

The themes of
outsider in 'silas
manner' and 'to kill a
mockingbird'



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' Silas Marner' and ' To Kill a Mockingbird' were written at different times but both were written at the height of great change in the world. Eliot wrote ' Silas Marner' in 1861, but set it at the earlier time of the 1820s, during the Industrial Revolution, and similarly, Harper Lee wrote ' To Kill a Mockingbird' at the height of the Civil Rights protests in America during the 1960s but she too had her novel set at an earlier time of the 1930s, when segregation in America was still the normal way of life for South Americans.

' Silas Marner' is a weaver who comes to live in the countryside village of Raveloe after he was wrongly accused of stealing a dying man's money in his hometown of Lantern Yard. The fact that he was wrongly accused destroys his faith in God and sees him depart from this town and to Raveloe to start a new life. However, it seems that his loss in faith is replaced by greed when he starts collecting his gold and counting it every evening.

To the people of Raveloe, where everyone knows each other, the arrival of Silas into their village makes them view him as a stranger and sees him as an outsider, something which Silas does nothing to discourage, never to be seen socialising with any of them or inviting anybody into his home. ' To Kill a Mockingbird' tells the story of a young girl, Scout, and her brother, Jem, in a small town called Maycomb, in the southern state of Alabama. They live with the difficulties life brings them, including the unpopularity of their father, Atticus, and the effects it has on them, when he defends a Negro, Tom Robinson against a rape charge.

Although Atticus fights to defend Tom, the outcome will inevitably be the same even though Atticus fought so much to prove that Tom is clearly not

guilty. This was due to the time this novel was set in and the discrimination against the blacks that was part of everyday life in the southern states of America. The narration in the two novels is very different. Eliot uses an omniscient narrator to create a distance from her readers " In the days when the spinning-wheels hummed busily in the farmhouses", immediately distancing us in the opening of the ' Silas Marner'.

This enables the anonymous speaker to describe exactly what the characters see, think and feel. In comparison, ' To Kill a Mockingbird' is narrated by one of the characters, Scout. Using a young girl to narrate the novel, we get a child's view of what is taking place, but with the innocence of a child. Also, the innocence and naivety of Scout gives us the story with gaps, as Scout does not really understand some of the things that are happening around her. This adds to the naive narrative, which Harper Lee has so cleverly used to make the reader fill in the missing pieces to make us think about what is going on.

The two novels have a similar structure in the fact that they both have two parts. However, ' Silas Marner' opens fifteen years after Silas arrived in Raveloe and then flashes back to his life in Lantern Yard to tell us the events that led him to leave it. Following this, the novel continues with Silas living in Raveloe and has his money stolen and ' replaced' in the form of Eppie, and subsequently leaps sixteen years in the second part of the novel to when Eppie is eighteen years old.

This leap shows us just how Eppie's presence in Silas's life has changed him and caused him to come out and interact with the community. Alternatively

Harper Lee's narrative structure is retrospective with Scout starting at the end of the story "When he was nearly thirteen my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow" and then going back three years to tell the story "when I was six and Jem was ten", telling it in chronological order. This structure makes the reader instantly start to think about Boo at the beginning of the novel when the three children are looking back at the events "he said it began ... when Dill first gave us the idea of making Boo Radley come out", making readers question who Boo is and what he has done for him not to come out.

At the time of writing this novel, George Eliot, along with other writers, including Charles Dickens, was concerned about the effects of the Industrial Revolution on the people living in the rural areas of England, and so in 'Silas Marner' she recreates an old fashioned village life in Raveloe, describing it as "a village where many of the old echoes lingered", creating this fictional village to resemble life as it was, and should be, unaffected by industrialisation.

The Revolution brought about fears of people from the countryside moving to the towns and cities, and through this, losing their community spirit as they would not know anybody else and would probably stop going to church and lose their sense of faith and religion. As a person who grew up surrounded by the effects of segregation throughout her childhood and much of her grown up life, Harper Lee wrote 'To Kill a Mockingbird' just as many individuals began to protest for Civil Rights for the black population of America.

Although at first sight, she does not seem to support the protest, Harper Lee does in fact support it, and through this novel, she is doing so. It would have been unrealistic for the jury to find Tom Robinson guilty, due to the time the novel was set in, but the way she has the character of Atticus fight Tom's case shows that he is clearly innocent of the charge.

As the readers we are left to see this verdict is wrong and occurred this way due to Tom's skin colour, " Attics had used every tool available to free men to save Tom Robinson, but in the secret courts of men's hearts Attics had no case", so no matter how well the case was argued, Tom would have always been found guilty owing to the personal prejudices existing in this period of time. Personal prejudices also affected the outsiders in this novel.

Having been locked up in his home for so many years, Arthur Radley becomes the object of many rumours in the small town of Maycomb, and becomes known as ' Boo' by many of the folks through the over-exaggerations of his features and characteristics by some of his ' neighbours'. The rumours such as one told by the local gossip, Miss Stephanie Crawford where " she woke up in the middle of the night and found him looking in the window at her" fuels the imagination of the impressionable Scout and her brother, Jem and prompts them to think about him and his features more.

They build a picture in their minds of Boo, and believe him to be a monster-like figure, " his hands were blood-stained... a long jagged scar that ran across his face... his eyes popped out and he drooled most of the time", without ever having seen him before. Likewise, the folk in Raveloe view Silas

as an outsider due to their personal discriminations against newcomers to the village and " a settler, if he came from distant parts, hardly ever ceased to be viewed with a remnant of distrust".

I think that Eliot uses the character of Silas Marner to represent those of the town as people living in the towns and cities would have probably have kept themselves to themselves as Silas Marner did in Raveloe', "... those scattered linen-weavers-emigrants from the town into the country- were to the last regarded as aliens by their rustic neighbours". There are clear social divisions in both novels, which add to the theme of outsiders. This is illustrated in ' Silas Marner' by the fact that when they are drinking and in the Rainbow, the upper class are found sitting closest to the fire or in a different room from the working class.

The Casses are greatly admired, " the greatest man in Raveloe was Squire Cass" and socialise with the Osgoods and the Lammeters, two highly respectable families. Below these families in the social division in Raveloe lie the working folks such as Ben and Dolly Winthrop, good honest people who try their best to get by. However, Silas Marner does not fit into any of these groups due to him having a special skill of weaving and so he is considered as an outsider.

Similarly, Maycomb is divided up into clearly defined social groups: " the ordinary folk like us and the neighbours", the white middle class who's families have been around for along time; " the kind like the Cunninghams", who are the farmers who were badly hit by the Great Depression; " the kind like the Ewells", the lowest class of white people who are considered as "

white trash" and "the Negroes", the black community who would automatically be seen as the lowest of the social division in Southern America.

In spite of this, it seems that the Ewells are lower than the black community in this novel as with Tom Robinson helping Mayella to bust up a chiffarobe, "Mr Ewell didn't seem to help her none, and neither did the chillun", because he felt sorry for her. The social divisions make up a key part of the story, as there would be no case if no social boundaries had been crossed with Tom feeling sorry for Mayella. Another important issue in that occurs in both novels is religion. Religion rules a great part of life and in these cases it is the cause for life changing incidents.

Incidentally, both novels show two types of religion and in both cases it is the stricter of the two, which form the basis of the changes that come about.

Lantern Yard was of strongly religious environment for the young Silas Marner and so the weaver was deeply religious and let his faith guide him and to a certain extent rule his life until the day when he was wrongly accused of stealing some money. Even then, such was his faith in God that he believed "God will clear me", which he repeats again when he realises who had committed the crime.

In comparison to the religion practiced in Lantern Yard, religion in Raveloe is not very strict. Namely, the church in Raveloe is seen as the social meeting point for the villagers. Arriving in Raveloe, Silas has lost his faith and lives his life alone without any real communication with the people living there.

Working on his weaving all day, everyday, Silas gains a lot of money and "

no man expected a share of them, and he loved no man that he should offer a share", whereas in the past it is likely he would have been saving up to marry Sarah and giving some of his money to the church in Lantern Yard.

So, for the first time Silas has money all for himself and hence he starts saving it and collecting it. As he does not really need a lot of money to live quite comfortably by himself, he ends up collecting a lot of it. It is ironic that Silas Marner should turn to collecting and counting his gold, as this greed would have been seen as a great sin, so as a result of his exclusion of the church in Lantern Yard, he has turned to one of the seven deadly sins of greed.

In the same way, the strict religion of Mr Radley, " a foot-washing Baptist" was the origin for Arthur ' Boo' Radley's imprisonment in his own home. " Foot-washers believe that anything that's pleasure is sin", so when Arthur Radley got acquainted with the wrong sort of people and got into a drunken joy-riding spree in his youth, his father has been punishing him for the rest of his life. The different churches in Maycomb are also used as the means for which Jem and Scout meet other Negroes except Calpurnia by going to the black church ' First Purchase'.

From the time he moved to Raveloe, the villagers have considered Silas Marner as an outsider. This is primarily to do with him being new to the village, and the people of Raveloe are noted for their routine and their lack of change, so when a newcomer arrives in their home village they do not really like it. Also, the fact that he has a skill intimidates the villagers as it shows a

sign of someone being more intellectual than them, and so for this reason they view him as an outsider.

Marner's appearance was also a reason for him being an outsider, with the Raveloe villagers describing it as having "mysterious qualities" and "large brown protuberant eyes in Silas Marner's pale face". Yet, Silas makes no attempt to prove this wrong and even encourages his role as an outsider since "he invited no comers to cross his door-sill". He does not stop to socialise with any of the villagers "he never strolled into the village to drink a pint at the Rainbow, or to gossip at the wheelwright's", subsequently Marner kept to himself and showed no signs of needing to be with anybody.

Then again, his one attempt at contact with the community seemed to have failed when he cured Sally Oates of an illness using herbs. The population of Raveloe were surprised that Marner had knowledge of herbs "and charms if he liked to give them away" and feared that he may have been some kind of witch doctor. So, his attempt did not go as planned and made him more of an outsider, particularly when Jem Rodney made the revelation of seeing him appearing to be dead, "just as he had made up his mind that the weaver was dead, he came all right again", catching him in a cataleptic fit.

Likewise, Boo Radley has been an outsider for most of his life. Being locked up in his house since his teens, Boo has been the subject of much speculation on whether he is still alive and if so what he looks like. The children, who have never seen him and have only heard stories about him, are interested by him and spend a great deal of their summers playing 'Boo Radley' and trying to get him out. Contrary to Silas Marner, Boo does not

choose to be an outsider, but has been made one by the actions of his past and his strict father.

Boo is able to communicate with Jem and Scout through leaving presents for them in a tree, giving them gum, Indian-heads, little figures of themselves, a medal and a pocket watch. This set up some communication between Boo and the children, with the children not realising that it was Boo. However, Mr Nathan Radley, Boo's brother, blocks up the hole in the tree with cement because the " tree's dying" thus breaking the communication between Boo and the children. Throughout the novel Boo is helpful to Jem and Scout, without them knowing it. It is almost as if he watches out for them and protects them.

An example of this is when Boo wraps a blanket around Scout whilst she was standing outside in the cold, when Miss Maudie's house was alight. Scout does know that Boo has been near her and it takes her some time to realise that it was him when she discovers the blanket around her, " Boo Radley. You were so busy looking at the fire you didn't know it when he put the blanket around you. " Even then, due to the rumours she has grown up hearing about him, she is uneasy by the fact that he came up to her, " my stomach turned to water and I nearly threw up".

However as Scout grows up, and the court case of Tom Robinson occupies more of her thoughts, she is less afraid of Boo and starts to view him as a normal person, feeling sorry for him due to his way of life. She even goes as far as imagining a conversation with Boo, " Hidy do, Mr Arthur, I would say, as if I had said it every afternoon of my life". Scout finally meets Boo when

he saves her and Jem from Bob Ewell, and her imaginary conversation becomes a reality “ Come along, Mr Arthur... you don't know the house real well.

I'll just take you to the porch, sir”, and talks to him just as if he was a normal person whom she had spoken to before. In the same way, the character of Silas Marner goes through changes and we see the ' real' Silas Marner through his bringing up of Eppie. The discovery of Eppie in Silas's home forces Silas to go seek help and so, it is her arrival that forces Silas to interact with the villagers, “ I'm come for the doctor”, interrupting the party at the Red House to find help for Eppie's mother who he found lying in the snow by the Stone-pits.

Also, raising Eppie causes Silas to interact further with the villagers, “ the child created fresh and fresh links between his life and the lives from which he had hitherto shrunk continually into narrower isolation”, with Eppie bringing out the good qualities in him, “ warming him into joy because she had joy”. Another character that can be seen as an outsider in ' Silas Marner' is Molly Farren, Godfrey Cass' secret wife and Eppie's mother. Although she only appears once, her appearance is crucial to the novel.

Through her we see a glimpse of the hardship and poverty in the 19th century, representing the life some women endured in this period of time. She is an outsider due to her husband keeping her a secret, as there would have been an outcry if it were known that someone from such a highly respected family had married someone like Molly Farren, from the lower classes of society. We see her struggle through the snow on her way to the

Red House to reveal Godfrey's dreadful secret to his father and everyone else at the party. However Molly's addiction to opium gets the better of her.

She gradually loses her senses " slowly, the demon was working his will, and cold and weariness were his helpers", and Molly falls in the snow and dies outside Silas Marner's house. Even in death, Godfrey dismisses her as she is described as " some vagrant" of no worth by the society of Raveloe, and so Molly is given a pauper's burial. It is quite sad to see that her death went unnoticed by most people " that was all the express notice that Molly had disappeared", and makes you think how many other women passed away in a similar way. In comparison, Dolphus Raymond is an outsider in ' To Kill a Mockingbird' because he chooses to be.

The white community of Maycomb looks down on him, as he is a white man who lives with a black woman and their children. However he is able to lead a good life without the help of local people because he is rich " he owns all one side of the riverbank down there", and does seem bothered by what people think of him or his family. That is to say he even gives them a reason for his way of life, " Dolphus Raymond's in the clutches of whisky- that's why he won't change his ways", hiding Coca- Cola in a brown bag so people think it is whisky.

In doing this he is enabling the folk in Maycomb to cope with something that is so different as a white man choosing to live with a black woman, " I live like I do because that's the way I want to live". So, in choosing to be an outsider, Dolphus Raymond is different to Boo Radley but similar to Silas

Marner, who also, in some ways, chooses to be an outsider. The language used is very important in portraying the characters in the novels.

Eliot uses long descriptive sentence, " The shepherd's dog barked fiercely when one of these alien-looking men appeared on the upland, dark against the early winter sunset; for what dog likes a figure bent by a heavy bag? - and these pale men rarely stirred abroad without that mysterious burden. " However, this kind of long sentence structure would have been normal for writers of the nineteenth century like Eliot, and it suited the people of the time, as they did not have televisions, or even theatres to watch anything so they relied on descriptive writing to create a picture in their minds of what was going on.

In comparison, Lee uses more varied sentence structures, with short sentences used to create suspense. " She tempted a Negro", describes what Mayella did and we can immediately tell that it seems wrong. The use of local dialect adds realism to the novels. In ' Silas Marner' dialect is used to differentiate between the social classes, as the language used by the gentry is proper English whilst the working class people use dialect known to the area of the Midlands. This can be seen particularly in the Rainbow, where we are given an insight into the lives of the local folk through their trivial conversations " I'm not for contradicking no man...

I'm for cutting 'em short, myself; but I don't quarrel with 'em. " Similarly, Harper Lee uses southern colloquialisms to bring more authenticity to the novel, " buying cotton", a phrase used in southern America to state that a person does nothing, like Bob Ewell. Also, Lee cleverly uses language to

emphasise the characters in the novel, with the language used by a character reflecting their personality. Atticus always speaks formally yet politely, whilst Bob Ewell uses, cruel unpleasant language at the trial " I seen that black nigger yonder ruttin' on my Mayella", using foul language to mirror the kind of person he is.

The authors can be seen to have ulterior motives and trying to get a message across to the readers in writing these novels. In ' To Kill a Mockingbird' it is clear that Lee is writing this to coincide with the Civil Rights Movement, to show readers how prejudiced society can be. She does this effectively through the case of Tom Robinson and showing that he was clearly innocent of the crime. On the contrary, Eliot's hidden motives in ' Silas Marner' are not so obvious to the reader, firstly being her concern over the Industrial Revolution and its effects on rural communities.

However, the fact that George Eliot is the pseudonym for Mary Ann Evans tells us that society at the time was quite small minded and would not have appreciated the work of a woman, thus forcing her to pretend to be a man. This tells us that she was different from other woman of her time, as determination to have her work published meant that she was willing to pretend to be a man. It is possible that the character of Silas mirrors Eliot in the way of her too being an outsider as she set up home with G. H. Lewes, whom already had an estranged wife.

So, through ' Silas Marner' Eliot could be trying to say that society needs to change and except those who seem to be strange or different in some way. To conclude, I would sympathise with Boo Radley more than Silas Marner.

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Silas chooses to be a recluse by shutting himself off from the rest of Raveloe whilst Boo had no real choice for being shut away from the world. He was made an outsider through the actions of his strict father, who has made Boo suffer the consequences of a past mistake for most of his life.