
KÖNIGS ERLÄUTERUNGEN SPEZIAL

Textanalyse und Interpretation zu

Tom Franklin

CROOKED LETTER, CROOKED LETTER

Patrick Charles

Analyse | Interpretation in englischer Sprache

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1. FOREWORD – AT A GLANCE

This study guide to Tom Franklin's *Crooked Letter*, *Crooked Letter* is designed to provide an easy-to-use overview of the structure, context, themes and characters of the novel. Here is a quick rundown of the most important points.

Part 2 takes a brief look at Tom Franklin and his career.

- ⇒ S. 9 → Franklin was born in Alabama in 1963. His career as a writer has been defined by the region of the country in which he was born and has always lived.
- ⇒ S. 10 → *Crooked Letter* is a crime thriller about two boyhood friends who are in fact half-brothers. Franklin is closely associated with the American South.

Part 3 offers analyses and interpretations of the novel.

Crooked Letter – Origins and sources

- ⇒ S. 16 Franklin is a Southern writer: all his published works have been concerned with the history and culture of the American South. *Crooked Letter* was published in 2010 and was his third and to date most successful novel.

Summaries

- ⇒ S. 18 Two young boys, Larry and Silas, become friends despite social and family pressure (Larry is white, Silas black) in rural Mississippi in the late 1970s. A girl they are both connected to, Cindy Walker, disappears, feared dead, and suspicion falls on Larry. Twenty-five years later, Larry is an outcast in the area, and Silas is now a police officer, investigating the disappearance of a lo-

cal girl, Tina Rutherford. Larry is again a suspect, even after he is found shot and badly wounded in his own home. Silas investigates the crime and is forced to re-examine his own history, and to acknowledge the secrets he has been keeping about Cindy. He had been with her on the night she disappeared and he could have saved Larry from the suspicion which destroyed his family and his life. While investigating the past, Silas also discovers that he and Larry are half-brothers. Silas is badly injured in a showdown with the man who shot Larry and killed Tina. After Silas has confessed about the events of 1982, he and Larry can begin to mend their friendship.

Structure

The novel is concerned with events from the past and their effect on, and reflection in, events occurring in the present day. The narrative takes place in the two time periods, with some chapters taking place entirely in the past, and characters often slipping into long memories which reveal the secrets and events of 25 years ago. ⇨ S. 31

Characters

The arrangement of the characters in *Crooked Letter* is a little more complex than in a less chronologically complex novel. ⇨ S. 52

Larry Ott

→ Larry is an outcast and a loner who comes from a local family. ⇨ S. 52

Silas Jones

→ Silas investigates the crimes in the novel and has to acknowledge his guilt for having ruined Larry's life. ⇨ S. 55

2.1 Biography

2. TOM FRANKLIN: LIFE & WORKS

2.1 Biography

| YEAR | PLACE | EVENT | AGE |
|------|------------------------|---|--------------|
| 1963 | Dickinson, Alabama | Born on 7th of July in the tiny community (400–500 citizens), Franklin grew up as a huge fan of comic books and pulp fiction (science fiction, horror, fantasy, Tarzan stories, etc.) and was not a good student at school. | Up to age 18 |
| 1981 | Mobile, Alabama | The family moved, and Franklin attended the University of South Alabama, where he worked many menial jobs and took nine years to graduate. | 18 |
| 1994 | Selma, Alabama | Taught for a year at the famous all-black Selma University. | 31 |
| 1998 | Fayetteville, Arkansas | He graduated from the University of Arkansas with an M.F.A. after four years which he really enjoyed, during which he also met his future wife Beth Ann. | 35 |
| 1999 | | First work published, the story collection <i>Poachers</i> | 36 |
| 2003 | | First novel published, <i>Hell at the Breech</i> | 40 |
| 2006 | | <i>Smonk</i> is published, cementing his reputation as a regional writer | 43 |
| 2010 | | <i>Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter</i> is published to widespread acclaim and great commercial success | 47 |
| 2013 | | <i>The Titled World</i> is published, a novel Franklin co-wrote with his wife | 50 |
| 2017 | | Tom Franklin is currently an associate professor at the University of Mississippi. | 54 |



Thomas Gerald Franklin (* 1963)
© Ulf ANDERSEN/
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laif

2.2 Contemporary Background

2.2 Contemporary Background

SUMMARY

Whether he is writing crime fiction or historical novels, Tom Franklin is a regional writer who is closely associated with the American South, specifically the states Alabama and Mississippi. The traditions, lifestyles and landscapes of the South feature prominently in his writing.

The South

The southern states of the USA are very different from the North. Traditional ways of life which were associated for generations with natural factors like different kind of agriculture (the plantations, for example) and the very different climate are combined with historical, political and social factors including slavery, segregation, the American Civil War, widespread religious intensity and a lot of rural poverty. Industrialisation and urbanisation had been northern phenomena long before they began affecting the South.

Southern identity

Franklin addresses many issues of Southern identity and life in *Crooked Letter*, including **racial dynamics**, the coherence and claustrophobia of small rural communities, and **social problems** like drugs, alcoholism and poverty. He also makes efforts to **portray the languid atmosphere** of the hot and humid climate, and there is a strong awareness of beauty in his descriptions of the landscapes of the South.

Chicago

Chicago has many nicknames, including the “Windy City” – referring to its chilly and raw climate – and the “City of the Big Shoulders”, which is a line taken from Carl Sandburg’s poem *Chicago* (1916)

North America,
Illinois

2.3 Notes on other works

2.3 Notes on other works

SUMMARY

Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter was Franklin's third novel, and is his most successful and famous work.

| Works | Publication year |
|--|------------------|
| <i>Poachers</i> (short story collection) | 1999 |
| <i>Hell at the Breech</i> | 2003 |
| <i>Smonk</i> | 2006 |
| <i>Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter</i> | 2010 |
| <i>The Tilted World</i> | 2013 |

Poachers

His first published work, this collection of short stories won a major prize in the field of crime fiction (the Edgar Award for Best Mystery Short Story).

Hell at the Breech and Smonk

His first two novels are historical novels, both examples of regional fiction, as they are set in Alabama. *Hell at the Breech*¹, his debut, was based on actual historical events. *Smonk* is a wildly over-the-top novel about a brutal rapist and his path of destruction, intended in part as a reaction against or parody of the excessively masculine Southern fiction of established writers like Cormac McCarthy (famous for novels like *Blood Meridian* – published 1985).

1 German Translation: *Die Gefürchteten*. Heyne Verlag, 2005. Translated by Wolfgang Müller.

3. ANALYSES AND INTERPRETATIONS

3.1 Origins and sources

SUMMARY

Tom Franklin is widely considered to be a regional, and specifically Southern writer. All of his published work has been set in Mississippi or Alabama, and the region and his experiences there have shaped his work as a writer.

“To write a story, you have to get the details right. You have to convince a reader you know what you’re talking about.”³

(Tom Franklin)

Biographical traces

Franklin’s personal background in the region and his familiarity with the life, landscape, history, people and feel of the South means that there are **traces of his life and experience in his work**. This is also true of *Crooked Letter*: for example, like Larry, he grew up with a father who ran a car repair workshop in a tiny rural community.

He mentions in interviews how much autobiographical detail has slipped into *Crooked Letter*: “the character of Silas ”32” Jones is very loosely based on the sole police officer of the hamlet of Dickinson, Alabama, where I grew up”⁴ and “I used a lot of autobiographical stuff for Larry, the mechanic”⁵. These **autobiographical details** include Larry’s reading habits – when asked in an interview who his

3 <https://www.mswritersandmusicians.com/mississippi-writers/tom-franklin>

4 https://www.amazon.com/Crooked-Letter-Novel/dp/0060594667/ref=ntt_at_ep_dpi_1

5 Ibid.

3.2 Summaries

3.2 Summaries

SUMMARY

Two young boys, Larry and Silas, become friends in rural Mississippi in the late 1970s. A girl, Cindy Walker, disappears, feared dead, and suspicion falls on Larry.

Twenty-five years later, Larry is an outcast in the area, and Silas is now a police officer, investigating the disappearance of a local girl, Tina Rutherford. Larry is again a suspect, even after he is found shot and badly wounded in his own home. Silas investigates the crime and is forced to re-examine his own history. After Silas has confessed about the events of 1982, he and Larry can begin to mend their friendship.

What follows in this section is a brief chapter-by-chapter summary of the novel. Some of the chapters are based entirely or largely in the past, as the novel covers two different periods (1979–1982 and two weeks in 2007), and these flashbacks are indicated in the summaries.

one

Intruder shoots
Larry Ott

The novel starts with Larry Ott, a 41-year old man who lives alone in his parents' house. He wakes up and goes about his morning routine, looking after his chickens, and heads off to work in his father's car repair workshop, Ottomotive. On the way he gets a call from his mother, who is in a nursing home, saying that she would like to see him. He heads back home. When he walks into his house he is ambushed by an intruder wearing an old zombie mask which Larry has had since he was a boy. The intruder shoots him and then watches him bleeding out on the kitchen floor.

3.2 Summaries



Wallace placed
a diamondback
rattlesnake in
Irina's mailbox
© picture alliance /
PIXSELL

him, and that he recognised Wallace's eyes behind the mask when he was shot. He describes the mask to French.

French later comes to Larry's room and has him identify the mask. He asks Larry some questions about Wallace and their relationship, and then informs Larry that Wallace is now dead.

Later, after French has left, Larry is thinking about time passing and loneliness and memories when he gets a new roommate: Silas is brought in.

3.3 Structure

3.3 Structure

Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter is structured as a crime thriller: a crime occurs early in the narrative and the plot involves solving the crime. The novel is also concerned with events in the past, and so it is structured to include long passages of flashbacks to 25 years ago. Other structural elements which organise the plot and the characters include the use of symmetry to highlight both divisions and similarities. Here we will also look at the evolution of the friendship between Larry and Wallace as an organising structure in the novel.

SUMMARY

The title

The concept of place – the idea of where you are, where you belong – and the actual physical location are important in the novel. Alice and Silas’ transition from the northern city of Chicago (the third largest city in the USA) to this tiny hamlet in **rural Mississippi** is a big deal: For the 13-year old Silas it’s a completely different world. The racial and social tensions and dynamics of rural Mississippi are not the same as in Chicago, a major northern city. And for Larry Ott, his notoriety as “Scary Larry” is greatly exacerbated by his location in a **tiny community** where everyone knows everyone else – a community he has never really left, with the exception of his short time in the military.

This idea of the **central importance of place** in the novel begins with the title. Taken from a children’s rhyme used as a mnemonic for the correct spelling of Mississippi (the crooked letter meaning the letter “s”), the title *Crooked Letter* immediately and firmly anchors the novel and our expectations in a specific place,

Crooked Letter “s”

3.3 Structure

namely the deep South, and gives it a specific frame of reference: **Childhood**.

The idea of
belonging

The idea of belonging is a **central theme in the novel**, and the characters belong to this specific place in varying degrees. We have Larry, who has never left and is tied to a place where he is now a pariah, and Silas, who was conceived here, but who grew up far to the north before being brought back as a teenager, only to leave again, and return yet again as an adult. Alice's inability to successfully leave this specific place behind her is an important device within the plot of the novel, a device which is used to bring Silas into the story, and to expose the secrets within Carl Ott's past. The place, **Chabot in Mississippi**, won't let people go: Larry can't escape. Alice can't escape. And Silas is dragged back twice, also unable to escape.

Chronology

The novel is concerned with the connected events of **two different times** – the year 1982 and the present day (presumably 2007, 25 years later). The narrative makes strong use of flashbacks, at times with entire chapters being set in the past (Chapters 3, 5 and 7) but also in shorter forms, with the central characters Larry and Silas **remembering moments** from their past and the events which drove them apart.

TIMETABLE/CHABOT



3.4 Characters: Constellations & Characteristics

3.4 Characters: Constellations & Characteristics

SUMMARY

The main characters in the novel are Larry Ott and Silas Jones. They are connected by their friendship as boys and by Carl Ott. Their parents are also important in the novel, as are individuals like Cindy Walker and Wallace Stringfellow, but the novel is essentially about these two men and their complicated and unhappy relationship.

Larry Ott

Larry is, at the time of the novel, 41 years old. The **only child of Carl and Ina Ott**, Larry was born in Chabot, where he has lived all his life, apart from the time he spent serving in the US military. Larry is average sized and is not particularly athletic. He “had been chubby as a kid” (p. 20.17) and tended towards “pudginess” (p. 61.29), but is now much leaner. He has “olive skin and straight brown hair and brown eyes with long lashes” (p. 62.32–33). As a child he was sickly and asthmatic (p. 61.26).

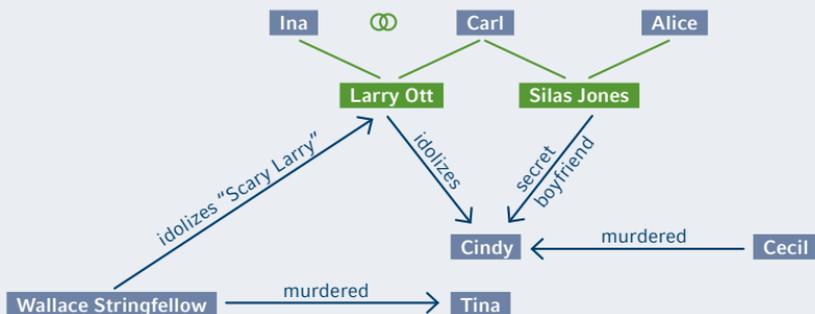
His father **Carl was a domineering** and abusive presence in his life, and Larry was made to understand throughout his life that he was a huge disappointment to his father – “He understood that Carl liked most everyone except him.” (61.25) His mother loved him and prayed together with him as a child.

He lives on the Ott family property, a house with a barn and originally over 500 acres of land, including woodland in which the little cabin stands where the Jones family live and where Tina Rutherford’s body is later found. Since returning from the military and the death of his father, Larry has been forced to sell areas of the Ott family property to the Rutherford timber company.

Disappointment
to his father

Ott property:
cabin

3.4 Characters: Constellations & Characteristics



in investigating him. He is the focus of the novel in the events of both 1982 and the present day, even though he is in both cases an accidental agent and not a protagonist.

Chronology

Another very important factor is that the **chronology** of the novel focuses on two different periods in time: 1982 and the present day. The constellations of the characters shift through time. Here there are reflections of the situation – the same central figures and a young girl gone missing – with the same suspect (Larry). There are however also “negative” reflections, with Silas in the older case being the one who condemns Larry through his silence while saving him in the present, and Cecil (the probable murderer) in the older case not being identified or caught, while Wallace (the killer in the present day) is identified and killed.

Family affairs

A further way to organise the characters which reflects the symmetry of the novel’s structure, plot(s) and characters is with **Carl Ott** at the centre. Carl is the father of both Larry and Silas and, as a quite literal point of origin for the entire story, he can be used as a focal point around which to arrange the two sides of most of

3.5 Themes

3.5 Themes

SUMMARY

The major themes in the novel revolve around memory and the past, guilt and responsibility and the broad idea of “belonging”. Belonging is an umbrella theme, which covers many other areas: loneliness and friendship, community and race, social status and ostracism. Specific minor themes include power, horror, kindness and cruelty. And as is the case with most fiction involving crime, friendships and secrets from the past, the theme of redemption plays an important role in *Crooked Letter*.

These themes are entwined in complex ways: many of the examples from the text discussed below are relevant to more than one of the thematic areas identified.

The themes at a glance:

- Memory, the past and secrets
- Guilt, responsibility and betrayal
- Power
- Belonging
- Horror and monsters
- Redemption

Memory, the past and secrets

The story of *Crooked Letter*, *Crooked Letter* unfolds in **two different time periods**. In the past (1979–1982), we have secrets (Silas’ parentage, what happened the night Cindy disappeared), a crime (the disappearance of Cindy Walker) and a betrayal (Larry and Silas –

Childhood and
adulthood

3.5 Themes

the fight, the insult, and Silas' silence), and in the present day we have a second, similar crime – the disappearance and murder of Tina Rutherford – and the overcoming of the old betrayal through the revelation of the secrets.

The two time frames are very significant for the development of the characters. Both Silas and Larry (and other characters around them) have been **frozen in time** by what happened in 1982, unable to escape the crimes and betrayals. For as long as there are secrets and unacknowledged guilt, there can be no confession, forgiveness or resolution of the events of that time.

No resolution

Prisoners of the past, frozen in time:

| TEXT | PP. | ANALYSIS |
|--|------------|--|
| <p>"I believe our victim here's the last resident in Mississippi without a remote control. [...] Unusual fellow. A frozen in the 1960s kind of character. [...] My guess is he ain't touched this particular room since his mamma went to the home."</p> | 90–95 | <p>Silas and Roy French investigate Larry's house. The past is of central importance in the novel. Larry has been frozen in time by the events of 1982. He lives where he was born and has been unable to leave. He goes through the motions of continuing his father's work at the repair shop (without having updated his tools or methods, as French notes – see 91.25–31) and maintains his mother's routines for caring for her chickens.</p> |
| <p>Shelves full of the books Larry had read as a kid. [...] ... rows of suits and shirts, clothes of a boy on one end and growing longer down the rod, a man on the other.</p> | 86.22–87.1 | <p>Larry surrounds himself with the books he read as a child and his wardrobe still contains the clothes he has worn through his life from boyhood to manhood (86.29–87.2).</p> |

3.5 Themes

Horror and monsters – outsiders

“Larry Ott returned home and found a monster waiting in his house.” (p. 17.2–3)

“Larry felt a strange forgiveness for him because all monsters were misunderstood.” (p. 24.22–23)

“Horror, it ain’t my thing. Too much of that in real life.”
(Silas, p. 265.1–2)

Horror plays a role in *Crooked Letter*: It is present in the culture the characters consume (Stephen King novels, horror films) as well as in the imagery (the zombie mask, the cabin in the woods) and the events (the acts of Wallace Stringfellow). One major element through the history of horror as a genre is **the idea of the monster** – ranging from the implicit threat of the ‘outsider’ to the full-blown inhuman or supernatural menace. *Crooked Letter* also contains monsters.

History of horror

The monsters in the book are **rejects and outsiders**. They are two men whose natures – one withdrawn and desperately lonely, the other weird and creepy – make it hard for them to interact with others. While Larry is completely innocent of what he is believed to have done – he is a monster in reputation only, not in fact – Wallace is in fact a monster whose obsession with rape and murder has become active.

Larry and Wallace

The monsters: “Scary Larry”

Wallace himself is nervous about Larry: When Larry asks him why he used the DIRECTV truck the first time he came to visit instead of riding his 4-wheeler, Wallace says he was worried Larry might cut him up and bury him in the woods (p. 208.23–27). Wallace, himself a real monster, is apparently nervous of Larry’s fearsome (and inaccurate) reputation as a monster.

Larry: reputation as a monster

3.6 Style and Language

3.6 Style and Language

Crooked Letter is a third person narrative told from the perspectives of the two main characters. The narrative moves back and forth between the present day and the protagonists' childhood in the late 1970s and early 80s. The language of the novel is vivid, particularly in the use of the regional dialect in the dialogue and in the effective use of striking poetic turns of phrase.

SUMMARY

Two aspects of the style and language used in *Crooked Letter* are immediately remarkable: the **regional accents** in the dialogues and the effective use of **poetic similes and expressive imagery** in the prose.

The novel is set in a small rural community in Mississippi and the speech of most of the characters reflects a “country” manner of speaking which includes many idiosyncrasies of grammar and pronunciation. This accent is most strongly heard in Wallace Stringfellow’s voice, and less so in a character like Roy French. The use of such a strong regional dialect in the novel further roots the story in a specific place – already a function of the novel’s title – and gives the novel a cohesive and authentic tone (pp. 15–16 in the novel provide a brief overview of the dialect).

Rural community

The **colourful and poetic similes and imagery** used throughout the novel enhance the atmosphere of a crime thriller, which relies just as much on a brooding, melancholy atmosphere as it does on suspense and tension.

3.7 Interpretations

3.7 Interpretations

SUMMARY

Crooked Letter is a crime thriller – it was marketed as such by the publishers, it can be found in the Crime Fiction sections in bookshops, and the story revolves around a crime and how that crime is solved. But as the discussion below will show, there is more than one tradition in the genre of crime fiction, and Tom Franklin’s novel belongs to the more literary tradition which has developed from the works of Raymond Chandler.

Restoring symbolic order to the world

Crime fiction has long been understood to deal with the kind of crisis in the world that can be seen in ancient stories like the Old English poem *Beowulf*, where a hero must defend his people against two monsters who threaten to disturb or destroy the order of the world. These are among the most primal of all stories – the protection of the community to which storyteller and listener belong from the threat of disorder, chaos or destruction, typically manifesting in the form of an Outsider (a monster) and/or a transgression of the community’s laws and values.

Order of the world

Very basically, in crime fiction the “right order” of the world is symbolically threatened or disturbed by the crime – an unnatural act which defies **right, law, order**. The protagonist – investigator, detective, police officer – serves as a **representative of the reader** and of the forces of order (very explicitly so, as protagonists in crime fiction are most often law enforcement officials or detectives). The protagonist must then *on behalf of* the reader and the forces of order attempt to **correct the imbalance** – to right the wrong, destroy the monster, and restore order to the world.

4. CRITICAL RECEPTION

SUMMARY

Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter was well received and won awards and prizes, but there were also critical reactions.

Reactions

Positive reactions

Positive critical reactions to *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter* have drawn attention to two features of the novels – Franklin’s skill at describing the region and **creating a Southern atmosphere**, and the ambition of the novel to grow beyond the limits of the genre of crime or mystery fiction.

“There is a great sense of place and exceptional character development in this mystery.”¹⁰

“Edgar Award-winning author Tom Franklin returns with his most accomplished and resonant novel so far.”¹¹

“Franklin’s prose is startlingly beautiful ... But what sticks at the end is Franklin’s shattering, heart-breaking depiction of loneliness.”¹²

“Franklin seemingly sets out precisely to subvert expectations, not just mine and those of his other fans, but those of the genres in which he operates.”¹³

10 http://www.princetonbookreview.com/book_pages/discussion/crooked-letter-crooked-letter.php

11 https://www.amazon.com/Crooked-Letter-Novel/dp/0060594667/ref=ntt_at_ep_dpi_1

12 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/dec/04/books-christmas-presents-thrillers-reviews>

13 <http://fictionwritersreview.com/review/crooked-letter-crooked-letter-by-tom-franklin>

5. MATERIALS

The American South

As usual, Wikipedia can be recommended as a first stop to learn the general outlines of a topic. It is a useful resource to find orientation on subjects as huge as the history of the USA, and the lists of sources are invaluable for more focussed, scholarly and detailed studies of specific topics.

The following hub pages are useful resources and can point readers to more specific and authoritative sources: Useful Links

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_United_States

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_War

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racism_in_the_United_States

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racial_segregation_in_the_United_States

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_display_of_the_Confederate_flag
[Reactions_to_2015_Charleston_church_shooting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reactions_to_2015_Charleston_church_shooting)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Gothic

A brief history of the American South

The American South is more a cultural than a geographical area. The American South includes those states which formed the Confederacy during the American Civil War (1861–1865) and fought against the Union. So while it doesn't include geographically southern states like New Mexico and Arizona, it does include West Virginia, which separated from the state of Virginia during the Civil War. Another term used to describe this region is the Old South, which means specifically those states which fought a civil war to uphold the institution of slavery.

Old South

6. SAMPLE EXAM QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Task 1*

Compare and contrast Larry and Silas' relationships with their mothers.

Model answer:

Ina Ott and Alice Jones are very different women. Ina is gentle, submissive and devout, and Alice is hard and strong. Ina is married and raises her son in a stable environment: Alice is driven back and forth from Mississippi to Chicago and back again, a single mother who must do what she can to provide for herself and her son.

Ina and Alice

The two boys are shaped by their mothers. Silas takes after his mother in being hard and strong in his self-interest: he protects himself by sacrificing Larry after the disappearance of Cindy Walker. Larry in turn inherits more from his mother than from his father Carl. He is, like Ina, a basically gentle and kind person. When Alice teaches Silas to rely on himself and to be constantly aware that the world is a cold, hard, unforgiving place, Ina teaches Larry to pray and provides him with all the comfort she can, whether he is suffering from asthma or from loneliness.

Both Larry and Silas have close relationships with their mothers, but Silas' is much more conflicted and painful. Alice is strict with him, forbidding him from seeing Cindy Walker, for example, and also from playing with Larry. Ina in contrast is very indulgent with Larry, often helping to persuade Carl to allow their son to do things, like take Cindy to the movies.

Close relationships

Silas appears to have more of Carl's nature than Larry does: he is more aggressive and more strong-willed. For example, when

Carl's nature

the two boys see Cecil and Carl harassing Cindy, it is Silas who immediately reacts and tries to protect the girl. Larry remains hidden and observes. Silas' temper and active nature show more of Carl's nature than Larry's passivity does. It is because Silas as a boy is so strong-willed and angry that he clashes with his mother so often, and grows up resenting her attempts to control him. Only later, after she has died, does he really come to understand and accept how much she had sacrificed for him and how painfully lonely and hard her life had been. Larry has no such conflict with his mother, and he remains close to her. When she is in the nursing home, lost to Alzheimer's, he continues to take every opportunity to see her.

Silas' struggles with Alice made him resent and reject her, something he feels badly about as an adult, but she had also made him strong and able to deal firmly with other people. Larry has a closer and more affectionate relationship with Ina, but her mothering has increased the meekness and passivity of his gentle nature.

Task 2**

**“What’s missing out of you, Silas?” (p. 141.31)
What does Alice mean when she says this to her son?**

Model answer:

Alice is concerned that Silas lacks the courage to face life's challenges head on, but she also worries that he lacks empathy and understanding for others. When he tries to run away from her on the way south, jumping out of the truck a local man is giving Alice and Silas a lift in (pp. 138–139), she is frightened for him and then furious. She tells him that he has had a relatively good and easy life so far, and has no reason to behave as he has done. She doesn't

Courage and
empathy