

# SILAS MARNER OVERVIEW

## STRUCTURE AND STORYTELLING

### 1. The web-like structure joining all elements of plot to point to the interconnection of human lives

- Individual characters + choices shown to have a wider social effect
- Presence of 2 distinct plot strands running in parallel, but which converge in one climatic scene within a single narrative:
  - SM + G's lives develop in parallel with each other – both concerning disinheritance, betrayal + close r/s b/w past and present
- > Reveals Eliot's vision of community + humanity: Characters linked not by ties of blood/family, but accidents of proximity reflecting intricate web-like interrelations of social life
- > Point to human responsibilities to one's immediate society due to mutual dependence of strangers

### 2. Elements of allegory and realism come together in the creation of a causally determined universe

- Through elements of fable, extrapolating general truths about human nature

#### **[Elements of fable]**

- Opening scenes of prosperity + plenty; final 'happily ever after'
- Key events reliant upon coincidence + heavily imbued w symbolism
- Twinned characters (G + SM) and their respective fates of retribution + reward
- These general truths govern common human behaviour. Hence despite allegorical elements: Fidelity to ordinary course of man's experience:

#### **[Elements of Realism]**

##### 1. Concern for the human condition/motivation

- Eliot's commitment to psychological realism makes characters + predicaments completely credible: Focus on the universality of human emotion and the understandable human reaction/actions (i.e. Godfrey + Silas' internal drama)
  - 'Have we not all'/'which of us have not'

- Identifies self + reader with characters > creating comprehensible + realistic personalities
- Draws Silas, reader and writer together through inescapable human needs/truths
- Analysing in abstract terms various logics of life + instabilities

##### 2. Omniscient narrator

- Use of free indirect speech > revealing thought processes + character motivations
- Frequently shifting perspective > revelations of indiv characters + impartial objectivity

> **Overall, both work together** to create a morally + psychologically plausible scenario to lend credibility to Eliot's moral + causally determined universe

- Mysterious disappearance of gold:
  - Puzzles villagers; to Silas, telling of the cruelty of an unknowable God
  - Yet, fully explicable in light of Dunsey's poor character
- Eppie's inexplicable appearance
  - Made more probable due to Molly's succumbing to temptation + Godfrey's terrified selfishness in refusing to acknowledge his child

## RELIGION

### Key philosophies:

1. Causal determinism
2. Moral responsibility of all individuals to society
3. Importance of human community

### Religion:

- Chapel at LY
- Church at Raveloe
- Nancy's principles
- Silas' fetishistic obsession with gold
- Dolly's homespun theology
- Raveloes' country superstitions
- Religion of humanity (underpins morality of novel)

Lantern Yard	Raveloe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Calvinistic evangelism</li> <li>- Utter refutation of indiv human action/moral choice or understanding</li> <li>- Requires rigorous obedience to unquestioned doctrine – fate of man + world in hands of an inscrutable God</li> <li>- Church and its sense of community, intimately a part of SM's identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tolerant + undemanding</li> <li>- Requires no great spiritual sacrifice/sensitivity</li> <li>- Religious festivals as powerful symbols of social order + unity ('Charter of Raveloe') &gt; focal point for communal values holding village life together</li> <li>- Elements of doctrine and church ritual assume equal weight as folklore, superstition and social traditions + independence and autonomy in indivs deriving at their own understanding of religion</li> </ul>

### **OVERALL: Silas' religious journey in itself is a statement of the human religious experience and its value in the individual and social existence**

- *Unquestioning faith > utter repudiation + 'darkness' > fetishistic worship > Church + community*

#### **1. Eliot exposes poverty of closed religious systems that shut out the possibility of human action**

- Through Silas' struggle to understand relative claims of divine + human action in LY, where God is seen as infallible and omnipotent (c.f. herbs w/o prayer episode)

- Questionable reliance upon ritual/chance to interpret what is fundamentally unknowable (liability to abuse - William Dane's visionary certitude)

- Failings of the lottery as a divine revelation of truth; God's will in fundamentally unknowable

- Its dangers: Leads to SM's loss of faith in God following false accusation + wrongful exile from LY:

- Shows harmful consequences of religious incomprehension + inflexibility
- SM's spiritual satisfaction in earlier life revealed to be overly narrow: SM's faith is feeble, incapable of providing solace

- Consequently, SM's desolation, ignorance + disillusionment blocks out bright + active scene of Raveloe life – shutting out all benevolent possibilities of life there

- VS ecumenical nature of religion in Raveloe:

- Elements of doctrine and church ritual assume equal weight as folklore, superstition and social traditions + independence and autonomy in indivs deriving at their own understanding of religion

- Tavern scene: Cliff's holiday and reconciling conflicting opinions
- Macey wrt Kimble and Wise Woman
- Later allows SM to indep define his notion of religion

#### **2. However, foundational importance of faith in men's lives**

- Explains why all faith in fetishistic worship, while insufficient, is essential and comforting

- Eliot does not condemn human veneration of idols + objects; rather, reflecting humans' search for physical manifestations of divine qualities: Protection, guidance, shelter, etc.

- For Silas, his fetishistic worship upon moving to Raveloe a necessary stage in his religious development with his yet immature and unstable understanding of religion:
    - Even in Silas' darkest moments, his faculties are dormant, not absent: With his spiritual beliefs uprooted, he is seen investing heavily into material objects unworthy of human love
    - Hearth, loom, gold stand at the centre of his understanding of all goodness in the world
  - Elements of fetishistic worship also seen as indispensable pillars of different characters' religion
  - Objects seen as more central to formal religious experience than spiritual understanding
    - Dolly: Belief in letters on cakes, seen as a physical manifestation of genuine desire to dispense blessings on Silas; hot dinner in bakehus
    - Macey: saying the Amens
    - Nancy: Bending over Mant's bible on a Sunday afternoon
  - To Raveloe villagers, going to church itself a source of grace
- > In these ways, fetishistic worship gives characters due comfort and assurance

- HOWEVER, clear limitations of this brand of religion
- SM's transplantation to Raveloe shows that this faith is insufficient and excessively narrow
- Due to his own simple faith + that of his neighbours: Unable to comprehend underlying spiritual truths – disorienting for SM, who believes God is very far away
  - Silas and Dolly existing in separate social + cultural worlds
  - Equally devout, but find any religious practice but their own incomprehensible/inaccessible

[Extension: Can skip if no time]

- Tavern scene wrt Cliff's Holiday:
- Macey deems Dowlas ignorant for wanting to stand there overnight to prove is ghosts exists
- Belief in ghosts wrt individual 'smell' for them'

### **3. Eliot equally prizes indiv-defined religious understanding indep of formal doctrine**

- Eliot prizes the sincere faith of people who independently arrive at a religious understanding that approximates formal doctrine
  - Holds up the exemplary religions of believers whose spiritual foundations are false but are sincere: Wisdom + clear-sightedness of Nancy
  - Guided by indiv moral consciousness + responsibility

### **5. Religion grounded in simple human sympathy and communion**

- Dolly's doctrine of goodness of God extrapolated from the goodness of man
  - Theologically uneducated Dolly with her simple-minded faith but who speaks as if from divine revelation when busy in service of neighbours
- SM in Raveloe church: Though does not hold any semblance to his religion in LY, invoked in him strong feelings of sympathy + *resonance*, serves as a conduit for comm fellowship
  - o SM's integration into Raveloe must first be mediated through acceptance of their practices
- Similarly, mankind replaces God as the source of benevolence
  - Through renewed links with community and experiences of giving and receiving kindness
  - Giving SM light enough to trusten by
- Explains why Eliot refuses to give SM closure on drawing of the lots: to do so would be a step backwards from SM's trust in goodness of God
  - C.f. E's final decision to stay with SM

## RELIGION AND RITUAL

1. Conveys meaning (c.f. fetishistic worship): In fact, central to religious belief
2. Codifies intention (c.f. Dolly's lardcakes and IHS)

## MORALITY

- Cannot rely upon mere doctrine, points of law or intention, however well-meant
- Need for active moral choice
- Causal determinism: Logical forces which guide characters to deserving, just outcomes

### **1. Inadequacy of leaving morality to fundamentally inscrutable divine judgment**

- In such a system, liability to abuse (c.f. Dane's exploitative actions)
  - C.f. 2 thefts and 2 trials in LY and Raveloe
  - SM in LY: Failure of LY's rigid dogma: No room for the guidance of compassion, understanding or forgiveness – silenced voice of comm that has ignorantly misapplied faith
  - Jem Rodney in Raveloe: No accusing of the innocent, independence and autonomy in indivs deriving at their own understanding of what is correct

### **2. Instead prizes characters who individually arrive at sound moral frameworks**

- Holds up the exemplary religions of believers whose spiritual foundations are false but are sincere: Wisdom + clear-sightedness of Nancy. Guided by indiv moral consciousness + responsibility

### **3. Need for active moral choices; good intentions do not suffice**

- Especially when they are clouded by or not transmuted to moral actions:
- C.f. where these moral choices are ultimately subordinate to self-interest

Godfrey: Harbours only a passive desire to do good

- Prizes what is convenient: Wanting N to part him from mire + lead him to path of goodness
- Intention of doing good by Eppie, but not stepping forward:
  - Not willing to risk Nancy for it

Molly: Desire to do good by Eppie, moral choice conflicting with temptation

Silas: Wrt active endeavor in raising Eppie

- Eppie comes to Silas because he can't part with her – actively clings to child
- Active care and love for Eppie from very beginning (chasing her around, giving Eppie food before bringing her to Red House)

### **4. Through causal determinism, delivery of justice and make a final moral statement**

- Makes clear implications of one character's actions on another
- Each character's life plays out in rational correspondence w a logical chain of causation
  - Seemingly supernatural forces at work in novel are result of wider confluence of actions, and interests (SM and LY exile, loss of gold, arrival of E)
- With an awareness of this, highlights moral responsibility of all indivs to society
- Morality grounded in doing right actions by those in the community
- Seen in how Eliot rewards + punishes characters accordingly. Justice ultimately achieved
  - Dunsey and his death; SM and Eppie
  - In fact, G's awareness that everything eventually comes to light drives him to come clean w Nancy and attempt to make amends w E (though too late)
    - Though claiming E would have been right, he does so too late + cannot make amends

## PARENTS AND PARENTHOOD

### **- Parents serve as role models – traits and attributes manifest in households and behaviour to parenthood. Play a key role in moral upbringing**

- Implications of good and bad parenting made clear: Parallels b/w Cassess + Winthrops/SM
- Cass family negligent parenting manifest in household
  - No guardianship over domestic sphere, characterized by extravagance
  - S's concern for public image (spending more time at Rainbow) than domestic upbringing
- Squire is capricious and unjust; implications of his parenting made clear through faults in D+G
- Dunsey and betting/deceit, Godfrey's vacillations
  - Root of G's predicament is fear of disinheritance: Explains no admission to wrongdoing
  - Failure of Red House to provide corrective influence to G; falls to vice + easy gratification, seeks out Nancy to help retrieve him from immorality he is mired in
- Even in tolerant Raveloe, villagers recognize + criticize Squire's failures
- c.f. Dolly Winthrop and Aaron
  - Evidence of her domesticity, thrift, care in what she teaches SM of how she parents Aaron
    - While Squire metes out unjust punishment, Dolly sees need to imbibe good morals
  - Aaron's good behaviour credited to Dolly (SM)
  - Eppie's knowledge of parenthood based on upbringing from Dolly and SM
    - Grows up to put needs of her father + household before those of her own
- c.f. Lammeters and Nancy/Priscilla
  - In direct opposition to Squire: Prudent upbringing, neatness
  - Embodied in Nancy: G seeing her as far-off, bright winged prize and source of salvation
  - Lammeter family remains in tact as Cass one disintegrates: Nancy revitalizing Cass household
- **Prized examples of good upbringing are those of parents who act on the welfare of children**
- Willingness to partake in social norms and do everything in his power to raise Eppie in ideal way
- Bringing her to church, heeding Dolly's advice
  - SM carrying the burden of Eppie's mischief + wrongdoing; saying he can't hurt her
- vs Molly who, though viewing Eppie with great tenderness, gives in to indiv selfish desires
- While there is sympathy invested in descriptions of M, it is not redemptive
- Her motherly love + consciousness is subsumed under temptation + enslavement to physical desires
- **Basis of connection is not blood ties or even feelings of love, but tangible acts of care**
- Makes clear that parental love in itself is insufficient – there is a need for this love to be grounded in acts of duty
- G: Though some measure of tenderness to E, stopping short of making explicit claim on her
- Ultimately acting on self-interest (desire to keep Nancy) that he does not do so
- Lofty declarations of love not rooted in deeper commitment to them
  - Calls E 'it'; relief when E could not recognize him
- SM: Sharp responses elicited by fear that someone will take E away from him
- E's physical appearances (blonde hair) representative of her blood ties w G – peripheral
- Her internal refinement attributed to SM
- Causal determinism: Sees parental connection as logical outcome of tangible actions
- Ultimately reflected in basis of Eppie's final claims to stay with SM, even though blood ties to G are made clear: E cannot comprehend presence of any father other than SM

## CLASS

### **1. Social class founded upon material wealth and external indicators**

- Cass family for having land parishioners

### **2. Presents traditional, stratified society: Class structures preserved + adhered to**

- Soc organized according to clear, immutable class lines which go largely uncontested
- Idea of 'knowing your place' and being content with it (imposed hierarchy)
- Beer and the spirits at Rainbow; rich and poor at New Years
  - Looking down upon attempts to breach this: London tailor
- Rustic Raveloe comm: Preservation of an outmoded system of hierarchy
- Medieval terms, 'Squire'

### **3. Class plays big role in informing individual identity**

- Class associated with strong sense of family lineage: Explains suspicions towards foreigners
  - C.f. intro on weavers, SM at first
- Tavern scene: Knowing how to respond in different situations; play clear roles
  - Adopting certain personas, contributing to general discourse in predictable fashion
- C.f. NYE party (indiv preferences) and the charter of Raveloe
- Villagers comforting SM with assurance that he was no worse off than him after losing his gold
- Eppie's final decision to stay w SM: Awareness that she was not brought up to be a lady, and would not enjoy it/care for such a life

### **4. But class not an accurate indicator for indiv worth**

- Makes clear that there is no personal, indiv basis for upper class prestige
- In Raveloe those in power are found undeserving: Cass family
- Those of lower classes freely criticize indivs of higher classes: Free indirect speech on D/G/Casses
- At the same time, endowing higher class with dignified traits
- Dolly and her kindness; SM and earnest parenting; E and personal refinement
- While immutable, social class is not seen as the highest ideal to aspire towards
- G's frustrated claims to E who chooses to live amongst the rustic, lower class instead of assuming her place with the Casses

## **FAMILY + DOMESTICITY**

\*'Presentation of' questions: Find loose overarching arguments, then can go by cases (e.g. characters), although linking it back to overall thesis

*Influence of family: Accounts for their faults + implications on its members*

- Centrality of role of wife and mother

### **1. Lack of domesticity leads to breakdown of family unit**

- Tainted with neglect, wealth and extravagance; Squire prizes his social status (Rainbow) over fulfillment of domestic needs of household
  - Not only fail to provide correcting influence on G/D, responsible for their faults
  - Implications on G/D: The respective faults they develop (inaction and deceit)
- Absence of familial warmth
- Transactional nature of r/s between brothers + with father
- G's fear of disinheritance: Shallow family ties, G's inability to turn to them in his hour of need

### **2. Contrasting against the Lammeter ideal: Adequate provisions + strong family ties**

- Lammeter household: Prudence and neatness

- Nourishment and providing for individual needs: Domestic provisions of pies + cheeses
- Need for and power of domestic influence reflected in Nancy Cass
  - G looking to her as a correcting influence, seen in how she revitalizes RH

### **3. Similar feelings of kinship in upbringing of E**

- SM's provision for E's immediate needs, bringing up in love
  - Unwillingness to levy punishment on her vs Squire's punishment
- Centrality of kinship and family ties that later transcend blood ones:
- E reciprocates by choosing to stay w SM

## **LOVE AND KINSHIP**

### **1. Fundamental need for kinship and love**

- Evidence of SM's need for love c.f. fetishistic worship (a clinging life; wrongly channeled love)
- Holding steadfastly to E

### **2. Effect of kinship + love on the individual**

- Where these ties transcend superficial/tangible aspects
- SM's love for E accounting for her refinement + fervor c.f. lack thereof in Cass family and G/D
- Ingenuity of Cass family r/s: Transactional nature based upon money
- Nancy's beliefs that sisters need to dress alike seem absurd + unnecessary

### **3. Grounded in acts of duty for other's welfare: Intention on its own is insufficient**

- Dolly and SM: Willingness to partake in Raveloe's practices; bearing brunt of E's mischief
- Molly: Subsuming love under physical desires and temptation

### **4. Most importantly seen in ending: Through highlighting causal determinism**

- 'Register': Failure of G's final natural claim
  - Meaning to do well by E, but falls short of taking action
  - Subordinated this natural claim to self-interest 16 years ago; only providing for E in \$ sense
- Silas' compounded actions of 16 years trumps G's natural claim
- Eating of the same bit, etc, choosing to keep her from the first, not wanting to forsake her

### **5. Redemptive powers of broader, genial relations + 'community kinship'**

- Fresh and fresh links for SM

## **COMMUNITY AND TRADITION**

### **1. Stability and eminence of social positions (Indiv)**

- Characters interacting in predictable ways; communal identity over individual one
- Acting in accordance to clearly defined social hierarchies
  - Attempts to break free of this are criticized (London tailor)

### **2. Undisputed communal identity reinforced through tradition (soc)**

- Though villagers appear to hold different opinions, appear convergent on issues; choric effect of collective social opinion though free indirect speech

- Tavern scene: Disputes about red Durham, though all essentially talking about same thing
  - Farrier and butcher both seeing the same cow, at different stages
- Collective opinions wrt Squire's upbringing; 'people shook their heads', 'neighbours said'
- 'At one time everyone was saying'

- Reinforced through shared traditions which community life: NYE Party
- Daily customs + rituals strengthen this identity: Church-going

### **3. Rituals also help to codify interactions in community**

- Especially religious rituals: C.f. the meaning they hold + how they help codify intentions
- IHS, lardcakes, various features which carry meaning and help communicate good intent
  - Exclusive to each community: C.f. Dolly and SM's mutual inability to comprehend

### **4. (Consequently) Insular nature of Raveloe/LY**

- Sense of belonging hugely contingent upon participation in rituals AND historical lineage
- Difficulty of settlers to Raveloe to fit in, with no shared historical memory: Weavers, SM, Lammeter's successes through inheriting their customs and beliefs
- (SM's) Integration into community contingent upon appropriation of village traditions/beliefs
- Smoking of the pipe; churchgoing