



Silas Marner

George Eliot

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George Eliot's tale of a solitary miser gradually redeemed by the joy of fatherhood, *Silas Marner* is edited with an introduction and notes by David Carroll in Penguin Classics.

Wrongly accused of theft and exiled from a religious community many years before, the embittered weaver Silas Marner lives alone in Raveloe, living only for work and his precious hoard of money. But when his money is stolen and an orphaned child finds her way into his house, Silas is given the chance to transform his life. His fate, and that of Eppie, the little girl he adopts, is entwined with Godfrey Cass, son of the village Squire, who, like Silas, is trapped by his past. *Silas Marner*, George Eliot's favourite of her novels, combines humour, rich symbolism and pointed social criticism to create an unsentimental but affectionate portrait of rural life.

This text uses the Cabinet edition, revised by George Eliot in 1878. David Carroll's introduction is complemented by the original Penguin Classics edition introduction by Q.D. Leavis.

Mary Ann Evans (1819-80) began her literary career as a translator, and later editor, of the Westminster Review. In 1857, she published *Scenes of Clerical Life*, the first of eight novels she would publish under the name of 'George Eliot', including *The Mill on the Floss*, *Middlemarch*, and *Daniel Deronda*.

If you enjoyed *Silas Marner*, you might like Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, also available in Penguin Classics.

'I think *Silas Marner* holds a higher place than any of the author's works. It is more nearly a masterpiece; it has more of that simple, rounded, consummate aspect ... which marks a classical work'

Henry James

Silas Marner Details

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From Reader Review *Silas Marner* for online ebook

Terry says

A strong 3.5 stars

As with *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, the only other Eliot book I've read thus far, *Silas Marner* shows off just how keen an observer of human nature Eliot was both in the adept manner she has at detailing the psychological motivations of her characters' actions and in the more explicit authorial asides in the narrative in which she details her insights into how the human mind and heart work, and the justifications that we give ourselves for our actions. No one in her stories seems to be either good or bad, though they may fall further on one side of the spectrum than the other, and as is always the case they have justifications for everything they do, even if they are justifications that will satisfy no one but themselves.

Silas Marner himself is an excellent character study of a miser who is more than a caricature. Thrown down by injustice and succumbing to despair the titular Silas exiles himself from his birthplace and becomes an outcast on the periphery of the village of Raveloe where his solitary life as a weaver is consumed by little more than work and the amassing of a small golden treasure upon which all of his love is centred. This state of affairs is not to last and Silas goes through yet another trial, the loss of his small fortune, though this is soon replaced by the person of a small orphaned child. As with the Grinch, Marner's heart grew three times that day! Still a taciturn and awkward man, Silas' new charge brings him into the fold of society from which he had been outcast nearly all of his adult life and we see him grow as a person as he learns to care for someone other than himself.

Eliot once again paints a wonderfully vivid picture of provincial English life in her village of Raveloe and we see all of the varied aspects of human nature on display: greed, cowardice, rigid moral inflexibility, filial love, devotion, despair, and hope. Even those characters that take up little of the narrative have a verisimilitude of life to them and we can readily believe that Raveloe is a real, living place filled with the foibles, defeats, and triumphs of real human life. Some might consider the story a bit saccharine, but I think the reality of its characters saves it from that fate.

An enjoyable read, especially good if you're feeling leery about human nature.

Henry Avila says

An innocent young man Silas Marner, is accused of stealing Church money, the actual crime committed by his best friend, William, (a common occurrence ?) the culprit wants Silas's fiancée, Sarah. She soon rejects Silas, but not the treacherous William. The distraught weaver flees Lantern Yard, when his brethren do not believe him blameless in the affair, to the country village of Raveloe . A bitter broken man he becomes, his life ruined ... Apparently set in the English Midlands, during the French wars of the early 1800's. For fifteen long years, the lonely miser keeps spinning his wheel, weaving. Countless hours, the tireless man continues, all alone in his cottage, isolated from the rest of the world, which he is not a welcomed member, he believes. Saving his money and watching the growing pile of coins, he counts every night , hiding them under the cottage's floor boards. The only joy in his solitary unhappy life, thinking, always thinking of the past, brooding forever. How had he come to this sad end? But a thief in the night changes everything, while Marner is away on business, all Silas's money is stolen, Mr. Marner can't believe it, searching the whole

cottage nothing is discovered however. Going to the local tavern the Rainbow, to report the crime, the villagers are shocked, frightened too at his sudden, unexpected appearance. Still nothing is found, and the locals blame wrongly, a recent peddler long gone, who would think that someone from the area, had done this evil deed? Time marches on, the quiet village becomes quiet again. The weaver has been punished, twice, later Silas subject to seizures, had his door open, looking out at the land. As if, somehow, someday, he'll see his money there. The snowy, cold night brings him salvation, instead, a little girl barely able to walk, comes into his home and lies down by the fireplace to get warm. Mr. Marner doesn't see her, another epileptic seizure, occurred? When he recovers and comes back in, sits down by the fire, a vague image in his tired, weak eyes, Gold? Has his golden coins returned? No, only a child and her golden hair... Heaven has given him a replacement for his lost money, much more valuable, he calls her Eppie (Hephzibah), after his dead mother and sister. Joy arrives to the friendless man and a reason to live, the little girl's mother's frozen body is found outside, but where did she come from? The mystery will not be solved for now, Silas is transformed, will he be able to care for Eppie, and keep her? Thankfully a kindly neighbor Mrs. Winthrop, with four sons helps out, becomes the child's Godmother (she always wanted a daughter). A classic fairy tale, still relevant in the modern era, the premise? Simple, everybody needs love.

Chrissie says

Eliot's prose style is difficult. It is wordy. Grasping the points she is trying to make is thwarted by her dated and convoluted prose. The sequence of plot events is not hard to follow, but when she switches to her "lecture-mode" what she is saying becomes difficult to understand. Eliot lectures, she preaches, she uses this book as a podium from which she pontificates her views on morality, on goodness, on superstition, on money, on social norms, on class and on religion. I was curious; I wanted to understand her views on these topics. I took the difficult prose style as a challenge rather than a stumbling block. I was given a puzzle I wanted to solve; I wanted to understand her point of view, so I kept reading.

In describing how the book starts, I will also be giving one example of the questions that popped up and which I wanted to resolve. Why did Eliot set up the novel as she did? The story begins in northern England. The central protagonist, Silas Marner, is a member of a Calvinist community. He is accused of theft. His guilt is determined by the drawing of lots. Today, this seems utterly absurd, but it was not unusual in the England of the early 1800s, the era in which the book is set. We are told that the drawing of lots is advocated in the Bible. Judged guilty, he moves south to a rural village called Raveloe in Warwickshire. It is **here** the story comes to unfold. Why was the story set up in this fashion? Clearly the author was saying something with the story's construction and with the drawing of the lots. What? The resolution of guilt by the drawing of lots and its connection to the Bible sent me to search internet. Do you see how one step led to another, how my search to understand why Eliot drew the story as she did became larger and more interesting?

Anyhow, look what I found among the diverse views expressed on the drawing of lots. I believe this represents Eliot's view:

"A fool casts lots in order to make decisions, but the 'wise' and 'prudent' 'avoid evil,' 'give heed to instruction,' and 'trust in the Lord.' But even when unwise fools seek God's will by resorting to the folly of dice throwing, God's greater purposes will still be accomplished. In other words, stupid people making bad decisions in unGodly ways, like casting lots, won't keep God from accomplishing His ultimate purpose. [For instance, the apostle's hasty decision to cast lots in order to appoint Mathias to replace Judas (Acts 1:26) did not keep God from accomplishing his decision to call the apostle Paul (Gal. 1:11-12).] " (Source: <https://soteriology101.com/2016/04/24...>)

Ivana Books Are Magic says

I've read this book today and absolutely loved it. It is remarkably deep for such a relatively short novel. I don't remember when exactly I started reading it, but I know I made it to the third chapter in one go, found the story fascinating, but somehow I forgot about it until I picked it up again this afternoon. My favourite way to read doesn't include pauses. Obviously that isn't always possible but when I get the chance to do so I tend to use it- like I did this afternoon. I've really enjoyed reading this novel and I'm happy I had the chance to finish it today.

The opening of the novel might seem a bit slow to some. The first few chapters are focused solely on the protagonist and you're not quite sure how the story will develop. Silas Marner leaves his home after being wrongly accused. He arrives and settles into a new community but besides focusing on his work and savings, he has no dealings with anyone. Basically, he completely isolates himself from human society. He becomes obsessed with his savings, in this novel often referred to as his gold. This idea of an old man obsessed with his gold has been present in literature since the ancient times (Marner isn't old at this point, but it is said he looks the part). You probably remember the Roman comedian Titius Maccius Plautus and his comedy *Aulularia*, that has been interpreted and copied by many notable European writers, right up to modern times.

Anyway, you can notice the key theme of this novel right from the start. This is a novel that focuses heavily on the theme of guilt and innocent. Silas, albeit innocent, gets punished for his crime. The novel doesn't leave it at that. There is another character that gets introduced and that is a young man plagued by some disgrace. When we meet him, he is in the process of being blackmailed by his brother for this crime of his. This young man wants to marry a certain Nancy, beautiful and virtuous girl, but his 'crime' prevents him. As I started to read about this man, I wondered what his connection to Silas might be, and I was a bit impatient for the story to get back to Silas.

However, what I did not expect is how quickly things will develop from that point. Silas gets robbed, his gold is taken from him and he ends up a broken man. Once this happens, the story really gets started. From this point, the plot develops effortlessly and effectively. I stressed the fact that Silas Marner is not a long novel. That doesn't mean that it lacks anything. Quite on the contrary, the narrative flows quite naturally. The new characters that get introduced soon start to take a form of their own. The characterization of characters is for the most part very well done, even the minor characters make sense. For all its brevity, this novel managed to discuss religion, social customs and morality standards of its time. It goes on very subtly about it, so subtly that you might miss it if you skip a passage or two...Don't!!! This is a novel you must read without skimming. The more you pay attention to conversations between the characters, the more you notice certain hints about, for example, the role of religion in one's life. That kind of subtle development of a philosophical theme, well that's quite an achievement, if you ask me. All the same, I was left feeling hungry for more.

The plot obviously reminded me of *Les Misérables*. When I checked the date, it turned out that this novel was published one year prior to well-known masterpiece by Victor Hugo. There are so many parallels between the two. *The Misérables* features an ex-convict, who becomes a foster father for an orphaned child. Likewise, Silas finds a gold haired child and decided to adopt her. He reminded me of the protagonist of *The Misérables* in so many ways. The relationship between his adopted daughter mirrors the one I read about in *Les Misérables*. Moreover, in both novels, it is the daughter that gives meaning to the life of the father and teaches to him the lesson of love. In both stories, the father figure would remain withdrawn from

society if it hadn't been for the daughter.

Silas accepts the girl as a miracle and he forgets his gold. Trying to be a good father for her, he reconnects with other human beings, finds friendship again, develops meaningful relationships with his neighbours and the whole community whose outcast (by choice) he was for so many years. However, many questions remain... Whose child she might be? Will she be claimed? Is she really an orphan? Who stole his gold? More tales of guilt and innocence will be told by the time this story is finished. There is one element in which this story differs from that of *Les Misérables* but to find out about it, you'll have to read the novel. In the end, there won't be any secrets left.

I do recommend this classic. I think it's well written and developed. I was somewhat perplexed by all the similarities between *Silas Marner* and *Les Misérables*, but I don't think it's possible there was any copying (on either side) simply due to the fact that the novels must have taken a long time to write. I don't think that Hugo could have developed and written his novel only a year after *Silas Marner* was published. Moreover, the novels are situated in different societies. As much as *Les Misérables* is a distinctly French novel in the sense that it speaks of the French society of the time period it describes, the same is the case with *Silas Marner*. Some things are universal, such as the philosophical question of a man's role in society, but societies described in these novels are different. The society of *Silas Marner* is distinctly English. So, I wouldn't say that either of these novels feels like the copy of the other. I think it was more the case of great minds think alike.

What more to say? I must admit that *Silas Marner* didn't move me as deeply as *Les Misérables* but that might be because it is a bit more vague. Silas is a fascinating protagonist, but he remains somewhat distant. I didn't feel we were given an insight into his psyche, thus I felt a bit less empathic towards him than I might have been otherwise. In addition, the story did have a rather sudden (albeit highly credible) ending. The story did move me, but I can't say it moved me to tears or anything like that, hence 4 stars instead of 5. It did make me think a great deal and that's always a tall sign of a really good book. To sum it up, it is a wonderful classic, well worth your time.

Kim says

This is a book which countless teenagers have been forced to read as part of the school syllabus. For some reason I didn't have to read it when I was at school. I'm glad that's the case, because I've a feeling this would not have appealed to me very much when I was a teenager.

As has been the case when I've read other novels by George Eliot, it took a while for me to become fully engaged with the narrative. But once the links between the various characters became clear, listening to the audiobook (beautifully narrated by Nadia May) became a joy. Essentially a story about the redemption which can come through love, the novel has something of the fairytale about it. Eliot might be criticised for sentimentality, but this is ultimately a feel-good story with an important moral. Added to this are Eliot's deft characterisation, elegant prose and the sure manner in which she evokes Victorian village life. Overall, listening to this was a most enjoyable experience.

Jan-Maat says

A slight, subtle and subversive fable, a post Christian novel, absurdly perfect in its balance and symbols. Filled with teasing humour and very careful intimate moments.

Yet because of that it seems unkind to even discuss it, since it is barely possible to do so without revealing great chunks of plot.

As a very young woman George Eliot was a person of severe and earnest Christian faith, the pursuit of which caused her to abandon it, still young she fell out with her father over her refusal to go to Church, eventually they came up with a compromise - she would attend Church but not take communion and that compromise seems to me to be at the centre of this novel. Equally I just reread Frankenstein and the two share a lot - both are centrally about parent child relationships and perhaps the failure of many families to achieve effective Eliotian compromises. Nature, nurture, adoption and the nature of parenthood are key concerns in both books as are character (the quintessential Victorian theme). Here Eliot shows us the perfection of the balance she constructs into the story - the characters are consistent and drive behaviours but those behaviours which are moral failings in one set of circumstances turn out to be virtues in another, and the reverse is also true setting up a balance between the weaver of the title and the son of the Squire. The Former's obsessive clinginess makes him a miser in the first part of the book, but when his golden guineas are replaced by a golden haired child we see the same character trait lead him to become a careful and attentive father. The Squire's son's easy going reliance on chance gets him exactly what he wants without ever having to work for it, but denies him that which he realises that he wants more than casual wealth and a pretty, socially desirable wife. The child who says that she doesn't want to see change and wants everything to stay the same is naturally the agent of transformation.

I'm struck most by the post Christian implications of the novel despite the formal Christian observance of the characters. Christianity here is a collection of words and rituals devoid of any meaning to the characters, Q.D. Leavis in the bonus introduction that this edition has points out the division between faith and works between two of the squire's sons, but this doesn't I feel go far enough, Christianity here is a collection of scraps without meaning, practised without understanding despite the presence of Preachers, chapel, church, vicars, regular attendance and prayer books, none of which has anything to do with what characters actually do or believe.

Instead we see the dominating presence of the Genius loci which for once are not entirely hostile. The titular Marner is a weaver, working away with his loom like a spider, in his web he catches a child, but instead of consuming it as a good spider ought, he is consumed and transformed by it, a process which like Eliot's childhood compromise brings him into community. Community, Eliot says is alone what sustains the Church, it's theology and history are nothings - meaningless to everybody - nobody not even the vicar understands what baptism and christening are. Apparently the dissenting Christianity that Marner first practises in his Northern Chapel is an entirely different religion to the Church of England Christianity practised in the rural shire later in the story. Different gods preside.

So we see that as Eliot tells us this morality tale she is making a subversive point. Christianity is not the font of morality, it is merely an alien growth, a parasite, grafted upon morality which itself arises from character and situation.

However in the central motive of the transformational nature of parenthood she also tells us that nature not only transcends nature, but also one's own nurturing and environment. Is George Eliot the greatest, or is that

an empty question?

Richard Derus says

This book was a real-life Book Circle read that, well, got mixed reviews. Some people thought the writing was brilliant and others found it dated; some people thought it was too short, others too long for the short story they felt it truly was and not the novel it's pretending to be.

I think it's a lovely book. I think Silas is about as honestly drawn and cannily observed a character as fiction offers. I think the village of Raveloe is as real as my own village of Hempstead. It's a delight to read about real people, presented without editorial snark, in a book from the 19th century.

And therein the book's real achievement. When it was published in 1861, it was a revolutionary tract! The hoi polloi were not to be represented in Art, and novels were then most definitely considered Art, unless they were romanticized, made into prettier or uglier or in some way extreme examples of a Point of View. Simple, honest, direct portrayal of people that novel-readers employed but never conversed with?! Shocking!

A book of great importance, then, for its groundbreaking treatment of The People. But also...and this is the reason it helped wreak the revolution whose Robespierres and Dantons were Hemingway and Company...it is a simple story of a man's journey down an ever-widening path that leads to enlightenment, told without A Message or A Moral, in prose that remains graceful 150 years later.

If you read it in high school, don't blame IT for the hatred your English teacher left you feeling...blame the teacher. It's not fairly presented in English courses. Read it as an adult, and judge it for itself. Maybe it'll be to your personal taste, maybe not, but I think a grown-up read of a book this seminal to all the others we read today, never thinking about how improbable their existence is, isn't too much to ask.

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Tyler Jones says

2011 marks 150 years since the publication of *Silas Marner*. I can see why some modern readers would find the pace slow, the language difficult, the moral message too strong and the story too neatly tied up. That will happen if you insist that a mid-19th century novel be judged by early-21st century standards. I don't understand why some people refuse to read a book on its own terms, but insist that the book conform to their terms. It's like they live in a city with great restaurants that represent every type of food in the world, but they only ever go to the steakhouse.

To me the story of the miserly weaver who loses his riches but discovers a greater treasure is one of the great novels of any time. The story itself is not so powerful as the incredibly deep insight the author has for what motivates human behaviour, particularly bad behaviour. Often while reading *Silas Marner* I was reminded of William Faulkner because both authors had a particular talent for exposing how people find self-righteous justifications for greedy actions. While Faulkner reveals hypocrisy in a darkly humorous way, Eliot shows

compassion for all her characters, no matter how flawed, and one gets the sense that her novels are presided over by a kind and forgiving God. The novels of George Eliot do not simply instruct us in proper behavior (for who wants to be preached at?) but give an example of a kind loving attitude that is needed much more today, I think, than it was 150 years ago.

Howard says

Dear Ms Park,

I finally finished reading *Silas Marner*. Yes, I know you assigned it during my sophomore year in high school, but I didn't finish it until this past February. I know I passed the test you gave us on the story and I even made a passing grade on the paper that I wrote about the story. But I have to confess that it was Jake D.'s *Classic Illustrated Comics* version of the story that allowed me to make those grades. Poor Jake. Even after reading the comic book from cover to cover he still failed both assignments.

Since I'm confessing and apologizing I suppose I should add one more thing. I'm sorry you caught me that day in class reading a paperback copy of Erskine Caldwell's *God's Little Acre* that I had tucked inside my lit book when I was supposed to have been reading about Silas. Now there was a writer. Erskine Caldwell, I mean. He could tell a story and, unlike *Silas Marner*, things happened in his books.

I had just gotten to a really interesting scene in this one when you caught me, the one with Darlin' Jill and the albino in the boat. I can still see your hand dart across my shoulder and snatch the book away. And then with everybody in the class looking, and while you held the book between your thumb and forefinger like it was a dead mouse, you looked at me and said one word, "Trash." Boy, was my face red. I never did know if you were talking about the book or me -- or both.

But in my defense, neither I nor any other fourteen-year old boy should have been required to read *Silas Marner*, unless, of course, the goal was to instill a hatred of reading. I say this as someone who always loved to read from the time that he first learned to read. Discounting comic books, poor old Jake, on the other hand, despised reading and had never read an entire book in his whole life. He might have been enticed to read about the Three Musketeers or Robin Hood or Huck Finn, but never Silas Marner.

One of the problems that I had at first with the story was the fact that you told us that the author's name wasn't really George Eliot. I remember thinking that I didn't blame him for not using his real name. I wouldn't have either. But then you told us that George's real name was Mary Ann Evans! Well, as far as I was concerned that made George a lot more interesting than Silas.

I also remember you telling us that Eliot/Evans' most famous quote was: "It is never too late to be what you might have been." Even at age fourteen, I found that to be profound and inspiring, much more so than the few pages I read in *Silas Marner*. But I recently discovered that the quote does not appear in anything that she wrote and that there is no evidence that she ever said it. I am no longer inspired, just disappointed.

But, as I say, I finally read the whole story. Here's my review: "It was better than I expected."

By the way, if you read my copy of *God's Little Acre*, the one you never returned, I bet you found it to be better than you expected.

Your former student,
Howard

Kelly ... says

I loved this book. The story of this sad and lonely man who finds love and redemption when he adopts a girl was just lovely to read.

Eliot took her protagonist from a tight knit and religious community to a solitary existence and then into the hearts of another community. She explored the theme of individual versus community so beautifully. At the time this book was written a person's village was extremely important; a person's identity was provided by the community. We see this most definitely when Silas is the outsider, as he seems to lack any identity. It feels as though the connection to community is not voluntary. It is there whether we like it or not.

Silas Marner worked a loom as a weaver and it was such a lovely symbol of Eliot's storytelling. She had so many threads in this story that she wove together perfectly in the end.

Paul says

I didn't read this at school and so managed to avoid the residual hatred that some have for certain classics as a result of poor teaching. The storyline and plot are well known. Silas Marner is a weaver in a Northern town and part of a religious congregation. He is falsely accused of stealing and his life falls apart. He moves to the village of Raveloe in the Midlands and lives alone on the edge of the community doing his weaving. Over time he builds up a substantial amount of money which becomes for him a purpose in life. One evening the dissolute younger son of the local squire steals the money and disappears. A while later on New Year's Eve there is a party at the local Squire's home. A woman with a young child makes her way through the snow towards the party with a view to making herself known as the wife of the squire's elder son (unacknowledged wife). She collapses in the snow outside Marner's cottage and dies. The child crawls into Marner's cottage where he discovers her in front of the fire. Marner determines to keep and bring up the child. This alters his relationship with the local community and inevitably proves to be redemptive: "Since the time the child was sent to me and I've come to love her as myself, 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."

One thing that marked this novel out at the time it was published was the realism and the way Eliot made ordinary working class characters rounded parts of the novel. This was quite revolutionary at the time.

Marner and the characters in Raveloe are not caricatures or walk on parts.

Eliot mentions a number of issues current in mid-Victorian society; the rising use of opium, a crisis in religion centred on the conflict between strict religious practice and human ethics, the stirrings of a change in the role of women. The reader gets a sense of this with Molly Farren, mother of Eppie and unacknowledged wife of Godfrey Cass just before she dies in the snow.

As this novel has been a school set text it has been analyzed and pored over ad infinitum. For me though it was a simple and rather touching parable of redemption which subverted traditional notions of parenting and gender roles and for once I didn't really object to a happy ending.

•Karen• says

The Fairy tale reading

Once upon a time, a poor linen weaver lived in a deep, dark, dank place. He had been much maligned, and had grown bitter and friendless. For comfort, he turned to work and building a crock of gold, which he kept hidden under a floorboard, and brought out at intervals to admire and gloat over. But one fateful evening, the feckless son of the local squire was passing by, and, having ridden his brother's horse to death by reckless hunting, and feeling sadly out of sorts at having to walk, and at having to explain to his brother where the money for the sale of said horse had disappeared to, and being of that class and disposition and education which had inculcated in him a deep sense of entitlement, (view spoiler) this devil of a selfish trickster wandered into the linen weaver's cottage and reasoned at once that such an industrious weaver, with few material wishes, would surely have a crock of gold hidden somewhere, and divined at once that such a poor cottage cannot offer many places of concealment. Alas, he was not wrong, and quickly purloined said bag of gold, disappearing into the night, ne'er to be seen again.

Poor Silas! But the tragedy of his stolen fortune throws him into the arms of the local community, who are sympathetic to his loss, and offer, at least, some practical help, taking him to the local officer to report the crime, although the money is not recovered. Nor can it be, yet. For there is a different treasure in store for Silas. Gold re-enters the cottage in the form of a faerie child. A child that arrives in a way that, for him, is entirely inexplicable by means of reason or deduction. Sent by heaven, named for his dead sister, brought up by Silas, Eppie is his path back to humanity, love and family ties. He is a loving, indulgent father to this girl, and is pleased to accept the aid and support of his neighbour, Dolly Winthrop, a woman of good sense and compassion. Silas is no longer an outcast, and when Eppie's true identity is revealed to her, she refuses the offer of riches and social prestige and respectability, preferring the warmth and loving care of the only real father she has ever known. Eppie marries Aaron, Dolly Winthrop's son, and offers a home to Silas in his old age. And they all live happily ever after.

The rather dull show-off smart-arse reading

England of the early 19th Century was a hotbed of religious dissent, discussion, dispute and debate. On one hand, the established Church could be seen as internally corrupt and seized by intellectual torpor. The Lords Spiritual were known to the irreverent as the Tory Party at prayer: those Anglican Bishops so much a part of the Establishment, sitting comfortably in the House of Lords, sitting with or in place of the local squire on the magistrate's bench, they belonged firmly to the league of the Tory landowner and magnate, enjoying the spoils of nepotism, pluralism, absenteeism, sinecures and simony, while many a parish priest lived on the edge of starvation. As such, the established church was vulnerable to attack, both on the intellectual, philosophical level and on the social level. It was no longer 'fit for purpose', providing neither spiritual succour nor even pastoral care in many places.

However, on the other hand, there were constructive movements within the Church that revived debate and strengthened the Church by forcing it to take up a position. For one, there was a huge interest in Evangelical movements, the church of Dissent, a faith that rested on the Word of God, a belief in the veracity of the word of the Bible, a focus on personal morality and acceptance of the Word. For another there was the Oxford Movement, aka Tractarianism, aka Puseyism, aka Anglo-Catholicism, a movement which had begun as protest, a defence against what was perceived as the possible subservience of the Church to temporal power. Electoral reform meant that the composition of the 1833 Parliament included such worrying elements as Dissenters and Roman Catholics, quite apart from the even more worrying aspect of its being Whig controlled. One of the first proposals by the Whigs was to abolish the 22 Irish Bishopsrics, which served a membership of a mere 850,00, although supported by the forced tithes of 6.4 million Roman Catholics in

Ireland. The Anglican Church saw this as an assault on their sovereignty, an opening of the door to the dissipation of the privileges that went hand in hand with being the Established Church: before 1837 there was no civil marriage, no civil registration of births, deaths and marriages. A child had to be baptised for its birth to be registered, a wedding had to take place in the Anglican Church for it to be legally recognized, a burial could take place only in silence or with the Anglican rite. Naturally enough, it was not only the Irish Catholics who felt resentful. Dissenters in England also paid for the upkeep of a parish church to whose views they did not subscribe, while supporting their own church communities as well. The Oxford Movement sought to re-establish the authority of their bishops. In order to do so, it was necessary to turn away from salvation through the Bible as illustrated by the inner light of the individual, and restore the idea of absolute and ultimate truth of which the Church was the mystical repository and expositor. John Henry Newman researched early Church history in an attempt to discover unbroken continuity, to re-establish apostolic succession: the power of the sacraments lay in the fact that they were administered by bishops and clergy whose own powers derived, ultimately, from Christ himself. The Church as mediator between god and man, which therefore should be wholly separate from state control.

This atmosphere of conflicting orthodoxies was divisive, leading to the High Church and Low Church forms of Anglicism, the one affirming sacramentalism as a means of grace, the exaltation of the symbol, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the other emphasising personal morality and salvation through acceptance of the Bible.

In the long view, these concerns may be seen as petty in-fighting. For although the debate gave rise to a certain regeneration of the clergy, an invigorated taking up of the good fight, religion was under attack from other developments: a certain Charles Darwin was just returning from an extended voyage aboard the *Beagle*, geology and paleontology, the so-called "Testimony of the Rocks" called the time-scale of the Bible into question, and Higher Criticism also undermined belief in the Bible as the repository of all wisdom.

Silas Marner, published in 1861, was George Eliot's third novel, after *Adam Bede* and *The Mill on the Floss*. Her first literary publication was her 1846 translation of *Das Leben Jesu* by David Friedrich Strauss, published in Germany in 1835, a work of Higher Criticism. Strauss analysed the Bible and came to the conclusion that the Old Testament was a mixed bag of human documents; tribal histories, genealogies, digests of laws, erotic songs, biographies, folk myths. A library, an archive of man-made texts, fortuitously assembled and endowed with divine authority long after the fact. The Gospels, similarly, comprised several versions of a biography of a historical figure named Jesus, whom an early group of disciples held to be the son of god, the Messiah, and to whom they therefore ascribed miraculous powers. Events in the Bible could not withstand historical and scientific scrutiny, but it retained its spiritual authority as a body of symbol and myth, a document of mankind's aspirations and desires.

In *Silas Marner*, Eliot describes a path through some of the controversies of the times she lived in. The novel is subtitled 'The Weaver of Raveloe' but Marner is not originally of Raveloe at all, in fact the novel traces the process of his becoming part of Raveloe. Originally he comes from somewhere 'Nor'ard', one of the industrial cities, where he belonged to an (unnamed) narrow religious sect, where the poorest layman has the chance of distinguishing himself by gifts of speech, and has, at the very least, the weight of a silent voter in the government of his community.' Thus Eliot highlights immediately one of the attractions of the religion of dissent: it is a democratic body, one that expects its members to take responsibility and show initiative. She also portrays some of the dangers inherent in the system: Marner and his friend William Dane (view spoiler) spend much time discussing Assurance of salvation, and how one might know. Scrupulous Marner confesses that he has never arrived at 'anything higher than hope mingled with fear' and envies Dane's confidence, which is based on nothing more than a dream he claims to have had. Marner it is who might seem to have the clearer sign, as he is subject to cataleptic fits, and once fell into a state of unconsciousness and rigidity at a prayer-meeting, which was generally accepted as an access of light and fervour. But Dane is jealous of Marner, and from an access of personal malevolence, suggests that these fits are more the work of Satan than a proof of divine favour. Dane engineers a destructive incident that casts suspicion of robbery on Marner; the

community resolve on prayer and the drawing of lots to find out the truth, but the lots declare that Silas Marner is guilty. Stunned with despair, Marner leaves that northern town and the community he has known.

To people accustomed to reason about the forms in which their religious feeling has incorporated itself, it is difficult to enter into that simple, untaught state of mind in which the form and the feeling have never been severed by an act of reflection.

Raveloe is that place, where the form and the feeling have never been severed. It lay 'in the rich central plain of what we are pleased to call Merry England', a village where 'many of the old echoes lingered, undrowned by new voices.' It has a fine old church and churchyard at the heart of it, but there are several homesteads close upon the road that lift more imposing fronts than the rectory, 'which peeped from among the trees'. And indeed, we never meet the rector until the squire's New Year party, for religion here in Raveloe is organic, is tradition, is an integral part of the warp and weft of life with little concern for its significance. The festivities at New Year are open for the people of the village to come and observe from the side, an opportunity for them to see the gentle folk at play, and nothing could be more natural. 'It was not thought of as an unbecoming levity for the old and middle-aged people to dance a little before sitting down to cards, but rather as a part of social duties.' And the parson naturally set an example in these social duties.

For it would not have been possible for the Raveloe mind, without a peculiar revelation, to know that a clergyman should be a pale-faced memento of solemnities, instead of a reasonably faulty man whose exclusive authority to read prayers and preach, to christen, marry and bury you, necessarily co-existed with the right to sell you the ground to be buried in and to take tithe in kind; on which last point, of course, there was a little grumbling, but not to the point of irreligion - not of deeper significance than the grumbling at the rain, which was by no means accompanied with a spirit of impious defiance, but with a desire that the prayer for fine weather might be read forthwith.

Dolly Winthrop is the embodiment of that fine feeling that has never been severed from the form, although a carping evangelist might see the feeling as more superstition than spirituality. In an access of kindness towards Marner, robbed of his gold, she brings him lard-cakes she has baked. "'There's letters pricked on 'em,' said Dolly. 'I can't read 'em myself, and there's nobody, not Mr Macey himself, rightly knows what they mean; but they've a good meaning, for they're the same as is on the pulpit-cloth at church.'" Silas can read, he reads the letters off: I.H.S., but is no more capable than Dolly of interpreting their meaning - in fact he is worse off, for he doesn't even associate them with a good sentiment - "but there was no possibility of misunderstanding the desire to give comfort that made itself heard in her quiet tones." She gently suggests to him that he might like to go to church of a Sunday, in the same breath as suggesting that he might like to roast a bit of something at the bakehus "for it's nothing but right to have a bit o' summat hot of a Sunday and not to make it as you can't know your dinner from Saturday." These rituals structure our lives and make for shared experience with neighbours, and do no harm, after all. When Eppie arrives, Dolly becomes more involved with Marner's life: she assures him that the child should be christened, although he has no concept of what that means. She too, is a little vague, seeing it as a kind of inoculation, good things and good words to keep us from harm, and salve our conscience if, by chance, things should turn out badly - then at least we did all we could.

Dolly Winthrop is not moved by any sentiment of salvation, or good Christian duty, her religion is a matter of habit, what is the done thing. But what moves her is common decency and sympathy for a fellow human being. These are the true bonds that sew Marner back into the fabric of community life: love, friendship,

compassion. Shared experience, jokes, laughter, banter, well-practised comments, familiar, recognizable and pleasurable. Habits. The done thing.

Well, this has turned into a term paper already, but there would be more to say about Eliot's sensitive analysis of class, her innovative use of the vernacular to portray character, her multi-layered irony and gentle humour, her graceful sentences and above all her warmth. Her charity. Her humanity.

Another time. (Is that a threat?)

Diane S ? says

I read this in high school many moons ago, and all I remembered about it was that I didn't much care for it, though could remember why. I picked it up again as it was a read for a group I'm in, and was very curious to find out how I felt about it now. Well, you can see by my rating how that worked out. As soon as I started reading I remembered why I disliked it back then. Too wordy, way too wordy, when one sentence would do, it takes four with all the descriptive meanderings. Was she paid by the word? I know books were scarcer in those times, and maybe flowery speech was to readers liking. I don't know, but as this is not a long book, if the extra was cut out, it probably would only have been novella length, or maybe a short story.

There is a good message buried within, I remember that too and since I now remember more about this novel I am not going to subject myself to rereading the whole thing. Done!

Erin says

I have spent so much of my year reading books that have been published in 2017, that there is something exceedingly special about diving into a book that was published in 1861. It was hard for me to consider that this was the same George Eliot that wrote *The Mill on the Floss* which I count among my favorite reads. Not that this was in any way a terrible story, but I believe I may be coming down from the 5 star high I had earlier today. A simple enough tale about a miserly weaver that is wrongly accused of a crime, shutting himself away from all those around him and the little girl that brings him back to the living. An appropriate read during the holiday season.

Loretta says

I was quite bored throughout. Can't say more than that.

Apatt says

*"God gave her to me because you turned your back upon her, and He looks upon her as mine:
you've no right to her!
When a man turns a blessing from his door, it falls to them as take it in."*

One of the main reasons I like reading Victorian novels is for the eloquence. The above quote there is spoken by the eponymous Silas Marner, a character with little in the way of education or wealth, so there is a plainness in his eloquence. In his position I would have said "F*k off mister, finders keepers!". Which is why I am not a novelist.

Silas Marner is a simple tale of a lonely miser who finds an abandoned child and decides to raise her as his own. The theme of how loving a child can "reawakening the senses" and "unfold the soul" is fairly common in fiction and popular culture. Movies like "Three Men and a Baby", "Despicable Me" and "Big Daddy" milk the theme for all it's worth, but it takes a major talent like George Eliot to achieve any kind of resonance. Silas starts off as a nice and simple guy with tremendous weaving skills and above average herbal knowledge, after being ripped off by his best friends and falsely accused he moves to another town settle into a rather Scrooge-ish existence, away from the nearest population. The poor fellow is soon ripped off again by robbery but shortly finds a greater wealth through a child that he learns to love.

The transformation of Silas from a miserable antisocial recluse to a popular kindly man rings very true to me. I have personally experienced a similar transformation when a child entered my life. Later in the book Silas is given an option of wealth in exchange for his adopted daughter and the theme of what real wealth really is becomes evident. Financial wealth becomes insignificant in comparison to parental love.

There is not a lot a can think of to write about such a straight forward and rather short novel. Suffice it to say that it is a heartfelt story that I have no hesitation in recommending. Once I again I am grateful for Librivox.org for making the audiobook version available for free. As their books are read by volunteers some are better than others, the quality of the audiobooks in their huge catalogue is definitely variable. However, this version of *Silas Marner* is skillfully read by "Tadhg" in a very charming Irish lilt. Reading books like this make me feel that life is good (then my boss shows up and shatters the illusion).

(Audiobook download link).

Cindy Newton says

How could this be anything other than enjoyable, when it was penned by George Eliot? Although this was a simpler story with a more overt theme than others, like *Middlemarch*, it still provided plenty of food for thought. It's a simple tale of faith lost and regained, the redemptive powers of love, and the powerful effect that human connections can have on our lives. Lovely, and highly recommended for lovers of classics and excellent writing.

Luffy says

Nul à en pleurer - that's the French phrase that sprang to my mind when I finished *Silas Marner*. It has a low average score here and it's not difficult to understand why, even to those who loved the book to bits.

I have no agenda, but classics and I rarely mix. I've been bitten so many times that I'm a gazillion times shy. I'm seriously considering of moving away from these tepid experiments and stick to my usual and benevolent hunting grounds as far as books are concerned.

Silas Marner is a righteous person with no worry about the future, despite his advanced years and despite his timeline in the 19th century. He is far from a happy-go-lucky person, but he is the closest person in the book that is developed in such a light.

I didn't like this book. I don't regard this book as a deserved classic. It should have been relegated to anonymity. Life isn't fair.
