

NAXOS
AudioBooks

**CLASSIC
FICTION**

George Eliot
Silas Marner

Read by **Freda Dowie**



NA207512D

1	The linen-weaver, Silas Marner	7:56
2	His friend, William Dane	10:21
3	The world of Raveloe	5:49
4	Squire Cass and his sons Godfrey and Dunstan	10:31
5	The secret marriage of Godfrey Cass	11:42
6	A shock for Silas Marner	5:38
7	'I want the constable'	7:55
8	An interview with Squire Cass	6:21
9	'A poor mushed creature'	7:14
10	Miss Nancy Lammeter – purity and nattiness	5:42
11	A surprise by the hearth	11:50
12	The naming of the tramp's child	5:13
13	Godfrey Cass – the right turn	2:32
14	Sixteen years later	15:20
15	Sunday dessert with Nancy and Priscilla	9:39
16	Some shocking news	8:44
17	Mr and Mrs Cass visit Silas and Eppie	14:08
18	Back at home	7:35
19	Conclusion	4:09

Total time: 2:38:29

George Eliot

Silas Marner

The novelist and critic, Henry James, was a huge admirer of George Eliot and regarded Silas Marner as the best of her earlier works. He was, however, keen to identify in her writing a fault of which she is still often accused: that of sentimental moralising – ‘her figures and situations are evolved from her moral consciousness and are only indirectly the products of observation’. Whether or not one agrees with this view, it is certainly true that George Eliot first became known as a philosopher and an intellectual, rather than a novelist.

She was born Mary Ann Evans in 1819 in Warwickshire, England. At the age of twenty-five she translated Strauss’s *Life of Jesus* and some years later brought out an English edition of Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity*. These books were part of a passionate debate about God, atheism and agnosticism. During her time as assistant editor of the *Westminster Review*, she met such influential thinkers as John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer. In 1854 she met George Henry Lewes, with whom she was to live for the next twenty-four years, and he encouraged her to write fiction. Lewes

was separated from his wife, with no possibility of a divorce, so the couple were never married. In 1878 Lewes died and in 1880 George Eliot married J W Cross, an old friend, who became her first biographer, but she herself died in December of that year. She wrote numerous articles and reviews, but is best known for her fiction: *Scenes From Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Silas Marner*, *Romola*, *Felix Holt: the Radical*, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*.

In terms of ‘ideas’ *Silas Marner* is a remarkably dense work. The treatment of the poor, for example, is both radical and conservative. The life of the poor is presented as being preferable to that of the rich. Godfrey Cass, son of the Squire, is embroiled in the same events as Silas Marner, and yet unlike the humble weaver, he makes the wrong decision at every turn. Moreover, when Eppie is offered the chance of becoming a ‘lady’, her rejection and contempt are clear: ‘it’ud be poor work for me to put on things and ride in a gig,’ and she willingly chooses the life of the poor: ‘I like the working folks – and their victuals,

and their ways.' Although this seems a fairly radical idea, in many ways this is an affirmation of the old order in the countryside, of neighbourliness and country work which was threatened by the encroaching towns and the effects of the Industrial Revolution. George Eliot also attacks the dehumanising effects of the Evangelical movement, which, also located in the town, was the cause of Silas Marner's original misfortune. In a sense then, there are no big solutions here to the problems of the nineteenth-century industrial transformation. George Eliot chooses rather to celebrate the charity and wisdom which, when stripped of dogma, status and false pride, bring true personal happiness.

When Silas Marner is forced from his solitude, first by the loss of his money, and secondly by the arrival of the child, it is his subsequent integration into the community which proves his salvation. The bones of the story may perhaps smack of sentimentality, but through the vivid portrayal of Silas Marner himself, George Eliot took on not only many issues of her time, but also the moral dilemmas which remain universal.

Notes by Heather Godwin

The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS catalogue

SCHUBERT PIANO TRIO IN E FLAT D.929 OP. 100 Stuttgart Piano Trio	8.550132
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courtesy of Fine Art Photographs.

George Eliot

Silas Marner

Read by **Freda Dowie**

Here is a tale straight from the fireside. We are compelled to follow the humble and mysterious figure of the linen weaver Silas Marner, on his journey from solitude and exile to the warmth and joy of family life. His path is a strange one; when he loses his hoard of hard-earned coins all seems to be lost, but in place of the golden guineas come the golden curls of a child – and from desolate misery comes triumphant joy.



Freda Dowie will be remembered as the mother in Terence Davies' film *Distant Voices: Still Lives*. She was an original member of Peter Brooks' Theatre of Cruelty experiment. Her stage credits include an award-winning *Electra* and *Emily Dickinson* in the one-woman play *Belle of Amherst*. She also reads *Wuthering Heights* and part of *Dangerous Liaisons* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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