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Don't Put Your Shoes on the Bed: A Moral Analysis of *To Kill a Mockingbird*

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of English  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in English

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by  
Mitzi-Ann Stiltner  
December 2002

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Keywords: Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, moral analysis, historical view, character  
development

## ABSTRACT

Don't Put Your Shoes on the Bed: A Moral Analysis of *To Kill a Mockingbird*

by

Mitzi-Ann Stiltner

Harper Lee wrote a remarkable novel that provides a great deal of moral insight for its readers; through a use of history, moral instruction, and character development, Lee establishes a foundation for how people in an often intolerant world should live peacefully together. Moreover, she reminds the reader that regardless of socioeconomic status or race everyone deserves to be treated with respect and kindness. In establishing this moral analysis one must consider the historical source of Tom Robinson's trial, the Scottsboro Trial; the Finch children's consistent and exemplified instruction from their widowed father, Atticus, their housekeeper, Calpurina, and other close neighbors; and the symbolic representation of the mockingbird as a peaceful and protective creature that generally gets along with other bird species.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Not only is *To Kill a Mockingbird* a fun novel to read, it is purposeful. Harper Lee wrote the novel to demonstrate the way in which the world and its people should live together in harmony through a basic moral attitude of treating others with respect and kindness. The novel received the Pulitzer Prize in 1960, which places it among the best adult novels ever written; although it achieved this high recognition, today's primary readers are adolescents. However, at the turning of the twenty-first century, one might wrongfully assume Harper Lee intended *To Kill a Mockingbird* a novel for adolescents and ignore its lessons for adults. According to "'Fine Fancy Gentlemen' and 'Yappy Folks': Contending Voices in *To Kill a Mockingbird*," by Theodore Hovet and Grace-Ann Hovet, Lee's work is important because she does not supply the normal assumptions most in America harbor regarding the origins of racism. To the contrary, they argue that "Rather than ascribing racial prejudice primarily to 'poor white trash' (qtd. in Newitz and Wray), Lee demonstrates how issues of gender and class intensify prejudice, silence the voices that might challenge the existing order, and greatly complicate many Americans' conception of the causes of racism and segregation" (67). Reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* provides its audience with a basic moral code by which to live and encounter individuals who appear different or make choices unlike those made by the mainstream populace. Therefore, this novel becomes part of our moral culture; regardless of age, people learn from the moral codes taught by defense attorney Atticus Finch, his children, and his community.

Using the backdrop of racial tension and an episode of southern living, Lee develops *To Kill a Mockingbird* to point out basic morals by which people should live. By Lee's combining a

fictionalization of the historic Scottsboro Trial and the novel's use of the community to morally educate two children, her characters demonstrate moral responsibility. In the first part of the novel, Lee establishes conflict as Atticus Finch, the father, and the surrounding community, through various situations and conversations, enlighten Jem and Scout Finch with lessons of moral ethic. The moral responsibility of others is to express kindness and respect to others in a world where people of different races, socioeconomic statuses, and cultures exist. In setting the tone Lee establishes the mood through mentions of the Great Depression to remind her reader of the hardships the nation endured. In addition she uses the perspective many people had regarding different races to provide a strong connection to how people should coexist in the world. Lee sets the novel in the 1930s to provide her reader with a specific epoch in time as many of her readers would vividly recall the emotion and attitude.

Furthermore, Lee establishes a strong moral foundation through Atticus and Calpurnia (the Finches' maid), as well as other adults in the community so Jem and Scout can learn to live in the world and get along with almost anyone. Many lessons are taught to the children through the adults with whom they come in contact; however, most importantly Atticus teaches the children that "you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view –" (Lee 30). Lee sets up several incidents in the novel requiring the children to employ this lesson. In "Communication in *To Kill a Mockingbird*" Lacy Daigle discusses the various moral lessons constructed. Using Atticus and the Maycomb community, Lee illustrates these morals through example, verbal statements, and experience to show these ideas as they relate to a "broader view of mankind" (Daigle 59). Several scenes depict Lee's application of these various moral ethics: Atticus verbally chastises his children for nosing into other people's lives, he

genuinely shows kindness and respect to Mrs. Dubose even after her condemnation of his work, and he works ardently to set right the wrong being placed upon Tom Robinson.

Throughout the novel, Lee establishes a historical context with which her audience can see the necessity for moral lessons. Not only does Lee set the mood with the Great Depression she also uses an attitude to enhance her message. African Americans in the South frequently faced false allegations, and juries, because of biases, wrongfully convicted. Because Lee's trial of Tom Robinson similarly recasts the 1930s Scottsboro trial, it seems likely she chose to use the high-profile, nationally exploited trial as the foundation for her novel. The novel's trial, like the Scottsboro Trial, implicates a black man and accuses him of raping a white woman. The trials have similar evidence to prove the accused's noninvolvement in the incident; however, because of white society's racist fear during the 1930s conviction results. Fictionalizing this historical event helps Lee establish the misguided attitudes of many whites, especially those in the deep South.

During the second part of the novel, Lee's child characters come to a strong understanding about moral responsibility and how to apply it in life. Through the characters Arthur "Boo" Radley, the reclusive neighbor, and Tom Robinson, an African American on trial for rape, Lee demonstrates the responsibility people have in their treatment of others. Therefore, the mockingbird, a serene creature with nothing but beautiful music to offer, becomes a crucial component to the moral education of the children as they pursue Boo's existence and reach an understanding of the real Robinson situation. Presenting the mockingbird as a symbol, Lee reminds the audience that often people respond to situations because of the unknown or past rather than the truth. Arthur Radley's kindness becomes obvious, but because he remains hidden and reclusive he is unknown. Likewise the community knows the truth about the rape, but



because of past fear and prejudice they convict Robinson of a crime he did not commit.

According to the lesson learned by Lee's characters, one's moral responsibility lies in respect and kindness toward others.

Tom Robinson's character demonstrates the unnecessary hatred many white people have for races other than white. Through his character, Lee illustrates a man who works hard and tries to assist others by kindness and represents the part of society or different races that face fear from others. Atticus uncovers Bob Ewell's lie, that he, not Robinson, has in fact beaten his daughter, but the jury, biased by fear, convicts Robinson even with convincing evidence to the contrary. Lee uses Robinson's characterization to chastise her audience and show the mistreatment of others regardless of peculiarity, race, or culture as morally wrong.

In addition to Boo Radley and Tom Robinson, Lee creates Dolphus Raymond and Atticus Finch to show various traits of the mockingbird. Both of these characters show convincing evidence that people can live together in an often intolerant world and do so without constant conflict. Dolphus Raymond, although a minor character, is a white man living with a black woman and represents the ability of different peoples to live together peacefully. This character portrays that whites and blacks can live together, but more generally, by his inclusion, Lee demonstrates that people of different cultures can live harmoniously.

Atticus expresses that people have the ability within themselves to accept others and respect them regardless of differences. Through Atticus, the reader discovers that rumor and fear frequently exist as foundations for impressions that need to be ignored so others do not get hurt or mistreated. By incorporating the lessons learned by the children, the novel's adult audience grasps that society needs to be less critical of other races and accept the contributions others make to society and live harmoniously. Additionally, adults should learn from Atticus that

sometimes it is appropriate to do things because of being asked or obligated, and one should provide a devoted effort to the task and responsibility. Summoned to the trial by a judge, Atticus does not accept the trial in an eager manner; however, he takes his responsibility seriously and gives much of his time and energy. Lee indicates throughout the second half of the novel that adults can learn from those people who take responsibility seriously.

Clearly the novel's audience will recognize the moral responsibility that Lee urges them to meet through an adult narrator who shares her childhood memory and takes a look at learning to treat others with respect. In doing so the audience receives a specific time period, a relationship to the historic attitudes and emotions of the people, a message of moral ethic, and a manner in which to apply those ethics. Although Harper Lee has never publicly announced an intent to morally educate her reader by such a radical and bold story, the reader of *To Kill a Mockingbird* should clearly see the message that regardless of an individual's socioeconomic status, race, or culture, one should get to know others or "climb into his skin and walk around in it" (Lee 30) before passing judgment.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORY SETS UP A MORAL FOUNDATION IN *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

Harper Lee wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the mid-to-late 1950s, when racial tensions began heating up across the South; and so an analysis of the novel suggests that one take a close look at the historical references, economic and social circumstances of the fictional Maycomb community, and trial of Tom Robinson. This analysis provides the reader with an example of why tolerance is important regardless of social class or racial differences. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Lee presents a strong code of conduct individuals and communities should practice. By comparing the nation's real-life events of the early to mid-twentieth century to Lee's fictionalization of the Scottsboro Trial, one can see how history affects individual responses to situations and other individuals; Lee invites this approach by establishing her novel's context in history:

“... I said if he [Jem] wanted to take a broad view of the thing, it really began with Andrew Jackson. If General Jackson hadn't run the Creeks up the creek, Simon Finch would never have paddled up the Alabama, and where would we be if he hadn't? We were far too old to settle an argument with a fist fight, so we consulted Atticus. Our father said we were both right.” (3)

Although never settled in the novel, the opening issue of General Jackson provides the reader with the knowledge that history plays a vital role. Part one shows a historical basis for the attitude of the Maycomb community; without this information, Lee's reader would not be able to identify the need for a moral standard. Part two of the novel harnesses the nation's history of racism, through a fictional account of the Scottsboro Trial, to demonstrate an obligation people

have toward one another. Through the carefully laid-out novel, Lee enhances the reader's sense regarding the time period and public attitudes, thus allowing a heightened awareness of a high moral standard.

Lee writes the novel with specific references to several historical events reflecting the social sentiments of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. By considering the social structure, racial situations, and stereotypes challenged during these decades, one must acknowledge Lee's use of history as vital to the novel. The novel's historical foundation begins in the opening paragraphs when Lee refers to General Andrew Jackson, the seventh president of the United States, who advocated the owning of slaves. According to records kept by The Hermitage, Jackson's Tennessee home and plantation, 140 slaves lived and served on the plantation during the 1800s (<http://www.thehermitage.com>). This opening suggests two things; first, the nation experienced heightened racial tensions because of a precedent set decades before, and second, history plays a role in one's life because one's surroundings and conditions help mold attitudes. Lee's reference to Jackson takes her readers back to a time before the end of slavery, allowing them to identify with the issue of race and the country's history.

The first part immerses the reader in the historical reference to provide the attitude and social idioms of Maycomb County, Alabama, where citizens have recently met with financial hard times and high tensions; consequently, one discovers the importance in the roles and assumptions held by the townspeople. Lee begins by descriptively establishing the lifestyle and attitudes of the Maycomb community, which represent the mindset of many white Southerners during the 1930s.

Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. In rainy weather the streets turned to red slop; grass grew on the sidewalks, the

courthouse sagged in the square. Somehow, it was hotter then: a black dog suffered on a summer's day; bony mules hitched to Hoover carts flicked flies in the sweltering shade of the live oaks on the square. Men's stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three-o'clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum.

People moved slowly then. They ambled across the square, shuffled in and out of the stores around it, took their time about everything. A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people: Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself. (5-6)

Lee points out several aspects in these two paragraphs. First, the mention of the people and their attitudes reflects the time. Women, because of the Great Depression, found themselves at home rather than in the factories and work trenches, yet men worked hard at their jobs in order to provide for their families. Time, in the early to mid twentieth century, appears as more a commodity; fathers, like Atticus Finch, retreated to their homes in the evening to spend time with family. Dinner played a part in the relationship of families; in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus, although a lawyer engaged in a big trial, never misses dinner with his family except when out of town on legislative business. Secondly, Lee points out that "people moved slowly." Unlike the twenty-first century, people at this time did not get in a hurry or wonder where the day had gone. Today's high-tech world certainly provides contrast to the world of Maycomb. Where Atticus eagerly comes home at the end of a work-day in time for dinner with

his family and time to reflect on their day, today's doctors, lawyers, and employees of other high-profile jobs appear to find little time for their families. At the beginning of the 1960s, when people noticeably lived a more fast-paced life, Lee reminds her reader that time should be cherished for important factors such as family.

Thirdly, Lee mentions the economic hard times people experienced. During the 1930s, money and jobs could scarcely be found. Roosevelt, newly elected president in 1933, gave his famous First Inaugural Speech claiming that "the only thing we have to fear is but fear itself" (Roosevelt <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/inaugural/pres49.html>). Again Lee's reference points to a specific epoch in history that allows the reader an opportunity to establish a connection and understanding with the novel's events. Consequently, the history of Lee's novel would have a lasting impression on her earliest readers who would have first-hand experience living through the Great Depression and its recovery; additionally, they would be able to recognize the emotions and actions of Maycomb's citizens.

The novel begins in 1933 but primarily takes place during 1935 and the nation's Great Depression and recovery. According to Lee scholar Claudia Durst Johnson, other references Lee makes to history include the Works Progress Administration (the WPA) and the National Recovery Act (NRA) (*Threatening Boundaries* 33). During this time people lived by meager means and rekindled the half-forgotten crafts of an earlier period, but programs such as the NRA provided morale boosters for many people in the onset of the Great Depression's recovery, which began around 1933 (Wecter 83). Similarly in 1935 at the advent of the WPA, a program designed to provide equal employment for everyone, Americans found excitement in the nation's recovery; however, in the South many of the employment regulations were being violated (Wecter 96 - 99). Thus many white Southerners looked for higher wages for themselves and

then discriminated against African Americans by offering them laborious jobs to benefit the white community. In *To Kill a Mockingbird* these hands-on labor jobs included field-hands, maids, and garbage collectors. The rural areas witnessed the Great Depression and recovery differently from the more populated cities; however, the effects brought many urbanites back to the rural towns and farm areas where more self-reliant abilities found use (Wecter 123).

The development of the life and attitudes of people brings up a significant historical aspect of the novel. In the town of Maycomb, Lee portrays white Southerners as staunch socialites, respectable businessmen, and professionals, with exception for the farmer, poor but surviving. Lee points out the townspeople do have more than the country folk, but really no one has much during this time. In fact, Scout asks Atticus if they are poor, and Atticus responds, yes, but the farmers have found more difficult times because the crash has hit them hardest (Lee 21). In this scene, Lee mentions the way the Great Depression affected those living in the rural and the farmland south.

The position of the poor white farmer is an ambiguous one to describe; however, according to Johnson, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Lee explains there are two different types of poor whites: the lawless represented by the Ewells, and the respectable hard-worker seen through the Cunninghams (156). Regardless of the differences between white Southerners, poor white farmers still felt threatened by the African American. According to *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites* by Wayne Flynt, socially the poor of the two races should have bound together; however, the poor white “strove for spatial separation.” Flynt goes on to illustrate that the poor whites depended on the more affluent white Southerner to protect their societal position (212). Expectantly, Lee employs the poor white’s attitude in the novel at two different levels. Initially

she establishes social rank through the education system, and secondly displays the loyalty of white Southern adults to one another regardless of truth.

Flynt claims several factors contributed to the culture of Alabama's poor white farmers. In addition to a lack of financial resources, the members of the farm community faced the nature of time as a factor of their daily lives: "[. . .] farmers worked extremely hard during certain seasons. During spring planting and fall harvesting there were never enough hours in a day" (211). The farmers' economic and social standing are discussed at length in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. On Scout's first day of school, Lee establishes the condition of life in Maycomb's Old Sarum, the more rural and poor area of Maycomb County. The young Finch, called on to explain Maycomb's hierarchy to Miss Caroline Fisher, attempts to explain that Walter Cunningham does not have a quarter to repay Miss Fisher for his lunch. Therefore, he will not accept her generosity because all his family can offer for reimbursement will do no good for Miss Caroline. As the story line develops and Walter goes home with the Finches for lunch, the reader learns he has not passed the first grade because he has had to help with the farm (24). This sentiment explains that farmers needed their offspring during the harvest season to provide essential finances for the family and continued a cycle of missed opportunity through education's perpetuating the distinct social status.

Secondly, Lee shows the loyalty of white Southern society by showing how the citizens of Old Sarum react to the rape of Mayella Ewell. Even though the community's sentiment shows distaste for her family, they find more distaste for the alleged actions of Tom Robinson. Not until the upstanding and honest Atticus explains the truth in a way that it cannot be ignored does the community acknowledge that the white Southerner may be wrong. Miss Maudie



explains to Scout that some men look at what is right and follow it through, while the majority of men are unable to speak or accept the truth (215).

As she grew up in the small Southern Alabama town of Monroeville, Lee evidently recognized within many racially motivated situations an injustice, and through her words, characters, and fiction, she produced a novel that ties together history and education. Employing the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s, when she wrote the novel, and the backdrop of the 1930s, Lee develops for her reader a new understanding about the events that received national coverage following the Great Depression. Even though the Civil War ended ninety-five years prior to *To Kill a Mockingbird's* release, African-Americans had not yet been accepted as part of society by the empowered white Southerner. Therefore, with so many racially related events occurring in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, it would be difficult to ignore the novel's events and release. Maycomb County provides a glimpse of how the South found difficulty in giving up its antiquated ways. Fred Erisman, in his article "The Romantic Regionalism of Harper Lee," points out that Maycomb refuses "to shed the past" (124). Erisman looks at the town courthouse in this part of his essay as a reminder that the South took offense at Reconstruction and strongly attempted to remain untouched by the Civil War's outcome. He goes on to identify the town's social structure which presents a strongly imbedded tie to the past: "Beneath its deceptively placid exterior, Maycomb has a taut, well-developed caste system designed to separate whites from blacks" (124). Therefore, Lee's mention of a "sagging courthouse" seems to foreshadow the upcoming trial and attitude of the white Southerner toward the African American. In studying what the novel says about the plight of the black American, one ascertains that the town of Maycomb nearly succeeded in remaining a segregated community.

Likewise, much of the United States Civil Rights Movement motivated Lee to employ the emotion of the racial battle stewing at the time of the novel's release. The Civil Rights Movement began in the 1880s with political activists and motivators such as Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois. Although these two activists took seriously the unequal rights of the African American, they held very different views on achieving equality for their race. Moreover, during the period just before Lee released *To Kill a Mockingbird*, incidents such as Rosa Parks' refusing to give up her seat which led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott; Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, making his notable ascension in the fight for African American rights; Autherine Lucy's fight to enter the University of Alabama; and the Supreme Court's ruling on school desegregation in *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* saturated the headlines of newspapers across the country (Johnson, *Understanding* 89- 91). Throughout the twentieth century, African Americans have been subjected to numerous injustices such as unfounded legal allegations, the inability to vote, and segregation on public transportation and in public places; many Southerners wanted to ignore these atrocities and brush off these actions as simply the way of society. However, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Lee exploits this material to provide the reader with fictional events that demonstrate the attitude ascribed to white Southerners. Furthermore, the novel provides the reader with a look at the social circumstances of the black American.

Throughout the novel, most white Maycomb citizens perceive the role of African Americans as servants rather than equals. The service of African Americans established in part one strongly substantiates that segregation remained essential to the lifestyles of white Southerners in the 1930s. Therefore, African Americans lived, worked, socialized, and, in general, functioned separately from the white race (Johnson, *Understanding* 83 - 84). Blacks

hold no prominent positions in the white community: Zeebo works as the garbage collector and music superintendent for the black church, the Reverend Sykes ministers in the black church, and the maids – Calpurnia at the Finches and Jessie at Mrs. Dubose – serve prominent Southern white households. In the second part of the novel, Lee introduces Tom Robinson, a local field-hand and handyman accused of raping a white woman. Although many of these characters seem less significant in the novel, they find themselves working in jobs typically presented to the African American during the 1930s. Johnson says that “through a realistic delineation of her characters, Harper Lee succeeded in challenging the stereotypes” (*Understanding* 137) so strongly embedded in the Southern culture. After the emancipation of slaves following the Civil War, the South did not graciously bow to the African American and provide them with well paying careers. Instead, years passed where jobs and opportunity for the black American were held back. Prominent white families of the South did not function properly without the assistance of a black servant. Lee portrays this sentiment in *To Kill a Mockingbird* through character stereotypes such as Calpurnia’s importance to the Finch household and Zeebo’s response to Tim Johnson, the rabid dog. Additionally, Lee casts Tom Robinson as essential for Mayella Ewell because she apparently receives little to no help from her father or siblings at home. It would appear Lee’s challenge to the white Southerner is to acknowledge the importance and contribution other races make to society.

Historically, as the novel indicates, the social custom of the white Southerner acknowledges that black Americans live and work as free men and women, while at the same time, predominately establishing the Southern belief that the black American remains unequal to whites. During the early- to-mid twentieth century the mistreatment of blacks served the interest of white Southerners; this included being accused of various crimes committed by whites. Lee

successfully captures this attitude during the trial of Tom Robinson. Because of the trial, the reader begins to discover the attitude of society. Racism has thus far not been a theme of the novel, yet through the innocence of the children it definitely surfaces. Moreover, several chapters of the novel grow deeply rooted in the racist attitudes that indicate the people's dislike of Atticus' court-appointed representation of Tom Robinson and his intention of actually putting forth a defense.

With the trial as a substantial focus of part two, one must consider the historical source of the Robinson Trial. Certainly in trials such as Robinson's many wrongly accused black Americans received a guilty verdict; apparently Lee fashioned the novel's trial after the notorious Scottsboro Trial that began in 1931 and received national media coverage. In her book *Understanding To Kill a Mockingbird: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historic Documents*, Claudia Durst Johnson provides extensive documents that establish a connection between the two trials. The evidence and similarities are simply remarkable. Not only do the sentiments of society, from the novel, appear to resemble the real time period, but the trial and saga that captured America's attention in the 1930s also share structural similarities with the novel's trial (Johnson, *Understanding* 15). With the coverage given to this particular trial, Lee's reader would be familiar with the scenario; consequently, she provides an arena to demonstrate the Southerners' biases and treatment of other races, particularly African Americans.

The Scottsboro Trial centered on seven defendants accused of raping two white female prostitutes on a train ride from Tennessee to Alabama. The first trial began in 1931, lasted for only nine days with two court-appointed attorneys, Milo Moody and Steve Roddy, and ended in convictions for all but one of the accused (Johnson, *Understanding* 19). The 1931 verdict was overturned on appeal, and in November 1932 the Supreme Court ordered new trials to begin.

During the second trial, a new lawyer, Samuel Leibowitz, for the defendants proved willing to work on behalf of the accused and a new judge sought the truth in the matter despite public opinion (Johnson, *Understanding* 15 - 19). In the 1933 trial, evidence presented to a second all-white jury proved the defendant's innocence; nonetheless, they suffered prejudiced sentences and once again conviction. The prosecution's main witness, Victoria Price, was also the chief accuser in the trial. Price, a poor white woman, cried rape in order to escape violation charges of the Mann Act which prohibited the crossing of state lines for immoral acts (Johnson, *Threatening Boundaries* 5). Emotions ran very high regarding fraternizing with members of another race; consequently, lynching was certainly not a foreign practice in the South. According to several historians, between 1892 and 1932 the number of lynchings exceeded 3,000 (Raper 1 and Grant x). Although the number decreased yearly and reached a low of eight in 1932 (Grant x), Lee's mature readers would be familiar with the emotion and attitude expressed by the citizens of Maycomb. During the Scottsboro Trial lynching mobs threatened to take matters into their own hands (Johnson, *Threatening Boundaries* 5). With the publicity received during the Scottsboro Trials of 1931 and 1933, Lee demonstrates a clear connection between history and the events in her novel.

Important to the analysis of the story primarily because of the emotion it stirs, the Robinson trial demonstrates the attitude not only about the people but also the time period. Johnson, in her chapter "Racial Climate in the Deep South," comments on several similarities between the two trials. The first likeness between the two trials appears in the basic structure of events (Johnson, *Threatening Boundaries* 5): black men were accused of raping white women, the court-appointed attorneys actually attempt to defend, mobs threatened to lynch the defendants, and the case involved poor white women considered to be of or come from families

of questionable reputation. The first mention of the Robinson trial comes in chapter nine, when Scout recalls that “Cecil Jacobs made me forget. He had announced in the school yard the day before that Scout Finch’s daddy defended niggers. I denied it, but told Jem” (Lee 74). Atticus Finch serves as Robinson’s court-appointed defense attorney who suffers ridicule by the community for acting professional on behalf of a black man. Atticus, like the second lawyer in the Scottsboro Trial, carefully demonstrates Robinson’s innocence; however, through prejudice that existed for decades prior to the offense, like the Scottsboro defendants, Robinson receives a guilty verdict.

The two trials share “the centrality of the woman’s testimony, her behavior on the witness stand, the cover-up of another crime or secret, and the important issue of her low social standing” (Johnson, *Threatening Boundaries* 5). In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Lee shows that Mayella, a victim of incest, searches for company by attempting to seduce a black man, the only person to pay any attention to her. Mayella explains her situation so she faces no embarrassment because she has broken a sacred code of not fraternizing with those of an opposite race. Scout points to the character of the Ewell family in chapter twelve with a surprise recognition of the plaintiff in the matter. Scout has questioned Calpurnia, the housekeeper, on the matter of the rape and inquires whether the Ewells are the same ones who attend school only one day a year. Upon her discovery they are the same, she comments that even Atticus calls them “absolute trash” (Lee 124). Like Price, who committed a crime and attempted to cover it up in the Scottsboro Trial, Mayella Ewell has a secret and seeks to hide her embarrassment from breaking a sacred code of conduct. Lastly, the emotions of the South ran high during the Great Depression. Socially and economically, the poorer whites and blacks competed for the same jobs. Because of such high tensions the lynching of Southern blacks had not slowed down. In

*To Kill a Mockingbird*, Lee engages this emotion. Atticus, while guarding the city jail during the night, meets a mob seeking to kidnap and lynch Tom. Similarly the defendants of the Scottsboro Trial saw an attempt made to lynch them (Johnson, *Understanding* 31). Clearly Lee employs her knowledge of a highly publicized trial to demonstrate people's prejudice and develop an awareness that perhaps one should not judge others before really examining the evidence.

Historians often claim that history teaches so it does not repeat itself. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Lee depicts a piece of history to encourage an audience to begin looking differently at each other and their own prejudices. In considering the book a historical publication used to transplant a person to a time when the nation suffered much conflict, one must assume a significant motivation of the author. One might contemplate the idea that the author intended for people to recognize the need to live in a harmonious world. Lee's novel portrays Atticus as a teacher of how to understand someone by bearing in mind what their life is like. After reading this novel one will agree with Carolyn Jones, who suggests that the novel "asks us to begin to understand ourselves by articulating the meaning of the actions and thoughts that, often, are reflections of the unspoken values of our communities" (102). Considering the issue of race, surroundings, and epoch expressed in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, one should come to believe Lee released a timeless treasure and constant reminder of how this country should be united. Historically, Lee created the novel at a time of stress in the nation. Having sold over fifteen million copies, the novel should serve as a constant reminder of the struggle this country faced in order to become a unified and desegregated union. Historically and morally this novel provides extensive education on not only socially accepted behavior but also on one's treatment of others. To accomplish her goal, Lee employs the innocence of children to express what she deems necessary for society; throughout the novel's use of historical references made to the

Great Depression, the Scottsboro Trial, and the attitude of white southerners, Lee immerses her reader in the social consciousness of Maycomb residents so that they might comprehend the need for change.

### CHAPTER 3

#### *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*: A MORAL ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION

In *To Kill a Mockingbird* Harper Lee embarks on a quest that should ultimately bring people together in a more harmonious world. Her journey to make society recognize its mistreatment of others begins by strengthening the moral consciousness and responsibility of future generations. To accomplish her goal, Lee places the fictional Finch family in various situations that require a moral consciousness about one's treatment of others. According to Fred Erisman in "The Romantic Regionalism of Harper Lee," she has established a dual view of the South: "On the one hand she sees the South as still in the grips of traditions and habits [. . .] On the other hand, she argues that the South has within itself the potential for progressive change . . . ." Erisman goes on to claim "if, as she suggests, the South can exchange its old romanticism for the new, it can modify its life to bring justice and humanity to all its inhabitants, black and white alike" (133). Looking at Lee's boldness, it comes easy for the reader to see the novel holds significant value for teaching children that moral responsibility includes having a heart of unselfishness and kindness for others. Although Lee sets her novel in the 1930s and applies the attitudes of the Civil Rights Movement, she seeks to help people understand that diverse elements of society must be recognized and that in the best interest of society, people need to respect each other's differences.



An individual's nature is one of self-centeredness; consequently it requires an individual to be educated regarding the consistent and moral correctness with which to treat others in a diverse society (Ezzo 16-17). This education begins in childhood, and children learn, by adult example, how to respond in various situations. Parents provide a conditioning of positive moral principles to their children in the hopes that one day they will act out these proper behaviors without premeditation. Children receive a moral ethic through repeated training, and such education comes from the many people influencing a child's life, so that eventually the effects of instruction become a conditioned response. Embarking on a moral analysis of a fictional novel requires that one know the definition of the moral consciousness. John Gardner, in his book *On Moral Fiction*, defines morality as "nothing more than doing what is unselfish, helpful, kind, and noble-hearted, and doing it with at least a reasonable expectation that in the long run as well as the short we won't be sorry for what we've done, whether or not it was against some petty human law" (23). A second definition based on the *Biblical Ethics for Parenting* claims the conscience "is the seat of moral testimony. It is that portion of our humanness that receives and reflects values that represent what the mind perceives as morally right and wrong, good and evil" (Ezzo 85). In order for society to function harmoniously, Lee claims that children must be taught to develop a strong moral conscience. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus embodies Lee's idea that absolute moral correctness exists in the face of a commonplace moral acceptance often exhibited by those in Maycomb County. Obviously Maycomb County and its average citizen represent the white South, while Atticus represents Lee's message that in order to be morally correct one must work to improve the moral standards by which one lives.

By establishing a honest and respectful moral code within the hearts of her characters, Lee presents the argument that to change the social behaviors existing in the world, people need

to accept a moral responsibility for their actions and take others for who they are regardless of social class or race. Through Atticus' moral consciousness of honesty and respect, the children learn that it is one's responsibility to embrace people despite family background, socioeconomic status, or race. Moreover, one's treatment of others requires an understanding that people are basically the same and deserve to be treated unselfishly and kindly. By Lee's setting up a foundation of moral responsibility through the father and close neighbors, the characters portray correct moral ethics to Jem and Scout. Atticus, the novel's hero, works diligently to provide a positive, strong example of how his children should be upstanding in a world that frowns upon inconvenient adherence to principle. A deeper look at the ethical mores of the novel provides the awareness that Atticus attempts to instill a basic ethic within the hearts of his children: that one must make the effort to get to know others or at least try to see things from their perspectives.

Raising children in moral ways often seems an endless task, yet Atticus Finch works honorably to secure a moral education for his children that he believes will carry them into any situation. Although many of the instructions found in the novel appear basic and simple, the ultimate code, not judging others until one knows them or tries to understand them, grows from these lessons. In her essay, "Atticus Finch and the Mad Dog: Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*," Carolyn Jones correctly states that "he [Atticus] stands as a supreme example of the moral life, and he communicates that morality to his children, and ultimately to the community by his actions" (53). Jones also points out that there are two halves to Atticus' ethic: "the demand for reflection" which he demonstrates through his own honesty and respect, and the need for "standing in another's shoes, the demand for compassion" (56). Both of these parts are exemplified through the example and instruction of moral teaching and its application by Jem

and Scout. Part one of the novel establishes Scout and Jem as innocent children out to discover the world and Atticus as a single parent attempting to raise children with the morals of honesty, respect, and understanding in an intolerant world. Part two expounds on these moral ethics and substantiates how the children apply these lessons and come to the basic awareness that people, made of the same fabric, should get along.

From the beginning of the novel, Lee depicts basic manners such as courtesy, kindness, and obedience to display the moral upbringing Atticus pursues for his children. Examples of courtesy can be seen as both Jem and Scout refer to adults using respectful titles such as “sir” and “ma’am” when responding to Atticus, Calpurnia, Miss Maudie, and others. Even at the age of six, Scout responds to Miss Caroline Fisher, her teacher, with politeness and respect. When spoken to, Scout uses “ma’am” as her reply, and later at home when speaking to Atticus she responds to him with polite respect (Lee 29). Jem also speaks as respectfully to any of the neighbors as he speaks to his father. Much like the common courtesy and graciousness Jem and Scout use, they act obediently; at home they respect their assigned boundaries for exploration -- Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose’s house two doors to the north and the Radley place three doors to the south (Lee 6). Likewise the children show graciousness to their neighbors and heed their instructions; when Miss Maudie establishes boundaries for their play in her yard, the children do not disturb the delicate balance of their relationship (Lee 42). Additionally, they remain together and cautious when allowed to travel into town alone.

Furthermore, basic moral ethics teach them to respect their belongings. Jem highly regards the pocket-watch Atticus allows him to carry once a week: “On the days he carried the watch, Jem walked on eggs” (Lee 61). Later while Jem provides Scout an explanation on the various types of “folks” in the world, Jem kicks off his shoes before he puts his feet on the bed

(Lee 226). Atticus obviously provides the instruction that shoes, often dirty, do not have a place on the bed. At the age of twelve this instruction no longer requires a reminder because it has been replaced with a morally obedient and respectful heart; therefore, it becomes a conditioned response which extends good manners. Lee establishes the Finch children as obedient to demonstrate that once a child learns a proper response to a situation, whether it is obedience or polite manners, the reaction becomes an unconscious response.

In almost everything Atticus does there exists honesty and truth as one of the key moral components; the reader, therefore, is immersed in truthfulness. Honesty, which indicates the moral responsibility of people and the humbleness of their hearts, establishes whether an individual values the respect of others. Truth provides options to those whom it influences; although morally honest people do not enjoy causing hurt or trouble to someone, they still recognize the need for truth. Since to be honest in all instances may be unpopular, telling the truth ultimately provides for a person to grow and overcome obstacles. Lee portrays honesty so the audience can reconnect with the emotional turmoil dishonesty causes. Most people comprehend the hurtful emotions of a lie. In response, Lee uses Atticus to demonstrate that the truth can enflame various responses within people, yet one can still understand the need to hold a high moral ethic and be honest.

At the end of the novel, Atticus tells Heck Tate that “if the children can’t trust me they won’t trust anybody” (Lee 274). Trust is a by-product of honesty, and because of Atticus’ honesty, he is trusted by his children and community. Thomas Shaffer in his “Moral Theology of Atticus Finch” declares that “it is important to the understanding of Atticus Finch to see that he was able to tell the truth about his community but remain fond of his community – a moral quality [ . . . ]” (186). In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, honesty lays a foundation for the moral outcome

Lee intends her reader to learn, and Atticus' ability to remain fond of his community speaks volumes of his character and dedication to the truth. Because of such a moral character development, Atticus sees the prejudiced viewpoint of the community and sees the need for social change and acceptance. In the end, he stands up for his moral code and does not forsake the community simply because others do not hold his views. As Lee forms a foundation for her audience to expand their ethical awareness and see that truth sets people free, she uses Atticus' illustrations of simple definitions to his children and the most difficult challenges of asking a jury to stand up for the truth of a black man.

Atticus displays a strong desire to be honest at all costs, and when his children ask him questions, he always answers honestly. Moreover, as the town calls on him to seek the truth, he finds and delivers it. "Atticus insisted on telling the truth, more so than others, because seeing and telling the truth was the way Atticus could know who he was and what his community was" (Shaffer 189). By creating this characteristic in Atticus, Lee establishes for her reader that all truths, even those not wanted, are important to discover and tell. To be honest in the face of adversity engages a mature moral responsibility of respect to others.

On Scout's first day at school, she begins to recognize ideas such as social status. Although she knows that the county folk live differently than she, Scout has not deeply considered the idea until the first day of school when she encounters children from the Old Sarum community. Perceiving a difference, she inquires of Atticus whether they are poor or not and whether they are as poor as the Cunninghams. Atticus answers her honestly and explains that yes they are poor, but those residing in the country with farms and land have even less than themselves because the economic crash hit them hardest (Lee 21). Through such a brief encounter, Scout finds comfort in the fact that Atticus helps her, even at a young age, understand

these big ideas. Thus, Lee expects her reader to be trustworthy so others will look to them for honest answers. If someone can answer easy questions with honesty, one can provide the same response to life's more difficult challenges.

Lee also provides instruction regarding the truth of how the government expects all children to attend school and the respect that should be extended to one's opportunity of a free education. With her first day at school not exactly the most rewarding, Scout declares that Atticus can teach her from this point forward, and because Burris Ewell does not have to be in school, she does not need to attend. Atticus, of course, does not see this option as a solution. Rather, he takes the opportunity to instruct Scout on how one should value one's education. Atticus reminds Scout that he has a job necessary for earning a living and that the Finches must obey the law. Atticus does not evade the request, but instead tackles it with truthfulness. In his argument concerning the Ewells, Atticus points out that the Ewell children have every right to an education and "can go to school any time they want to, when they show the faintest symptom of wanting an education" (Lee 30). Through Atticus' truthful approach to Scout's dilemma, Lee uses the opportunity to establish that earning an education is a personal responsibility.

Lee suggests here that people, regardless of economic circumstance, can be educated; knowledge, a free, yet valuable commodity, provides a way for people to better understand the world in which they live. Through the educational system individuals interact with and become acquainted with people of different social status and race. Lee understands that developing social skills serves as part of the educational system; by using such an episode, she furthers her point that in order to build a better world people must build stronger relationships by knowing others better.

The audience easily sees that Atticus takes the responsibility of being truthful seriously. After an encounter with Cecil Jacobs on the playground, Scout inquires about Atticus' defense of a black man; Atticus honestly educates Scout on his defense of Tom Robinson. Trying to instill in his children a strong and good moral ethic, Atticus explains that Tom Robinson needs his help to show his innocence. Atticus believes that if he does not properly defend Tom Robinson, "I couldn't hold up my head in town, I couldn't represent this county in the legislature, I couldn't even tell you or Jem not to do something again" (Lee 75). Through honesty, although not deeply expanded upon, Atticus explains that the truth must be told even when frowned upon by others. Obviously Scout does not yet understand the significance of everything Atticus tells her; therefore, Atticus uses discretion in what he chooses to explain to his six-year-old daughter. Through this episode, Lee illustrates that truth often requires a modest approach. Atticus realizes that Scout's age prevents her from a full understanding of what his job in this trial will be and why it is a difficult challenge; so he simply provides her with the basic truth that he must defend anyone who needs his help. Confiding in his brother, Jack, Atticus says that although they (Jem and Scout) will not fully understand the events of the trial now, he hopes the children will remain untouched by Maycomb's usual disease of prejudice (Lee 88).

When called on to tell the truth in an unpopular arena one must have the moral footing on which to stand. Atticus, appointed to defend Tom Robinson, has this grounding, and the judge and morally right citizens of Maycomb count on his ability to comprehend the difference between the legal and moral outcome. In his jury summation, Atticus boldly walks about in his most moral uprightness. He places before the jury that the only crime committed in Maycomb on that night has been the indiscretion of a white woman tempting a black man. Additionally, he points to the likelihood that Mr. Ewell has beaten his daughter for her sin before accusing the

black man who could not use his right arm for rape. Once covering the basic trial material, Atticus explains Lee's message to the audience:

“You know the truth, and the truth is this: some Negroes lie, some Negroes are immoral, some Negro men are not to be trusted around women – black or white. But this is a truth that applies to the human race and to no particular race of men. There is not a person in this courtroom who has never told a lie, who has never done an immoral thing, and there is no man living who has never looked upon a woman without desire.” (Lee 204-05)

Through Atticus' conclusion to an emotional trial, Lee establishes for her reader that one's character lies within his ability to identify the truth and respect it; furthermore, she states that people of all economic status and race are made of the same material and deserve equal respect.

Lee employs both direct lectures and examples as illustrations to show respect as an abstract concept. Through Atticus' examples and directives, Jem and Scout learn that to have respect for others brings to light the knowledge that people are similar; and each person deserves respect. According to Claudia Durst Johnson, Lee, through an attitude of respect, attempts to break the boundaries between races and social classes. The lines between race begin to break with the children's respect toward Calpurnia, and social barriers begin to recede when Walter Cunningham joins the Finches for lunch (*Understanding* 7). Not only does Atticus portray respect, he and Calpurnia teach the children how to respect others; the reader clearly finds several depictions of respect through Atticus, Calpurnia, Jem, and Scout in the Finch home and Maycomb community.

Atticus teaches his children respect by the way he treats those around him and the way in which he requires Scout and Jem to treat others. First, it should be noted how the Finches treat



Calpurnia, their housekeeper. As part of the family, Calpurnia becomes the household authority in Atticus' absence. Lee never indicates that Atticus thinks Calpurnia makes an error in judgment. "Lee clearly represents Calpurnia's alliance with the Finch family" (Power 95). Atticus always, according to Scout, sides with Cal (Lee 6). The respect and obedience Scout and Jem provide Calpurnia find expression throughout the novel; first, when Calpurnia's dismissal comes up for discussion Atticus defends his trusted housekeeper and reminds others just how Calpurnia serves the family. Another example of respect given to Calpurnia occurs when the children attend her church. Jem and Scout, in the presence of Calpurnia's friends and family, behave in a reverent manner; they sit quietly in church and accept Calpurnia's direction with immediate obedience. During the 1930s, one would not likely see white children in a black church and would definitely not see them possess a respectful attitude to those around them. By engaging such a strong deep-seated respect for the housekeeper, Lee shows that respect serves as part of one's moral ethic regardless of the person's affluence.

Additionally, Lee shows that Atticus' trust and respect of Calpurnia transfers to Jem. Atticus teaches his children to rely on her in every situation. Jem places this trust and respect on Calpurnia when he trusts her instincts regarding the mad dog he spots coming down the street (Lee 93). Although he could have called Atticus or simply disturbed a neighbor, Jem places his trust in Calpurnia's ability to know what should be done about the neighborhood's threat. Lee makes a clear testament to the trust and respect an individual should strive to gain. Calpurnia serves the Finch household with honesty and respect; therefore, Atticus and his children reciprocate the morally correct behavior to her.

Purposely, Lee sets Atticus up as an example of respect both verbally and physically. Atticus not only displays respectful behavior in private, he possesses a high standard of respect

as he serves the citizens of Maycomb County. As a defense attorney, Atticus treats all witnesses with respect and politeness. During the trial of Tom Robinson, he extends a polite respect to Mayella as she testifies before the court to the events of her alleged rape. Politely he refers to Mayella as “Miss,” causing her to become agitated. Atticus, again being respectful, shockingly says “ma’am” which furthers her irritation as she becomes offended and brash with him (Lee 181). Lee uses his surprise at Mayella’s reaction to courtesy as a means of demonstrating the depth of Atticus’ moral ideals. In this scene, Lee engages the idea that those exhibiting her high moral standards would be caught off guard if the behavior does not instantly receive acceptance. Lee wants her reader to acknowledge that a higher standard of treatment toward others exists, and the white Southerner particularly, and white America in general, has the responsibility of changing the way they treat others.

Lee furthers her characterization by showing the reaction of Judge Taylor. The judge steps in to assure the defendant that Atticus always treats people with respect and means her no harm; in fact, he goes so far as to allow the court record to show that contrary to the witness she had not been mocked or sassed (Lee 182). This passage provides a great deal of foundation to the moral education of the Finch children. It becomes clear that Atticus practices his moral beliefs and simply expects that others recognize respect when given; therefore, his expectation of Jem and Scout is to provide respect toward others. Lee’s journey to have people live in a world where social class and race mean little in terms of harmony finds weight in Atticus’ ability to practice basic manners. Like the Finch children, Lee’s audience should recognize that people should be respectful both in their homes and public lives. Additionally, with proper respectful behavior and courtesy, Atticus draws a sharp contrast between the abusive moral practices of

Mayella's father and those of himself. Lee, as Atticus does Mayella, asks her audience to decide which conduct is better.

After the trial, Miss Maudie states the respect given to Atticus by those of the community who believe that he has done honorably by defending Tom Robinson. As they learn of the attempted escape and death of Tom Robinson, Aunt Alexandra becomes exasperated with the community's need of Atticus to do its unpleasant work. Miss Maudie reminds Alexandra that "whether Maycomb knows it or not, we're paying the highest tribute we can pay a man. We trust him to do right. It's that simple" (Lee 236). Not only does this trust extend from Atticus' ability to tell the truth, it stretches the town's respect. The community as a whole finds disgust in the manner which Atticus defends Tom Robinson. However, many in the town know that if the truth is to be told, then Atticus can handle telling it and accept any fallout that occurs. By handing down such respect for her protagonist, Lee explains that trust goes a long way to building respect. Even though unpleasant to always be truthful, it works out for the best in the future. As Lee takes one step toward encouraging moral growth for her reader, she establishes a foundation on which other steps can be added.

Lee not only presents the behavior of respect through the children's relationship with Atticus and Calpurnia, she provides examples of how the children receive instruction on the standard of respect. The reader of *To Kill a Mockingbird* witnesses several aspects of growth from the children as they learn the standard of respect. Scout displays a respectful attitude when trying to assist Miss Caroline on the first day of school and while keeping her emotions in check when people speak disrespectfully of Atticus. Various experiences stimulate one's ability to respect others. Lee establishes Jem's growth and development of respect with episodes including Boo and Mrs. Dubose. Like most parents, Atticus provides continuous instruction on

honesty and respect. The children obviously try to make their father proud, but on occasion they need reminders about their behavior. It is important to note that Jem and Scout recognize their need to be respectful and trustworthy. Lee intends her reader to be aware that changing the moral behavior of people is difficult but can be accomplished.

The respect of another's privacy finds instruction when Dill Harris arrives in Maycomb. He fans Jem's and Scout's already vivid imagination regarding Arthur "Boo" Radley. On several occasions the children ignore the respect they usually give their neighbors and embark on an adventure to uncover the daily activities of the neighborhood recluse. Using creativity, the children script a play about the legend of Boo Radley and attract Atticus' attention. Later, Jem, Dill, and Scout attempt to pry Boo from his house with a letter of friendship. As Jem gingerly tries to place a letter upon the window sill, of course from the distance of the sidewalk and a bamboo stick, Atticus appears (Lee 47-49). They explain to Atticus they believe Boo might actually enjoy their company, and they would like for him to emerge and have a chat with them. Atticus reminds them that they need to respect Arthur's privacy and leave him alone, and besides, it expresses disrespect to invade someone's life without an invitation. The Finch children and Dill are not invited into the Radley's life; therefore, Atticus finds their behavior unacceptable. Furthermore, Lee once again reminds her audience that one's grasp of the moral right and wrong may take several examples.

By not squandering the imagination of the children, Atticus encourages learning through experience. Lacy Daigle reminds readers that Atticus gains his children's respect for this reason: "Atticus gains respect from his children and is capable of teaching them good values because he allows them to experience some of life for themselves" (61). Including the Radley fascination as

an instructional aid helps Lee's reader understand that people deserve to have their privacy respected.

Evidently Atticus teaches his children how to be polite to others and show interest in their hobbies or business when in conversation. As Jem, Scout, and Walter Cunningham walk to the Finches' for lunch, Jem generates conversations to include Walter's life experiences instead of focusing only on things that pertain to himself and Scout. Likewise, when people have guests in their home, a certain level of respect which *To Kill a Mockingbird* employs strong links exists. Lunch time on Scout's first day of school demonstrates how one should treat "company." As Walter Cunningham sits for lunch, Scout scrutinizes his table manners. As Scout expounds on this difference, she receives a quick and brash moral lesson from Calpurnia. In correction to her behavior, Scout learns it

"don't matter who they are, anybody sets foot in this house's yo' comp'ny, and don't you let me catch you remarkin' on their ways like you was so high and mighty! Yo' folks might be better'n the Cunninghams but it don't count for nothin' the way you're disgracin' 'em." (Lee 24-25).

Lee obviously feels compelled to show the audience that continued education in moral responsibility is necessary; in other words, it often takes more than one lecture to get it right.

Scout works hard at being polite and respectful toward her teacher and classmates. Attempting to enlighten Miss Caroline on the ways of the Cunninghams, Scout speaks up to save any embarrassment to her teacher, who has understandably not learned the ways of Maycomb's citizens, and absorb the attention from a shy child in class. However, Scout's plan backfires, and she ends up in trouble. As a six-year-old, Scout does not comprehend why her attempt to be respectful in this situation does not work, and she feels angry from the rejection and

embarrassment of being punished in front of the class. Her noble action, however, meets with unintended embarrassment. Atticus realizes her respectful attitude and helps her to see why the event unfolds as it has. In her respect, Scout fails to look at things from Miss Caroline's point of view and see that the teacher still feels embarrassed and reacts with anger. Lee begins her push for a dual perspective here as a way to slowly draw her audience to the same conclusions her narrator makes. Lee reminds her audience that one should always consider the viewpoint of another when situations seem different than expected. Scout expects one outcome and receives another.

When the town exhibits disappointment with Atticus' decision to truly defend Tom Robinson, Scout becomes confused by the negative response. Confronted with this tension for the first time, Scout reacts by lashing out at her attacker, Cecil Jacobs. However, upon Atticus' explanation of why he defends Tom Robinson, Scout receives a directive that requires her to keep her cool when others speak ill of his work on the case. In the aftermath, Scout works hard at respecting his plea to not fight or lose her head when people comment. Approached by Cecil Jacobs a second time, Scout walks away and reflects on the idea that respect is something you earn, and she does not want Atticus disappointed in her: "Somehow, if I fought Cecil I would let Atticus down. Atticus so rarely asked Jem and me to do something for him; I could take being called a coward for him. I felt extremely noble for having remembered [. . .]" (Lee 77). Lee engages Scout's ability to use the directive and comprehend its purpose in this scene.

While visiting Finch's Landing over Christmas vacation, she meets with the family's resentment of Atticus' defense of Tom Robinson and is unable to back down from cousin Francis. Her stubbornness keeps her from telling on Francis, but in her attempt to educate Uncle Jack on the finer points of child discipline, she explains what really happens. Scout then strives

to respect Atticus' wish; when Uncle Jack vows to fix the wrong, she asks him to do nothing because she has broken Atticus' request and wants him to remain unaware she fails. Uncle Jack helps her to regain her sense of respect. In this episode, Lee suggests that errors in our moral application happen, but to fix the wrong engages a mature moral responsibility. The important ethic applied here is that Scout recognizes the wrong action and works to correct her attitude.

Lee's reader discovers Jem's moral maturity within the confines of the Boo Radley scenes. One night the children sneak onto the Radley property in an attempt to see Boo; Jem loses his pants in their attempt to escape. Upon his return to collect his pants in the middle of the night, Jem finds them mended and waiting on him; in this moment he realizes he has been seeing Boo all along. Boo does not want to be a physical part of their lives; rather he wants to be a phantom friend and protector. Jem realizes Boo chooses to be reclusive and acquires a new understanding that leads to respect. This respect becomes clear when he decides to leave a note and thank Boo for the kindness of gifts: gum, soap dolls, pocket watch, and his mended pants. The disappointment in discovering the knot-hole cemented exasperates Jem because he seemingly has no way of apologizing for his past disrespect. Not only has Jem discovered a respect for the person and privacy of Boo, but he has also discovered the respect of property one must eventually gain. According to the Ezzo's work in *Biblical Ethics to Parenting*, to respect someone's property establishes a deep respect for the owner (138). Jem displays this through his acknowledgment that Boo is a real person not the malevolent phantom he once thought. When Jem acknowledges who gives him the treasures, he recognizes Boo as a real person and takes responsibility for the preservation of their relationship. Moreover, he quits attempting to draw Boo from the house. By composing this unique relationship, Lee establishes the connection between respect and one's moral responsibility to others in society.

Likewise, Lee develops a growing form of respect through Jem's encounter with Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose. Atticus serves as a positive example of how one should act cordially when crossing paths with acquaintances. Each day when Atticus passes by the Dubose house he politely comments on both the beauty of her and her flowers. However, according to the narrator, she is the meanest woman alive, and they can do nothing to please her. Being cordial is difficult. During her constant complaining about Atticus and how he raises his two children, Mrs. Dubose insults Atticus too many times and Jem loses his composure. In a moment of rage, he cut off the blooms of her camellia bush; as punishment Jem spends each afternoon and Saturdays reading to her for a month. Lee intends this punishment to show that one's obligation to others extends to the care of their belongings. Additionally, Jem's reading to a sick lady makes an opportunity for him, as well as Lee's reader, to see courage and how it takes personal respect to overcome difficult obstacles. Suffering from a morphine addiction, Mrs. Dubose needs something to take her mind off the withdrawal; Jem's distraction of reading helps her pass the time. As a last wish, Mrs. Dubose sends Jem a wax camellia bloom symbolizing their relationship and that even though they do not share the same views, she respects both Jem and his father. Giving such attention to Jem's failed respect, subsequent punishment, and final peace offering allows Lee's reader to see that regardless of differing views people can live peacefully together.

Part two of the novel takes this moral education and puts it into practice during a time when the conflict of desegregation and racism is strong and the courageousness of standing up to racism reflects poorly on one's upbringing. The novel, according to Eric Sundquist, "harks back to the 1930s both to move the mounting fear and violence surrounding desegregation into an arena of safer contemplation and to remind us, through a merciless string of moral lessons, that the children of Atticus Finch are the only hope for a future world of racial justice" (186). By



using the attitude and fear of people during the mid-twentieth century, Lee allows her reader to see that this attitude must begin somewhere. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the ability to see the injustice being committed against black Americans and others starts with Jem and Scout. Consequently, Lee's audience may recognize that adults teach children how to respond and react to others; therefore, it is the job of the adult to teach children to respond to others with unselfishness, kindness, and courtesy.

Any time one gives instruction it becomes rewarding to witness its application. Furthermore, in part two, Scout and Jem find themselves put to the test on various moral issues. Scout closely watches the attitudes of her neighbors and their lack of respect toward one another. As she matures, ponders the trial's outcome, and listens to the ladies of the missionary circle, Jean Louise Finch comes to recognize the injustice she witnesses and ultimately the reasons Boo Radley remains reclusive. Meanwhile, Jem wrestles with the issue of why white Southerners practice blatant cruelty and racism. These lessons not only bring to light the white and black racial tensions, but also indicate these tensions visibly in the way individuals treat and respond to others of differing socioeconomic status or race.

The moral analysis of *To Kill a Mockingbird* requires two considerations prior to a look at Lee's application of the moral education presented in part two. First the moral analysis would not be complete without an understanding of the novel's narrator. Many critics feel the narrator is a six-year-old child; however, the novel itself disproves this claim. The novel opens with Jean Louise Finch looking back at the events which lead to Jem's broken arm.

When enough years had gone by to enable us to look back on them, we sometimes discussed the events leading to his accident. I maintain that the Ewells started it all, but Jem who was four years my senior, said it started long before

that. He said it began the summer Dill came to us, when Dill first gave us the idea of making Boo Radley come out. (Lee 3)

This opening suggests that the narrator prepares to retell an episode of her life in order to demonstrate a concept regarding the varying emotions of the time. Ultimately the reader learns that the adult narrator gains a lasting moral education through her father's example and direction.

Several passages express the narrator's experience beyond that of the child in the story. First is the novel's opening. Secondly, after Scout's altercation with cousin Francis and Uncle Jack's talk with Atticus, the narrator comments that "it was not until many years later that I realized he [Atticus] wanted me to hear every word he said [to Uncle Jack]" (Lee 89). Of course this provides evidence that the narrator looks back at the lessons learned during this time period. Again at the end of the novel, Jean Louise Finch discusses the events surrounding her encounter with Arthur Radley as she recalls that

Neighbors bring food with death and flowers with sickness and little things in between. Boo was our neighbor. He gave us two soap dolls, a broken watch and chain, a pair of good-luck pennies, and our lives. But neighbors give in return. We never put back into the tree what we took out of it: we had given him nothing, and it made me sad. (Lee 278)

Through this memory, Lee expands the perspective of Scout. Turning to leave the Radley front porch, Scout realizes that Boo has been able to see every outdoor action of her and her brother; further, he watches the activities of the neighborhood. This epiphany allows Scout to piece together the most important moral quality Atticus works to instill in his children: "You never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them" (Lee 279). Jean Louise

Finch, the narrator, has effectively stood in the shoes of Boo Radley and relived, as flashes of memory, the three years leading up to Jem's broken arm.

By creating an adult narrator, Lee enhances her historical position and moral exhibition. She creates the adult narrator as a means of demonstrating that children learn to employ morally correct behavior through adult example. Moreover, the adult narrator displays the attitudes of white Southerners as they deal with the outcomes from the emancipation of slavery and subsequent Reconstruction of the South. Lee constructs a well-informed narrator who reexamines an important period of growth in the life of her family and shows that moral correctness must be taught to children in order for future generations to examine their treatment of others and stop prejudice against individuals who are different.

To consider the application of the moral correctness of the Finch children and Dill, one must secondly examine Lee's construction of perception. It is the moral responsibility of adults to show the children they influence how to properly treat others. One must look openly at people and accept what they find; likewise, it is morally responsible to treat all people with respect. Lee writes her novel so the audience must contemplate the events from the perspective of the children and their ability to see the moral responsibility of living in an imperfect world. Laurie Champion points to numerous mentions of eyesight and recurring images of darkness and light, but ultimately Lee chooses to develop the proper perception regarding one's treatment and acceptance of others. Champion, in her essay "When You Finally See Them: The Unconquered Eye in *To Kill a Mockingbird*," looks at the repetitious mention of Atticus' glasses and goes on to suggest his poor eyesight actually draws attention to his "acute moral perception" (127). Lee develops Atticus as a man of integrity: honest, hard-working, and respectful. He considers much of what he sees as injustice to people in his community, and although he realizes he can do little

to change the attitudes of others, he chooses to instill in his children the perception that attitudes can be changed. This perception passing from Atticus and other Maycomb citizens to Jem and Scout is clear in the application of moral training exhibited by the children.

Because Atticus faces a moral imperative in a confused and confusing world, Shaffer claims that “Atticus’ moral heroism lies both in what he did and in his seeing that it was important to do right even if he ended up doing wrong. He decided with doubt but with responsibility” (196). Moving from the final chapters of part one to the trial of part two, one recognizes the importance that lies within the trial of Tom Robinson and subsequent discovery of Boo Radley. Morally, based on historical allusions in part one, the reader obtains the understanding that people should strive toward more harmonizing instead of bickering. Champion further concludes that “Atticus teaches his children, the symbolic future generation, to be nondiscriminatory, to observe events from an innocent eye that does not seek to categorize people hierarchically” (130). Based on the moral instruction of Atticus and others, the children, hence the reader, perceive they should not disregard people based on social status or race but rather should respect them and look at things from their perspective.

Lee’s further demonstration of the perception that honesty and respect morally strengthen an individual finds weight in several passages of part two. First, Jem’s moral maturity is displayed in his reaction to the runaway Dill. Also, Jem places a great deal of trust in Tom Robinson’s jury. Jem’s trust indicates two things: he determines there to be no difference between the races and he believes others should recognize no difference as well. Secondly, Dill makes a connection about the respect people should give one another; he recognizes the person’s background does not matter because no one deserves to be mistreated. Thirdly, Scout comes to several realizations regarding people and their biases. As she listens to the community’s view

about the Robinson trial and the Allied world's view regarding Adolf Hitler, she makes the connection between the lack of respect people have toward one another and the high respect they should show one another. Finally, she determines that most people are nice and it just takes getting to know them to figure it out. Each of these realizations demonstrates the level of moral responsibility the children have attained; moreover, they conclude that although people do not necessarily get along, they should respect one another.

Jem confirms his respect of Dill, Atticus, and their neighbor, Miss Rachel, when he alerts them to Dill's whereabouts. Dill leaves Meridian without telling his mother and step-father he is traveling to Maycomb. Upon arrival in Maycomb, Dill seeks refuge with the Finch children under the assumption they will keep him hidden. Jem, however, understands that worrying one's parents is wrong and alerts Atticus they have a visitor. Doing the right thing and uncovering a runaway indicates Jem respects Atticus and Miss Rachel enough to trust their decisions in handling a sensitive situation. The morally responsible action of Jem shows Lee's audience that once an individual trusts and respects others one has an obligation to them. Champion points out that Lee sets the novel up to be about the "ability to see clearly" (127) and in this scenario, like Jem, the reader should recognize that when one extends respect to others, one sees why everyone deserves respect.

Jem's excitement regarding Tom Robinson's trial provides a strong application of the moral standards Atticus has instilled in his children. Jem truly wants to see the proceedings but knows the segregated courtroom is packed and he will not even be able to stand in the galley. When Reverend Sykes offers the children a seat in the balcony, where only the black community are allowed to sit, Jem, without hesitation, accepts. Jem's quick response shows he harbors no bias toward the members of the town's black community; instead, he feels comfortable enough

to sit throughout the trial with Reverend Sykes. Lee presents the moral standard here in a way the reader can clearly identify a true lack of prejudice.

Throughout the trial Jem sits on the edge of his seat and watches as Atticus plainly establishes the grounds for an acquittal. During the jury's deliberation, which takes several hours, Jem is confident Tom will be sent home. The Reverend Sykes reminds Jem that black men rarely receive acquittals and he should not get his hopes too high. Jem disagrees (Lee 208). When the verdict returns as guilty, a distraught Jem cannot comprehend how, after looking at the evidence, the jury could send any man to prison. Lee presents the truth here as important. Because the truth was told, the outcome should have been Tom's release back into society. Jem understands this concept; consequently, the reader should have learned the importance of knowing the truth. Even though the truth hurts some of the people in the case, it could have made a difference in their lives as well. The Ewell children could have received help from social services if Mayella had told the truth and the Robinson family could have been spared the outcome they receive. Lee portrays her characters as knowledgeable that the truth would set everything right in this instance; therefore, her reader should be able to see that the truth is a moral and upstanding ethic to strive for in all situations regardless of its popularity.

Later in the trial, Dill comes to the realization that belittling others because they are different is wrong. As he hears Mr. Gilmer's cross-examination and mistreatment of Tom Robinson, he becomes disgusted. In fact, Dill becomes physically sick at his stomach and so overcome with emotion he has to leave the courtroom. Scout's attempt to help him understand the workings of the court leads Dill to explaining "I don't care one speck [if it is his job or Tom is just a Negro]. It ain't right to do 'em that way. Hasn't anybody got any business talkin' like that – it just makes me sick" (Lee 199). Additionally, Dill realizes that Atticus would not treat

others this way – even if it were his job. Lee creates this scene to prod the reader’s recognition of Scout’s growth as well. Even she makes this recognition and reminds Dill that Atticus does not act one way at home and another in public. Lee uses the trial as a way to catapult the audience into a situation where they can understand that mistreating others, because of their differences, is wrong.

Scout reaches a point where the knowledge she retains about the trial and events leading up to World War II collide and create a comprehension about the importance in the way people treat each other. In the third grade, Scout’s teacher, Miss Gates, requires the students to keep up with current events. As they keep up, they learn about the situation building in Germany where Hitler begins putting Jews in concentration camps. Scout recognizes the wrong being done, but has a difficult time with the reaction of Miss Gates because during the trial she hears Miss Gates say the outcome of the Robinson case is right because they need to be taught a lesson. Apparently Miss Gates believes that they [black Southerners] were “gettin’ way above themselves,” (Lee 247). Mixed with this comment, Miss Gates’s attitude on the mistreatment of Jews becomes confusing. Consequently, it jolts the clarity of the situation as Scout realizes one should not hate Hitler if then turn around and “be ugly about folks right here at home – “ (Lee 247). Carolyn Jones points out that “Maycomb clings to its ideals, its traditions and its rigid caste system as ways of affirming its identity” (55). However, through Scout’s perception, Lee boldly speaks to her audience through this episode. It is not right to see the mistreatment of people because of their race or socioeconomic status as wrong when one does not see the similar mistreatment of others as wrong. In this instance, Lee claims it wrong to mistreat the Southern black then say the mistreatment of the Jews in Germany is also wrong. They are both people who deserve better treatment.

At the end of the novel, Lee drives home her point that people are made of the same fabric and one sees another based on one's own perspectives and moral upbringing. When Scout finally meets Boo Radley, she realizes he is not to be feared. "Indeed she [Scout] sees from a new perspective, understands that Boo is not a 'malevolent phantom' (15) as described by local rumor [. . .]" (Champion 132). In fact, Scout's moral character stood out the night she met Boo. She remembers the manners Atticus imparts to her about not pointing, thinking of her guest, and helping him to feel welcome and secure. Lastly, she walks him home and sees that he gets inside. Lee offers this demonstration of moral correctness to point out Scout's maturity and understanding. Scout now sees that most people are nice – when one gets to know them. Of course, Lee intends her reader to see that Scout has developed what the reader should – in order to get along in the world, one should be able to look within an individual for what is important rather than at one's perceived persona.

Ultimately, the reader, by ideal moral lessons taught through Maycomb County, learns that judging others before one knows them serves as a prejudiced action and should be something to stand against. During the second part of the novel, Lee's characters are charged with exercising the proper behavior they have learned. Johnson claims that "while most of Maycomb is still in a primordial stage, the higher evolution of Atticus is apparent in his achievement of a code that rises above hate, egocentricity, and madness. Bigotry has been superseded by a higher law: people are to be regarded as individuals, human beings, not as dehumanized types" ("The Secret Courts . . ." 134). Lee, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, shows that people should come together and accept their differences, and through the use of morally strong characters and plausible applications, these standards have been attained.



For generations the white Southerner directly and subtly withheld advancement from the black American in an effort to remain in some way superior. Through the characters of Atticus, Jem, and Scout, Lee speaks to the audience who grew up during the 1930s and were experiencing the Civil Rights Movement when the African American chose to no longer accept where the white Southerner wanted them. Through Atticus' moral theology, Lee dispels the idea that blacks are liars, rapists, or thieves; instead she points out that most, like most whites, are hardworking, honest, and friendly. Just as Atticus wishes his children to understand this fact, Lee wants her reader to grasp the same. According to Fred Erisman, Lee is explicit and successful in her attempt to embody the South within Maycomb and its residents (136). Therefore, the responsibility of white Southerners extends to embrace the diversity with which the South is made. Not only does one have the responsibility to uphold the law and one's respect of another's property but also accept responsibility for one's community and its acceptance of diversity.

## CHAPTER 4

### *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*: HARPER LEE'S CHARACTER REPRESENTATION

The careful development of characters in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* provides a clear path to her moral message of respecting others and working toward getting along. In setting up her characters, she establishes the symbol of a serene yet territorial creature which gives protection to flowers and gardens as it feeds on insects that may be dangerous to various plant life (*The Audubon Society* 549). Creating several characters with traits similar to the mockingbird, Lee brings her reader to the realization that simply because someone appears different does not mean one should be mistreated or disrespected and that individuals can live harmoniously in the world. Boo Radley and Tom Robinson are innocent individuals who often receive disrespect and mistreatment based on perceived personal differences. Additionally, she develops the characters of Dolphus Raymond and Atticus Finch to display how people work toward living together in an often intolerant world. Dolphus Raymond shows Lee's audience the ability to live harmoniously among those who are ethnically or culturally different from the mainstream white population. Finally, Atticus depicts the guardianship a mockingbird gives to the territory it watches. Although Southerners would be particularly familiar with the mockingbird, people throughout the United States have these wonderful creatures in their backyards as well; therefore, one should recognize that Lee's message crosses regional boundaries. Morally, Lee ties her portrayal of the mockingbird and character representation to the message that people, regardless of differences, should live harmoniously.

Several critics point to the idea that Lee intends Boo Radley and Tom Robinson to serve as the novel's mockingbirds; while this idea holds true, Lee develops several characters to

preserve the mockingbird's image. In his article "Harper Lee's Tragic Vision" R. A. Dave suggests the symbolic mockingbird fulfills two purposes: to demonstrate a moral significance and bring out the subculture of race (50-51). With the mockingbird as a sort of protector and harmonious creature, Lee emphasizes the idea that it is a sin to kill one because they do not cause harm. Miss Maudie Atkinson, the Finch neighbor, claims "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird" (Lee 90). Lee develops characters to show her audience that, like the mockingbird, people in general, and Southern whites in particular, do not need to live in an intolerant world but rather should work toward getting to know and respect others better.

These four characters provide focal points giving the reader a chance to see the good in people and depict varying mockingbird-like qualities. Feared because of his reclusiveness, Boo Radley receives disrespect from the community. Boo illustrates those individuals who choose to live reclusively from the social majority. Tom Robinson, a hardworking African American, represents the people who have been mistreated for centuries because their ethnic or cultural characteristics do not match the empowered majority. Neither of these men actually threatens society, but because of their personal nature, they become feared and disrespected. "Both Arthur Radley and Tom Robinson, who are punished for no crimes they ever committed, are the representatives of all innocent victims" (Dave 56). Lee urges her audience to recognize because someone is unfamiliar there no reason to show disrespect. Claudia Durst Johnson, in *Understanding To Kill a Mockingbird: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historic Documents*, points out that Tom Robinson and Boo Radley become clearly defined by Lee as the mockingbirds (9). First, Tom's death is likened by Mr. Underwood to "the senseless slaughter of

songbirds by hunters and children” (Lee 241). Similarly, in the final chapter of the novel, Scout realizes that Heck Tate cannot prosecute Boo Radley for the murder of Bob Ewell because it would be “sort of like shootin’ a mockingbird” (Lee 276). Lee doubly demonstrates her moral message not only by creating two “mockingbirds” but also by using other characters to morally demonstrate the wrong in the mistreatment and disrespect of others. Through Dolphus Raymond, a white man who lives with a black woman and their children along the river of Maycomb County, Lee engages her audience to look at how people do live together, with apparent differences, yet still get along. Atticus helps in developing this symbolic gesture by consistently reminding the reader that one must not judge people before getting to know them.

Lee obviously intends her reader to be affected by Boo’s constant presence. In the first part of the novel, he intrigues the Finch children with small gifts. In part two, the novelty of his presence becomes overshadowed by the trial; however, he remains important to the children’s maturity. Arthur Radley, referred to by his neighbors as “Boo,” serves as the neighborhood and community recluse; he represents those in society who choose not to participate with the social mainstream. Mentioned in the second paragraph of the novel and remaining a central focus until the novel’s end, he provides a significant amount of structure to *To Kill a Mockingbird’s* plot and theme. Setting up the children’s desire to see and know Boo Radley allows Lee to direct her reader to look beyond Boo’s reputation and discover that those who keep to themselves should not be feared. “In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Boo Radley exists as a kind of everyman character who represents people everywhere who are different and therefore, misunderstood, forgotten, and abused” (Power 173). The fear and disrespect of such individuals stem from the unknown, and this air of mystery feeds the imagination of the children. Boo so seldom ventures from his house that the Finch children have not seen him but only witness signs of his kindness. Lee’s

reader, unaware of Boo's known physical description until the end of the novel, knows only a little about his past: he is a white adult male, the younger of two children, and as a teen has hung out with rambunctious friends. However, the audience quickly receives the community's, and thus the children's, imagined appearance of him. In chapter one, Jem describes Boo's appearance and behaviors to Dill, who has become fascinated with the recluse.

Boo was about six-and-a-half feet tall, judging from his tracks; he dined on raw squirrels and any cats he could catch, that's why his hands were bloodstained – if you ate an animal raw, you could never wash the blood off. There was a long jagged scar that ran across his face; what teeth he had were yellow and rotten; his eyes popped, and he drooled most of the time. (Lee 13)

Through the use of this monstrous and gothic-like description, Lee establishes the reader's initial view of Boo to be similar to that of Jem and Scout. The neighborhood has instilled rumor and fear into the children with this persona; therefore, until they witness his true personality the children have no other foundation for Boo's existence. Lee's point in this character development stresses that by rumor and imagination, people often become disrespected by the mainstream populace; moreover, Lee enhances a situation, that once dispelled, her audience will re-evaluate through their own conscience. As she guides her audience with the curiosity of children, Lee symbolically constructs Boo as a tool to instruct her audience in proper moral responsibility. Boo's reclusiveness demonstrates that the blinders of moral responsibility do not extend to the mistreatment of another person who appears or chooses to live differently. As the Finch children learn moral values from their father, Lee teaches her reader to be polite and mannerly to all individuals, including those who choose to live diversely from society.

Boo establishes that a lack of respect can be shown to those white Americans who fail to socially incorporate themselves. Scout realizes at the end of the novel that Boo has been very much a part of the community. Although he rarely appears in the flesh, indications of his presence can be seen frequently. During Miss Maudie's house fire, Boo makes certain that Scout keeps warm by adding a blanket to her shoulders. When the children escape from the Radley property, he mends Jem's pants so no one will suspect how they became torn. Finally as Bob Ewell makes his attack on the children, Boo stops a tragedy. The caring nature of this recluse makes him a more likable person rather than the monster previously considered by the community and children. These various scenarios show Lee's audience that simply because one does not openly and publicly express friendliness does not make one a monster.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the reader plainly witnesses a changing perception of Boo develop through the children. Jem becomes satisfied with his existence but still marvels at his mystery. Jem's concept of Boo changes around the middle of the novel when he, Scout, and Dill essentially get caught sneaking on the Radley property. At the time Jem finds his pants mended, he realizes Boo's true nature. Scout begins to recognize the kindness and truth about Boo as she grips the notion he has helped her keep warm on the night of Miss Maudie's house fire. While Scout's life circles around the imagination and mystery of Boo, her thoughts become more adult with the idea of carrying on mature conversations with him. Furthermore, as Jem and Scout learn the truth about Boo, Lee shows that children have the ability to redirect the moral codes by which people live. Consequently, at the novel's conclusion, Lee demonstrates an adult's acceptance when Scout holds Boo's arm as he escorts her properly to his front porch. Here Lee reminds her audience that, like Miss Stephanie Crawford, adults generally watch for the younger

generation to make changes in life's moral code. Lee advances this progression to show her audience that often those people feared should not be mistreated or judged disrespectfully.

The second mockingbird of the novel is Tom Robinson, an African American field worker convicted of raping a white woman. Robinson serves as a mockingbird to challenge racism. Lee successfully makes her audience aware that human beings, regardless of color, do not deserve to be feared or mistreated; therefore, ignorance does not serve as an excuse to moral behavior.

Tom Robinson, falsely accused of a heinous crime, is also a representative character. He stands for the people of minority in the South, especially the much persecuted Blacks. Lee attempts throughout her novel to give her readers a benevolent view of African Americans. Though she writes about them in times of duress, she warmly describes their homes and open doors of their church to show its value. (Power 173)

The reader sees the goodness of the black characters through the church people and their kindness to Jem and Scout. Tom Robinson epitomizes this facet of American life by representing the good, honest, and hardworking African American persecuted simply because of his race. Laurie Champion points out that "Tom is the symbolic mockingbird whose plight illustrates that racial injustice is the most apparent manifestation of moral corruption in Maycomb County; thus, the novel suggests that it is a sin, spiritually wrong, to shoot Tom and to discriminate against people" (128). Robinson is a mockingbird because he does not harm anything – he serves the community by helping those in need, such as Mayella Ewell, and working hard in the fields of Link Deas. However, due to his race, he receives a conviction for a crime he has not committed.

Historically black Americans have been accused and convicted for the crimes of whites; morally Tom's representation as a mockingbird reminds the reader that people should be respected rather than mistreated. Another critic, Carolyn Jones, claims "The Tom Robinsons of the world are defined as the abyss around which we create impenetrable boundaries" (56). By creating such a character and situation, Lee challenges her reader with the idea that one should not judge, mistreat, or convict someone until the entire truth becomes told. In Maycomb County, although Atticus tells the truth, most residents decide not to pursue justice but instead accept the morally corrupt means of looking the other way as generations before them had done. Champion further claims the novel's central theme involves the county's inability to recognize Robinson as a victim or see, through truth, justice served (134). With Atticus' powerful summation of the trial and directive to the jury, Lee's audience should succumb to the idea that Tom is a mockingbird and his conviction would not serve justice. This idea lends the novel's title credibility because he committed no crime and his eventual death was sinful. The reader understands that the outcome of the trial will be conviction, but more importantly, by the novel's end, the reader sees the wrong in this outcome.

Lee not only sets up the audience with two characters who do not fit in socially, but she also develops a character who chooses to live between colliding worlds, thus opting not to fit into mainstream society. Boo, a white man with little interest in a public life, chooses to be different and apparently does not mind the community's rumors. Tom Robinson, on the other hand, as an African American living during the 1930s South, has few to no rights in society. The third character, Dolphus Raymond, represents the connection between the world of those whites who chose to live outside the mainstream, especially the Southern white populace, and the African American world which for centuries has been mistreated and disrespected. With the



collision of these two worlds, Lee constructs a character to show that individuals outside the boundaries are no less human than those within the boundaries. Moreover, they still manage to exist in harmony. Lee encourages her reader to consider how these people have been made outcasts and then make changes to one's behavior toward them.

When Scout sees Dolphus Raymond for the first time Jem explains that he is a drunk who lives along the riverbank with his colored wife and “mixed” children (Lee 161). Based on rumor and misguided views, Jem’s explanation, although not intentionally mean, serves to demean Dolphus Raymond. Jem’s observation regarding Raymond appears to be a community consensus rather than a first-hand judgment. As the children sit watching the people in the square, Lee’s audience should note that no tension appears between the black community and Dolphus Raymond. They simply accept the connection. Scout’s second encounter with Dolphus Raymond arrives during the trial as Dill becomes physically ill at the prosecutor’s treatment of Tom. When the two children leave the courthouse and rest next to a tree in the courtyard, Dolphus Raymond introduces himself and explains why he carries his cola in a bag.

“I try to give ’em a reason, you see. It helps folks if they can latch onto a reason. When I come to town, which is seldom, if I weave a little and drink out of this sack, folks can say Dolphus Raymond’s in the clutches of whiskey – that’s why he won’t changes his ways. He can’t help himself, that’s why he lives the way he does.” (Lee 200)

Lee provides her audience with an attitude most find familiar and gives Scout the chance to begin seeing clearly that people do not always turn out how one expects.

People often make judgments regarding others by the first impression instead of getting first-hand experience. Charles Chappell in his essay “The Unity of *To Kill a Mockingbird*” states Scout instinctively understands the basis for Dolphus Raymond’s clandestine identity.

Finally, Scout gains the insight to understand how Dolphus Raymond can marry a black woman, farm his acreage productively, and avoid the calumny of the white community by outthinking his potential adversaries. She understands clearly when he tells her, “Secretly, Miss Finch, I’m not much of a drinker, but you see they could never, never understand that I live like I do because that’s the way I want to live” (Lee 213). (46)

Dolphus Raymond portrays the lack of respect given by the general populace to one who chooses to live a life in conflict with the mainstream population. Lee sets this character up to engage her reader in the idea that people of every race can live together in harmony. Part of living together with little conflict means substantiating a relationship of peace. Dolphus Raymond demonstrates this ability, and Atticus Finch builds the case that peace begins by leaving people to their own business and getting to know them better before passing judgment. Atticus instills a voice that explains the idea people should be left alone to live their lives as they see fit.

Atticus Finch, the novel’s protagonist and hero, raises two children in a single-parent home in the 1930s South; moreover, he chooses to bring them up with morals that conflict with the common everyday behavior of those in the community. Atticus protects both Boo’s identity and Tom’s innocence; he also underscores the general moral good of respecting others. Atticus’ character stands for the simple, honest goodness people across the nation should express when dealing with others regardless of their circumstances. He represents those individuals who realize the existence of a moral right in one’s attitude toward others and those who understand

that people should rear their children, America's future, in a manner that reflects this moral standard. Carolyn Jones points out Atticus provides the children with the ultimate symbolic gesture in the novel. Giving the children air rifles for Christmas, Atticus tells them it is a sin to kill a mockingbird: "I'd rather you shot at tin cans in the back yard, but I know you'll go after birds. Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember its a sin to kill a mockingbird'" (Lee 90). The audience should recognize Atticus' message and Lee's ultimate moral through this passage: "It is wrong to do harm to something or to someone who only tries to help us or to give us pleasure" (Jones 62). Lee stands boldly on this moral as this sentiment receives expression on two other occasions: first when talking about Tom's death and second when Atticus and Heck Tate discuss Boo's involvement with Bob Ewell's death.

Atticus, a man who practices positive and good moral ethics, is not condescending or snobbish about his beliefs. Thomas Shaffer discusses the ordinary man Atticus represents by claiming that "Disposition, more than the crisis, illustrates how it is that virtue is a matter of seeing with the self and learning to see with the self, and how moral life – and heroism too – are revealed in the ordinary" (190). Atticus, in this manner, manages conflict by sorting it out, discovering the moral illustrated by the wrong, and passing the knowledge and ability on to his children and community. Shaffer goes on to illustrate that Atticus' character development shows he is ordinary through a realistic, simple response to his children.

Atticus not only protects the innocent he also helps those in society who need it. In fact, despite obvious moral philosophies, he helps Mrs. DuBose, a neighbor, when she needs a distraction to withdraw from a morphine addiction. Additionally, he continues to help Helen Robinson after the trial ends. As the children witness his kindness to everyone, Lee's audience should see this morally upstanding attitude and choose to become more like Atticus. "Through

the actions of her father, Scout is able to make sense of Boo and Tom as she criticizes the morality of the 1930s and 1960s America. Atticus' moral structure gives form to the imagination that Scout's meeting with Boo fires" (Jones 53). Jones goes on to express that Scout gains complete insight into Atticus' ethic when she looks at her life from the Radley front porch. Lee expresses Scout's realization in the final chapter of the novel when Scout walks Boo home.

I had never seen our neighborhood from this angle. There were Miss Maudie's, Miss Stephanie's – there was our house, I could see the porch swing -- Miss Rachel's house was beyond us, plainly visible. I could even see Mrs. Dubose's. [. . .] To the left of the brown door was a long shuttered window. I walked to it, stood in front of it, and turned around. In daylight, I thought, you could see to the post office corner.

Daylight [. . .] in my mind, the night faded. It was daytime and the neighborhood was busy. [. . .] It was summertime, and two children scampered down the sidewalk toward a man approaching in the distance. (Lee 278-79)

From a new angle, Scout realizes her moral character and that it derives from her father's familiar adage that "you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view – " (Lee 30). Most importantly Scout, thus the reader, realizes that Boo is aware of the children's relationship with their father and the neighbors because he can see all the way to the post office and see what everyone does each day. Lee's reader should be as perceptive as Boo and clearly understand that Atticus works hard to build for his children a moral foundation that allows them the ability to look at each person for who they are rather than for whom they appear. Atticus demonstrates that moral integrity requires people to look out for and respect one

another regardless of differences. Successfully Atticus shows that even during the 1930s South people from different areas of life can get along.

The mockingbird is obviously significant to Harper Lee's novel and its moral conclusion. Lee equips the reader with several well-developed "mockingbirds" who illustrate that people, although different, deserve the same respect and treatment. Boo, as the audience confirms at the novel's conclusion, watches over the neighborhood from his nest. Tom Robinson works hard in the fields of Link Deas and serves the community by working odd jobs; ultimately this character development lends a hand in establishing that truth protects a community from chaos. If the truth had been accepted during the Robinson trial, many in the community could have been spared the torment of Bob Ewell. A more minor mockingbird figure is Dolphus Raymond, whose character serves as a connection between the worlds of Boo Radley and Tom Robinson. Dolphus Raymond, as Lee points out, lives peacefully among the races of white and black, much like the mockingbird lives among other birds with little conflict. Atticus protects the world of each character by instructing his children in a strong moral ethic that calls for respecting others and not passing premature judgment. Like Atticus, the mockingbird provides help and defense to those in the community by standing watch over the garden and eating what may be harmful insects. Lee's character construction ultimately lends significance to her title by showing that the mistreatment and disrespect of others is wrong. Based on strong character development and a symbolic look at the mockingbird, Lee's reader should conclude that respecting others serves a strong moral code that crosses not only racial and privacy boundaries but geographical regions as well.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION: HARPER LEE'S FINAL POINT

After reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*, one discovers that Harper Lee, through a use of history, moral instruction, and character development, has presented a strong moral message to her audience. Her title suggests that a sin occurs when one kills a mockingbird, and Scout Finch's recounting the central summer of her life reflects the integrity of her moral development. With historical context and character representation, Lee's moral message finds weight. She begins by setting her story in the final years of the Great Depression exploiting her audience's familiarity with the financial position of most Southerners, especially the poor white farmer. She then establishes the mindset and attitude of the Southern white toward other races and cultures, which may well represent the sentiments of many Americans. Furthermore, a look at the Finch children, their father, and their community reveals a deep moral message. Depicting fatherly instruction and neighborly advice, Lee educates her reader on the moral responsibility of how to treat others. As the children search for clues to their mysterious neighbor's existence and face the consequences of racism in their small Southern town, they receive lessons in how to treat others with respect and kindness regardless of who they are or from where they come. Finally, Lee's characters demonstrate how often people suffer misjudgment and mistreatment because of fear and prejudice; Lee asserts that one can live among all cultures and races without fear and prejudice. Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* encourages its readers to consider their moral judgment and subsequent treatment of others.

Setting her novel in motion, Lee describes the difficulties of the Southern whites and particularly the rural farmer who was hit especially hard during the Great Depression. Looking

at the 1930s reminds readers of both the financial hardships and relational issues people faced; during this difficult time the farm barely sustained life for many farmers, yet they used what they grew to pay for outside services. This hardship forced the poor to rely on themselves and be defensive when threatened; in the aftermath of Southern Reconstruction, the rural farmers often banded together to keep their social status higher than that of Southern blacks (Flynt 211-16). Setting up the Old Sarum community, Lee pulls in this high emotion when Bob Ewell makes accusations against Tom Robinson.

Lee clearly builds a foundation for the historical social structure throughout the novel. She works to dispel this hierarchical structure by showing characters such as Atticus who make no differentiation between the rich or poor, or black or white. As the South stares down Reconstruction, many Southern whites become hostile toward members of other races. By depicting this attitude, Lee establishes a forum by which she imparts that all people, regardless of socioeconomic status or race, should be treated with respect and not misjudged. As the South struggles to unite races and pull itself from the depths of the Great Depression, Lee's early audience easily recognizes the pain various characters face. Recasting the nationally known Scottsboro Trial, Lee points out the moral wrongs of white society by portraying the injustice handed down to innocent black citizens. Tom Robinson, like the Scottsboro defendants, is wrongfully accused of a crime he has not committed. Similar to the defense attorneys of the Scottsboro Trial, Atticus attempts to bring out the truth and redefine the Southern judicial system. However, the community cannot handle allowing the truth to be admitted and convicts a black man because of past fear and prejudice. Using the backdrop of such a highly publicized trial, Lee urges her audience to examine the past and learn from the mistakes so future generations can live in a more peaceful world.

One major aspect of the novel appears in its direct instruction of the treatment of others. As the children face Boo Radley, his reclusiveness, and the newly defined racism surrounding them, they look toward the moral example of their father. The heart of Lee's novel surrounds the verbal and active examples of the moral responsibility Atticus expresses to Jem and Scout. From leaving people to their privacy and treating everyone with respect, to simply not putting one's shoes on the bed, Lee covers numerous acts of responsibility both to others and oneself. Lee establishes her characters to demonstrate the behavior she deems morally necessary for people to show. As Jem and Scout receive a moral upbringing from their father, their housekeeper, and the community, it is Atticus, the novel's hero, that everyone should look to and emulate. Claudia A. Carver suggests that Atticus is a hero because he reacts with frustration at the wrong behavior people express toward others (13). As a parent he guides his children in the correct paths of moral living, and as a lawyer he works to ensure justice is delivered to those he defends even when the odds stack against them. Most importantly for Lee's reader, Atticus serves as an example who treats all people with respect and kindness.

Further characterizations provide the reader with several mockingbird-like qualities with which Lee endows her characters. Somewhat of a mystery, mockingbirds have the ability to imitate other birds and generally display serene and non-threatening behaviors; therefore, they most often provide nothing but entertainment for people. Several of the novel's characters serve as mockingbirds while others emulate qualities that entice people to like the songbird. Boo Radley and Tom Robinson serve as the novel's mockingbirds while Dolphus Raymond and Atticus Finch emulate various qualities of the songbird. Boo Radley expresses that people should not be judged before they become known; simply because someone is reclusive does not mean they are unsavory. Tom Robinson then represents the years of hatred and violence



unnecessarily bestowed upon races other than white. Dolphus Raymond and Atticus Finch go on to demonstrate the ease of which people can get along. Lee's goal in character development provides her reader with the example, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view – " (Lee 30). Scout and Jem, through their encounter with Boo, realize the foolishness of a misjudgment; moreover, Lee's reader should also recognize the need to reserve judgment on an individual.

Through the Finch children, the reader witnesses the response Lee wants from her message as Scout realizes that most people are "real nice [. . .] once you finally see them" (Lee 281). Jem and Scout, therefore, epitomize *To Kill a Mockingbird's* intended audience: those with eyes to see and ears to hear a simply message of moral responsibility with an innocent approach. Through Atticus' verbal and active examples of moral ethic Jem and Scout, thus Lee's reader, learn to treat others well. Lee's adult narrator reminds her reader that one must look at things from another's perspective in order to understand and treat others kindly and respectfully. One should capitalize on the capacity to see with childlike eyes that all people can get along and live peacefully.

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