

George Elliot- how
sympathy is created
for silas marner the
eponymous character



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Mary Anne Evans was born in 1819 near Aubrey, the youngest child of the local priest Robert Evans, she was highly educated and first developed her career writing pieces for Blackwoods magazine and went on to write her first book in that was a translation of Strauss's life of Christ in 1846. Being a determined woman writer in a society ruled by men, where women writers weren't accepted; Mary developed a false name, George Elliot, to enable her to have her wonderful books published. She went on to write many more novels, two of these great novels Felix halt the Radical (1866) and Daniel Deronda (1874-7). Although her shortest it was and still is one of her most loved novels, Silas Marner which was published in 1861 during the Victorian period, a time of strict values and traditional religious beliefs.

Unlike most the other writers of her time, who wrote about the upper classes, Elliot wrote about a lonely linen weaver that lived exiled in the rural village of Raveloe. Elliot had humanistic views and felt empathetic towards the lower classes. Another great writer who shared her views, which Elliot quotes at the start of her book, was Wordsworth. Silas Marner the eponymous character leaves his first home in lantern Yard when he is found guilty of stealing the church's money, feeling cheated by God and his best friend he leaves home and moves to the rural village of Raveloe, leaving behind religion and his social character and becomes exiled and isolated in his cottage home for 15 years. Causing suspicion and speculation, he doesn't try to mix with the community and they knew no more about him 15 years on than they did the day he arrived, and so treat him like an outcast. This reflects the struggles that Elliot faces during her life after becoming a fallen woman, she also is treated as an outcast and isn't accepted in society, also

the small similarities that they both have as they both wear glasses and she knows what it is like to stare at things and how this may seem strange to other people, but is completely normal.

Elliot uses money as a major plot line for this novel; she shows how rejection of one thing leads to the love of money and how having too much can lead to certain consequences when having to deal with it. She is trying to show the reader that money doesn't have to play a part in happiness and that sometimes not having it can make you happier. At the start of the novel Elliot tells us about the village of Raveloe, she talks in the first person to include the reader, firstly she shows it is a traditional village " old echoes lingered undrowned by new voices" she explains that even the ' new' younger generation hasn't changed the village and that it still is very much the same as it has always been. Raveloe is from the rich central plain and Elliot who knew about it so well from her childhood describes it as " Merry England" which shows it is a luscious rural area that is close to nature, this gives it a bright sunny feeling and makes it seem warm and inviting. Elliot also gives the sense that it is a comfortable village, describing it as " nestled in a snug, well-wooded hollow", which makes it feel safe and secure and cosy but also seems like a creature hibernating so gives the impression that maybe it is sleepy and innocent of what is going on in the world around them.

The people of Raveloe liked to display their wealth, and although the church is described as the ' centre Of the community' it is only frequently visited by its members who look upon it from their homes, admiring its grandness of ' large brick and stone' from their homes. ' Orchards and ornamental

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weathercocks' stood proudly on their rooftops; Elliot is using irony here to show that the people displayed their wealth on their houses. Elliot does show however that everyone is equal as she says " there is no manor house in the vicinity" this expresses that no one is more important than the other, even if there is different levels of wealth. She also portrays a relaxed attitude towards work and that the villagers enjoyed religious holidays,' a jolly Whitsun and Easter tide'. Silas Marner moves to Raveloe in 1805 and Elliot talks about him 15 years on still living in Raveloe. The book shows that he hasn't changed the impression of the neighbouring villagers living around him it says " and the years rolled on without producing any change in the impressions of the neighbours concerning Marner".

Elliot is showing that the impression that people had when he first moved to Raveloe that he was strange and odd and this perception remained 15 years on. The villagers found Silas' unexplained perfect weaving a suspicion " the shepherd himself...

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" they believed that his immaculate weaving was helped on by the devil, so he was thought of as evil, this again gives the reader a bad impression of him. Elliot goes on to portray Marner as a rather odd peculiar person as she describes his physical appearance, ' he has a pale face and ' brown pechewberent eyes'; she also calls him a ' palid young man'. In saying the dog barked at him the reader assumes that he was quite unbearable to look at. The writer also gives the impression that he is quite scruffy and scrawny he is described as ' undersized' making him seem abnormal, also giving the reader reason to <https://assignbuster.com/george-elliot-how-sympathy-is-created-for-silas-marner-the-eponymous-character/>

think badly about him. At this point although we know about him being falsely accused of stealing money, it is hard for the reader to fully understand him, as he isn't presented in a very likeable way.

Another main reason why they believed he was weird because of his fits that he got into, she describes his eyes as unexampled, making the reader think he is confused or thinking deeply about something. When Mr Marcy sees Silas in a fit he tells the other villagers about it, saying that his soul must be going loose from his body “ like bird out of its nest and back “. There were other stories made up about Marner that he could cast bad spells and so on, this links with the thought of him being evil at the start as evil people cast spells. Elliot also mentions that boys from the village were scared of him because he was different and looked strange, “ a half fearful fascination for the Raveloe boys” they found him scary but were also quite fascinated because of the stories they had heard about him. When Silas was ever interrupted by the boys while working “ he would fix on them a gaze that was always enough to make them take to their legs in terror” he would glare at them but because of the stories about spells they were petrified, these weren't only fears about the children believed but the adults also believed the stories about him.

Elliot portrays these prejudices the people of Raveloe believed to make the reader feel sympathetic towards Silas and tried to put across that these weren't true but still existed in real life and in the novel. Elliot wanted ordinary people to be able to reflect the novel to every day life and the prejudices that exist; this is why it still appeals to the readers today as much as when it was first published. Elliot implies that the two towns Lantern Yard <https://assignbuster.com/george-elliot-how-sympathy-is-created-for-silas-marner-the-eponymous-character/>

and Raveloe are very different, “ nothing could be more unlike the native town, set within sight of the wide spread hillsides than this low wooden region”. He is saying that Raveloe was lovely and green but Raveloe is lovely and green but Lantern Yard was not. Elliot describes the church in Lantern Yard, when Silas went there as a young man, “ the white-washed walls; the little pews”, this whole description presents to the reader a close religious community.

His best friend William Dane cheated him setting him up to so he was falsely accused of stealing money. He remained determined that God would clear him, as he knew he was innocent but when the lots were drawn he was found guilty. Silas felt that his trust in God was gone “ poor Marner went out with that despair in his soul- that shaken trust in God “. He went to Raveloe and became isolated, keeping himself to himself, living alone in a small cottage.

He had lost his faith in humanity and God because they had both let him down; this is when the reader really begins to understand him and feels sympathy for him. Marner saved lots of Gold and silver over the years working in Raveloe he got paid mainly in gold for his woven linen pieces but only used his shillings and sixpences for food and necessities, this shows that he is sacrificing himself to only having as little as possible just for the sake of saving his money. He gets so taken up about saving and keeping his money that when he breaks a brown pot he sticks the bit together and keeps it even though it is of no use, this shows he still has sentimental feelings not that he couldn't buy another pot. He becomes obsessive about his money making himself 2 leather bags to securely hold the money in, so he had something to <https://assignbuster.com/george-elliot-how-sympathy-is-created-for-silas-marner-the-eponymous-character/>

look forward to at night “ the habit of looking towards the money and grasping it”, holding the money showed him he had achieved something, he got a fulfilment from the effort he produced to make the linen. When he left Lantern Yard he also left religion behind and being part of a community so he converted his love of those things to the love of money, which he treasured even though it served no purpose.

In Lantern Yard “ of his weekly earning a large proportion had gone to objects of piety and charity” this is why he loved his money even more now because it was all for him and he wanted to hold on to it. Elliot is showing how a love for money almost becomes greed and is all Silas desperately lives for, this makes the reader feel sorry for Marner as he has nothing good in his life, and works all the time and lives for money that he has piled up but doesn't spend. When Silas' money is stolen by Dunstan the Squires younger son the villagers soften towards Silas and they feel sorry for him. They realise that Silas is just the same as the rest of them and that had lost a lot of gold that he treasured, this also confirms to the reader that he is completely normal. They try to find his money and the thief that has taken it, as he sits inside in despair over losing what he loved best.

Elliot tries to show the reader that the villagers aren't as heartless as they first may have seemed. It also makes the reader able to relate to him more than they had first been able to do so. The arrival of Eppie is the first time that the reader sees Silas take a real liking to someone else, he shows he is affectionate and humanistic. When he first sees her ' golden hair' he thinks that somehow his money may have returned scattered over the floor,”

instead of the hard coin with the familiar resisting outline, his fingers encountered soft warm curls”.

Then he thinks it could be his little sister “ whom he carried about in his arms for a year before she died”, Eppie reminds him of his little sister that had died as she looked just like her to Silas, this makes the reader feel sadness for what Silas had to go through. He then thought he was in a dream because it seemed so unremarkable to him, immediately he began to care for the child,” his porridge which had got cool by the dying fire, would do to feed the child if it were only warmed up a little” he surprises the reader as he is for the first time so caring and gentle. Silas says he wants to keep the child as he found her and is granted permission to do so by Godfrey, Eppie’s real father who is relieved that his first wife has died so he could marry his desired wife Nancy. He doesn’t acknowledge the child for another 15 years, until he needs someone to take the family inheritance and he knows that his wife can’t have children. Silas brings up Eppie as his own daughter lovingly with help of Dolly Winthrop, and Godfrey who gives him money to bring Eppie up and renovate their house. At this later part of the novel Silas is a happy man a no longer longs for his money, and the readers feelings change towards him and empathy is felt rather than sympathy.

Later Dunstan’s body is discovered along with Silas’ money and although he gets it back, he no longer wants the money in the same desperate way he did earlier, he had Eppie now and didn’t need to have money to love as he had her and she fulfilled all his happiness. Later still when Godfrey goes to Silas’ house to tell his daughter that she is rightfully his and not Silas’, the reader begins to feel sorry for Silas again thinking that he will loose her.

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Elliot shows that it is a really brave thing for Silas to let Eppie choose if she wanted to go with her real father, as he knew that he was offering her more than he ever could, but he had brought her up and didn't want to let her go. Her saying that she wanted to stay with him soothes both Silas' and the reader's minds as they can see that he is getting something good despite all the knockbacks he has had in the past. To conclude Elliot used many effective techniques to create sympathy for Silas Marner; there is a lot of dramatic terminology when Silas is accused of doing something when really he is innocent.

Elliot was expressing that large amounts of money don't make anyone completely happy. It was set prior to the industrial revolution, and so making the villagers seem old-fashioned compared to the reader. Elliot also uses irony to ridicule the country folk, as they are suspicious of everything that Silas does when he first arrives. Elliot shows how life and attitudes are changing throughout the novel. When Silas tells Eppie about how he used to count his money and how 'his soul was utterly desolate'.

This is when he finds a fulfilment in other human beings. Silas also comes to believe that God was good to him for feeling dishonestly of what had happened earlier. Elliot shows that money doesn't make anyone a better person or let you have the best, at the end the Squire had no one to give his inheritance to so it was of no use to him, just as Silas' money was of no use to him when he never spent it. Elliot also uses things such as the weather to add impact, like when he goes outside to look at the snow Eppie comes to him.