

# 'silas marner' and harper lee's 'to kill a mockingbird'



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Although George Eliot and Harper Lee lived a century apart, growing up in different communities, with their minds informed by different experiences and intellectual training, their works, 'Silas Marner' and 'To Kill A Mockingbird' are strikingly similar in their thematic concerns. Both novels address topics of fundamental importance even in our own society. It is interesting to compare these authors' views of alienation and prejudice, in what soil they flourish and how they can be overcome. In considering the treatment of alienation and prejudice within the context of these two books, one must first explore what is meant by each of these terms.

Alienation is a modern day term, (it is actually 200 years old and even used by Karl Marx); it is used to explain how a person can become hostile or feel estranged from society or friends. However, in exploring an abstract concept you have to find ways of perceiving them in reality. To do this you must learn to recognise signs and symptoms, which illustrate this phenomenon. Typical examples are being isolated from the community, by not feeling part of it, as well as not being seen as part of it, not being included in society' or living alone. These examples can be simply interpreted as not relating with people in any way or form. Related to alienation, but definitely different from it is the phenomenon of prejudice.

This concept is preconceived opinion, resulting in a bias to or against, a person or group. Examples of prejudice are: racism, seeing people as different because of their skin colour; sexism, treating people differently because of their gender; religious bias, regarding certain religions as "strange" and possibly persecuting the believers of the religion; and disability, which is treating people with suspicion because they have a disability. These

two issues (alienation and prejudice) appear throughout both books to very different people, and is brought upon them in different ways. "Silas Marner" by George Eliot Silas Marner is "The Weaver of Raveloe" as George Eliot first described him. Silas is introduced in the book as a young man, exemplary of ardent faith. He is a simple, trusting, self-doubting ordinary workingman with a fervent belief in God and his fellow man.

Due to his immense physical work, as a weaver, he has a crooked structure. He has a pale face, which creates the look of illness, and is referred to as having a "deer like gaze", this may indicate possible vulnerability. Despite this, the most unusual feature about Silas is his catalepsy. Different people interpreted this in different ways.

It was either seen as further strangeness, that it may indicate the influence of Satan or as a special sign of grace from god. It was only Dane who saw this as a bad omen. It claimed "Marner's" fit was a vision, which is untrue, and he possibly wants to try and make money out of it. His catalepsy is a mysterious rigidity of consciousness. However this pallid young man, with prominent, short sighted protuberant brown eyes, whose appearance once would have no affect on people of average culture and experience, but for the narrow minded ignorance of the people of Raveloe it had mysterious peculiarities which corresponded with the exceptional nature of his occupation, and from this they were unable to accept it as benign. Silas' alienation is quite individual; he was firstly alienated in Lantern yard, where he belonged to a "narrow religious sect," probably Congregation, but this pious man soon lost his faith in God and human beings, turning his back on society, due to being falsely accused.

This is rather ambiguous as Silas had been falsely accused, and because his trust in God was so great, he believed that God would prove him innocent. However he was found guilty, and because of this, God is falsely accused as Silas declared, " There is no God that governs the earth righteously, but a God of lies, that bears witness against the innocent? These cruel twists of evil and fate at lantern yard have meddled with the life of an innocent man. George Eliot explains about Silas's rather sad past life, in LanternYard, and how he became alienated there. Eliot explains about Lantern Yard being an urban mysterious place, which is like a little hidden world.

He had to leave his home after being cruelly betrayed by his closest friend William Dane. Dane is a malign, twisted man, but is regarded by the community as " a shining instance of youthful piety". Despite this he is very arrogant, " to be so dazzled by his own light as to hold himself wiser than his teachers. Dane seeks to destroy the qualities in Silas which shine out.

Dane was extremely jealous of Silas and saw as bete-noire. Silas leaves Lantern Yard " with that despair in his soul" and begins a new life in Raveloe. Raveloe was a representation of rural England, and is untouched by industrialisation, " the old echoes lingered undrowned by new voices. " It is situated in a rich central plain of England, whose beauty is there for all to enjoy. The villagers are described as simple, homely, narrow-minded people, and the community is bound together such that everyone knows everyone else. Silas lived in a cottage on the outskirts of the village.

The villagers of Raveloe regarded him with great suspicion and believed him to be a strange, mystical character, who is a pariah from society. They went

by the saying, " How was a man to be explained if you didn't know his mother or father. " The look upon Silas with suspicion for of number of reasons, his trade, the fact that Silas is a weaver, they did not believe in this profession. A reason they could not interoperate was why Silas had rejected their company, " He invited no comer to step across his doorstep, and he never strode into the village to drink a pint at the Rainbow.

This act was regarded as a strange act, as the Rainbow was the spirit of the village, and to reject it was to reject life in rural England. The men of the village were quite anxious of him, as they find out about when Jem Rodney meets Silas whilst he is having a fit. Jem says he saw that, " Marner's eyes were set like a dead man's", these fits are also referred to as " A dead man come to life again. " Silas' knowledge of certain herbs, and the fact that he possesses magical charms. A good example of this is when Silas realises that Sally Oates is suffering from the same disease as his mother once did. He feels pity for her, and so takes her a herbal remedy his mother had used.

Sally Oates finds relief and the villagers find Silas stranger still! These suspicions drive Silas further away from acceptance by the villagers. Silas' alienation was to a certain extent his own fault, as he did not want to be part of the community. Silas now has nobody to relate to, and so spends all of his time working, so that he can hoard the money he earns. As a miser, Silas's prime focus is his obsessive feeling towards " inanimate" money. His one joy in life is to nightly count his money, and slowly admire the increasing amounts; this is effectively a form of worship.

Eliot elucidates how important the money is to him, especially as it is his own, " It was pleasant for him to feel them in his palm, and look at their bright faces, which are all his own. " Eliot also makes it clear that Silas has no intention to spend it, which would have made him part of the community. However, this is all taken away from him when his money is stolen. To him, his life is effectively over, although there are signs that he is slowly beginning to have more contact with the community. Finally there is a turn for the good and at this point in the book becomes symbolic.

Silas' money, in a way is returned, but in the form of a child. Silas has a vision that his money is returned, as her golden curls and beautiful appearance suddenly have an impact upon him. He interprets Eppie's arrival in his life as a sign that she has been sent to him like a blessing. From this his faith and trust are restored and he displaces all his feelings onto Eppie, and as she can return them, this feeling grows to love. Silas's alienation is slowly overcome, as Eppie restores the remedial influence of pure natural human relations in the book.

People see him as human and their suspicions of him are also overcome. It is also the strength of Dolly Winthrop which helps to overcome the alienation. Because of the community accepting him, Silas " breaks out of his shell", and this aids him to seek advice from the community, as he now feels part of it, which further reinforces their acceptance of him. Silas also regains his piety going to church and Eppie makes Silas realise that life is more than just surviving. The above explanations describe the core themes in George Eliot's treatment of Alienation.

Contrasting to Harper Lee's treatment who explores alienation and prejudice through two main characters, and also takes a society wide perspective. The two characters are Boo Radley and Tom Robinson. "To Kill A Mockingbird" by Harper Lee "To Kill A Mockingbird" is broken up into two parts. Part one explores the innocence of childhood and the alienation of Boo Radley, whereas part two features the maturity of childhood and about the racial issue of Tom Robinson, and is steadily focused either on the trial itself or on the matters arising from the trial.

Arthur, nicknamed "Boo" Radley, the younger son, is sacrificed to the cold hearts and family pride of his parents and elder brother. Arthur Radley as Miss Maudie remembers him, was once a pleasant boy who always "Spoke as nicely as he knew how." As a teenager, he became involved with a gang of Cunningham boys. They were caught driving a car the wrong way around the square, and then mischievously locking up the officer who tried to arrest them. All of them were punished.

The other boys were sent to a state school where they would learn trades which would effectively benefit them. However, Boo supposedly, in the eyes of Mr Radley, brought disrepute to the family name, and Mr Radley was too proud to allow his son to be treated in the same way as the Cunningham's, as he stuck by his word, "No Radley should mix with any other kind." This was individually alienating him from the rest of society. Arthur was excused formal punishment and sent home to his father, and was still sentenced to a lifetime of confinement. From this he gained the reputation of a dangerous lunatic.

Because of the great suspicion surrounding him, many stories were created. The best example is the one Miss Stephanie Crawford told the children. According to her, " Boo was sitting in the living-room cutting some items from The Macomb Tribune to paste in his scrapbook. His father entered the room. As Mr Radley passed by, Boo drove the scissors into his parent's leg, pulled them out, wiped them on his pants, and resumed his activities.

" These stories fascinated the children, and their main interest was trying to establish communication with him. The children were rapt by the stories of Boo, and how he was kept away from society-individually alienated. However from a more mature perspective, the Radleys were alienated as a group. The Radley's never assorted with their neighbours; the door of their house is kept shut. Even though Mr Radley is " So upright that he took the word of God as his only law", he never attended church with the rest of the community. Miss Maudie portrays Mr Radley as a " Foot washing Baptist.

" Foot washers believe anything that is pleasure is a sin, and are obsessed by others failings, plus are quite sadistic towards folk, especially their son. Arthur is deprived of pure natural human relations. As he has been isolated, he is obviously craving some sort of contact, as he puts some old chewing-gum in the hole of a tree, when he realises that someone has found it a took it, he puts some polished coins in, then other possessions. This shows he understands the children by giving them the sort of presents they like.

This is trying to break his isolation, a way of demonstrating his existence to someone other than inside his home. In fact, the children discover that he is simple-minded, childlike and sweet natured. Arthur's alienation is overcome



but only in the eyes of the children. At the end of the book he saves the children's lives by killing Bob Ewell, and if it was heard that he murdered Bob Ewell, then justice would not be done. They are discussing how it happened and scout sees the one who saved her hiding behind the door, " When I pointed to him his palms slipped slightly leaving greasy sweat stains on the wall and he hooked his thumbs in his belt.

A strange spasm shook him as if he heard finger nails scrape, but as I gazed at him in wonder, the tension slowly drained from his face. His lips parted in a timid smile and our neighbour's image blurred with my sudden tears. " Hey, Boo! " I said. " This takes you to the heart of a child and suddenly everything becomes simple, as the recognition, revelation and acceptance of young Scout is the anti-climax of bringing Boo Radley out.

This is an " act of closure". It gives this moment a tremendous significance in the book. In the end, however, he returns to his lonely house, since after the long years of solitude he is too shy to associate with other humans. It is implied that the long confinement has weakened his health. When Atticus tries to explain to Scout why Arthur must be spared the publicity which would result from informing the community of his part in the children's escape, she understands at once, " Well, it'd be sort of like shootin' a mockingbird, wouldn't it? " In contrast to Boo, Tom Robinson is well integrated into his own social group.

Unfortunately, his social group, the black community, is a victim of prejudice and alienation by the wider, white-dominated society. In contrast to Boo, Tom Robinson is a well-integrated part of his own social group.

Unfortunately, his social group, the black community is a victim of prejudice and alienation by the wider white-dominated society. Tom Robinson is alienated, but as part of a group not as an individual, due to prejudice; but within his group he is well respected and definitely not alienated. This prejudice is the key theme of Harper Lee's book; it is shown to be the main cause of a society wide alienation of the black community. Harper Lee's treatment of the blacks is to demonstrate that they are every bit as good as the whites.

Indeed apart from a few certain individuals none of the white folk in the story are anywhere near as good as the black characters, certainly they do not attract as much sympathy. Tom is kind, generous, courteous and intelligent. He refuses to accept for the mass amounts of work he completes for Mayella Ewell, because he pities her hard life and admires her efforts to bring up her brothers and sisters in the shadow of her father. The description of the filthy Ewell residence is placed beside that of the neat Negro settlement, " Their cabins looked neat and snug with pale blue smoke rising from the chimney and doorways glowing amber from the fires inside. There were delicious smells about: chicken, bacon frying crisp as the twilight air. " However on one occasion when he did a job for her, the sorrow of Mayella Ewell prepared her to exploit a completely innocent man.

He was the only one who ever treated her with any decency, and so she wanted to treat him like a man but the rules of our society claim that he is not a man he is a " nigger". She tempted a Negro, which means that she is a " nigger lover", and inter-racial partnerships are not allowed, (although not illegal, as it used to be in South Africa under apartheid, people in such

relationships would be ostracised; perhaps in cities such as New York, it may have been ok, but certainly not in Harper's semi-rural community in the south of America). In her circumstances it is understandable that she is driven by depression and desperation to make sexual advances on Tom. As Atticus explains it, in doing so, " She has committed no crime, she has merely broken a rigid and time-honoured code of our society.

She knew full well the enormity of her offence, but because her desires were stronger than the code she was breaking, she persisted in breaking it. " This shows the pity Atticus gives her, mainly because she is the victim not only of her father but also of the intolerance and prejudice of her society. She lies in court, but Tom's intelligence and skill enable him to avoid accusing Mayella directly of lying; instead he uses the words, " She must be mistaken in her mind. Atticus says in court, " You know the truth, and the truth is this: some Negro's lie, some Negro's are immoral, some Negro men are not to be trusted around women-black or white.

But this is a truth that applies to the whole human race and to no particular race of men. " After several hours' deliberation Tom is found guilty, but Atticus says, " Tom was condemned entirely on account of racial prejudice. " The way Tom stays so calm throughout the court case seems quite fictional. However Tom cannot escape or fight the prejudice against him, and the only thing he can do is run away from it, and from this Tom is shot dead while attempting to escape. Treatment And Structure The above examinations of the themes and characters in each book do much to demonstrate how each author treats the concepts of alienation and prejudice. There are clearly

similarities and differences and these can be better explained by exploring some of the main issues.

Probably the most striking comparison is the way each author treats the core subject of alienation. George Eliot explores regarding alienation and only has very limited background to prejudice. She explores three main types of alienation. The first one she explains is Silas' exile from the Lantern Yard community; this is established to be total alienation.

She then clarifies the less severe alienation of simply being a stranger within the new and suspicious community, born out of ignorance and prejudice against strangers in Raveloe. Her third example is regarding self-inflicted alienation. This is not wanting to unite with others. In contrast with this, Harper Lee examines alienation from a society wide point of view.

She looks at how two individuals are alienated arising out of the prejudice against them. Although their two persons (Boo and Tom) are individually alienated, this arises due to the membership of socially unacceptable groups (the Radley family and the black community). The overall storylines of both books are quite enthralling. Harper Lee's view of the story is something which goes on in everyday humanity, and is rather realistic. Harper Lee grew up in a time where racial hatred was stirred up by the Ku Klux Klan.

Whereas George Eliot novel is somewhat too extreme. People isolating themselves from society is something which would only happen in rare instances. The book also has a " fairy tale" plot within, this is Eppies arrival. In addition to this George Eliot demonstrates how alienation can be overcome, whereas in To Kill A Mockingbird, it tends to show that alienation

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is ever-present and inescapable. George Eliot lived in a period of time when women's suffrage was a big issue.

From this she must have had first hand experience of prejudice and alienation both within a group. She had to go by the pen name of "George Eliot" as women in that time were seen as the blacks were in America, and women writers were distinguished to not be talented enough to write proper novels. Harper Lee however grew up in a time where prejudice was a key issue, but never experienced it herself. Harper Lee's novel is semi-autobiographical, as she is writing from direct experience.

She had her own childhood experiences as the daughter of a lawyer in Alabama, and together with her elder brother and childhood friend, Lee enjoyed many of the small town adventures depicted in the novel. The novel is written in first person narrative. It may seem that there are drawbacks to this as the didactic knowledge may be limited, but this role in the novel is filled by Atticus. In first person narrative the reader of the novel feels more involved, and it breaks down any alienation. While with "Silas Marner", the novel is written in third person narrative and it makes the reader feel alienated from the story and the characters, and it alienates the characters as well, as it talks about them as if they are objects.

Despite this Eliot adopts the persona of a humane "Silas Marner" is based over a much longer time period than "To Kill A Mockingbird". "Silas Marner" displays the changes which can happen during a lifetime, and explains the story by using flashbacks. By doing this, the novel is able to skip a lot of time. Both books are divided into two parts. In "Silas Marner", plenty of time

is missed especially between part one and part two, while in "To Kill A Mockingbird" the connection between parts one and two are not immediately obvious.

Part two is well unified in itself, since it is almost concerned with the Robinson trial. Part one, however, contains a wide variety of events based on a much smaller time span.