Harvest

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JIM CRACE

Jim Crace was born in Hertforshire, in southern England, and grew up in London. He graduated from the University of London in 1968, after which he joined Britain's Voluntary Services Overseas and worked as an educational television assistant in Khartoum, Sudan. Upon his return home he worked for the BBC and then spent twenty years as a freelance journalist, in which profession he learned that "neither the absence of 'the Muse' nor the presence of 'the block' should be allowed to hinder the orderly progress of a book," according to the British Council. Crace published *Continent*, a series of interconnected stories, in 1986, followed by several novels, of which *Harvest* is one of the most recent. His novel *Being Dead* won the National Book Critics Circle Award, two of his books (*Quarantine* and *Harvest*) have been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. Crace won the Windham-Campbell Literature Prize in 2014. He lives in Birmingham, England, with his wife and two children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Taking place from the 16th to the 18th century, enclosure was an agricultural and political movement in which small parcels of arable land were combined into large farms or estates. Since the feudal period, most land had been owned by aristocrats but farmed communally by small villages. Under enclosure, land was controlled exclusively by its owners, and communal use was prohibited. Enclosure facilitated the British Agricultural Revolution, a period of unusually high agricultural productivity, by shifting land use from subsistence farming towards larger and more efficient farms that often focused on a single product (in the case of *Harvest*, sheep). By driving newly landless peasants into larger cities, enclosure also created the surplus of cheap factory labor necessary for Britain's Industrial Revolution. By the 19th century, enclosure had helped England become one of the wealthiest countries in the world. However, because it dispossessed large groups of people, helped concentrate profit and power in the hands of the elite, and disrupted a centuries-old way of life, enclosure remains a highly controversial moment in British history.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Harvest is deeply rooted in the historical drama of early modern England, but it's also an examination of universally relevant themes like dispossession and community. In this way, it's similar to other novels that seek to illuminate contemporary issues by historical exploration, such as Geraldine Brooks's *Year of Wonders*, which is set in the same era, during a plague outbreak in rural England; Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, which takes place during the Salem Witch Trials; and Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*, which addresses power and politics during the reign of Henry VIII. In its vehement opposition to the enclosure movement, *Harvest* also has much in common with British literature in the centuries after enclosure became prevalent. Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth and Keats, are often interpreted as criticizing enclosure by championing wilderness and open spaces. Some scholars have even argued that Jane Austen's *Emma* implicitly addresses enclosure and its pernicious effects on a bucolic English community.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Harvest
- **When Written:** 2013
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 2013
- **Literary Period:** contemporary
- **Genre:** historical fiction
- **Setting:** a remote English hamlet in the 17th or 18th century
- **Climax:** From a window in the manor house attic, Walter watches Mistress Beldam and her husband destroy the pillory and set fire to the village cottages, before then finding Mr. Quill's dead body stuffed in a trunk.
- **Antagonist:** Edmund Jordan
- **Point of View:** first person limited

EXTRA CREDIT

History Buff. Many of Crace's novels take place during historical moments of unprecedented change. His novel *The Gift of Stones* explores the transition between the Neolithic Age and the Bronze Age, while *Quarantine* takes place during Jesus Christ's forty days in the desert.

Family Man. While Crace loves writing, he doesn't romanticize his craft, saying he's most motivated by "good, old-fashioned work guilt" and that writing is "less important to me than family or politics."

PLOT SUMMARY

The village wakes up to two fires. One comes from a shack set up by some strangers on the edge of the village land, who are following the age-old custom decreeing they will have the right

to stay if they erect a structure and build a fire before they are discovered. The other comes from Master Kent's dovecote, and the villagers are worried they will be reprimanded for sleeping through it. Walter, the narrator, suspects that the Derby twins and Brooker Higgs are to blame; he caught them returning from the forest with hallucinogenic mushrooms the night before, and deduces they set the fire.

The previous day, the villagers were finishing the autumn harvest. They were surprised to see a stranger in the fields, whom they nicknamed Mr. Quill for his ever-present pen. Mr. Quill said he was surveying Master Kent's land. At first, this wasn't important enough to distract the villagers from the work of harvesting grain to sustain them through the winter. However, as the day progressed, the villagers began to wonder aloud if Master Kent was planning on selling their lands.

Walter now supposes that the three young men, angry at the prospect, set the fire as a prank. Such a crime would get them hanged in a larger town, but there's no formal government in the village, and Master Kent is too kind to exact such harsh justice.

Eager to divert suspicion, the Derby twins and Brooker Higgs suggest that the strangers are responsible for the fire; the entire village seizes on this convenient excuse and hurries to the shack, except for Walter, who burned his hand trying to put out the fire. At the shack, the villagers find a woman, a young man, and an old man. Master Kent decrees that the men will be punished by a week in the **pillory**. He nicknames the woman Mistress Beldam for her brash and unfeminine demeanor.

In the evening, the village celebrates a successful harvest, feasting on meat and ale provided by Master Kent. There's a lurking sense of unease, however, because the pillory, which hasn't been used for years, is now occupied by strangers. The pillory is in the shape of a cross, and since the village is too small to have a church, Master Kent conducts marriages and baptisms in front of it, including Walter's own.

At the end of the meal, Master Kent formally introduces Mr. Quill, whose real name is Philip Earle; he announces that the mapmaker has been drawing up plans to shift the village from communal agriculture to **sheep** farming, which Master Kent says will be an "organization to all our advantages." When he finishes speaking, the strange woman appears at the edge of the barn, surveys the festival for a moment, and vanishes.

Master Kent tells Walter to go find Mistress Beldam and offer her shelter in the farm. Walter has known Master Kent since they were children, when Walter's father served Master Kent. When Master Kent married and took over the village, his wife Lucy's property, Walter accompanied him as his manservant until he met his own wife and joined the village as a farmer. Walter walks through the forest looking for Mistress Beldam but can't locate her.

In the morning, the villagers glean the fields, gathering by hand all the grain that is left after the harvest. The annual process is accompanied by a ceremony in which the villagers choose a Gleaning Queen from among the young girls. Master Kent gives Mr. Quill the privilege of choosing. He selects Lizzie Carr, the village's youngest child.

Because of his wounded hand, Walter is excused from threshing and assigned to assist Mr. Quill for a week. Mr. Quill asks Walter to show him around the village so that he can understand the lay of the land. Mr. Quill has a limp and moves slowly, but he's thoughtful and attentive. Walter takes him to the Bottom, a marshland used by the villagers as a disposal ground for animal carcasses and sewage. Mr. Quill says the village's beauty is "humbling," and his naïve wonder reminds Walter of his own reactions upon first arriving. Next, he takes Mr. Quill to the boundary stones, which mark the end of the village territory. Mr. Quill asks Walter to tell him the names of all these places, but Walter responds that they don't have any—even the village itself doesn't have a name.

Mr. Quill confides to Walter that, since the death of Master Kent's wife, the land actually belongs to a distant cousin, Edmund Jordan. It's Jordan who wants to bring in sheep, and he's arriving today to see that his wishes are enforced. When they return to the town, they find Master Kent saying prayers at the pillory; the old man has died, likely from exposure.

Master Jordan, a well-dressed and arrogant man, arrives while Mr. Quill and Master Kent are carrying the corpse into the manor house. Master Jordan takes no account of the dead man, but only remarks that the once-fine manor house has become dilapidated. Walter follows the men upstairs and spies on them from the landing. Master Jordan explains his plans to shift the village towards sheep farming, which will be much more profitable to him; he'll cut down the forests for timber and enclose the common land for private pasture. Master Kent points out that the village has to be fed off the land, but Jordan only says there might not be room for all the villagers under his new scheme.

Worried, that night Walter visits Widow Gosse, with whom he has a long-standing sexual relationship. She can't replace his loving relationship with his deceased wife, Cecily, but they each allay the other's loneliness. Walter sometimes wonders what she sees in him, a graying middle-aged man; he couldn't even recognize his own reflection now, since the village doesn't have a mirror. He says the villagers only know what they look like from the way other people, especially their romantic partners, perceive them.

In the morning, the villagers find that Willowjack, Master Kent's horse, has been clubbed to death. Master Jordan announces that he will investigate and that the culprit will be executed. The villagers are worried to see Master Kent deferring to this stranger. Walter is assigned to guide Jordan's henchmen through the village cottages, which they ransack in search of any bloody clothes or incriminating evidence. In an abandoned

outbuilding, Jordan himself uncovers a blood-soaked shawl, which everyone recognizes as Mistress Beldam's. In order to protect the woman, Master Kent says the shawl was his wife's and must have been stolen from the manor house by a passing thief.

That afternoon, Walter assists Mr. Quill again, preparing vellum for his final sketches. He's eager to work well, because he's hoping to find employment with the man if Jordan tries to drive people out of the village. Both men agree that they must warn Mistress Beldam of impending danger and assert that they will look for her that night. Mr. Quill shows Walter his work, which is a beautiful multi-colored representation of the town, and of the proposed sheep farm. Walter is amazed by his artistry but says Mr. Quill can never capture the rhythms of village life in his drawings.

Meanwhile, Jordan's men have detained young Lizzie Carr, Widow Gosse, and Anne Rogers, accusing them of witchcraft and culpability in Willowjack's murder. The villagers present themselves at the manor to defend the women, but they don't take Walter with them—he's been spending too much time with the outsider Mr. Quill, and they don't trust him anymore. Instead, Walter and Mr. Quill hide out near the pillory, hoping Mistress Beldam will talk to the young man, who, Mr. Quill has ascertained, is her husband. The young man has told Mr. Quill that his family's village was destroyed by enclosure, which is why they've had to seek shelter in this one. Eventually Mistress Beldam appears, bearing a sack of food, but when she hears the noise of villagers returning from the manor, she runs away, followed by Mr. Quill.

Walter coaxes John Carr, his neighbor, into talking with him. John says that Jordan's henchmen wouldn't allow them to enter the manor or talk to the women. Frustrated, the villagers became angry and asserted that it's Walter and Mr. Quill, the two outsiders, who are guilty of sorcery, not the women. He encourages Walter to flee the village, as the Derby twins and Brooker Higgs have done recently.

Master Kent comes to see Walter. He says he spent the night imprisoned in his room by Jordan's men; he could hear them torturing, and probably sexually assaulting, Kitty and Anne until they confessed to witchcraft. The women have implicated a number of other villagers and said they were all following Mr. Quill's directives. The men have gone to hunt for Mr. Quill, but he's nowhere to be found.

One of Jordan's grooms wanders down to the village cottages. Lizzie's father, Gervase, accosts him and asks where his daughter is. The groom taunts him that Lizzie could be burned for witchcraft. Furious, Lizzie's parents attack the groom and the whole village joins in. When the furor subsides the villagers realize that, having attacked a powerful man's servant, they have to flee. All the families leave the village, and Walter is alone.

Master Jordan is happy with this development, as it leaves him free to proceed with his plans unhindered. He tells Walter that he's leaving today with his men, Master Kent, and the accused women, whom he'll drop off in a nearby town; he offers Walter the position of steward over his estate, and Walter accepts since it will allow him to stay in the village. The day after Master Jordan leaves, Walter frees Mistress Beldam's husband. He gives him food and says he can take supplies from the village if he helps Walter plow the recently harvested fields. The man agrees, and he and Walter plough one furrow. Walter intends this as a gesture of loyalty to the village, but as he looks at his work it seems like a feeble effort.

Dejected, Walter spends the night drinking and consuming hallucinogenic mushrooms. In the morning, he wakes up in the manor house surrounded by two packed bags; he can't remember if he prepared them or someone else did. Hoping that this is a gesture of kindness from Mistress Beldam and her husband, and that they will take him with them when they leave the village, he enters the house to look for them. He finds that everything has been upended or destroyed, from pots to curtains to portraits.

Walter climbs into the dilapidated attic, hoping to find the Beldams there. From the window, he sees the husband cutting down the pillory while Mistress Beldam sets fire to all the cottages. He's about to leave before they set fire to the manor house, when he notices blood smeared on the floor and finds Mr. Quill's body stuffed inside a chest. He's been stabbed to death, but Walter will never know if Jordan's men or Mistress Beldam did it. Walter runs out of the house, and it burns down.

After the Beldams have gone, Walter packs his bags and prepares to leave the village. At the boundary stones, he takes a last look at the land around him. Instead of being surrounded by a tight-knit community, he knows he has to proceed alone until he arrives "wherever is awaiting me."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Walter Thirsk – A childless middle-aged widower who narrates the story of his village's demise in pragmatic but elegiac terms. Walter has lived in the village for a dozen years, since he arrived in the employ of Master Kent, and was married to Cecily Thirsk, a local. As one of only a few villagers born in a larger town. Consequently, he straddles the boundary between the village and the outside world. Having known another life, he's able to truly appreciate the harmonious life of the village before Edmund Jordan's arrival. Walter's commitment to the village is especially visible through his persistent use of the plural "we" in his narration. However, he's also intensely conscious of being perceived as an outsider to the other villagers, and in the face of Jordan's intimidations his neighbors

quickly become suspicious of him. By the end of the novel, despite Walter's craving for community, he's left on his own. His tragic ending demonstrates his love for the village's vanishing way of life, but also highlights the ways in which that way of life, with its intense hostility to outsiders, ultimately fails him.

Philip Earle/Mr. Quill – A mapmaker hired by Edmund Jordan to assess his property and draw up plans for a sheep farm, nicknamed "Mr. Quill" by the villagers for his ever-present pen and paper. Mr. Quill is educated and comes from a wealthy background, but he lacks Jordan's arrogance and is more similar to Master Kent in his kind dealings with the villagers. His humility is likely informed by a limp he's had since childhood, which exposes him to mockery from other men, notably Jordan himself. Mr. Quill's artistry is a source of fascination to Walter; it shows how men can wield power over the land without actually working it, an intriguing but frightening prospect. While his arrival in the village prefigures its downfall, Mr. Quill quickly becomes enamored of village life and sympathetic to the villagers. Conveying information on Jordan's plans to Walter and also comforting Master Beldam and Father Beldam while they are trapped in the **pillory**, he combines a respect for traditional life with a sympathy towards outsiders that the village lacks. Despite his evident goodwill, the villagers mistrust him and accuse him of sorcery; he's eventually murdered, probably by Mistress Beldam, even though he tried to help her. His death suggests that innate goodness can't persist long in the turbulent, unwelcoming circumstances of the novel.

Master Kent – The original owner of the land on which the village is situated. He administers the property on behalf of his wife, Lucy Kent, but since she's recently died without children, her cousin, Edmund Jordan, inherits the land and soon ousts Master Kent. Like Walter, Master Kent is a childless widower; in fact, Walter's mother nursed Master Kent as a baby, making them "milk cousins" and childhood playmates. The two men share a certain kinship despite the vast differences in their socioeconomic positions. As the only landowner in a town without any formal government, Master Kent exercises total authority over the village. He's a gentle man, however, reluctant to exercise that authority or even to remind the villagers of his rank. It's Master Kent's kindly nature that facilitates the peaceful and egalitarian village life, but this character also makes him unable to combat his rapacious cousin. While he's deeply sympathetic to the plight of the villagers, he ultimately does nothing to protect them from losing their home.

Edmund Jordan – The owner of the land on which the village is situated. Since Master Kent produced no sons with his wife, Lucy, her property is entailed to her cousin, Jordan. Jordan arrives in the village with the intention of converting it from collective agriculture to **sheep** farming, a business which will concentrate most of the profits in his hands and displace most of the villagers. Casting himself as a champion of "progress" but possessing no morals or respect for the people who have farmed his land for centuries, Jordan is emblematic of a pernicious modernity which strives for innovation and productivity without considering the human cost of these endeavors, ultimately conferring prosperity on a chosen few while disenfranchising the majority. He's a notable foil to Master Kent, who shares his aristocratic background but completely lacks his pretensions and his aspirations to wealth.

Mistress Beldam/Stranger Woman – An enigmatic woman who arrives in the village with her father and husband at the beginning of the novel. Her real name is never known; Master Kent nicknames her Mistress Beldam, and Walter explains that he's referencing the word "beldam," meaning a female sorceress, and the phrase "Belle Dame," meaning a beautiful woman. It's a powerful name, and Mistress Beldam is associated with the power of the natural world, which inspires both attraction and wariness in the villagers. When she first arrives, the villagers note her youth and fertility and see her as a mate for their sons, a means by which they can shore up the village's declining population. Walter often compares her to an animal and she survives in the forest for long periods of time, showing her close connection to an abundant nature. However, she's also a highly destructive force, especially after the death of her father; she commits senseless acts of violence, like killing Master Kent's horse and likely murdering Mr. Quill, and she puts the final seal on the village's demise by burning all the cottages. In this sense, she represents the natural world's promise of strength and regeneration and, at the same time, its destructive and anarchic potential.

Master Beldam/Young Man/Husband – Mistress Beldam's husband, a mysterious stranger who builds a shack on the village fringes at the beginning of the novel. As punishment for allegedly stealing Master Kent's birds and burning his dovecote, Master Beldam spends most of the week during which the novel takes place shackled in the **pillory**. Here, he appears as a sort of Christ figure, suffering public punishment for a crime he didn't commit. When Walter is left alone in the village, he frees Master Beldam and provides him with food, hoping they can band together to face the frightening dissolution of the village. However, Master and Mistress Beldam burn down the cottages and leave the village without Walter, showing that his ideals of community have no place in the new world created by the enclosure movement.

Beldam Father/Old Man – Mistress Beldam's father, who arrives in the village with his daughter and son-in-law at the beginning of the novel. With Master Beldam, he's sentenced to a week in the **pillory**, but because the villagers neglect to feed him or bring him water he dies of exposure before the punishment is over. Enraged by the injustice of her father's death, Mistress Beldam kills Master Kent's horse, which gives Edmund Jordan an excuse to persecute the villagers and break up the village. In this sense, the Beldam father is a reminder

that the village's downfall is partly caused by its hostility to outsiders.

Lizzie Carr – One of the youngest girls in the village. In the beginning of the novel, Mr. Quill chooses her as the Gleaning Queen, investing her with all the symbolism of harvest abundance and the promise of regeneration in the new year. However, Edmund Jordan later detains her and two other women on false charges of witchcraft; worry over the little girl prompts the villagers to attack one of Jordan's men and then flee the village, fearing reprisals. In this sense, Lizzie represents both the village's strength and the ultimate tragedy of its downfall.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Cecily Thirsk – Walter's wife. Although she's been dead for several years, Walter mentions her frequently. The years of his marriage marked the height of his feelings of inclusion in the village; as a widower, he feels lonely and isolated even before Edmund Jordan arrives and unsettles the town.

Kitty Gosse – A middle-aged widow with whom Walter has a sexual relationship. While she provides a respite from his loneliness, Walter says he feels nothing for her compared to his love for his dead wife, Cecily.

John Carr – Walter's neighbor, and one of the village men he most respects. When the villagers begin to suspect that Walter is in league with Jordan and close ranks against him, John is the only person who will talk to him and alert him that he's been accused of witchcraft.

Lucy Kent – Master Kent's wife. Because she dies without leaving any children, her property passes from her husband's hands into Edmund Jordan's. Lucy Kent's childless death represents the insidious decay troubling the village even before Jordan arrives to disrupt its routines.

Christopher and Thomas Derby/The Derby Twins – A set of twins, two unmarried young men. Along with Brooker Higgs, they're probably responsible for burning down Master Kent's dovecote, although Mistress, Master, and Father Beldam are blamed for this incident. They're also among the first to flee the village.

Brooker Higgs – One of the village's young bachelors, a companion of the Derby twins. With them he burns down Master Kent's dovecote; later, all three flee the village, fearing persecution from Edmund Jordan.

Emma Carr – John Carr's wife.

Thomas Rogers – A young man of the village, known for playing his pipe (albeit badly) on feast days.

Mr. Baynham – Edmund Jordan's steward.

Edmund Jordan Sr. – Lucy Kent's father, who originally owned the village.

Anne Rogers – Thomas Roger's mother, who is detained by Edmund Jordan on spurious charges of witchcraft and confesses after being tortured.

Abel Saxton – The village blacksmith.

Gervase Carr – Lizzie Carr's father, who instigates the village attack on Jordan's groom.

The groom – one of Edmund Jordan's manservants. After he unwisely taunts Gervase Carr that Lizzie could be burned for witchcraft, the villagers attack him, after which they're forced to immediately flee Jordan's wrath.

TERMS

Gleaning – The process of manually gathering residual crops from the field after formal harvesting is finished. The *Old Testament* establishes gleaning as a right of the poor, and it was widely practiced in agrarian communities in most European countries.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RENEWAL AND DECAY

Jim Crace's *Harvest* portrays a society that derives both stability and satisfaction from the cycles of death and rebirth occurring constantly in the surrounding land. Isolated and centered around subsistence farming, the villagers are always one bad harvest away from disaster; at the same time, their bountiful harvests have allowed them to survive for centuries without altering their way of life. When the village experiences a rapid decline, Walter, the narrator, blames Edmund Jordan and his plan for "enclosure," a practice that swept through England in from the 16th to the 18th century, in which landlords assumed total control over common lands and displaced peasant farmers. Signs of decay are present from the beginning of the novel, however, long before Jordan arrives on the scene. By arguing that the village's disintegration precedes Jordan, *Harvest* presents an ambivalent view of humanity's place within nature: on one hand, the land provides a rhythm of life that can never be replaced by manmade innovations. On the other hand, nature is an impersonal force, indifferent to human welfare and sometimes contributing to human entropy.

The novel's opening harvest scenes show the land's perennial ability to sustain the village and the extent to which village life

is structured around stewarding and celebrating the land's renewal. The harvest season occurs at the cusp of winter, when the land will stop producing and most plants will die. However, the successful harvest ensures that the village will survive until spring. Before the frost, the villagers intend to plow the fields and sow winter wheat, already anticipating the promise of renewal in the spring.

One of the village's most important rituals, the gleaning ceremony emblematizes the hope that the harvest provides. A young woman is selected as the "Gleaning Queen," connecting the renewal of the land to the renewal of the village population. Walter's description of the gleaned barley as "tokens of our bread and drink [...] sitting on a child's undamaged skin" explicitly links the renewal of the land to the vitality of the village. Walter notes that even Master Kent's speech is the same every year, emphasizing that the end of the harvest coincides with the beginning of the spring planting. The speech's pattern shows that, somewhat ironically, the constant renewal of the seasons permits the unchanging nature of the town and all its practices.

However, even before Jordan's arrival, when village life seems to be proceeding as it always has, lurking signs of decay are present. For all its focus on sustenance through continuous planting and harvesting, the village population is dwindling, unable to renew itself. It's notable that Walter is a childless widower, unsuccessful in perpetuating his own family. So is Master Kent—in fact, it's Kent's inability to father children that allows the village to fall into Edmund Jordan's hands and makes it vulnerable to takeover.

Walter notes that the harvest mood is subdued because the crop has proved "frugal in the ear." Similarly, the manor house, even before its destruction, has been slowly decaying since its mistress, Lucy Kent, died. The village's physical decay mirrors the decline of Master Kent's family and the general population. When three young men accidentally burn the dovecote while trying to steal birds, Walter attributes their mischievous impulses to the fact that the village lacks unmarried women; in his view, the young men are at loose ends instead of marrying and procreating, and this leads to destruction. Thus, despite Walter's celebration of the land's renewal and the unchanging nature of village life, it's clear that the community is tending towards decline before Jordan introduces his **sheep**-farming plan.

The village's simultaneous hopes for renewal and anxieties about decay are emblematized in its collective fascination with Mistress Beldam, the mysterious stranger who arrives in the village after enclosure has forced her to flee from her own. When she arrives, everyone sees her as a sign of renewal. Village women imagine her as a partner for their sons, while the men want her for themselves. This is partly a matter of sexual desire, but in a culture centered around renewal—sex is referred to as "sowing seed"—such desire is intimately linked to perpetuating the community and reversing its current population decline.

However, instead of living up to her initial reputation as a symbol of rebirth, Mistress Beldam proves a harbinger of destruction and instability. As revenge for her husband and father's imprisonment, she kills Willowjack, Master Kent's beloved horse. Her action gives Edmund Jordan an excuse to "investigate" and intimidate the villagers, resulting in their collective flight from the village. When Walter frees her husband and allows the couple to take abandoned animals and supplies, she responds by destroying the manor house and setting fire to the village cottages.

The destruction that Mistress Beldam inflicts is independent of Jordan's schemes for the towns. After all, she has also left her village because of enclosure; rather than representing the ravages of economic "progress" like Jordan, Mistress Beldam is closely linked with nature, especially with her animal-like footsteps and the cropped hair which Walter often compares to fur. Through her, the novel contrasts nature's ability to provide for humanity to its capacity to inflict wanton destruction.

The novel's tragedy is that the cycle of village life, initially secure and unchanged for centuries, is destroyed in a matter of days by the enclosure movement. However, besides the threat posed by economic progress, the village also faces decay from within. Even as the novel glorifies pastoral life, with its manifold possibilities of renewal, it questions the stability of such a life and points out the dangers lurking in an existence so closely connected to the forces of nature.

INDIVIDUALS AND THE COMMUNITY

One of the novel's chief preoccupations is the tension between the assertion of individual character and the preservation of the community as a whole. At the outset, most characters, especially Walter, scorn the idea of individuality; they identify more strongly as members of the village than as discrete beings, and their thoughts and feelings are oriented around the good of the community rather than personal aspirations. When Edmund Jordan announces his determination to find a culprit for the various "crimes" that have occurred in the village, however, he forces the townspeople to turn against each other in order to save themselves. The emergence of individual character thus occurs in a context of suspicion and blame. With the disintegration of the village at the end of the novel, its various families choose disparate paths, while Walter is alone after years of trying to find a place within the community. Ultimately, the novel presents individual development as a heart-wrenching, almost unnatural process; its final tragedy is that its characters are forced to assert themselves as individuals at the expense of the integrity of their community.

Walter's loving description of the village rhythms shows that, at first, all the villagers prioritize their community over the development of individual characters. Since the community is based on collective enterprise for everyone's benefit, no one needs to think for themselves; in fact, any assertion of individual aspirations would damage the community's efficiency and cohesion.

The spirit of collective thinking is further reflected in the community's remarkable homogeneity. Walter constantly remarks that everyone around him is blond. He also notes that since there are no mirrors, no one knows exactly what they look like; the lack of knowledge or even interest in their own reflection shows a remarkable level of individual effacement. In his narration, Walter also usually uses the pronoun "we," couching descriptions of events and even thoughts and feelings on the community level. It's especially notable that Walter presents such a communal narrative, given that he was born outside the village. As someone who has experienced other ways of life, Walter's love for the village and desire to be completely subsumed in it provides an additional endorsement for this community's way of life.

The villagers only develop individuality as a negative consequence of Edmund Jordan's quest to dismantle their community structures in order to push them off their land. Jordan understands that the easiest way to overcome opposition to his plans is to investigate a largely invented series of crimes, encouraging the villagers to become more preoccupied with their personal safety than the good of the community. Understanding his days in the village may be numbered, Walter decides to seek employment with Mr. Quill. While this decision is logical, it inspires a lot of guilt in Walter; thinking on an individual level, even in terms of his own survival, feels like a betrayal of the community he loves.

This process is wrenching for the rest of the community as well, especially as Jordan intimidates them into naming the "culprits" in their midst. When Jordan tortures Anne Rogers and Kitty Gosse into confessing to witchcraft and naming their "accomplices," the women accuse several of their neighbors. They later backtrack and say that they're all "followers" of Mr. Quill, seeking to "redeem a little reputation for their men and friends" while casting the blame on someone outside the community. Here, the women wrestle for the first time with a conflict between their personal benefit and the benefit of the community at large. By portraying their first assertion of individuality in the context of torture and fear, the novel casts this development as a calamity and emphasizes its role in fracturing the community.

Amidst the break-up of the village, Walter loses the tight-knight community he loves. After everyone has fled the village, he fights against his new and unwelcome individuality by trying to preserve the customs of the community. Assisted by the Beldam husband, he begins to plow the common ground for winter wheat; however, he fails in this task because it requires the effort of all the village men and can't be completed by a single individual. As he faces life alone, Walter tries to cultivate a friendship with Mistress Beldam and her husband, freeing them and allowing them to take supplies from the village because he hopes they'll welcome him into his circle. His fantasy that "they will feed me, and I will leave this village in their company" shows his strong reluctance to think of himself as an individual rather than a member of a community, no matter how small.

However, the Beldams' indifference to Walter, as well as the fact that they burn his beloved village after taking what they need, show that this dream of communal life is forever closed to him. As Walter leaves the village in the final chapter, he says that leaving "these common fields" is "heavy labor" for him. Saying that he'll have to keep going "until I reach wherever is awaiting me," he experiments with a singular pronoun instead of his familiar "we." Correcting himself in the final sentence to "awaiting *us*," he demonstrates not a renewed faith in his irrevocably broken community, but rather that his transformation from a member of strong community to a lone actor is difficult and wrenching.

Many novels, especially those of the contemporary era, feature a protagonist struggling to assert a positive individuality in the face of community norms. By instead focusing on the plight of people trying to preserve such norms against a new and destructive individuality, *Harvest* points out that the idea of strong individual character as inherently good is essentially a modern invention. Ultimately, the novel's skepticism of individuality and nostalgia for the all-encompassing communities that vanished with modern life questions the wisdom of embracing modernity, especially when doing so involves disowning the mores of the past.

PROGRESS AND DISPOSSESSION

Over the course of the novel, the village's agrarian lifestyle quickly succumbs to the machinations of its new landlord Edmund Jordan, who decides to convert he land to more profitable **sheep** farming. Jordan enacts the policy of "enclosure," which was widespread in England in the 16th and 18th centuries and involved landowners converting common lands (which villagers previously farmed to sustain themselves) into economic enterprises that produced a single item—in this case, wool.

Jordan describes enclosure as a movement toward "progress and prosperity," and, in fact, the enclosure movement *did* strengthen England's economy and move it closer to industrial development. However, by illustrating the harmony of agrarian life and focusing on the plight of villagers who are quickly ejected from land they've farmed for centuries, the novel makes clear that Jordan's narrative of progress doesn't apply to

these villagers at all. Rather, Jordan establishes a sheep farm from which only *he* will profit, by dispossessing the villagers of their land and reducing them to an itinerant and unstable lifestyle. By contrasting the theoretical narrative of "progress" with the actual narrative of dispossession, the novel displays an intense skepticism towards the social and economic motivations of the elite classes, who claim to be acting on behalf of the entire society but actually enrich themselves at the expense of the poor.

The villagers' lifestyle is primitive and sometimes harsh, but it's also remarkably egalitarian and secure prior to Jordan's arrival. It's not easy to live in the village, though—Walter remarks casually that there's only been "one appalling death from sweating fits" this year, his offhand attitude showing how accustomed the villagers are to calamity and death. The villagers are also uneducated, and England's quasi-feudal landowning policies prevent them from owning their farms. Still, because they work all the land in common, the village has a remarkable atmosphere of equality and cohesion. There are no distinctions in rank among the villagers.

While everyone is subservient to Master Kent, his ability to abuse his power over them is limited by the fact that he relies on their labor for his sustenance and livelihood. Walter points out that Master Kent "would be the poorest man if all he had to work his property were his own two hands." The agrarian system, which puts a premium on farm labor, allows the laborers to be "possessive of this ground" and provides them "common rights […] despite [their] lack of muniments." Rather than worshipping or aspiring to wealth, the villagers seem to disdain it. They quietly scorn Master Kent's soft hands and the ignorance of hard work they signify, and the villagers are proud that they don't require the soft beds and other luxuries the manor house contains. While the villagers have very few legal rights, the agrarian system provides them with a sense of security and makes them feel a certain ownership of the land.

Edmund Jordan—and even, to some extent, Master Kent—phrase enclosure as a move that will benefit everyone. However, Jordan's actions show that it actually serves to enrich the elite while robbing the poor of their few securities. Enclosure comes cloaked in flowery and optimistic language. Master Kent calls it "an organization to all of our advantages," while Jordan refers loftily to "Progress, Prosperity, and Enterprise." Their impressive but ultimately empty language heightens the contrast between enclosure and the agrarian system it replaces, which is outwardly humble but very substantial, based on work and actions rather than discussion.

The enclosure system does not enrich the village, as Master Kent nervously promises when he relates his "dream" of the peasants becoming "rich and leisurely." In fact, the villagers become painfully aware that their "common rights" aren't nearly as stable as they thought, and that their prosperity doesn't depend on their ability to work but on the whims of their landlord. Interestingly, at one point Jordan laughs at the villagers and refers to them archly as "sheep." Rather than considering them "friends and neighbors," as Master Kent did when the agrarian system required him to respect the villagers, Jordan regards the villagers in the same light as the livestock he will soon import—as objects off which he can profit.

When he eventually frightens the villagers off the land, Jordan becomes secure in his rights as landlord, and satisfied that he won't have to share his wool profits with many inhabitants. His increasing prosperity contrasts with the tragic image of villagers hurrying away from land they've farmed for centuries. They're accustomed to being poor, but without common land to farm, they face not only poverty but instability. At the novel's outset, the furtive and itinerant Mistress Beldam and her husband and father provide a contrast to the settled and complacent lifestyle in the village. However, by the end it's clear that most of the villagers will have to take on the Beldams' scrambling lifestyle; the family thus becomes a contrast between the increased prosperity of the landowning class and the deteriorating lot of the peasants.

Ultimately, *Harvest*'s examination of the enclosure movement argues that economic "progress" often confers its benefits on the elite classes while doing nothing to improve the lives of the poor, and cautions against blind optimism about such transformative movements.

RELIGION AND RITUAL

While Christianity was central to English civil life in the 16th and 17th centuries, the time in which the novel takes place, the village conspicuously lacks a church. Instead of formal religion, it relies on quasi-pagan rituals to celebrate its few festivals. Formal Christianity arrives only with Edmund Jordan, who says he's going to promote religion as an act of charity towards the village but actually intends to use it to enforce his own authority. By contrasting the rituals that precede Jordan with the harsh Christianity he brings to the village, the novel suggests that organized religion hastens the decline of the community, and argues against embracing religious dogma, especially when that dogma is used as a coercive mechanism.

At the outset of the novel, the villagers are generally indifferent to Christian tenets; more important are rituals that celebrate agricultural milestones and emphasize their equality and security within a natural order. The village lacks a church; instead, it has a cross-shaped **pillory**, where both punishments and celebrations take place. Walter notes that both his marriage and Master Kent's took place there, showing that the town's rituals bind together its lowly and lofty residents. The absence of a church or a priest thus contributes to the town's egalitarian character, because there's little enforcement of outside doctrines and few divisions of rank between villagers.

Prior to the introduction of more formalized Christianity, the villagers already have a strong sense of ritual. The gleaning ceremony, which marks the end of a successful harvest, is tied to the sanctity of the earth. Notably, the ceremony is centered around the selection of a female Gleaning Queen, whose youth and fertility corresponds to the abundance provided by the land. The importance of the Earth and the primacy of female figures makes the ritual similar to pagan rites and contrasts it to the more male-centered Christianity. At each year's ceremony, Master Kent's speech also describes the mutual dependence of landlords, peasants, and animals on the earth, highlighting the natural equality of everyone in the village.

When Jordan arrives, his abolition of the village's egalitarian culture coincides with his promise to introduce organized religion. Jordan objects to the fact that there's no real church, and especially no bell. His announcement that he'll find and finance a preacher is ostensibly a gesture of goodwill, but really a desire to standardize town life and introduce another source of authority who will reinforce Jordan's capitalistic, profit-oriented vision for the village.

While Jordan never actually builds a church, he does introduce witchcraft hysteria (one of Christianity's worst byproducts during this era) into the village. Moreover, he does so not out of any genuine belief or fear of a moral threat, but simply to frighten the inhabitants and tighten his control over them. Rather than face accusations of witchcraft, the entire village flees, allowing Jordan to bring the land completely under his own control. Jordan's pious rhetoric about Christian values is deeply ironic given his ruthless and self-centered behavior toward the villagers; the novel's portrait of him as an individual character isn't an indictment of Christianity as a whole, but it does argue that those who claim to represent Christian values may be doing so to polish their own image while acting in their own interest.

Always lingering on the narrative's periphery, the Beldams emphasize the extent to which the introduction of Christianity to the village proves fatal. For the novel's duration, the Beldam husband and father are languishing in the pillory. While it's the villagers who put them there, it's Jordan's negligence and suspicion that allows the older man to die of exposure, punishing them out of proportion to their crime of trespassing. There's a clear parallel between the two scapegoated men hanging on a cross-shaped pillory and the narrative of Jesus Christ's crucifixion. Such a comparison implicates Jordan (especially since he refuses to bury the man in consecrated ground, adding bodily humiliation to punishment just as Roman soldiers did during Christ's crucifixion), but also the villagers, who instigated the punishment. Moreover, while the elder Beldam dies for sins he didn't commit, nothing is accomplished or redeemed by the old man's death, just as nothing positive is accomplished by Jordan's introduction of Christianity.

While her menfolk expose the hypocrisy of Jordan's Christianity, Mistress Beldam represents a distorted version of the powerful female entities on which the village's rituals rest. When she first arrives, she seems to possess the attributes of a Gleaning Queen; all the villagers note her youth and potential fertility, and Walter describes the almost totemic fascination that the village's men feel for her. However, Mistress Beldam doesn't contribute to the village's renewal but instead accelerates its destruction.

After killing a horse, Willowjack, in the middle of the novel, she breaks everything she can in the manor house and burns all the cottages. Her destructive behavior contrasts with the abundance and regeneration initially promised by her similarity to Gleaning Queen, but it's informed by the fact that she's been pushed out of her own village by enclosure and enforced religion. In light of her history, Mistress Beldam's association with rituals of renewal and her fundamentally anarchic actions show the extent to which the fulfilling culture of ritual is disrupted by enclosure and the modern religion it brings.

Harvest shows that for the village, earth-based, informal rituals reinforce positive values and facilitate a secure and cohesive communal life. In contrast, the brand of organized Christianity that Jordan attempts to impose on the villagers is characterized by fear and emerges as a mechanism to enforce external domination. This dichotomy shows the hypocrisy of those, like Jordan, who use Christianity to increase their own power; moreover, it suggests that religious dogma is detrimental, rather than useful, to a strong and egalitarian civic life.

OUTSIDERS AND BLAME

Harvest depicts a primitive but highly functional and idyllic community just as it's annihilated by economic progress. There's a clear contrast between the village, usually characterized positively, and the insidious forces of change, represented by Edmund Jordan and his mantra of "Profit, Progress, and Enterprise." Complicating this contrast is the villagers' behavior towards the outsiders in their midst, including Mr. Quill, the Beldam family, and Walter himself. While Jordan sacrifices the village to his dreams of a **sheep**-farming fortune, the villagers are quick to blame outsiders whenever it will get them out of trouble, replicating their new master's behavior on a smaller level. This pattern of behavior is impractical; it's often outsiders who can impart helpful knowledge or information, while by themselves the villagers are largely helpless against Jordan. Moreover, by pointing out the violence and hostility lurking beneath the village's sleepy rhythms, the novel implicitly questions the isolated and insular lifestyle on which it outwardly heaps praise.

The villagers quickly establish a pattern of blaming the least integrated member of the community for any crime or misfortune. In the novel's opening scenes, the villagers awaken to find that Master Kent's dovecote is burning down. Though

Walter and several other villagers correctly surmise that Brooker Higgs and the Derby twins, are responsible, no one blames them. Instead, the villagers take advantage of the fact that three outsiders, whom they nickname the Beldams, have set up camp on the commons, and attribute the blame to them. After they place the Beldam husband and father in the **pillory**, the older man dies of exposure, even though the whole village knows he's guiltless.

Later, when Jordan's bad intentions become clear, the villagers quickly become suspicious of Walter; though he's lived among them for a dozen years, he says "they're closing ranks already and I am not included," even when the whole village goes to the manor house to petition for the return of Lizzie Carr, Kitty Gosse, and Anne Rogers, who have been detained after the murder of Master Kent's horse, Willowjack. In order to establish the women's innocence, they say that Walter has been behaving strangely. Walter's neighbor, John Carr, tells him guiltily that "we had to take care of our own," and Walter feels little surprise to find he's no longer "included in 'our own.'"

In this same incident, the village accuses Mr. Quill of troublemaking. It's notable that they seize on his small acts of kindness towards other outsiders—giving a hand to Mistress Beldam after Brooker Higgs clubs her, or putting an arm around her husband while he's in the pillory—as evidence that he's of bad character and aligned against the village. Given that Jordan has raised allegations of sorcery, the villagers have put both men in an extremely dangerous position through these allegations. In one climactic scene, Jordan's groom threatens young Lizzie Carr and the entire town attacks the outsider, beating him until he's nearly dead. It's a display of primal mob violence, and in fact Walter compares the villagers to animals, referencing their "livestock sounds" and "waspy fits." Walter concludes that the manservant will either die or go mad.

This pattern of behavior is unwise; rather than protecting the villagers from Jordan, it hastens the community's demise. After attacking the groom, the villagers quickly realize that "everything has changed for the worst." To avoid punishment, they must flee the village immediately. The harshest display of violence towards outsiders, then, immediately precipitates the abandonment of the village.

More importantly, while Walter romanticizes the village's way of life, the violence and hostility the villagers display towards anyone they perceive as not belonging emphasizes that the village has deep moral flaws, despite its aura of purity and simplicity. In disowning outsiders, the village casts away the very people who could help them, or at least explain Jordan's confusing and sinister agenda. The Beldams, for instance, are victims of enclosure themselves, and so have the benefit of experience in confronting this threat. Mr. Quill is also deeply sympathetic to the village; he gives Walter much more information than he technically should, and makes clear that he's aligned with the villagers, but they don't trust his goodwill enough to make use of it.

Moreover, the outsiders are among the most sympathetic and highly characterized in the book. Mr. Quill's natural kindness is quickly apparent, and his dignity in the face of a disability that frequently exposes him to mockery from other men makes him likeable. While they're wary and proud, the Beldams are much like the villagers, coming from a similar way of life; that they honor the regional custom of constructing four walls and building a fire in order to petition entrance into the village shows that they crave acceptance and inclusion.

Most importantly, the novel's narration is completely controlled by an outsider. Walter's sensitive observations, and his wholehearted desire to be considered a full member of the village, make him sympathetic on a personal level and align the reader with the plight of the outsider in general. In light of this, the village's pattern of unthinking hostility is disturbing, indicative of a severe flaw in their way of life. While the novel ostensibly casts them as victims, helpless against the forces that threaten them, it implicitly sympathizes with the people that they themselves oppress.

While *Harvest* takes place in the distant past, Crace is a contemporary writer whose work often comments on contemporary issues. As such, the tragedy of the village's demise can be viewed as a critique of globalization, which prioritizes economic progress above all else and is indifferent to the destruction of smaller cultures. At the same time, his preoccupation with the fate of outsiders in those very communities is an implicit indictment of xenophobia, questioning the moral rectitude of isolated cultures which prioritize homogeneity and perceive difference as a threat.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE PILLORY

In its various uses, the pillory represents the village's initial vitality and eventual decline. At the beginning of the novel, Walter notes that the village doesn't have a church, only a pile of stones that no one has had time to assemble. Instead, the pillory, which Walter describes as a cross "more muscular and far reaching than the usual, narrower crucifix" is the site of many rituals that would normally take place in a church; Master Kent conducts marriages, baptisms and funerals here, and the village congregates at the pillory to give thanks for successful harvests. The funerals of Master Kent's wife, Lucy, and Walter's wife, Cecily, take place at the pillory as well. In this sense, the pillory shows the village's distance from conventional sources of authority, like the church. By emphasizing the similarity between the funerals of

Lucy, an aristocrat, and Cecily, a peasant, the novel further suggests that this distance facilitates the village's remarkably egalitarian character.

However, early on in the novel the villagers consign the Beldam father and husband to the pillory for no greater crime than trespassing. The depiction of the two men dangling from the cross with "hanging heads and hands" is a clear comparison to Jesus Christ's crucifixion narrative, which in turn casts the villagers as oppressive Roman soldiers and Master Kent as a tyrannical Pontius Pilate. While it establishes the village as harmonious and cohesive, then, the pillory demonstrates that this strength comes with an intense hostility to outsiders that makes the villagers complicit in injustice, not just victims of it. Before fleeing at the end of the novel, the Beldam husband chops down the pillory, marking the final disintegration of a way of life at once beautiful and deeply flawed. While Master Jordan is the major threat to the village's integrity, it's important that he's not responsible for the pillory's destruction; rather, it's a moment of retribution from someone the village has wronged independently of him.

SHEEP

Sheep in the novel represent an unfeeling yet unavoidable modernity, whose cost is the dissolution of a more communal way of life. When Master Jordan arrives to take control of his property, he announces a plan to enclose the common lands, previously used for farming, and convert them to a large sheep farm. Jordan describes this as a move towards progress, and in some ways he's right; it would move the land away from subsistence farming, which barely provides enough food for the villagers, and instead link it to a large, modern economy with the promise of much greater profits. However, Jordan's total lack of concern about the villagers' fates shows that his idea of progress is entirely economic, with no considerations of ethics. In this sense, the arrival of sheep symbolizes the transition from an ancient, communally-centered life to an aggressively capitalistic modernity which harms more people than it helps.

Notably, there are several comparisons between the villagers and sheep. Jordan compares the perplexed villagers to "so many sheep," and after they have fled he says mockingly that "the meek shall inherit the earth," contrasting the villagers' flight with the imminent arrival of his livestock. Playing on this, at one point Walter describes the villagers exchanging "sheepish" glances. Jordan's cruel humor and Walter's adoption of it emblematizes the villagers' shift in their self-conception, from informal owners of the land to disposable tenants. In this sense, sheep imagery represents the tragic dispossession of the villagers, who by the end of the novel have lost not only their homes but their entire worldview.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Harvest* published in 2013.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Our work is consecrated by the sun. Compared to winter days, let's say, or digging days, it's satisfying work, made all the more so by the company we keep, for on such days all the faces we know and love [...] are gathered in one space and bounded by common ditches and collective hopes.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Walter describes the annual reaping, or harvesting of the barley crop. Walter derives a lot of satisfaction from this process, as do the other villagers, and the language he uses to describe it is important. Using the word "consecrated," he imbues the reaping with a sense of holiness; it derives this holiness, however, by allowing the villagers to connect with the land and natural elements like the sun, rather than being associated with any formal religious practices. In this sense, Walter's comment showcases the village's disregard for Christianity and reliance on land-based rituals instead.

Moreover, to describe the sense of community during the harvest, Walter says the villagers are "bounded by common ditches and collective hopes." Basically, he's saying they're penned together, which is interesting because when Master Jordan encloses the land, fences and boundaries are feared and loathed. By using the same vocabulary to describe the village before and after Jordan arrives, Crace heightens the contrast between the inhabitants' initial security and their eventual dispossession.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ But what are documents and deeds when there are harvests to be gathered in? Only toughened hands can do that job. And Master Kent, for all his parchmenting, would be the poorest man if all he had to work his property were his own two hands and no others [...] Ours are the deeds that make the difference.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Master Kent

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Walter describes the balance of power between the villagers and Master Kent. Master Kent owns all the land and the villagers have almost no legal rights; moreover, Master Kent is educated and literate, the only one who can interact with the outside world. However, the villagers have a lot of informal power because the age-old agrarian system puts a premium on their labor. The agrarian system was hardly an egalitarian paradise (a few hundred years earlier, the peasants would have been serfs, quasi-enslaved and bound to their land) and this village is particularly tranquil due to Master Kent's mild disposition. Still, as Walter points out, this system does provide a lot of stability for peasants; innovations like enclosure, which Master Jordan will present as "progressive," will destroy this stability without replacing it. Ultimately, the novel will use the contrast between the village's ancient stability and its rapid collapse to argue that ideas of progress should not be embraced unthinkingly.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ The organization to all of our advantages that the master has in mind–against his usual character and sympathies, against his promises–involves the closing and engrossment of our fields with walls and hedges, ditches, gates. He means to throw a halter round our lives. He means the clearing of our common land.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Master Kent

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

When Master Kent gives a speech at the reaping festival announcing changes to the village's structure, he bills them as beneficial to all the villagers. However, having previously lived outside the village, Walter immediately realizes Kent is speaking about enclosure, and he knows this will be harmful to the village. It's important that, for Walter, enclosing the land necessarily means that restricting "our lives"; he's very conscious that the village's tranquil lifestyle depends on a close and communal relationship with the land. It's also notable that while in Chapter 1 he was happy to be "bounded" with his neighbors by the harvest fields, now "walls and hedges, ditches, gates" are sinister signs of unwelcome change. Boundaries once suggested the security of being deeply rooted, but they now emblematize the village's loss of control over the land.

❝ We know we ought to make amends for shearing her. That's why she's standing there, awaiting us. She's asking us to witness what we've done [...] For a moment, the temper of the barn is not that she has shamed our evening but that we've found our Gleaning Queen.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Mistress Beldam/Stranger Woman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

After imprisoning her menfolk in the pillory, the villagers leave Mistress Beldam to roam the woods and find her own shelter. However, she appears at the edge of the reaping celebration, startling the villagers out of their dancing. To Walter, it seems as if she is reproaching them for the unjust punishment they've inflicted; his use of the "we" pronoun suggests a collective understanding of wrongdoing. Walter also imagines a possibility for amending the situation; by welcoming the stranger into their midst, the villagers could atone for their earlier hostility and draw out the promise of fertility and renewal Mistress Beldam seemed to emanate when she arrived in the village. However, ultimately the villagers do nothing, and she disappears; their inability to extend hospitality to her and the retribution she exacts will hasten the village's demise, showing that the villagers themselves have some responsibility for the impending catastrophe.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ But this was precisely what I most liked about this village life, the way we had to press our cheeks and chests against a living, fickle world which in the place where I and Master Kent had lived before only displayed itself as casual weeds in cracks or on our market stalls where country goods were put on sale, already ripe, and magicked up from God knows where.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Master Kent

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

As he participates in the annual barley harvest, Walter reflects on the satisfactions of his agrarian life. Hailing from a larger town, Walter didn't have to choose the life of a peasant; in fact, subsistence farming in the village is at times more precarious than life in a city. However, Walter loves the village because it makes him feel intimately connected to the cycles of death and renewal that are constantly evident around him—most obviously in the harvest itself, which represents both the impending winter and the abundant spring that will follow. In contrast, city-dwellers are alienated from these cycles, and don't even understand the origins of the crops that sustain them. Walter's evocation of the importance of this connection to the earth is beautiful; however, in light of the fact that he and all the other villagers will soon be pushed into crowded towns, where the only plants will be "casual weeds," it takes on a dimension of poignancy and tragedy.

> The moment is always a rousing one. Our labors are condensed to this: a dozen tokens of our bread and drink, each tucked and swaddled in the oval of a grain, and sitting on a child's undamaged skin. What should we do but toss our hats and cheer?

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Lizzie Carr

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

According to the ancient tradition, to celebrate a successful harvest the village selects one of its young women to be the Gleaning Queen and lead the others in the collection of leftover barley–in this case, Mr. Quill has chosen young Lizzie Carr. Holding out the barley in her hand, Lizzie shows how the end of one life, that of the mature crop, fuels other lives, both her own and that of the village in general. In this sense, her action emblematizes the cycles of renewal and decay that have sustained village life for centuries, and the cheers show the villagers' strong awareness of and veneration for these cycles.

Additionally, it's important that this ritual, in worshipping the earth through a female intermediary, is more reminiscent of pagan culture than Christian principles. Rituals like these emphasize the steady, unchanging character of village life. Later, they will contrast with the self-interested Christianity Master Jordan spouts, which is unconnected to specific circumstances in the village and only serves to reinforce his own power.

> Their suspicion of anyone who was not born within these boundaries is unwavering. Next time they catch me sitting on my bench at home with a cup and slice, they are bound to wonder if it tastes all the sweeter for not being earned with labor.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's opening pages, Walter injures himself while trying to save hay from the fire in Master Kent's barn. Although this was a loyal and brave act, he's very conscious that his inability to work will not be looked upon kindly. For the villagers, it's essential that everyone be equally invested in the common work of farming; these shared aims allow the village to maintain cohesion and stability without any formal government, but villagers make no allowances for individual circumstances. The village's inability to adapt to change of any kind will render it vulnerable to Master Jordan, a malicious but canny opportunist.

Additionally, Walter's fear of censure shows that even before the chaos Master Jordan brings, his position among his fellows his tenuous. The village's hostility towards strangers of any kind is a protective measure for a community that thrives on isolation, but it's also a moral defect that will lead them to behave unjustly towards the Beldams and towards Walter himself.

Chapter 5 Quotes

> The air was cracking with the retributions and damnations that, in my heart of hearts, I knew that some of us deserved. I prayed that this was just a dream and that soon the couldn't-care-less clamor of the sunrise birds would rouse me to another day, a better day, a bloodless one, one in which, despite my hand, I'd do my common duty and drag up a log or stone to make that short man tall.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Beldam Father/Old Man

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

After the old man dies in the pillory during the night, Walter stands by his body while Master Kent prays over it. By scapegoating the man for a crime he didn't even commit, the village has basically murdered him, and Walter is painfully aware of the extent to which they've transgressed. Walter's use of the phrase "common duty" is interesting, showing both his embrace of village morays and the ways in which he differs from his neighbors. Since the village is organized around collective farming, all its members are defined by the imperative to take care of each other and further their common aims. However, the village's idea of "common duty" excludes and is actively hostile to strangers; the villagers apprehend the Beldams in order to protect their shared resources and stability.

Walter, who has lived outside the village and has a stronger sense of individuality even at the beginning of the novel, has a broader sense of the word "common"; for him, the idea means an extension of basic kindness to anyone who needs it. While his sense of duty points out the village's moral flaws, it's important to note that he doesn't always live by it. He failed to bring a log for the man, and in this sense has a particular responsibility for his death. This passage thus shows both the strengths and shortcomings in Walter's character.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ I bring you sheep, and I supply a Holy Shepherd too. There'll be a steeple, higher than the turret of this house, taller than any ancient oak that we might fell. This place will be visible from far. And I will have a bell cast for the very top of it to summon everyone to prayer. And hurry everyone to work.

Related Characters: Edmund Jordan (speaker), Master Kent

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Master Jordan outlines his plans for the village, camouflaging them as act of charity rather than a brutal takeover. His approach to religion is especially notable, and contrasts starkly with the rituals that dominate village life before his arrival. While ceremonies with the Gleaning Ceremony emphasize a close relationship to and dependence on the land, Jordan's proposed steeple, "taller than any ancient oak," represents human dominance over the earth.

Master Kent's speech at the reaping festival tells how the land links everyone, from aristocrat to peasant to animal, thus fostering an unusually egalitarian culture in the village. Master Jordan's impersonal bell represents the landlord's control over village's spiritual and economic life. While village rituals cultivate and affirm an atmosphere that is beneficial to its inhabitants, Jordan's Christianity is entirely based on the exercise of power, and serves to establish his own dominance over people towards whom he has no good intentions.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ It feels as if some impish force has come out of the forest in the past few days to see what pleasure it can take in causing turmoil in a tranquil place.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Mistress Beldam/Stranger Woman

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

After the murder of Willowjack, Walter tries to think through possible suspects while also wondering how his sleepy life could so suddenly be dominated by crime and suspicion. His description of supernatural "impish" forces at play is interesting. Normally, earth-based village spirituality is characterized positively, in contrast to the self-interested Christianity Jordan brings. However, by pointing out that, as well as sustaining the village, the land can produce chaos and violence, Walter acknowledges the entropy that exists in the village before Jordan arrives.

Walter's comment is also important in light of the fact that Mistress Beldam almost certainly murdered Willowjack. Describing an enigmatic force originating in the forest, where the strange woman is hiding, he makes it seem as though Mistress Beldam has been committing crimes out of

pure malice. However, the villagers have recently killed her father, so her desire for retribution is certainly understandable. Walter's refusal to see any logic in her antipathy towards the village reflects his inability to grapple with the full injustice of the village's behavior towards her family.

❝ There's nothing like a show of heavy justice–and a swinging corpse–to persuade a populace not used to formal discipline that their compliance in all matters–including those regarding wool and fence–is beyond debate.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Edmund Jordan

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

As he listens to Master Jordan promise violent reprisals for Willowjack's death, Walter contrasts his style of governance with the village's habitual norms. Master Jordan views a lack of "formal discipline" as a problem, something to be brutally corrected. However, the absence of formal government is what has allowed the village's simple and satisfying lifestyle to persist for so many centuries.

Moreover, Walter is fully aware that Master Jordan doesn't care about finding a criminal, only about enforcing his own authority; therefore, he's eliminating any meaningful law and order from the village, rather than fostering it. While the novel mostly focuses on the villagers' dispossession through loss of land, this passage shows that dispossession can also occur through the removal of long-respected–if not formal–legal rights.

❝ "Nothing but sheep," he says, and laughs out loud. His joke, I think, is this: we are the sheep, already here, and munching at the grass. There's none more pitiful than us, he thinks. There's none more meek. There's none to match our peevish fearfulness, our thoughtless lives, our vacant, puny faces, our dependency, our fretful scurrying, our plaints.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Edmund Jordan

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

In the face of Willowjack's murder and Master Jordan's abrupt grasping of authority, the villagers are understandably confused, facing more upheaval than they've known in decades. Master Jordan sees their confusion as a character flaw, a contrast to his own cunning. In doing so, he twists the villagers' positive attributes into evidence of weakness and indignity: their tranquility becomes "meekness," their austere existence "thoughtless lives," their relationship with the land mere "dependency." By calling them "sheep," he makes clear that he thinks of them as vehicles by which to profit, just as he does the livestock he'll soon import. His cruel comparison emblematizes the clash between the villagers' satisfaction with their way of life and larger outside forces which not only don't value that lifestyle but have the power to destroy it.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ But none of these compare for patterned vividness with Mr. Quill's designs. His endeavors are tidier and more wildly colorful–they're certainly more blue–than anything that nature can provide. They're rewarding in themselves. They are more pleasing than a barleycorn.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Edmund Jordan, Philip Earle/Mr. Quill

Related Themes:

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

Incapacitated by his wounded hand, Walter spends the afternoon helping Mr. Quill prepare his maps of the village in its current state and as it will appear under Master Jordan's new plans. Comparing the drawings to the intricate patterns he observes in nature, Walter says that nature doesn't compare to the "patterned vividness" of Mr. Quill's art; by saying it's "more pleasing than a barleycorn," he elevates the contemplation of art above the harvest, the most important event in the village. This is one of the few instances in which Walter admits that something man-made can trump the natural world. Master Jordan represents an

unwelcome threat to the village's intimacy with the land around them. By making Walter appreciate art, which exists outside the village paradigm and can't be contained by it, Mr. Quill brings a more intriguing, and thus more destabilizing, challenge, eroding Walter's confidence in the superiority of his limited way of life.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Dissent is never counted. It is weighed. The master always weighs the most. Besides, they can't draw up a petition and fit it to the doorway of the church as other places do. It only takes a piece of paper and a nail, that's true. But, even if they had a doorway to a church, none of them has a signature.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Master Kent, Lizzie Carr, Edmund Jordan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

Watching his neighbors prepare to confront Master Jordan about his abduction of Lizzie Carr and two village women, Walter is sad and cynical about their prospects. His reflection here is a notable contrast to the villagers' former relationship to Master Kent. Earlier in the novel, Walter noted that Master Kent's education and "parchmenting" was useless to the important work of farming and actually put him at a disadvantage with the villagers, on whom he depends to work his land. Formerly, the village's isolation and simplicity meant that formal education or an understanding of legal rights were irrelevant. Now, Walter sees the villagers' lack of a "signature" and inability to formally advocate for themselves as grave handicaps. More importantly, he notes that the system of justice is inherently stacked against them, prioritizing Jordan's power over their wishes. Thus, this passage reflects both the abrupt change of village governance and a profound disillusionment with the new system.

❝ Our church ground has been desecrated by our surliness. Our usual scriptures are abused. This body on the cross is not the one that's promised us. Yet, once again, it's Mr. Quill who teaches us our shortcomings. It's Mr. Quill who's intimate and kind. It's Mr. Quill who's valiant. It will not make him popular.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Master Beldam/Young Man/Husband, Edmund Jordan, Philip Earle/Mr. Quill

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

On their way to beg Master Jordan to release the women who have been abducted by his men, the villagers pass the pillory and see Mr. Quill conversing with and comforting the young man still imprisoned there. Where Master Jordan deliberately misinterprets the village's virtues, through his actions now Mr. Quill accurately points out the village's failings, namely its violent hostility toward strangers. While Jordan shows the dangers of outside interference, in this case, the presence of an outsider with different values has the potential to refine and improve village character.

Moreover, by openly comforting the suffering man and displaying attributes like "kindness," Mr. Quill aligns himself with the Christ narrative the young man is unwillingly reenacting. He's the character who most actively displays Christ's radical compassion, and like Christ he will suffer an ignominious death as a result. Through Mr. Quill, the novel expresses serious doubt about the moral fiber of societies–both the village community and the one created by Jordan–that don't reward, but rather punish, these displays of incontrovertible virtue.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ "I have the sense my cousin is taking pleasure from sowing these anxieties, in the same way we take pleasure in the sowing of our seed," says Master Kent. "I fear his harvesting. I think he means to shear us all, then turn us into mutton."

Related Characters: Master Kent (speaker), Edmund Jordan, Walter Thirsk

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 142

Explanation and Analysis

Visiting Walter to tell him about the women's imprisonment, Master Kent shares his despair and impotence in the face of

his cousin. Using agricultural metaphors, he eloquently shows how the position of the villagers has shifted relative to their land and their landlord. Formerly, processes like "sowing" and "harvesting" are highly positive events emphasizing the regeneration promised by the land and the villagers' active role in stewarding their fields. However, Master Kent casts his cousin's "harvesting" as ominous, putting an end to the old cycles through which the villagers have thrived; by using habitual language to describe this shift, he makes it even starker and more poignant. His final prediction that Jordan will make "mutton" from everyone continues the pattern of comparing the villagers to sheep and emphasizes that under Jordan's rule they are objects of profit, rather than a community with agency and value.

Chapter 11 Quotes

He must realize I'm not truly a villager. He knows I used to be the manor man. He sees that I stand apart. I'm separate. Indeed, I haven't felt as separate in years. Perhaps it's just as well, this recent, saddening detachment from the drove. I almost welcome it. These loose roots might save me yet.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Edmund Jordan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 161

Explanation and Analysis

After the villagers have fled, Master Jordan recruits Walter to stay on as his manager, while he himself returns to the city. Walter has been worried that he'll face blame for the attack on the groom or Willowjack's murder, so this show of favor should be a relief. Walter knows it's certainly practical to go along with Master Jordan and to start thinking for himself, rather than as a member of the "drove." However, he's actually ashamed that Master Jordan, an outsider, can so easily perceive his differences from the other villagers, when he's spent so many years trying to establish himself as one of them. His ambivalent feelings here reflect the tension between the individuality he's always possessed and now needs to use, and his desire to subsume himself in a strong community, even if that community has proved all too ready to abandon him.

Chapter 13 Quotes

I'll not forget her blowing on the grains to winnow off the flake and how the barley pearls were weighty on her palm. But now she is like chaff herself. A sneeze could lift her up and take her off. She's hollowed out and terrified.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Lizzie Carr

Related Themes:

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

The morning that Master Jordan leaves, Walter hides and watches as the imprisoned women finally leave the house. He's most struck by the appearance of Lizzie Carr, the former Gleaning Queen. When Lizzie gathered the first barleycorn at the beginning of the novel, the resemblance between her and the plant was pleasing, reminding the villagers of the land's ability to sustain and protect them. Here, Walter again compares her to barley, but this time it's in order to emphasize the harm she's suffered. While comparisons to nature were almost unequivocally positive at the novel's start, by this point they're often ambivalent or outright ominous. This shift in language shows Walter's growing realization that the land can't always be relied on to protect its inhabitants. In fact, rather than being oriented around cycles of renewal, as Walter originally asserts, the land is always freighted with the possibility for meaningless destruction.

We're used to looking out and seeing what's preceded us, and what will also outlive us. Now we have to contemplate a land bare of both. Those woods that linked us to eternity will be removed by spring [...] That grizzled oak which we believe is so old it must have come from Eden to our fields will be felled and rooted out.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Edmund Jordan, Master Kent

Related Themes:

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

Standing together for the last time, Master Kent and Walter contemplate the land to which they arrived together and from which they must now leave. Remarking on the security of always knowing "what's preceded us and what will also

outlive us," Walter notes his veneration of the land's cycles and the stability they've given to his life. By providing a connection to "eternity," the integrity of these cycles informs a profound spirituality that's much more satisfying than any religion Master Jordan could import. Walter's reference to the "grizzled oak," soon to die, recalls Master Jordan's earlier boast that his church will replace the tall trees. Drawing on the two different spiritual paradigms present throughout the novel, this passage depicts the contrast between cyclical continuity and Jordan's aggressively modernistic new vision.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ Frost and furrows. That's the prompt. I know my duty now. I have to put the earth to the plow. The time has come to put the earth to plow, no matter what the Jordans say. The frost will finish what the plow begins. Winter will provide the spring.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Edmund Jordan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

Alone in the village, Walter sleeps uneasily, plagued by various nightmares. When he wakes, he's struck by an epiphany that he must plow the wheat fields, even though he knows they'll never be used again. Walter's use of the word "duty" shows how loyal he still is to the village's communal lifestyle, even though his neighbors have disowned him and disbanded. It also reflects an idealistic confidence in the strength of the land to "provide" and remain strong against human incursion. Here, Walter clings to the cyclical nature of agriculture, with its promise of infinite renewal, that has defined his life for the last dozen years. However, his awareness that he's facing many "Jordans," not one man but the entire class of capitalist modernizers he represents, undermines his resolve and reminds the reader that Walter's stand against the village's dissolution can be symbolic at most.

❝ It is a warning–among country folk, at least–that life should be allowed to proceed in its natural and logical order. In other words, you do not eat before you cook, you do not weave before you shear, you do not attempt to light the fire until you have the kindling…

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Master Beldam/Young Man/Husband

Related Themes:

Page Number: 201

Explanation and Analysis

As Walter hitches up the plow, the young man, whom Walter has convinced to help him, watches and reminds him to put "nose before ear." On one level, this is a technical instruction about assembling the plow. However, Walter explains it's also an old warning to respect the "natural and logical" cycles of life. The proverb shows how closely-rooted the village's philosophy and spirituality is in their stewardship of the land. Its constant relevance to their daily lives is the reason this spirituality is so satisfying.

The young man is a stranger, but he quotes a proverb that is well-known and respected in the village. He's demonstrating to Walter that they have much more in common than the villagers originally thought, when they accused the Beldams of being "rootless wanderers." In this sense, his remark isn't only an instruction but an implicit reproach to the village for failing to respect and understand even those with whom they share core values.

❝ The plowing's done. The seed is spread. The weather is reminding me that, rain or shine, the earth abides, the land endures, the soil will persevere forever and a day. Its smell is pungent and high-seasoned. This is happiness.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker), Edmund Jordan, Mistress Beldam/Stranger Woman, Master Beldam/Young Man/Husband

Related Themes:

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

After finishing the plowing, Walter is suffused by a sense of calm and tranquility that he hasn't felt since before the Beldams arrived. While most of the villagers believed that the strangers brought turmoil with them to the village, it's notable that the young man understands why Walter needs to symbolically plow the fields and helps him achieve this feeling of joy.

Although Walter now feels that he's honored the land and reaffirmed its strength, his happiness is short-lived. Later, he'll dream that his dead wife and neighbors are mocking

him for his feeble attempt to stand up to Jordan, calling it a "townsman's revenge." Ultimately, the value and beauty of Walter's action are balanced by his real impotence in the face of Jordan's power, emphasizing the deep sense of loss Walter experiences at forfeiting control over the land.

Chapter 17 Quotes

This is my heavy labor now. I have to leave behind these common fields. I have to take this first step out of bounds. I have to carry on alone until I reach wherever is awaiting me, until I gain wherever is awaiting us.

Related Characters: Walter Thirsk (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's final passage, Walter meditates on the conflict between his nostalgia for the strong community he's lost and the individuality he's reluctantly developing. At first, Walter seems to be reconciled to thinking and acting for himself alone, rather than on behalf of the community. He says resolutely that he's ready to leave the "common" land, and to step outside the "bounds" that have long contained him. Saying he has to "reach wherever is awaiting me," he's even imagining a future, however vague. for himself as an individual.

However, by rephrasing this final thought to say he's looking for the place that's "awaiting us," Walter shows his inability to conceive of himself as completely alone in the world. While his use of the plural "we" formerly emphasized his feelings of security within the community, the ghostly "us" is a reminder of everything he has lost. The novel ends by emphasizing the devastating emotional consequences that attend the dissolution of a community.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

The villagers wake at dawn to see smoke from two unexpected fires. One comes from the edge of the village, in the common ground of the woods, where some strangers have erected a hut and lit a fire by the light of the moon. They're following the age-old custom which decrees that strangers can earn the right to stay in a village by building four walls and a fire before they're discovered.

Crace will never name or locate the village nor specify when the novel takes place. This tactic distances the village from the contemporary world around it and roots it in ancient customs, such as the practice of communal farming on common land and specific rituals that govern conduct towards strangers.

The second fire is more worrying, because it comes from the landlord, Master Kent's, property. The villagers worry that the manor house itself is on fire, and that they will get in trouble for sleeping through it. Yesterday was the end of the harvest, and since everyone is so tired, they were slow to get up and investigate the flames. When they arrive, they see the stable is on fire and the dovecote has already been consumed; there are no doves in sight.

The arrival of strangers coincides with an unusual catastrophe and the destruction of valuable property; the two events are even heralded by similar fires. Whether or not there's any meaning in these coincidences, it will certainly influence the villagers' reactions.

Walter, the narrator, suspects that three of the village's young bachelors, Christopher and Thomas Derby and Brooker Higgs, are responsible. He saw them coming back from the woods the previous night, consumed in "immodest fits of laughter," and concluded that they'd been eating intoxicating mushrooms just as he used to do when he was a young man after the harvest was finished. The lads had even shown Walter an enormous "tindery" mushroom they'd collected, too dry to eat.

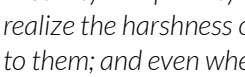
That Walter immediately deduces who is responsible suggests that the crime should be easily solved, and in fact isn't so strange as it seems. By linking the fire to the escapades of his own youth, Walter establishes it as a mishap on the route to maturity, part of the pattern of village life, rather than something more sinister.

Walter mulls over the event and the men's motives; the issue has to be resolved "without recourse to any constable or magistrate" since the village is too small and isolated to have any formal government.

This observation heightens the village's aura of isolation and shows that such isolation affects how the villagers govern themselves.

In a flashback, Walter recalls that yesterday was the last day of the harvest. This is stressful for everyone, partly because the crop is less plentiful than they'd hoped, and partly because a rare stranger is standing on the edge of the field, making a map of the land on behalf of Master Kent. A well-dressed young man, the stranger is pleasant and shows everyone his drawings. He has a waxed and pointed beard, a sign of wealth, but one side of his body is paralyzed and he walks with a limp. Despite his unassuming demeanor, the villagers are suspicious and worry that "those scratchings on his board might scratch us too." They nickname the man Mr. Quill for his ever-present pen.

Mr. Quill's rich clothes, well-groomed beard, and education, evidenced through his ability to write, contrast markedly with the austerity and poverty of village life. Importantly, the villagers don't realize the harshness of their life until such strangers make it clear to them; and even when this happens they become defensive and suspicious, rather than envious, showing how satisfied they are with their routines.



Still, the villagers are more worried about securing the harvest, on which their survival through the winter relies. The lower fields have always produced small crops, but the higher ones have been more promising this year. Walter says they've begun to smell "nutlike and sugary," foretelling the "winter ales and porridges" the villagers will make from the harvested barley.

The villagers' worry shows their deep attachment to and dependence on the land. While Walter loves his close relationship to the earth, often describing its fruits in poetic terms, the uncertain harvest makes clear that this agrarian lifestyle poses as many dangers as satisfactions.

One the reaping days, everyone in the village—since the population is now too small for anyone to stay idle—works together in the fields, gossiping constantly. The children go first, weeding, while the men follow with scythes and the women tie up the sheaves of barley. Walter says that work is "consecrated by the sun"; it's more enjoyable than plowing and planting, or the long winter days with nothing to do, and it's nice to be working together for a common goal. If the villagers hear animal noises from the woods, they look up in unison.

The ritualized nature of the reaping process shows that the village is grounded and sustained by repeated customs; the nature of village life is cyclical, and thus even the fall harvest foretells the renewal of the spring. However, small details—like Walter's observation that the population is dwindling—hint at a troubling pattern of decay that exists even when the village's cycle is undisturbed.

They also share lewd but friendly gossip, discussing which spouses are unfaithful and "which bearded bachelor is far too friendly with his goat." On this harvest, they talk about Mr. Quill, wondering if he's managed to find a wife with his disability, and comparing his triangular beard to female genitalia.

Walter relates the general pattern of the conversation without giving many specifics or naming speakers. His narrative emphasizes the consummate unity of the villagers and their lack of strong individual identities.

However, in the afternoon the villagers become more uneasy about Mr. Quill's aims. The sense of being recorded makes them feel that some unwanted change is impending. He's a representation of the outside world, where harvests aren't "divided into shares and portions for the larder" but rather sold. The villagers wonder if Master Kent is so financially strapped that he's planning to sell the land.

The villagers rightly perceive any modern innovation—even one as simple as writing down events—as a threat to their primitive but steady way of life. By encouraging the reader to view simple processes like writing from the village's suspicious viewpoint, the novel argues that advancements in the name of progress are often harmful and should not be viewed as unqualified positives.


Now, each animal noise or moving cloud seems like a "warning," alerting the villagers to potential change. Without speaking of it, the villagers become angry, and the young men swagger as if to suggest their willingness to defend the land with their lives. Master Kent's doves have landed in the fields and are picking at the fallen grain, which the villagers will glean the next morning. The men say that the birds are "feasting on our bread and ale" and tell the children to drive them away with slingshots.

The villagers change their views and feelings collectively but without speaking, showing how deeply attuned they are to each other. That they seem to see their reactions reflected in the earth around them further demonstrates their close relationship to the earth, and the extent to which the community's identity depends on the common land they farm.


After the work is finished, the Derby twins and Brooker Higgs, three young bachelors in "a village dismayingly short of unmarried women," take off for the woods. Everyone else goes home, where they convince themselves that nothing bad will happen after all. Master Kent has always taken good care of the village, and there's no real evidence that he's planning to sell. They resolve not to worry, but to enjoy the next day's gleaning ceremony. They take comfort in the knowledge that the seasons will "unfold in all their usual sequences."

Like Walter's earlier remark on the declining population, the lack of young women shows that decay is already at work in the village. By suggesting that the young men wouldn't be gallivanting in the woods if they had wives at home, Walter links their petty crime to this decay, implicitly suggesting that the strangers shouldn't be held responsible for the fires.

Walter imagines the young men became even angrier in the woods and "concocted ways of getting even with the thieving birds." Walter knows they could easily have used the moonball mushroom to set a fire in the stable, although he's sure they only meant to create a little smoke and disturb the birds. The birds were probably trapped against the roof of the dovecote by the blaze, trying unsuccessfully to escape.

By picking at the barley during the harvest, the doves steal resources that the village desperately needs. However, imagining their deaths in the fire, Walter casts the birds as tragic innocents. His reverie foretells his ambivalence about the newly arrived strangers, who are making unwelcome claims on the village but, like the doves, may be deserving of charity and compassion.

In another town, anyone who purposefully set a fire would be hanged. However, the only source of authority here is Master Kent, who is "timid" about punishing the villagers, aware that to do so is to "rob a family of their father, husband, son." Walter thinks it's best for the young men he suspects to fight the fire with everyone else and hope Master Kent concludes it's an "act of God."

While lack of formal governance could be a serious problem, for this village it's a boon, since Master Kent cultivates an unusually merciful atmosphere. His awareness of wrongdoers as valued members of families shows that he respects and values the villagers, despite the total authority he possesses as their landlord.

The Derby twins and Brooker Higgs clearly seem worried and guilty. They are "too noisy and too keen" in fighting the fire, wanting Master Kent to notice how loyal they are. Moreover, once everyone agrees that someone must have set the fire, Brooker is the most vocal in insisting that the perpetrator must be found. He says the arsonist must have intended to poach the doves to eat, but none of the villagers need to do so, since they've just brought in the harvest and are looking forward to a feast the next day. Therefore, it must be a stranger who's responsible.

Brooker's fear and sense of guilt leads him to cast blame on the strangers, even though he knows they're not at fault. His willingness to scapegoat others shows his cowardice. Moreover, his arguments rest on establishing clear differences between the community and the "others" who have just arrived. While the villagers derive strength and satisfaction from unity, it also deprives them of compassion and understanding when it comes to strangers.

Someone else quickly points out that people have arrived "out of nowhere" on the edge of the woods; the villagers can still see the smoke from their fire. Master Kent says that they will "call on them" after the buildings have been made safe. He's dejected, both because of the damage to his property and the likelihood that he'll have to inflict punishment on the strangers.

Walter is ambivalent about Master Kent's diffident attitude towards punishment, neither praising nor condemning him. In fact, his seeming indecision reflects a thoughtful and meditative approach towards justice, which will notably contrast with Master Jordan's ruthless overconfidence.

Walter knows that he should tell Master Kent about the moonball, but he doesn't want to get the Derby twins, and Brooker in trouble. He also knows everyone wants to "let this drama run its course and die back," so they can all enjoy the gleaning ceremony and the upcoming feast. He's sure that other villagers have come to the same conclusions that he has, but no one will betray their own men.

That all the villagers know the young men are guilty yet remain silent while the strangers are accused shows a disturbing lack of scruples towards anyone outside the community. While the novel generally characterizes the village positively, its conduct towards strangers is a significant indictment of its morals.

Walter has sustained an injury while trying to save some of the hay from the barn. His left palm is completely scorched. Master Kent takes him by the shoulders and hugs him. Walter is most concerned about his own health, knowing that "a farmer with an injured hand is as useful as a one-pronged pitchfork." While the villagers go to investigate the outsiders, Walter returns to his cottage to treat his wounds.

Master Kent's hug is an unusually friendly gesture from an aristocrat towards a peasant, showing that the village's isolation helps blur distinctions between classes. The lack of strong class boundaries is one of the village's chief virtues.

CHAPTER 2

Without Walter, the villagers proceed in a large group towards the remaining fire. Master Kent rides in the back, "mindful of his horse's dung." Some of the villagers are armed with sticks. Walter says they're not a fierce group, but in such an impoverished place, which requires everyone's effort to produce enough food to survive, it makes sense to be wary of strangers.

The villagers' improvised arms show that they're unaccustomed both to conflict and to novelty. While the village's isolation facilitates a simple lifestyle and an egalitarian relationship with Master Kent (who doesn't even care about riding at the head of the procession) it also makes them unable to respond rationally to change.

Master Kent may own the land, which he's inherited through his wife, Lucy Kent, but the villager's labor is just as important as his legal rights. Walter points out that Master Kent would be helpless "if all he had to work his property were his own two hands." Although the villagers don't legally own everything, their labor gives them an informal right of possession over the land.

In Walter's evaluation, while the agrarian system gives the villagers no formal rights, it gives them a lot of informal power, and requires their landlord to respect them. In this sense, ancient practices of allocating and farming land provide a better life for the peasantry than the new arrangements Master Jordan will advocate as signs of "progress."

The villagers don't want to share these rights with any strangers. It's true that some inhabitants—including Walter himself—weren't born in the village. But lately, the population has been declining and harvests have been bad. They're suspicious as to why the strangers have arrived just as the harvest is being gathered, and they also know that strangers might carry disease. Only one person has died of the sweating sickness this year, but they don't want to invite contagion into the town. Therefore, blaming the fire on the strangers might be a "blessing in disguise," allowing the villagers to avoid respecting the law that demands they welcome the newcomers.

Walter's revelation that he was born outside the village is important, since his community is highly attuned to distinctions of this kind. Even as he claims to speak for his neighbors and usually describes feelings and actions with the collective pronoun "we," he's separated from them by birth. It's also notable that the village could solve some of its problems—like the dwindling population—by welcoming strangers. Instead, villagers respond to these stressors with increased hostility and largely groundless suspicions.

Walter sits outside his cottage, resting his hand. It's rare to be among the village dwellings by himself. When Walter first arrived in the village, all the houses were full and always noisy. Now, many of them are empty; there's actually lots of room to house newcomers, if only the village wasn't so suspicious of them.

Throughout the novel, Walter will be absent from most of the collective actions he describes. Even while he speaks on behalf of the village, his reliance on hearsay shows that he's not as integrated into the village as he likes to think, and that his narrative reflects his individual thoughts and feelings more than those of the community.

In moments like these, Walter misses the larger towns in which he grew up. Place like those towns have more choices, while the village is "ditched and fenced against the outside world," so inhospitable that no new person has settled there since Walter and Master Kent arrived a dozen years ago. Still, Walter knows he is part of the village now, a "frowner" like all its other inhabitants. He even finds he's becoming thickset like the other villagers, although he was skinny when he arrived.

It's interesting that Walter describes the village's hostility to strangers as a "fence," when fences will become the emblem of Master Jordan's hated plans for enclosure. His language suggests that the villagers' attitude towards outsiders degrades its integrity, just as Jordan's plans threaten its existence.

Although he hasn't seen it, Walter reports that the strangers' shack is poorly constructed, more fit for animals than people. No one is sure if such a hovel is enough to guarantee them the right of inclusion. In any case, Walter expects they'll leave once they see how ill-disposed toward the villagers are toward strangers.

The villagers grudgingly respect the custom that allows the strangers to stay if they erect a home, while looking for loopholes to get around it. Their behavior is strikingly similar to Master Jordan's devotion to the ideals of progress, which barely disguise his total self-interest.

The villagers, Master Kent, and Mr. Quill arrive at the shack, where the fire is burning out. In the ashes, everyone can see bird bones; Christopher Derby immediately declares that it's one of the doves and everyone agrees, even though the bird has dark feathers and a yellow beak.

Even when the evidence clearly exonerates the strangers, the villagers persist in their accusations, showing how completely they prioritize their own comrades—even those who are guilty—over outsiders.

Brooker Higgs hits the roof of the shack with his stick and it collapses. As the other men step forward to demolish the shack, two men step out of the woods, aiming drawn bows at the villagers. They seem surprised, "more innocent than any of us would have liked." In the face of these weapons, the villagers draw back and widen out, already calculating how to disarm and attack the men.

The villagers are struck and discomforted by their own similarities to the strangers. While the villagers will try to distinguish themselves from the strangers throughout the novel, the sight of their faces will always remind Walter of their shared humanity.

It's Mr. Quill who tries to diffuse the situation. He limps forward with open hands; the other villagers wonder if he will be shot, and conclude it's "a price they could afford," since he himself is an outsider.

Here, Mr. Quill's kindness and bravery contrast with the village's careless disregard for anyone who isn't a member of their community.

Then a woman emerges from the half-demolished shack. Her head is bloody from the collapse of the roof, and the injury turns an altercation between armed men in to an "occasion of shame." The villagers let their weapons fall, and Mr. Quill helps the woman out of the shack. She's not beautiful; she has a "weasel face" and shiny eyes like "belladonna berries." Around her shoulders she wears a beautiful shawl, too expensive for a woman of her station to possess.

From her first appearance, the woman is notable in several ways. Walter describes her features in terms of their resemblance to animals and plants, establishing her as closely connected to nature. Moreover, the richness of her shawl suggests that it is stolen. While the village's atmosphere is fairly egalitarian, they never blur class boundaries this far. Thus, the woman is immediately destabilizing to the hierarchies that govern village life.

The woman is enthralling to the men, not because of her beauty, but because she's "within reach" and because of her proud and unafraid demeanor. One of the men is young and the other old, so they conclude that they are her brother and father, and that she's conveniently unmarried. The women see her as a good partner for their sons or brothers, but she's a tempting prospect for all the men, married or not. The village women are "like land—fenced in, assigned and spoken for" by their large family networks. In contrast, the stranger is "no better than any other wild quarry on common ground."

On one hand, the immediate impulse to welcome the woman suggests that the villagers could improve their behavior towards outsiders, and thus solve the problem of decay they face. On the other hand, their conception of the woman as unprotected and an easy target is disturbing, suggesting that they can take advantage of her because she's not yet part of the community. Notably, Walter will later observe that Jordan's manservants consider the village women in much the same light.

Master Kent comes forward on Willowjack, his impressive horse. He demands they put the longbows aside, saying this is "no place for rough manners," but the woman responds derisively that they've only seen rough manners since they arrived here. Master Kent decrees that the old man and young man will both spend one week in the **pillory** for stealing the birds. Their bows will be snapped, and all three will have their heads shaven. It's a comparatively lenient punishment, but the woman spits on the ground in front of Master Kent. He tells her to consider herself lucky there isn't space for three people in the pillory. She spits again, hitting Willowjack this time.

While the men remain passive throughout the interaction, the woman speaks for them and expresses anger on behalf, showing she possess an unusual amount of authority. Feeling herself in the right, she's unwilling to concede Master Kent's authority over her, even though it might mitigate her punishment. From the start, the woman is a strongly anarchic, if sometimes irrational, force.

CHAPTER 3

In the evening, the villagers gather in the remaining barn, lying on bales of hay and consuming the rich food Master Kent provides for the harvest feast. Master Kent has killed one of his own calves for the occasion. Everyone should be content, but they are unnerved from the morning's excitement. Brooker Higgs and the Derby twins seem ashamed, as do all the men who held down the strange woman and cut her hair. By now everyone has figured out who really set the fire, and Walter says they "can be absolved only if these three guilty friends" confess and take their place instead of the strangers in the **pillory**.

Despite their demonstrated hostility to the strangers, the villagers do seem to know that they're in the wrong. In fact, their sense of guilt towards the strangers is already corrupting their most treasured rituals, like the festival that follows the harvest. Walter's suggestion that the villagers need "absolution" is ominous, suggesting that their behavior deserves and will certainly result in punishment.

Walter knows that the old man and young man's punishment is unjust, but he's decided it's best to leave it alone. Once they're released, it's unlikely they'll want to stay in the village, and then they'll be free of them. In any case, seven days in the **pillory** isn't much for roaming men like them, "men who have no roots but are like mistletoe."

Walter also is callous towards the strangers, even though he was once new to the village and lacking in "roots" himself. By differentiating himself from the outsiders, he hopes to feel more secure within the village.

The **pillory** hasn't been used in many years, ever since two cousins, related to Walter's wife Cecily, had a dispute over a pig. They only spent a night in the pillory, and the instance ended the fight and became a subject of much humor. Instead, the pillory functions as the "village cross," since the village has some land set aside for a church which has never been built. The villagers feel much closer to the animals they work with than "the Father who created us and them." While they respect God, he's irrelevant to their daily work and won't help them bring the harvest in.

The pillory is central to village life. Although technically an object of punishment, it's lost any ominous connotations through infrequent use. The juxtaposition of the pillory with the unbuilt church both shows the pillory's spiritual significance in the village and demonstrates the extent to which the villagers are distanced from conventional religion.

The **pillory** stands on the site of the unbuilt church, taller than a man and shaped like a cross. In front of it, Master Kent officiates weddings, funerals, and baptisms. Both Master Kent's wife Lucy and Walter's Cecily had their funeral in this same spot. Walter is sad to see the two men hanging from the pillory in the same place where so many important village functions have occurred. It's the first time he's actually laid eyes on the prisoners, having just heard reports from his neighbors, John and Emma Carr, and the Widow Gosse. The old man has to stand on tiptoe to keep from being strangled in the pillory, and Walter resolves to bring him a log to stand on later.

The pillory's location and shape create a resemblance to the Christian crucifix. Its function as a site for rituals like weddings and funerals, which would normally be performed in a church, shows the village's reliance on improvised rituals, which are much more egalitarian (Master Kent, an aristocrat, and Walter, a peasant, had identical weddings). However, by hanging on the cross the strangers are aligned with Jesus Christ, highlighting their own innocence and the villagers' guilt.

Now, at the feast, Master Kent stands up to make a speech. He introduces Mr. Quill, whose real name is Philip Earle. Master Kent says he's come to make a map of all the common lands, in order to facilitate a new "organization to all our advantages." Mr. Quill unfurls a map that purports to show the land, but all the villagers can make out are strange geometric shapes with no logic.

Mr. Quill's job is to make sense of the land by recording it. However, his drawings are completely inaccessible to the villagers who have known the land all their lives. This moment foretells that the land will become unrecognizable to its inhabitants, negatively characterizing whatever changes are impending.

Master Kent stands uncertainly for a moment without explaining, but Walter knows what's coming, having feared this ever since Lucy Kent died. He knows that in other towns, the masters have enclosed common fields with fences, cleared timber, and turned the land into **sheep** farms in order to produce and sell wool.

Walter's knowledge of life outside the village gives him an edge in understanding what's about to happen. Walter wants to be a full member of the village, not an individual character; at times, however, the qualities that differentiate him are useful.

Master Kent presents these changes as a "dream" he's had. In the dream, all the villagers, whom he calls "friends and neighbors," no longer have to work hard all year and face uncertain harvests. Instead, they will rely on **sheep**, which are predictable and don't rely on good weather to produce fleece. Their work will consist of shepherding and spinning and weaving the cloth, which people in far away places will turn into clothes.

Master Kent is doing is best to make these changes palatable to the villagers, but the arguments he uses aren't very relevant. They don't think of their lives as hard and uncertain, and it's not interesting to them if people far away use their products, since they have little interest in strangers and only care about their insular community. The attractions of "progress" have little value to the villagers.

Walter knows no one is in a position to object right now. They've all dined well on Master Kent's food, and everyone is a little drunk. To lighten the mood, Thomas Rogers picks up his pipe and plays. Mr. Quill produces a fiddle and joins Thomas, in fact playing much better than him, to Thomas's consternation. Everyone begins to dance, especially the young unmarried girls. After the music is over, the prettiest one will be selected as the Gleaning Queen, and the next morning she will inaugurate the barley gleaning by picking the first fallen grain from the field.

The villagers respond to the unwelcome news by retreating into their age-old rituals. The prospect of the annual gleaning ceremony is especially comforting. By equating the healthy and fertile girls with the harvested crop, the ceremony links the land's abundance and the village's vitality, promising that the community can always find renewal and stability by working the land.

Mr. Quill is "shaping us again" with his fiddle, making them lighthearted and friendly just as he has recorded and encapsulated the land with his pen. A middle-aged widower, Walter stands to the side with Master Kent and watches the young people drawing closer together than they should. The sight reminds Walter that the village is "more devoted to the customs and the Holy days than to the Holiness itself." It's lucky they don't have a priest to exhort them to be more pious.

The village's most valued rituals stand outside of and even in contrast to established religion. For example, the village values everything that connotes fertility and renewal, even if it's unmarried coupling, while the church explicitly condemns this. Thus, the village rituals, and the satisfaction they provide, implicitly argue that conventional religion is unnecessary and irrelevant.

Just when they're becoming truly merry, the strange woman approaches the barn, standing at the edge of the feast. Walter recognizes the shawl he's heard so much about. Master Kent nudges him and points, nicknaming the woman Mistress Beldam; soon, everyone has stopped dancing to stare at her. The villagers know they ought to make amends and welcome her into the feast to dance and eat. They could even select her as the Gleaning Queen, and then everything would be made right. Walter imagines her leading the village into the field while the doves, still alive, circle in the sky. However, even in his imagination it seems that the doves can't find any place to land.

Master Kent's nickname is important. Beldam is an elision of "belle dame," or "beautiful woman," which highlights the stranger's fascination for the men in the village; but "beldam" is also a contemporary term for a female sorceress. Her name thus emblematizes the allure and danger she emanates. The unspoken desire to name her the Gleaning Queen recalls Walter's earlier description of her in terms of her similarity to nature, underscoring her close association with the land and its promises of fertility and renewal.

Mistress Beldam hesitates for a moment and then walks away through the gate. The villagers "exchange **sheepish** glances" and, with the atmosphere spoiled, everyone hurries away to bed.

Walter plays with language here, associating the villagers with the very creatures whose arrival they fear and detest.

Master Kent asks Walter to find Mistress Beldam and bring her to the barn, where she can find some shelter away from "danger." Since there are few dangerous animals in the woods, Walter knows Master Kent is trying to protect her from any of the village men who might drunkenly search for her during the night.

Master Kent's thoughtfulness again shows his respect for everyone under his care, even strangers. In this respect he's different from his tenants. On the other hand, the village men seem capable of violence, despite Walter's repeated description of the villagers as peaceful and harmless.

When he leaves the barn, Walter sees it's raining hard. All the neighbors have returned to their cottages, but Walter feels the rain is cleansing, washing away the rich food and drink and helping the pain in his hand. He walks toward the **pillory**. When he sees the miserable old man and young man exposed to the elements, he wishes he could build a church right away, with an arch over the pillory to protect them. Now, the rain seems to him not cleansing but threatening.

Walter's interpretations of natural phenomena change depending on goings-on in the village. Even though the land provides the villagers a stable life, it doesn't give their actions any moral certainty. Walter's desire to build a church, thus importing outside practices to the village, implies that the village norms, while satisfactory to the community, aren't sufficient to address the problem of the strangers.

Walter approaches the **pillory** and introduces himself, but the men don't respond. In the bad weather, Walter can't even find a log for the old man to stand on; he tries to bring one of the stones intended for the church, but his hand hurts too much to drag it. Walter tells himself that the man can make it through the night, and in the morning he and John Carr will bring a bench for him.

While Walter is more sympathetic to the strangers than anyone else, he fails to act decisively on their behalf. Walter often feels that the village as a whole is at fault for their treatment of the strangers, but he rarely examines his personal culpability.

Then Walter goes in search of Mistress Beldam. He's always been loyal to Master Kent's instructions, having known him since childhood; Walter's father worked for Master Kent's, and his own mother was Master Kent's wet nurse. The two men played together as children, and then Walter became Master Kent's manservant, eventually accompanying him to the village when he married Lucy and took charge of her estates. Master Kent was kind to Walter when he announced his desire to marry a villager, Cecily, and become a farmer, even though it meant losing him as a servant. Now, Walter always speaks on Master Kent's behalf to his neighbors, and he relates village grievances to the landlord.

Walter and Master Kent's life shows the class differences between the two men; Walter has always been defined as a subordinate, and his path determined by his duty to serve his master. At the same time, their familiarity breaks down class boundaries between the two men. Their marriage to women from the same insular village, and their current status as widowers, emphasizes their similarities. Moreover, Walter's special relationship to the landlord differentiates him further from his neighbors.

Walter hurries towards the shack, hoping Mistress Beldam has sought shelter there. He admits that his intentions aren't entirely pure. Mistress Beldam is fascinating to him—not in the manner of his wife, Cecily, but in a new and "uncomfortable" way. Walter found comfort and security in his wife, but Mistress Beldam is more intriguing. In the darkness, he hears other men prowling about, and knows that they're beset by the same thoughts as he is. He feels more entitled to search for the woman than they are, since he doesn't have to hide her from a wife or family. Walter calls out to her many times, but he never receives an answer.

Although no one knows much about her, Mistress Beldam exercises a totemic fascination over the village men. They all desire her sexually, but since sex is linked to fertility and renewal, it's clear they desire her as a means to reaffirm the cycles that drive village life. At this point in the narrative, Mistress Beldam embodies a hope for sustenance and growth in a village that is already suffering insidious decay.

CHAPTER 4

Because of his injured hand, Walter doesn't work in the threshing barns but is assigned to help Mr. Quill for the week. He has to be careful of his hand, because many villagers have lost limbs from wounds that didn't heal correctly. His neighbors are jealous of his release from hard work, and he imagines they'll make fun of him all day.

Although Walter injured himself protecting the village's supply of hay, his neighbors see it as something that differentiates him from them and aligns him with the seemingly idle men of the upper class who don't work for their food. This moment shows how suspicious the villagers are of any demonstrated differences.

Before the working day, everyone gathers at the gleaning field. Everyone feels weary, both from the feasting and the unexpected altercation with the strangers. During the night, the wind has spread much of the chaff across the village, and some of the barley has dropped onto the ground. Walter says there's a "silent ripeness to the air" that is unique to Gleaning Day.

The Gleaning Ceremony is the crowning moment of the harvest, when the villagers celebrate what they've accomplished and prepare the land for another year of farming. However, this year the moment is tainted by the troubling presence of strangers and by Master Kent's worrying announcement of changes to village life.

With the shock of Mistress Beldam's appearance at the feast, the village still hasn't nominated a Gleaning Queen. All the girls have adorned themselves with ribbons, garlands, and gold paste from flowers and are lined up, waiting to be judged. Master Kent arrives on Willowjack, his hat ornamented with green and yellow cloth.

It's notable that the Gleaning Ceremony hinges on the selection of a woman to represent the harvest. The village's rituals are closer to pagan religion, centered around female deities, than they are to contemporary Christianity.

This day is a chance for the villagers to give thanks, "not to some higher being but to the soil itself." It's also a chance for them to reflect on the changing of the seasons, marveling that it's already been half a year since the spring when they seeded the land.

The villagers respect the land to the point of disregarding any other "beings" they're supposed to worship. This moment emphasizes the village's distance from the religion that dominates the outside world, but also shows that their culture depends on the integrity of their land.

When Walter first arrived in the village, he fell in love with its fertile soil and ancient way of life, marveling at its closeness with the surrounding nature. After meeting Cecily, he became determined to make a future there, and became a farmer as an "act of love." He loved the fact that the village's survival depends on the land and the weather, unlike the towns he grew up in, where such things seemed unimportant. Now that he's widowed, he's less content with his life here; he no longer loves the hard labor of farming and feels that without his wife he'll never be fully tied to the village. The recent arrival of Mr. Quill and the other strangers has made him uneasy, reminding him of the existence of a wider world.

While Walter respects and even lionizes the villagers' devotion to the land in and of itself, he has a slightly different relationship to it. Walter's love of farming was connected to his love for his wife. Unlike the rest of the villagers, who function as a homogenous group, Walter is governed by individual attachments and passions. His individuality makes him chafe at the village's closed lifestyle, while his neighbors don't even seem to notice it.

Master Kent begins his speech, which follows the same pattern year after year. The barley the villagers glean from the fields is theirs to keep and cook throughout the winter. After the people are through, the livestock will root through the fields, from cattle to hogs "according to their station." While he normally mentions that the plow follows the hogs, in order to prepare the land for the next crop of winter-wheat, he leaves this part out of the speech. This detail shows Walter that the plan to enclose the land is already underway, and that this might be their last harvest.

During the gleaning, the villagers work for individual gain, collecting barley to take home rather than for the communal stores. However, Master Kent's typical speech, with its emphasis on the common dependence on the land, ensures that this is still a communal enterprise, one which affirms the village's need to work together in order to produce enough food to survive the winter.

Master Kent says that Mr. Quill, as an honored guest, will choose the Gleaning Queen. Mr. Quill walks down the line of girls, and Walter notices that he lingers over the older and more shapely ones. In fact, all the men in the village are strangely "seduced" by the ceremony, seeing "their own daughters and their neighbors' daughters in a new, inconsistent light." Mr. Quill stands in an attitude of dramatic thought, looking into the distance, and the villagers wonder if he's waiting for Mistress Beldam to appear so he can crown her the Gleaning Queen; some of the men turn to stare into the woods, where they expect she must be hiding. Walter wonders if one of them has found her and bedded with her in the night.

The Gleaning Ceremony makes clear that the village girls are growing into young women, soon to produce children of their own. This is a normal and essential part of village life, but it's still discomforting, especially to those who have known them since infancy. On the brink of womanhood, the girls promise the continuity of village life, but also remind individuals that they are small participants in an inevitable cycle of life and death.

In the end, Mr. Quill makes an unexpected decision, choosing Lizzie Carr, a four-year-old. She's delighted to be chosen but scared to hold his hand; to placate her, Master Kent gives her his green sash, making all the other girls jealous. Her father and uncle carry her to the edge of the field, and Master Kent whispers that she should go into the field barefoot and find a grain. She brings back a complete ear of barley, opening her hand to show it to the village. The winter's food, held in a healthy child's hand, marks the culmination of a year's labor. Everyone cheers.

Lizzie's new sash is too fine for her station as a peasant, just like Mistress Beldam's shawl. Although it was given voluntarily, it will make her an object of suspicion later in the novel. These two incidents show that the suspicion and blame with which the villagers treat the strangers are revisited on them.

Mr. Quill approaches Walter and asks if he can walk him around the village bounds, telling him the names for the different pieces of land. Later, Walter will help him prepare his paints and the calf-skin vellum to make his charts. Usually, Walter would be reluctant to miss the gleaning, but he's intrigued by Mr. Quill and hopes he can find discover some sign of Mistress Beldam during their tour of the village.

Walter doesn't think much of his willingness to miss an important community event, but to his neighbors this will eventually prove a telling sign of difference and even disloyalty.

Master Kent stands watching the gleaning. He knows Walter hasn't found Mistress Beldam, but he seems more troubled than this circumstance warrants. Earlier, he told Walter that the younger man shouted at him as he passed the **pillory**, as if he were the true criminal. Now, he instructs him to report to the manor house when he's finished helping Mr. Quill.

The young man's shouts, and Master Kent's unease, heighten the parallels between the shackled men and the crucified Christ. In contrast, the villagers, generally characterized as egalitarian and peaceful, emerge as similar to the tyrannical Roman government who inflicted an unjust punishment on the innocent Christ.

Mr. Quill can't move quickly, but he's alert and intelligent. Walter takes him first the large marshland where the villagers discard animal carcasses and sometimes use as a privy (among themselves, they call it Turd and Turf). The path is neglected here, and Walter clears it for Mr. Quill until they reach the steaming marsh. The smell is terrible and there's no sign of Mistress Beldam, but Mr. Quill is excited by everything in the village, exclaiming on its humble beauty and the many songs of the different birds. His naïve appreciation reminds Walter of himself, when he first arrived in the village and even the Bottom was beautiful to him. In those days, he "felt more like an angel than a beast."

The marsh is the dumping ground of the village, but Mr. Quill still sees it as a bucolic idyll. This incident gently pokes fun at the genre of British pastoral, in which writers (usually wealthy and elite) praise natural beauty without really understanding it. This behavior seems ridiculous to Walter even though he's displayed it himself; thus, Mr. Quill reminds him both how much he's integrated into the village, and of his origins as an outsider.

The other villagers laughed at Walter's amazement; to them, plants are important for their usefulness, not their beauty. Once he got married and became a farmer, Walter quickly adopted their mentality. He realized that the land is exacting and harsh, requiring the villagers to work constantly and leaving them no time to "stand back and comment on its comeliness." Although the land provides sustenance, it also requires the village to work hard for it every year.

Walter's reflection juxtaposes appreciation of the land by the educated elite, who describe and define it without truly living in it, and the peasantry who are immersed in the land but lack the skills to express themselves. Importantly, both these groups will ultimately be unable to protect the land they love.

Mr. Quill asks Walter for the marsh's name, but Walter says it has none, since he judges both its names too vulgar for maps. Walter leads Mr. Quill on the route the entire village takes every spring, when they collectively survey the state of the land; they also knock their children's heads against the boundary stones and make them taste the grass so that they remember where they belong, and they air and reconcile any grievances that may have arisen in the past year.

Like the Gleaning Ceremony, the spring rituals emphasize the village's need to act communally rather than individually. They also show that even though they have little education and no formal government, they're able to resolve problems peacefully and promote an egalitarian atmosphere when they're untroubled by outside forces.

This tour is very different, since Mr. Quill doesn't look at the land like a laborer or care about the local issues that dominate village life. He doesn't have to worry about the land from the point of view of someone who relies on it for survival. Instead, he makes notes about the beautiful views and writes down the names of different plants. Walter knows all the herbs and their uses without having to name or list them. He explains that when they have to name things, they use directions or family names—for example, West Field or John Carr's flax garth—in order not to complicate their lives. Even the village doesn't have a formal title, which Mr. Quill says is unusual.

The villagers are only interested in the land insofar as it contributes to their survival. On the other hand, Mr. Quill is more alert to its aesthetic merits and economic usefulness. In some ways, his appreciation of the land is less limited, but it's also much less intimate that that of the villagers, who don't need to name or record the land to understand it.

More somberly, Mr. Quill says that Master Kent has asked him to convey some information to Walter. In fact, Master Kent does not own the land outright as all the villagers assume. The property belonged to his wife, Lucy, and was to be divided among her male heirs by blood upon her death. Since she produced no sons and Master Kent is not a blood relative, the land passes to a cousin, named Edmund Jordan. It's Jordan, not Master Kent, who plans to introduce **sheep** and disrupt village life, and he's arriving this afternoon to enforce his wishes.

It's important that the impending changes to the village occur indirectly through Lucy Kent's inability to produce a son, part of the village's general population problem. While its rituals are focused around fertility, the village is more characterized by decay. This fact both predates and facilitates Master Jordan's arrival to hasten the demise of the village.

As he absorbs this news, Walter looks out on the land from the top of a hill. After the harvest, there's no sign of green life left. When they descend into the village, everyone is too busy in the threshing barn to pay attention to the two idle men. The villagers must separate the barley grains from the plant and stack them for storage in the barn. Walter thrusts his arm into a sack to test the quality of the grain; it's neither as plump nor as puny as it's been in previous years.

While the absence of greenery is normal, and actually signifies a successful harvest, in the aftermath of this disturbing news the sight troubles Walter and suggests that the cycle of renewal the harvest celebrates may be grinding to a halt.

Mr. Quill stands at the edge of the barn and watches the villagers process the harvested barley. Walter imagines he must be thinking how everything in the village "will pay for Mistress Lucy's failure to produce a son." He himself tries to look composed, so no one will guess he knows the unhappy news. He also lets his injured hand hang so it's clear that he's truly incapable of working, rather than trying to shirk. He already knows that they'll tease him the next time they see him eating his portion of food.

While Lucy Kent's infertility is ostensibly an individual problem, it actually has ramifications for everyone in the village. This emphasizes the intensely communal nature of village life; it also shows that, while Master Kent is a gentle and fair landlord, the system of absolute power under which he functions leaves the villagers extremely vulnerable should he be replaced.

Before leaving, Mr. Quill says goodbye to everyone, but they barely respond, too engrossed in their work. The two men walk toward the manor house; Walter is happy to have gained the stranger's friendship and feels it could be a potential opportunity to him. As they approach the **pillory**, he realizes he's forgotten about Mistress Beldam and feels suddenly disloyal. Right after this thought, he and Mr. Quill catch sight of Master Kent, riding in circles around the pillory on his horse. He's reciting the prayers for the dead, and it's clear that the older stranger has perished.

Walter claims to feel sympathetic and drawn to the strangers, but he's not as attentive as he wants to be. Moreover, it's probable that the old man died because he couldn't keep from choking in the pillory, a problem Walter noticed the night before and vowed to fix in the morning. In this sense, Walter's particular sympathy for the strangers gives him a particular culpability in the old man's death.

CHAPTER 5

Around the same time, Edmund Jordan arrives with five servants, blowing his saddle horn to signal his approach. Walter says he must've expected a grand welcome or at least a busy town, but instead he arrives to a burned-out barn and sees Master Kent, his cousin, helping Mr. Quill carrying the old man's body away from the **pillory** and into the manor house courtyard. Part of his leg has been eaten by an errant pig, and the young man is screaming and cursing at them.

Edmund Jordan arrives in a moment of unprecedented upheaval. This grants his entrance an ominous flavor, suggesting that he will undermine the village's integrity. At the same time, it makes clear that the village's problems precede him, and—in respect to the strangers—stem from the villagers themselves.

While Walter and Mr. Quill cover the old man's eyes and put a sheet over him, Master Kent prays over the body. Although he rarely prays, Walter joins in; he feels culpable in the man's death senses that "a mighty storm of reckoning was on the way." He wishes he'd done his "common duty" and found a log for the man, instead of leaving it for later.

In this moment Walter is humble in his acknowledgement of responsibility for the crime. In this respect he's much different from the villagers, who will continue to distance themselves from the strangers in order to avoid feelings of guilt.

Just as he did the night of the fire, Walter reconstructs events himself, "without recourse to any constable or magistrate." Sometime during the night, the old man must have slipped in the mud and broken his neck. They don't know if he died suddenly or in great agony, and Walter hopes he didn't slip and fall because one of the hogs was bothering him. When the young man cursed at Master Kent that morning, he must have already been dead.

In the morning, Master Kent had believed the man's shouts to be unfounded rudeness; now, it's clear that he was rightfully upset. Since the strangers are innocent of any serious wrongdoing, it's clear that the villagers have behaved criminally towards them. Their failure to adjudicate this incident justly shows the limits of their ability to self-govern.

For the moment, the village has to welcome Edmund Jordan. The gentlemen pass into the manor house, the three sidemen carry the luggage, and Walter shows the groom where to stable Master Jordan's horse. He's annoyed by the servant's disdainful manner—he's not superior to Walter in any way, but he acts like he is. Coming back to the door, Walter hears Master Kent giving his cousin an account of recent events and Master Jordan lamenting that the manor house has become so shabby and dilapidated.

From the beginning, Edmund Jordan is characterized by the number of servants he possesses. He contrasts unfavorably with Master Kent, who doesn't need personal retainers to show his authority. However, although it's distasteful, this practice also makes him more powerful than his cousin because he has many lackeys to enforce his wishes.

As a servant Walter can't join the conversation, but he decides to spy, not knowing whether he's doing so for his master or his neighbors. The manor house isn't very elaborate; in fact, the villagers scorn the idea that anyone could need more than a small cottage and earthen floor as a dwelling. They're always astonished when they hear tales of grand houses in other towns, where noble men and women sleep in fine sheets and eat food they can't even imagine, while servants rise early to keep floors and furniture clean. Even Master Kent's childhood home was much larger and more imposing.

It's important that the villagers view reports of grand houses in other towns with disbelief but not envy. Although their life is harsh, they can't be convinced that it's in any way inferior. This shows that they're not just loyal to their lifestyle because they know nothing else, but because it provides satisfactions that material comforts couldn't replace.

When Lucy Kent was alive, the house was better maintained, and she made sure that the rooms smelled good and that village women came to cook and clean. Since her death, Master Kent has closed off many of the rooms and allowed the woodwork to decay. He himself sleeps on a plain mattress like the villagers, with coarse blankets. His house is more spacious than the village cottages, but Walter doubts it's more comfortable. Without children or dogs, the abandoned upper floor is dark and melancholy. Walter reaches the landing and stands behind a curtain to hear the men talking in the upper gallery.

Decaying and ill-maintained, the house contrasts with the lovingly cared for fields and tidy cottages in the village. However, it corresponds to the decay in Master Kent's family and inability to produce a child that leads to Master Jordan's arrival. Even though the house is technically finer than the village cottages, it's not attractive to Walter, who implicitly recognizes that it's different from his self-sustaining lifestyle.

A tall man dressed in a fine doublet, Master Jordan stands at one end of the room. He's talking to Mr. Quill, and Walter can tell he scorns the disabled man and considers him a "local idiot." Walter listens for much of the afternoon.

While Mr. Quill and Master Jordan both wear fine clothes and display outward signs of wealth, Master Jordan's scorn for the kindly man shows that privilege has made him arrogant and unkind, while it's fostered Mr. Quill's thoughtful and compassionate character.

CHAPTER 6

That night, Walter sleeps in the Widow Gosse's bed. They've had a longstanding attachment, and he often creeps over to her cottage. Walter doesn't like to share his own bed with her, because it feels like a betrayal of Cecily, with whom he shared much of his life and for whom he had more than physical feelings. When he feels lonely, he often lies in his bed and reminds himself that Cecily's body was once there too.

Walter's attachment to his dead wife is touching, showing the depth of his feelings. At the same time, it showcases the decay at work in his own life. Like the manor house, Walter's cottage is a monument to a deceased woman, not a site of renewal and propagation.

Kitty Gosse often tells Walter he's too cautious and educated, and he thinks she's unintelligent. However, they get along well and their sexual relationship relieves their mutual loneliness. Walter was shocked to discover how voraciously she craves sex; it reminds him that they are both like "forest beasts," controlled by animal urges. The widow isn't beautiful; she's middle-aged, gray-haired, and has all the warts and scars from a hard farmer's life.

Although Walter describes the desire for sex as an animal urge, he's not doing so in a pejorative sense. Rather, sex is one way in which the villagers, like the animals around them, participate in the cycles of life and death at play all around them.

Still, Walter often wonders what Kitty sees in him. He doesn't even know what he looks like these days. Several years ago, he peeked in Lucy Kent's mirror and could barely believe he was looking at his own face. Now, since Master Kent buried his wife's mirror with her body, Walter figures his "nearest likeness is two days' distant." In the town of his youth, everyone looked in a mirror before going out in the street, and even there they could count on seeing themselves reflected in windows. In the village, almost no one knows what they look like; Walter suspects that the widow is un-self-conscious because she doesn't quite know she's lost the bloom of youth.

In this reflection, Walter contrasts the different attitudes towards individuality in large towns and isolated villages like his own. The presence of mirrors means that people are constantly conscious of what they look like, while the lack of mirrors in the village not only prevents vanity but eventually erodes villagers' awareness of themselves as individuals. While lack of individuality is often viewed as a problem, for Walter it's comforting to think of himself as an indistinguishable member of a group.

Tonight, Walter doesn't find much pleasure with Kitty. He's too busy thinking over and replaying what he heard in the gallery. Master Jordan seems like an "efficient" and sensible man, although "sometimes his sense is colder than an icicle." When Master Kent relays the story of the strangers, Master Jordan says that his cousin has been too kind, and that the old man deserved to meet his death in the **pillory**. He says he'll release the young man in another city when he departs and announces that his servants will throw the old man's corpse wherever animal corpses are disposed since he "has not earned a place on hallowed ground."

Master Jordan's ruthless appraisal of the situation at hand makes clear that he's a much different leader than Master Kent. While Master Kent constantly ponders his own actions, Master Jordan takes action quickly and always in his own interest. In this way, he's much like the villagers, who are willing to scapegoat the strangers if it improves things for themselves.


Having dispatched these problems, Master Jordan announces his plans for "Progress and Prosperity." His plan is no different from the one of which Master Kent spoke at the harvest feast, but Jordan says nothing about "friends and neighbors" or benefits for the village. Rather, he's open about his desire to streamline the village's way of life in order to assure a better profit for himself.

Master Jordan emblematizes "progress" in that he can make the village run more efficiently. However, he's oblivious to the moral ramifications of his plan. Through Jordan, the novel argues that unqualified worship of the ideal of progress leads people to disregard important ethical quandaries.

Jordan will allow Master Kent to stay on in the village, administering his affairs and directing his laborers. At the thought of laborers, Jordan sighs and refers to them as "so many ravens to be fed and satisfied." He says that no modern person can possibly approve of communal agriculture, "which only benefits the commoners." While Mr. Quill finishes making his charts, the steward, Mr. Baynham, will build fences and prepare the land for the arrival of **sheep** in the spring. The trees will be cut down and sold for tinder.

It's shocking that Master Jordan views the villagers as burdens on the land which has existed solely to sustain them for so long. His conviction that he represents the most rational viewpoint is belied by his transparent greed and utter lack of concern for those who depend on him.

Master Kent speaks up, reminding his cousin that there are sixty villagers who depend on the common land for food. Master Jordan only shrugs, saying that Mr. Baynham will employ the people he needs, but "we will sadly need to make economies." When Mr. Quill points out that Jordan won't have to economize personally, he smiles and retorts that he has charitable intentions toward the village. He will build a church and employ a priest, bringing a "Holy Shepherd" along with his **sheep**. It will have a steeple taller than the felled trees, and a bell that can summon people to prayer and to work.

The novel has long characterized organized religion as irrelevant to the village, but in Jordan's service it emerges as overtly harmful. While rituals like the Gleaning Ceremony emphasize equality and common dependence on the land, Jordan's envisioned church emphasizes both man's dominance over the land by replacing the trees and the peasant's servitude to the landlord by ordering them to work every day.

Master Jordan quips that it's Mr. Earle who doesn't have to make economies, since he's disabled and only fit for light work. Readily, Mr. Quill acknowledges his deformity, saying "the devil himself concocted me in his cracked jar." To Walter, it sounds like an oft-recited speech, which Mr. Quill must have used before to deflect mockery.

Even though Mr. Quill is morally superior to Master Jordan, he has to defend himself from accusations of weakness because of his disability. Importantly, his glib remarks about the devil will be turned against him later.

Now, Walter is tempted to tell Kitty everything he's heard. It's lonely to be the only one who knows what's in store for the village, and that Master Kent and all the villagers are now "displaced." However, he wants to make plans for his own survival before all his neighbors become aware of the news. He thinks of Mistress Beldam spending the night in the forest, and then he and Kitty make love again. Walter imagines that, in the anxiety of the day's events, everyone in the village is doing the same thing, turning to each other to find comfort in "sowing seed."

Walter revolts against being distinguished from the other villagers, even if it's only through the knowledge he has. However, he also understands that, in the face of future upheaval, he needs to start thinking for himself again. While individual development is a positive occurrence in many novels, here it's a negative byproduct of the village's demise.

CHAPTER 7

In the morning, Anne Rogers barges in Kitty's cottage to announce that Willowjack has been found dead, impaled through the head with a sharp piece of metal. Anne surmises that it must have been a strong man, and someone who knew the horse, as Willowjack would never have allowed a stranger to approach her. Walter believes that Anne suspects Abel Saxton, a blacksmith.

This second crime recalls the fires with which the novel opened. However, since a very different man is now in charge of the village, the response to this crime will be an important contrast between the village's traditional practices and Jordan's new ideas.

Walter himself isn't sure who's responsible. He's suspicious of Master Jordan's groom, who seems easily angered, but it could also be Brooker Higgs or the Derby twins, impetuous young men who may have heard of Jordan's new plans and, with no wives to make love to, taken out their anxiety on the horse. However, Walter discards this notion, knowing that the young men love the horse and are too chastened from their previous wrongdoings to commit another crime. It could even be Walter's neighbor, John Carr, the village slaughterman, who is adept with animals.

Regardless of who is responsible, the certain existence of one individual who must be apprehended turns the villagers against each other, forcing them to isolate and blame individuals in order to save themselves. Just as Walter's individual development is presented negatively, when the villagers have to think for themselves rather than as a group, they are distressed and confused.

Anne Rogers leaves, and Walter imagines she's busy telling the other villagers that she found him in Kitty's bed. While preparing porridge, Kitty suggests that it's the ghost of the old man who killed the horse. Trying to dismiss this notion in terms she'll understand, Walter points out he's too short to reach Willowjack's head, but Kitty points out the horse would have been lying down and sleeping. Walter is struck by this; if the horse was lying down, then it wouldn't have required much strength to kill her, and even a woman or child could be suspected of the crime.

While Kitty's irrationality is amusing, she leads Walter to an important conclusion and shows him that anyone in the village can be blamed for the crime. In this sense, every villager is now subject to the suspicion and scrutiny that they inflicted on the strangers at the beginning of the novel.

Master Jordan gathers everyone and informs them they must stay within the barn while his men search the cottages, looking for bloody clothes. He doesn't give his name or any reasons for his authority, but in the face of his fine clothes and ruthless servants the villagers don't dare to ask for justification.

Even though Master Jordan does have legal authority, his power doesn't rest on that, but rather on his potential to inflict violence. His "progressive" rule is actually more brutal and primitive than Master Kent's.

Master Jordan says that the village is too far from "ordinance and regulation," and that they will have to learn to behave better by seeing the person responsible for Willowjack's death hanging, and his body discarded in the Bottom. Walter notices that Brooker Higgs and the Derby twins look terrified. Master Kent says nothing, and all the villagers can tell he's no longer in charge.

The village's previous system of conflict resolution and minimal punishment only worked when it was undisturbed by strangers and everyone was equally committed to the village's survival. In this sense, the village were right to be wary of strangers like Master Jordan, who clearly don't have their common interests at heart.

After the gathering, Master Kent relates his grievances to Walter. Jordan wanted to sell Willowjack's carcass to grease makers, and it was only after prolonged argument that he saved his beloved horse. He tells Walter to hold his tongue among the villagers; Master Kent wants to secure some benefits for the villagers and protect some of the common ground before Jordan's **sheep** arrive.

Master Kent's advocacy for the villagers shows his inherent decency. However, by keeping the villagers in the dark, he unintentionally makes them more vulnerable to Jordan and less able to organize against him.

Walter imagines Master Kent has been planning his negotiations with Jordan long before the new master arrived or anyone knew of his plans. However, everything seems to have gone wrong already. Walter thinks back on the strangers with their raised bows and Mistress Beldam, still at large; he now sees these events as evidence that something is fundamentally wrong in the village. Since Jordan is within earshot, Master Kent can't say much, but his "eloquent" shrug tells Walter how sympathetic and helpless he feels.

Even though the strangers' arrival and Master Jordan's power grab aren't explicitly linked, to Walter they both represent outside forces negatively interfering in village life. It's especially troubling that Master Kent, who has been a figure of authority to Walter all his life, has suddenly lost all his power.

Walter is required to guide Jordan's servants through the villages while they ransack the different cottages. He hasn't been inside many of them, and in the presence of outsiders he realizes how cramped and spare the dwellings are. When they reach his neighbor John Carr's house, Walter can't stand to watch them search ands steps outside. When they reach his own house, a scrap of bloody cloth raises Master Jordan's suspicions until Master Kent explains that it's a bandage from Walter's hands, damaged in his loyal attempt to preserve the nobleman's hay.

Even though he didn't choose it, Walter's position as the guide to unwelcome intruders differentiates him even further from his neighbors. At the same time, he's briefly a figure of suspicion to Master Jordan and his men, showing his inability to fully belong to either camp.

Walter rests while the men check search various outbuildings for bloody cloth. Inspecting the building where Cecily grew up, Master Jordan discovers a bloodstained piece of cloth, which Walter and Master Kent immediately recognize as Mistress Beldam's shawl. Jordan demands that Walter identify the shawl's owner but he says it doesn't belong to any of the neighbors, trying to stall for time.

It's interesting that the shawl was found in Cecily's childhood home. This coincidence links Mistress Beldam to Walter's wife—in fact, he has the same sense of loyalty towards both women, unwilling to implicate Mistress Beldam even if doing so is the only way to save himself.

Any man besides Master Kent would be angry at a woman who killed his beloved horse; however, he seems neither surprised nor angry at this evident demonstration of Mistress Beldam's guilt. While it's senseless to take out anger on a horse, she was distraught from her father's death. Master Kent doesn't identify her as the owner of the shawl, but instead lies that the shawl belonged to his wife, Lucy. He suggests that a vagrant stole the shawl, attempted to steal Willowjack, killed her when he was unable to control her, and discarded the bloody cloth in the cottage.

By outright lying to his cousin, Master Kent establishes himself as completely loyal to the villagers. At the same time, Mistress Beldam reveals herself as a highly enigmatic figure. While the villagers saw in her hope for new fertility, she now emerges as defined by anger and grief and determined to achieve revenge, even if she can't do so in any meaningful or rational way.

Master Jordan considers this possibility. It makes sense, but Walter knows he wants to hang someone in order to demonstrate his authority over the village and induce everyone to comply with his plans. Moreover, if no one in the village is to blame, his threats and investigations will begin to seem silly.

Master Jordan conducts a fairly rational investigation, but his motives make a mockery of his claims to represent justice, showing that modern or innovative tactics are useless if they're not grounded in sound ethics.

Jordan questions Master Kent about the younger stranger, still imprisoned in the **pillory**. Affecting to be concerned that the man has insulted his cousin and threatened to murder him, he says "with a heavy heart" that he must question the man and try him for sedition and incitement. He sighs and looks around, and it's clear to Walter that he's frustrated by the slow and overly forgiving rhythm of the village.

Just as the villagers did at the beginning of the novel, Jordan is attempting to pin a crime on an innocent stranger, solely to advance his own objectives.

Master Jordan paces in a circle "like a preacher." Looking around the land, he laughs and says, "nothing but **sheep**." Walter knows that the joke comes at the villagers' expense, mocking their meek and fearful natures.

Equating Jordan's predatory pacing with the movements of a preacher, the novel further condemns the organized religion he wants to introduce. Jordan also makes one of the many comparisons between villagers and sheep, showing how their way of life, which once seemed proud and dignified, now appears silly through his profit-oriented eyes.

CHAPTER 8

All afternoon, Walter works with Mr. Quill and daydreams about finding employment with him when the **sheep** push him out of the village. It's sad to think of leaving Master Kent, but he'd prefer that to living under Master Jordan's rule. He works as meticulously as possible turning dried calfskin into vellum, although he doesn't really know what he's doing. Mr. Quill says he fears "for us," but Walter points out that it's Mistress Beldam who has most to fear. They agree that she must be found and warned, before someone eventually admits that the shawl belongs to her.

It's interesting that Mr. Quill talks about "us," referring to himself as a member of the village even though he's only been there a few days. His enchantment and desire to belong mirror Walter's own reactions when he first arrived. However, the futility of Mr. Quill's wish to integrate into the village just as it's about to dissolve imbues a kind of pointlessness on Walter's years-long quest for belonging.

The two men are worried that Mistress Beldam will return to the cottage where she hid the shawl, and which the servants are guarding now. They know that her "native insolence and vulnerability" will attract the rough men, and that they will not behave kindly toward her. Mr. Quill says they must wait until Mr. Baynham isn't around to look for her, and Walter suggests that they wait for her by the **pillory**, since she'll probably come during the night to feed the young man.

Walter and Mr. Quill predict that Jordan's servants will feel the same draw to Mistress Beldam that the village men do. However, without a strong community to regulate and judge their actions, these men are capable of acting much more violently.

Walter spreads out the calfskin and scrapes it smooth. It smells terrible, but Walter sees this as a test, an opportunity to prove his value as an employee. Meanwhile, Mr. Quill experiments with different colors, looking for the combination that will make the map easiest to read. He explains the process of mixing various colors to Walter as he works, as familiar with his implements as Walter is with the fields or the weather. Walter finds him a good companion for the long afternoon.

While Mr. Quill can't do physical work, his skill with his paints demonstrates the same dignity and reverence with which the villagers approach farming. Through their shared attitudes, the novel suggests that art and manual labor are similar both in their inherent value and the devotion they exact from people who practice them.

Thinking about the prospect of leaving the village, Walter know that he'll miss long winter days most, when everyone is snug in their cottages, making new tools and fixing old ones. When Cecily was alive, she and Walter wove baskets for everyone in the village, enjoying each other's quiet company.

Walter's favorite memory encapsulates both the village's isolation—everyone is sheltering from the weather separately—and its profound sense of community—he and Cecily work not only for themselves, but for everyone around them.

Now that Cecily is gone, Walter tells Mr. Quill, he's eager for a new adventure, and to leave the village before the **sheep** arrive. Mr. Quill nods, understanding Walter's hint. Walter asks about his own background, and he explains that his parents are dead and that his eldest brother has inherited their house and merchant business; Mr. Quill can't be of use to him, since he's "unfit to work out of doors and too great an encumbrance to be employed within." His disability has driven him to become a mapmaker, an occupation he enjoys.

Mr. Quill's compassion for the village is probably marked by his own sense of dispossession. Because of his disability, he's barred from his father's employment, and his brother has obviously taken no steps to help him. Such a fraught relationship with his own family also informs his respect for the lifestyle of the village, in which everyone either is related or cares for each other like relatives.


Mr. Quill invites Walter to look at his sketches, and Walter is impressed by their strange beauty. To him, it looks like the patterns made by mosses or butterfly wings, which he observes in the land around the village. However, Mr. Quill's drawings are neater and brighter than anything he's seen in nature, "more pleasing than a barleycorn."

Like his neighbors, Walter mostly appreciates nature for its usefulness, rather than any inherent beauty. Through the drawings, he sees that not only nature but art can have inherent value and be as compelling as the work to which he's devoted his life.


First Mr. Quill shows Walter the sketch of the current village. With difficulty Walter discerns which shapes represent the barley fields and which lines delineate streams and boundary lines. He's never had a true sense of the village's shape. In fact, its outline looks like a man's profile. It seems strange to view the common fields and forests in miniature, only the size of his thumb.

Viewing the map is disconcerting because it forces Walter to consider the land as an outsider, rather than an inhabitant. At the same time, the human profile hidden in the land is a reminder of the close and satisfying relationship the village has with the earth.



However, Walter says, the drawings aren't completely accurate. Mr. Quill can't capture the character of the land or the feeling of living in the fields. He's made the village too beautiful, not taking into account rocky slopes and harsh terrain.

Mr. Quill is still under the sway of the village's aesthetic beauty, and thus unable to capture the harshness of life within its bounds.

In the second drawing, the fields are even neater and more colorful. With the forests broken up, the profile Walter saw before isn't evident. Walter praises the beauty of the maps and appreciates the vision they provide of his own world. Still, while they tell him where he's standing now they say nothing about where he will be in a few days, and thus give him a sense of desolation.

That the map, which shows Jordan's future plans, removes the human face from the land and reflects that he will sever the close human relationship with the earth, ending the cyclical processes of regeneration that have sustained both the earth and its inhabitants for so long.

CHAPTER 9

That night, Walter relates that Lizzie Carr, the young Gleaning Queen, has been detained by Master Jordan, along with Anne Rogers and Kitty Gosse. The youngest and strongest men should be agitating for their return, but Walter believes they've fled the village—Brooker Higgs hasn't been seen in hours, and he spotted the Derby twins walking away with bundles on their backs. None of the villagers have ever felt it safer to be outside the town than within.

Within a day of his arrival, Jordan has already managed to fracture the village's integrity. Normally, all decisions are made communally, but now people are running away without giving any warning, and others are in captivity without any reason.

Walter doesn't know which "version of events" to believe. In their confusion, many villagers attribute all the recent wrongs—from the ransacking of the cottages, to Willowjack's death, to the impending arrival of the **sheep**—to Mistress Beldam. Even Walter considers the possibility that "she's brought a curse onto our land." They've told their suspicion to Master Jordan, but instead he's targeting their women and children.

Previously, the villagers seemed to acknowledge they'd behaved unjustly to Mistress Beldam. However, when they're again under pressure they return to scapegoating strangers in order to improve their own situation. Moreover, they're attributing things to her which she can't possibly have caused, like Jordan's plans for enclosure.

The one thing of which Walter is certain is that earlier in the afternoon, Lizzie snuck out of the threshing barn, still wearing her gleaning sash, only to be picked up by Jordan's men, who held her by her braids and questioned her about why she was outside the barn and why she was wearing such an expensive cloth. Unsatisfied with her answers, they marched her away to the manor house.

Just like Mistress Beldam, Lizzie is both distinguished and made vulnerable by wearing something above her station. This is a reminder that Mistress Beldam has much in common with the villagers who revile her; it also shows Jordan and his men operating by the same principles of blind suspicion with which the village treats strangers.

Walter isn't sure how the other women got involved. He imagined they witnessed Lizzie's capture and ran out of the barn to defend her, only to be born off to the manor house themselves. Anne's shouts must have drawn everyone else to the door of the barn to witness the events, and the young men must have decided to leave the village then. Walter doesn't know the specifics because he's "not included in village circles" at the moment.

As usual, Walter wasn't present during the events he's reconstructing. His imprecise narrative style demonstrates his emotional distance from the rest of the village; it also reflects the confusion everyone must be feeling at this sudden descent into chaos.

Walter is as angry as his neighbors, but they are becoming suspicious and close-mouthed around him, refusing to answer his questions or even converse with him. After a dozen years among them, his "once darker hair is clashing with their blond again," reminding them that he's still an outsider, that he didn't participate in the gleaning, and that he spent the afternoon with Mr. Quill while they were penned in the barn.

The village's quickness to close ranks against Walter shows how deep their suspicion of strangers runs. In this case, they're actively working against their own interests, since Walter is the only one who knows what's going on and could give them valuable information.

Walter imagines that he's also made enemies by being found in Kitty Gosse's bed. The villagers who are related to her will see him as disrespectful and those related to Cecily will consider him disloyal, while other men who desired the widow will resent him.

Even though Walter found a sense of closeness and community with Kitty, it actually works to his detriment in the eyes of the village.

From their silence towards him, Walter intuits that if the villagers have to implicate someone to allay Jordan's wrath, they will choose him, rather than sacrificing a native villager. Walter doesn't blame them—after all, he's been keeping secrets and looking after his own interests by seeking employment with Mr. Quill, rather than theirs.

Even though he sees the village turning against him, Walter isn't angry at all. This reflects his inborn sense of loyalty.

Walter wonders if instead of casting his lot with Mr. Quill, who is after all a disabled man of uncertain fortunes, he should ask Master Kent to employ him again. He can help his old master stand up to Jordan and keep his place in the house. While Walter feels he has many options for the future, he's gloomy because he knows that any of the village's happiness, "or at least the lands that nurture it," will be gone by the time the frost comes.

While Walter occasionally chafes at his restricted life, now that he must leave it behind he's nostalgic about its many pleasures. Moreover, while he may have many options, he knows his neighbors will be dislodged without anywhere to go, and his strong sense of rootedness in the community makes it difficult to plan only for himself.

While Walter listens, the villagers decide they must "petition" Jordan for the return of the women. They are certain that, as the majority, they will be listened to; Walter worries that this isn't true, and that the "master always weighs the most" in any dispute. Anyway, the villagers can't even write enough to make a petition.

The villagers still believe in the sanctity of the informal rights they've always enjoyed; it's only Walter, having lived outside the village, who knows how powerless they truly are under any landlord less sympathetic than Master Kent.

Some of the more hotheaded villagers want to storm the manor house with sticks, but this isn't a popular idea, given Jordan's fierce sidemen. Others want to let the drama run its course and trust that Jordan will be reasonable. Finally, it's decided that two of the men will humbly present themselves at the manor, explain that all the recent troubles are the fault of the newcomers, particularly Mistress Beldam, and ask for the women back in exchange for their help in apprehending her.

Here, the villagers realize that the methods they use to protect themselves from powerless strangers— descending in a mob with sticks— are completely useless against Jordan. The new master's ability to undermine them reveals the latent weakness in the agrarian system which, until now, has emblematized security and tranquility.

As they're walking to the manor, they see Mr. Quill in conversation with the young man in the **pillory**; all the villagers disapprove, seeing this as a sign of Mr. Quill's disloyalty even though they know they haven't been just to this strange man. Their feelings of shame are simultaneously the reason why no one curses at him and why no one brings him food or ale. With his kindness, Mr. Quill is showing the villagers what they've done wrong, but this won't make anyone like him.

By openly consorting with the man hanging from the cross, Mr. Quill takes on some of his associations with Jesus Christ. Like Christ, Quill demonstrates a way to behave more bravely and compassionately; also like Christ, he earns the enmity of people who see this as a threat to their own security.

Walter quietly breaks off from the villagers and joins Mr. Quill, as they've agreed to search for Mistress Beldam that night. As they settle down to wait in the shadows, Mr. Quill explains that the man in the **pillory** is her husband, and the dead man was her father. They've traveled to the village because their own common ground, not far away, has been converted into a **sheep** farm. Walter is unhappy to hear that Mistress Beldam, the object of his fascination, is married, and he suspects Mr. Quill is as well. He simultaneously wants to see and dreads seeing her approach the pillory to kiss and care for her husband.

The entire village is accustomed to thinking of the strangers as rootless wanderers, completely unlike themselves. However, Mr. Quill reveals that not only are the strangers a family group, they're peasants who have faced exactly the same threats in their own village. In light of this, it's especially ironic that the villagers have behaved so inhospitably to the strangers. Their poverty and homelessness are ominous signs of what awaits the villagers if Jordan succeeds in his plans.

Eventually, all three men hear Mistress Beldam coming. Walter isn't sure if the husband knows they are crouching near him, or if he will warn her away. However, he only whistles softly to her. Mr. Quill points her out as she emerges; it's only the second time Walter has seen her, and she's smaller and "more birdlike" than he remembers her. He wonders if she was really strong enough to drive a metal spike into Willowjack's head. He wishes he could touch her velvety hair.

Again, Mistress Beldam is described by her similarity to natural elements. This makes her seem harmless and attractive to Walter, but he's not taking account of the danger and harshness that are as inherent to nature as beauty.

Mistress Beldam carries a bundle of food and a bottle of cordial Walter knows she must have stolen from the village. She kisses her husband and lifts the bottle to his mouth, but when she hears the villagers noisily returning from the manor house she disappears. Mr. Quill runs to the **pillory**, hides the bottle which she's dropped, and hurries after the departed woman.

Mistress Beldam's ability to steal and remain hidden shows she's much cannier than Walter gives her credit for. Her affection for her husband shows that she's rooted in strong personal attachments, just as all the villagers are, and heightens the sense of her similarity to them.

CHAPTER 10

The next day, Walter persuades John Carr to talk honestly with him. He's the only villager who's still kind towards him. Walter urges him to open up and tell the whole story, and after he reassures John that he's not deceiving the villagers in any way, John explains that the sidemen kept them waiting outside the house, refusing to let them see Master Kent or Master Jordan. Instead, Mr. Baynham came to the door and suggested cryptically that there's "witchery about." Walter is surprised because no one has mentioned witchcraft before, and worried because such an accusation always brings serious punishment.

It's notable that Walter's closest friends have to be reassured he's still on their side, when he hasn't done anything to display disloyalty. Mr. Baynham's vague accusations of witchcraft are disturbing and important; since persecution of "witches" is usually organized by religious authorities, it's another demonstration of the harm that Jordan's brand of Christianity brings to the village.

When Mr. Baynham says tauntingly that the three women in custody are "she-devils" and that they might soon be burned, the villagers lose their temper and begin to make their own accusations. John says heavily that they didn't do Walter "any favors," but they "had to take care of our own." Walter is unsurprised he's no longer included in the category "our own."

After refusing to speak to Walter about what's going on, the villagers are falsely accusing him of wrongdoing just as they've accused other strangers in the past. Walter is losing his identity as a villager and becoming more of an outsider.

According to John Carr, the villagers suggested that Mr. Quill, whom they've renamed the "Chart-Maker," is somehow in league with the three strangers, who arrived at the same time he did. His kind behavior to Mistress Beldam and the young man proves they're scheming together. Moreover, since Walter now spends too much time with the Chart-Maker and didn't even come to the manor house when his own paramour was inside, they've accused him of being the Chart-Maker's accomplice. With so many more logical culprits to pursue, the villagers assume that Jordan will free the women.

The villagers' accusations are completely groundless, but that doesn't make them less dangerous—it serves Master Jordan's interests to accuse as many criminals as possible in order to intimidate others and drive them from the village. Even though they are enemies, both Master Jordan and the villagers are complicit in implicating the most vulnerable among them.

John suggests that Walter flee the village, as Brooker Higgs and the Derby twins have already done. Indeed, Walter is worried for himself and all the villagers. He refers to the community as "a moonball that's been kicked, just for the devilry, by some vexatious foot."

While comparisons to nature are usually positive and soothing, here Walter's language shows that the natural world doesn't always promise stability and sometimes delivers destruction instead.

Soon afterwards, Master Kent visits Walter in his cottage to present his own version of events. He spent the night locked in his room, but he heard Jordan's men torturing Anne and Kitty and probably raping them until they confessed to witchcraft. Master Kent supposes that Jordan allowed his men to do whatever they wanted to the women as long as they produced a confession. He tells Walter that Jordan "means to shear us all, then turn us into **mutton**."

Here, Master Kent makes the most explicit comparison between villagers and sheep. As he tells it, to Jordan, the villagers are not people but merely livestock to control and from which to profit, just like the sheep Jordan will import soon. These comparisons point out the dehumanization that comes along with Jordan's ideas of progress.

Master Kent is evidently ashamed to have been powerless to stop the men, but Walter imagines they were especially cruel to Anne and Kitty because they were away from their own homes and families, and in charge of someone else for the first time in their lives.

Walter evaluates the servants' behavior shrewdly; implicitly, he points out the role of a strong community in policing its members' behavior and shows the kind of abuse to which the villagers will be vulnerable once their community is disbanded.

Master Kent says that Kitty Gosse identified herself as a witch while trying to spare Anne and Lizzie. Moreover, she said that all three of them were only followers and named half a dozen other villagers. Master Kent believes she chose people who were not relative or close friends. Walter is surprised to learn she didn't name him.

For the first time, the women have to act in order to preserve themselves at the expense of the larger group. Kitty's first assertion of individuality occurs in terrifying and heart-wrenching circumstances, rather than as a moment of positive personal development.

However, the men weren't satisfied with the names of "followers," and demanded to know the leader. Master Kent heard Anne Rogers name "the gentleman," and imagines she mimicked Mr. Quill's walk to implicate him.

Both of the women are more comfortable implicating Mr. Quill, an outsider, than other villagers they've known all their lives.

The sidemen brought these confessions to Master Jordan, who was smoking downstairs. Next, they brought in the confused Lizzie Carr and induced her to corroborate the women's testimony by saying that Mr. Quill "made me Queen and tried to put his hand on me."

Lizzie is describing the Gleaning Ceremony, the village's most important ritual. However, for Jordan, who wants to dismantle the way of life these rituals support, her description is easily twisted into evidence of something sinister.

However, when they looked for Mr. Quill, they couldn't find him. By that time, he was with Walter at the **pillory**. However, the men interpret the tools of his craft—pestles, paints, and books about plants—as evidence of sorcery.

By this point, the investigation is becoming a mockery; Jordan is seeking to implicate Mr. Quill for the tools with which he does the work Jordan has ordered.

By the time the villagers approached the manor house, Anne and Kitty had already confessed and it was too late. In any case, their accusations were in line with Anne and Kitty's confessions, implicating Mr. Quill and connecting him to the strangers. Master Kent says that Mr. Quill is still at large, but that Jordan's men are searching for him now.

Instead of helping them, accusing the strangers has only strengthened the witchcraft case in Jordan's eyes. This incident shows that scapegoating outsiders rarely has good results for anyone.

CHAPTER 11

Walter sees Master Jordan's groom prowling around the village. He imagines the man feels dissatisfied, since as a lesser servant he had to guard Master Kent during the night and played no part in the torture. Now he must be eager to find Mistress Beldam, as she's a "free-roaming sorceress to lay his hands upon."

For Jordan's servants, satisfaction and fulfillment come not from any meaningful work, but from abusing others. Jordan's vision of progress a world dominated by brute power, rather than organized around communities.

The groom spots Walter and asks if he knows anything about the whereabouts of Mistress Beldam. From his swaggering demeanor, Walter knows the man doesn't understand how much the villagers hate everyone associated with Master Jordan. On any other day, they'd be too busy working to bother with him, but with the women not returned and the Derby twins and Brooker Higgs still gone, everyone is tense and upset, and no one has picked up their tools. Walter himself has nothing to do, since Mr. Quill is in hiding.

The collective idleness shows how much the community has fractured in the few days since Jordan arrived. While their model of life was strong enough to survive centuries while undisturbed, it's remarkably vulnerable in the face of the new attacks Jordan brings.

The villagers' idleness shows that "already our village fabric is unraveling." They haven't bothered to care for the harvested barley or the cattle, or to keep the rats away from the crops. Walter has heard that they're holding a meeting at noon, but he knows he'll be unwelcome there.

By this point, Walter is almost as much a stranger to the village as the groom is. It's remarkable that such a transition can occur in just a few days.

The groom is a small man, able to hurt a woman but not a grown man, like Gervase Carr, Lizzie's father, who approaches and asks roughly where his daughter is. Thinking himself protected by his attachment to Master Jordan, the groom responds scornfully, telling him that she's likely to burn with the other women. Lizzie's mother grabs him, Gervase throws the first punch, and all the other villagers gather and join in, beating the groom. In the tumult Walter falls to the ground and gets kicked in the face; he curls onto his side and waits for the attack to end.

While the villagers are certainly justified in their anger, the sudden attack is a disconcerting episode of mob behavior, showing their inability to respond rationally to new challenges. It's important that Walter gets caught in the beating; while they don't hit him intentionally, their lack of concern shows that they've stopped thinking of him as a member of the community.

One of the men strikes the groom with a pruning blade, and the rush of blood makes the villagers realize how much they've hurt the man and how much trouble they'll face when he reports the incident to his master. Everyone steps back and scatters, leaving Walter and the groom on the ground. The groom is alive, but barely moving. Walter knows no one in the village is safe from the reprisals that will follow this attack.

While the villagers can harm homeless strangers without any punishment, things are much different when it come to the servant of a powerful man like Jordan. The contrast shows how blame and punishments don't follow an objective idea of justice, but favor those who have power and harm those who are already vulnerable.

In the afternoon, he sees the Carrs and the Saxtons, the two families who attacked the groom first, leave the village quickly. Walter's old friend, John Carr, barely looks at him as he leaves. Walter knows they're not abandoning Lizzie, but trying to reach safety outside the village, where they can regroup and plan how to rescue her. Soon, the other families leave, knowing that Mr. Baynham will soon arrive with more men to enforce his aims and clear the village by force. Only Walter remains.

The villagers leave their homes in the same mute concord with which they conduct the harvest. However, this time Walter isn't included in their plans. Therefore, their unity isn't comforting now, but a sad reminder of Walter's exclusion from their midst.

Walter knows it's difficult for everyone to leave. The families who were less involved in the beating worry about the loss of their livestock, and the pain of parting with the land on which they've lived "since Adam's time." They don't want to melt into the large towns where they will be anonymous and without community. However, as people who have lived off a harsh land their entire life, they're resilient and practical, and know they only face death by staying in the village.

Walter knows that his neighbors won't easily find a safe haven outside the village; rather, they'll probably encounter unscrupulous men like the ones who accompany Jordan, and they'll be unable to recreate their insular community in a larger town.

Most of the families leave via the wide lane, in order to take some livestock or a wagon with them. They will end up among the "restless, paler people of the towns." Only the Carrs and the Saxtons set out into the forest, into land that "might not have seen a human face before." This means they'll be safer from pursuit by Jordan's men. Walter hopes they reach another village in a few days, where they can build and hut and fire and hope the inhabitants respect the custom that allows them to stay.

There's a tragic irony in seeing the village families reduced to the same plight as the Beldams when they first arrived in the village. Walter's implicit reference to the strangers points out that the villagers will likely encounter the same hostility that they themselves earlier displayed. With the cycle of their agricultural life ended, the villagers are entering into a new cycle of dispossession and homelessness.

That night, Walter lies in Kitty Gosse's bed. Even though he was never very attached to her, he's both comforted by being in her cottage and anxious at the thought of her ongoing imprisonment. He doesn't want to stay in his own cottage in case Jordan's men come looking for him. Now that the villagers have left, he could sleep wherever he wants, but he's keeping to his accustomed spaces in a display of loyalty that his neighbors will never see. He's still worried that he will be blamed for everything.

Even though the villagers have abandoned him and he no longer has a place in their community, Walter still considers himself bound to the norms he's observed for the past dozen years. For him, acting as an individual isn't liberating but instead a terrifying prospect.

On the other hand, Master Kent has told Walter that Master Jordan doesn't suspect him, and on the contrary considers him a man he can "rely upon." This knowledge comforts Walter but also makes him ashamed. Walter imagines that Jordan sees that he's not a true villager.

Although Walter's status as an individual, rather than a member of the group, saves him from blame, it's hurtful that everyone can so easily disregard the village identity he's constructed over the years.

Walter sleeps fitfully all night. In his dreams, he's tormented by "demons" who say that he's Jordan's servant now, and that worse things are coming for him. He also dreams that his neighbors burst into the cottage and kill him. Outside the cottage, the wind blows and the abandoned livestock make noise.

If anything, Walter's neighbors should feel bad about their treatment of him. The feelings of guilt that plague Walter show how much he buys into the village's fear of outsiders, even when the outsider happens to be him.


Walter is also worried about Mr. Quill. He doesn't want him to be killed, and he hopes he's warned Mistress Beldam, but at the same time he's vaguely jealous that Mr. Quill might have caught up with the fascinating woman and might be spending the night with her right now.

It's disturbing that there's been no sign of Mr. Quill for so long. For Walter, it's especially hurtful that he might have found companionship with the strange woman and left his friend alone.

Besides the women imprisoned in the manor house, there's no one left in the village who was born in the area. The only people left are Walter, Jordan and his men, and Mr. Quill and the strangers.

Despite the village's rampant hostility towards strangers, outsiders have quickly vanquished them. The villager's hurried exit means the collapse of the cyclical agrarian lifestyle that could only be maintained by people with strong roots in the land.


Walter knows he has to concentrate on something in order to fall asleep. He closes his eyes and dreams he's in the barn, threshing the barley crop. He knows his neighbors will be proud of him for carrying out this task on his own.

In order to comfort himself, Walter imagines restoring the village that which have been disrupted. Not only is the work itself satisfying, it allows him to imagine himself as a valuable member of the community again.


CHAPTER 12

The next morning, with the village empty, Master Jordan is pleased. He invites Walter into the manor house and feeds him breakfast while asking him about the state of affairs in the village. When Walter reveals that everyone has left, Jordan laughs and announces that "the meek shall inherit the world," referring to his **sheep**.

Here, Master Jordan quotes the Bible but inverts the proverb's meaning. He's the one who has "inherited" and gained control over the village, but he's far from meek. The Biblical verse promises recompense to the poor and suffering, but Jordan profits by harming those who are already vulnerable.

Wanting to ask his own questions without associating himself with the imprisoned "witches," Walter says that he's worried Master Kent will be "deposed," showing his loyalty to his old master. Jordan reassures Walter that Master Kent will be taken care of. Jordan lectures Walter on his principles of "Progress, Profit, and Enterprise." He wants to turn the village, which has always produced just enough to survive, into a **sheep** farm that will waste nothing and produce a large profit for him. Now that the villagers left, he says, the land "has returned to the Lord," by which he means himself.

Jordan continues to use religious rhetoric to advance and justify his own self-interested agenda. While the village rituals that preceded Jordan created and sustained a fairly egalitarian and communal atmosphere, Jordan's Christianity is just another mechanism by which he facilitates the dispossession of his dependents.

Innocently, Walter asks where Mr. Quill is. Jordan doesn't respond but only remarks that his cheek is very bruised, and that he hopes he won't incur any more injuries. Walter looks at Master Kent, who is strangely composed, evidently resigned to "progress of a sort."

Jordan speaks of "progress" in unequivocally positive terms, but when Walter uses the word he does so with marked ambivalence about its merits.

Jordan informs Walter that he and Master Kent will leave today, taking the prisoners with them. He wants Walter to stay behind as his agent, since Mr. Baynham has left to acquire **sheep** and hired men. He makes Walter promise not to let the young man out of the **pillory** until his allotted sentence is over, and tells him to prepare the horses for their journey.

Jordan's meticulous adherence to the enforcement of an unjust punishment serves to highlight his differences from Master Kent. His leadership style is morally bankrupt, but it also allows him to exert control over his surroundings and quickly vanquish his cousin.

Master Kent accompanies Walter to the orchard, where the horses are tethered; Walter says he and his master could be "mistaken for equals," since they look so similar. Master Kent says that Jordan became less interested in his captives after the villagers fled, and he was able to argue successfully on their behalf. If Walter agrees to watch over his land and wait for the **sheep**, he will release them, but not on his own land, where "their greatest sorcery has been to make the clock stand still." Instead, he'll let them go in a town several days away, and Master Kent will accompany them as a witness.

Walter's similarity to Master Kent recalls the time when class distinctions mattered little to village life. Under Jordan's new rule, Walter can never have the same relationship with the man whom he's followed his entire life. It's ironic that Jordan describes the continuity fostered in the village negatively as "sorcery," when this is exactly the thing both Walter and Master Kent most value in their home.

Master Kent says he will never return to the village, and hugs Walter fiercely. Walter imagines a bird flying over the village, seeing its various animals and the "two gray heads swirling in a lovers' dance" within the orchard.

Walter is envisioning the village as an outsider, just as he did when viewing Mr. Quill's maps. Although he's still deeply invested in the village, he's unable to see himself as completely immersed in it and has gained an unwelcome consciousness of the outside world.

CHAPTER 13

By midday, Walter is waiting with the horses for Jordan's departure. They're unsettled because, with the groom out of commission, they've been free for the past several days eating apples. The servants carry the groom on a makeshift bed; he's clearly in great pain, and Walter believes he'll be dead or insane after days of travel.

The groom's miserable fate, and the inattention with which his comrades treat him, shows that Jordan's power-oriented community can't replace the care and protection with which the villagers treat everyone within their insular world.

Next the servants lead the Kitty, Anne, and Lizzie into the courtyard. Kitty sees Walter and he knows he should approach and comfort them, and he wants them to know that he's staying here so that they'll be freed. However, he's shocked by their somber, defeated behavior. Lizzie's terrified face is a contrast to her previous triumph as the Gleaning Queen holding the barley in her hand.

While Lizzie once represented the spring regeneration promised by the fall harvest, now she emblematizes the rapid decay of the village, and the inability of village rituals to persist in the face of modern "progress."

Not wanting to be seen, Walter sneaks into the lane, where he finds Master Kent leaning against an elm. He tells Walter that the land, which used to be "so much older than ourselves," will "soon be new." It will no longer contain an ancient history or connect its inhabitants to "eternity," but rather will be reshaped to represent modern innovation. In farewell, Master Kent puts one finger on Walter's arm and gives him a meaningful look.

While innovation is often presented as— and indeed often is—a social good, the novel points out that it always comes with a cost. Moreover, it argues that, if spearheaded by someone like Jordan, completely lacking in moral convictions, it is likely to do more harm than good.

Once the party has left, Walter runs up the common fields to a hill where he can watch the lane below. He's crying a little and tired from the unusual haste. While he waits for the men and horses to appear, he considers Master Kent's final expression, wondering if it was a plea or a warning. It reminds him of Cecily's expression when she was exhorting him to carry out some duty.

By conflating Master Kent with his wife, Walter is expressing the almost familial closeness he feels with the aristocrat. He also suggests that, although separated from them by birth, Master Kent has more in common with the villagers than with his cousin Master Jordan.

Soon, Walter sees Master Kent and Master Jordan riding next to each other. Their large hats identify them as rich men, since they aren't practical for men who have to move around and work. Walter is unhappy to see how similar they look. He hopes that Master Kent has some secret strategy to subvert his cousin, but he believes he sees the two men laughing together, and he knows it's in Master Kent's personal interest to cooperate with Jordan. Perhaps his final gesture was just an acknowledgment that he's defeated.

At the same time, the kinship Walter feels with Master Kent is visible only to him, and can't survive in the new landscape that Master Jordan has created. The men's impractical hats recall Walter's earlier description of his master's white, useless hands. However, instead of stressing his dependence on the villagers, the hats signify their power and dominion over their tenants.

Next, Walter sees Kitty, Anne, and Lizzie pass by, looking down and guarded by the men. Master Kent is too far ahead to watch them, and Walter hopes the servants won't abuse the women before they reach the town. To Walter, the procession looks like a pageant, with Jordan representing "Privilege," followed by "the Guilty and the Innocent," and with "Despair," invisible, bringing up the rear.

In Walter's era, pageants were festive occasions, often focusing around religious stories with strong moral conclusions. However, the pageant Walter imagines has no satisfying conclusion or moral lesson to impart. His language here subtly mocks organized religion and its inability to address the moral quandaries the village faces.

When the lane is empty, Walter feels cold and alone. He can't imagine spending months in the village with no one for company. He wishes Kitty was still here, or that he could comfort young Lizzie and take care of her. Instead, Walter walks down into the fields, where he's comforted by the pleasant breeze. He thinks of his wife Cecily, and although this makes him sad it's also comforting to know that he'll "never finish missing her," just as he'll never stop longing for the village.

Instead of spending his time to stewarding and sustaining the village, Walter now knows that, to some extent, he'll always be mourning its loss. At this point, his life is devoted to witnessing the village's decay rather than participating in its constant renewal.

Walter passes a copse of large oak trees, stocked with birds, berries, nuts, and mushrooms. Even though the barley is harvested, the land still produces plenty of food. Still, it's clear that winter is coming, since the birds are already starting to migrate and the leaves are looking a little bit rusty. Walter imagines the entire land readying itself for the cold months, stocking upon food before the snow arrives. To him, the earth seems like a "rich barn."

Although human society has largely failed Walter, he's still highly conscious of the manifest abundance of nature. By comparing the earth itself to a familiar "barn," he stresses how closely his accustomed life mirrors natural patterns of survival.

CHAPTER 14

Now there are only four people in the village: Walter, Mistress Beldam, her husband, and Mr. Quill. Walter plans to search for him the next day, but hopes he's had the wisdom to flee. However, it seems more likely that Mr. Quill has bravely stayed on to help those left behind. Walter wonders if Master Kent found a way to warn him, but imagines he would have told Walter if this was the case.

For Walter, it's odd to think that people must flee the village, which has always represented safety to him. Ironically, although the villagers have always been hostile to strangers, the only people safe here now are outsiders.

In his nightmarish imaginings, Walter sees Mr. Quill melting in flames, hanged by the servants, or cudgeled by the angry villagers and left for the pigs to eat. For the matter, the pigs could easily have eaten Mistress Beldam as well, since Walter hasn't seen her for two days. On the other hand, Mistress Beldam could have lured Mr. Quill to her and killed him, angry and grieving over her father's death.

Walter's imaginings mirror his new and disconcerting feelings of danger within the village. Most troubling, he doesn't even know if the remaining people in the village—namely, Mistress Beldam—are potential friends or deadly foes.

Although he's not supposed to, Walter spends the night in the manor house. He sees the bloody sheets where the groom lay and the room where the sidemen slept and tortured the women. Walter takes Master Jordan's bed, which is covered in carpets. When he lies down on this makeshift nest, he realizes Master Jordan has been using Mistress Beldam's shawl as a pillow. Walter wraps it around him, imagining he's sleeping next to the owner herself. After a long night, he awakens with a sense of clarity about what he ought to do: he must plow the field. Although it's still dark, Walter can't sleep anymore, so he takes Mistress Beldam's shawl outside, intending to place it by the **pillory**, where she'll find it.

While Jordan's arrival tightens class barriers for most people, Walter experiences unexpected mobility, promoted into Master Jordan's service and in charge of the village. However, his inability to sleep well in the manor house and his desire to complete farming tasks is a rejection of this mobility—not out of fear of overstepping himself, but because his life as a peasant in the village provided more fulfillment than servitude to Jordan ever could.

Once outside, Walter feels too nervous to walk to the **pillory** and instead places the shawl on a bench in the courtyard. Back in bed, he hears footsteps that sound human, and when he leaves the manor again after dawn he finds that the shawl is gone. It seems to Walter that Mistress Beldam "has been roaming like a living ghost throughout our lanes," not needing to sleep. She must have known that Walter was sleeping in the manor house, and perhaps had even seen him leave her shawl outside.

Walter has often wandered at night, and never been nervous before. His new fear shows that his feelings of security in the village depended on the existence of the village community. Although the land provided for the community's existence, the community also facilitated Walter's close relationship with the land.


Walter thought that he'd be happy to remain in the village, despite his shame at submitting to Jordan's authority. However, this morning he feels haunted and fearful, and wonders if he should have left before. He thinks of packing up and leaving this morning, but then remembers Master Kent's strange farewell and knows he has unfinished work in the village.

Walter's feeling of being "haunted" shows how connected he still feels to the village community. Moreover, it suggests an implicit desire to retreat into the village's pagan rituals, which allowed for the supernatural, rather than function along Jordan's rational but inhumane principles.


Walter gets dressed, arms himself with an old sword, and finds the key to the **pillory**. As he approaches the young man, Walter smiles in reassurance, but the man doesn't respond. Despite the "mild" punishment he's endured, he's pale and weak. Walter tells him that he's been told to wait until the end of the week but wants to free him now. The man doesn't express any gratitude and refuses to tell him his name.

Walter extends more sympathy to the young man than anyone else, but he still falls short. That the young man has been forced to watch his father-in-law die and then to grieve for him while trapped in a torture device is a human tragedy that no one, not even Walter, fully acknowledges or begins to atone for.

Walter says that if the young man helps him with farming for a day, he will free him and allow him to take anything he wants from the cottages when he leaves. The man agrees, and Walter clumsily releases him, after which the man collapses. Even though the man has good reason to be angry, Walter trusts him and leaves him to recover while he fetches some bread and water. Having received hospitality from Walter, the man seems better disposed toward him and Walter gives him the sword as a display of trust.

Here, Walter models the behavior that the village should have displayed when the strangers first arrived. By peacefully extending and receiving hospitality, the two men form a stark contrast to the mutual suspicion with which their two groups initially treated each other.


Walter harnesses the two remaining oxen. Next, he goes to the ramshackle tool barn, which he loves because when he first arrived, he was always sent here to fetch tools, and everyone made a joke of his habit of bringing the wrong ones. He removes the plow from the barn and finds the young man watching him. Without a greeting, the man says, "nose before ear," an old memory device that helps people put the plow parts together. Walter knows how to assemble the plow is surprised that the man has intuited he's not a native countryman. Moreover, the phrase also functions as an old proverb saying that "life should be allowed to proceed in its natural and logical order."

The young man's familiarity with the plow shows how similar he is to Walter; he probably grew up in a village just like this one, which suffered the same fate not long before. As the proverb he quotes suggest, both he and Walter led lives defined by adherence to the cycles of nature. Their mutual displacement is a reminder that the village's fate is part of a larger process of turning away from the land in the name of modernity.

From his ease with the machine, Walter can tell the young man was once a plowman. Together, they set off toward the barley field, which is already sprouting weeds. The barley stubble remains, however, showing that a harvest has recently occurred. It seems like ages since Mr. Quill named the Gleaning Queen and Master Kent made his customary speech. Walter remembers that Master Kent amended his speech, no longer promising that the harvests would continue year after year. Now, he feels he's contradicting his master's resignation.

It's important to remember that the events of the novel have occurred in a short time—it hasn't even been a week since the strangers first arrived. This realization contrasts the enduring nature of the land with the extreme vulnerability of the society it supported.

Walter leads the oxen while the young man guides the plow. His face seems "passionate," and Walter can tell plowing is meaningful for him too; he remembers that this man was also exiled from his own common ground.

In a sense, Walter and the young man are working to reestablish the "common ground" they've both lost to Jordan and men like him.

In order to plow, the men must guide the oxen in a straight line. It's a huge task, and would normally require twenty men, but Walter only intends to plough one good furrow. He tells the young man that this endeavor will be "to all our advantages," but his companion remains silent. Still, Walter is so excited that he tells the man all about Cecily, his close relationship with Master Kent, and his new respect for Mr. Quill. He even talks about oxen, which he prefers to helpless **sheep**.

It's important that Walter recycles Master Kent's phrase from the gleaning ceremony to describe the task at hand. While Master Kent wishfully imagined a scenario in which enclosure actually helped the peasants, Walter now knows that it's actually the ancient agrarian system that provides benefits, however modest, to everyone.

When they have finished plowing, Walter sows the winter wheat alone. Normally, he would leave the plowed soil for a week, but he doesn't have time. He scatters the seed without delay, accomplishing his "countrymen's revenge."

Describing the planting as an act of "revenge" reaffirms the sense of power Walter derives from his relationship with the land, even if that relationship is dissolving.

As Walter finishes the task, the light begins to die. The sunlight falls onto the common fields, "as if searching for something" and not wanting to leave. After a few moments, the sun sets and the field is black. Walter feels like he's walking through a chilly cathedral until a sudden downpour drenches him, causing the earth to stick to his feet. Walter looks around for the young man, but he can't see him and assumes he's gone to sleep in one of the cottages, perhaps reunited with Mistress Beldam.

It's interesting that Walter compares the landscape to a cathedral here. In doing so, he imbues the land with a special holiness. His positive use of Christian imagery shows that the novel doesn't necessarily disapprove of religion in general, but rather condemns religious dogma when it's used for self-interested purposes.

Thinking of the husband and wife together, Walter feels suddenly lonely. However, the feeling is strangely exciting for him; he's happy to know that his plowing is accomplished, and the weather is a reminder that the soil and the seasons will last forever.

His new individuality is still strange to Walter, but for the first time it's not entirely bad.

CHAPTER 15

When the storm has subsided, Walter leaves Kitty's cottage to look for the young man and Mistress Beldam, thinking that they should be grateful to him and welcome his company. They must be sleeping indoors in one of the abandoned buildings. As he searches, he mistakes moonlight for Mistress Beldam's shawl several times. He's both sad and relieved not to find them, since he might interrupt them making love, and he neither wants to interrupt them nor feel left out.

Walter's search for the Beldams, which will occupy the next several chapters, reflects his desperate search for a new community after his is disbanded. In this respect, it's eerily similar to the Beldams original quest for inclusion when they arrived in the village at the beginning of the novel.

Back in Kitty's cottage, Walter takes advantage of her large supply of ale. He rarely drinks, but since he's alone he sees no reason to stay sober. The first two pots make him cheer up, while the next two inspire fantasies: he imagines his friends and neighbors arriving at the cottage door. Lining up the pots on the bed, he designates one as Mr. Quill, one as Kitty, one as John, another as Master Kent, two more for the young man and Mistress Beldam, and the last as Cecily. In his imagination, all of them are proud of him and repent their earlier suspicions.

Normally, village life doesn't leave enough idle time for its inhabitants to descend into bad habits like drunkenness. That Walter does so now is a reflection of his despair at the collapse of the community, and a demonstration of the ways in which strong communities enforce positive behavior and norms.

After several more pots, Walter becomes angry and sad. The final pot makes him feel sick, and he leaves the cottage to vomit and to listen for any human sounds. Having sobered up slightly, he no longer feels like a "hero," and when he returns inside he imagines his visitors mocking him. They tell him that his revenge is pitiful and demonstrates that he's a timid townsman, not a real farmer. Walter falls asleep and dreams that he's knocking on doors and no one answers. In the dream, Mistress Beldam gags him with her shawl and strikes him with a metal prong, after which all the other villagers attack him. Even Cecily participates, telling him he hasn't "done enough."

Walter still seeks the approval of his community, if only imaginatively, which shows how reluctant he is to begin approaching life as an individual. His dreams also reflect his new sense of powerlessness. Before Jordan arrived, he felt calm and secure in his place within the village, but now he feels vulnerable to attack both from overt enemies, like the new master, and people he's always considered friends and family.

In the morning, Walter wakes up with a terrible hangover, and sees a plume of smoke rising from the manor house chimney, which means the young man and Mistress Beldam have spent the night there. Although it's logical that a young couple will be curious about a noble house, he feels it's improper. After all, he slept in Kitty's cottage because he didn't feel right taking Master Jordan's bed. He imagines they've lit the fire in the kitchen, probably using furniture as fuel to cook their first meal. He decides to stay away from them he feels sick and they're not his responsibility.

Although Walter and the Beldams are in the same predicament of losing their land, their actions show the latter two are not motivated by loyalty toward the village as Walter is. Their conflicting loyalties are an obstacle to the friendship Walter hopes to develop with them, but he doesn't acknowledge this yet.

Instead, Walter walks to the woods to search for Mr. Quill. He passes by the Bottom, hoping he won't find Mr. Quill's body among the animal corpses. He sees a small monument of stones, which Mistress Beldam must have constructed for her father. Cupping his hands, Walter calls to Mr. Quill several times; while he startles the birds, his friend doesn't emerge from the woods.

Although Master Jordan refused to bury the old man in the common graveyard, Mistress Beldam has still made a memorial to her father. Like the rituals which dominated village life, her cairn is a response to conventional religious practices which fail to address her circumstances.

On his way back to the village, Walter finds fairy cap mushrooms growing next to a hedge. It seems like ages ago that he saw the Derby twins and Brooker Higgs carrying a sack of the same mushrooms. If not for their nighttime expedition, there would have been no fire, no men in the **pillory**, no slaughter of Willowjack, and none of the disasters that followed. To Walter, the fairy caps are to blame for everything, even though Walter knows that nothing would have prevented Master Jordan from arriving and disrupting the village life. Still, the mushrooms have "set our lives alight."

Here, Walter's reasoning is profoundly faulty; after all, whether or not the Derby twins set a fire, Master Jordan would still have contrived to dispossess the villagers. His train of thought shows that he can't really conceive of forces operating outside the village and affecting its fate. To him, only events that occur within the village are truly real.

Hungover and lacking his normal judgment, Walter bends to touch the mushrooms and feels them suddenly take hold of him. He smells the mushrooms to see if they are poisonous and eats them without hesitating. They taste disgusting, but Walter swallows them quickly, not wanting to "dither" like a townsman. Then he stretches out on ground to wait for them to take effect.

In eating the mushrooms, Walter is reenacting the young men's actions at the beginning of the novel. While his behavior makes him part of a cycle, this is one of despair and confusion, not regeneration.

Walter expects to hallucinate lights and colors, as he did when he tried the mushrooms as a young man. However, he experiences a sense of "paralyzing dread" wonders if he's actually eaten poisonous mushrooms. He tries to stand up, but he's too unsteady, and he imagines the mushrooms want him to stay on the ground.

Walter's flirtation with poisoning himself is a reminder that nature isn't a uniformly benevolent provider to humans. Normally, the villagers are astute about navigating its dangers, but as he's about to be driven off the land Walter behaves more recklessly toward it.

Walter doesn't remember what happened during the rest of the day. He knows he must have exerted himself, because he's tired and aching. He recalls "hugging" animals and tumbling through the forest, at one point lying on the ground and feeling like a wheat seed waiting to be buried by the plow.

In order to forestall his inevitable departure from the land, Walter seems to be attempting to actually become a part of it.

As the mushrooms wear off, it seems that a "twin" comes to help Walter, helping him stand up and regain control of his body. Then Walter walks the perimeter of the village, freeing the animals, saying farewell to his favorite spots, and closing all the cottage doors. He passes the church ground and spends some time at the spot where Cecily is buried. He feels heavy like an ox, but simultaneously has the sense that he's flying, viewing the land as Mr. Quill presents it in his sketches, as a beautiful but unreal drawing.

It remains unclear if anyone (it would have to be the Beldams) actually helped Walter. More likely, he invented the "twin" out of an extreme aversion to being alone. Moreover, his feeling of flying over the land and seeing it as Mr. Quill does reflects his growing conception of himself as apart from the land, rather than existing with it.

Now, Walter stands alone in the manor house courtyard, not knowing how he arrived there. Someone has packed two bags for him, and he wonders who it was. Inside is everything he needs in order to leave the village, including a silver spoon that Master Kent gave him on his wedding day. He's even wearing his walking boots and equipped with a stick.

That all his possessions (even his silver spoon) have made it into the bag suggests Walter packed it himself. He knows he has to leave the village but doesn't want to admit the unpleasant reality to himself.

CHAPTER 16

The manor house's smell has changed since Walter spent the night here. Someone has been cooking and it smells homely, as it did when Lucy Kent was alive. Mistress Beldam has been using the manor's stores to care for her liberated husband.

Although the manor house is abandoned, Mistress Beldam has restored some of its vitality. For the first time, the house represents renewal rather than decay.

The parlor door is closed, and Walter imagines them sitting inside. In his mind, the young man is naked and wrapped in the shawl while his clothes dry against the fire. Mistress Beldam has made a stew and set the table for three, waiting for Walter to arrive and join them. He believes it's the Beldams who packed everything for him and interprets it as a gesture of thanks for freeing the husband early. Now he can share a meal with them and perhaps leave the village together.

Walter has no reason to believe the Beldams want to befriend him, but his desire for companionship leads him to imagine this outcome. If he does fall in with the Beldams, he could recreate at least part of the community he's lost.

However, Walter finds that whatever food was cooked has already been eaten. There are no clothes drying and the fire is dead. In fact, the young man and Mistress Beldam have ransacked the parlor and stolen everything of value. Walter walks into the scullery, which is in a similar state of disarray.

Instead of restoring order and peace to the house, the Beldams have actually intensified the chaos that defines it.

Throughout the house, Walter finds damage. All the furniture is toppled, and objects have been slashed or broken. Walter knows they have stolen many things, probably to sell in a nearby town, and the damage they've inflicted on furniture left behind shows enthusiastic spite. On one hand, this is justified since the young man and Mistress Beldam suffered much in the village; however, Walter feels betrayed by Mistress Beldam's "keenness to punish everyone and everything," when he's tried to be kind to her. On the mantel, he even discovers the bloody stone she used to murder Willowjack. Now, the manor house seems like a monument to disaster.

The Beldams don't share Walter's loyalty to the village, and this is completely understandabl—the villagers imprisoned them and directly caused the death of the old man. The Beldams' retributive behavior shows how easily a sense of injustice can translate into anger and anarchy. While Walter has sown the fields in revenge against Jordan, the Beldams have wrecked the house to avenge themselves against the villagers' hostility.

Upstairs, the walls have been stripped and all the mattresses slashed. Walter imagines that the destruction of "trimmings and trappings" must be a woman's work, since men are more likely to take out anger on people. Normally, the village men struck their wives in anger, while the women destroyed their husbands' possessions.

To Walter, the man is fairly unimportant. It's Mistress Beldam's violence that interests him the most, possibly because in his world women are supposed to be emblems of regeneration, not destruction.

Walter finds himself at the bottom of the staircase that leads into the attic, where he lived when he first arrived in the village. Now, the timbers are rotting and almost collapsed. It looks like someone has climbed them recently, leaving smudges on the bannister. He wonders if the young man and Mistress Beldam are hiding from him and calls out, but they don't respond. Carefully, Walter climbs up the stairs; at one point he almost falls, but quickly recovers himself.

Walter is encountering a space that used to be his, but he's now entering it as a cautious outsider. This moment reflects his new relationship with the village, which he used to know intimately but is now unknown and full of new danger.

The attic is filled with junk and broken furniture, including the trunk where Walter once stored his clothes. He climbs the ladder into the turret and looks out the window to see a plume of smoke from the tool-barn and the cottages; soon the whole row, even his own house, is engulfed. He knows Mistress Beldam has set the fire and sees the couple loading a cart with possessions from the manor and animals from the village. The young man marches to the **pillory**, and with some effort, chops it down with an axe while his wife torches the last cottages.

The man's destruction of the pillory is a powerful gesture. Because this is the site of so many important village functions, this moment is a reminder of the community's tragic downfall. However, the man's evident bitterness is a reminder of the village's failings and an indictment of its inability to accept outsiders.

Walter knows he needs to leave the manor before Mistress Beldam sets it on fire as well. If he's caught in the wooden turret, he won't be able to get out; he wonders if she somehow planned to lure him here and kill him. In the attic room, he pauses and notices that blood is seeping from his old trunk. Investigating, he finds Mr. Quill's corpse lying face-down. He's still wearing the outfit in which Walter last saw him.

The death of Mr. Quill is one of the novel's most profound tragedies. He's one of the only characters who has never demonstrated violence or unkindness to anyone. Although Walter constantly tries to find order in the world around him, this moment shows its unavoidable tendency toward entropy and destruction.

Walter examines Mr. Quill's body briefly, seeing that he was killed by a sword, run through several times and piercing his main organs. However, he can't tell when he was killed; it could have been a night ago, or earlier, when the imprisoned women named him. He wonders if Jordan's men or the young man and Mistress Beldam are responsible. He feels that he's failed Mr. Quill, both because he's allowed him to die and because he doesn't even have time to carry his body outside and build a monument. He has to flee before Mistress Beldam arrives.

While the need to apprehend perpetrators of previous crime consumed all the village's energy, Walter doesn't even have time to ponder who did this to Mr. Quill. However, for Walter mourning his friend's death doesn't require finding someone to blame or exacting revenge. In fact, the haste with which he has to leave saves him from entering the cycle of scapegoating that has been so detrimental to the village.

However, Mistress Beldam doesn't arrive with her torch. Perhaps she's in a hurry to leave before someone returns to the village and apprehends them, or perhaps she's exhausted her supply of anger. After all, there's no real point in burning the manor house. When Walter reaches the courtyard, he sees her and the young man hurrying away. Now, Walter will accompany the young man and Mistress Beldam "only in dreams." He imagines himself following them and waiting until Mistress Beldam invites him to join them.

Walter finally knows that friendship with the Beldams is not a possibility. Their disregard, if not hostility, towards him underlines their sense of injustice at the hands of the villagers. Finding himself alone forces Walter to acknowledge his complicity in the village's mistreatment of the strangers.

Walter wants to give Mr. Quill "an honorable cremation," and to prove the courage that he's found himself lacking recently. The fire has put an end to the village, so he wants to see it destroy the manor house as well. With scattered documents from the parlor floor, Walter kindles a fire and leaves the house as it burns.

This is a much bolder act of revenge than Walter's plowing of the fields. He finally understands that his strong loyalty to the village is pointless now. In fact, it's better to hasten the village's collapse than to preserve it for Master Jordan's use.

CHAPTER 17

Walking on the main lane, Walter has reached the village bounds, which are marked by a tall stone. He hasn't been so close to the edge of the boundary for years, and he recalls Master Kent's dictum that "if we stay within our bounds, there are no bounds to stay us." On the other hand, leaving the bounds means losing everything he's ever had.

Walter returns to meditating on the nature of boundaries. The clearly delineated edge of the village used to provide security for its inhabitants. However, now it's a barrier between them and the land, and has come to represent their dispossession.

Walter breaks off a blade of grass and chews it. Then he bumps his head against the boundary stone, just as village parents do when their children are big enough to walk, to remind them not to stray. The resulting cut on his forehead joins his other injuries, reminders of the recent disasters. In one hand he carries the piece of vellum he'd prepared for Mr. Quill's map. He has already burned the two sketches, along with their creator. But he intends to keep the vellum, which is empty and "could be anywhere."

Just as he's about to depart for good, Walter is reenacting the ritual that affirms membership in the village. His decision to burn the maps shows that he rejects viewing the land as Master Jordan does; taking the empty vellum shows his desire to recreate himself and at last take charge of his own life as an individual.

Walter looks back at the village for the last time. No one is working, and the land is unattended, "an Eden with no Adam and no Eve." The wheat Walter has planted is growing under the earth. The manor house is burning; if anyone ever asks, Walter will blame it on Mistress Beldam, who is bringing "sin and mischief" to the village but also "bearing [him] away."

Walter uses Edenic imagery not to praise the land but to emphasize its eerie emptiness, which contradicts the Bible's depiction of a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. By speaking both of the "sin" Mistress Beldam embodies and the service she's done by helping him leave the village, he shows a new understanding of her, accepting that she's neither an emblem of regeneration, as he first thought, nor a beacon of groundless anger.

The view away from the village is more exciting, or at least wilder. The hedges are untended, showing that no one inhabits this land. However, Walter sees trees full of fruits and nuts, telling him that the land will provide for him until he finds another place to live.

Even though the village has collapsed beyond repair, Walter understands that nature is much larger than its manifestation in his small community, and he can continue to rely on it for sustenance.

A mouse scurries into the lane until Walter kicks some earth toward it, warning it of his presence. It disappears under a rock. Walter gathers up his few possessions and his intangible memories. His one task now is to say farewell to the common land, leave the village behind, and travel forth until he reaches "wherever is awaiting me." As he finishes this thought, Walter amends it, saying that he will find "wherever is awaiting us."

As he leaves the village, Walter tries on his identity as an individual by describing his plans in the singular. However, his retreat into the plural pronoun shows poignantly how difficult this is for him. It's a reminder that his development as an individual comes at the expense of his beloved community.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Connelly, Irene. "*Harvest*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 31 Aug 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Connelly, Irene. "*Harvest*." LitCharts LLC, August 31, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/harvest.

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MLA

Crace, Jim. Harvest. Vintage. 2013.

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Crace, Jim. Harvest. New York: Vintage. 2013.