

How does george  
eliot use setting in  
silas marner



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Throughout *Silas Marner* a variety of different settings are used to create a location for the events that are taking place in the novel to happen. A common example of a setting used at numerous points in the novel is Silas Marner's stone cottage. Eliot uses setting in many ways: symbolism can be shown, for example Silas' stone cottage reflects his character; atmosphere can be created for events, for example the description of spring and flowers in relation to the wedding scene and also pathetic fallacy is used to create atmosphere and prepare for the events in the plot, for example the cold winter's night in relation to Molly Farren's death.

All of these setting uses in *Silas Marner* can also help to illustrate the themes that are present within the novel. One of the most prominent of these themes is the impact that the Industrial Revolution had on the town and the country. Silas Marner's cottage is an example of symbolism and it reveals a large amount about his character and personality. In Chapter 1 his cottage is described as being, 'a stone cottage'. The fact that the cottage is made out of stone creates the idea that the cottage is cold and harsh, reflecting Silas Marner's character.

Just as a stone is hard to break and open, Silas' heart is also hard to reach. Stone is also generally a bleak grey colour, it is thought of as quite a dull material. His cottage is described as being, 'not far from the edge of a deserted stone-pit'. This shows that Silas Marner does not live near the heart of the village of Raveloe. The placing of Silas Marner's cottage illustrates Silas' part in the society. He is on the edge of society in the same way that he lives, 'not far from the edge of a deserted stone-pit'.

Although Raveloe is a close community, where everyone knows and speaks to everyone else, Silas has never been part of it. The word pit is a harsh word as it starts and ends with a consonant; this again creates more negativity around Silas' cottage. A pit is normally very dark and seems to continue on forever and is never-ending. Eliot is showing how dark and bleak Silas' life is and that because a pit appears to be never-ending, it also appears that Silas' bitterness, pain and disconnection from the village will be never-ending.

Eliot uses the word stone to describe Silas' cottage at numerous points in the novel. The repetition of the word stone throughout the novel emphasises Silas' cold character; it also leaves a clear, but negative image in the reader's mind of Silas' cottage. During the novel Silas Marner's cottage evolves due to the presence of Eppie. At the beginning of the novel the cottage is described as being, 'a stone cottage... not far from the edge of a deserted stone pit'.

It is during Chapter 12 that Silas Marner discovers Eppie in his cottage and from this point onwards the progression of Silas' stone cottage into Silas and Eppie's home is clear. In Chapter 14 it says, 'The stone hut was made a soft nest for her'. Although the cottage is still being referred to as a stone hut, it is only to emphasise the transformation that has been made. The cottage is being described as soft. This is a complete contradiction to the harsh stone image that was created of the cottage earlier in the novel.

Soft is a very delicate word that is generally associated with positive and nice things. The use of this word may also reflect that Silas himself has become 'soft'. He has opened his heart to Eppie and so his love for her has

changed him from the stone-like character that he once was. The fact that the stone cottage is now a nest illustrates that the cottage has also become a home and not just a cottage. Pathetic fallacy is used in *Silas Marner* to create atmosphere and prepare the reader for particular events in the plot.

There are two main points in the novel in which pathetic fallacy is used. The first is in Chapter 12 when Molly Farren dies. A New Year's Eve party full of celebration and joy is taking place at the Red House. At the same time as the party setting though, Eliot describes the setting of Raveloe on a cold winter's evening as Molly Farren is walking through the village. The weather is quite treacherous, 'snow-hidden ruggedness of the long lanes'. This quote highlights the harshness of the situation. The snow illustrates how that cold and damp atmosphere that Molly Farren is in.

It would be very difficult for Molly to walk along slippery lanes while also trying to carry a small child. As the lanes are snow-hidden they would probably have been quite hard to see and Molly would have found it difficult to see exactly where she was going. Alliteration is used when describing the long lanes. This helps to exaggerate how long the roads are and how they give the impression that they are endless. The lanes are rough and uneven due to the use of the word ruggedness. All of these ideas combined create a vivid image of a woman stumbling along trying to find her footing on uneven paths.

The negative portrayal of Molly Farren's entire situation builds up an atmosphere for the incident that is about to occur. The second of the main points in the novel where pathetic fallacy is used is at the very end of the

novel where the wedding takes place. The Conclusion commences with, 'It was when the lilacs and laburnums... showed their golden and purple wealth'. From this imagery that Eliot uses it is clear that this part of the novel is set in spring. The flowers described are yellow and purple; these are complimentary colours that enhance one another making them very bright, vivid and colourful.

The word wealth may have two meanings; it may illustrate the richness of the two colours and also the vast quantity of flowers that are in the garden. Rather than simply describing the flowers as lilacs Eliot describes them as great lilacs, creating the image of the flowers being large, easily noticeable and very distinguished. This multitude of positive imagery prepares the reader for the wedding scene that follows shortly after. There is a recurring theme of the difference between life in the town and the county throughout the novel.

Near the beginning of the novel Eliot compares Raveloe and Lantern Yard. Overall Raveloe is given a more positive description and Lantern Yard a more negative description. When describing Raveloe the description appears to relate to nature as orchards, woods and the outdoors are described. On the other hand though, the description of Lantern Yard appears to mainly be relating to the insides of the buildings in Lantern Yard. The description relating to Raveloe is colourful, 'purple-faced farmers jogging along the lanes or turning in at the Rainbow'.

Lots of colour is used, creating the image that Raveloe is a more colourful place full of life and excitement. The pub, the Rainbow, is a focal place in

Raveloe where members of the community talk and exchange gossip. The colourful name creates the idea that it is a cheerful and happy place full of pleasant people. Lantern Yard is described as a less friendly place, 'The white-washed walls; the little pews where well-known figures entered with a subdued rustling'. In contrast to Raveloe the walls are white – they are very plain, lacking in any colourful or cheerfulness.

Even though people knew each other in Lantern Yard they would not immediately come up and greet someone. The people in Lantern Yard were quiet and kept to themselves more in contrast to the 'purple-faced farmers' in Raveloe. Although Lantern Yard is just the church community within the town it is clear the Eliot is describing the town as not as lively as the village of Raveloe. Eliot may describe Raveloe as such a pleasant place because she herself experienced her childhood in the country and took many great memories with her of her childhood before she later moved to a town when she was older.

When Silas goes to visit Lantern Yard in Chapter 21 he is very surprised to see how much it has changed. What was once a close religious community has been lost and the chapel replaced by a factory. Through this disappearance of what Lantern Yard once was Eliot may be demonstrating the disruptive power of industrialisation, which has destroyed the old traditions and erases the memory of Silas' past. Here it seems that Eliot is portraying to the reader her negative feelings relating to industrialisation. Eppie's response to the town is, 'It's worse than the Workhouse'.

The Workhouse was a public institution that housed and fed people who were unable to support themselves. It was considered a terrible place for anyone to go and signalled the end of the line. The idea that Eppie could say that Lantern Yard was worse than the Workhouse clearly shows what an awful place it has become. It is shown that the Industrial Revolution has caused the loss of close communities in Lantern Yard as Silas asks the brush-maker about people his old friends from Lantern Yard, but he even after living in Lantern Yard for ten years knows nothing of them.