

How is silas marnier  
changed by his  
experiences in  
raveloe



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In the novel *Silas Marner* by George Eliot, the eponymous hero has moved into the outskirts of a small rural village called Raveloe and, during his time there, we can observe many changes in him. He goes from being withdrawn and mysterious to being a part of community life.

When he arrived there, he was traumatised by his experiences at the Lantern Yard. Lantern Yard was a strict religious sect that feared, rather than loved, God, with a lot of guilt. His so-called "friend" William Dane framed him for stealing from a church and leaving a dying parson he was supposed to be looking after. Thus he lost his friends and the trust of the people that knew him.

Even Eliot's description of his appearance shows how more evil and guilty he is in comparison: "The expression of trusting simplicity in Marner's face, heightened by that absence of special observation, that defenceless, deer-like gaze which belongs to large prominent eyes, was strongly contrasted by the self-complacent suppression of inward triumph that lurked in the narrow slanting eyes and compressed lips of William Dane." The word "lurked" is quite sinister. The innocence and as well as the physical description of Silas Marner is expressed by the words such as "trusting" and "defenceless", and hints that he wasn't at all suspecting what would happen to him. (Similar to the modern phrase "Like a deer in the lights of a speeding car.

") The way the descriptions of the outsides of people are similar to their insides is almost fairytale-like. This event left him helplessly alone with no purpose in life and drove him to moving far away, hoping to leave his troubles behind. Through this he was disillusioned and lost his faith - like the

author: she was raised in a strict orthodox religion, which she rebelled against. Quote (Silas): " ' But you may prosper, for all that: there is no just God that governs the earth righteously, but a God of lies, that bears witness against the innocent.

" Religious faith and doubt are part of the relevant literary tradition of that time - almost all British people were strict Christians in the Victorian era. In Raveloe, when he first moved there, he kept himself to himself, working in his little cottage by the stone-pit, a flooded quarry near the woods. He doesn't interact with the locals at all, looks strange, and they don't know about his past, so he is mysterious to them. They have never travelled further than the outer limits of their village and are uneducated about the outside world, so to them foreigners might as well be aliens from another planet. This was probably typical of many small, rural, isolated towns and villages before the twentieth century.

" The shepherd's dog barked fiercely when one of these alien-looking men appeared on the upland, dark against the early winter sunset... these pale men rarely stirred abroad without that mysterious burden. The shepherd..

. was not quite sure that this trade of weaving, indispensable though it was, could be carried on entirely without the help of the Evil One. " This also shows the superstition and strong belief in the devil by rural people at the time. George Eliot is critical, but affectionate, of these people. When she points out their faults, like the fact that they're superstitious and backward, she does it subtly but not cruelly or directly. All cleverness, whether in the rapid use of that difficult instrument the tongue, or in some other art

unfamiliar to villagers, was in itself suspicious: honest folk, born and bred in a visible manner, were mostly not over-wise or clever.

.. and the process by which rapidity and dexterity of any kind were acquired was so wholly hidden, that they partook of the nature of conjuring. " This quote is typical of her poetic language, and the way she often understates things.

She seems to understate things to emphasize them. She points out that they're negligent in their religion, looking at the church from their doors but not going there on Sundays, but she doesn't damn them for this. E. g. " The inhabitants of Raveloe were not severely regular in their church-going..

. " (This is also another one of her understatements) They're inbred, ignorant of the outside world, and lazy, but she still likes them because they are essentially a friendly community, they just don't like Silas because they don't understand him. When Silas cures a woman of dropsy, and everyone starts coming to him for miracle cures, this scares him into shying away from them even more than before because they think he is possessed with magical powers. This, plus his fits, scares the people, and they begin to think he's a supernatural being who could curse them (as well as cure them) if he wanted to. "[His eyes'] dreadful stare could dart cramp, or rickets, or a wry mouth at any boy who happened to be in the rear..

. They had, perhaps, heard their fathers and mothers hint that Silas Marner could cure folks' rheumatism if he had a mind, and add, still more darkly, that if you could only speak the devil fair enough, he might save you the cost of a doctor. " When Silas's gold is stolen, it has a huge effect on him since it <https://assignbuster.com/how-is-silas-marner-changed-by-his-experiences-in-raveloe/>

is really all he's got. He immediately runs to the local pub, the Rainbow, where the people, although initially frightened when he bursts in, decide to help. This shows that although they fear him, they don't fear him enough not to help him when he's in serious trouble, and they soon learn that maybe he is human after all.

They all try, clumsily but good-naturedly, to console and help him, even though many aren't much help. For example, Mr Macey's advice, although well intended, does a lot more harm than good; and in the local search for the thief, a witch-hunt for gypsies soon starts, not because there is any proof that it was a gypsy, but because they don't trust travellers. The Victorians weren't exactly friendly with foreigners, but it just could have been typical of small villages like Raveloe where none of the inhabitants ever travelled far from home and had lots of superstitions. (People were more superstitious at that time.

) This also shows Eliot's humour - how the blundering villagers try to help and find someone to blame but miss badly. She also uses the dialects and accents of the characters to add more humour as well as make it seem more real, and the dialect of the Midlands used by the characters contrasts with the sophisticated and philosophical language of the narrator. Another of her linguistic devices is the names of her characters, such as Eppie's full name "Hephzibah" which is from the Bible and means "my delight is in her", and "Silas" which comes from a name meaning "the one who lives in the woods". That incident and the offers of help do make Silas slightly more part of the community, but the arrival of Eppie truly makes him one of them, e.

g. " No child was afraid of approaching Silas when Eppie was near him. "

When he found her, he ran straight to Raveloe for help, like he did when his gold went missing. This shows that even though he's detached from the village, he still has some trust in fellow humans. Dolly comes over with her son Aaron to help him look after her; he goes into the village with them, and people see Eppie and ask him about her - she becomes a talking point, breaks the ice, and gets him communicating more with people. He wants her to be accepted by them so he communicates with the people more.

He also asks for them to help him bring her up since he wants to make sure he is doing the right thing and that she'll be accepted in Raveloe. " What is it as you mean by ' christened? "' he said at last, timidly. " Won't folks be good to her without it? ... But I want to do everything as can be done for the child.

And whatever's right for it i' this country, and you think ' ull do it good, I'll act according, if you'll tell me. "' For him, his money was his entire family, but in the end Eppie takes its place in his heart, as his adopted daughter. " ' You didn't know then, Eppie, when you were such a little un - you didn't know what your old father Silas felt for you. "' Eppie brings out the fathering instinct in Silas: he is eventually so devoted to her that he ends up preferring her to his gold, and would rather be poor but with her than rich and without her. "'.

.. I thought I should be glad if I could feel it, and find it was come back. But that didn't last long. After a bit, I should have thought it was a curse come again, if it had drove you from me, for I'd got to feel the need o' your looks and your voice and the touch o' your little fingers.

“ He lives for her: through her he has a reason to live again, rather than just existing soullessly, “ working like the spider. George Eliot uses her to represent how children can change people’s lives: “ in old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction; a hand is put into theirs, which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and the hand may be a little child’s. ” During that time (the Victorian era), references to the Bible, classical stories, dreams, visions, the past and religious imagery were common in literature.

It could be said that she has an idealistic and romantic idea of children being the purest form of human goodness, so she presents Eppie like an ideal character rather than a realistic one. She doesn’t rebel against her father and loves him like he loves her. On the other hand, teenage rebellion against parents was probably quite rare back then because of discipline – for example, Puritan law used to dictate that children who dared rebel against their parents must be hung, regardless of their age or circumstances, because the Bible forbade rebellion. People had to lead very moral lives.

Even though Silas can hardly bear to discipline her, she still learns to be good. Children, social reform and religion are among the main themes that are often found in Victorian literature. (Other themes of the literary tradition of the time were the roles of women, grief and superstitions, which are also found elsewhere in the story. ) I interpreted Silas as religious but lost, a person who is caring but at first didn’t have anything apart from money and objects to care about, and shy because of his experiences before finding <https://assignbuster.com/how-is-silas-marner-changed-by-his-experiences-in-raveloe/>

Eppie. She makes him more confident and helps him to believe that there is goodness in the world again.

He goes back to religion, but this is a warm, caring, loving and forgiving religion, unlike Lantern Yard. It is also like Dolly - warm, caring, loving and forgiving. She uses simple language and the religion in Raveloe is also simple. She wants to help him and slowly eases him into talking about his worries and his past. She is loyal - if blind - in her faith, accepting what the church says and accepting what happens in life, trying to see the bright side: " it's like the night and the morning, and the sleeping and the waking, and the rain and the harvest - one goes and the other comes, and we know nothing how nor where. " Eliot may have been an early feminist as the character that turns Marner into a miser, William Dane, is male, and the two characters that have the biggest positive effect, Eppie and Dolly, are female.

Through the language and atmosphere used by Eliot in the first half of the novel, before Eppie's arrival, everything seems cold, dark, claustrophobic, and lonely, because this is the winter of Silas's life. " And all the evening, as he sat in his loneliness by his dull fire, he leaned his elbows on his knees, and clasped his head with his hands, and moaned very low - not as one who seeks to be heard. " He finds Eppie when she toddles out of the cold and into his house as she follows the light from his fire. This is like the warmth and light coming into their lives. This is the beginning of the summer of his life.

This is also like " coming towards the light" in religion. Not only does he change inside, but also his appearance changes (" Silas's face showed that sort of transfiguration, as he sat in his arm-chair and looked at Eppie. ") and



his fits seem to occur less often. The stone-pit being drained shows changes are happening: not just to traditional farming methods but also to Silas: he is thawing out slowly. (Comparisons between the past and present and social reform were two themes of Victorian literature.

When the pit is fully drained, Dunstan's body is found with Silas's money, but by then he doesn't want it anymore since all he wants is to keep his adopted daughter. " After a bit, I should have thought it was a curse come again, if it had drove you from me, for I'd got to feel the need o' your looks and your voice and the touch o' your little fingers. " Later on, Eppie and Aaron make a garden outside the cottage, full of flowers and light: this symbolises Silas coming back to life (his spiritual rebirth) and light, warmth and colour coming back into his world. Through his experiences in Raveloe he is completely changed.