

From rags to riches:  
comparing job to  
george eliot's silas  
manner



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Whether it be getting a cold or losing a loved one, suffering is something everyone will experience. Ironically, suffering is one of the main reasons we have happiness; although we suffer, eventually our pain will be resolved. Many stories have been created based on this concept, like the story of Job in the Old Testament, for example. Job's faith was tested by God, and after enduring great pain and loss, Job's life was restored when he proved his faith to be true. A book demonstrating this idea is George Eliot's novel *Silas Marner*. In this story, Silas Marner resembles a similar scenario to that of Job's. Silas's constant loss and deep depression is eventually healed with the arrival of Eppie, just like how Job's trials were ended when he proved that he could keep his faith in God. Silas Marner channels the earlier figure of Job through his suffering, loss, and redemption.

The first way in which Silas represents Job is through the suffering Silas experiences in the story. In the beginning of the novel, Silas is betrayed by his "friend" William Dane, left by his wife Sarah who then marries William Dane, and is later cut off from the church, so that he feels as though he has been betrayed by his friends, family, and most importantly God. Not even the omniscient and all-powerful loving God wants Silas in his life, Silas concludes. The narrator remarks on Silas's loneliness, saying, " Thus it came to pass that his movement of pity towards Sally Oates, which had given him a transient sense of brotherhood, heightened the repulsion between him and his neighbors, and made his isolation more complete" (Eliot 16). Silas begins to sympathize with Sally Oates, a lady struck with heart disease, he realizes how alone he really is. He is completely and utterly shut off from any being. Another quote also demonstrates Silas's loneliness and suffering. Eliot

compares Silas's life to that of an insect, saying, " There were the calls of hunger; and Silas, in his solitude, had to provide his own breakfast, dinner, and supper, to fetch his own water from the well, and put his own kettle on the fire; and all these immediate promptings helped, along with the weaving, to reduce his life to the unquestioning activity of a spinning insect" (Eliot 14). Silas's life is compared to an insect because he essentially feels useless and helpless in the world. He has no one to go to and no one will receive him. He does these tedious tasks with no help which shows that he is like a robot mindlessly doing work with no real sense of purpose. The suffering that is brought up from his separation from society must be nearly unbearable for Silas. But this suffering that Silas experiences also represents the suffering of Job in the Bible. In Job's second trial, he is plagued with painful boils and sores in order to test his faith towards God. The Bible states, " So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head" (New International Version, Job 2: 7). Job has to withstand this agony from Satan, and yet still keeps his faith in God. Both Job and Silas's situations are similar, however, Job endures a more physical suffering while Silas experiences a mental and emotional suffering.

The second way in which Silas portrays Job is through Silas's loss. As aforementioned, Silas loses his family, friends, and faith right at the beginning of the story. The narrator describes these losses, saying, " Poor Marner, went out with that despair in his soul—that shaken trust in man which is little short of madness to a loving nature...her whole faith must be upset, as his was" (Eliot 11). Right as he discovers that both his friend and

God have betrayed him, he concludes that his own fiancée will leave him as well. This short sequence of losing everything he has draws Silas away from happiness and leaves him in despair. In that period of time when he had absolutely no one to go to, Silas clings on to his money as it becomes literally the only thing that he cares about in his life. This money, which is basically Silas's family, is stolen by Dustan Cass. Eliot describes Silas's pain when finding out his money is lost, saying, " He could see every object in his cottage—and his gold was not there. Again he put his trembling hands to his head, and gave a wild wringing scream, the cry of desolation" (Eliot 41).

When Silas realizes that his money has been stolen, he cries as if he had just lost a family member. At this point Silas has absolutely nothing: no friends, no family, no faith, and none of his own meaningful belongings. Similarly to how Silas loses everything, Job also experiences the same situation. In Job's first trial, all of his animals and siblings are taken away from him by Satan. " A messenger came to Job and said, ' The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabbeans attacked and carried them off'...The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants...Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you" (New International Version, Job 1: 14-19). In these verses, it describes all the possessions and loved ones that Job loses as part of his test. His animals, servants, and family are all taken from him, similarly to how Silas's family, friends, faith, and possessions were taken from him. Both Job and Silas are left in despair as they lose all that is meaningful to them.

<https://assignbuster.com/from-rags-to-riches-comparing-job-to-george-eliot-silas-marner/>

One final way in which Silas is similar to Job involves the redemption that they both eventually receive. For Silas, he regains his happiness through his encounter with Eppie. Once Silas finds Eppie and comes to care for her, he realizes he does not need his money, he just needs someone to love to find happiness. Once Eppie comes into his life, Silas begins to assimilate into society. Eliot symbolizes his acceptance into the community with the pipe, saying, " Silas had taken to smoking a pipe daily during the last two years, having been strongly urged to it by the sages of Raveloe" (Eliot 143). This pipe symbolizes his assimilation because it shows that he is doing things that are also done by the community, and that he is finally fitting in with society. After Part II of the novel begins, we see that Silas has changed very much over the 16 years he has had with Eppie. He is now a family man, has a daughter, a home filled with pets, friends in his town, restored faith, etc. After going through so much suffering and loss, Eppie brings him back and redeems him from his misery. In fact, at the end of the story, Eppie exclaims, " Oh Father, what a pretty home ours is! I think nobody could be happier than we are" (Eliot 183). This is an amazing comeback for Silas. At the beginning of the book we see that he is in the darkest place of his life, but at the end, however, he is described as the happiest man alive. This transition shows the redemption the Silas finally gets, and it represents the same redemption the Job acquires. In the Bible, after Job has lost all his over ones, suffered extremely painful boils and sores, he is finally redeemed by God. Job keeping his faith strong is the key to his redemption, like Eppie is for Silas. When Job remains faithful, God restores his family and belongings, even more than what he had before. The Bible states, " After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he

<https://assignbuster.com/from-rags-to-riches-comparing-job-to-george-eliot-silas-marner/>

had before. All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house...The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the former part...Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers" (New International Version, Job 42: 10-15). This passage shows Job's redemption for keeping his faith. Similar to Silas, Job had nothing left, but kept his faith strong, which ultimately led to his restoration. So both Silas and Job experience redemption, Silas finding it through Eppie, and Job finding it through God.

Throughout both Silas Marner and the book of Job, we see two men who both lose everything, and experience great suffering. Both Silas and Job lose their friends, family, faith, and belongings, with the exception of Job keeping his faith. Both endure very hard suffering: Silas deals with great depression and loneliness, while Job is afflicted with boils and sores all over his body. All of these things show the similarities between the two stories, supporting the argument that Silas Marner by George Eliot is a clear re-portrayal of the story of Job. Although they struggle, both Silas and Job are eventually redeemed in the end.