip of a cataleptic fit is unconscious. Eliot's reader of his loss by describing how he clung on to the hope of New Year's Eve brought him back to him' (p. 109). It is purely luck, or chance, that brings the child to his cottage. If not for the catalepsy the door would have been shut and she would probably have died in the snow.

When Silas comes to himself, he goes over to the fire: 'it seemed as if there was a hearth. Gold! - his own gold! - brought back to him as mysteriously as it had been lost. The identification of the child and Silas' gold is to become a trope or motif that runs through the novel. Silas is bewildered by the discovery that it is not gold, but a child. However, the discovery does not bring him, as we might expect. Instead it triggers memories of his lost little sister and 'old quiverings of tenderness - old impressions of awe at the presentiment of some Power presiding over his life' (p. 111). This re-emphasises Eliot's earlier point that it is not money itself that Silas loves, but money as a substitute for love itself. The little girl is indeed the gold returning because she provides a new focus for Silas' love. He immediately shows this by tending to her needs, even though he is still a man at a loss to explain her presence. Only the discovery of wet boots leads him to the idea that she has come from outside and results in him discovering Molly's body.

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Chapter Thirteen

Summary

In this chapter Silas and Godfrey come face to face as Silas arrives at the ball carrying Godfrey's child in his arms. Godfrey is terrified by the thought that his wife might not be dead and then he would be disgraced. Silas surprises himself by insisting on keeping the child. Godfrey uses the excuse of fetching Dolly to see if his wife is really dead. When he realises that he has the chance of escaping scandal and marrying Nancy, he gives up any claim to his child. Luck seems to have favoured him so he promises himself that he will provide for the child and live a good life to atone for his mistakes.

Analysis

It is a dramatic scene when Godfrey '... recognises his child in Silas' arms. This chapter is largely told from Godfrey's perspective and starts with a description of the feast from which Silas' interruption appears to Godfrey as 'an apparition of the dead' (p. 114). He immediately recognises the child, although he tries to convince himself that he might be mistaken. When he realises that a woman who must be his wife has been discovered, he is filled with terror in case she isn't dead. Eliot states that: 'That was an evil terror – an ugly inner in Godfrey's kindly disposition; but no disposition is a security from evil wishes to a duplicity.' (p. 114). In other words, the lies and deceit that Godfrey has had to employ only result in evil consequences. He wishes Molly dead and this is a short step away

However, there is no need to take any further action because Godfrey's wishes are no one has found out about his deception. Godfrey's actions that evening in fetching the body is examined are interpreted as kind-heartedness, adding to the irony. On the other hand, Eliot does not present Godfrey's decision to keep quiet as an easy one. Guilt, then when he realises Molly is dead, he responds to the pull of fatherly affection, conflict of regret and joy' (p. 118) but this is not strong enough for him to claim that she will be given to the parish, a harsh and shameful fate for a gentleman's daughter.

There is a strong sense in this chapter that destiny plays a role in deciding the outcome. The simple fact that he has escaped from all suspicion, contributes to Godfrey's decision. '... when events turn out so much better for a man than he has reason to dread, is he has been less foolish and blameworthy than it might otherwise have appeared?' (p. 118). Godfrey's duplicity and he is able to quiet his conscience by convincing himself that he is doing what is best for the people he loves and that he will behave better from now on. Silas is still confused but adamant he wants to keep the child. This also seems attributed to events beyond his control. 'I don't know where – and this is come from I don't know where.' (p. 118). Silas is a lone thing – and I'm a lone thing' (p. 118) which is the turning point for his character. He does not understand the events of the night, but is aware for the first time of the need to do something. At this time he has a much more rewarding life for his love.



Question

Do you think that Eliot intends the main events in *Silas Marner* to be determined by the actions of the characters? Refer to the whole book and use evidence.



Exam Tip

Go through the main events and analyse why they occurred. Was it circumstance or control which determined the outcome, or was it due to a decision made by a character? *analyse*: Silas' betrayal by Dane; Silas' isolation in Raveloe and obsession with marriage; Dunstan's theft of Silas' gold; Eppie's arrival; Godfrey and Nancy's confession and Eppie's decision to stay with Silas.

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Chapter Fourteen

Summary

This chapter describes the effect of Eppie's arrival on Silas' life. Caring for her for the community. He is even persuaded to have her christened and attend church regularly to connect this with his previous religious life. There is also a humorous account of his failure to punish her which emphasises how much he now cares for her. Eliot illustrates his new horizons and banishes the fear and suspicion that the villagers had felt towards him.

Analysis

Eliot begins the chapter by describing the change in attitude towards Silas because of Eppie. He becomes an object of interest and speculation, rather than one of fear and suspicion. He instructs her in the practical aspects of child rearing. However, when Eppie is bathed, he fails to impress upon Silas the importance of making sure that Eppie is christened and that she attends church.

Dolly has an unquestioned belief in the importance of church ritual and ceremony. Her 'noculation' (p. 123). To be christened and to learn your catechism were sure ways of being harmed. Dolly cannot read and therefore has no knowledge of the Bible or of church. She has no understanding of theology. However, she has a simple goodness which compels her to bring up the subject of church attendance and christening.

In spite of Silas' superior education (he can read and does have some biblical knowledge from his previous experience of chapel worship with the Raveloe church services. He is not a baptist, which for his sect was an adult practice, and christening. This chapter is a study of religious ideology presented in this book. It seems that Eliot is arguing that religion is a belonging to a community, rather than has value in itself. It is the traditional rites of the villagers, who are largely unconscious of its religious significance.¹¹

The next part of the chapter describes how Silas is re-engaging with the community. Eppie makes him an object of interest and speculation, not fear. Eppie herself 'was a creature of ever-growing desires, seeking and loving sunshine, and living sounds, and living kindness in all eyes that looked on her' (p. 125). Eliot compares Silas' love for gold to a gold had kept his thoughts in an ever-repeated circle, leading to nothing beyond a compacted of changes and hopes that forced his thoughts onward' (p. 125). In the isolation where his thoughts and feelings had gradually become deadened, towards Eppie becomes part of the community and learns to love all that she does. Eppie leads Silas to look at the flowers and metaphorically – outside of the monotonous drudgery and to the

In the last part of the chapter Eliot describes Silas' struggles to manage Eppie's misdeeds. In a picture of a harsh Victorian father, Silas can't bring himself to punish Eppie. However, when she tethers to the loom and runs out into the street, calling Silas with a terrible fear, he decides to follow Dolly's advice and smacking Eppie he puts her in the stocks. Unfortunately, this does not have the desired effect on Eppie who takes the next day and hides herself. Silas is forced to bear 'the burden of her misdeeds' (p. 129) himself, a constant reminder to him and to the villagers of all ages and all walks of life.

Eliot ends the chapter by creating an image of how Eppie has brought about Silas' salvation: 'But yet men are led away from threatening destruction: a hand is put into theirs, which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so they look no more backward; and the hand may be a little child's.' (p. 131). Eppie may not be an angel, but she has had an angelic effect on Silas' life.

¹¹ For more on this please see 'Religious Ideology' in *Ideas and Messages* p. 48

Chapter Fifteen

Summary

In this short chapter we return to Godfrey's viewpoint. Freed from his wife and convinced now that he has nothing to fear from his brother, Godfrey is happily pursuing his courtship with Nancy. He salves his conscience by reflecting that Eppie is well cared for and determining to do what he can to support her.

Analysis

Godfrey's thoughts are presented through omniscient narration, driven by rhetorical questions. While he remains interested in Eppie's welfare, it is easy to convince himself that she is better off with her mother. She was 'being taken care of, and would be very likely to be happy, as people in humble stations often were – happier, perhaps, than those brought up in luxury' (p. 132). So Godfrey is free from guilt that his daughter is being raised in a socially inferior environment, comforting himself with the notion that wealth does not always bring happiness.

Eliot uses the image of a ring described in Madame Leprince de Beaumont's book *Contes des Fees* which 'pricked its owner when he forgot duty and followed desire' (p. 132) at once to describe Godfrey's actions and to note that he is currently insensitive to the pain. Godfrey is engaged in 'the chase' (p. 132) for Nancy's affections and oblivious to everything else. However there are hints that when this is over, regret will follow.

Dunstan is nowhere to be seen and Godfrey has ceased to fear his reappearance. Nothing therefore stands in the way of his future happiness with Nancy. In fact events seemed to have worked out so well for Godfrey that he almost feels as if destiny has intervened on his behalf: 'He felt like a reformed man, delivered from temptation; and the vision of his future life seemed to him which he had no cause to fight.' (p. 132). His vision of the future includes having a child with while basking in Nancy's smiles. The chapter ends with: 'And that other child he would not forget it; he would see it was well provided for. That was a father's duty.' (p. 132). The duties of fatherhood contrasts ironically with the previous chapter where Silas described the responsibilities of fatherhood. While apparently positive, there are strong hints that Godfrey will not escape the consequences of his actions. This comes across through the image of the word 'duty' and Godfrey's hopeful speculations about Eppie's future, what his future married life.

Active Learning Task

Analyse the use of irony in chapters 14 and 15. Which characters and events are ironic? How does this have on the reader?

Tip: consider comic effect of the irony with the character and hinting at future events.

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Chapter Sixteen

Summary

Sixteen years have now passed and the story catches up with the characters as the Nancy are described first and there is a hint that Nancy has been tested by trouble reintroduced, with Eppie described as a beautiful and vibrant young girl of 18. It is her love with Eppie, as Eppie makes use of this to plan a garden in the Stone-pits. Silas is attached and happy together. In the last part of the chapter, Eliot describes how Silas, with his past experience by sharing it with Dolly. Although neither of them are able to do much, lots did not clear Silas, they do agree that if Silas had been able to trust more in the future, he would have been spared the misery of isolation. In the end, Eppie tells Silas that Aaron has died and she gives his blessing.

Analysis

By starting with a church service, Eliot restarts the story at the heart of community. Silas embraces both Godfrey and Silas. Godfrey is described first as 'practically unchanged, with an indefinable look of youth' (p. 137). So far it appears that Godfrey has escaped the consequences of his deeds. Nancy, on the other hand, has aged more, but Eliot emphasises that her goodness of her character. Her eyes are described as 'veracious' (p. 137) or truth-telling in nature that has been tested and has kept its highest qualities' (p. 137). This hint indicates that she at least has suffered over the last 16 years.

The focus now moves to Silas Marner and in this chapter we hear him speak more for the first point of the narration so far. Silas' sight has improved over the years, symbolising his connection with the world since Eppie's arrival. He is now bent and worn, in contrast to Eppie whose unruly vitality. Eppie is conscious of the censure of others, she 'does not like to be blamed' (p. 138) and is equally conscious of her power over Aaron Winthrop. In the conversation, we see how she can manipulate circumstances to get her own way, but there is no harm in her wish for a garden and she shows a lot of concern for Silas. She also shows a regard for Dolly, wanting to include her in all their plans. When Aaron has gone she dances with delight and reveals that she knew that Aaron would offer to dig it for them. It is also clear that she is very happy with her lot, stating that 'I don't think I shall want anything else when we've got a little garden' (p. 140).

Discuss...

Compare the description of Eppie before and after the sixteen years. What changes symbolise her growth? Is it important that she has a home and wants to stay?

Eliot then describes the way in which Silas' home has changed over the years. Eppie is introducing pets to liven up their home. The house is also filled with furniture donated by the villagers have no suspicion about what Silas represents have been made, seeing that they should be looked on and helped by those who could afford it' (p. 141), especially his ability to earn money. In fact, the villagers now believe that Silas may be a good man, in contrast to their previous view that the theft was a judgment on him. His domestic activities are a way of emphasising how much Silas has now conformed to the community, coming to 'appropriate the forms of custom and belief that were the contrast to his previous ignorance and isolation from all those customs and beliefs'.

Now that Silas has embraced community life he is able to make friends like Dolly. It is such a close friend that he is moved to share with her his memories of life before his isolation. Her horizons are very narrow, so she finds it difficult to understand any experience outside her own. Both she and Silas struggle to understand why the drawing of lots, which is described as Silas' innocence. It shakes Dolly's simple absolute belief in God, but she remains loyal.

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rights' (p. 144) in what happened to Silas somewhere, if only she could be clever. In her deliberation she tries to explain to Silas that in life there was suffering which noble and bad alike. Her philosophy is simple: 'all as we've got to do is trusten, Master Silas, fur as we know, and to trusten. For if us as knows so little can see a bit o' good an' there's a good and a rights bigger nor what we can know - I feel it i' my own inside' (p. 145) that the goodness of others would clear him in time. His belief in this mystery is strengthened by the mysterious appearance of Eppie; he believes now that 'the good is this way, although Silas is still unable to explain why the drawing of lots had not shown the workings of the Almighty, he now believes in a God who is good to him.

In the last part of the chapter Eliot explains how Eppie has grown up with the knowledge of a child. She has felt the lack of a mother, but had very little curiosity or need for a father very close to her, who loved her better than any of the real fathers in the village. 'daughters?' (p. 146). Eliot stresses the 'perfect love' (p. 146) which Eppie has received from Silas, which has made her more refined than any village girl: 'she was not quite a common girl, of refinement and feeling which came from no other teaching than that of tender love' (p. 146). Eliot attributes this refinement to Silas' love, however a Victorian audience might attribute it to her father's superior breeding.¹² Eppie is of course completely ignorant of her past. She is already considering marriage to Aaron, which would permanently exclude her from her father's house. Her reservation is a dislike of change, but Silas is aware that change will come whether he accepts Aaron. It is a touching scene where Silas explains that it would be a comfort to have somebody else besides me – somebody young and strong, as'll outlive me of you to the end' (p. 150). It looks as if Eppie's future is secure; a smooth transition from her father to that of her potential husband.

Chapter Seventeen

Summary

The focus shifts to Nancy and Godfrey and the changes that have taken place over the years. Nancy is as close to her sister and her father and has transformed the old Red House into a home. She broods on Godfrey's unhappiness at their inability to have children and her reluctance to adoption on a matter of principle, unaware that Eppie was Godfrey's child. The chapter ends with Godfrey's thoughts as he convinces himself again that he could not confess to Nancy. He is contented without Eppie. Godfrey can see no other obstacle in the way of adoption. He would be glad of the help. The chapter ends with a commotion outside.

Analysis

The chapter begins with a description of the changes to the Red House which reflect Nancy's love and care. Not only is it clean and comfortable but Nancy has kept mementos of the old Squire which demonstrate her 'filial reverence' (p. 151) (daughterly love). Nancy tries to persuade her father and sister to stay longer, but it is clear now that Godfrey is in charge and is eager to return to the work of running the mill. In contrast, Nancy's life is restricted to household duties and the sisters talk about the new dairy as a way of occupying her further. However, it is evident that Nancy is concerned about Godfrey as she is: 'contented with the blessings we have, if only he could be so contented' (p. 152). The reason for this discontent is that they have not had children, so Godfrey's confident vision of the future with children around the hearth has not come to pass.

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¹² See 'Class and Social Position' in *Ideas and Messages* p. 48

Eliot then records the inner monologue of Nancy's thoughts. As the rest of her far from happy married life and questions her actions. She is in the habit of doing this as: "'I am I well?'" (p. 154) has become the recurring question which fills her lonely, idle moments. This is a topical issue of the role of women in society, before returning to Nancy's thoughts.

Nancy's self-questioning is centred on whether or not she should have agreed to Eppie. Eliot describes how Nancy has controlled her own feelings of grief and loss, and how she sees these feelings as 'cherishing a longing for what was not given' (p. 155). She is more indulgent towards Godfrey's wishes for children, making excuses to justify them. When it came to adopting a child Nancy's rigid ethical code prevented her from agreeing. She believes that adoption means to: 'try and choose your lot in spite of Providence' (p. 156), which would be very familiar to a contemporary audience, as is the notion that there is your fate and that trying to change this could have disastrous consequences. Nancy 'meant' to have children, so any attempt to bring this about by adopting a child would be wrong. Godfrey's attempts to argue that 'there are no reasons to expect Eppie would not be happy' (p. 156). Eliot ironically compares the Calvinist, network religious theory to that of 'many deists' held in the shape of a 'system' quite remote from her knowledge' (p. 157). She uses the ideas of a religious system, giving a significant insight into her religious ideology.

Returning to the issue of Eppie's adoption Eliot explains that Godfrey assumed that Eppie to be adopted as this would be giving her advantages in life. Godfrey clearly is a superior father than Silas purely because of his social position. However, he has been denying him, conscious that this was due to an 'unselfish clinging to the right' (p. 157). He is upset such a loving wife with recriminations, but is unable to hide his disappointment. He also prevents him from confessing the truth to her as he worries that she would feel 'repulsion' (p. 158) that his story would hold for her and may also direct some of the blame to Godfrey's conscience, so easily quietened before, now troubles him and adds to his distress. At the end of the chapter the maid informs Nancy of a commotion in the village and she feels 'uneasiness' (p. 160) and a wish for Godfrey's return which hints at the crisis to come.

Active Learning Task

Compare Silas and Dolly's view of religion with Nancy's. What 'system' (p. 157) does she comment on its similarities to Nancy's beliefs? Research the different religious beliefs and their popularity during the Victorian period; particularly Baptist, Methodist and Calvinist. Compare your previous religion and Nancy's current theology?

Tip: use the 'Religious Ideology' section in Ideas and Messages as a starting point

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¹³ See 'The Rise of Feminism' in *Ideas and Messages* p. 57

¹⁴ See 'Religious Ideology' in *Ideas and Messages* p. 50



Chapter Eighteen

Summary

Godfrey returns home with the news that Dunstan's body has been discovered. The discovery of the thief has come as such a shock to Godfrey and such proof that sins will be discovered that he is compelled to confess to Nancy. Instead of rejecting him, Nancy is filled with regret for bringing up Eppie as her own. She is able to forgive Godfrey and he determines to seek forgiveness.

Analysis

The dramatic events of this chapter unfold quickly and are told briefly. It is as if nothing needs to be added to the picture of the situation, instead Eliot allows the characters to speak for themselves. The chapter is entirely made up of dialogue and like Godfrey, the reader has to wait in anticipation for Nancy's answer with no clue from the narrator of how she will react.

Shock has pushed Godfrey into decisiveness for once. His discovery of Dunstan's body with knowing his brother was a thief makes it clear to him that "Everything comes to light when God Almighty wills it, our secrets are found out." (p. 162). The fact that Dunstan is brought to light by what seemed like pure chance convinces Godfrey that his own secrets will also be revealed possibly in a similar way. His mind dwells on the effect on Nancy should she only find out.

Nancy is shocked and ashamed by the revelation that Dunstan was a thief. However, feeling that Godfrey has more to tell her so she waits in silence. As Godfrey confesses to his husband and Eppie's father, Nancy waits 'pale and quiet like a meditative statue' (p. 162). Godfrey admits that he should not have left Eppie 'unowned' (p. 163) and tells the truth. But his main concern is for himself saying 'You'll never think the same of me now as I was when I was suffering'.

Like Godfrey, the reader has to wait for Nancy's reply. Instead of condemning him for his secret, she expresses regret. She asks him: 'Do you think I'd have refused to take her in, if I'd known the truth?' (p. 163). Not telling her the truth Godfrey had unnecessarily deprived himself of the one thing that could have made her so much. He felt 'all the bitterness of an error that was not simply futile, but had cost her life' (p. 163). Nancy then goes on to mourn the fact that if she had known about Eppie from the start, she would have taken her as her own daughter and need not have suffered so much when her baby died.

Of course this is rewriting the past from the perspective of the future and Godfrey knows that Nancy would never have married him had she known the truth. However, Nancy is not regretting her decision, she is saying: 'I wasn't worth doing wrong for – no more in this world. Nothing is worth doing wrong for – not even our marrying wasn't, you see' (p. 163). In Nancy's view the deceit that Godfrey has committed over the last 16 years has been the cause of all the unhappiness they have experienced since then.

Godfrey's next move is that Nancy should forgive him, which she does by saying that he has been good to her and that it is Eppie who has suffered most. Determined to put things right at last Godfrey resolves to acknowledge Eppie and to 'take her' (p. 164) at last, confident that this is what she would wish.

Discuss...

Did you expect Nancy to react differently to Godfrey's confession? How do you think her character would change if she knew the truth about Dunstan?

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Chapter Nineteen

Summary

Silas reflects on the return of the money, feeling that it is an amazing blessing that Eppie needs it. They are interrupted by Godfrey and Nancy who come to offer the offer to adopt Eppie. Godfrey tries to do this at first without acknowledging her and refuses to consider leaving Silas, he owns the truth. Silas chastises Godfrey for not unwilling to deprive her of the 'better' life Godfrey and Nancy offer her. However Eppie declares that she will never leave Silas and that she has no wish to leave the she has been raised in. Filled with dejection, Godfrey rushes away.

Analysis

Silas tells Eppie about his previous obsession with the gold and how at first he wished that Eppie might turn her into gold. This feeling did not last for long and Silas understood how much good loving Eppie has done him. Without it he would have 'gone to the grave in my misery' (p. 166). He understands that the gold has no hold on him now, but if he were to lose it, the hold might return.

They are surprised by Godfrey and Nancy's entrance. Godfrey apologises for Dunstan's behaviour and explains that he owes Silas a debt, but does not explain more fully. He and Nancy had decided that it would be better not to reveal that Godfrey was her father as yet. Nancy is concerned about the effect that this may have on Eppie and 'the painful light in which Eppie must inevitably see the relation between her father and mother' (p. 166).

Godfrey blunders into asking to adopt Eppie, hampered by his inability to tell the truth. He offers to bring Eppie up as his daughter and stresses the comfort it would be to Silas to 'see her fortune made in that way' (p. 168). It had previously seemed to Godfrey a perfectly natural agreement that both would immediately accept.

Silas lets Eppie answer and to his delight she is adamant that she does not want to 'couldn't give up the folks I've been used to.'" (p. 169). Moved to anger at this unfeeling claim, Godfrey asserts his claim over her as his daughter, declaring "'I've a natural claim that must stand before you.'" Eliot brings to focus issues of nature and nurture,¹⁵ as Silas questions Godfrey about his claim and argues that by caring for her he has become her father. "'Your coming now and saying that you are my father alter the feelings inside us. It's me she's been calling her father ever since she could speak.'" (p. 170).

Although Godfrey feels the truth of Silas' words and is moved by the weaver's directness, which is different to his own deceit and evasions, he still feels that Silas is being selfish. He offers Eppie a better life and that he could prevent her from making the same mistake as he did (p. 170) which would stop her from being able to give her financial assistance.

It is significant that while Godfrey's arguments all revolve around money and social status, Eppie's is only of love. Godfrey turns the decision over to Eppie because he cannot bear the thought of her doing anything. Nancy too believes that restoring Eppie to her 'birthright' was an 'unqualified duty'.



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¹⁵ See 'Class and Social Position' in *Ideas and Messages* p. 48

However Eppie is only repulsed by Godfrey's words and is determined not to leave. When Godfrey appeals directly to her she does not come forward and treat him with a deferent and respectful attitude. In a passionate speech defending her love for Silas and her determination to continue with her way of life. She rejects social improvement saying that fine clothes and riding in a gig, or sitting in a special place in church would only make her feel as if she were rejecting the people she had grown up with. When Nancy attempts to make her feel dutiful towards her father Eppie is scornful at the suggestion: "I can't feel as I've got any father but one... I've always thought of a little home where he'd sit i' the corner, and I should fend and do everything for him: I can't think o' no other home. I wasn't brought up to be a lady, I like working-folks" (p. 173).¹⁶ She then reveals that she is engaged to a working man, leaving no possibility that she might be persuaded to change.

Discuss...

Compare Silas and Godfrey's. What arguments present about the value of class?

Godfrey, frustrated in his attempt to atone for his previous misdeeds leaves with Eppie to cover the debt as best she can.



Chapter Twenty

Summary

Godfrey reflects on the failure of plans to adopt Eppie. Both he and Nancy agree to try to change Eppie's mind. Godfrey realises that sometimes it is too late to atone for his past. He finds out that he no longer intends to publicly acknowledge Eppie as his daughter, to his shame. With the realisation that there is no prospect of ever having children of his own, he who has unfailingly supported him and promises to appreciate her more.

Analysis

This is a very short and simple chapter where both Nancy and Godfrey talk frankly. The strong bond between them is made clear from the first where they simply stop and look at each other with 'a quiet mutual gaze of trusting husband and wife' which is like 'the first moment of rest and refuge from a great weariness or a great danger' (p. 174). Here Eliot also hints that in failing to adopt Eppie, Godfrey and Nancy may have avoided 'a great danger'. In other words, to try to make Eppie part of their family now (however much Godfrey might wish it) could have threatened their strong relationship and settled life. A contemporary audience would have been very conscious of the difficulties of moving Eppie from a working class to an upper class society.¹⁷

Another consequence of adopting Eppie would have been that Godfrey would have had to acknowledge his 'low' marriage and abandonment of her. This would have been regarded as shameful by Godfrey and Nancy. Nancy is therefore very relieved when Godfrey announces that he will not make his relationship to Eppie public. In this way, the father's need never know. Godfrey plans to make it known in his will, this also suggests that he may leave Eppie a legacy, which is now the only option open to atone for the past.

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¹⁶ See 'Class and Social Position' in *Ideas and Messages* p. 48 for a more in-depth discussion.

¹⁷ See 'Class and Social Position' in *Ideas and Messages* p. 48

Godfrey is still concerned about Eppie, wondering if it is Aaron that she means to marry. He is sad that she was 'a very pretty, nice girl,' (p. 175). By getting married and being with Aaron, Eppie will fix her social position by joining Aaron's family. From a Victorian perspective, she would be forever separated from her father. Nancy tries to support Godfrey, calling him 'very sober and industrious' (p. 175), which is the most praise that she could bestow. Godfrey observes a likeness between Godfrey and Eppie, which re-emphasises the natural connection between them.

Godfrey then reflects on Eppie's reaction to him and for the first time resolves to tell her the truth. He thinks it is better for Eppie to think badly of him than to find out the truth about her mother's death. Godfrey starts to show maturity as he realises at last that he is to blame for the situation. "I've got into that trouble if I'd been true to you – if I hadn't been a fool. I'd no right to marry you – and when I shirked doing a father's part too." (p. 176)

Nancy sees the truth of this and does not mind his confession. With the acceptance of his past wrongs and that he will never harm her again, she comes to the realisation that he has not changed. "And I got you, Nancy, in my arms, and yet I've been grumbling and uneasy because as if I deserved it." Nancy declares that she has never wanted anything but to be with Godfrey. Godfrey makes a resolution to try to be happy with his lot. In this way, he hopes that this will bring Godfrey and Nancy together. There is a sense that in being honest, Godfrey may actually have been saved to build a new future with his wife.

Practice Question



In what way can Eppie's rejection of Godfrey be seen as a punishment for his lower class life; a reward for Silas' honesty and love or the natural consequence of being raised in a working class environment? EITHER discuss each of these arguments or choose one you believe to be most relevant and support your argument using evidence from the text.



Exam Tip

For option 1: go through each statement and find evidence to support or refute it.
Key chapters to refer to: Ch 3; Ch 5; Ch 11; Ch 12; Ch 13; Ch 15; Ch. 16–22
 For option 2: choose which statement you think best fits and the find evidence to support it. Consider the other arguments and refute them in order to make your case. It would also help to look at *Ideas and Messages* particularly 'Class and Society'.

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Chapter Twenty-one

Summary

Silas resolves to take Eppie back to his old home at Lantern Yard, in the hope of regaining a greater understanding of his past and present religion. However, when the yard has been swept away, replaced by a factory. Silas returns to Raveloe resolved to forge a new future.

Analysis

Here it seems as if Eliot will tie up the loose ends of the story. Silas' journey to Lantern Yard will surely lead to the injustice being overturned. He may also be brought to a deeper religious understanding, as one of his main motivations is to 'ask the minister about drawing lots and about 'the religious life in the country-side, for I partly think he doesn't know on it.' (p. 177). It is from this that despite 16 years of churchgoing Silas is still unable to link his previous religious practices and beliefs with those of Raveloe.

However, as we read the chapter we realise that Eliot is not intending a neat ending to the story. Silas and Eppie are lost from the moment they arrive in the town. Eppie, who has been excited at the prospect of going to a new place and teaching Aaron something for once, is 'stifled' (p. 178) by the crowded buildings and dark streets. When Silas at last comes to where Lantern Yard had been he is overcome with shock. In its place is a factory, there is no trace of the yard, the chapel or the previous inhabitants. Unable to find out any more Silas and Eppie return.

Silas has to conclude that he will never know if the injustice was discovered or the truth behind the drawing of lots. It will remain '... dark to the last' (p. 179). As Dolly argues, this makes no difference to whether or not a wrong was done to Silas. Silas realises that he will just have to carry on trusting and now that he knows that Eppie will always stay with him he will 'trusten till I die' (p. 180). The reader also has to 'trusten' as our curiosity is not satisfied by a neat resolution of the past. Instead, Eliot creates a much more realistic ending which makes clear that it is not always possible to find out the truth of what has happened. The resolution of the story involves accepting this and moving on to focus on the future.

Active Learning
Imagine that Silas returns to Lantern Yard.
Write the dialogue between Silas and the minister Mr Popenoe.

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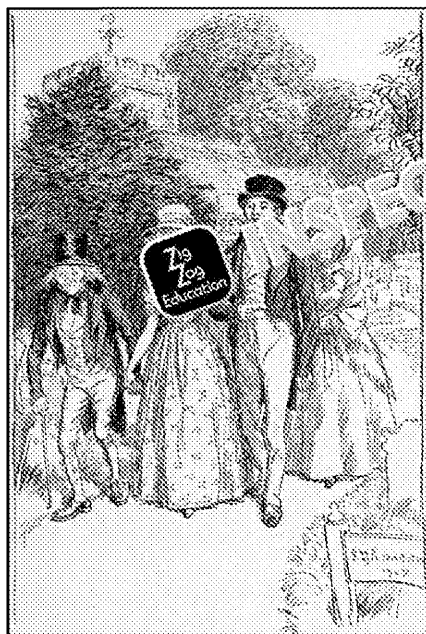


Conclusion

Summary

The story ends with Eppie's wedding. This joyful occasion includes Silas, but not Godfrey, who has to leave the village for the day. Eppie's wedding dress and the enlargements to their home are gifts from Godfrey, so he is still providing financial support. The chapter also shows how Silas has become a part of the community who feel that the return of his gold was a just reward.

Analysis



Eppie's bridal procession has a simple beauty. Mr Macey assures him that instead of giving her away to a 'rich son' (p. 181) 'he himself, the procession is only a wedding' and Mrs Macey wishes that Nancy had 'the luck to bring her up' (p. 182). Godfrey has absented himself on a return to old form, leaving Nancy to continue her life.

This is the last we see of the upper classes and the 'humbler part of the village' (p. 182) and end of the story. Eppie has embraced. Mr Macey is now the spokesman for them, claiming that he was the first to see and the first to predict that his money would be a goodness in bringing up Eppie. Here we see that Eppie has been fully accepted by the villagers. Now she has 'brought a blessing on himself' (p. 183) and fully deserved his good luck. With the cheering of the villagers, Eppie, her new husband, Silas and the village which Eppie preferred to any new house. It is a just reward for good behaviour.

money from Godfrey and there is now the garden that Eppie wanted. The last words of Eppie: "Oh father," said Eppie, "what a pretty home ours is! I think nobody could do better" (p. 183). In this way Eliot ends with the contentment of those who have acted honestly and the just rewards for good behaviour.

Discuss...

*How else could Eliot have ended this novel?
Discuss what the effect would be of including
Godfrey in the final chapter or excluding the
comments of the villagers.*



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Characterisation

Characterisation:

how the author presents the characters in the book; what techniques they use to develop personality and how they interact with each other. To analyse characterisation you look at descriptive language, dialogue and authorial comment.

Silas Marner

Silas Marner is the eponymous character in this book, but arguably one of two protagonists. You can say that the novel is written from the perspective of either of these protagonists, with the actions of all her characters dipping in to their speech, thoughts and feelings and you can analyse their motives or view them from the perspective of another character.

It is the perspective of the villagers that Eliot adopts in order to present Silas' character. By presenting how Silas is wrongly viewed because of the prejudice and superstitions of the villagers, Eliot immediately gains the reader's sympathy for him. As a result, Silas is immediately viewed with suspicion and his 'dreadful stare' (p. 6) is really due to short-sightedness, terrifies the village children. His strange appearance and unwillingness to mix with the community contributes to the distrust of the villagers and his isolation from them.

Honest and naïve.

Silas' short-sightedness is more than a physical ailment, it is symbolic of his character. 'The very distinctly that was not close' (p. 6) is echoed by his inability to see the true motives of others. Similarly, his catalepsy means that he literally loses touch with the world around him, which is of great significance for his character. In recounting the story of Silas' betrayal by William Dane, the honesty and simplicity of Silas' character prevented him from seeing duplicity about his friends and about the religious practices which had governed his life up to that point. He cannot recognise the warning signs – William Dane suggesting that catalepsy could be prevented – which influences Silas' fiancée Sarah. When falsely accused of theft, Silas is 'mute with astonishment' and confidently that 'God will clear me' (p. 12).

It is significant that these are the first words of direct speech from Silas. Most of the novel is told through characterisation, omniscient narration and recounting what he has heard. This part of the novel. Silas' simple faith in God, even in the face of the growing realism of the world around him, shows the trusting nature of his personality. As Eliot later states Silas' 'faith in God towards falsity,' (pp. 18–19) and until his betrayal was unable to see this falsity in the world around him. The loss of lots appears to show that God too has betrayed him, Silas' whole world collapses and he is effectively to illustrate this loss,¹⁸ making him into a greater object of sympathy and

A loner and obsessive

Eliot needs to explain Silas' past in order to help the reader to identify with his character. His short-sighted narrow outlook first sees no wrong in his life, but after his betrayal is equally as narrow. From his perspective, all his loved ones have turned against him and this extends to his inability to see any links between his past life and life in Raveloe, or any goodness in the world. He now finds himself isolated. The connection that he makes between his past and present life, the illness of Oates, only leads to further misunderstanding and isolation. Again, Eliot helps the reader to sympathise with Silas by describing how it is his very honesty which stops him from producing fake cures and turns the villagers against him. He has lost faith in himself and the other villagers only adds to this lack of faith. Isolation becomes his only option.

It is easy to sympathise with a victim of injustice, it is harder to understand why a person becomes obsessive. Eliot directly appeals to the reader with analogies and rhetorical questions to help understand Silas' obsessive love.¹⁹ It is not the idea of being wealthy which obsesses Silas but the

¹⁸ See Analysis of Ch 2 for more detail on p. 6

¹⁹ Again see Analysis of Ch 2, p. 6

them all. He spread them out in heaps and bathed his hands in them; then he counted the regular piles, and felt their rounded outline between his thumb and fingers' (p. 21). This description to describe Silas' physical pleasure in the coins, even describing the outline of the coins (p. 21). This description is full of sympathy even though Eliot is also quick to point out the love which turns Silas' thoughts inward and reduces his life to the mechanical process of counting and weighing the gold.

Lost and Found

The scene which describes Silas discovering the theft of his gold has a heartbreaking quality. Even though he has not lost a family member or a friend, his grief is the same. Eliot describes how Silas fruitlessly hunts every part of the cottage, as if the gold had somehow moved in his absence. In his loss he 'put his trembling hands to his head, and gave a wild ringing scream, then he fell on his knees and wept' (p. 22). This is reminiscent of how a parent may react to the loss of a child. In effect, Silas has lost his affection. It is therefore appropriate that a real child should come to make up for the loss of his gold.

Because of his short-sightedness, Silas first mistakes Eppie's golden curls for his lost gold. When he finds her, he comes to believe that, in some mysterious way, the child is his gold. In chapter 9, Eliot reflects on his changing feelings at this time: "At first, I thought I had found the gold; and now I feel as if you might be changed into the gold again; for sometimes I would, I seemed to see the gold; and I thought I should be glad if I could feel it, and that didn't last long. After a bit, I should have thought it was a curse come again, I should have thought I'd got to feel the need o' your looks and your voice and the touch o' your little fingers. Eppie, when you were such a little un – you didn't know what your old father Silas was worth." This quotation is significant, firstly because it describes the transfer of Silas' affections from gold to his loving child, but also because it is a testament to the simple honesty of Silas' character. The love of the gold turned Silas inwards, increasing his isolation and his fear. Eppie's love has the opposite effect, he has to ask for help from others to look after her, which banishes any remaining fear or suspicion the villagers may have felt towards him. The villagers help Eppie and the village respond kindly as 'the little child had come to link him once more with the whole world' (p. 130).

This change is also reflected by the way in which Eliot depicts Silas. Before Eppie, most of the depiction of Silas is through omniscient narration and description, very little through direct speech. Eppie's arrival gives Silas a voice and the chapters after his discovery of the child are largely made up of direct speech.

Discuss...

Why do you think Eliot uses omniscient narration of describing Silas before Eppie's arrival?

Keeping Eppie and Letting Go of the Past

In the final part of the book, Silas has to face the possibility of losing Eppie to her natural father. Godfrey offers to adopt Eppie without revealing that he is her father. Characteristically, Silas thinks only of the good that Eppie could gain from the change in situation. He is brought to a 'subdued sob' (p. 169) when Eppie rejects the suggestion. Silas had been told that Eppie was a 'lady', realising that she won't leave him giving her strength. Godfrey's offer does not frighten Silas. Instead he speaks honestly from the heart: "I was born sixteen year ago, and claim her before I'm old enough to love her, i'stead o' coming to her when she might as well take the heart out o' me. God gave her to me because you turn your back upon her as mine. I was brought to her! When a man turns a blessing from him, it's his fault." This speech is important because it is an act of bravery and defiance. Silas was cautious before. He speaks honestly, from the heart as he always does. Eppie and deceit are equally inexplicable. That such a man should now feel that it is his fault is against everything that Silas has come to believe in. It is also evident that Silas has changed, although the exact nature of this is never fully explored. When Godfrey again suggests Eppie return to her natural father, Silas is again urged by his conscience to keep quiet and accept the rejection of the 'better' life Godfrey and Nancy could offer and her assertion while she lives 'as I've got any father but one' (p. 173) puts Silas' final fears to rest and confirms his choice for the rest of his life. In this chapter therefore, Silas shows that he can fight his fears and always put Eppie first.

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In the penultimate chapter Silas tries to return to the past to put right the injustice. Perhaps the confrontation with Godfrey has at last given him the courage to face him. However, when they return to where Lantern Yard used to be it has vanished. Eliot shows the new world of industrialisation sweeping away the past. Silas' past yard and it has been wiped away. With the destruction of his past, Silas is forced to admit that he will never fully understand the injustices of the past or find out his 'family'. He only knows that had it not been for the past, he would never have cared for Eppie. He believes that Eppie was sent to him and since then, as he says: "I've had light enough to trusten by; and now she says she'll never leave me, I think I shall trusten till I die." (p. 180). The final maturation of Silas' character is the acceptance that love and trust are the guiding principles by which he can live the rest of his life, and he is comforted by the love and comfort of his adopted daughter, his new husband and the support and acceptance of the community.

Active Learning
Look at the physical appearance of Silas Marner. What does it tell you about his character? How have his disabilities affected his life?

Key Quotes

'For some time he was mute with astonishment: then he said, "God will clear me being there, the money being gone. Search me and my dwelling"' (p. 12).

'money on this condition was no temptation to him: he had never known an impulse of this kind.'

'So, year after year, Silas Marner had lived in this solitude, his guineas rising in the chest and hardening itself more and more into a mere pulsation of desire and satisfaction for other being.' (p. 20).

'Again he put his trembling hands to his head, and gave a wild ringing scream, the first he had given since the day of his coming.'

"At first, I'd a sort o' feeling come across me now and then... as if you might be coming sometimes, turn my head which way I would, I seemed to see the gold; and I thought, if it came, I would find it was come back. But that didn't last long. After a bit, I should have thought if it had drove you from me, for I'd got to feel the need o' your looks and your voice and your fingers. You didn't know then, Eppie, when you were such a little un – you didn't know how I felt for you." (p. 165).

Godfrey Cass

The second protagonist of the novel, Godfrey Cass provides a real contrast with Silas. His social position is higher than Silas', but it is soon evident that his moral character is inferior. Although he rejects dishonesty, Godfrey has been forced to embrace it. For most of the novel, he lives in deception, which is maintained by nothing stronger than a hope for a lucky outcome.

Upbringing and Initial Character Traits

Eliot takes care to sketch Godfrey's upbringing and to lay some of the blame at the feet of his father who is essentially too selfish to interfere with the upbringing of his children. Godfrey's household with a mixture of indulgence and excessive rebuke when things go wrong. Godfrey is involved with a local barmaid, been persuaded into marrying her.

It is clear from the first introduction, where Godfrey and Dunstan are arguing, that Godfrey is weak. Eliot chooses to present Godfrey mainly through direct speech, thus showing his words and his actual intentions. He puts up a blustering resistance to Dunstan's demands. This is typical of Godfrey's character throughout: he knows how he should act but lacks the strength to do it. His natural irresolution and moral cowardice were exaggerated by a position where the consequences seemed to press equally on all sides... The results of confession were uncertain; whereas betrayal was not certain.' (p. 28). Godfrey consistently avoids the possibility of confessing in favour of the possibility that luck might intervene on his behalf and

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Redeeming Love and the Effect of Fate

However, Godfrey is not presented as an evil character. Even in the first introduction of Godfrey, Eliot shows that Godfrey has the capabilities to improve given the right conditions. ‘the need of sympathy, affection, the longing for some influence that would make the good he preferred his own, the neatness, purity and liberal orderliness of the Lammeter household, sunned by the light of those fresh bright hours of the morning when temptations go to sleep and leave the way clear for a good angel, inviting to industry, sobriety, and peace’ (pp. 31–2). In other words, if Godfrey had the influence of a strong, morally upright character to help guide his natural inclinations, if only he had not met and married Molly, this would be his current position.

Godfrey constantly puts off confessing all to his father because of a blind hope in the future. When events come to a head, it seems as if this faith has been justified. Molly has been taken away from him, there is no one to connect her with Godfrey. During this time, Godfrey has disappeared. The child Godfrey appears to have escaped the consequences of his past deeds and is free to live. When events turn out so much better for him than he has had reason to dread, is it not to be expected that he has been less foolish and blameworthy than it might otherwise have appeared?’ (p. 132). This is a rhetorical question to the reader to understand that Godfrey feels that in some way, his fate has been redeemed. Confessing all to his father would only hurt others. He is not young enough to feel the loss of his child and to confidently anticipate more children in the future. He would always ‘see that it was well provided for’ (p. 133), but now it seems as if he has been ‘delivered from temptation’ (p. 132). So Eliot shows that a combination of Godfrey’s selfish wishes, a belief that fate has delivered him and his hopes of being good in the future lead him inevitably to disowning Eppie.

Discuss...

Look at the different ways in which Silas’ and Godfrey’s characters are introduced. What is the significance of the way they are described as the novel begins?

Growth, Maturity and Repentance

In the first part of the novel Godfrey is largely presented through direct speech, in the second part this is reversed and we see Godfrey more through the eyes of others. He is dissatisfied with his life that gaining Nancy was not enough. As he has grown older he has felt the need for more. When it became apparent that he and Nancy could not have children of their own, he decided to adopt Eppie. Godfrey is still selfish, he does not reflect on the effect this would have on Eppie, partly because he feels disconnected from them, his social ‘superiority’ leads him to believe that his affections are not enough. ‘Was it not an appropriate thing for people in a higher station to take a child from the lower? It seemed an eminently appropriate thing to Godfrey... he imagined that he had private motives for desiring it.’ (p. 157). Just as Godfrey had imagined that his wish to adopt Eppie would lead him to disown Eppie, it was the right thing to do, he imagines that his wish to adopt Eppie would lead him to disown Eppie. Unfortunately he meets resistance from Nancy who does not believe adoption is the right thing to do. On the good side of his character, he does not attempt to press Nancy, but he can’t control his feelings.

This situation could have carried on indefinitely, it is the shock to bring about change. The death of a brother provides that shock. Godfrey is less happy because of the death of a brother he despises. The theft which leads him to believe that everything comes to light... sooner or later. The death of the brother and the theft of the body lead Godfrey to his previous beliefs that he will be able to control his fate with no harm. His decision to adopt Eppie leads to a further shock, when he realises that she is not his own. He allowed himself to be deceived by Eppie if only he had been honest with her. However, it is not until he returns to Silas’ cottage his old confidence that his wishes are right and that fate will help him.

Eppie’s rejection of Godfrey soon puts an end to this way of looking at the world. Godfrey is convinced that Eppie will gratefully accept the social advantages he can offer her, but she is shattered. You can see in this chapter how great a value Godfrey places on his wealth. When he tries to persuade Eppie his arguments are all based on the social advantages she can gain. On the other hand, she speaks only of love and respect for those who have loved them. She has a personal one, saying ‘“I can’t feel as I’ve got any father but one”’ and rejecting the idea of her future: ‘“I wasn’t brought up to be a lady, and I can’t turn my mind to

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Key Quote

'And when events turn out so much better for a man than he has had reason to expect, his conduct has been less foolish and blameworthy than it might otherwise have appeared.'

"She thinks of me worse than I am. But she must think of it: she can never know Nancy, for my daughter to dislike me. I should never have got into that trouble if been a fool. I'd no right to expect anything but evil could come of that marriage – father's part too." (p. 175).



Write a comparison of the characters of Silas Marner and Godfrey Cass personality over the course of the novel. Comment on the techniques reference to the text.



Use the information above and the key quotes to help you. Make sure that your narration used thinking about rhetorical questions, direct speech, omniscient comments and use of irony.

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Dunstan Cass

Godfrey's brother Dunstan Cass is presented as an unsavoury character from the start. He does not suffer with his conscience. His philosophy appears to be simple – to make his money for amusement and financial gain. He is known by the villagers as 'a spiteful jeering fellow who would drink the more when other people went dry' (p. 24), a succinct description which suggests that the younger son, Dunstan has no real prospects so he seeks power and money through other means.

In chapter 3, Dunstan shows his manipulative powers tormenting Godfrey with his bluff, backing off, keeping his hold over Godfrey and obtaining the horse to sell at the sale. Dunstan's marriage was 'partly due to a trap laid for him by Dunstan' (p. 31) and it is this power that the marriage has given him over Godfrey.

This appetite for power as well as money is evident when Dunstan decides to come to the village by spotting Silas' cottage he had found a more 'pragmatic' way of raising the money: 'The important consciousness of having a horse to sell, and the opportunity of driving a horse, possibly taking somebod else's (p. 34)'. Similarly after agreeing a price for Wildfire, 'It did occur to Dunstan that it might be wise for him to give up a day's hunting... But he was encouraged by his confidence in his luck... was not easy to overcome especially with the horse to take the fences to the admiration of the field.' (p. 35). Dunstan's belief in his riding skills manages to kill the poor horse. This turns his thoughts back to Silas' deserted cottage and the money. Eliot carefully builds up the story, relating Dunstan's tiredness, his growing reluctance to part with his money and then his amazement at finding the house empty. He justifies the loss by saying 'He may have died. If the weaver was dead who had a right to his money? Who would have taken it hidden? *Who would know anyone had come to take it away?* He went no farther than the pressing question, "Where is the money?" now took such entire possession of his mind that he forgot that the weaver's death was not a certainty.' (p. 39).

In this way, Dunstan makes the easy transition from obtaining money by threats and false promises to theft. When he discovers the money, the fear that the dead Silas may return, forces him to flee without taking a lantern. In this way, his greed causes his death as in the dark he must have slipped. He is later discovered at the bottom of a Stone-pit not far from Silas' cottage.

Discuss...

Eliot builds up her character of Dunstan showing the stages from his initial greed up to their defining of his relation to Dunstan's death and Nancy's decision to stay.

The importance of Dunstan Cass as a character is arguably partly to cast Godfrey in a better light. He does not have Silas' moral strength and honesty, but he is clearly a more upright character. The theft itself turns out to be a blessing for Silas – without the loss of his money would Dunstan's death moreover that precipitates Godfrey's confession. In this way, Eliot suggests that what may appear to have little value can bring about a good outcome.

Nancy

It would be difficult to think of a greater contrast to Dunstan than Nancy. From the start she is the ideal wife for Godfrey, described in terms of neatness, purity and wholesomeness. She is introduced in chapter 1, her beauty and lack of vanity are both emphasised. It is described that she has set herself high moral standards: 'Did he suppose that Miss Maudlin won by any means acquire or no squire, who had led a bad life?' (p. 89). Here Eliot also suggests the importance that she places on social position. A squire would be an appropriate match for her. She was also a good man.

As Nancy interacts with the other guests it is noticeable that she has none of the airs and graces acquired by women in her position. She is not ashamed of doing housework and her desire for Priscilla to always dress in the same way as she does indicates a strong will power. Nancy speaks softly, but as the rougher Priscilla reacts to her, it is clear that she has a strong will power.

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how you'll master your husband and never raise your voice above the singing of a lullaby. Nancy may be softly spoken, but she is still capable of being in charge.

When the story resumes after the 16-year gap, Nancy's character is brought more fully into focus. Eliot uses omniscient narration to explore her thoughts as she waits for her husband. She is again shown in the way in which she has coped with the loss of her child and her determination to refuse to allow herself to be 'cherishing a longing for what was not given' (p. 155). Her indulgent attitude towards Godfrey's dissatisfaction is not least because she has prevented him from realising his wish. Nancy's belief that adoption is wrong is an example of where her opinions have become a 'code' (p. 156) by which she lives her life. It was not uncommon at this time to be told that if you denied you a child it would be wrong to try and change this. However, when Godfrey reveals to Eppie's father this immediately changes the situation: "'Do you think I'd have refused to let her be yours?'" (p. 163) she asks when Godfrey reveals that he is Eppie's father. Nancy speaks with 'deep regret' (p. 163) which becomes more pronounced as she realises that she has been a mother to Eppie if only Godfrey had owned her from the start. Unlike Godfrey, who is himself second and is unhappy about her forgiveness and resolution to try to make

In the confrontation between Silas and Godfrey, Nancy tries to calm the situation. Silas 'her coldness showed no question that a father by blood must have a claim above all others' (p. 164). He also is unable to understand Eppie's wish to remain with the 'working-folks' (p. 164). Her sense of respectability and pride that her social position entails. However, once Eppie has been revealed, there is no choice but to back away. There is some hope at the end of the novel when Godfrey is doing and promises to be more contented that Nancy and Godfrey's life may be better.

Eppie

As Godfrey's secret and Silas' saviour, Eppie is at the very heart of the novel. Her character is well delineated. She is young, vibrant and loving, with a simple honesty which echoes her innocent appearance as an infant it is clear that she is fearless and open to affection. She is picked up and later 'seized his head with both her small arms, and put her lips to his cheek and his noises' (p. 122). Eppie's affectionate nature helps to bind her and Silas together.

Eliot humorously describes Eppie's capacity for mischief and Silas' inability to punish her. When frightened when shut in the coal-hole, Eppie's next action is to escape and go down to the garden. As she was reared without punishment, the burden of her misdeeds being borne vicariously by Silas. The stone hut was made a soft nest for her, lined with downy patience: and also in the stone hut she knew nothing of frowns and denials.' (p. 129).

It may seem surprising that in an era known for its harsh discipline Eliot seems to depict a child without punishment. But the relationship between Silas and Eppie needs to be understood in order to bring about Silas' redemption. When the rector meets Eppie again at the garden, he is struck by her beauty and her affection. She may be capable of manipulating Aaron slightly to get what she wants. The plan to create a garden is to continue to encourage her life and growth into their lives. Eppie has an exceptionally close bond with Silas where she will not contemplate leaving him. She is content with life as it is, not seeing the need to change. However, Silas persuades her that he wants her to be around.

Given what we have learned about Silas and Eppie's bond, it is not surprising that when Godfrey suggests that she should live with him, Eppie paints a picture of her relationship with Silas touching in its intensity and singleness of purpose: "'And he's took care of me and I'll cleave to him as long as he lives, and nobody shall come between him and me.'" (p. 173). Her loyalty in this scene where she unequivocally rejects not just her father, but the society she was born into. She rejects her father: "'I can't feel as I've got any father but one'" and rejecting the vision Godfrey offers her: "'I wasn't brought up to be a lady, and I can't turn my mind to it. I like working-folks ways. And,' she ended passionately while the tears fell, 'I'm promised to a working-folk man. Help me to take care of him'" (p. 173). By declaring her impending marriage to Aaron, Eppie

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previous statement to her father that Eppie “may marry some low working-man, and then... I couldn’t make her well-off” (p. 170). Silas’ reward for loving Eppie is the equal return of her love. At the end of the novel she declares that “nobody could be happier than we are” (p. 183) effectively showing that far from missing out, Eppie has achieved that rare state, perfect contentment.

Discuss...

Did you expect Eppie to find an alternative father and a new life?

Molly

Molly is an essential part of the story that links Silas and Godfrey together, but as little about her. She is first described in disparaging terms in chapter 3 as a ‘drunk’ of her marriage to Godfrey is ‘an ugly story... of passion, delusion and waking from a dream’ (p. 31). In chapter 4, Molly is portrayed as the stumbling block in the way of Godfrey’s happiness on his life’ (p. 31). We learn a lot in this chapter of her addiction to laudanum, which is an opium derivative, and her alcoholism.

Molly appears only once in the novel, on her fatal journey of vengeance to the Newgate Prison. She is described as a ‘premeditated act of vengeance’ (p. 107) because she blames her degradation and comments that: ‘It is seldom that the miserable can help regarding their misery as are less miserable. Molly knew that the cause of her dingy rags was not her husband but Opium to whom she was enslaved, body and soul, except in the lingering motherly love to give him her hungry child. She knew this well; and yet, in moments of wretchedness, the sense of her want and degradation transformed itself continually into bitterness.’ Eliot helps to make Molly a more sympathetic character even in face of Victorian readers for her drunkenness, addiction and for marrying ‘above’ her.²⁰ Firstly, she has motherly feelings both of which have not been apparent before. Secondly, Eliot shows her enslavement: Molly is not in control of her life any more. Godfrey has abandoned her, and she is dead, so she has some justification for her bitterness against him.

This insight into Molly’s mind continues as Eliot describes how she struggles to resist the spite of the worsening of conditions. Lost in the snow-covered lanes she ‘needed to struggle to resist temptation as ‘the mother’s love pleaded for painful consciousness’ (p. 108). However, Molly is not strong enough and gives in to temptation, losing consciousness around her and succumbing to the urge to go to sleep. The last thing to be relinquished is showing that motherly affection is still her strongest impulse. She keeps the child and maintains consciousness, but at last slips into a deadly torpor. Eliot does not attack her as a villain, instead she makes her actions understandable. Her strongest character

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²⁰ See the section ‘Class and social position’ in *Ideas and Messages* p. 48

Dolly

In contrast to Molly, Dolly is a 'good' working-class woman with a strong moral sense. She is the first to be thought of in any crisis: 'a woman of scrupulous conscience, so eager to offer them too scantily unless she rose at half-past four... she was a very mild, patient woman, who was to seek out all the sadder and more serious elements of life, and pasture her mind on such she is well suited to become Silas' friend and advisor. She is unable to help when money is stolen, but after the arrival of Eppie, Silas is in need of all the practical help she can give.'

Dolly is not an educated woman, she pricks the buns with the letters 'I.H.S.' which she knows 'they've got a good meaning, for they're the same as is on the pulpit cross'. In fact, I.H.S. is an abbreviation commonly known as a Christogram for the name of Jesus. Dolly does not know its significance, as it did not form part of her previous religious work. This is because they are good without understanding the meaning is typical of Dolly's piety and customs and practices of church life with her. She is therefore sees it as vital to Eppie's well-being. There is no true religious understanding behind Dolly's views, like "noculation" (p. 122) which is a way of protecting her from harm.

Dolly is deeply troubled when Silas recounts his false accusation at Lantern Yard. She understands his wickedness or William Dane, but like Silas she cannot question the drawing of the line that it happens in the Bible. After much thought she decides that it is like many other things to explain, like why illness should carry off the adults and leave the helpless infants. 'It's i' this world, and there's things we can niver make out the rights on. And all as we know, Marner – to do the right thing as fur as we know, and to trusten. For if us as know the rights and rights, we may be sure as there's good and a rights bigger nor what we can know. It must be so.' (p. 145). In her view, Silas should have stayed and trusted to the good. However, she is sympathetic with his decision to leave. In this way, Dolly helps Silas to come to terms with his past. She provides motherly guidance to Eppie and when she marries Eppie, they become a happy (if unconventional) family at the end of the novel.



Practice Question

Consider Eliot's presentation of character in the light of the following quotation:

So intense is George Eliot's desire to dissect the human heart and dissect the situations, and even consistency in the vocabulary of the characters subservient to it. With her it is not so much that the characters do thus and so. Dickens portrays the behaviour, George Eliot dissects the motives.

Nathan Sheppard, *George Eliot's Essays*, 'George Eliot's Analysis of Motives'

Do you agree that Eliot is primarily concerned with portraying the motives of her characters? Choose one or two character(s) as your focus to answer this question using evidence from the text.



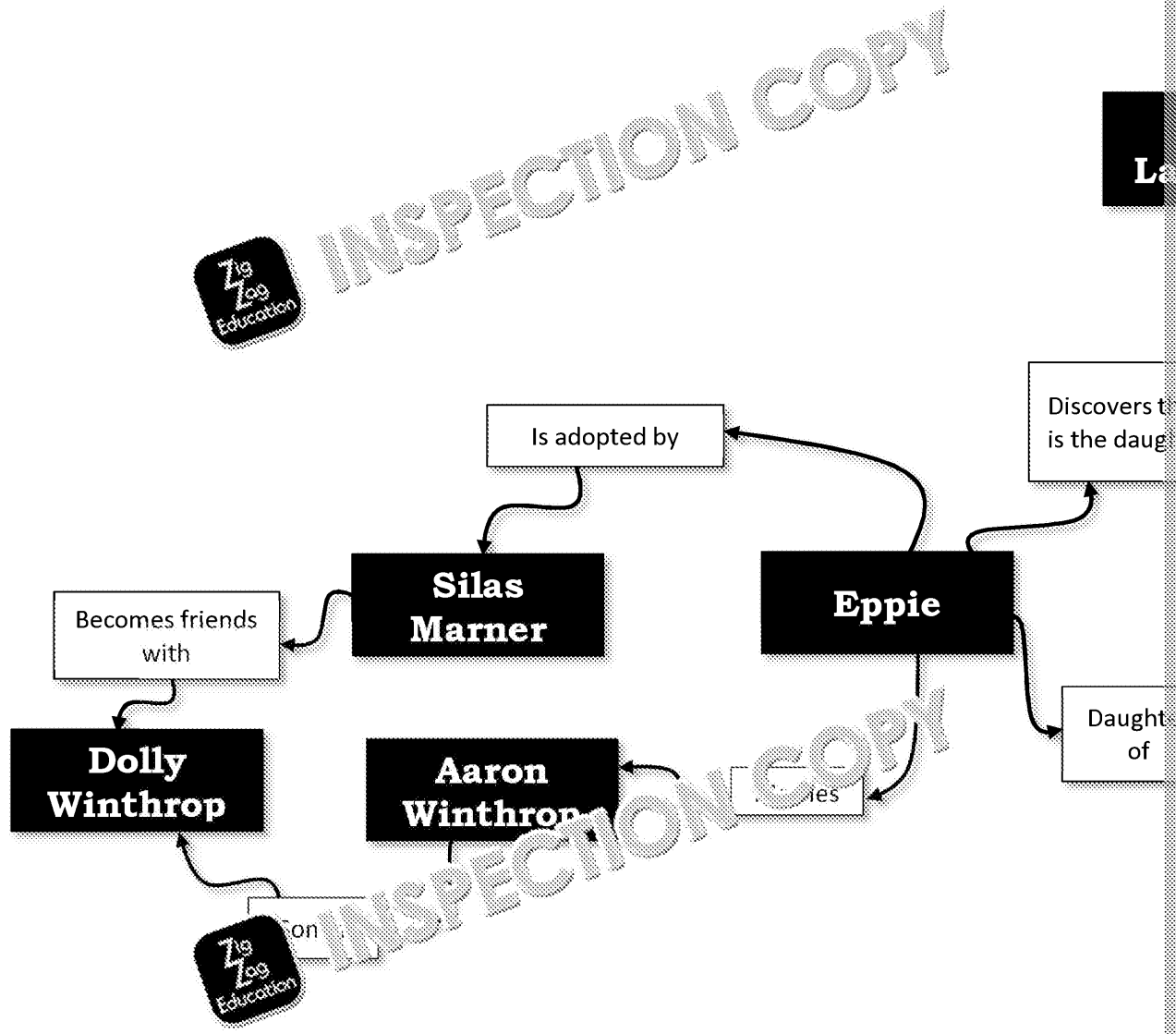
Exam Tip

Choose one or two major characters. Consider if/how their motives are portrayed in her characterisation and what details does she appear to be less concerned with. Consider the use of rhetorical questions and omniscient narration to present motives.

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Relationships Mind Map



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Relationships Analysis

Godfrey and Dunstan

The first relationship between characters to be presented in any detail is that of Godfrey and Dunstan. Dunstan's relationship is a toxic one, where Dunstan's envy of his older brother has led him to blackmail him. Godfrey is the eldest son of the Squire so naturally inherits the means, while the younger son, Dunstan's options are more limited. So in entrapping Godfrey into a relationship with him, Dunstan uses 'the means of gratifying at once his jealous hate and his cupidity' (p. 31). It is clear that Dunstan has the opportunity to torment Godfrey as much as he enjoys getting money out of him.

When Dunstan disappears, unsurprisingly Godfrey does not grieve at his absence, assuming that he has left the country, possibly to enlist. The last twist in Godfrey's story is the discovery of Dunstan's body with Silas' gold. It is the shock of discovering the truth about the revelation that his theft had been discovered that leads to Godfrey's confession and his most positive achievement.

Godfrey and Nancy

From our first introduction to Godfrey it is evident that he is in love with Nancy and that this is a powerful force for good in his life. Unlike Molly, who could only degrade him, Nancy is his salvation. Godfrey feels 'the need of some tender permanent affection, the love which would make the good he preferred easy to pursue, caused the neatness, purity and order of the Lammeter household, sunned by the smile of Nancy, to seem like those fresh bright temptations go to sleep and leave the ear open to the voice of a good angel, inviting to peace' (pp. 31–2). Godfrey knows that he can only win Nancy by being a good man, and this becomes his best motivation to become more morally upright.

After the 16-year gap, we see how Godfrey and Nancy's relationship has turned out well. Godfrey is now a good and responsible landowner and he and Nancy still have a child, but their inability to have children and Nancy's unwillingness to adopt is threatening the closeness of their relationship. Godfrey refuses to criticise her husband and continually questions her decisions, always putting her in a certain 'awe' (p. 158) at her 'unselfish clinging to the right' (p. 158) and her very good nature. He confesses. He feels that 'she would never recover from the repulsion the story of his life would cause' (p. 158). He is disappointed that she won't consider adoption but never tries to blame her. When Godfrey finally confesses the truth he finds that he has misjudged Nancy. His thoughts are all centred on the lost opportunity of bringing up Eppie, lost because he did not know that Eppie was Godfrey's child. She forgives him instantly saying, "'The wrong was to me is but little, Godfrey: you've made it up to me – you've been good to me for 16 years.'" (p. 164). After the disappointment of Eppie's rejection, Godfrey turns back to Nancy saying, "'And I got you, Nancy, in spite of all; and yet I've been grumbling and complaining and uneasy because I hadn't something else'" (p. 175). Now that he realises that there is no children and no change in their relationship he resolves to appreciate it more.

Silas and Eppie

Eppie's arrival brings about Silas' salvation, bringing love into his lonely, isolated life. Silas, clinging to him when he takes her to the New Year's Ball to get help. She does not recognise Godfrey, turning from him with no recognition to pulling Silas' cheek. She kisses Silas after the ball, but it is evident that her affection towards him is returned. Silas recalls the moment when he explains to Eppie that he stopped wishing she would marry him. "'I'd got to feel the need o' your looks and your voice and the touch o' your little hand,'" he says. Eppie, when you were such a little un – you didn't know what your old father Silas was for."

After the 16-year gap we get to see how their relationship has matured. They are now a family and share everything together, including Eppie's mild manipulation of Aaron. Eliot describes their 'perfect love' (p. 146); it is clear that Silas would do anything for Eppie and it soon becomes clear that this is mutual. Eppie sees her future life as one with Silas. At the end of the novel where she is married to Aaron and they return to the cottage, Silas declares that she is perfectly happy.

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Settings

Raveloe

The main setting for *Silas Marner* is the fictional country village of Raveloe. It is a village not 'on the outskirts of civilisation' (p. 7), but at the same time was: 'quite an hour's ride from the nearest town' (p. 7). In this way, it is not disturbed by newcomers passing through, it is a settled village. Raveloe is rich enough to boast of a few stone homesteads, but has 'no great park or manor house'. Later it is made evident that the Squire, the only landlord, is the 'The greatest man in the village' in terms of social standing.

The countryside around Raveloe is rich and lush, its 'orchards looking lazy with new green leaves' in the wide churchyard, which men gazed at lounging at their own doors in service of the village, jogging along the lanes or turning in at the 'humble' homesteads, where men supped at the light of the evening hearth, and women were seen to be laying up a stock of food. There is a lazy self-indulgence in Raveloe, which has resulted from this rich farmland, unlike the enlightenment and industry which characterised Silas' past life in Lantern Yard.

The advantage of setting a novel in a large village like Raveloe is that Eliot is able to create a close-knit community. Everybody has a place in this community, which is why Silas as a stranger is accepted even years after his arrival. The customs of the village are clearly established and there is a social hierarchy. This is likely to be reassuring to many Victorian readers who have been alienated from society brought about by industrialisation.²¹ Raveloe is 'aloof from the currents of the world' and its earnestness: the rich ate and drank freely, accepting gout and apoplexy as things of the world, and respectable families, and the poor thought that the rich were entirely in the right. Moreover it also gives Eliot the opportunity to create a community which first rejected him. A less settled community would not have been so quick to reject him, but would also have been less well when he made the decision to care for Eppie.

An important part of this setting is the local pub, The Rainbow. Here all sections of the village meet, the upper classes in the parlour and the lower in the bar or kitchen. Just as the common ground of conversation in the pub often takes the same well-worn path. There is an amicable rivalry between the farrier and Mr Macey, the town clerk and a retelling of the histories of the local families. Eliot does not describe the pub in any detail, but it is clearly a comfortable place where you can meet the men in the village.

The village itself does not change through the course of the novel. It provides a steady and constant backdrop to the changing lives of Silas, Godfrey and Eppie. At the end of the novel, the bridal walk to the church takes the reader from the 'superior' to the 'humble' village houses, besides the Rainbow pub and finally to Silas' cottage. Eppie is welcomed by everyone as she makes this journey, symbolising her position at the heart of the village.

Discuss...

What are the strengths of the country setting?
Which do you prefer?

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²¹ See *Context* p. 56

Lantern Yard

There is only one contrasting setting to Raveloe and that is the depiction of Silas' cottage. The initial description of Lantern Yard in chapters 1 and 2 is very sparse. It is not a town, although this can be surmised from the word 'Yard' and the existence of a community of neighbours and serving a community of artisans. Even when contrasting the change coming to Raveloe, Eliot does not describe the setting of Lantern Yard apart from the church but rather the behaviour of the chapel members.

This absence of description allows the reader to see it freshly through Eppie's eyes. The first landmark Silas recognises is the jail, which Eppie sees as: "a dark ugly place" (p. 178). Eppie can't believe the over-crowdedness saying, "I'm like as if I was stuck with any folks lived it this way, so close together." (p. 178). Silas also remarks that it is bad. When he discovers that Lantern Yard no longer exists, he is overcome with a picture of what Lantern Yard was like, but it no longer exists. In contrast to the gradual and gradual, Silas' entire past life has been swept away.

Silas' Cottage and the Stone-pits

To start with there is very little description of Silas' cottage; it is described simply as being among the nutty hedgerows near the village of Raveloe, and not far from the edge of the parish. As a stone cottage, it is one step above the housing of the average worker. It is also emphasising Silas' position as an outsider.

The 'deserted stone-pit' (p. 6), moreover, is a reminder of the emptiness of Silas' life. It is a dangerous place, particularly in misty weather, as described through Dunstan's eye. 'But now the mist, helped by the evening darkness, was more a screen than a guide into which his feet were liable to slip – hid everything, so that he had to guide his way by the low bushes in advance of the hedgerow.' (p. 37). In this mist it is not surprising that he sees lights from Silas' cottage. When he flees from the cottage, full of guilt, Dunstan 'saw the darkness' (p. 40), his hands too full to allow him to use the whip as a guide. It seems that he made a fatal slip. So there is danger beyond the cottage, but perhaps only for Dunstan.

Silas' love for gold turns his focus inwards so that all he is interested in are the heathen gods. To care for Eppie she turns his gaze outwards once again. In this way, we learn more about the cottage after Eppie's arrival. Silas takes Eppie 'beyond the Stone-pits to where there was some favourite bank where he could sit down, while Eppie toddled to pluck the flowers and the winged things that murmured happily above the bright petals' (p. 126). Therefore, the cottage is a wealth of plant and insect life which attracts Eppie from the first.

After the 16-year gap, the stone cottage changes considerably. New life has been brought to it and good quality oaken furniture has been donated by the Cans family. The description of the cleanliness and extols Eppie's virtues as a housekeeper, which make Silas his dinner. This is discussed in the first part of the chapter, and shows her wish for more living space to manage this new life. In the final chapter it is told that 'Eppie had a larger garden there now; and in other ways there had been alterations at the expense of Mr Casbar's larger family. For he and Eppie had decided that they would rather stay at the Stone-pit home. The garden was enclosed with stones on two sides, but in the front there was a path to the flowers' (p. 183). Silas and Eppie have maintained the past that led to their introduction. At the same time, the growth of the garden in the old cottage; there is a control maintained by the stone fences, but the 'open fence' is springing forth.

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The Red House

Squire Cass' house is known as the Red House, 'the large red house with the handsome front and high stables behind it, nearly opposite the church' (p. 23). So the Squire's house looks imposing from the outside, although we soon find out that the interior is the death of his wife.

The Squire's house may have been the grandest in the village, but after the death of his wife, it has fallen into disrepair: 'The fading grey light fell dimly on the walls decorated with portraits of ancestors, on coats and hats flung on chairs, on tankards sending forth a scent of flat ale, and on pipes propped up in the chimney-corners; signs of a domestic life destitute of any prevailing theme here is one of hunting, which seems to be the main occupation of the Squire. It is an exclusively masculine environment, which lacks any signs of comfort.'

After the 16-year gap, the story returns to the Red House which has now been transformed. It is now polished, on which no yesterday's dust is ever allowed to rest, from the yard's wide carpet, to the old Squire's boots, whips and walking-sticks, ranged on the stag's head. ... The tankards are on the side table still, but the bossed silver is undimmed and shining, and there are no dregs to send forth unpleasant suggestions: the only prevailing scent is of the lavender and rose-leaves that fill the vases of Derbyshire spar.' (p. 151). Neatness, order and femininity have transformed the previously comfortless home. This is symbolic of the changes that Nancy has wrought on Godfrey's life – giving it purpose and comfort, while retaining some links to the past by lovingly preserving the Squire's possessions.

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Themes

Theme:

repeated subject or idea that reoccurs throughout the text and often links different

The Desire for Gold

The lure or desire for gold affects the lives of both of the protagonists, but in very different ways. In both cases, it is a destructive desire in both cases, leading to emptiness, death and

For Silas Marner, the lure of gold is not connected with greed or any of the benefits of being wealthy. Gold is a substitute for companionship and love. In fact Silas deprives himself of a more comfortable life because of his desire to see 'the heaps of ten grow into a hundred, and then into a larger square' (p. 19). However, even though Silas is not motivated by greed or power, the desire for gold is still damaging. He turns to gold to fill the void in his life caused by the loss of his old friends and the rejection of the villagers. But his love of gold only increases his isolation and starts to reduce his capacity for love and friendship, even ageing him prematurely. 'So, year after year, Silas Marner had lived in this solitude, his guineas rising in the iron pot, and his life narrowing and hardening itself more and more into a satisfaction that had no relation to any other being. His life had reduced itself to hoarding, without any contemplation of an end towards which the functions tend used to look trusting and dreamy, now looked as if they had been made to see only very small, like tiny grain, for which they hunted everywhere: and he was so withered was not yet forty, the children always called him "Old Master Marner".' (p. 20). He could not think of 'an end' (p. 20) to which his hoarding could lead. The absence of greed and the desire for power mean that the worst effects that the money has on his quality of life to mere existence. It is therefore possible for him to be saved.

Dunstan Cass, by contrast, only sees money as a means of obtaining power. This is why he takes in tormenting his brother over the debt which Dunstan's blackmail has forced him to choose to proceed with the sale of Wildfire, even though he has thought of an alternative way to get money because he 'enjoyed the self-important consciousness of having a horse to drive a bargain, swaggering, and possibly taking somebody in' (p. 34). Dunstan has outwitted someone, thus proving his superiority in his own mind. Money is the power over others, whether it is blackmailing Godfrey or overpricing a horse. When he sees gold as a solution to his problems, he is confident that he can 'frighten or persuade money on the excellent security of the young Squire's prospects' (p. 34). It is later revealed that the money would never be repaid. Gold, however, is set to be Dunstan's downfall. When he is lured by the lure of the gold is so strong that he is able to make himself believe that Silas is dead and therefore justify the theft in his own mind. He is unable to banish all guilt though, in fact, he believes that Silas' ghost may be returning. This leads to him slipping out of the cottage without any light and being caught by the bags of coins. It is later clear that this mistake was caused by him to slip into the Stone-pit and drown. In this way, Eliot illustrates the fate of those who allow themselves to be governed by the desire for money as a means of satisfying greed and obtaining power.

The influence of gold on Godfrey Cass' life is more complicated. He does not seek money but because he has been blackmailed by Dunstan, he is forced to 'borrow' money. This is a very serious matter as the Squire is intending to expel the tenant from his estate if he has not been paying the rent. Godfrey has been driven to this fraud by blackmail, and he has the power but desperately trying to maintain his position. However, Godfrey's position

Discuss

Look at the way Dunstan Cass does it tell

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on money. He has grown up to expect a certain standard of life and at the same time he is selfish and thinks only of his own pleasure. This is why he made an unsuitable marriage. The truth partly by the fear of losing his social position and prospective wealth: 'The squire, equally disinclined to dig and to beg, was almost as helpless as an uprooted tree. Without his wealth and social position he would have had no hope of marrying Nancy. He did not actively seek gold but it is part of the reason why he takes the wrong path.'

It is also significant that Godfrey is able to justify his rejection of Eppie by thinking that he could give her. Similarly, when he considers adopting Eppie he assumes her consent that an increase in wealth and social position could be anything other than attractive. He wishes the best for the child he had taken so much trouble with, and would be glad if it happened to her: she would always be very grateful to him, and she would be well provided for (p. 157). Here, Godfrey assumes that money will be able to compensate Silas. When he offers to adopt Eppie the terms of his offer are all ones which relate to the financial aspects of adoption. For example: 'You'd like to see her taken care of by those who can leave her no want of anything' (p. 168); 'It 'ud be a great comfort to you in your old age, I hope, to see her have every need supplied' (p. 168). Even when he is forced to admit that he is not offering but trying to provide for her: 'a claim ... to own Eppie as my child and provide for her' if Silas was not to allow Godfrey's adoption Godfrey suggests that Eppie might marry and says 'I couldn't make her well-off. You're putting yourself in the way of her well-being'. When Silas withdraws his objections that Godfrey speaks of love and this is still from the love of her. Money, whether it is to raise social position, to give Eppie comforts or to provide for her, is fundamental to the argument Godfrey puts forward to persuade Eppie. This argument is one that Eppie who has no desire for either wealth or social position. In this more subtle way Godfrey's eminence of love over the desire for gold. Without the desire for money and the power it could have made a different series of choices: he may never have become involved with Eppie; he may have confessed; he would not have rejected Eppie as an infant and he may have lived a normal life, even if adoption were out of the question.

Community: Inclusion and Exclusion

Another strong theme throughout the book is that of community: the benefits of belonging to a community and its power to exclude and isolate. Silas Marner begins his life as part of a very contained community, that of a Calvinistic religious sect. So contained is it in fact that when he goes back to rediscover his past life, Silas does not look for any signs of the community outside of Lantern Yard. When he discovers that has gone, all his previous connections have gone too.

As part of the community, Silas was respected, even thought to be particularly spiritually gifted because of his cataleptic fits. However, it does not take long for the community to turn against him. They are influenced by finding the knife which William Marner had hidden, finally, by the result of the drawing of lots which convinced them that God has found a man outside this community who can speak for Silas and that it is within it takes his part. They condemn God: 'a God of lies that bears witness against the innocent' (p. 14) thus turning the eyes of the community and then Silas at home 'stunned by despair' (p. 14). He even his fiancée, but eventually turns his back on the community and then leaves.

When Silas comes to Raveloe, his strange appearance and the fact of him coming from a different community have stood in the way of his acceptance into the community. However, Silas makes connections with the community, partly because he is still suffering the effects of rejection and partly because of the connections between his previous way of life and life in Raveloe. The one connection, Sally Oates' illness, only leads him to further exclusion. His refusal to deal in herbs and his suspicion and fear that surrounds him and makes the villagers less inclined to have anything to do with him.

When Silas was part of the Lantern Yard community his life was 'filled with the meaning of the work and the close fellowship, which ... marked the life of an artisan early incorporated into the life of the community' (p. 9). Isolated by his own actions and excluded by the community he becomes a

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'narrowing and hardening itself more and more into a mere pulsation of desire and relation to any other being' (p. 20). With the theft of the money, Silas is forced to leave the heart of the village community, the Rainbow. Here you can see how his life would have been chosen to mix with the other villagers. There are petty disagreements between the villagers, but on the whole it is a comfortable atmosphere, where old stories are known and everyone has a clearly established role. Even though Silas has never been accepted, the villagers doubt that it is their duty to help him in misfortune. This help goes beyond assigning it involves worthy figures of the community like Dolly and Mr Macey giving Silas advice. When he ignores this advice and turn back to his isolation, he had learnt that help comes from the community. It leaves the door open, allowing Eppie to enter.

Eppie's entrance brings about a change not just in Silas' personal life but to his involvement in the moment that he volunteers to care for her he is valued that he will need help from the community. She encourages him to come to church and thus a point where the whole community get together. Eppie is also key to him for she is like him: 'the little child had a face that link him once more with the whole world. The child was a link between the world and the child, and there was a love between the child and the women with her. Her looks and tones, to the red lady-birds and the round pebbles at the end of the book where Eppie processes through the village, greeted by Mr Macey and the villagers and then surrounded by cheering guests as they pass the Rainbow. Silas is 'brought a blessing on himself by acting like a father to a lone motherless child' (p. 87) the community who once rejected him.

Whereas the main theme of community inclusion or exclusion relates to Silas, there are other features to note with regard to the other main characters. The Cass family are not in the village because of their social standing, however they do form part of the upper class. They are seen by the hospitality of the New Year's Ball. Both Dunstan and Godfrey, on the other hand, are excluded from this society. Dunstan is not missed at social occasions 'nobody was it would be too long' (p. 87) suggesting that even his family have excluded him. At the end of the celebrations, but is isolated by his own guilt and worries which prevent him from joining after he marries Nancy, Godfrey is still partially excluded from family life by the secrets he keeps from her. It is also notable that in the second half of the novel the upper class society has shrunk to Godfrey, Nancy, her sister and her father. Nancy is part of this small family community, but Godfrey takes every opportunity to escape and be on his own. So in many ways at the end of the novel Silas and Godfrey's positions are reversed with Silas being at the centre of the community and Godfrey isolated by his social position and still by secrets which prevent him from openly revealing that he is Eppie's father.

Discuss...

Compare the way the characters are presented in the novel; the way the villagers; the way the children; any similar or different you about Eppie.

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Parenting

Another theme which runs through the book is parenting and what it means to be a parent. This applies to fatherhood, but mothers also have a minor role to play. It is important that Godfrey has no voice to defend him when he is falsely accused. However, the memory of his mother's death has a profound effect on him. It is Sally Oates who first triggers this memory as her illness reminds him of his mother. 'He felt a rush of pity at the mingled sight and remembrance' (p. 18) the first time he sees her. To any of the Raveloe villagers. Moreover, when he adopts Eppie, his mother's 'advice about the herbs and their preparation' (p. 10) which she left to him as 'a solemn bequest' (p. 10) in a sense of crowding memories' (p. 126) as Eppie explores the plants. So the impression of his mother is that she tried to teach him and that he looked after her at the end. The

In contrast to this, Godfrey's mother is only referred to as having died before the birth of Godfrey. Godfrey's father's parenting is commented on. First of all, we are given the opinion that a weakness in the Squire that he was to put all his sons at home in idleness. The Squire's sons is being attributed to the Squire's lack of parental care. When the Squire's authority comes to Godfrey's head. There is no sense that the Squire could distance himself from his father and son is made clear by the Squire's ignorance of Godfrey. This reflects on the Squire's character: 'The old Squire was an implacable man: he made his anger felt and he was not to be moved from them after his anger had subsided – as fiery volleys into rock. Like many violent and implacable men, he allowed evils to grow under him till they pressed upon him with exasperating force, and then he turned round with unrelentingly hard.' (p. 66). The Squire's indulgence, which really springs from a desire to give Godfrey the freedom to meet Molly and marry her secretly. However, his violent reaction almost certain that his reaction to hearing about Godfrey's marriage would to be explained. This explains Godfrey's behaviour by partly attributing it to bad parenting. Godfrey himself makes a partial confession to his father: 'he had always had a sense that his father's kindness, and had a vague longing for some discipline that would have checked his better will' (p. 71). Better parenting may well have prevented Godfrey's marriage. It would more certainly have made it possible for Godfrey to confess.

The theme of parenting is brought into focus most strongly by the depiction of Eppie and her different approach to parental responsibility. Silas, who has no biological claim to Eppie, is the one to act as a parent. As soon as he realises that Eppie is not gold but a child, he is ready to act. 'he had carried about in his arms for a year before she died' (p. 111). Here the sight of Eppie reveals a caring side to Silas' nature. When Eppie wakes up in his arms, he puts her on his knee and she 'clung round his neck' (p. 111) instantly creating a bond between them. He becomes a parent by feeding her and removing her wet boots. His reaction to being asked to hand over the child at the Ball is to claim her "'No – no – no – go,' ... 'It's come to me – I've a right to keep it.'" (p. 115). Eppie also instantly trusts Silas. When he takes her to the New Year's Ball, she was 'always clinging to Marner, who had appeared to her with confidence' (p. 116). In this way, Silas, who has no 'natural' claim to Eppie, instinctively becomes her parent.

Eppie's biological father, Godfrey, by contrast, expresses his fatherly instincts in only a few ways. It is evident that there is no close relationship between Eppie and Godfrey, but there is a bond. This is apparent when Godfrey recognises Eppie: 'It was his own child ... The impression was not for a moment by doubt, though he had not seen the child for months. He had chosen not to acknowledge a relationship with his child, but he instinctively knows that she is his. Godfrey feels 'as if some fibre were drawn tight within him' (p. 116). However, Godfrey suppresses these natural, instinctive feelings in order to try and maintain the secrecy of his past. Consumed by fear that his estranged wife may not be dead and may reveal his secret, if she is indeed dead, there are no further obstacles in the way of his relationship with Eppie. His feelings does not seem to be reciprocated by Eppie: 'The wide-open blue eyes looked at him with no uneasiness or sign of recognition: the child could make no visible [or] audible claim. He felt a strange mixture of feelings, a conflict of regret and joy, that the pulse of the child was the half-jealous yearning in his own' (p. 118). Eppie does not apparently recognise Godfrey. This turns to Silas and pulls at his cheek with 'loving disfiguration' (p. 118). Godfrey

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favour of the joy that he sees stretching before him. He asks Silas if he will take to relinquishing any attempt to care for her. After this he offers Silas money and this his conscience and fulfilling 'a father's duty' (p. 133), as he justifies it to himself later.

In the last part of the novel, Eliot examines the nature of parenthood, posing the question 'What is a father?' First of all she portrays the very close relationship between Silas and Eppie through their conversations, the ways in which Eppie is now trying to care for Silas and Eliot's reflections on their relationship. Eppie has been raised in an atmosphere of 'perfect love' (p. 146) and that she did not have a father because 'Had she not got a father very close to her, who loved her better than any other person in the village seemed to love their daughters?' (p. 146). In the next chapter we discover that Godfrey had planned to marry Nancy according to plan and that he feels unhappy that he and Nancy have had no children. Godfrey's wish to adopt Eppie through Nancy's reflections shows the irony behind his actions. It was unnatural because of her ignorance of Eppie's true parentage. It is also clear that Godfrey's parental care: to Godfrey the biological link between him and Eppie is what matters, while for Silas that Silas would feel if Eppie were to be taken away from him. Moreover, Godfrey tries to communicate to Eppie, but primarily to add comfort to his own home for his being restored to her 'rightful place' in society. Again he is defining fatherhood in terms of social standing rather than by fatherly love. This different view is shown when Godfrey asks Eppie to see Silas and she will 'feel just the same towards you' (p. 170) and Silas replies with a willingness to share their life together, ending with "'You'd cut us i' two.'" (p. 170). In the contrast between Godfrey the father and the man who has actually been her father Eliot also makes the contrast between Godfrey's motives and Silas' selfless wish not to act 'as an obstacle to Eppie's good' (p. 171) through his actions which decide who gets to be Eppie's father. By not owning Eppie and not acknowledging her, Godfrey has forfeited his natural right. Eppie sums it up by saying, "'I can't feel as if I were your daughter'" (p. 173) thus putting a final end to the arguments over her father's identity. In the end, the questions about the nature of fatherhood – it is not about a biological link but about love.



Practice Question

Which theme do you think is presented most strongly in this novel? Justify your answer with evidence from the text.



Exam Tip

You can use the information above or identify a theme that has not been discussed. A theme must reoccur throughout the book and relate to different characters. Try to find evidence through the direct speech of characters and commentary in the omniscient narrator.



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Ideas and Messages

Ideas and Messages:

these are broader concepts which underpin themes. They often relate to the content of the novel. Please read these sections side by side.

Class and Social Position

Despite the apparent simplicity of Silas Marner's story, there is a complex presentation of class and social position which underpins every aspect of the novel. Eliot has chosen to set the novel in the recent past and makes clear that this means that in Raveloe social position was fixed. Consider this passage: 'Raveloe lay low among the bushy trees and the rutted lanes, aloof from the currents of industrial energy and Puritan earnestness: the rich and the poor lived freely, accepting gout and mysterious in respectable families, and the poor thought that the rich were entitled to a jolly life; besides, their feasting produced a multiplication of orts [leftovers] which were Betty Jay's comfort with the eating of Squire Cass's hams, but her longing was arrested when they were eaten, and when the seasons brought around great merry-makings, this was as a fine thing for the poor.' (p. 23). Here Eliot observes that the rich and the poor both unquestioningly accepted their respective positions. She does not directly state that they should not be content with leftovers, merely observes that this is the way things were. She does not question or accept this. This is very much Eliot's style of writing: it is not didactic or provoking.²² Raveloe is a pre-industrialised society where little has changed for generations and order is apparently unquestioned.

However, even very early in the novel Eliot suggests that this is not always the case. In Lantern Yard she introduces a town environment, immediately prior to industrialisation, where people emerge that have different ideas about precedence. In Silas' religious sect, in one sense, 'the poorest layman has the chance of distinguishing himself by gifts of speech, as well as the weight of a silent voter in the government of his community' (p. 9). So in this community, it is important and Silas himself is 'highly thought of' (p. 9). However, this community is small and when it turns against Silas, he has no one to turn to. It is ironic that Silas lives in a town with a larger population than Raveloe, but that his social interactions are limited to a few people on the streets. In this way, Eliot illustrates that even societies which may appear more progressive have different lines to that of a traditional division between rich and poor can be equal.

The majority of the novel is set in Raveloe with its clear social divisions. But if you look at the novel from a different angle, you may struggle to come up with an answer. In fact, Eliot treats the issue in a different way: she portrays their strengths and their failings. Who is better, Dolly or Nancy? Who is Dunstan? There are rich and poor characters who are corrupt, honest, selfish and kind. What is less clear to the reader of today is that this in itself was quite revolutionary. In fact, the novel was new. Most authors of the period would either sympathise with the poor, or make the poor the villains. Eliot was one of the first authors to try to present ordinary working people as this. 'We know that these poor are like you and I, and all people' (George Eliot: The Critical Heritage, p. 10). It was unusual at a time when, as the influential literary critic in the Saturday Review commented, 'the poor were seen by novelists as subjects for experimenting on, for reclaiming, improving, and relieving'.²³ The characters of Dolly, Ben and Aaron Winthrop, Mr Macey, Mr Deane, and Jem Rodney, the poor characters, are not over-exaggerated, but presented as ordinary, like

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²² See *The Writer's Use of Language* for more on Eliot's style of writing p. 52

²³ Both quoted in the introduction to *Silas Marner* p. ix

The difference between the way in which the rich and the poor are presented is that the poor are presented collectively, whereas the rich are more individualised. Eliot often speaks of the villagers as if they were one coherent group, for example: 'At the end of fifteen years the Raveloe people were the same things about Silas Marner as at the beginning' (p. 9); 'Raveloe was not a place where things were thought but it was thought' (p. 24). There are disagreements between the villagers, as she shows, but they largely appear to make collective decisions as to who is included or excluded. By contrast, the rich do not speak with a coherent voice. In fact, if you examine the rich you will see that they are a rather disparate group. The old Squire is 'The greatest of the village in the virtue of him being the only landowner in the parish. He had 'been used to parish business on the presupposition that his family, his tankards, and everything that was his, were the same as the village never associated with any gentry higher than himself, his opinion was not disturbed by the opinion of any other. In other words, the Squire's assumptions of his social importance were entirely dependent on the company in which he moved. The other families that he associated with range from the Osgoods, who are rich farmers, to the Milcotes, who are the daughters of a wealthy family. 'nobility' in Raveloe – no lords and no nobles, but simply an assortment of those wealthy families who attend the hunt. On the whole, this does not affect the superiority which the Squire has over the people. If anything, it makes it more important that the separation between the rich and the poor be maintained.



Issues of social class really come to a head when considering Godfrey's marriage to Molly. Molly's position as a barmaid would have made her an unsuitable wife for Godfrey and laudanum. It is likely that the Squire would have been angry at the match and Godfrey. Godfrey's only hope was that the Squire's pride would make him more lenient. From a Victorian social class point of view, Eppie's position is problematic. She has a 'noble' mother. In a classic fairytale scenario which was often depicted in fiction of this period, a girl with noble origins, but have fallen on hard times (consider *Oliver Twist*). This would be to 'rescue' Eppie and restore her to her rightful social position, probably after the death of her mother. Eliot's choice of storyline is far more radical than this and caused some consternation.

First of all Molly is simply a barmaid and therefore would have been regarded as a lowly position in the novel. Godfrey and Nancy, however, are prepared to overlook this and want to marry her. This, in itself, is quite a radical step, however Eliot has prepared us for this by describing Molly as a common village maiden, but had a touch of refinement and fervour that came from her mother. 'of tenderly-nurtured unvitiated feeling' (p. 146). She explains this as attributable to her mother, but it could also be seen as proof of her genteel origin. Therefore Eppie's acceptance of Godfrey's proposal arguably comes as a shock, not just to Godfrey but to the reader. It is as if Godfrey is offering her a father, but of the social position he is offering: "'I wasn't brought up to be a lady, like working-folks, and their victuals, and their ways. And," she ended passionately, "I've promised to a working-man, as 'll live with father, and help me to take care of him." Godfrey's confession until Eppie is an adult, Eliot allows her to speak for herself. Her rejection of upper class values and embracing of the life of a working people. A completely contented whereas Godfrey and Nancy have to reconcile themselves to their disappointment and appreciate what they have.

As a final note, however, there is a sense in which Eliot has confirmed the status of Eppie's decision. After all, she has a working-class mother and she has been raised in a working-class environment. It is not therefore right that she should stay there? This is why it is so complicated to assess what Eliot's true views on social class are as expressed in this novel.²⁴ What can be said without doubt is that *Silas Marner* provokes questions about class and social position, which in itself unsettles assumptions that they are fixed.

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²⁴ For more information on Eliot's views please see *Context* p. 56

Religious Ideology

Throughout the novel there is an exploration of religious ideologies and differing ways in which people seek guidance and justify their decisions. There is no simple 'right' way of doing this propounded in the text, rather Eliot illustrates the variety of religious approaches and moral justifications that her characters adopt in the course of the novel.

The story begins with Silas Marner's experience of belonging to 'a narrow religious sect' (p. 9). Eliot does not name this sect, but because of her later comments of the discussion between William Dane and Silas referring to 'Assurance of salvation' (p. 10) which was a

Calvinistic belief, it is reasonable to assume that it is a Calvinistic sect. An inherent part of Calvin's teaching was that some people were selected from birth with the divine gift of 'salvation'.²⁵ It is of course ironic that William Dane, who is later proved to be a thief and betrayer, believes in the assurance of salvation. Eliot does not comment on this, but she exposes the shortcomings of beliefs centred on drawing lots rather than making a judgment. When the lots seem to show Silas is a thief, he declares 'there is no just God' (p. 14) rather than reflecting that the process of drawing of lots could be the reason for the failure.

Silas is not able to judge the validity of religious practice or separate it from religion. He has been 'an effort of independent thought such as he had never known' (p. 14) and unlike other members of the sect who believe unquestioningly in the judgment of the lot.

The rest of the novel examines the religious practices of Raveloe and how the different characters relate to them. First of all we have Silas' judgment that, unlike Lantern Yard where religious worship was central, here the men gazed at the church while 'lounging at their own doors at service-time'. In Raveloe, where the church seems to fulfil more of a social role, it is impressively large and at the centre of the village. The church next door however, where most of the villagers congregate. On the other hand, when Silas is in Raveloe, his neighbours try to help him, their first act is to try to get him to come to church. They tell him he has a 'Sunday suit?' (p. 79) and then telling him to buy one, 'come to church, and see the minister, and Mr Macey is not attempting to console Silas with any religious doctrine, but more to make him part of the community. Similarly, Dolly Winthrop asks him if he will go to church and recommends that he at least should go to church at Christmas because 'if you go to church, and see the bakehus, and go to church, and see the holly and the yew, and hear the anthem, and you'd be a deal the better, and you'd know what end you stood on, and you could better nor we do, seein' you'd ha' done what it lies on all to do' (p. 83). Here religious practices and customs are mixed with customs, like not cooking on holy days. This is a very good example of how religion is mixed with customs. She is not educated and cannot read the Bible, but she knows the customs and they are associated in her mind with goodness and protection from evil. It will be these practices, she believes, with no real understanding of why. In the same way, when she discusses christening to Silas, which she sees as a way of preventing evil in the future, she can prevent illness. Silas is unable to make any connection between christening and the prevention of illness, but that the practice of the church far outweighs the religious understanding in the mind of the villagers.

Later on, when she tries to understand Silas' past experience Dolly can't question it because it is in the Bible. Instead she tries to sum up her own view concluding: 'there's things we can niver make out the rights on. And all as we've got to do is to do the right thing as fur as we know, and to trusten. For if us as knows so little can see the right thing, we may be sure as there's good and a rights bigger nor what we can know – I feel it' (p. 145). To trust in the goodness of people and to act in the way that she believes in is Dolly's philosophy and it becomes the basis of Silas' too. Attending church becomes

Discuss...

How often does Silas Marner go to church? Is it important to him? Is God or taking part in worship? Is it important to the people of Lantern Yard? What about Mr Macey?

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²⁵ For more on Calvin's beliefs see *Context* p. 56

when he adopts Eppie because although 'He was quite unable, by means of any religion, to identify the Raveloe religion with his old faith ... Dolly had said it was for the good not to undergo any religious conversion, but by attending church regularly he conformed; thus is accepted back into Raveloe society. It is this reintegration into the community that allows for moral and spiritual growth; which had been stunted by the isolation.

The final dimension to Eliot's exploration of religious ideology is the basis by which Godfrey makes his decisions. In a sense, this is easy for Silas because he is naturally honest and loving. Eppie too has been brought up by these principles and puts her love for Silas, and not any other considerations. However Godfrey and Nancy have more moral dilemmas as there is no religious understanding which governs his actions. The apparent luck Godfrey takes as 'proof that his conduct had been less foolish and less unworthy than it might have been' (p. 119). He makes his decisions based on selfishness but attempts to justify them. It does come to regret his biggest moral question – turning his back on Eppie. At this point that: "While I have been putting my own interests off, the trees have been growing." Neither any religious teaching nor any moral principles have guided Godfrey in his actions. The example of his own selfishness that motivates him to try to be more content.

Nancy, by contrast, does not make decisions based on selfishness, but has drawn from a strict code. 'On all the duties and proprieties of life, from filial behaviour to the arrangements of a household, Nancy Lammeter, by the time she was three-and-twenty, had her unalterable little code. One of her habits in accordance with that code.' (p. 156). This code does not direct her but more to ideas of Providence, the notion that life is pre-determined and to act accordingly. She therefore decides against adoption on the basis that she seemed fated not to have a child. In an instance she had heard of an adopted child had been disastrous. When Godfrey decides to adopt, the reader is uncertain of how Nancy will react: what part of her code has prepared her? What happens, the fact that Eppie is Godfrey's natural child and she has missed out on a child are the utmost thoughts in Nancy's mind. Likewise, although she sympathises with Eppie, she should accept her father because 'there's a duty that you owe to your lawful father.' Her code accepts the superiority of Godfrey's natural claim to Eppie above Silas'.

What can we make of these different religious or moral ideologies: Calvinism, materialism, trusting in goodness, belief in luck, fate and Providence and making your own struggles? Eliot does not pass judgment on any of these ideologies but leaves it to the reader to decide.



Practice exam question

Consider this contemporary quotation:

'She does not betray any religious bias ... Every side has its say, every prejudice and side and vagary even has the philosophical reason given, an explanation applied to it. She analyses the religious motives without affect or nauseous cant – whether of the orthodox or the infidel form.'

Nathan Sheppard, *George Eliot's Essays*, 'George Eliot's Analysis of Religion'

Do you agree? Find evidence from the text to support your answer.



Exam tip

Look at each of the different sections of the text which discuss religion and examine the tone of the omniscient narration, the comments of the characters and what they look at are Ch 1 Lantern Yard; Ch 10 Mr Macey and Dolly's conversations with Silas for christening; Ch. 16 and 21 – understanding Lantern Yard and Ch. 17 and 18 – understanding Eppie's adoption.

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The Writer's Use of Language

Literary Style

Silas Marner can be described as a combination of two literary styles: **realism** and **naturalism**, a powerful combination, which distinguishes it from the novels of her contemporaries.

Realism

This is the attempt to create a realistic description of life and human interaction. Eliot creates authentic characters. She uses dialect in direct speech, particularly in that of the poor. Her depiction of 'the poor' was remarked on at the time for its authenticity.²⁶ So the working-class characters speak simply and use incorrect tenses or miss the beginning of sentences in real life. This does not prevent them being witty. In the speech of Mr Macey, there's allus two 'pinions; there's the 'nigh'ly gairmas of himsen, and there's the him. There'd be two 'pinions about a rickled bell, if a bell could hear itself.'" (p. 4). The pathos, consider this scene in *Silas* when Godfrey suggests that he takes the child – and the money – for nothing. My money's gone, I don't know where – and this is all I know nothing about. I'm partly mazed.'" (p. 118). Silas' simple words come from the heart, more effective than an author attempting to make him speak like an educated gentleman.

Similarly, Eliot does not elevate the upper-class characters, but presents their speech as it is. This is her account of Nancy as observed by the Miss Gunns: 'The Miss Gunns smile with pity it was that these rich people, who could afford to buy such good clothes ... should be ignorant and vulgar. She actually said "mate" for "meat", "appen" for "perhaps".' (p. 93). Here is an example of how Nancy spoke, but more importantly, it shows the social snobbery surrounding language use at this time. The Miss Gunns, who are merchant and wear too tight skirts and low cut bodices are now judging that the poor woman on her countrified speech! Eliot tries as far as possible to give her characters a speech that is written the language is simple, expressive and appropriate to that character.

Another aspect of the realism of the novel is that all the events that occur can be explained by human interactions. There are no exaggerated saints or villains. Dolly is a good woman, but her understanding of Christian beliefs is very limited. Dunstan and William Dane are not demonised. In fact, in both cases Eliot suggests that they are motivated by good intentions. Dunstan in particular she gives the reader an insight into how he progresses from a thief to a good man. His death, although undoubtedly deserved, is also given a pragmatic explanation: his lantern and his hands are too full to allow him to use the whip as a guide. She also shows that Godfrey makes his decisions with understanding and sympathy. Eppie's story is told with ordinary human error and guilt, which is firmly based in reality.

Allegory

However, behind the realism there are elements of an allegorical story. When writing *Silas Marner*, Eliot described her inspiration for writing *Silas Marner*: 'It came to me in a sort of legendary tale suggested by my recollections of having once, in early childhood, seen a bag on his back, but as my mind dwelt upon the subject, I became inclined to a more serious treatment' (quoted on p. 11 of Q D Leavis' introduction to *Silas Marner*). The image of a weaver is reminiscent of John Bunyan's *A Pilgrim's Progress*, where Christian carries the burden of sin. *Pilgrim's Progress* is a Christian allegory, with each stage in Christian's journey leading towards salvation, ending in the Celestial City (Heaven). The story of *Silas Marner* is an allegory throughout. The Stone-pits are reminiscent of the Slough of Despond, especially in the case of Dunstan. After Eppie's adoption, it is drained and becomes a beautiful flower garden. The Palace Beautiful where Christian rests before continuing on his journey. However, the end point of Silas' journey, not the Celestial City.

²⁶ See previous quotation from the 'Saturday Review' in *Ideas and Messages* p. 48

There are also overtones of legend and fairytale running through the book. Silas Eppie leads Silas by the hand like the ‘angels who came and took men by the hand to the city of destruction’ (p. 131); and Eppie is the lost princess, brought up in humble surroundings. Eliot’s realism previously discussed works against these parallels. The gold has not really been found. Silas’ catalepsy which prevents him seeing her arriving and his short-sightedness, which fails to distinguish between the gold colour and her curls, that leads to this impression. Eppie does lead Silas towards the light and away from the inward monotony of his weaving and hoarding. However, she does this as an ordinary child who is playful and naughty, not as an angel. Finally the lost princess tale which Eppie’s birth may seem to resemble, is overturned when the ‘princess’ firmly rejects her social status in favour of remaining in the humble abode. In this way, Eliot arguably combines the best aspects of an allegorical and realistic story: she creates a plot and characters which are authentically true, while hinting at allegorical and legendary parallels that create extra depth to our experience of the novel.

Symbolism and Motifs

The main way that Eliot uses symbolism is to make a link between the physical appearance of a character and their personality. This is most noticeable with Silas Marner where, as previously discussed in *Characterisation*, his physical condition – old, worn, bent, short-sighted and suffering from catalepsy reflects his personal development – naïve, blind to the motivations of those around him and old before his time because of the narrow monotony of his life. Silas has become almost machine-like by weaving: ‘Strangely Marner’s face and figure shrank and bent themselves into a constant mechanical relation to the objects of his life, so that his impression as a handle or a crooked tube which has no means of standing apart from his sight improves, so physically and metaphorically he is seeing more of life. The catalepsy, which seems to indicate that he is experiencing life fully, with no more

Other characters too have symbolic aspects of their characterisation. Eppie’s hair ‘like a March breeze’ (p. 138) symbolises her vitality and freedom from convention. Nancy ‘were stuck in after a pattern from which she was careful to allow no aberration’ (p. 138) by which she applies standards to her own life. Aaron’s profession as a gardener is introducing new life into Silas’ and Eppie’s lives.

On the whole, Eliot uses symbolism sparingly. The main reoccurring motif is gold – ends as Eppie’s curls. In most cases where there may be a symbolic significance, there is an explanation, which links back to the realism of the novel.

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Form

Like many Victorian novels, *Silas Marner* is written in the third person, using omniscient narration. This enables Eliot to present an overview of events and to move beyond the perspective of her characters. It also allows her to move the focus both from one place to another and from one character's thoughts to another, with ease. It could be argued that this technique creates more of a distance between the reader and the characters than, for example, a first person narrative would do. However, Eliot overcomes this by showing the thoughts of her characters and also by asking rhetorical questions. The distance that the narration can provide also enables her to move the reader's perspective beyond that of the characters in the story.

A good example of this is chapter 8 where Eliot moves the perspective of the story from the theft of the gold, to Godfrey's struggle with his conscience. The chapter begins with his lack of concern for his brother, and the reader knows has stolen the money. The villagers' suspicion of the theft. There is an irony behind Godfrey's visit to the brother is revealed to be for the theft. The discovery of the tinder box, which has not instantly becomes a focus for suspicion. Eliot moves the perspective from a nameless man to doubt Silas' account of the theft to an argument between Mr Macey and Mr Tooker who investigated at all. The focus then moves to the official investigation where Mr Snell and the pedlar who mentioned using a tinder box are unsurprisingly strong: 'And as memory is sometimes surprisingly fertile, Mr Snell gradually recovered the facts produced on him by the pedlar's countenance and conversation.' (p. 61). Here Eliot shows how memory is influenced by suggestion. She then continues the ironic tone, showing the pedlar wearing earrings takes hold of the imagination of the villagers to the extent that he is firmly identified as the culprit. By using a few examples, such as the glazier's wife, she generalises statements such as 'Some disappointment was felt' (p. 62) and 'But it was not the pedlar who presented the generalised viewpoint of the villagers. The final irony is the villagers' attempts to demystify some of the allegations surrounding the mysterious pedlar had seen something odd about the pedlar!' (p. 63) effectively showing how quickly rumours transmute into accepted facts in this community.

At this point in the chapter there is an abrupt change. Eliot uses Godfrey's entrance into Rainbow to turn the perspective of the narrative to his thoughts. 'But by this time before his growing anxiety about Dunstan and Wildfire' (p. 63). She appeals to the reader's thoughts: 'Instead of trying to still his fears he encouraged them, with that superstitious notion to us all, that if we expect evil very strongly it is less likely to come' (p. 63). Here Eliot moves the reader into Godfrey's thought processes. At other points in the text she uses rhetorical questions. It is an effective way of gaining sympathy for Godfrey as he receives the news of his brother's death. She then moves into direct speech with the conversation between Godfrey and Bryce. Eliot shows that often and when she does the characters speak with a point in an authentic tone. This advances the story but Godfrey's reveals the truth about his feelings for his brother and his guilt. He's made to hurt other people. "Yes I wanted to part with the horse, but I was making him wince under the weight of the sale to be a matter of no consequence."

From direct speech the narration moves back to Godfrey's thoughts. Godfrey ends the chapter and tries to justify to himself the wrong he has done by taking money from the town. In letting Dunstan have the money, he had already been guilty of a breach of trust by spending the money for his own behoof; and yet there was a distinction between the two. He felt that one was so much more blackening than the other as to be intolerable to comment on Godfrey's thought processes, but allows the reader to draw their own conclusions. He is presented as direct speech when he tries again to distinguish between taking the money and using it: "I don't pretend to be a good fellow" ... "but I'm not a scoundrel -" (p. 65). This allows the reader to become more involved in Godfrey's story and sympathise with his thought processes.

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In the last part of the chapter Eliot moves away from Godfrey's thoughts to give a 'volcanic' (p. 66) temper. This allows the reader to gain a greater understanding of Godfrey without interrupting the story with dialogue. Finally, she charts how he changes. 'Instead of arguments for confession, he could now feel the presence of nothing but this way, the reader actually experiences Godfrey's indecisiveness, arguably becoming a more interesting story than if his thoughts had not been explored in depth. At the same time, the reader can judge Godfrey, especially as the focus will move back to Silas and his loss.

Structure

The structure of *Silas Marner* is broadly linear: events are described in chronological order, with the exception of the account of Silas' past experiences in Lantern Yard. There is also a significant gap in the story of 16 years, which separates the two parts of the novel. The novel is divided into chapters.

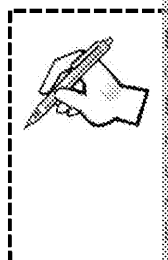
She then has the chance to go

The story begins in Raveloe, 15 years after Silas' arrival. This allows Eliot to set the isolated position of the village. She then moves back to his first arrival in Raveloe. To explain why Silas chooses to isolate himself, she has to go back in time to describe his experiences. Eliot does this very simply by using the omniscient narration: 'But while opinion concerning him was stationary, and his daily habits had presented scarcely any visible change, Marner underwent a metamorphosis, as that of every fervid nature must be when it has fled, or been reborn, before he came to Raveloe' (p. 9). Here Eliot intrigues the reader by suggesting that Silas is just due to village suspicions or his own choice, but had been forced upon him by Godfrey. The story flows very easily from the present to the past and back again, using omniscient narration.

The main part of the novel is split between Silas' story and Godfrey's, with both stories converging in chapter 12, with the arrival of Eppie. Dunstan's theft has formed an earlier link, but it is the two characters' fates become inextricably linked. Eppie is Godfrey's secret daughter, born of regret, and becomes Silas' devoted adopted daughter. It takes a 16-year gap to reach the present.

The 16-year gap is presented simply: 'It was a bright autumn Sunday, sixteen years after he had found his new treasure on the hearth.' (p. 137). The reason for a 16-year gap is clearly to show that Eppie is now 18, marriageable age for the Victorian period. Moreover she is evident in her decision about whether to stay with Silas or allow Godfrey to adopt her. Finally, it shows the changes that the years have brought about. Silas has transformed into a happy member of the community. Godfrey and Nancy have suffered the loss of a child and had to come to terms with this. In this way, Eliot shows how good actions have been rewarded and that Godfrey's actions, which seemed to be without consequence, have in fact led to unhappiness. At the end of the novel, Silas' happiness – he is esteemed by the villagers and still incomparable from Eppie – is a reward for his forward-looking actions. Godfrey, by contrast, is absent from the village, showing that despite his previous actions are still felt deeply.

There is a clear sense at the end of the novel that there is no going back. Silas cannot go back to Lantern Yard when he tries to reconcile himself with the past and Godfrey is unable to atone for the missing 16 years with Eppie. In this way the chronological structure of the story reflects the experiences of the characters, who must look to the future and 'trustin' (p. 180).



Exam Tip

Look at the main characters in the text and assess how their thoughts and feelings are revealed. The omniscient narration allows access to the characters' thoughts and feelings, as well as direct appeals to the reader.

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Context

The Writer's Life

George Eliot was in fact the pseudonym of Mary Ann (or Marian) Evans, the daughter of an estate manager from Nuneaton in Warwickshire. She adopted a male pen name, like her contemporaries the Brontë sisters, in the hope of being taken more seriously as a novelist. Moreover, there is much evidence to suggest that she wanted to separate her professional life and her private life, which was seen by many of her contemporaries as scandalous. While writing her novel, Marian was living with a married man, George Henry Lewes. He was a Roman Catholic who had been married before and was prevented by his religion from seeking a divorce. In practice, Marian was married to George in all but name. However, in the Victorian era, their relationship was seen by many as flaunting the sanctity of marriage and excluded her from much of conventional society. On the other hand as the novelist George Eliot, she was praised by contemporary critics from George Eliot and held up as one of the greatest novelists of her time.

As the daughter of the estate manager of Arbury Hall Estate, Marian was neither of the aristocratic class society, but part of the growing middle classes. Very unusually for the time, she attended schools from the age of five. Here she learnt to read and speak French and German. Her intellectual society formed around her friends Cara and Charles Bray. Here she met liberal thinking views and began to question her previous evangelical Christian beliefs. Her first work was a translation of David Strauss' *Das Leben Jesu* which she published as *The Life of Jesus*. In this work, Jesus is not portrayed as the son of God, but as an inspirational preacher, an ordinary man. She later translated Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* which also questioned the elements of Christian belief. Feuerbach believed that the best aspects of Christianity were these supernatural elements. Marian questioned and rejected the faith that she had adopted. She adopted many of August Comte's theories of positivism. Comte is now known as a philosopher who believed, in simple terms, that there was no god, but that people should instead live for others, which meant that they should try to be good and live for others.

Marian's loss of faith upset her family, particularly her father who was a committed Anglican. He decided to continue attending church when caring for her father. She concluded that attending church was itself harmful and in fact often encouraged the moral behaviour that she approved of. This is reflected in *Silas Marner*, where attending church reintegrates Silas with the community, but without the religious fervour. As Q D Leavis wrote in her original introduction to *Silas Marner*: "a similar process [to Marian] ending by accepting not dogmatic religion but a place in the world. The religious system has passed the pragmatic test – it visibly works as right and wise – and 'personal happiness' (p. 233). In this way, Marian's religious views are arguably explained by her experience.

In the same way, Marian's experience of growing up in a Midlands village influenced *Silas Marner*. Although she was a fan of William Wordsworth and the Romantic poets who sought to present the pastoral ideal of the English countryside, Marian also saw through the idealism they represented. Consider this quotation from the *Westminster Review*: "Observe a company of haymakers" she writes, "The fresh hay, the golden light, the wagon, the meadow, the activity – the scene is 'smiling' and the labourers must be bright and cheerful. Approach them and you find that haymaking is a time for joking, especially if there are women among the labourers. It bursts out every now and then, and expresses the triumphant taunt, is as far as possible from idyllic merriment ..." (quoted in the Introduction to *Silas Marner* p. ix to x). Marian's connection to a country village and associating with the working classes as well as the upper classes is a key element of the realism of her work.

Discuss
What
Marian
Evans
thought
of her
private
English
life

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Influence of Contemporary Events

Industrialisation

The Victorian period saw huge advances in industrialisation, which brought about the time. Briefly, the rise of mass manufacture and factories made the artisan recede of workers from the countryside to the new towns and cities. Changes in the rural of country people into towns.

This social change was seen by many writers and artists of the time as destructive to the traditional English village and despised the overcrowded, dirty and polluted towns. Contemporaries, from Wordsworth to Thomas Hardy, romanticised country life, as a pastoral idyll. It is significant that George Eliot sets *Silas Marner* in a pre-industrial village, which has not been replaced by factory manufacture when the book was written. However, despite this, it is not an idealised picture of village life. As previously discussed, her work was seen as realistic. Lantern Yard is not idealised either, rather it seeks to present the shortcomings of the time.

The Rise of the Middle Class

One of the significant social changes brought about by industrialisation, was the rise of the 'middle class'. Moreover, this started to happen very quickly, as people moved from obscurity to wealth and position in a very short space of time. The aristocratic families (like Squire Cass') were dismayed and unsettled by the new found wealth of the middle class to be inferior. In addition, there were more opportunities for working people to become better educated. This led to a rise in radical thinking, particularly in the demand for social reform. In this way, Eliot's exploration of Eppie's place in society and her defence of the working class is seen as very pertinent in a world where social relations seemed to be constantly changing.

Religious Debate

Another very pertinent issue at the time was the nature and practice of Christianity. During the Victorian period, the popularity of different Christian denominations and religious sects grew. In particular, the Baptist and Methodist churches became more popular. There was also a growth in Calvinistic sects, like the one which Silas Marner is part of. In addition to this there were also a growing number of people who argued that Christian belief itself was false, such as Strauss and Feuerbach who influenced Eliot and Karl Marx, whose more radical views were also gaining popularity at this time. Marx argued that religion was not just false, but harmful as it helped to suppress working people. As we have seen, Eliot's novels explore religious philosophy and morality. By creating the diverse Christian characters in her novels, Eliot is reflecting the multiplicity of Christian splinter groups which existed at the time. The reconciliation Silas needs to make between his past and present religious experience is a central theme of the theological debate of this time.

The Rise of Feminism

Another important aspect of Victorian life was the growing debate over the role of women. The middle class women were expected to marry well and manage their households. However, with the growing demand for education for women, more and more women were entering the workforce. In some of Eliot's future work, *Silas Marner* does not really address the role of women, but they are content to remain housekeepers. The unmarried Priscilla Lammer, who manages the farm for her ailing father. However, she would not break with the conventions of the time. Eliot questions the role of women in *Middlemarch* (1871–1872).

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²⁷ See 'Realism' p. 52

Contemporary Novelists

The Victorian age saw a huge growth in the number of novelists and has produced some of the greatest writers of our time. Charles Dickens was a contemporary of George Eliot and one of the first people to guess that she was a woman. Notable female novelists of the time include the Brontë sisters and Elizabeth Gaskell. Like Eliot these authors explore the changes in society brought about by industrialisation, the rise of the middle classes and the growth of feminism. All of these novelists approach these themes in different ways. For example, Elizabeth Gaskell shares Eliot's realistic portrayal of the working classes, but her approach to religion is more conventional. The influence of the Romantic poets is evident in *Silas Marner*. Wordsworth's dedication to the text: 'A child, more than all other gifts, that earth can offer to it, it, and forward-looking thoughts.' However, as we have already discussed, she also rejected much of his poetry. In this way Eliot was influenced and inspired by the literary tradition. Moreover, as sub-editor of the *Edinburgh Review* she also contributed to critical



Exam Tip

Use your previous research on 'The Rise of the Middle Classes' to help you. Look for quotations about the roles of the working, middle and upper classes. In what ways do these views conform to these views and how far does it depart from them? Look at the way in which Eppie's decision to remain a working-class girl.

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Key Term Glossary

Analogy	where a comparison is made between two situations to make a point
Characterisation	how the author presents the characters in the book; what they are like; how they describe their appearance, personality and how they interact with others
Didactic	intend to teach; for example, in matters of moral judgment
Eponymous character	a character who gives his name to something, in this case a story
Form	the way in which a text is organised and arranged; the structure
Ideas and Messages	These are broader concepts which underpin themes. The author's ideas are often repeated throughout the novel so it is useful to record these sections side by side
Inner monologue	when the thoughts of a character are presented as if they were spoken
Irony	when a character is made to be ignorant and willing to learn; or giving the opposite of what is expected; or highlighting the difference between appearance and reality for an emphatic effect
Motif	a recurrent theme or metaphor
Omniscient narrative	where the author has full knowledge of all events and the thoughts of all characters
Pathos	evoking pity or sadness
Plot	the key events that make up the story / the basic storyline
Protagonist	leading character
Rhetorical question	a question asked without an answer required, to make a point
Structure	the overall way in which a text has been constructed, e.g. the order of events, the use of flashbacks, gaps in the narrative
Theme	repeated subject or idea that reoccurs throughout the text and links the different strands of the story together
Trope	a recurrent theme or metaphor
Turning point	a significant point in the story where the situation changes

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Further Reading

Suggested Books

- Delphi Classics, *The Complete Works of George Eliot*, Hastings, Delphi Classics and academic works this book comprises contemporary literary criticism and available second hand and as an ebook).

Biographical Studies

- Cross, J W *George Eliot's Life as Related in Her Letters and Journals* (Edinburgh 1885)
- Haight, G S *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1968)
- Uglow, J *George Eliot* (London: Virago, 1987)

Correspondence and Essays

- Haight, G S ed., *The George Eliot Letters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965)
- A S Byrnes, ed., *George Eliot, Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings* (1990)

Other Works

- Eliot, G *Adam Bede* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1849)
- Eliot, G *The Mill on the Floss* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1872)
- Eliot, G *Romola* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1863)
- Eliot, G *Felix Holt The Radical* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1865)
- Eliot, G *Middlemarch* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1871)
- Eliot, G *Daniel Deronda* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1876)

Literary Criticism

- Carroll, D ed., *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968)
- Draper, R P ed., *George Eliot: 'The Mill on the Floss' and 'Silas Marner' A Case Study* (London: Duckworth, 1968)
- Knoepfelmacher, U C *George Eliot's Early Novels: The Limits of Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968)
- Carroll, D ed., *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971)

Suggested Websites

- www.gutenberg.org (all Eliot's writings and contemporary criticism) including 'The Essays of George Eliot', Edited by Nathan Sheppard, release date: May 2008.
- www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00q4310 (Radio 4 discussion of *Silas Marner*)
- www.goodreads.com/book/show/54539.Silas_Marner
- www.victorianweb.org/authors/eliot/index.html

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Suggested Answers

Chapter 1 Discussion Key Points

- Refers to villagers as 'peasants' – suggests inferiority/mock
- Labels them as 'not overwise or clever' (p. 5) – patronising
- Does take pains to explain why strangers were treated with suspicion
- Goes into detail to explain why Silas is particularly feared – catalepsy / knowledge of
- Overall balance mocking / understanding up to personal interpretation

Chapter 1 Active Task

By rewriting either of the accounts in the first person pupils should have found that it was from different perspectives. It should also have allowed them to present the characters more sympathetically.

Chapter 2 Practice Question

Look for analysis of the language of form and how this contributes to effective communication. Pupils should pick out rhetorical questions and analyse how they are used. They should also describe the characters and what they are. The essay should comment on the absence of metaphor and infrequent use of simile. The essay should be more in keeping with Silas Marner's experience.

Chapter 3 Active Task

Look for research which describes the changes in rich and poor relations through the Victorian period. Pupils should identify the rise of industrialisation as precipitating the middle classes and the changes in society. They may also look at the popular pastoral idyll which was used as escapism from the harsh realities of the time. Whether or not *Silas Marner* fits this pattern.

Chapter 3 Discussion Key Points

- Direct speech allows the reader to make independent judgments about the characters
- Eliot can show the contrast between what the characters say and what they are thinking
- Allows for the element of surprise when Godfrey's secret marriage is revealed
- Shows the contrast between Godfrey, who is forced to interact with others all the time, and Silas, who is isolated and honest

Chapter 4 Practice Question

At first sight it may seem that Eliot presents the poor characters as honest and the rich as dishonest. However, the character of William Dane belies this. On the whole more poor characters are honest than the rich. The poor are ignorant, prone to superstition and unable to separate religious practice from belief. The rich appear to have no religious faith and be concerned with material comforts and getting ahead. The novel speaks for the poor characters, but allows the rich characters to speak for themselves. The novel speaks for the community but individualises the Cass family. On the other hand the poor characters are not always sympathetic.

Chapter 5 Discussion Key Points

- Dunstan deceives himself (that Silas is dead) in order to justify taking the money to himself
- Silas deceives himself (that Jem Rodney took the money) first to find a practical explanation for his loss. Secondly it gives him the hope of recovering the money
- Dunstan is motivated by greed, Silas by grief and despair.
- Consequence of Dunstan's deception – first he steals the money, committing an act of dishonesty. He then uses blackmail and bullying to achieve his ends. Secondly the money is lost when he flees the town in a hurry leaving the lamp behind. We later find out that he fell into the river
- A likely consequence if it had not led to his death would have been to increase the suspicion of the villagers prepared to commit.
- Consequence of Silas' deception could have been a false accusation of an innocent person. It could have led to Jem Rodney's imprisonment. However as the village is so small the actual loss actually leads to Silas recognising that he had deceived himself and evokes memories of his past. It is another step towards forming links with the villagers as Silas starts to identify with them

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Chapter 6 Active Task

Mr Macey is a traditionalist and would be keen to defend the Cass family because of their money. He would see many of their vices – greed, selfishness and gambling as appropriate to their social rank. Mr Macey would see Dunstan Cass as Eliot has already mentioned that he is not held in high regard. Mr Dowling would be more likely to be critical of the Cass family and question their right to behave badly. He might be sympathetic to Godfrey Cass, as again Eliot has made it clear that the villagers were aware that his behaviour was not what it should be.

Chapter 7 Discussion Key Points

There are strong arguments to support this theory as follows:

- We know from chapter 2 that Silas' life had contracted as the obsession with money.
- Losing the money forces Silas to engage with the villagers. He has to ask for help.
- The villagers in turn begin to see Silas as a victim rather than fear him.
- Eliot makes this clear first of all in her description of Silas' life before the theft: 'So, wretched' (p. 20) which shows how low the quality of his life was before the theft.
- In chapter 7 she shows how the villagers move from fear to sympathy: 'The slight suspicion of the villagers was now sympathy.'
- By the end of the chapter the villagers are taking an active part in helping Silas. He is

Chapter 7 Acti Ta

Analogy:

- p. 41 – influence of education on habit and miner
p. 43 – wine and guineas
p. 48 – the cracked bell and Tookey's voice
p. 51 – a coat pulled by two tails and Mr Macey's dilemma
p. 54 – no sense of smell and not seeing ghosts
p. 57 – growth of consciousness and plant growth

Effect: link to the reader's experience and create a stronger understanding of the situation

Other methods: use of figurative language – similes, metaphors and personification

Less appropriate to the situation being described? Restricts appeal to less poetic? Alters the examples on p. 41 and p. 57 as a way of building up imagery and creating a sympathetic

Chapter 8 Discussion Key Points

- Silas: does not understand why you would lie ('had never known an impulse towards lying'); the book he maintains total honesty in his speech and actions.
- Dunstan: lies to achieve his aims and to maintain the illusion of his superiority. Look at the secrets he keeps hidden from the Squire to blackmail Godfrey; the deception that he is a friend; he lends Godfrey money and finally his ability to deceive himself into thinking Silas is dead.
- Godfrey: wants to be honest but is not morally strong enough. He struggles with his honesty, but with compromises – telling some of the truth, but not revealing his real secret. Godfrey is not afraid that it doesn't threaten to ruin his life. He also persuades himself that telling the truth can be done without harm.
- Pupils should discuss their attitudes to honesty and what they would do in Silas, Dunstan or Godfrey's shoes.

Chapter 9 Active Task

Pupils should find evidence from the text which describes the Squire's parenting such as the house and the villagers view of the Squire's weakness (p. 27), Godfrey's view of what would be his father; the mixture of anger and indulgence in chapter 9 and his behaviour towards Godfrey. Pupils should be able to find evidence to support Eliot's opinion of the Squire for Godfrey's poor moral behaviour.

Chapter 11 Practice Questions

This could be argued the other way. However, I believe that the evidence more strongly supports Marner. He is presented as more innocent and more of a victim than Godfrey. Key evidence is Eliot's discussion of Eliot's views on the importance of honesty. Evidence such as 'he had never' (pp. 18–19) for Silas whereas Godfrey is a much weaker character whose 'natural irresolution' lead him into duplicity. In these early chapters Eliot continually praises honest behaviour and compares her treatment of Dolly and Dunstan. However, she does present Godfrey's inner dialogue and then entering his thoughts. By contrast Silas rarely talks and much of his character is revealed through the views of the villagers. These different techniques could be argued to represent a more sympathetic dilemma or to contribute to our sense of Silas as a victim, making him more sympathetic. The techniques as well as finding evidence from the text to support their argument.

Chapter 12 Discussion Key Points

- When Molly is introduced in chapter 3 she is seen through Godfrey and Dunstan's eyes as 'that nice young woman... drunken wife' (p. 26). The marriage is described as 'a blighted thing' and no mention is made of the child.
- In chapter 12 the contrast is drawn between the Ball and Molly's journey through the streets in 'dingy rags, with her faded face' (p. 107) contrasts with the previous description of her as a sympathetic young woman.
- However, Eliot is quick to explain that opium is the cause of her downfall and explains her actions as her wrongs.
- What makes Molly more sympathetic is the description of her motherly instincts – her act of clinging to the child which protects her from dying too.
- Overall in spite of Molly's addiction to opium and her vengeful feelings, the picture of her is sympathetic and insensitive to the cold but still clutching her child (p. 108) is a picture of pathos. The penultimate image of 'the lace-trimmed cradle' in particular leaves you with a sense of compassion that in spite of everything Molly is still a mother.

Chapter 13 Practice Question

Again this could be argued either way. There is an element of fate/ luck/ chance behind the events but really rests on how far the personality and actions of the character determine the outcome. Whether the events were inevitable or whether a different personality would have reacted differently. Here is a quick summary:

- Silas' betrayal by Dane: outwith Silas' control although a more worldly wise character might have seen it coming.
- Silas' isolation in Raveloe and obsession with gold: character – another type of person might have reacted in the same way?
- Godfrey's hidden marriage: fate brought him and Molly together / a stronger character might have acknowledged the mistake.
- Dunstan's theft of Silas' gold: fate brought him to the empty cottage / character determined the outcome.
- Eppie's arrival: fate plays a strong role in bringing her to that place at that time. However, her wish for vengeance and Godfrey's rejection. See chapter 14 for quotation about fate.
- Godfrey and Nancy's childlessness: Bad luck or a punishment for Godfrey rejecting Eppie?
- Godfrey's confession: the discovery of Dunstan's body – luck / Godfrey's character determined the outcome.
- Eppie's decision to stay with Silas: this is a decision that she makes freely and therefore not fate.

Pupils should go through each of these events and argue their case, using evidence from the text. They should also consider events that they could include; for example, Nancy's decision to marry Godfrey and not to leave him.

Chapter 14 Discussion Key Points

- First impression in this chapter is her laughing to herself at the new discovery of her own child.
- She then kisses Silas and wants to go to him – affection and loyalty.
- Again full of joy and the urge to explore – leading Silas outside to rediscover flowers.
- Urge to explore and intelligence leads her to cut the tether with scissors and escape.
- Coal hole incident shows a lack of fear.
- Last images of Eppie in the chapter – link with the world (p. 130) – parallel with World's End destruction (p. 131) – parallel to *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Chapter 15 Active Task

Examples of irony and effect.

Chapter 14 – presentation of 'the old and crazy' mothers (p. 120) – increase sympathy for Silas' jealousy (p. 120-121) – makes him more sympathetic.

Linking Christ's 'innocent inoculation' (p. 123) – comic effect but also questions the importance of the name Hephzibah – as above.

The coal-hole incident – comic effect / sympathy with Silas / mocking the need for punishment. Godfrey's reflections on the happy life of the poor – harshen judgment against him.

Godfrey's speculations about Dunstan – hint at future punishment.

His definition of 'a father's duty' – as above.

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Chapter 16 Discussion Key Points

- Silas' house before Eppie – best description chapter 5 – supper on a string attached over the brick floor where the gold was hidden.
- After Eppie: pets, oak table and chair, grate still there, clean cloth on table.
- His house is bare before and provides for only basic needs, Eppie has brought luxury.
- It is important that Eppie has improved the house – it reflects how she has improved loyalty towards him. Planning the garden – continued commitment to Silas and to her.
- Could also discuss how Eppie's housewifely virtues could be seen as positive at the time. Look at 'The Rise of Feminism' in *Context* for further information.

Chapter 17 Active Task

There are a number of similarities between Silas and Dolly's religious theories and Nancy's.

- Neither believe that they have a full understanding of God.
- They both have a belief that if they are good they will be rewarded.
- Their beliefs are formed through a mixture of well understood biblical references, customs and superstitions.
- Luck and chance are taken as signs of God's will.

The main difference is that Silas and Dolly don't seem to have the belief that their lives are pre-destined.

Popular Victorian religious movements:

Baptists: believe in adult baptism as a conscious choice. This concurs with Silas' experience of joining Baptist sects.

Methodist: involves preaching to the community, no clear links here.

Calvinist: again covers a wide variety of sects but part of the Calvinist belief system is the idea that souls are destined to be saved in spite of any actions they may take. There is evidence to suggest that Silas is Calvinistic and it would accord with their changing views of Silas from saint to sinner as Eppie grows. This is also the system of belief most similar to Nancy's as Eliot ironically highlights.

Chapter 18 Discussion Key Points

- Nancy is presented as morally upright. Therefore we may expect her to be repulsed by Eppie's mother and her dishonesty.
- We might expect that the shock of the revelation would cause her to turn against Godfrey and her father and sister.
- This would put Godfrey into a moral quandary: should he try to get Eppie back or try to keep her?
- We also know that Nancy is proud – see p. 89. She may look down on Eppie as a socially inferior mother.
- This would make it more difficult for her to accept Eppie as part of her family.
- We also know that Nancy wanted to have children of her own. It would be natural for her to be jealous towards Eppie.
- Pupils may discuss that what they discover about Nancy from the way that she reacts to Eppie's arrival overcomes any of the above emotions and that she is capable of great forgiveness.

Chapter 19 Discussion Key Points

- Silas' speech: puts Eppie first above all else and gives her the choice. Sees Eppie as a gift from God. Feels that Frank and his wife would 'cut us 'i two.' (p. 170), but reverts to his duty to God and to Eppie in Eppie's way.
- Eppie: immediately says 'no thanks'; then is clear in her love for her father and her sense of duty. Love for Silas and for the community are her presiding reasons for rejecting Godfrey.
- Godfrey: talks about making Eppie's fortune; having a claim to her; does not understand Silas; wants her to improve her welfare which to him means raise her social position and provide for her and give her a mother.
- It is very clear from this that Silas and Eppie value love above all else and Godfrey values money. He sees Eppie's love as his right to claim. However, the emotion in his tones and his actions suggest that he is beginning to understand the selflessness of love.

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Chapter 20 Practice Question

Look for the clear presentation of any or all of the arguments below with supporting evidence.

- *Punishment for Godfrey* – Godfrey is constantly looking to chance to rescue him and scot-free and be able to atone in the future. (Chapter 15.) Eliot makes many references to faith in fortune – chapter 3 and chapter 13. Eppie's rejection of him makes him realise his past sins, chapter 20.
- *Embracing of working-class life* – throughout, working-class life is presented as more honest than upper-class life. Contrast chapters 3 and 5 with chapter 6 and chapter 11. Eppie's defence of her father can be seen as embracing working-class life and rejecting upper-class society.
- *A reward for Silas' honesty and love* – look at the imagery in chapter 12 where Silas' honesty is contrasted with Godfrey's deceit and look at the depiction of him as a loving father in chapter 13.
- *The natural consequence of a child of 'mixed' parentage being raised in a working-class environment* – see 'Social Position' p. 48 where the changing views of social class and the social insecurity of the Victorian period are discussed. Eppie's social position is uncertain – father a gentleman, mother a barmaid. It is uncertain whether she will remain in a working-class environment, especially as this is where she has been raised. However, look at the stress on her 'character and refinement' (chapter 16) and her likeability which separate her from the rest of the working classes. On the other hand, the presence of her father in chapter 12 would make it very difficult for her to be accepted by Victorians as part of the working class. This is a difficult summary, please reward any other valid arguments that are supported by evidence.

Chapter 21 Active Task

Look for an imaginative dialogue with either Mr Paston or William Dane that addresses Silas' situation. What happened since then. For example, Dane may have been discovered as a thief and they may have been wrongly accused or he may have been able to conceal this deception and Silas' arrival may have led to include a discussion of the drawing of lots with either a defence of the practice – there is a lot of confusion when it has been proved not to work. It is likely that the minister would still seek to find an excuse for its failure. Any attempt to refer back to previous conversations would be welcome.

Conclusion: Discussion Key Points

- Many different answers to this. Godfrey could have been included in the wedding/celebration or to turn to Godfrey; Godfrey and Nancy could have children ...
- If Godfrey had been included in the final scene this would have meant some sort of reconciliation of her affection between her two 'fathers'. This would affect our impression of the strength of the book. Remember that in the Victorian period the concept of shared parenting was not common.
- An alternative could have been that Godfrey would have an unsettling effect on the happy ending. Again this would compromise the happy ending.
- Eliot gives a happy ending to the characters that have made the right moral choice. Including Godfrey part of a happy ending could compromise this.
- If the villagers' comments were excluded then the impression of Silas and Eppie being accepted would be diminished. Inclusion is a key theme of the book, as discussed in *Themes*.

Characterisation: Silas Marner Discussion Key Points

- Silas is isolated in the first part of the book. Therefore it would be difficult to use direct speech to characterise him.
- Omniscient narration adds to the impression of this isolation, especially as it allows us to see his thoughts.
- In the second half direct speech is a clear indication that Silas is now part of a community. Aaron and Dolly, showing that he has formed bonds with others.
- Direct speech allows Eliot to present Silas' simplicity and honesty in a sympathetic way. It also shows how he becomes more alive and more confident in his growth as a character.

Characterisation: Active Task

Physical description:

- short-sighted – is unaware of motivations of those around him. Blind to duplicity of Godfrey and to how his manner creates fear and suspicion in the community. Notice his sight in chapter 13 as a greater awareness of the thoughts and feelings of others.
- Catalepsy – Silas literally sleeps through parts of his life. This mirrors the aspects of his character where he rejects people. He is existing, not living, before Eppie. No cataleptic fits in the second half of the book.
- 'withered and yellow' (p. 20) old before his time. Again this symbolises the poverty of his life and the long period of isolation are not to be entirely overcome by the changes in his life.

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Effect on key aspects of his life:

- Peculiar appearance frightens villagers and enhances his isolation.
- Catalepsy – at first seen as a sign of grace then feared as a sign of the devil.
- Premature aging – may contribute to Dunstan's theory that he has died – allows adopting Eppie will be a relief.

Characterisation: Godfrey Cass Discussion Key Points

- Beginning – Godfrey is presented using direct speech mainly this shifts to a greater book continues and finally he is presented largely through the eyes of others.
- Silas' presentation is opposite to this – eyes of others, omniscient narration, direct speech
- Arguably these techniques mean the reader's sympathies shift more from Godfrey to Silas. Direct speech allows the reader direct access to the character's personality; omniscient narration gives the reader thoughts but also judgments and irony; eyes of others give the reader a more distant view.
- Pupils should discuss these techniques used and also the use of irony which is used to show that the reader should make their own judgments about which characters are presented more sympathetically.

Characterisation: Dunstan Cass and Nancy Discussion Key Points

Refer extensively to chapter 16 for characterisation and chapter by chapter analysis. In simple terms Godfrey is a hypocrite, he is duplicitous and more aware of the motivations of others. Silas naturally is constantly questioning which path is the right one to take and takes the one that suits him best. Godfrey is selfish, but events force him to mature and become less selfish by the end.

Techniques used:

- Silas – omniscient commentary/ views of others/ presentation of his thoughts/ rhetorical questions to explain his character which he would find difficult to express. Also he is isolated so we see him through the eyes of others.
- Movement towards direct speech at end – greater involvement with life and community, becoming less unselfish.
- Godfrey – direct speech, rhetorical questions, presentation of thoughts – allows the reader to see his character in a more sympathetic light.
- Use of irony for both. Silas – emphasises the false views of the villagers and his own hypocrisy. Godfrey illustrates the true motives behind the ones he uses to salve his conscience.
- Students should refer to key quotes in answer and use extensive references from the text.

Characterisation: Eppie Discussion Key Points

- Clues in her character – look at previous discussion of Eppie's character in chapter 15. She shows love and loyalty to Silas.
- In Chapter 16 we see the close relationship between Eppie and Silas and her unwillingness to leave him.
- In terms of social position Eppie is part of the community. She worries about conforming to Dolly and Aaron. She is comfortable with her social position. There is no indication of a desire for a situation to change: quite the reverse.

Characterisation: Practice Question 2

Students should choose one or two characters from Silas, Godfrey, Nancy or Dunstan to discuss the presentation of character – what is she mainly focused on? Does she always reveal their motives? Omniscient narration, rhetorical questions, presentation of thoughts? What is left out – often in conversation – speech is often reported rather than direct, allowing Eliot to comment on the character. Question the first part of the quotation and argue whether or not the plot, speech and silence reflect Eliot's wish to explore motive. For example, it could be argued that the reason Silas speaks so much is to reflect the complex motives behind his obsession with gold through the simplicity of his language. Refer extensively to the text and use key quotes where appropriate.

Characterisation: Dunstan Cass and Nancy

- Build up to Dunstan's theft: presentation of the villagers' view of his character (clues from Godfrey) – both showing greed and unscrupulousness; his first impression of Silas' cottage all lead up to his discovery of the empty cottage and the possibility of stealing the money.
- First presentation of Nancy shows her fixed views – using the example of making a decision. It is clear that she has strong views – look at Priscilla's comments on how she does. Arguably adds to our understanding of why Nancy stops Godfrey trying to adopt Eppie.

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Relationships Analysis: Active Task

Key factors:

- Silas' honesty and straightforward character – this ensures that their relationship is
- Silas' unselfishness – he always puts Eppie first and she has come to be grateful for it
- Eppie's affectionate nature – she makes the first moves towards Silas and it is then not
- Eppie's courage – she shows no fear of Silas' appearance or the coal-hole as an infant when she stands up to Godfrey's attempts to adopt her.

Settings: Discussion Key Points

- Countryside: at first presented negatively through Silas' eyes – hidden from the heavy hedgerows; plentiful but neglected; farmers and their wives concerned only with making money
- Transforms when Eppie arrives – she leads him outside to rediscover flowers and herbs; her connection to the community; her wish for a garden which is achieved at the end of the novel shows the
- Town: initially presented through Silas' eyes as an open, busy community which accepts
- On return to town – frightening, dirty, smelly and has changed out of all recognition
- Arguably, on the whole countryside is presented more positively.

Settings: Active Task

Pupils should consider migration to cities, the loss of skilled craftsmen like weavers, the enclosure which has dispossessed many tenants. By making Raveloe pre-industrialised Eliot is showing where values are mixed and there is a community with customs and traditions. It is not idealised how a community can reject outsiders, but also the restorative benefits of embracing those who are different.

Themes: Desire for Gold: Discussion Key Points

- Silas' thoughts about money are linked to desire and love for the coins themselves. This particularly makes it clear that they are a substitute for love.
- When he loses the money he reacts as if he has lost someone he loves. He is not interested in wanting the actual coins that were taken from him.
- Dunstan sees money primarily as a way of increasing his power over others. This is why when he is taking delight in torturing Godfrey, he is not concerned about what he will lose. He continues to the hunt in chapter 4 because he is more interested in showing off than in winning.
- The exception to this is his desire to steal the money which occurs when he enters Raveloe and he simply can't resist the opportunity.
- Pupils could argue that Silas' desire for gold is only self-destructive, whereas Dunstan's is not.

Themes: Active Task

Presented through omniscient narration and direct speech. Eliot often presents their opinions to us that the community of Raveloe is generally cohesive: they have similar views and opinions. They present the 'normal' perspective which acts as a contrast to Silas and Godfrey's experience. This is often patronising, presenting the villagers' opinions in an oversimplified way as if there is no complexity or characterisation of individuals within the village.

Themes: Community Inclusion and Exclusion Discussion Key Points

- The most obvious similarity here is William Dane from Lantern Yard and Dunstan Deane. Both are outsiders – the main difference is the amount of money stolen.
- Another similar pair are Dolly and Nancy who are both strong, morally upright women. The main difference between them is social position and the degree of education.
- There are also similarities between the novel's characters between Mr Macey and Mr Deane and the Squire.
- Arguably this shows that Eliot's policy is that human nature is essentially the same in all circumstances.

Themes: Parenting: Question

Three obvious answers for this but students should feel free to come up with their own ideas. It should also be possible for a student to present an argument of equal quality of supporting evidence. It should also be possible for a student to present an argument that is equally strong and justify their answer.

- **Desire for gold:** Silas/Dunstan/Godfrey even Eppie's rejection is a response to desire for gold. These characters view gold and the influence of it on their actions and ultimate fate. This is particularly clear in the case of Dunstan.
- **Community: exclusion and inclusion** – Compare Silas' story of inclusion / rejection with Godfrey's self-imposed isolation. Look at the omniscient commentary on the importance of the character's views – those of Dolly and Nancy in particular.
- **Parenting:** influence of previous parents – particularly the old Squire. What makes Eppie's father? What judgments are made about Silas' and Godfrey's parenting and how is this particularly important to showing Eliot's judgments on parenting.

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Ideas and Messages: Active Task

Here is a selection, I'm sure your students will find more! : I have put a brief judgement as to the poor or rich in a positive or negative light.

Poor quotations:

- pp. 5–6 'To the peasants... loneliness' (or parts of this very long quote!): negative
- p. 6 'A shadowy conception... faith': negative
- 'the rich ate... poor' (p. 23): mocks both
- 'And yet he was not utterly forsaken... craziness' (p. 77): positive
- 'there's never a garden... does' (p. 140): poor's view of the wastefulness of the rich
- 'And I don't... used to' (p. 169) and 'I can never be sorry... then?' (p. 172) and 'I was' Eppie's rejection of social improvement.

Rich quotations:

- 'several chiefs... tide' (p. 7): negative
- 'It was still that glorious war-time... wheels' (p. 21): negative
- 'the rich ate... poor' (p. 23): mocks both
- 'His person... comparison' (p. 23): negative
- 'It was the great... enations' (p. 87): gentle mocking
- 'The ch... ur' (p. 132): Godfrey's view of the poor – ironic
- 'Mrs C... comfortable' (p. 168) and 'I should have thought... duty' (p. 170): Godfrey's view of Eppie's life.

Ideas and Messages: Discussion Key Points

- God is mentioned very rarely. The key moment when God is directly referred to is in chapter 16 where Godfrey says 'I gave her to me because you turned your back on her' (p. 169). Note particularly in chapter 16 where Dolly tries to make sense of what has happened to Silas. Godfrey's exclamation: 'God help 'em!' (p. 144)
- In Lantern Yard acts of worship and whether you had been selected for salvation is central to the story.
- In Raveloe the focus again is on acts of worship, Christening and taking the sacraments.
- Dolly and Mr Macey urge Silas to come to church as a way of joining the community but they do not suggest that God will help him.
- Nancy's code is based on her limited experience and moral judgments without reference to God.
- Pupils may therefore conclude that belief in God is less important than acts of community.

Ideas and Messages: Practice Question

The arguments from the 'Religious Ideology' section broadly support the argument put forward in the 'Exam Tips' section. It is worth noticing that Eliot does not make overt judgments, but does use the language of christening and baptism and in the presentation of Godfrey's theories that luck justifies his actions.

If students argue the opposite point of view they will have to decide on which aspect of the text they will make their judgment on and present evidence to support this.

The Writer's Use of Language: Discussion Key Points

- The first point is entirely dependent on the pupil's choice.
- *Rumpelstiltskin* is hinted at because Silas is a weaver who produces gold. Also, in a sense, he is a Cinderella when she finds out that Godfrey is her father.
- There are also clear links to *Cinderella* in the way that Silas is a Cinderella who rejects the hand of fate.
- The idea of an orphan child being raised in a humble setting runs through many fairy tales.

The Writer's Use of Language: Active Task

Here are some questions but this is not an exhaustive list.

Chapter 2:

Imagery of hedgerows shutting out light / parental lap / local divinities – Silas' restricted world. Changes in his life or make connections with Raveloe. Summed up by the quotation: 'The light was like a spider's web' (p. 16). Next – comparison of weaving – spider. Darkness / closed pathways (pp. 16–17)

Brightness of gold – life (p. 17)

Solitary imprisonment – link again with spider and web. (p. 19)

Gold – thirst / physical need (end of p. 19)

Silas – changes into machine – physically mirroring his work. (p. 20)

Guineas – bathing his hands in them / like children – but drawing him away from the outside world.

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Chapter 16:

Silas – vision improved / Eppie vital as a ‘brooklet’ (p. 138)

Dolly and Silas – shadow of past life / slow steps of communication (p. 143)

Red hot iron – of injustice (p. 143)

Dark lots / light of child (p. 145)

Perfect love – poetry (p. 146)

Ring in box shaped like a shoe – reminiscent of Cinderella (p. 146)

Choosing flowers for the garden – new life (p. 147)

Moving the stones – need for strong help (p. 148)

Silas – a burden- (pp. 149–150)

Chapter 2 – overview – dark imagery / comparison to machine. Light of gold – false / no real

Chapter 16 – life/growth/garden – mirrors changes in Silas’ life from the isolation and of growth after Eppie.

The Writer’s Use of Language: Practice Question

One approach to this would be to analyse the depiction of Silas’ and Godfrey’s thoughts. For example, chapter 2 (Silas) and chapter 12 (Godfrey). Students should reflect on the advantage of the author, i.e. the ability to present thoughts and then change the perspective quickly to show different thoughts. The teacher should look at use of reader engagement and rhetorical questions and more deeply at the use of context, thus engaging sympathy. There is also an absence of authorial judgement to condemn her characters.

Limitations: lacks the immediate personal involvement of a first person narrative. Can appear to reduce sympathetic involvement.

Look for evidence from the text which shows: omniscient account of thoughts; mocking or movement from one perspective to another.

Context: Marian Evans Discussion Key Points

- It is interesting that Marian Evans presents a village which would reject her – firstly for being a woman for living with a married man.
- There is a pathos in the way that she presents Silas’ isolation which may reflect some of her own feelings.
- This is particularly evident when Silas is unjustly accused of theft and when the village rejects him.
- She is at pains to present the positive aspects of community life which perhaps suggests that she herself would have continued to be part of it.

Context: Religious Debate Discussion Key Points

- Movement from country to town inevitably leads to breaking up of communities like those found around the church.
- People arguably looked for comfort and religious guidance in an unfamiliar setting.
- Look at description of housing in the new towns – crowded and overpopulated. Small communities could develop more easily.
- Preachers had a wider audience and the ability to create different small sects.
- Pupils should also be made aware of the growth of education in towns. Note that Silas is illiterate.
- There was constant change and movement in town unlike the country.
- This is reflected by the transient nature of Lantern Yard – a small religious sect which was founded and then abandoned and the unchanging nature of the church in Raveloe.
- For further reading on this recommend *Middlemarch* by Elizabeth Gaskell, a novel which goes into these differences in more depth.

Context: Practice Question

Previous resources have helped students to understand social movement and attitudes. They should be able to provide evidence to support the fixed roles perceived as desirable by many social classes. They should discuss the presentation of social classes in *Silas Marner*, highlighting first that of the industrialisation and social movement. They should examine the lack of a clear identifiable social class – bad, or vice versa. They should also present their own judgments on whether Eppie represents contemporary social attitudes. Q D Leavis section on radicalism included in the appendix (pp. 225–232) provides additional useful background reading.

Encourage students to juxtapose contemporary quotations with Eppie’s speech or Eliot’s of

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