



Harper lee's to kill a mockingbird as a paragon of social stratification and legality

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Abstract

The novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* has become a classic of American literature. The fictional Alabama town of Maycomb serves as the setting for the novel. It is the story of Scout's development, but it is also a tale of the racially sensitive environment in the town during the Great Depression. Due to its explicit and implicit treatment of specifically Southern themes and issues, it belongs to the American literary genre known as Southern literature. It displays a moralistic and oversimplified depiction of racial discrimination, implying that black people accused of assault in the middle of the 20th century—were subjected to harsh treatment. A vivid picture of the 1930s' societal impact and legal flaws has been drawn. It is also the core of American history's most significant racial group lawsuit. Law acknowledges a wider range of justifications for abiding by the law, including more social justifications. In particular, social norms, moral principles, and legitimacy have all been significant. Lee gives the influence and importance of laws in a community's thoughts and behaviour.

Keywords: prejudice, law, racism, evil, judgement, trial, right, innocence

Introduction

Author Harper Lee utilises memorable characters in her book *To Kill a Mockingbird* to examine prejudice and civil rights in the segregated South US of the 1930s. "Someone rare has written this very fine first novel: a writer with the liveliest sense of life, and the warmest, most authentic sense of humour. A touching book; and so funny, so likeable." (Capote). Truman Capote was a close friend of Harper Lee. This novel has narrated by Jean Louise Scout, the daughter of white legal advisor Atticus Finch. From their father, Scout and her brother Jem learn about the norms of racial justice and receptivity. They also develop the courage and unity to act on their instincts and form a prospective friendship with "Boo" Radley, a recluse mocked by the community. "In the 33 years since its publication, has never been the focus of a dissertation, and it has been the subject of only six literary studies, several of them no more than a couple of pages long" (Johnson). Harper Lee gives her portrayals a dash of realism and realistic depth. She has witnessed Whites' conduct towards Black people and is well aware of how Black people are degraded. She speaks to the greatness and virtue of the ordinary citizenry using a "mockingbird." Mockingbirds don't cause any trouble for anyone. Simply said, they sing quietly, and killing them would be wrong. Mockingbird is used to address the excellent citizens who have been wrongfully accused or killed. Tom Robinson portrays a decent person who has been falsely accused, indicted, and then killed while trying to escape jail. Another mockingbird, Boo Radley, protects the children from the wicked Bob Ewell. The sheriff must reassure him since he is a mockingbird who causes no harm to anybody. Boo Radley did everything to protect innocent children from actual dishonesty. In the eyes of the general people, Ewell represents evil. The loss of innocence and racial injustice are main themes in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. "Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird" (Lee 99). Since it was introduced as a text for school study in 1963, *To Kill a Mockingbird* has been the topic of considerable debate. People have questioned the book's suitability for use in classrooms and libraries around the country due to its use of racial slurs, obscenity, and an open description of rape.

The more sombre portion of the book, Part 2, shifts from Scout's joyful childhood memories to the Tom Robinson trial and its lasting repercussions on Atticus and the kids. "She says she never kissed a grown man before an' she might as well kiss a nigger. She says what her papa do to her don't count" (Lee 214). This statement from Tom strongly suggests that Mayella's father sexually assaulted her and that she approached him rather than the other way around. A fair trial should be used to discover a person's true innocence or guilt. The verdict cannot be believable if the jury or the judge is biased. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the jury chose to act on their racial prejudice instead of considering the enormous amount of evidence that supported Tom's case. Tom's constitutional rights to an impartial jury and due process were also violated, in addition to the fact that he did not obtain a fair trial as required by law. The only person who obeyed the law and went above and above to provide proof to the court was Atticus.

"Atticus had used every tool available to free men to save Tom Robinson, but in the secret courts of men's hearts Atticus had no case. Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed" (Lee 266). According to Atticus, Tom did not deserve to die because he only did well. It is not beyond the realm of common knowledge for legal authorities or public members to demonstrate that mistakes happen and that

criminals escape punishment while innocent people are condemned. A system that always finds the guilty and never finds the innocent would be ideal. However, this idealised procedure is impossible to implement in real life. There will be some innocent individuals found guilty and some guilty persons released. Jurors are aware that a confession could be coerced and, they have disregarded confessions obtained by direct physical force. However, they are blind to the influence of covert social influences, which in fact, have a significant influence on how people behave. Similar to how Mayella was compelled to overturn the court's judgments. Mayella may be falsely accusing Tom of rape, but even if she is, she likely feels that she has no other option, given that Atticus has made it apparent that Mr. Ewell will punish her if she disobeys. If this happened in a real court, there might be a mistrial, or the verdict might be overturned.

According to the Constitution, everyone has rights, and when those rights are infringed, someone must answer for it. Making people more conscious of the effects of social pressure on people in social settings is one form of the solution in the instance of questioning. "Judge Taylor was on the bench, looking like a sleepy old shark, his pilot fish writing rapidly below in front of him" (Lee 181). In these lines, Judge and jury appear bored and tired, as if they are aware that the case is hopeless and not worth fighting for, while the public is hyperactive. When it comes to race, gender, and potentially sexual orientation, acting out of group bias—that is, taking action against a person based on opinions about a group they are a part of—is unlawful. However, how can we know the logic behind someone's policy or decision? A judge will typically explain other reasons for a sentencing, even if it is prompted by racial bias. Police officers rarely say they stopped someone because "they are Black." The legal system has a long history of having difficulty defining the conditions in which it can be said that prejudice exists based on what judges and other legal authorities say and do in specific situations.

The trial's opening statement was provided by Mr. Heck Tate, the county sheriff of Maycomb. Tate was sworn in; thus, it makes sense that he would tell just the truth and the truth alone. The author makes it clear that the jury never acknowledged being racist and never considered being racist, yet they were very critical when delivering the judgement against Robinson. They softened their stance on racism. The jury members depicted in the story were affected by the same disease, which led to the conviction of Tom Robinson despite his innocence. "Maycomb's usual disease" (Lee 98). Their condition was severe and beyond their awareness. Because of the widespread racism, Atticus was referred to as a "nigger-lover" by the public because he defended Robinson. "Tom Robinson's case is something that goes to the essence of a man's conscience — Scout, I could not go to church and worship God if I didn't try to help that man" (Lee 116). This insight also raises the issue of conscience, which Lee addresses directly in the book. Atticus offers when Scout questions the need to protect Tom.

Society changes faster than the law, and there is a need to examine the law constantly. Rules of Law are not the principal factor in deciding the cases; there is the human factor. Law is a creation of the Judiciary. Law is a product of judgements by judges with their social, economic, and contextual influences. "But this is a truth that applies to the human race and to no particular race of men" (Lee 226). In his statement to the jury, Atticus dissects the societal norms that allow someone like Mayella to get away with charging Tom with rape while also preventing Tom from mounting a defence. He contends that Mayella and the jury would commit a terrible sin if they gave credence to racial prejudices that deprive black people of any feeling of dignity or even humanity. In reality, racism works in such a way as to give the impression to white people that black people are less than human.

The two forces at odds throughout the rape trial—the law and the code—are fundamentally differentiated. Tom Robinson, he claims, has broken no laws, but Mayella Ewell, who is accusing him of doing so, has broken the law by making advances toward a black man: "She has committed no crime, she has merely broken a rigid and time-honoured code of our society, a code so severe that whoever breaks it is hounded from our midst as unfit to live with" (Lee 224). Prior to breaking the code, none of the codes mattered to her, but subsequently, everything changed for her. Atticus contends that Tom Robinson, the black man accused of raping the white lady, must be examined according to the law. However, he knows that the jury would consider the defendant under Maycomb society's standards because of his membership in that society. Bob Ewell's phrase, "of that black nigger yonder ruttin' on my Mayella," sums up Atticus' immediate concern. However, his more significant concern is the discrepancy between the rules people are supposed to live by and the code they really obey.

People in symbolic courtrooms break many social norms: Mayella Ewell is beaten by her father as retribution for kissing Tom Robinson, and Boo Radley receives a punishment far worse than any court could have given him by being transformed into a non-person. Moreover, due to choosing a black lady as his common-law spouse and producing mixed-race offspring, Mr. Dolphus Raymond was banished by society.

When deciding a case, judges take into account not only abstract rules but also socio-economic interests and public policy. Although Atticus teaches us a valuable lesson in professional and legal ethics, he does not teach us how essential character is compared to laws and ideals. Realists hold that only acknowledged natural scientific techniques should be used to study laws in an impartial and value-free way. Atticus agrees to take the case, out of moral integrity, and a genuine conviction that the racial practises of the deep South will eventually change. Even if it is only a modest step, he sees this trial as a chance to contribute to that historic mindset shift. When used daily, the law's scope is incomprehensible and inseparable from its usage. It focuses more on the practical application of the law than on how it should be written out in the statutes. Particularly when social groupings or interests are at odds, its role becomes crucial.

Nevertheless, the all-white jury uses its own biases to decide the case's conclusion rather than interpreting the facts in accordance with the law. Tom Robinson's guilty judgement serves as an example of the law's limits and prompts the reader to reevaluate what is "fair" in the term "a fair trial." Atticus strongly believes in the judicial system, even if he is aware of its flaws.

By examining the nature of bias, psychology has helped to solve these crucial problems. In the past, the most people in our society, especially white men, held and openly stated prejudices against women and members of minority groups, such as the belief that women are weak and passive and that members of minority groups are dishonest or lazy. It is plausible to think that when people discriminate, they will come out, and there will be smoking firearms since there are such prejudices and no standards against having and acting on such ideas.

Sceptical judges must approve the law. Different judges have various mental states. The judges' behavioural patterns change based on the circumstances or cases brought before them. "I'm no idealist to believe firmly in the integrity of our courts and in the jury system—that is no ideal to me, it is a living, working reality. Gentlemen, a court is no better than each man of you sitting before me on this jury. A court is only as sound as its jury, and a jury is only as sound as the men who make it up. I am confident that you gentlemen will review without passion the evidence you have heard, come to a decision, and restore this defendant to his family. In the name of God, do your duty" (Lee 227). Atticus also thinks that different persons should be treated differently regarding the law. He makes his daughter understand that because she has a good life with plenty of opportunities, she should be required to obey the law entirely. However, he suggests that others have much worse lives and significantly fewer opportunities, so let those people break the law in minor ways so that applying the law does not overly hurt them.

Legal academics have seen references to legal matters in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, notably in events outside the courtroom. The opening quote by the 19th-century essayist Charles Lamb reads: "Lawyers, I suppose, were children once." Jim Crow laws influence people's perceptions of Atticus in this book. As early as the 1890s, statutes that encouraged the segregation of blacks and whites in southern American states were Jim Crow Laws. In contrast to the rest of Maycomb, Atticus is disliked because he does not harbour prejudice against black people and fights the Jim Crow laws subtly and overtly throughout the book. Unlike the rest of Maycomb, Atticus is also not a victim of the Jim Crow laws. Jim Crow laws served as anti-black propaganda, putting whites under a "spell" that made them dislike blacks. By standing up for Tom Robinson, forbidding Jem and Scout from using racial insults, and treating Calpurnia as an equal member of his family, Atticus opposes these laws. People, however, strongly disagree with Atticus' beliefs and discriminate against him by calling him a "nigger-lover." Everyone in Maycomb County instantly feels Tom is guilty due to the "spell." Jim Crow laws are reflected in *To Kill A Mockingbird* during the trial and killing of Tom Robinson.

Classism, misogyny, and racism are just a few of the prejudices Scout encounter throughout *To Kill a Mockingbird*—and she even engages in herself. Whatever the biased worldview, they all treat people as members of stereotyped groups, expect compliance, and offer no credit to individuals. *To Kill a Mockingbird* repeatedly demonstrates how prejudice may be narrow-minded and harmful as well as seeming benign—but in every instance, it is absurd and stupid. Racist white people are evil, and non-racist white people are wonderful. Because Atticus is good and not prejudiced, he puts his name, standing in the community, and, eventually, the safety of his children in jeopardy. "Mr. Finch, if you was a nigger like me, you'd be scared, too" (Lee 215). Tom recounts why he left the area when he saw Bob Ewell approaching and why he refrained from touching Mayella Ewell. Bob Ewell is racist and, consequently, terrible. He falsely charges a black guy with rape, spits on Atticus in public, and tries to kill a child. It makes an effort to examine some of the difficulties of surviving in a racist society. As Atticus discovers how his family's opposition to racial discrimination has set them up against the community, Scout and Jem must deal with anything from annoyance to deadly enmity.

Conclusion

According to some critics, Atticus lacks moral clarity and neglects to use his legal expertise to change Maycomb's discriminatory social norms. The Alabama State Bar installed a monument honouring Atticus in Monroeville in 1997, citing his existence as the "first significant milestone in the state's judicial history." In recognition of her creation of Atticus, who "has become the epitome of the ideal lawyer in servicing the legal needs of the poor," Lee earned a special honorary membership to the Alabama State Bar in 2008. Numerous young people have been motivated to work for justice and become lawyers due to this book. A "post-bias" society has been described as the one we live in now. People are aware that it is improper to display their biases in a social setting, to the extent that they are aware of having such biases. "To capture modern bias it has to be recognized that people can sincerely believe that they are not biased, yet can hold biases toward groups which shape their attitudes, feelings and behaviour. These biases are often expressed through subtle non-verbal actions" (Tyler 455). Regardless of emotions, practically everyone is aware that using "the N word" in public is no longer appropriate. Unfortunately, research by psychologists has demonstrated that bias still exists. It has evolved into something more "contemporary," and is now based on ideas about other things, such the idea that people of colour desire "preferential treatment" or are "pushing too hard for change."

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