Context-Silas Marner

George Eliot was the pseudonym of Mary Ann Evans, born in 1819 at the estate of her father's employer in Chilvers Coton, Warwickshire, England. She was sent to boarding school, where she developed a strong religious faith, deeply influenced by the evangelical preacher Rev. John Edmund Jones. After her mother's death, Evans moved with her father to the city of Coventry. There she met Charles and Caroline Bray, progressive intellectuals who led her to question her faith. In 1842 she stopped going to church, and this renunciation of her faith put a strain on Evans's relationship with her father that did not ease for several years.

Evans became acquainted with intellectuals in Coventry who broadened her mind beyond a provincial perspective. Through her new associations, she traveled to Geneva and then to London, where she worked as a freelance writer. In London she met George Lewes, who became her husband in all but the legal sense—a true legal marriage was impossible, as Lewes already had an estranged wife. At this point in her life Evans was still primarily interested in philosophy, but Lewes persuaded her to turn her hand to fiction instead. The publication of her first collection of stories in 1857, under the male pseudonym of George Eliot, brought immediate acclaim from critics as prestigious as Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray, as well as much speculation about the identity of the mysterious George Eliot. After the publication of her next book and first novel, *Adam Bede,* a number of impostors claimed authorship. In response, Evans asserted herself as the true author, causing quite a stir in a society that still regarded women as incapable of serious writing. Lewes died in 1878, and in 1880 Evans married a banker named John Walter Cross, who was twenty-one years her junior. She died the same year.

Eliot wrote the novels *Adam Bede* (1859) and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) before publishing *Silas Marner* (1861), the tale of a lonely, miserly village weaver transformed by the love of his adopted daughter. Eliot is best known, however, for *Middlemarch* (1871–1872). Subtitled "A Study in Provincial Life," this lengthy work tells the story of a small English village and its inhabitants, centering on the idealistic and self-sacrificing Dorothea Brooke.

Eliot's novels are deeply philosophical. In exploring the inner workings of her characters and their relationship to their environment, she drew on influences that included the English poet William Wordsworth, the Italian poet Dante, the English art critic John Ruskin, and the Portuguese-Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza, whose work Eliot translated into English. The philosophical concerns and references found in her novels—and the refusal to provide the requisite happy ending—struck some contemporary critics as unbecoming in a lady novelist. Eliot's detailed and insightful psychological portrayals of her characters, as well as her exploration of the complex ways these characters confront

moral dilemmas, decisively broke from the plot-driven domestic melodrama that had previously served as the standard for the Victorian novel. Eliot's break from tradition inspired the modern novel and inspired numerous future authors, among them Henry James, who admirered Eliot.

Silas Marner was Eliot's third novel and is among the best known of her works. Many of the novel's themes and concerns stem from Eliot's own life experiences. Silas's loss of religious faith recalls Eliot's own struggle with her faith, and the novel's setting in the vanishing English countryside reflects Eliot's concern that England was fast becoming industrialized and impersonal. The novel's concern with class and family can likewise be linked back to Eliot's own life. The voice of the novel's narrator can thus, to some extent, be seen as Eliot's own voice—one tinged with slight condescension, but fond of the setting and thoroughly empathetic with the characters. Though *Silas Marner* is in a sense a very personal novel for Eliot, its treatment of the themes of faith, family, and class has nonetheless given it universal appeal, especially at the time of publication, when English society and institutions were undergoing rapid change.

At his death, eleven years before the publication of *Silas Marner,* William Wordsworth was widely considered the most important English writer of his time. His intensely personal poetry, with its simple language and rhythms, marked a revolutionary departure from the complex, formal structures and classical subject matter of his predecessors, poets such as John Dryden and Alexander Pope. Unlike the poetry of Dryden and Pope, Wordsworth's poems are meditative rather than narrative. They celebrate beauty and simplicity most often most often located in the natural landscape. Wordsworth's influence on English poetry—at a time when poetry was unquestioningly held to be the most important form of literature—was enormous. Along with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wordsworth set in motion the Romantic era, inspiring a generation of poets that included John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Lord Byron.

George Eliot evidently felt a kinship with Wordsworth and his strong identification with the English landscape. Like Wordsworth, Eliot draws many of her metaphors from the natural world. However, the Wordsworth epigraph she chose for *Silas Marner* also highlights the philosophical aspect of her affinity with Wordsworth. Like Eliot, Wordsworth had tried his hand at philosophy before turning to more literary pursuits, and in his poetry he works out his conception of human consciousness. One of Wordsworth's major ideas, radical at the time, was that at the moment of birth, human beings move from a perfect, idealized "otherworld" to this imperfect world, characterized by injustice and corruption. Children, being closest to that otherworld, can remember its beauty and purity, seeing its traces in the natural world around them. As they grow up, however, they lose that connection and forget the knowledge they had as children. However, as described in the quote Eliot has chosen, children and the memories of childhood they evoke in adults can still bring us close to that early, idyllic state. It is not hard to imagine that Eliot had this

model in mind when she wrote her story of a child bringing a man out of isolation and spiritual desolation.

Plot Overview

Silas Marner is the weaver in the English countryside village of Raveloe in the early nineteenth century. Like many weavers of his time, he is an outsider—the object of suspicion because of his special skills and the fact that he has come to Raveloe from elsewhere. The villagers see Silas as especially odd because of the curious cataleptic fits he occasionally suffers. Silas has ended up in Raveloe because the members of his religious sect in Lantern Yard, an insular neighborhood in a larger town, falsely accused him of theft and excommunicated him.

Nancy Lammeter arrives at Squire Cass's famed New Year's dance resolved to reject Godfrey's advances because of his unsound character. However, Godfrey is more direct and insistent than he has been in a long time, and Nancy finds herself exhilarated by the evening in spite of her resolution. Meanwhile, Molly, Godfrey's secret wife, is making her way to the Casses' house to reveal the secret marriage. She has their daughter, a toddler, in her arms. Tiring after her long walk, Molly takes a draft of opium and passes out by the road. Seeing Silas's cottage and drawn by the light of the fire, Molly's little girl wanders through the open door and falls asleep at Silas's hearth.

Silas is having one of his fits at the time and does not notice the little girl enter his cottage. When he comes to, he sees her already asleep on his hearth, and is as stunned by her appearance as he was by the disappearance of his money. A while later, Silas traces the girl's footsteps outside and finds Molly's body lying in the snow. Silas goes to the Squire's house to find the doctor, and causes a stir at the dance when he arrives with the baby girl in his arms. Godfrey, recognizing his daughter, accompanies the doctor to Silas's cottage. When the doctor declares that Molly is dead, Godfrey realizes that his secret is safe. He does not claim his daughter, and Silas adopts her.

Silas grows increasingly attached to the child and names her Eppie, after his mother and sister. With Dolly Winthrop's help, Silas raises the child lovingly. Eppie begins to serve as a bridge between Silas and the rest of the villagers, who offer him help and advice and have come to think of him as an exemplary person because of what he has done. Eppie also brings Silas out of the benumbed state he fell into after the loss of his gold. In his newfound happiness, Silas begins to explore the memories of his past that he has long repressed.

The novel jumps ahead sixteen years. Godfrey has married Nancy and Squire Cass has died. Godfrey has inherited his father's house, but he and Nancy have no children. Their one daughter died at birth, and Nancy has refused to adopt. Eppie has grown into a pretty and spirited young woman, and Silas a contented father. The stone-pit behind Silas's cottage is drained to water neighboring fields, and Dunsey's skeleton is found at the bottom, along with Silas's gold. The discovery frightens Godfrey, who becomes convinced that his own secrets are destined to be uncovered as well. He confesses the truth to Nancy

about his marriage to Molly and fathering of Eppie. Nancy is not angry but regretful, saying that they could have adopted Eppie legitimately if Godfrey had told her earlier.

That evening, Godfrey and Nancy decide to visit Silas's cottage to confess the truth of Eppie's lineage and claim her as their daughter. However, after hearing Godfrey and Nancy's story, Eppie tells them she would rather stay with Silas than live with her biological father. Godfrey and Nancy leave, resigning themselves to helping Eppie from afar. The next day Silas decides to visit Lantern Yard to see if he was ever cleared of the theft of which he was accused years before. The town has changed almost beyond recognition, though, and Silas's old chapel has been torn down to make way for a new factory. Silas realizes that his questions will never be answered, but he is content with the sense of faith he has regained through his life with Eppie. That summer Eppie is married to Aaron Winthrop, Dolly's son. Aaron comes to live in Silas's cottage, which has been expanded and refurbished at Godfrey's expense.

Main characters

Silas Marner

The title character, Silas is a solitary weaver who, at the time we meet him, is about thirty-nine years old and has been living in the English countryside village of Raveloe for fifteen years. Silas is reclusive and his neighbors in Raveloe regard him with a mixture of suspicion and curiosity. He spends all day working at his loom and has never made an effort to get to know any of the villagers. Silas's physical appearance is odd: he is bent from his work at the loom, has strange and frightening eyes, and generally looks much older than his years. Because Silas has knowledge of medicinal herbs and is subject to occasional cataleptic fits, many of his neighbors speculate that he has otherworldly powers.

Despite his antisocial behavior, however, Silas is at heart a deeply kind and honest person. At no point in the novel does Silas do or say anything remotely malicious and, strangely for a miser, he is not even particularly selfish. Silas's love of money is merely the product of spiritual desolation, and his hidden capacity for love and sacrifice manifests itself when he takes in and raises Eppie.

Silas's outsider status makes him the focal point for the themes of community, religion, and family that Eliot explores in the novel. As an outcast who eventually becomes Raveloe's most exemplary citizen, Silas serves as a study in the relationship between the individual and the community. His loss and subsequent rediscovery of faith demonstrate both the difficulty and the solace that religious belief can bring. Additionally, the unlikely domestic life that Silas creates with Eppie presents an unconventional but powerful portrait of family and the home.

Though he is the title character of the novel, Silas is by and large passive, acted upon rather than acting on others. Almost all of the major events in the novel demonstrate this passivity. Silas is framed for theft in his old town and, instead of proclaiming his innocence, puts his trust in God to clear his name. Similarly, Dunsey's theft of Silas's gold and Eppie's appearance on Silas's doorstep—rather than any actions Silas takes of his own accord—are

the major events that drive the narrative forward. Silas significantly diverges from this pattern of passivity when he decides to keep Eppie, thereby becoming an agent of his eventual salvation.

Godfrey Cass

Godfrey is the eldest son of Squire Cass and the heir to the Cass estate. He is a good-natured young man, but weak-willed and usually unable to think of much beyond his immediate material comfort. As a young man he married an opium addict, Molly Farren, with whom he had a daughter. This secret marriage and Godfrey's handling of it demonstrate the mixture of guilt and moral cowardice that keep him paralyzed for much of the novel. Godfrey consented to the marriage largely out of guilt and keeps the marriage secret because he knows his father will disown him if it ever comes to light.

Despite his physically powerful and graceful presence, Godfrey is generally passive. In this respect he is similar to Silas. However, Godfrey's passivity is different from Silas's, as his endless waffling and indecisiveness stem entirely from selfishness. Godfrey is subject to constant blackmail from Dunsey, who knows of Godfrey's secret marriage, and Godfrey is finally freed of his malicious brother simply by an accident. He is delivered from Molly in a similarly fortuitous way, when Molly freezes to death while en route to Raveloe to expose their marriage to Godfrey's family. Even Godfrey's eventual confession to Nancy is motivated simply by his fright after the discovery of Dunsey's remains. This confession comes years too late—by the time Godfrey is finally ready to take responsibility for Eppie, she has already accepted Silas as her father and does not want to replace him in her life.

Nancy Lammeter

Nancy is the pretty, caring, and stubborn young lady whom Godfrey pursues and then marries. Like Godfrey, Nancy comes from a family that is wealthy by Raveloe standards. However, her father, unlike Squire Cass, is a man who values moral rectitude, thrift, and hard work. Nancy has inherited these strict values and looks disapprovingly on what she sees as Godfrey's weakness of character. She is, however, exhilarated by Godfrey's attention, in part because of the status he embodies.

Nancy lives her life according to an inflexible code of behavior and belief. She seems to have already decided how she feels about every question that might come up in her life, not necessarily on the basis of any reason or thought, but simply because anything else would represent a sort of weakness in her own eyes. When Nancy is younger, this "code" of hers demands that she and her sister dress alike on formal occasions. When she is older, Nancy's code forbids her to adopt a child, as in her mind such an action represents a defiance of God's plan. Nancy is neither well educated nor particularly curious, and her code marks her as just as much a product of Raveloe's isolation and rusticity as Dolly Winthrop. Nancy is, however, a genuinely kind and caring person, as evidenced by her forgiveness of Godfrey after his confession.

Summary Chapter 1

To have sought a medical explanation for this phenomenon would have been held by Silas himself, as well as by his minister and fellow-members, a willful self-exclusion from the spiritual significance that might lie therein.

The novel opens in the English countryside "in the days when the spinning-wheels hummed busily in the farmhouses." In this era one would occasionally encounter weavers—typically pale, thin men who looked like "the remnants of a disinherited race"—beside the hearty peasants who worked in the fields. Because they possessed a special skill and typically had emigrated from larger towns, weavers were invariably outsiders to the peasants among whom they lived. The peasants were superstitious people, often suspicious of both "cleverness" and the world beyond their immediate experience. Thus, the weavers lived isolated lives and often developed the eccentric habits that result from loneliness.

Silas Marner, a linen-weaver of this sort, lives in a stone cottage near a deserted stone-pit in the fictional village of Raveloe. The boys of the village are drawn to the sound of his loom, and often peer through his window with both awe and scorn for his strangeness. Silas responds by glaring at them to scare them away. The boys' parents claim that Silas has special powers, such as the ability to cure rheumatism by invoking the devil. Although Raveloe is a fairly affluent, attractive village, it is far from any major road. Sheltered from currents of progressive thought, the townspeople retain many primitive beliefs.

In the fifteen years Silas, has lived in Raveloe, he has not invited any guests into his home, made any effort to befriend other villagers, or attempted to court any of the town's women. Silas's reclusiveness has given rise to a number of myths and rumors among the townspeople. One man swears he once saw Silas in a sort of fit, standing with his limbs stiff and his eyes "set like a dead man's." Mr. Macey, the parish clerk, suggests that such episodes are caused by Silas's soul leaving his body to commune with the devil. Despite these rumors, Silas is never persecuted because the townspeople fear him and because he is indispensable—he is the only weaver in town. As the year's pass, local lore also begins to hold that Silas's business has enabled him to save a sizable hoard of money.

Before Silas came to Raveloe, he lived in a town to the north, where he was thought of as a young man "of exemplary life and ardent faith." This town was dominated by a strict religious sect that met in a place called Lantern Yard. During one prayer meeting, Silas became unconscious and rigid for more than an hour, an event that his fellow church members regarded as divinely inspired. However, Silas's best friend at the time, William Dane—a seemingly equally devout but arrogant young man—suggested that Silas's fit might have represented a visitation from the devil rather than from God. Troubled by this suggestion, Silas asked his fiancée, a young servant named Sarah, if she wished to call off their engagement. Though Sarah seemed at first to want to, she did not.

One night Silas stayed up to watch over the senior deacon of -Lantern Yard, who was sick. Waiting for William to come in to relieve him at the end of his shift, Silas suddenly

realized that it was nearly dawn, the deacon had stopped breathing, and William had never arrived. Silas wondered if he had fallen asleep on his watch. However, later that morning William and the other church members accused Silas of stealing the church's money from the deacon's room. Silas's pocketknife turned up in the bureau where the money had been stored, and the empty money bag was later found in Silas's dwelling. Silas expected God to clear him of the crime, but when the church members drew lots, Silas was determined guilty and excommunicated. Sarah called their engagement off. Crushed, Silas maintained that the last time he used his knife was in William's presence and that he did not remember putting it back in his pocket afterward. To the horror of the church, Silas angrily renounced his religious faith. Soon thereafter, William married Sarah and Silas left town.

Summary Chapter 2

Marner's face and figure shrank and bent themselves into a constant mechanical relation to the objects of his life, so that he produced the same sort of impression as a handle or a crooked tube, which has no meaning standing apart.

According to the narrator, Silas finds Raveloe, with its sense of "neglected plenty," completely unlike the world in which he grew up. The fertile soil and climate make farm life much easier in Raveloe than in the barren north, and the villagers are consequently more easygoing and less ardent in their religion. Nothing familiar in Raveloe reawakens Silas's "benumbed" faith in God. Spiritually depleted, Silas uses his loom as a distraction, weaving more quickly than necessary. For the first time, he is able to keep the full portion of his earnings for himself, no longer having to share them with an employer or the church. Having no other sense of purpose, Silas feels a sense of fulfillment merely in holding his newly earned money and looking at it.

Around this time, Silas notices the cobbler's wife, Sally Oates, suffering the symptoms of heart disease and dropsy, a condition of abnormal swelling in the body. Sally awakens in Silas memories of his mother, who died of similar causes. He offers Sally an herbal preparation of foxglove that his mother had used to ease the pain of the disease. The concoction works, so the villagers conclude that Silas must have some dealings with the occult. Mothers start to bring their sick children to his house to be cured, and men with rheumatism offer Silas silver to cure them. Too honest to play along, Silas sends them all away with growing irritation. The townspeople's hope in Silas's healing power turns to dread, and they come to blame him for accidents and misfortunes that befall them. Having wanted only to help Sally Oates, Silas now finds himself further isolated from his neighbors.

Silas gradually begins to make more money, working sixteen hours a day and obsessively counting his earnings. He enjoys the physical appearance of the gold coins and handles them joyfully. He keeps the coins in an iron pot hidden under the floor beneath his loom, and takes them out only at night, "to enjoy their companionship." When the pot is no longer large enough to hold his hoard, Silas begins keeping the money in two leather bags. He lives this way for fifteen years, until a sudden change alters his life one Christmas.

Summary Chapter 3

Squire Cass is acknowledged as the greatest man in Raveloe, the closest thing the village has to a lord. His sons, however, have "turned out rather ill." The Squire's younger son, Dunstan, more commonly called by the nickname Dunsey, is a sneering and unpleasant young man with a taste for gambling and drinking. The elder son, Godfrey, is handsome and good-natured, and everyone in town wants to see him married to the lovely Nancy Lammeter. Lately, however, Godfrey has been acting strange and looking unwell.

One November afternoon, the two Cass brothers get into a heated argument over 100 pounds that Godfrey has lent Dunsey—money that was the rent from one of their father's tenants. The Squire is growing impatient, Godfrey says, and will soon find out that Godfrey has been lying to him about the rent if Dunsey does not repay the money. Dunsey, however, tells Godfrey to come up with the money himself, lest Dunsey tell their father about Godfrey's secret marriage to the drunken opium addict Molly Farren. Dunsey suggests that Godfrey borrow money or sell his prized horse, Wildfire, at the next day's hunt. Godfrey balks at this, since there is a dance that evening at which he plans to see Nancy. When Dunsey mockingly suggests that Godfrey simply kill Molly off, Godfrey angrily threatens to tell their father about the money and his marriage himself, thus getting Dunsey thrown out of the house along with him.

Godfrey, however, is unwilling to take this step, preferring his uncertain but currently comfortable existence to the certain embarrassment that would result from revealing his secret marriage. Thinking that he has perhaps pushed Godfrey too far, Dunsey offers to sell Godfrey's horse for him. Godfrey agrees to this, and Dunsey leaves. The narrator then gives us a glimpse of Godfrey's future: the empty, monotonous prosperity of the aging country squire who spends his years drinking and wallowing in regret. The narrator adds that Godfrey already has experienced this regret to some degree: we learn that Godfrey was talked into his secret marriage by none other than Dunsey, who used the idea as a trap to gain leverage with which to blackmail Godfrey. Godfrey does genuinely love Nancy Lammeter—as the narrator suggests, Nancy represents everything missing from the household in which Godfrey grew up after his mother's death. The fact that Godfrey cannot act upon his emotions toward Nancy only increases his misery.

Summary Chapter 4

Dunsey sets off the next morning to sell his brother's horse. Passing by Silas Marner's cottage, Dunsey remembers the rumors about Silas's hoard of gold and wonders why he has never thought to persuade Godfrey to ask Silas for a loan. Despite the promise of this idea, Dunsey decides to ride on anyway, since he wants his brother to be upset about having had to sell Wildfire and he looks forward to the bargaining and swagger that will be involved in the sale of the horse.

Dunsey meets some acquaintances who are hunting. After some negotiation, he arranges Wildfire's sale, with payment to be handed over upon safe delivery of the horse to

the stable. Dunsey decides not to deliver the horse right away, and instead takes part in the hunt, enjoying the prospect of jumping fences to show off the horse. However, Dunsey jumps one fence too many, and Wildfire gets impaled on a stake and dies. No one witnesses the accident, and Dunsey is unhurt, so he makes his way to the road in order to walk home. All the while he thinks of Silas's money. When Dunsey passes Silas's cottage just after dusk and sees a light on through the window, he decides to introduce himself. To his surprise the door is unlocked and the cottage empty. Tempted by the blazing fire inside and the piece of pork roasting over it, Dunsey sits down at the hearth and wonders where Silas is. His thoughts quickly shift to Silas's money and, looking around the cottage, Dunsey notices a spot in the floor carefully covered over with sand. He sweeps away the sand, pries up the loose bricks, and finds the bags of gold. He steals the bags and flees into the darkness.

Summary Chapter 5

Silas returns to his cottage, thinking nothing of the unlocked door because he has never been robbed before. He is looking forward to the roast pork, a gift from a customer, which he left cooking while he was running an errand. Noticing nothing out of the ordinary, Silas sits down before his fire. He cannot wait to pull his money out, and decides to lay it on the table as he eats.

Silas removes the bricks and finds the hole under the floorboards empty. He frantically searches the cottage for his gold, desperately hoping that he might have decided to store it someplace else for the night. He eventually realizes that the gold is gone, and he screams in anguish. Silas then tries to think of what could have happened. He initially fears that a greater power removed the money to ruin him a second time, but banishes that thought in favor of the simpler explanation of a robbery. He mentally runs through a list of his neighbors and decides that Jem Rodney, a well-known poacher, might have taken the gold.

Silas decides to declare his loss to the important people of the town, including Squire Cass, in the hopes that they might be able to help recover his money. Silas goes to the Rainbow, the village inn and tavern, to find someone of authority. However, the more prominent citizens of Raveloe are all at the birthday dance we saw Godfrey anticipating earlier, so Silas finds only the "less lofty customers" at the tavern. The Rainbow has two rooms, separating patrons according to their social standing. The parlor, frequented by Squire Cass and others of "select society," is empty. The few hangers-on who are normally permitted into the parlor to enlarge "the opportunity of hectoring and condescension for their betters" are instead taking the better seats in the bar across the hall, to hector and condescend to their inferiors in turn.

Summary Chapter 6

The conversation in the tavern is quite animated by the time Silas arrives, though it has taken a while to get up to speed. The narrator describes this conversation in considerable detail. It begins with an aimless argument about a cow, followed by a story

from Mr. Macey about a time when he heard the parson bungle the words of a wedding vow, a story that everyone in the tavern has heard many times before. Macey says that the parson's lapse set him thinking about whether the wedding was therefore invalid and, if not, just what it was that gave weddings meaning in the first place. Just before Silas appears, the conversation lapses back into an argument, this time about the existence of a ghost who allegedly haunts a local stable. The argumentative farrier, Mr. Dowlas, does not believe in the ghost, and offers to stand out in front of the stable all night, betting that he will not see the ghost. He gets no takers, as the Rainbow's landlord, Mr. Snell, argues that some people are just unable to see ghosts.

Summary Chapter 7

Our consciousness rarely registers the beginning of a growth within us any more than without us: there have been many circulations of the sap before we detect the smallest sign of the bud.

Silas suddenly appears in the middle of the tavern, his agitation giving him a strange, unearthly appearance. For a moment, everyone present, regardless of his stance in the previous argument about the supernatural, believes he is looking at a ghost. Silas, short of breath after his hurried walk to the inn, finally declares that he has been robbed. The landlord tells Jem Rodney, who is sitting nearest Silas, to seize him, as he is delirious. Hearing the name, Silas turns to Rodney and pleads with him to give his money back, telling him that he will give him a guinea and will not press charges. Rodney reacts angrily, saying that he will not be accused.

The tavern-goers make Silas take off his coat and sit down in a chair by the fire. Everyone calms down, and Silas tells the story of the robbery. The villagers become more sympathetic and believe Silas's story, largely because he appears so crushed and pathetic. The landlord vouches for Jem Rodney, saying that he has been in the inn all evening. Silas apologizes to Rodney, and Mr. Dowlas, the farrier, asks how much money was lost. Silas tells him the exact figure, which is more than 270 pounds. Dowlas suggests that 270 pounds could be carried out easily, and he offers to visit Silas's cottage to search for evidence, since Silas's eyesight is poor and he might have missed something. Dowlas also offers to ask the constable to appoint him deputy-constable, which sets off an argument. Mr. Macey objects that no doctor can also be a constable and that Dowlas—whose duties as a farrier including the treatment of livestock diseases—is a sort of doctor. A compromise is reached wherein Dowlas agrees to act only in an unofficial capacity. Silas then leaves with Dowlas and the landlord to go to the constable's office.

Summary Chapter 8

Godfrey returns home from the dance to find that Dunsey has not yet returned. Godfrey is distracted by thoughts of Nancy Lammeter, and does not think very much about his brother's whereabouts. By morning, everyone is discussing the robbery, and Godfrey and other residents of the village visit Silas's cottage to gather evidence and gossip. A

tinder-box is found on the scene and is suspected to be somehow connected to the crime. Though a few villagers suspect that Silas is simply mad or possessed and has lied about the theft, others defend him. Some townspeople suspect that occult forces took the money, and consider clues such as the tinder-box useless.

The tinder-box reminds Mr. Snell, the tavern landlord, of a peddler who had visited Raveloe a month before and had mentioned that he was carrying a tinder-box. The talk among the townspeople turns to determining the peddler's appearance, recalling his "evil looks" and trying to determine whether or not he wore earrings. Everyone is disappointed, however, when Silas says he remembers the peddler's visit but never invited him inside his cottage. Godfrey, remembering the peddler as a "merry grinning fellow," dismisses the stories about the peddler's suspicious character. Silas, however, wanting to identify a specific culprit, clings to the notion of the peddler's guilt.

Dunsey's continuing absence distracts Godfrey from this discussion, and Godfrey worries that Dunsey may have run away with his horse. In an attempt to find out what has happened, Godfrey rides to the town where the hunt started and encounters Bryce, the young man who had agreed to buy Wildfire. Bryce is surprised to learn of Dunsey's disappearance and tells Godfrey that Wildfire has been found dead. Seeing no alternative and hoping to free himself from Dunsey's threats of blackmail, Godfrey decides to tell his father not only about the rent money but about his secret marriage as well. Godfrey steels himself for the worst, as Squire Cass is prone to violent fits of anger and rash decisions that he refuses to rescind, even when his anger has passed. The next morning, Godfrey decides to confess only partly and to try to direct his father's anger toward Dunsey.

Summary Chapter 9

[Godfrey] was not likely to be very penetrating in his judgments, but he had always had a sense that his father's indulgence had not been kindness, and had had a vague longing for some discipline that would have checked his own errant weakness and helped his better will.

Godfrey takes his own breakfast early and waits for Squire Cass to eat and take his morning walk before speaking with him. Godfrey tells his father about Wildfire and about how he gave the rent money to Dunsey. His father flies into one of his rages and asks why Godfrey stole from him and lied to him for Dunsey's sake. When Godfrey is evasive, the Squire comes close to guessing the truth. The Squire goes on and on, blaming his current financial troubles on the overindulgence of his sons. Godfrey insists that he has always been willing to help with the management of his father's estate, but the Squire changes the subject, complaining about Godfrey's waffling over whether to marry Nancy Lammeter. The Squire offers to propose for Godfrey, but Godfrey is again evasive and refuses the offer. Afterward, Godfrey is not sure whether to be grateful that nothing seems to have changed or uneasy that he has had to tell more half-truths. Though Godfrey worries that his father might push his hand and force him to refuse Nancy, as usual, he merely places his trust in

"Favourable Chance," hoping that some unforeseen event will rescue him from his predicament.

Summary Chapter 10

Weeks pass with no new evidence about the robbery and no sign of Dunsey. No one connects Dunsey's disappearance with the theft, however, and the peddler remains the primary suspect, though some still insist that an inexplicable otherworldly force is responsible. Silas is still inconsolable, and passes the days weaving joylessly. Without his money, his life feels empty and purposeless. He earns the pity of the villagers, who now think of him as helpless rather than dangerous. They bring Silas food, call on him to offer condolences, and try to help him get over his loss. These efforts are only mildly successful. Mr. Macey subjects Silas to a long and discursive speech about coming to church, among other things, but gets little reaction and leaves more perplexed by Silas than before.

Another visitor is Dolly Winthrop, the wheelwright's wife, a selfless and patient woman. Dolly brings her son Aaron and some of her famed lard-cakes. She encourages Silas to attend church, particularly since it is Christmastime. When she asks if he has ever been to church, Silas responds that he has not; he has only been to chapel. Dolly does not understand the distinction Silas is making—nor, in any significant way, does Silas. Wanting to show his gratitude for the visit, all Silas can think to do is offer Aaron a bit of lard-cake. Aaron is frightened of Silas, but Dolly coaxes him into singing a Christmas carol. Despite his gratitude, Silas is relieved after the two have left and he is alone to weave and mourn the loss of his money.

Silas does not go to church on Christmas Day, but almost everyone else in town does. The Casses hold a family Christmas party that night, and invite the Kimbles, Godfrey's aunt and uncle. All evening Godfrey looks forward longingly to the Squire's famed New Year's dance and the chance to be with Nancy. The prospect of Dunsey's return looms over Godfrey, but he tries to ignore it.

Summary Chapter 11

Nancy Lammeter and her father arrive at the Red House for the Squire's New Year's dance. The trip over slushy roads has not been an easy one, and Nancy is annoyed that she has to let Godfrey help her out of her carriage. Nancy thinks she has made it clear that she does not wish to marry Godfrey. His unwelcome attention bothers her, though the way he often ignores her bothers her just as much. Nancy makes her way upstairs to a dressing room that she must share with six other women, including the Gunn sisters, who come from a larger town and regard Raveloe society with disdain. Mrs. Osgood, an aunt of whom Nancy is fond, is also among the women. As she puts on her dress for the dance, Nancy impresses the Gunn sisters as a "rustic beauty"—lovely and immaculate but, with her rough hands and slang, clearly ignorant of the higher social graces.

Nancy's sister Priscilla arrives and complains about how Nancy always insists they wear matching gowns. Priscilla freely admits she is ugly and, in doing so, manages to imply that the Gunns are ugly as well. However, Priscilla insists that she has no desire to marry anyway. When Nancy says that she doesn't want to marry either, Priscilla pooh-poohs her. When they go down to the parlor, Nancy accepts a seat between Godfrey and the rector, Mr. Crackenthorp. She cannot help but feel exhilarated by the prospect that she could be the mistress of the Red House herself. Nancy reminds herself, however, that she does not care for Godfrey's money or status because she finds him of unsound character. She blushes at these thoughts. The rector notices and points out her blush to Godfrey. Though Godfrey determinedly avoids looking at Nancy, the half-drunk Squire tries to help things along by complimenting Nancy's beauty. After a little more banter, the Squire pointedly asks Godfrey if he has asked Nancy for the first dance of the evening. Godfrey replies that he has not, but nonetheless embarrassedly asks Nancy, and she accepts.

The fiddler comes in, and, after playing a few preludes, he leads the guests into the White Parlour, where the dancing begins. Mr. Macey and a few other townspeople sit off to one side, commenting on the dancers. They notice Godfrey escorting Nancy off to the adjoining smaller parlor, and assume that the two are going "sweethearting." In reality, Nancy has torn her dress and has asked to sit down to wait for her sister to help mend it. Nancy tells Godfrey that she doesn't want to go into the smaller room with him and will just wait on her own. He insists that she will be more comfortable there and offers to leave. To her own exasperation, Nancy is as annoyed as she is relieved by Godfrey's offer. He tells Nancy that dancing with her means very much to him and asks if she would ever forgive him if he changed his ways. She replies that it would be better if no change were necessary. Godfrey, aware that Nancy still cares for him, tells Nancy she is hard-hearted, hoping to provoke a quarrel. Just then, however, Priscilla arrives to fix the hem of Nancy's dress. Godfrey, exhilarated by the opportunity to be near Nancy, decides to stay with them rather than go back to the dance.

Summary Chapter 12

While Godfrey is at the dance, his wife Molly is approaching Raveloe on foot with their baby daughter in her arms. Godfrey has told Molly that he would rather die than acknowledge her as his wife. She knows there is a dance being held at the Red House and plans to crash the party in order to get revenge against Godfrey. Molly is addicted to opium and knows that this, not Godfrey, is the primary reason for her troubles, but she also resents Godfrey's wealth and comfort and believes that he should support her.

Molly has been walking since morning, and, as evening falls, she begins to tire in the snow and cold. To comfort herself, she takes a draft of opium. The drug makes her drowsy, and after a while she passes out by the side of the road, still holding the child. As Molly's arms relax, the little girl wakes up and sees a light moving. Thinking it is a living thing, she tries to catch the light but fails. She follows it to its source, which is the fire in Silas Marner's

nearby cottage. The child toddles through the open door, sits down on the hearth, and soon falls asleep, content in the warmth of the fire.

In the weeks since the theft, Silas has developed a habit of opening his door and looking out distractedly, as if he might somehow see his gold return, or at least get some news of it. On New Year's Eve he is particularly agitated and opens the door repeatedly. The last time he does so, he stands and looks out for a long time, but does not see what is actually coming toward him at that instant: Molly's child. As he turns to shut the door again, Silas has one of his cataleptic fits, and stands unaware and unmoving with his hand on the open door. When he comes out of the fit—as always, unaware that it has even occurred—he shuts the door.

As Silas walks back inside, his eyes nearsighted and weak from his years of close work at the loom, he sees what he thinks is his gold on the floor. He leans forward to touch the gold, but finds that the object under his fingers is soft—the blonde hair of the sleeping child. Silas kneels down to examine the child, thinking for a moment that his little sister, who died in childhood, has been brought back to him. This memory of his sister triggers a flood of other memories of Lantern Yard, the first he has had in many years. These memories occupy Silas until the child wakes up, calling for her mother. Silas reheats some of his porridge, sweetening it with the brown sugar he has always denied himself, and feeds it to the child, which quiets her. Finally, seeing the child's wet boots, it occurs to Silas to wonder where she came from, and he follows her tracks along the road until he finds her mother's body lying in the snow.

Summary Chapter 13

Back at the Red House, the men dance and Godfrey stands to the side of the parlor to admire Nancy. Godfrey suddenly notices Silas Marner enter carrying Godfrey's child, and, shocked, he walks over with Mr. Lammeter and Mr. Crackenthorp to discover what has brought Silas here. The Squire angrily questions Silas, asking him why he has intruded. Silas says he is looking for the doctor because he has found a woman, apparently dead, lying near his door. Knowing that it is Molly, Godfrey is terrified that perhaps she is not in fact dead. Silas's appearance causes a stir, and the guests are told simply that a woman has been found ill. When Mrs. Kimble suggests that Silas leave the girl at the Red House, Silas refuses, claiming that she came to him and is his to keep.

Godfrey insists on accompanying the doctor, Mr. Kimble, to Silas's cottage, and they pick up Dolly along the way to serve as a nurse. Kimble's title is "Mr." rather than "Dr." because he has no medical degree and inherited his position as village doctor. Godfrey waits outside the cottage in agony, realizing that if Molly is dead he is free to marry Nancy, but that if Molly lives he has to confess everything. When Kimble comes out, he declares that the woman has been dead for hours. Godfrey insists on seeing her, claiming to Kimble that he had seen a woman of a similar description the day before. As he verifies that the woman is in fact Molly, Godfrey sees Silas holding the child and asks him if he intends to

take the child to the parish. Silas replies that he wants to keep her, since both he and she are alone, and without his gold he has nothing else to live for. He implies a connection between his lost money, “gone, I don’t know where,” and the baby, “come from I don’t know where.” Godfrey gives Silas money to buy clothes for the little girl, and then hurries to catch up with Mr. Kimble.

Godfrey tells Kimble that the dead woman is not the woman he saw before. The two talk about the oddness of Silas wanting to keep the child, and Kimble says that if he were younger he might want the child for himself. Godfrey’s thoughts turn to Nancy, and how he can now court her without dread of the consequences. He sees no reason to confess his previous marriage to her, and vows that he will see to it that his daughter is well cared for. Godfrey tells himself that the girl might be just as happy without knowing him as her father.

Summary Chapter 14

Molly is given an anonymous pauper’s burial, but her death, the narrator notes, will have great consequences for the inhabitants of Raveloe. The villagers are surprised by Silas’s desire to keep the child, and once again they become more sympathetic toward him. Dolly is particularly helpful, offering advice, giving him clothing outgrown by her own children, and helping to bathe and care for the girl. Silas is grateful but makes clear that he wishes to learn to do everything himself, so that the little girl will be attached to him from the start. Silas remains amazed by the girl’s arrival and continues to think that in some way his gold has turned into the child.

Dolly persuades Silas to have the child baptized, though at first Silas does not really know what the ceremony means. Dolly tells him to come up with a name for her and he suggests Hephzibah, the name of his mother and sister. Dolly is skeptical, saying that it doesn’t sound like a “christened name” and is a little long. Silas surprises her by responding that it is in fact a name from the Bible. He adds that his little sister was called Eppie for short.

Eppie and Silas are baptized together, and Silas finds that the child brings him closer to the other villagers. Unlike his gold, which exacerbated his isolation and did not respond to his attentions, young Eppie is endlessly curious and demanding. Her desires are infectious, and as she hungrily explores the world around her, so does Silas. Whereas his gold had driven him to stay indoors and work endlessly, Eppie tempts Silas away from his work to play outside. In the spring and summer, when it is sunny, Silas takes Eppie to the fields of flowers beyond the stone-pit and sits and watches her play. Silas’s growth mirrors Eppie’s, and he begins to explore memories and thoughts he has kept locked away for many years.

By the time Eppie is three, she shows signs of mischievousness, and Dolly insists that Silas not spoil her: he should punish her either by spanking her or by putting her in the coal-hole to frighten her. Shortly after this conversation, Eppie escapes from the cottage and goes missing for a while, though she is soon found. Despite his relief at finding her, Silas

decides that he must be stern with Eppie. His use of the coal-hole is ineffective, however, as Eppie takes a liking to the place.

Thus, Eppie is reared without punishment. Silas is even reluctant to leave her with anyone else and so takes her with him on his rounds to gather yarn. Eppie becomes an object of fascination and affection, and, as a result, so does Silas. Instead of looking at him with repulsion, the townspeople now offer advice and encouragement. Even children who had formerly found Silas frightening take a liking to him. Silas, in turn, takes an active interest in the town, wanting to give Eppie all that is good in the village. Moreover, Silas no longer hoards his money. Since his gold was stolen, he has lost the sense of pleasure he once felt at counting and touching his savings. Now, with Eppie, he realizes he has found something greater.

Summary Chapter 15

Godfrey keeps a distant eye on Eppie. He gives her the occasional present but is careful not to betray too strong an interest. He does not feel particularly guilty about failing to claim her because he is confident that she is being taken care of well. Dunsey still has not returned, and Godfrey, released from his marriage and doubtful that he will ever hear from his brother again, can devote himself to freely wooing Nancy. He begins to spend more time at Nancy's home, and people say that he has changed for the better. Godfrey promises himself that his daughter will always be well cared for, even though she is in the hands of the poor weaver.

Summary Chapter 16

The action resumes sixteen years later, as the Raveloe congregation files out of church after a Sunday service. Godfrey has married Nancy, and though they have aged well, they no longer look young. Squire Cass has died, but his inheritance was divided after his death, and Godfrey did not inherit the title of Squire. Silas Marner is also in the departing congregation. His eyes have a more focused look than they did before, but otherwise he looks quite old for a man of fifty-five. Eppie, eighteen and quite pretty, walks beside Silas, while Aaron Winthrop follows them eagerly. Eppie tells Silas that she wants a garden, and Aaron offers to dig it for them. They decide that Aaron should come to their cottage to mark it out that afternoon, and that he should bring his mother, Dolly.

Silas and Eppie return to the cottage, which has changed greatly since we last saw it. There are now pets: a dog, a cat, and a kitten. The cottage now has another room and is decorated with oak furniture, courtesy of Godfrey. We learn that the townspeople always note Godfrey's kindness toward Silas and Eppie with approval and that they now regard Silas as an "exceptional person." Mr. Macey even claims that Silas's good deed of adopting Eppie will bring back the stolen gold someday. Having returned home, Silas and Eppie eat dinner. Silas watches Eppie play with the pets as she eats.

After dinner, Silas and Eppie go outside so that Silas can smoke his pipe. The pipe is a habit that Silas's neighbors have suggested as a possible remedy for his cataleptic fits. Though Silas finds tobacco disagreeable, he continues with the practice, going along with his neighbors' advice. Silas's adoption of Raveloe customs such as smoking, the narrator tells us, is matched by a growing acknowledgement of his own past. Silas has gradually been telling Dolly Winthrop the story of his previous life in Lantern Yard. Dolly is intrigued and puzzled by the customs he describes. They both try to make sense of the practice of drawing lots to mete out justice, and attempt to understand how Silas could have been falsely convicted by this method.

We learn that Silas has also discussed his past with Eppie. He has informed her that he is not her father and has told her how she came to him at her mother's death. She is not unduly troubled by the story and does not wonder about her father, as she considers Silas a better father than any other in Raveloe. She is, however, eager to know things about her mother, and repeatedly asks Silas to describe what little he knows of her. Silas has given Eppie her mother's wedding ring, which she often gets out to look at.

As the two come out of the cottage for Silas's smoke, Silas mentions that the garden will need a wall to keep the animals out. Eppie suggests building a wall out of stones, so she goes to the stone-pit, where she notices that the water level has dropped. Silas tells her that the pit is being drained in order to water neighboring fields. Eppie tries to carry a stone, but it is heavy and she lets it drop. Sitting down with Silas, Eppie tells him that Aaron Winthrop has spoken of marrying her. Silas conceals his sadness at this news. Eppie adds that Aaron has offered Silas a place to live in their household if they are married. Eppie says she is reluctant, as she does not want her life to change at all, but Silas tells her that she will eventually need someone younger than he to take care of her. Silas suggests that they speak to Dolly, who is Eppie's godmother, about the matter.

Summary Chapter 17

Meanwhile, the Red House has likewise gained a much more domestic feel than it had during the Squire's "wifeless reign." Nancy invites Priscilla and their father to stay at the Red House for tea, but Priscilla declines, saying she has work to do at home. Priscilla has taken over management of the Lammeter farm from her aging father. Before Priscilla leaves, she and Nancy take a walk around the garden. Nancy mentions that Godfrey is not contented with their domestic life. This angers Priscilla, but Nancy rushes to defend Godfrey, saying it is only natural that he should be disappointed at not having any children.

Godfrey goes on his customary Sunday afternoon walk around his grounds and leaves Nancy with her thoughts. Nancy muses, as she often does, on their lack of children and the disappointment it has caused Godfrey. They did have one daughter, but she died at birth. Nancy wonders whether she was right to resist Godfrey's suggestion that they adopt. She has been adamant in her resistance, insisting that it is not right to seek something that Providence had withheld and predicting that an adopted child would inevitably turn out

poorly. Like her insistence years before that she and Priscilla wear the same dress, Nancy's unyielding opposition to adoption is not based on any particular reasoning, but simply because she feels it important to have "her unalterable little code." Godfrey's argument—that the adopted Eppie has turned out well—is of no use. Never considering that Silas might object, Godfrey has all along specified that if he and Nancy were to adopt, they should adopt Eppie. Considering his childless home a retribution for failing to claim Eppie, Godfrey sees adopting her as a way to make up for his earlier fault.

Summary Chapter 18

Godfrey returns from his walk, trembling, and tells Nancy to sit down. He tells her that the skeleton of his brother Dunsey has been found in the newly drained stone-pit behind Silas's cottage. The body has been there for sixteen years, and it is clear that it was Dunsey who robbed Silas. Dunsey fell into the pit as he made his escape, and the money has been found with his remains. Godfrey is greatly shaken by the discovery, and it convinces him that all hidden things eventually come to light. Thus, Godfrey goes on to make his own confession, telling Nancy of his secret marriage to Molly and of Eppie's true lineage. Nancy responds not angrily but instead with regret, saying that had she known the truth about Eppie, she would have consented to adopt her six years before. Nancy and Godfrey resolve to do their duty now and make plans to visit Silas Marner's cottage that evening.

Summary Chapter 19

Eppie and Silas sit in their cottage later that evening. Silas has sent Dolly and Aaron Winthrop away, desiring solitude with his daughter after the excitement of the afternoon's discovery. Silas muses about the return of his money and reconsiders the events that have passed since he lost it. He tells Eppie how he initially hoped she might somehow turn back into the gold, but later grew fearful of that that prospect because he loved her more than the money. Silas tells Eppie how much he loves her, and says the money has simply been "kept till it was wanted for you." She responds that if not for Silas, she would have been sent to the workhouse.

Someone knocks at the door, and Eppie opens it to find Godfrey and Nancy Cass. Godfrey tells Silas that he wants to make up to Silas not only for what Dunsey did, but also for another debt he owes to the weaver. Godfrey tells Silas that the money is not enough for him to live on without continuing to work. Silas, however, argues that though it might seem like a very small sum to a gentleman, it is more money than many other working people have. Godfrey says that Eppie does not look like she was born for a working life and that she would do better living in a place like his home. Silas becomes uneasy.

Godfrey explains that since they have no children, they would like Eppie to come live with them as their daughter. He assumes that Silas would like to see Eppie in such an advantageous position, and promises that Silas will be provided for himself. Eppie sees that Silas is distressed, though Silas tells her to do as she chooses. Eppie tells Godfrey and Nancy that she does not want to leave her father, nor does she want to become a lady.

Godfrey insists that he has a claim on Eppie and confesses that he is her father. Silas angrily retorts that, if this is the case, Godfrey should have claimed Eppie when she was a baby instead of waiting until Silas and Eppie had grown to love each other. Not expecting this resistance, Godfrey tells Silas that he is standing in the way of Eppie's welfare. Silas says that he will not argue anymore and leaves the decision up to Eppie. As she listens, Nancy cannot help but sympathize with Silas and Eppie, but feels that it is only right that Eppie claim her birthright. Nancy feels that Eppie's new life would be an unquestionably better one. Eppie, however, says that she would rather stay with Silas. Nancy tells her that it is her duty to go to her real father's house, but Eppie responds that Silas is her real father. Godfrey, greatly discouraged, turns to leave, and Nancy says they will return another day.

Summary Chapter 20

Godfrey and Nancy return home and realize that Eppie's decision is final. Godfrey concedes that what Silas has said is right, and he resigns himself simply to helping Eppie from afar. Godfrey and Nancy surmise that Eppie will marry Aaron, and Godfrey wistfully comments on how pretty and nice Eppie seemed. He says he noticed that Eppie took a dislike to him when he confessed that he was her father, and he decides that it must be his punishment in life to be disliked by his daughter. Godfrey tells Nancy that he is grateful, despite everything, to have been able to marry her, and vows to be satisfied with their marriage.

Summary Chapter 21

The next morning Silas tells Eppie that he wants to make a trip to his old home, Lantern Yard, to clear up his lingering questions about the theft and the drawing of the lots. After a few days' journey, they find the old manufacturing town much changed and walk through it looking for the old chapel. The town is frightening and alien to them, with high buildings and narrow, dirty alleys. They finally reach the spot where the chapel used to be, and it is gone, having been replaced by a large factory. No one in the area knows what happened to the former residents of Lantern Yard. Silas realizes that Raveloe is his only home now, and upon his return tells Dolly that he will never know the answers to his questions. Dolly responds that it does not matter if his questions remain unanswered because that does not change the fact that he was in the right all along. Silas agrees, saying that he does not mind because he has Eppie now, and that gives him faith.

The Individual Versus the Community

Silas Marner is in one sense the story of the title character, but it is also very much about the community of Raveloe in which he lives. Much of the novel's dramatic force is generated by the tension between Silas and the society of Raveloe. Silas, who goes from being a member of a tight-knit community to utterly alone and then back again, is a perfect vehicle for Eliot to explore the relationship between the individual and the surrounding community.

In the early nineteenth century, a person's village or town was all-important, providing the sole source of material and emotional support. The notion of interconnectedness and support within a village runs through the novel, in such examples as the parish's charitable allowance for the crippled, the donation of leftovers from the Squire's feasts to the village's poor, and the villagers who drop by Silas's cottage after he is robbed.

The community also provides its members with a structured sense of identity. We see this sense of identity play out in Raveloe's public gatherings. At both the Rainbow and the Squire's dance, interaction is ritualized through a shared understanding of each person's social class and place in the community. As an outsider, living apart from this social structure, Silas initially lacks any sense of this identity. Not able to understand Silas in the context of their community, the villagers see him as strange, regarding him with a mixture of fear and curiosity. Silas is compared to an apparition both when he shows up at the Rainbow and the Red House. To be outside the community is to be something unnatural, even otherworldly.

Though it takes fifteen years, the influence of the community of Raveloe does eventually seep into Silas's life. It does so via Godfrey's problems, which find their way into Silas's cottage first in the form of Dunsey, then again in Eppie. Eliot suggests that the interconnectedness of community is not something one necessarily enters into voluntarily, nor something one can even avoid. In terms of social standing, Silas and Godfrey are quite far from each other: whereas Silas is a distrusted outsider, Godfrey is the village's golden boy, the heir of its most prominent family. By braiding together the fates of these two characters and showing how the rest of the village becomes implicated as well, Eliot portrays the bonds of community at their most inescapable and pervasive.

Character as Destiny

The plot of *Silas Marner* seems mechanistic at times, as Eliot takes care to give each character his or her just deserts. Dunsey dies, the Squire's lands are divided Godfrey wins Nancy but ends up childless, and Silas lives happily ever after with Eppie as the most admired man in Raveloe. The tidiness of the novel's resolution may or may not be entirely believable, but it is a central part of Eliot's goal to present the universe as morally ordered. Fate, in the sense of a higher power rewarding and punishing each character's actions, is a central theme of the novel. For Eliot, who we are determines not only what we do, but also what is done to us.

Nearly any character in the novel could serve as an example of this moral order, but perhaps the best illustration is Godfrey. Godfrey usually means well, but is unwilling to make sacrifices for what he knows to be right. At one point Godfrey finds himself actually hoping that Molly will die, as his constant hemming and hawing have backed him into so tight a corner that his thoughts have become truly horrible and cruel. However, throughout the novel Eliot maintains that Godfrey is not a bad person—he has simply been

compromised by his inaction. Fittingly, Godfrey ends up with a similarly compromised destiny: in his marriage to Nancy he gets what he wants, only to eventually reach the dissatisfied conclusion that it is not what he wanted after all. Godfrey ends up in this ironic situation not simply because he is deserving, but because compromised thoughts and actions cannot, in the moral universe of Eliot's novel, have anything but compromised results.

The Interdependence of Faith and Community

In one sense *Silas Marner*can be seen simply as the story of Silas's loss and regaining of his faith. But one could just as easily describe the novel as the story of Silas's rejection and subsequent embrace of his community. In the novel, these notions of faith and community are closely linked. They are both human necessities, and they both feed off of each other. The community of Lantern Yard is united by religious faith, and Raveloe is likewise introduced as a place in which people share the same set of superstitious beliefs. In the typical English village, the church functioned as the predominant social organization. Thus, when Silas loses his faith, he is isolated from any sort of larger community.

The connection between faith and community lies in Eliot's close association of faith in a higher authority with faith in one's fellow man. Silas's regained faith differs from his former Lantern Yard faith in significant ways. His former faith was based first and foremost on the idea of God. When he is unjustly charged with murder, he does nothing to defend himself, trusting in a just God to clear his name. The faith Silas regains through Eppie is different in that it is not even explicitly Christian. Silas does not mention God in the same way he did in Lantern Yard, but bases his faith on the strength of his and Eppie's commitment to each other. In his words, "since... I've come to love her . . . 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."

Silas's new faith is a religion that one might imagine Eliot herself espousing after her own break with formalized Christianity. It is a more personal faith than that of Lantern Yard, in which people zealously and superstitiously ascribe supernatural causes to events with straightforward causes, such as Silas's fits. In a sense, Silas's new belief is the opposite of his earlier, simplistic world view in that it preserves the place of mystery and ambiguity. Rather than functioning merely as a supernatural scapegoat, Silas's faith comforts him in the face of the things that do not make sense to him. Additionally, as Dolly points out, Silas's is a faith based on helping others and trusting others to do the same. Both Dolly's and especially Silas's faith consists of a belief in the goodness of other people as much as an idea of the divine. Such a faith is thus inextricably linked to the bonds of community.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

The Natural World

Throughout the novel, Eliot draws on the natural world for many images and metaphors. Silas in particular is often compared to plants or animals, and these images are used to trace his progression from isolated loner to well-loved father figure. As he sits alone weaving near the start of the novel, Silas is likened to a spider, solitary and slightly ominous. Just after he is robbed, Silas is compared to an ant that finds its usual path blocked—an image of limitation and confusion, but also of searching for a solution. Later, as Silas begins to reach out to the rest of the village, his soul is likened to a plant, not yet budding but with its sap beginning to circulate. Finally, as he raises Eppie, Silas is described as "unfolding" and "trembling into full consciousness," imagery evoking both the metamorphosis of an insect and the blooming of a flower. This nature imagery also emphasizes the preindustrial setting of the novel, reminding us of a time in England when the natural world was a bigger part of daily life than it was after the Industrial Revolution.

Domesticity

For the most part, the events of *Silas Marner* take place in two homes, Silas's cottage and the Cass household. The novel's two key events are intrusions into Silas's domestic space, first by Dunsey and then by Eppie. Eliot uses the home as a marker of the state of its owner. When Silas is isolated and without faith, his cottage is bleak and closed off from the outside world. As Silas opens himself up to the community, we see that his door is more frequently open and he has a steady stream of visitors. Finally, as Silas and Eppie become a family, the cottage is brightened and filled with new life, both figuratively and in the form of literal improvements and refurbishments to the house and yard. Likewise, the Cass household moves from slovenly and "wifeless" under the Squire to clean and inviting under Nancy.

Class

Raveloe, like most of nineteenth-century English society, is organized along strict lines of social class. This social hierarchy is encoded in many ways: the forms characters use to address one another, their habits, even where they sit at social events. While the Casses are not nobility, as landowners they sit atop Raveloe's social pecking order, while Silas, an outsider, is at its base. Nonetheless, Silas proves himself to be the better man than his social superiors. Similarly, in Eppie's view, the simple life of the working class is preferable to that of the landed class. Eliot is skilled in showing how class influences the thinking of her characters, from Dunsey's idea of Silas as simply a source of easy money to Godfrey and Nancy's idea that, as higher-class landowners, their claim to Eppie is stronger than Silas's.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Silas's Loom

Silas's loom embodies many of the novel's major themes. On a literal level, the loom is Silas's livelihood and source of income. The extent to which Silas's obsession with money deforms his character is physically embodied by the bent frame and limited eyesight he develops due to so many hours at the loom. The loom also foreshadows the coming of industrialization—the loom is a machine in a time and place when most labor was nonmechanical, related to farming and animal husbandry. Additionally, the loom, constantly in motion but never going anywhere, embodies the unceasing but unchanging nature of Silas's work and life. Finally, the process of weaving functions as a metaphor for the creation of a community, with its many interwoven threads, and presages the way in which Silas will bring together the village of Raveloe.

Lantern Yard

The place where Silas was raised in a tight-knit religious sect, Lantern Yard is a community of faith, held together by a narrow religious belief that Eliot suggests is based more on superstition than any sort of rational thought. Lantern Yard is the only community Silas knows, and after he is excommunicated, he is unable to find any similar community in Raveloe. Throughout the novel Lantern Yard functions as a symbol of Silas's past, and his gradual coming to grips with what happened there signals his spiritual thaw. When Silas finally goes back to visit Lantern Yard, he finds that the entire neighborhood has disappeared, and no one remembers anything of it. A large factory stands in the spot where the chapel once stood. This disappearance demonstrates the disruptive power of industrialization, which destroys tradition and erases memory. Likewise, this break with the past signals that Silas has finally been able to move beyond his own embittering history, and that his earlier loss of faith has been replaced with newfound purpose.

The Hearth

The hearth represents the physical center of the household and symbolizes all of the comforts of home and family. When Godfrey dreams of a life with Nancy, he sees himself "with all his happiness centred on his own hearth, while Nancy would smile on him as he played with the children." Even in a public place such as the Rainbow, one's importance is measured by how close one sits to the fire. Initially, Silas shares his hearth with no one, at least not intentionally. However, the two intruders who forever change Silas's life, first Dunsey and then Eppie, are drawn out of inclement weather by the inviting light of Silas's fire. Silas's cottage can never be entirely separate from the outside world, and the light of Silas's fire attracts both misfortune and redemption. In the end, it is Silas's hearth that feels the warmth of family, while Godfrey's is childless.