

# "silas marner" and "to kill a mockingbird" essay



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In response to the claim that all outsiders in fiction are oppressed victims rather than strong non-conformists I have compared two novels, featuring one or more outsider, ' Silas Marner' by George Eliot and ' To Kill a Mocking Bird' by Harper Lee. The claim has some measure of truth in that, at the beginning of the novel, Silas Marner is very much an oppressed victim in the town of Raveloe, another example that backs up the claim is Boo Radley from ' To Kill a Mocking Bird' he is introduced as a rejected and isolated outsider and by the end he is still not comfortable in the company of the rest of the town. However, the claim is disproved because a very strong individual and is no longer oppressed. More evidence that invalidates the claim is the Finch family; they are obviously outsiders but clearly are not weak and oppressed.

Before even getting to know him well, the people of Raveloe reject Silas Marner as being strange and different. This immediate exclusion due to his reputation makes it impossible for Marner to become an active member of the Society.

"(The Raveloe woman) would never marry a dead man come to life again".

This quote shows that the women of Raveloe could not possibly accept Marner because they have heard of these strange, deathlike trances he is prone to. These trances used to make Marner an even greater part of his old community but just serve to isolate him from his new home town.

Silas tries to become a member of the Community but the harder he tries to reach out to people the further he isolates himself.

"... his movement of pity towards Sally Oates, which had given him a transient sense of brotherhood, heightened the repulsion between him and his neighbours, and made his isolation more complete."

Just as Marner thought he was a part of the 'brotherhood' he becomes more isolated than ever. When he helps Sally Oates, suddenly the whole town are asking for his help, this gives him the centre stage for a short time, but when they find that he cannot help everybody they feel even further from him and think of him as incompetent.

Eventually, Silas gives up on the dream of being accepted and his love for the town turns to hate, he blames the villagers for his situation and this only makes his predicament decline further.

"He hated the thought of the past; there was nothing that called out his love and fellowship towards the strangers he had come amongst; and the future was all dark, for there was no unseen love that cared for him".

Silas holds the whole village in utter contempt and has lost all will to establish himself in the town, as there is no-one out there, no 'unseen love', it is nearly impossible for Silas to ever be liked and respected again. This evidence supports the claim as it shows Silas Marner to be named as an outsider by the village and put into a downward spiral of isolation and bitterness.

However, Silas does not stay an 'oppressed outsider' for ever, one day a young girl arrives on his doorstep and he takes her in and cares for her, this new obsession replaces his lust for money, which served only to isolate him

further, with a new found humanity which gives Marner a whole new outlook on life and radically changes his personality.

Although he remains an outsider and different from the average villagers of Raveloe, he is now a much stronger person and is no longer oppressed and patronised by the town.

“ Marner took her on his lap, trembling with an emotion mysterious to himself, at something unknown dawning on his life”.

By describing the emotion Silas is feeling as ‘ mysterious to himself’ shows that he is changing emotionally, he has never felt these emotions before and it is bringing about a massive change in Silas’ life.

“ Eppie was an object compacted of changes and hopes that forced his thoughts onward.... Carried them away to new things that would come.”

Here the author is emphasising that it is the finding of Eppie that is changing Marner’s life. He is thinking of the future and now it is bright and full of near and different experiences, Silas is out of depression and is thinking more positively.

“ Reawakening his senses with her fresh life even to the old winterflies that cam crawling forther in the early spring sunshine, and warming him into joy because she had joy”. Again Eppie is being blamed for Marner’s newfound happiness he has something to live for now, someone who loves him, and as long as he has Eppie his life will continue to improve.

“ As her life unfolded, his soul, long stupefied into a cold narrow prison, was unfolding too, and trembling gradually into full consciousness.”

The author is using a metaphor here, she describes Silas' past life as being trapped in his depression and hate for the villagers, he was in a ' cold narrow prison' but now that Eppie has arrived he is able to escape his dark emotion and embrace his new optimistic life of happiness and joy. Silas is no longer weak and unsure of himself but is now very much a strong non-conformist, this goes to refute the original claim that, as an outsider, Silas must be weak and oppressed.

The most conclusive piece of evidence that goes to disprove the claim is the Finch family from Harper Lee's " To Kill a Mocking Bird". This includes Jem and Scout, but most importantly, Atticus. He is a lawyer living in Maycomb and is given the job of defending a black man, Tom Robinson, in court. The county expect Atticus to simply go through the motions as it can not possibly be that. Tom Robinson is innocent, because he is black.

“ The state has not produced one iota of medical evidence to the effect that the Crime Tom Robinson is charged with ever took place”.

This shows that Atticus has much higher moral standards than the rest of Maycomb, Atticus is not just going to stand by and watch Tom Robinson get convicted of a crime he did not commit simply because he is black, Atticus is going to defend him with all his available strength. This courtroom is a microcosm for Atticus' real life, he must constantly defend himself against the other villagers just as he is defending Tom Robinson. (Atticus describes

Tom Robinson) – “ a quiet respectable humble Negro who had the unmitigated temerity to ‘ feel sorry’ for a white woman.”

This is also a very outrageous and controversial statement for Atticus to make, he is describing the black man favourably while describing the white woman as being arrogant, and in effect is saying that the black man is better than the white woman! This was simply not acceptable in Maycomb as blacks were thought of as inferior. Atticus is attacking the whole country’s social structure, this evidence proves without doubt that Atticus is a very strong-minded person who holds his own standards that are very different from the rest of the town, therefore he is a strong non-conformist.

“ Aunt Alexandra fitted into the world of Maycomb like a hand into a glove but never into the world of Jem and me” (Scout)

Aunt Alexandra fits into the town of Maycomb well because she is very much like the people there, but she does not fit in with the Finches because they are not like the people of Maycomb, they are different and do not fit in there. This proves that, to the eyes of the townsfolk, the Finch family are separated from the rest of society.

“ ‘ She (Aunt Alexandra) wants to talk to you about the family and what it’s meant to Maycomb county ...so that you might be moved to behave accordingly.’ My father never thought these thoughts, never spoke so.”

Atticus has called Aunt Alexandra in to try and make the children grow up to be true members of Maycomb county but Scout knows that that is not what Atticus really wants. He really wants the children to grow up how they

choose and as responsible adults and not just follow the lead of Maycomb; he does not like everything about their ways and does not want his children to grow up like that. This shows that the Finches are outsiders but are anything but weak and oppressed.

Boo Radley is the one exception that prevents the claim from being completely wrong, all the other outsiders are, or become, very strong and not weak outcasts of the main town, but boo starts off weak and never changes fully. He is the only outsider that is, and remains, weak and oppressed.

" She (Mrs Radley) .. lost most of her teeth, her hair, and her right forefinger...(Boo bit it off one night when he couldn't find any cats and squirrels to eat)" from gossip in the town mixed with a child's wild imagination, Jem and Scout have painted this horrible picture of what the Radley family must look like. They are so isolated from the rest of the town that little is known about them and they are assumed to be some sort of freaks. How can they be described as anything other than isolated, oppressed victims of the town's vicious and unkind nature?

" Jem gave a reasonable description of Boo...he dined on raw squirrels and any cats he could catch.... what teeth he had were yellow and rotten...and he drooled most of the time."

It is not the entire Radley family who are seen as freaks but more specifically Boo is targeted for abuse. He is seen as some vile, uncontrolled animal that attacks his parents and eats raw meat for food. There cannot be anyone more oppressed than Boo Radley.

“ An expression of timid curiosity was on his face, as though he had never seen a boy’s face before...every move he made was uncertain.”

Here Boo has saved Jem and Scout’s lives and suddenly everyone is paying attention to him, but still he is not comfortable in the presence of the rest of the town. Boo has been isolated his whole life and has no experience when it comes to people, it is now too late for Boo to learn the skills required and change himself sufficiently to become a member of society. He is and will always be an isolated figure of fun for the rest of Maycomb.

The claim that “ all outsiders are oppressed victims rather than strong non-conformists” is false because in the majority of cases the outsiders are in fact strong and self-confident. This is backed up by the two characters I have studied: Silas Marner and Atticus Finch. Although Silas Marner starts off weak he does change to become stronger. However the claim does have some measure of truth in that Boo Radley is an oppressed figure of fun for Maycomb throughout the novel “ To Kill a Mockingbird”.