

Setting and character change in silas manner



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George Eliot's novel, *Silas Marner*, conveys the power of the church in Victorian era England over the lives of its parishioners. Silas, in the opening pages, is an innocent, albeit naïve, God-fearing Christian. When the church of Lantern Yard convicts him of theft, a crime which he was framed for by best friend, he is led to believe that God has abandoned him, and that he can no longer trust the church. He retreats then to the fictional village of Raveloe, becoming a recluse and the object of much of the town's superstitions. Despite being thought of as a devil worshipper by some townsfolk, he prefers Raveloe as it is more easygoing and less ardent in religion. As England grows more industrial, communities like Raveloe are becoming difficult to find, making it the perfect out-of-the-way place where Silas could begin anew. This new town, despite lacking the sort of religious fervor of Lantern Yard, came to be the place where Silas at last began to rediscover himself and recommit to God. The detail with which Eliot writes about the community depicts a feeling of nostalgia for "old England", which was rapidly beginning to fade. Describing Raveloe as "snug" and "nestled," Eliot gives the town a comfortable feeling, making it feel as if it were a place of refuge. When looked upon from this angle, it becomes clear why the spiritually and emotionally damaged Silas sought life here, rather than in a urban center like London. The titular character of Eliot's *Silas Marner* undergoes dramatic, yet passive changes throughout the course of the plot. Silas renounced his Christian faith after the incident in Lantern Yard, forcing himself to live as a recluse in the village of Raveloe. The devotion he felt toward God, however, was not eradicated, but replaced by devotion toward money. Despite being a miser, Silas remains a kind and honest person. After learning of the theft of his treasure, and suspecting a neighbor, Jem Rodney,

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Silas does not threaten legal action against him, but merely asks for the safe return of his money. ““ If it was you stole my money,” said Silas, clasping his hands entreatingly, and raising his voice to a cry, “ give it me back, and I won’t meddle with you. I won’t set the constable on you.”” (ch. 7 pg.

57)Silas’ love of money is instantly shattered when his hoard of treasure disappears. For a time, he is depressed and without a purpose in life. Like all humanity, Silas required a purpose in life, something which he could work toward and would give him happiness in life. For much of his life leading up to the incident in Lantern Yard, Silas fills this longing with his love of God. After the loss of his money, his life becomes dedicated to, who he initially perceives to be the physical manifestation of his gold, Eppie. Despite knowing nothing about child rearing, Silas is determined to keep her, believing that she was given to him to fill the void in his life. ““ No-no- I can’t part with it, I can’t let it go,” said Silas abruptly. “ It’s come to me-I’ve a right to keep it.”” (Ch. 13 pg. 121) His neighbors, and indeed, Silas himself are surprised by his conviction to keep the child whom he had only met by pure chance. Nevertheless, Eppie has a profound impact on his life, and begins the process of restoring Silas’ shattered soul. Silas’ most prominent characteristic, however, is his change in attitude toward the community of Raveloe. Whereas he initially wanted nothing to do with them, treating the people only as a source for more gold, over the course of the novel, Silas becomes an upstanding member of the community, one whom the people of Raveloe come to respect and admire. Eppie, being energetic and curious, frequently drew Silas away from his loom work, and accompanied him on his trips for wool. The sight of the two sparked a change in the minds of the people, revealing that their earlier impressions of Silas were wrong, and that,

like each of them, he was simply human. “ But now Silas was met with open smiling faces and cheerful questioning, as a person whose satisfactions and difficulties could be understood.” (Ch. 14 pg. 138)Throughout the novel, community and character change often go hand in hand. Silas’ reemergence into the public sphere following his self-imposed exile reveals the effect a change in setting can have. By the end of the novel, Silas, though no longer the same man he once was, is arguably stronger, the great ordeals of his life having resulted in positive change upon his life.