Silas Marner Study Guide

Silas Marner by George Eliot

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Author Biography

George Eliot, neé Mary Ann Evans, was born on November 22, 1819, in Chilvers Coton, in Warwickshire, England, the daughter of estate manager Robert Evans and his wife Christiana Pearson. Evans was educated at home and at various schools, including Mrs. Wallington's school in Nuneaton, where she became an Evangelical Christian. When her mother died in 1836, Evans became her father's housekeeper, while continuing her education through private tutors. She learned Italian, German, and Latin, and within a few years also studied Greek and Hebrew.

In 1841, Evans and her father moved to the outskirts of Coventry. There she met the philanthropist Charles Bray and his wife, Caroline Hennell, as well as Hennell's family, who introduced her to new political and religious ideas and under whose influence she rejected Christianity.

Evans translated and published David Friedrich Strauss's *The Life of Jesus* in 1846, and within three years she had also translated the work of the philosophers Spinoza and Feuerbach. After her father died in 1849, she moved to London and became assistant editor of the influential journal, *Westminster Review*. In the London literary circles in which she now moved, she met the man of letters, essayist and playwright, George Henry Lewes, and in 1853 she traveled to Germany with him. Lewes was estranged from his wife but was unable to obtain a divorce, and he and Evans lived together until Lewes's death in 1878. Their relationship shocked Victorian society; even Evans's brother Isaac refused to communicate with her in any way until after Lewes's death.

While Evans experienced social isolation because of her relationship with Lewes, she excelled as a novelist. In 1857, she published her first work of fiction, "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton," in *Blackwood's Magazine*, under the pseudonym George Eliot, the name she used for all her subsequent works. The following year, "Amos Burton" was republished as one of Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life*, in two volumes.

Evans's first novel, *Adam Bede*, appeared in 1859 and achieved huge critical and popular success. Evans continued to maintain her anonymity, going to some lengths to disguise the fact that she was George Eliot. Over the next dozen years, Evans produced a series of novels that placed her in the front rank of English novelists. In 1860, after traveling with Lewes to Italy, she published *The Mill on the Floss*. *Silas Marner* followed in 1861, and *Romola*, a historical romance, was published in serial form in the *Cornhill* magazine in 1862 and 1863. It appeared in three volumes in 1863. *Felix Holt: The Radical* appeared in 1866, after which Evans and Lewes traveled extensively in Europe, visiting Holland, Belgium, Germany, and Spain. These European travels were a regular feature of Evans's life for the next decade.

Evans began writing her greatest novel, *Middlemarch*, in 1869. It was published in serial form from 1871 to 1872, and then in three volumes. Evans's last novel was *Daniel Deronda* (1876).

In 1880, two years after Lewes's death, Evans married John Walter Cross, who was twenty years her junior. She died that year, on December 22.

Plot Summary

Part 1

Silas Marner begins in the early years of the nineteenth century, near the English village of Raveloe, where Silas Marner practices his trade as a weaver. He is a solitary man who is regarded as strange by the other villagers because he does not socialize with them. Marner first arrived in the village fifteen years earlier, from a large town in northern England. In his hometown he had lived a pious life and was a member of a Dissenting chapel (that is, a Protestant sect not affiliated to the Church of England) that met at Lantern Yard. But when Marner was falsely accused of theft by another member of the church, his friend William Dane, he was forced to leave the town and make his life elsewhere. With his religious faith shattered, Marner turned inward and made himself hard. Now, fifteen years later, the only thing he loves is his money, which he hoards.

The chief family in Raveloe is that of Squire Cass. Cass has three sons, two of whom are important for the story. Dunsey, the youngest son is a dishonest ne'er-do-well, while Godfrey, the eldest, is good-natured but weak. Godfrey made the mistake of marrying secretly to Molly, a girl from a lower class. She became an opium addict and now threatens to betray his secret to his father. She also has a young child by Godfrey. Godfrey is terrified that his father will discover his secret and cut him off from his inheritance. He is also frustrated because he wants to marry Nancy Lammeter, a pretty girl from the village, but cannot do so as long as he is married to Molly. Dunsey knows his secret and blackmails him. Godfrey agrees to let Dunsey sell Godfrey's horse, Wildfire, to raise money, but Dunsey rides the horse foolishly, and it is killed in an accident. Dunsey walks home, and finding himself near Marner's cottage, he robs Marner, who has slipped out of his house on an errand, of all his gold. When Marner discovers the theft, he is distraught. Dunsey disappears, but no one connects his disappearance to the robbery. In the meantime, Marner's misfortune makes the villagers think more kindly of him.

On New Year's Eve, a dance is held at Red House, the home of Squire Cass. Molly decides to walk there to reveal the truth about Godfrey, but drugged on opium, she collapses near Marner's cottage. Her two-year-old daughter wanders into the cottage, where Marner discovers her asleep. Then Marner finds Molly and rushes to Red House for assistance, taking the child with him. When Molly is later declared dead, Marner insists on keeping the child, while Godfrey is relieved that the death of Molly leaves him free to marry Nancy Lammeter. He also goes out of his way to show kindness to Marner and the child, who is his daughter.

Marner christens the child Eppie and raises her as his own. The presence of the child revives his spirits, and he becomes once more open to life. The villagers lose their suspicions of him and welcome him whenever he comes into the village. His long years of isolation are over.

Part 2

Sixteen years have passed since Marner first took in Eppie. Godfrey has married Nancy, and they are childless. They lost a child in infancy, and Nancy has resisted her husband's desire to adopt Eppie. Dunsey has never returned. Eppie has grown into a pretty young woman who is very fond of Marner, whom she regards as her father, even though he has explained to her the circumstances in which she arrived at his house. Eppie has a young male admirer named Aaron, and they are contemplating marriage. Marner, now a respected member of village society, says he will do nothing to prevent her marrying.

One day, the stone-pit near Marner's cottage goes dry, and the remains of Dunsey are found. Godfrey informs Nancy that it was Dunsey who robbed Marner, since the money was found in the pit. Godfrey also confesses that the woman Marner found dead in the snow was his wife and that Eppie is his child. He and Nancy agree that they will try to adopt her. But when they inform Marner and Eppie of their intentions, Eppie says she would prefer to stay with Marner. Even Godfrey's announcement that he is Eppie's real father does not change Eppie's mind, even though Marner says she is free to go if she wishes.

After his money is returned, Marner takes Eppie north to visit the town were he grew up. He wants to find out if he has ever been cleared of the crime he was falsely accused of, thirty years ago. But the chapel has been pulled down and a factory built in its place.

The novel ends happily with Eppie's marriage to Aaron. The young couple plans to live with Marner.

Characters

Dunstan Cass

Dunstan Cass is Godfrey's younger brother. He is a disreputable, dishonest, spiteful young man who uses his knowledge of Godfrey's secret marriage to blackmail him. Godfrey agrees to let Dunsey sell Godfrey's horse, Wildfire, to raise money, but Dunsey rides the horse foolishly and is responsible for the horse's death. As he walks home, Dunsey robs Marner of his gold and then disappears. No one is concerned by his absence, since he has left home for long periods before. His remains are discovered sixteen years later in a stone-pit that has gone dry. It is concluded that he drowned.

Godfrey Cass

Godfrey Cass is the eldest son of Squire Cass and heir to the estate. He is a good-natured man, but he lacks strength of character and does not like to face up to difficult situations. In a fit of drunkenness he made the mistake of marrying beneath his station, and he has kept his wife and child a secret. He lives in fear that his ill-willed younger brother Dunsey will tell their father about his secret, which would probably result in his being turned out of the family home and cut off from his inheritance. He is also bitterly frustrated by the fact that because he is already married, he cannot marry the girl of his choice, Nancy Lammeter. When his wife dies and Dunsey disappears, Godfrey's worries appear to be over, and he duly marries Nancy. But he is tormented by the fact that his unacknowledged daughter Eppie is being raised by Marner. He shows as much care and concern for her as he can without arousing suspicion, and he tries to persuade Nancy that they should adopt Eppie. But Nancy refuses. After Dunsey's remains are found, Godfrey tells Nancy everything about his past. They try to adopt Eppie, but she refuses to be parted from the man she regards as her father. Godfrey is forced to accept that he can never publicly acknowledge Eppie as his daughter, a blow for which his happy marriage is only partial consolation.

Molly Cass

Molly Cass is Godfrey Cass's first wife, whom he married secretly. She comes from a lower social class than her husband, and she is addicted to opium. She decides to walk to the Red House on New Year's Eve to betray Godfrey's secret, but she collapses and dies near Marner's cottage.

Squire Cass

Squire Cass, the father of Dunsey and Godfrey, is the most prominent landowner in Raveloe. A widower of sixty, he is a bluff, robust, quick-tempered man who never questions the superiority of his own family within the parish. He is a difficult man to deal

with. He is indulgent with his tenants for a while and lets them get into arrears, but then when he gets short of money, he comes down on them hard for rent. Once he has made up his mind about something, he does not alter it.

William Dane

William Dane is a treacherous friend of Silas. When they are both young men, they are devout members of a religious sect that meets at Lantern Yard in a town in northern England. But Dane steals money from the church and deliberately arranges for Marner to take the blame. He then marries the girl to whom Marner had been engaged.

Dunsey

See Dunstan Cass

Eppie

Eppie is the daughter of Godfrey and Molly Cass. Since Godfrey will not acknowledge his marriage, it is left to Molly to raise the child. But she is unfit to do so, and when she dies of an overdose of opium, the child is adopted by Marner. He christens her Eppie. Eppie grows up in a loving home and regards Marner as her father. She is pretty, with golden curly hair. She is content with her position in life and has no interest in being adopted by Godfrey and Nancy, even when she is informed that Godfrey is her real father. She remains utterly loyal and devoted to Marner and is happy to be associated with the poor, working people of the village. When she is eighteen, Eppie marries Aaron, and they live together in Marner's cottage.

Mr. Kimble

Mr. Kimble is the village farrier (veterinarian), and he also serves as the town doctor. Because of his status he has a rather high opinion of himself. It is Kimble who takes charge of the situation in the Rainbow tavern after Marner tells the people he has been robbed.

Nancy Lammeter

Nancy Lammeter is the attractive young woman courted by Godfrey Cass. Nancy is well mannered, sincere, and always neat; at the New Year's Eve dance she is perfectly attired, with not a hair out of place. Although Nancy is a woman of good character, she also lives by some rigid, simple ideas, which she refuses to alter. She insists that her sister Priscilla dress in exactly the same way as she does, even though this does not set Priscilla off to best advantage. Nancy also refuses to adopt Eppie, even though Godfrey her husband greatly desires it, because she believes that Providence has

decreed she remain childless. In Nancy's inflexible mind, adopting a child would be wrong, and the child would not turn out well. In spite of this fault, however, Nancy is a good, tender wife to Godfrey, and after he finally confesses his past indiscretions she agrees to try to adopt Eppie.

Priscilla Lammeter

Priscilla Lammeter is Nancy Lammeter's sister. Five years older than Nancy, she is not as pretty as her sister and describes herself as ugly. But she does not seem to mind this disadvantage. She is a cheerful woman, full of common sense, and she has no wish to marry.

Mr. Macey

Mr. Macey is the old tailor and parish clerk of Raveloe. He often tells stories about village history in the Rainbow, and the men listen to him with respect.

Silas Marner

Silas Marner is a weaver. As a young man living in a town in northern England, he is a member of a fundamentalist Christian sect that meets at a place called Lantern Yard. He is highly thought of by the other members of the sect, and the fact that during prayer meetings he sometimes goes into trances that last as long as an hour is seen as a sign of some special spiritual gift. But Marner is driven away from the town after his treacherous friend, William Dane, ensures that Marner is falsely convicted of theft. Marner settles in Raveloe, but his faith is shattered, and he isolates himself from the community. The villagers regard him with suspicion, which is not helped by the fact that Marner has knowledge of the healing properties of herbs. The superstitious villagers think this kind of knowledge may have something to do with the devil. Marner does not attend church and knows nothing of the village's church calendar because it is very different from the sect of Christianity practiced in Lantern Yard. The only thing he loves is his money. He earns a good income as a weaver, working alone in his cottage, and he hoards his gold, counting it lovingly. When the gold is stolen he is shattered. He seeks help from the villagers, and they begin to think more kindly of him. Marner's life changes completely when a child whose mother lies dead in the snow near his home finds her way to his cottage. He insists on raising her himself. The child, christened Eppie, brings out Marner's latent kindness and gentleness. Through Eppie he realizes that love is more valuable than money. He is then able to connect with the life of the community, and he becomes a respected and honored citizen of Raveloe.

Mr. Tookey

Mr. Tookey is the deputy parish clerk and is unpopular with the other men.

Aaron Winthrop

Aaron Winthrop is the son of Dolly Winthrop. He is a steady, good-hearted young man, and he marries Eppie while promising also to take care of Marner.

Dolly Winthrop

Dolly Winthrop is the mother of Aaron and the wife of Ben, the village wheelwright. She is a mild, patient, hard-working woman who is always ready to look after the sick and the dying. She is one of the first of the villagers to take pity on Marner after his gold has been stolen, visiting him with her young son and bringing lard-cakes. Dolly supports Marner's decision to adopt Eppie, and she is full of valuable advice and practical help about how to raise the child.

Themes

Moral Order

Although there are tragedies in *Silas Marner* (the death of Molly Cass, for example), the narrative emphasizes the moral order of the universe. The principal characters get their just desserts. Silas Marner is rewarded for the love he shows Eppie; Dunsey never lives to profit from his robbery; and Godfrey Cass, because of his deceitfulness and moral cowardice, can never publicly acknowledge that Eppie is his daughter. This moral order is at work through seemingly chance events. It seems to be chance, for example, that Marner happens to be away from his cottage on a short errand and has left his door unlocked (which he would never normally do) at the exact moment that Dunsey is walking by, thus giving Dunsey a chance to rob him. It also seems to be a chance event when Molly Cass collapses near Marner's cottage and Eppie wanders inside. The door to the cottage is once again open and Marner is in one of his strange trances, so he does not notice the girl until she is asleep on his hearth.

But there is more at work than chance. Almost as soon as he sees the child, Marner senses that some supernatural order is operating in his life, and he later thinks that the child must have been deliberately sent to him. Dolly Winthrop agrees with him, although neither offers any explanation as to who or what this benevolent power might be. Later, after Marner has explained his past life to Dolly, she struggles to articulate her intuitive feeling that there is a higher power that arranges everything for the best: "For if us as knows so little can see a bit o' good and rights, we may be sure as there's a good and a rights bigger nor what we can know."

The Need for Human Community

The novel presents pictures of two poles of human existence, isolation and community. For fifteen years Marner retreats into a solitude that denies life. He is redeemed only when events conspire to make him rejoin a human community.

In his years of isolation at Raveloe, cut off from the real springs of life, Marner makes the mistake of treating inert things as if they were alive. His delight in his gold is so great that it even gratifies his senses of touch and sight: "It was pleasant to feel them [the guineas] in his palm"; he enjoys looking at their "bright faces"; they offer him "companionship," and as he "bathed his hands" in them he "felt their rounded outline between his thumb and fingers." He even begins to think that the gold is conscious of him, as he believes his loom is. And Marner's life, with its ceaseless, monotonous, repetitive activity, has come to resemble the actions of the loom. His constant bending over his loom has also deformed him physically, making him curiously fitted to it, like a "handle or a crooked tube" that has no independent existence apart from what it is attached to. In his attachment to a machine, Marner has cut himself off from nature. He forgets all about his former interest in herbs and his skill in using them for healing.

When he walks through the lanes on a work-related trip, he thinks only of his money and his loom. The life of nature goes on around him unobserved. As a miser, he has given to inanimate things a spurious life and forgotten what real life is. His own life has become "a mere pulsation of desire and satisfaction that had no relation to any other being."

The loss of his money is a blessing in disguise for Marner because it breaks his attachment to things that have no life. It also reveals that the human spirit within him is not quite dead. He has a dim sense that if any help is to reach him, it must come from outside. This is why, when the villagers become more sympathetic to him, "there was a slight stirring of expectation at the sight of his fellow-men, a faint consciousness of dependence on their goodwill." This faint channel of hope is symbolized by the fact that at Christmas, Marner, even though he is still full of grief, does not make any attempt to close the shutters or lock the door of his cottage. Moreover, he develops a habit of opening his door and looking out from time to time. He does this not because he is consciously inviting companionship, but because he has some irrational hope that his money will somehow be returned. But it is this habit of leaving his door open that allows the child to come into his life. It is a sign that he has begun his journey back from isolation to community.

The arrival of Eppie has an immediate effect on Marner. When he first sees the child, he thinks it may be his little sister, come back in a dream. He remembers how he carried his sister around in his arms for a year until she died. By recalling a tender time of childhood that he had closed off from memory, Silas begins the process of reconnecting with his past. The process continues when he tells Dolly Winthrop all the details of his early life. Through this process his fractured psyche starts to become whole again. And with Eppie taking his thoughts away from their endless circularity into a more outward direction, Marner is at last ready to become integrated into the community life of Raveloe.

Just as Marner is a case study in isolation, Raveloe is presented as an example of community. There are two centers of community in Raveloe: the Squire's Red House, which is generous in giving out food to the poor and hosts the New Year's Eve dance, and the Rainbow inn, where the villagers gather round the hearth to tell their stories. The inhabitants of Raveloe may not be perfect, but they are fairly easy going and do not make a habit of applying moral censure to others. Although the village is strictly divided along class lines, there is no envy of the rich by the poor. It is a community in which everyone knows his or her place, and a spirit of cooperation and tolerance is the norm. This is shown especially vividly when the men in the Rainbow immediately do everything they can to help Marner, a man they all regard as rather strange, when he informs them that he has been robbed. The villagers all know that they are dependent on each other, and when Marner also realizes this, he is ready to play his part in a wider community, instead of foolishly trying to be self-sufficient.

Style

Imagery

In becoming a solitary miser, Silas Marner has become almost less than human, a point which is brought out by the imagery that is associated with him. He is described as like a spider, weaving its web; his life is reduced to the "unquestioning activity of a spinning insect." After he has lost his money, the image changes to that of an ant. His mind is baffled like a "plodding ant" that on its way home finds that the earth has been moved.

The imagery changes when Marner is on the way to redemption. When he sits with Eppie on a bank of flowers listening to the birds, he starts to look for herbs again, as he did when he was younger. As a leaf lies in his palm, memories of the past come flooding back to him. His mind is "growing into memory," and his soul is "unfolding too, and trembling gradually into full consciousness." Instead of being compared to an insect, Marner is now implicitly likened to an unfolding flower.

Fairy Tale and Realism

The narrative combines elements of the fairy tale with realistic settings and characters. Fairy tales often tell of a man or woman who is unjustly banished from a kingdom or is otherwise the victim of great misfortune. The person then goes through many trials and much suffering and feels that all is lost. Chance events, often involving the supernatural, intervene, evil is punished, good is rewarded, a perfect marriage is arranged, and the characters live happily ever after.

The story of Silas Marner has clear affinities with the fairy tale. Silas is unjustly expelled from his hometown and arrives in what is to him an alien environment. As a miser hoarding his gold, he is like a stock figure in folklore and fairy tale. When the miser sees the child and mistakes her golden curls for his stolen gold, the narrative is firmly in fairy tale mode. Marner's restoration to happiness and the happy ending with Eppie marrying Aaron are also strongly reminiscent of the fairy tale.

But other elements in the story are realistic. Unlike fairy tales, which are set in unnamed places in unknown times, Silas Marner takes place at a definite time and in a definite place. It is anchored in rural England at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Village life and customs are described in realistic mode, and realism is also seen in the dialect in the villagers' speech. The story of Godfrey Cass, as opposed to that of the miser, contains no fairy tale elements. Godfrey's marriages, his family relations, the secret he keeps that may ruin him are the stuff of realistic Victorian fiction.

Historical Context

Weavers in England

Historian E. P. Thompson, in his book *The Making of the English Working Class*, describes four different employment situations for weavers during the nineteenth century. The first was the "customer-weaver," like Silas Marner, an independent worker in a village or small town who fulfilled orders from individual customers. Although customer-weavers were diminishing in numbers, those who continued the practice made a good living. In *Silas Marner*, Mr. Macey guesses that the hard-working Marner may make a pound a week from his weaving, which would have been a fairly sizable income. (This would have been during the early years of the nineteenth century.) The second kind of weaver was self-employed, producing work for a number of different masters. The third type was the journeyman weaver, who often owned his own loom and worked in his own home for one master. This was probably the status of Silas Marner in his hometown in northern England, where he learned his trade. The last category of weaver was the farmer who worked part-time at the loom. From 1780 to 1830, according to Thompson, these groups tended to merge into one group, "the proletarian outworker, who worked in his own home, sometimes owned and sometimes rented his loom, and who wove up the yarn to the specifications of the factor or agent of a mill or of some middleman."

Thompson emphasizes the loss of status and security that accompanied these changes, although weaving could still be a profitable business for the weaver.

The business was changing, however. The power loom was invented in 1784 and patented the following year. It enabled the weaver to once more to keep pace with the spinner, who up to then had been able to produce more yarn than the weaver could use. The power loom was first used in Manchester in 1791. By 1813, there were 2,400 power looms in England. But weaving remained predominantly a domestic industry until 1820, when power looms came into general use.

Social Change

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, England was a largely settled and static society. Villages like the fictional Raveloe in *Silas Marner* were relatively self-sufficient, since the inhabitants were able to manufacture their own clothes and supply their own food. But social change accelerated during the course of the century. Agricultural laborers and manufacturers became willing to leave villages in search of work or of better paid work. This was not just a matter of a shift from the countryside to the nearest town, but of large-scale migrations. By the end of the century, workers were moving to Lancashire, where the cotton industry was flourishing, at the rate of fifteen thousand a year. The town of Bolton, for example, increased its population from 5,339 in 1773 to 11,739 in 1789. New canals enabled raw materials to be transported more quickly and

efficiently, and new roads facilitated the recruitment of a labor force. There was, however, a price to be paid for economic gain, and that was the creation of a new class of landless agricultural laborers, who had lost their independence.

By the beginning of the reign of King George IV in 1820, the huge growth in manufacturing towns that had little connection with the old rural communities had radically changed England. As social historian G. M. Trevelyan writes in *Illustrated English Social History*: "The harmonious fabric of old English society suffered a perpendicular cleavage between town and country, as well as expanding the old lateral cleavage between rich and poor."

Critical Overview

Although there have been occasional complaints that the first part of the book is too gloomy and the second part too sentimental, *Silas Marner* has always been highly regarded by literary critics. Initial reviews were all positive. In a review published in *The Times* in 1861, E. S. Dallas praised the novel for its truthful portrayal of village life. He pointed out that although the characters were not idealized they were given dignity by the author's treatment of them:

The personages of the tale are common, very common people, but they are good and kind, hardworking and dutiful. . . . their lives are ennobled and beautified by their sense of duty, and by their sympathy with each other.

Many modern critics regard *Silas Marner* as a flawless work, although because it is only novella-length it is not regarded as Eliot's greatest novel. Critics have shown that the novel is far more than a simple moral tale about a miser who discovers through adopting a young child that love is more rewarding than money. Elizabeth Deeds Ermath analyzes the novel as a "double story about isolation and community," and points out the complex similarities and differences between the stories of Marner and Godfrey Cass. Q. D. Leavis, in her introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel, discusses it in terms of the social changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. She points out that Marner, brought up in a manufacturing town, has become a slave to his loom□a piece of machinery□whereas Raveloe still clings to the traditional way of life, "the organic community and the unified society."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on nineteenth-century literature. In this essay, Aubrey discusses the contrast between the approach to religion of the sect at Lantern Yard and that of the villagers of Raveloe.

The story of Silas Marner's life has a mythic dimension to it. Silas undergoes a spiritual journey that is a variation on the great religious myth of Western culture. In the Christian myth, man is expelled from a garden, saved by the birth of the Christ-child, and promised a life in bliss in the heavenly city of Jerusalem described in the Book of Revelations. Silas travels a similar path from expulsion to redemption, but the symbolism is reversed. He is expelled from a city, saved by a child, and ends up in a garden (as seen in the final chapter when Eppie and Aaron grow a garden just outside his cottage). In the course of this journey, which occupies over thirty years of Silas's life, he travels from a stern, Bible-centered Calvinistic religion, in which the central concern is the "Assurance of salvation," to a more tolerant, nondogmatic version of Christianity in which the emphasis falls not on the idea of salvation but on tolerance and solidarity with others in a cooperative human community.

Marner's spirituality is first awakened at Lantern Yard, where as a young man in the 1780s he is a member of a Dissenting Protestant sect. In nineteenth century England, those who rejected the doctrines and authority of the Church of England were known as dissenters. They included such groups as the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Quakers, Unitarians, and other minor sects. The most notable feature of the dissenters was that they were more democratic than Anglicans. They had no bishops or priests and did not accept doctrines or policies handed down from above. Instead, they took responsibility for organizing, financing and running their own groups. Large towns like Birmingham and Manchester were dominated by dissenters, and many artisans, like Silas Marner, were members of dissenting sects. The sect to which Marner belonged has not been identified as of 2004, but from the clues given in the text, it was strongly Calvinistic in nature. Calvinist tradition was strong in parts of Yorkshire and Lancashire during this period. The tenets of Calvinism, as Q. D. Leavis points out in her notes to the Penguin edition of the novel, include the idea of a priesthood of all believers; marriage only within the sect (as Silas, who was engaged to a girl named Sarah, intended to do); and the necessity of personal salvation, accomplished through divine grace revealed through personal religious experience. Those who were assured of salvation became members of the Elect.

Silas, who by nature is humble and self-doubting, never manages to convince himself that he possesses that vital assurance, quite unlike his holier-than-thou, judgmental friend William Dane. From Dane's treachery to the subsequent unjust condemnation of Silas for theft, it appears that the members of this sect, that pride themselves on being among the Elect, do not possess much in the way of spiritual wisdom. And just in case events do not speak sufficiently for themselves, the narrator (whose voice is surely that of Eliot) adds this poignant description of the earnest discussions that take place between Silas and William Dane and others of their type: "Such colloquies have

occupied many a pair of pale-faced weavers, whose unnurtured souls have been like young winged things, fluttering forsaken in the twilight." This description gives the impression of youthful purity of heart and intention that is given no guidance at all by the religious sects to which the young people entrust their spiritual lives.

It is a long journey, in more ways than one, from Lantern Yard to Raveloe, from dissenting chapel to village church. Not surprisingly, Silas, his faith shattered, does not go out of his way to discover what kind of religion might be available to him in his new place of residence. Lantern Yard was all he knew. Had he been of a mind to investigate, he would have discovered that religion in Raveloe is a different matter altogether than the fierce and narrow faith he has been fed at Lantern Yard. The narrator is at pains to point out that Raveloe has not only seen nothing of the Industrial Revolution, it has not been affected by "puritan earnestness"—the kind that flourished in many of the dissenting chapels. People in Raveloe are not in the habit of applying a stern morality to their own lives, and they do not judge their neighbors in that way either.

In Raveloe, religion is a much more easy-going, casual affair than it is at Lantern Yard. No one is expected to be fanatical about regular church attendance, for example. In fact, the opposite seems to apply:

[T]here was hardly a person in the parish who would not have held that to go to church every Sunday in the calendar would have shown a greedy desire to stand well with Heaven, and get an undue advantage over their neighbors—a wish to be better than the "common run."

Whereas in Lantern Yard, religion has an element of competition in it—the urge to show that one is saved—in Raveloe, it is a more cooperative enterprise. It is valued primarily as a way of encouraging a sense of community. For example, Mr. Macey's purpose in telling Silas he should have a suit made so he can come to church on Sunday, is to enable Silas to "be a bit neighborly." It has nothing to do with salvation, which no one in Raveloe ever talks about. Indeed, Godfrey Cass, who perhaps has as much reason as anyone in the novel to fear God and ask Him for mercy and forgiveness, appears to be untroubled by any religious thought at all. He relies only on "chances which might be favourable to him."

"Favourable Chance," as Godfrey continually finds out, makes a poor god. Most people in Raveloe, if anyone were to ask them, would no doubt claim to believe in a better one, but few trouble themselves to inquire into His nature. Eliot gives no opportunity to the rector, Mr. Crackenthorp, to discourse on such a topic. A minor character, his sole contribution is to admonish Silas that his money has probably been taken from him because he thinks too much about it and also because he does not go to church. But Mr. Crackenthorp, like some of the other villagers, does bring Silas a gift of food, a gesture that shows his desire to include Silas in the community.

The real theologian of Raveloe is not the rector but the humble, inarticulate, unlearned Dolly Winthrop. Dolly understands almost nothing of Christian doctrine, but she has an intuitive faith that a higher force operates in human life that knows better than she does

what is right for her and for everyone else. She goes to church because doing so makes her feel better. She trusts in "Them," as she puts it□the plural pronoun satisfying her need not to seem overly familiar with the divine persons. Dolly's faith is based on bits and pieces she has picked up from sermons and other aspects of the church services, as well as from her own experience. It serves her well enough. Like Mr. Macey, she has no interest in assuring Silas's eternal salvation; she simply wants him to go to church because it will make him feel better too and will also enable him to participate in the community.

Such is religion in Raveloe. It offers comfort and a sense of community. In that respect it is perhaps no more important than the Rainbow or even the squire's Red House when it hosts a community event. The nearest the Raveloe church congregation ever gets to the kind of spiritual experience that the believers at Lantern Yard might value is during the special service at Christmas, which "brought a vague exulting sense . . . that something great and mysterious had been done for them in heaven above and in earth below, which they were appropriating by their presence."

The "something great and mysterious" in *Silas Marner* is of course the appearance of Eppie on Silas's hearth. This is the moment when salvation reaches out and touches the miser. But it is a this-worldly salvation, redemption of Silas's earthly life, not the promise of an afterlife in heaven. It has nothing to do with the Thirty-Nine Articles that constitute the orthodox doctrine of the Anglican Church. And just in case the reader misses the point, the narrator, who has earlier subtly conveyed her disapproval of the spiritual education provided at Lantern Yard, now tellingly comments on the events by which Silas's life is to be transformed. His salvation is not to be confused with anything transcendental or supernatural:

In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction. We see no white-angels now. 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 that they look no more backwards; and the hand may be a little child's.

This interpolation by the narrator might be seen as a kind of agnosticism or humanism. The child that saves is not the divine child that the wise men came to honor, nor the angels of popular tradition, but a poor little orphan girl. What counts in human life, the narrator seems to be telling the reader, is not man's relationship to God or his reliance on the panoply of divine helpers so beloved by true believers, but man's relationship with man. In place of empty speculation about "Assurance of salvation," which led the pious young Silas into the barren terrain of "hope mingled with fear," is the concrete reality, mediated to him by the innocent Eppie, of a man's connections to the human community in which he lives. Silas's salvation is found not in supernature but in nature, not in a future shining heavenly city but in a garden and a cottage and the comforting familiarity of daughter and son-in-law and neighbors well-known and loved.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on *Silas Marner*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #2

Hart has degrees in English and creative writing and is the author of several books. In this essay, Hart examines the themes of Eliot's novel as they develop through a contrasting evaluation of the characters of Silas Marner and Godfrey Cass.

Some critics have dismissed Eliot's *Silas Marner* because it reads too much like a fairy tale. And true, there are many fairy-tale elements in the novel, but this is no reason to condemn it as lacking depth. Eliot uses the familiar story frame of fortuitous coincidence, clear-cut relationships between good and evil, as well as the novel's happy ending so as to avoid inventing a new kind of story structure. Using this simple form has allowed Eliot to concentrate on the themes she wants to explore. The fundamental form highlights Eliot's messages, making them stand out against the more basic background. Her point is not to tell a complicated story but rather to get her point of view across. Eliot's themes are her message, and her messages can be seen most clearly through an examination of the contrasting characters of Silas Marner and Godfrey Cass.

Although the title of this novel emphasizes Silas Marner as the main character, Marner would not be as fully developed if Eliot had not included Marner's mirror image, Godfrey Cass. Not only does Eliot flip back and forth between the circumstances of these men's lives throughout the story, she also compares and contrasts their images with one another long before their eventual meeting. So as readers travel through this novel, it is as if they are wearing stereophonic headphones through which they listen to two separate tracks of music that, though diverse, complement one another. Godfrey is like the bass to the melody of Silas. One offsets the other.

When Silas is first introduced, he is seen as an "alien-looking" man who lives near the village of Ravenloe. He has "mysterious peculiarities." He also does not invite people to his cottage, nor does he enter the village to seek company. Silas is a loner, who needs, or so it appears, nothing more than to work, which he does incessantly. He is, according to gossip, a "dead man come to life again," a man who might just as easily cure you from a malady as to cause you mischief. In the villagers' eyes, Silas is someone to talk about but not someone to talk to. He is a man with no known past and thus a man who cannot be trusted.

In contrast, Godfrey Cass is the son of "the greatest man in Raveloe" whose main weakness, according to village sentiment, is that he has "kept all his sons at home in idleness." Although Godfrey has his family's reputation behind him, he has not proven himself. He has yet to establish any worth other than his inheritance. Godfrey's history is well known, and so he is trusted. His path has been determined by the stature of his father and his grandfather. He has a path that the local citizens expect him to follow. Their only fear is that Godfrey might stray from that path, as did his brother. Thus, the comparison of Silas and Godfrey begins. Silas works hard but is criticized for not socializing while Godfrey is deemed a "fine, open-faced, good-natured young man," but he is lazy. At this point, Eliot also begins to display her other major theme: the disparities between the working class and the wealthy landowners. Each group has its

qualities; each has its weaknesses. At the beginning of the novel, Godfrey is given the benefit of the doubt because of his known ancestry. Silas is feared because he represents the unknown. As the novel progresses, however, the villagers become more acquainted with Silas as his humanity becomes exposed. In contrast, Godfrey's reputation begins to crumble.

Eliot gives both Silas and Godfrey adversaries. It is through the men's relationship with these antagonists that the novelist explores her dual theme of honesty and deception. Ironically for Silas, his enemy is his best friend, William Dane. Dane betrays Silas and is the reason Silas leaves his hometown and lives for many years in total isolation. Dane's dishonesty causes Silas to mistrust everyone. Silas eventually turns against himself. Instead of blossoming in his youth, Silas sinks deeper and deeper into a world of darkness.

Godfrey's adversary is his brother Dunstan, a fraudulent man who causes Godfrey a lot of distress. The circumstances surrounding the brothers' relationship are more complicated than that between Silas and Dane. Dane, in comparison to Silas, is a man of loose morals. The Silas and Dane relationship has very definite boundaries without any shades of gray. Silas is all good. Dane is all bad. Dane acts alone, without any communication with Silas. Dane is cruel and, as far as the story studies the matter, fully without repentance. Silas portrays the role of the innocent and is caught completely off guard when Dane betrays him. In contrast, Godfrey, even though at first it appears he is only trying to protect his brother from their father's wrath, turns out to be a silent partner in his brother's deception. Godfrey himself is dishonest and makes excuses for his own weaknesses in order to justify them. In this way, Eliot's contrast of the two main characters begins to deepen. Silas, Eliot demonstrates, is the better man.

The issue of money is another major theme of Eliot's story. She looks at it from several different points of view. There is, of course, the money that William Dane stole and then blamed its theft on Silas. This matter of pilfering a small bag of coins has as much to do with money as it does with religion and friendship, at least in terms of Silas's life. It was this theft and the blame for it that drove Silas away from his home, his church, and his friends. This act was the catalyst that in the end would save Silas from a life of monotonous labor in an industrialized world. It might have also saved him from an unhappy marriage, as his betrothed ended up marrying Silas's best friend, the one who had betrayed him, implying that the young woman might not have been worth Silas's love. This money and the theft of it turned out to be Silas's ticket out of town. Looked at in this way, this first robbery foreshadows a greater and more significant crime, one that will once again change the course of Silas's life.

Silas is more personally involved in the second robbery. This time the money is his□savings he has accumulated over many years. Silas's devotion to and admiration of his wealth is as close as he comes to feeling love. There is nothing more precious to him than the gold that he hides under his loom and counts each night before going to bed. It is the reason for him to weave all day and night. It is what drives him to go out and sell his wares. This money is the motivation that makes him want to continue to live. It is his family, his friends, and his community. When Godfrey's brother steals it, Silas is

devastated. He was like a "man falling into deep water," Eliot writes, and he "gave a wild ringing scream, the cry of desolation" when the full realization of the theft sunk deep into his consciousness. Silas had invested every thought, every hope in his golden treasure. His attention to his wealth might even have absorbed him to the depth of his identity, his soul. Who was he without the rewards he had earned through his labors? What worth remained in him? Or as Eliot puts it, the theft had "left his soul like a forlorn traveler on an unknown desert." This loss of money will once again turn Silas's life around. Only this time, instead of turning toward the dark, Silas will turn toward the light. His life will open up, as will his heart. He will become a part of the community. His past, both the good and the bad parts, will be reviewed. He will no longer have to hide. Money, Eliot seems to be saying, is not the proper goal in life. It is but currency and must move from one hand to another to provide food and shelter. The love of money can turn one's heart into an organ as cold as a rock.

Offsetting Silas's part of the story, Eliot presents Godfrey's problems once again. Godfrey has wealth but it is controlled by his father. This does not usually seem to concern Godfrey. His needs are always met. He has no need for a craft by which to earn a wage because he will one day rule the family estate. It seems that the only time Godfrey thinks of money is when he is forced to cover his brother's mishandling of it. Money, in Godfrey's case, is not associated with sweat, as it is with Silas. The only sweat Godfrey experiences is of a psychological nature. For one thing, Dunstan causes Godfrey great anxiety. So, too, does Godfrey's own deeds. Godfrey's real fear is that his secret will be found out, and he will lose both his father's and his sweetheart's respect. It is at this point that Eliot reveals further corruptions of Godfrey's integrity. For reasons of sexual passion, Godfrey has become involved with a poor, drug-addicted woman. She has born him a child for whom Godfrey shows little affection. He provides monetary easements but little else. With this, Eliot demonstrates again her theme that money is not related to love. She also shows the shallowness of Godfrey's feelings. Godfrey cares little for his wife, Molly. He wants only to be rid of her so that he can marry Nancy, a woman more suited to his social standing. Also with Godfrey's involvement with Molly, Eliot emphasizes the chasm that exists between the poor class and the rich. It is in contrast with these exposed elements of Godfrey's personality, his weaknesses and deficits, that Silas Marner begins to shine.

Finally there is Eppie, Godfrey's child, who has a head of gold curls that remind Silas of the pile of gold treasure he once had but has lost. Upon seeing Eppie, Silas immediately falls in love with her. It is his belief that the gods of fortune have replaced his lost money with this child. He feels he has finally been rewarded. Eppie now becomes the true reason for living. She opens Silas's heart. Silas had been misguided in the past, trying to amass a fortune of gold to dismiss his loneliness and make up for the false judgment of his character. It takes more than gold, Eliot proclaims through Silas, to make a life worthwhile. Opening oneself to another is the most gratifying pleasure that exists. Then, Eliot takes this concept one step further by having Godfrey try to win the heart of Eppie through monetary things. Godfrey tries to buy Eppie's love. He will provide her a better home and bestow on her social status. Eppie exemplifies Eliot's message. Love, not money, is the way to open someone's heart. So in the end, Silas is victorious, and

Godfrey berates himself for having failed. "It's part of my punishment," he says to his wife, "for my daughter to dislike me."

With this, the fairy tale ends. The bad are punished for their weaknesses and sins, and the good are provided benevolence. Through this fairy tale, Eliot has found a form upon which to display her message.

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on *Silas Marner*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

The film *Silas Marner* (1985) was directed by Giles Foster and starred Ben Kingsley as Marner, with co-stars Jenny Agutter, Freddie Jones, and Angela Pleasence.

Topics for Further Study

Does Godfrey Cass, Eppie's biological father, have the right to take her from Silas Marner, her foster father? What moral issues does this matter raise? How is this issue relevant in the early 2000s?

Bearing in mind that Eliot has sometimes been criticized by feminists for being too conservative in her representation of women, discuss the characters Nancy Lammeter, Dolly Winthrop, and Eppie. Are they presented as dependent on men? How do they go about fulfilling their needs and desires? How do they support others?

Discuss how Silas Marner rears Eppie. What principles does he follow? Does he follow Dolly Winthrop's advice? What role does punishment have in childrearing?

Write a detailed analysis of the scene in Chapter 6 in which the male villagers meet at the Rainbow. Who are the main characters, and what do they discuss? What does this scene reveal about village life in Raveloe? Why is the scene placed at this point in the narrative?

Compare and Contrast

1810s: Each parish in England provides a workhouse to accommodate and employ the destitute. Conditions in the workhouses vary. Some are relatively acceptable, but others are grim. In 1810, George Crabbe writes of one workhouse: "It is a prison, with a milder name, / Which few inhabit without dread or shame."

1860s: Since the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, hundreds of new workhouses have been built. They are supervised by a local Board of Guardians. Conditions in the workhouses are intentionally made harsh and degrading, to deter all but the most desperate. They are inhabited mainly by the old, the infirm, the sick, the orphaned, and unmarried mothers. The largest of them house over a thousand people.

Today: Workhouses no longer exist. They were abolished in 1930. People who in addition to being poor are sick, old, or mentally ill are cared for in hospitals and by social welfare organizations. Under the National Health Service, every British citizen is entitled to free health care, according to his or her need. No social stigma is attached to being an unmarried mother, and women in such situations are able to gain employment.

1810s: The population of England and Wales, according to the official census, is 10,164,000. The population is rising rapidly. The increase is due largely to a falling death rate, which falls from 33.4 per 1,000 in 1730 to 19.98 per 1,000 in 1810. This is due to better living conditions and better diet.

1860s: The population continues to increase. There is a continuing shift of population to cities and away from rural areas. London is the biggest city in the world, with a population in 1861 of 2,803,989. This is an increase of 19 percent in ten years. Manchester also becomes one of the largest industrial centers in the world. After 1860, mortality rates decline because of the reduction in deaths from scarlet fever, typhus, and consumption.

Today: The population of the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) at mid-2001 is 58.8 million. Nearly 84 percent of this total lives in England, mainly in the major cities. London is the largest city in Europe, with a population of 7.2 million. The population of the United Kingdom is increasing. It has risen by 10 million between 1950 and 2000, mainly due to rising immigration. The death rate has dropped to 10.35 deaths per 1,000 population.

1810s: The Napoleonic Wars end in 1815. Britain's conservative government fears social revolution and represses civil liberties.

1860s: Britain increases democracy by extending the franchise. In the 1850s, only 900,000 out of 5,300,000 adult males in England and Wales were eligible to vote, but the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1867 adds an additional 1,008,000 men to the voter rolls. An amendment for the enfranchisement of women is rejected by 196 to 73 votes in the House of Commons.

Today: Like all Western democracies, all British citizens who qualify by age are eligible to vote. However, voter participation is in decline. In the general election of 2001, only 59.4 percent of the total electorate vote. This figure is down from 70.9 percent in 1997 and 76.7 percent in 1992. It remains higher than voter turnout in the United States.

What Do I Read Next?

Like *Silas Marner*, Eliot's novel *Adam Bede* (1859) is set in a fictional rural community in which the people adhere to traditional ways of communal living. Unlike the situation in *Silas Marner*, however, the villagers must learn to deal with the kinds of social change they are ill-equipped to face.

North and South (1855), by Victorian novelist Elizabeth Gaskell, makes for an interesting comparison with Eliot's style and themes. Margaret Hale, a girl from southern England, is unwillingly sent to the northern industrial city of Manchester, where she must adjust to a rougher society than the one in which she was raised.

Frederick Robert Karl's biography *George Eliot: Voice of a Century: A Biography* (1995) has been widely praised for bringing Eliot vividly to life. Giving full attention to issues of class and gender, he recreates the world in which she lived and shows how she became a great writer.

Asa Briggs's *The Age of Improvement: 1783—1867* (1959; 2d ed., 1999) is a classic study of how and why Britain changed from the time of the French Revolution to the mid-Victorian era. Briggs covers sociological, economic, political, and cultural history.

Richard Muir's *The English Village* (1980) describes the history of the English village and provides many photographs.

Further Study

Beer, Gillian, *George Eliot*, Indiana University Press, 1986, pp. 108—46.

In this feminist study, Beer discusses Silas Marner, Romola, and Felix Holt in terms of the displacement involved in proposing a conflict between natural parents and nurturing parents.

Johnstone, Peggy Fitzburgh, *The Transformation of Rage: Mourning and Creativity in George Eliot's Fiction*, New York University Press, 1994, pp. 68—94.

This is a Freudian interpretation of the novel, including a discussion of what is called obsessive-compulsive disorder (repetitious actions and thoughts) and its cure.

McCormack, Kathleen, *George Eliot and Intoxication: Dangerous Drugs for the Condition of England*, St. Martin's Press, 2000, pp. 91—109.

As part of her study of Eliot's drug metaphors, McCormack analyzes the novel as a parable of addiction and recovery.

Speaight, Robert, Review of *Silas Marner*, in *George Eliot*, 2d ed., Arthur Barker, 1968, pp. 61—67.

This is a short review of the many outstanding aspects of the novel, including its characterization, its lack of excessive moralism, and its life-like realism that still allows for symbolic elements.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamedfor instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as The Narrator and alphabetized as Narrator. If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name Jean Louise Finch would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname Scout Finch.
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an at-a-glance comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature, a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

BOOKRAGS

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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