Analysis Of To Kill A Mockingbird By Harper Lee

‘Composers will often use novels to explore issues and concerns that they have about the society they live in’

Harper Lee’s ‘To Kill A Mockingbird’ is set in the 1930s within a deep southern country town of Maycomb, Alabama. Harper Lee was one of the first in the south to use books as a way to explore the issues in which she saw in her time living. ‘To Kill A Mockingbird’ is based on the issues of truth and justice both within the time of the book, and the time she spent living in the reality of it. In ‘To Kill A Mockingbird’, The story is told by a young child named Jean Louise Finch, (who is referenced as Scout throughout the book) who is the main character in the book. It begins by envisioning a young child’s imagination which slowly becomes a dark realisation of the outside adult world.

One of the main themes explored within the book, Truth, is not commonplace in the southern town of Maycomb. This is shown many times within the book, with many of the main events of ’To Kill A Mockingbird’ focusing on this issue. This is primarily shown in the court scene where Tom Robinson, a young coloured man is put up against the word of two white people. These white people are Bob and Mayella Ewell, who accuses Tom of rape.

The Ewell family, despite being low-class citizens who are poor, and skip education, still have a stronger word against the respectable, law-abiding coloured man, Tom Robinson. In this scene, Atticus, Maycomb’s best lawyer and father of Jem and Scout, is nominated to defend Tom Robinson. With a flawless court defence, showing that Tom Robinson could not have possibly executed this attack among other evidence, he is still found guilty by the all-white jury and is sentenced to a gaol term for the charge of rape, which in Alabama during the 1930’s usually ended in execution. It is clear to the reader despite not being stated, that Bob Ewell had beat Mayella for kissing Tom Robinson, and attempted to destroy the evidence of this abuse by removing the only witness, Tom himself, and succeeded in doing so. Shortly after this scene, Atticus is informed that Tom has been killed after attempting to escape prison, despite Atticus telling him that they will attempt to repeal the sentence. This is a sudden realisation of reality for Scout, where she considers why people would find someone like Tom as guilty.

Metaphors are used to explore the issues of truth in ‘To Kill A Mockingbird’. The main metaphor in ‘To Kill A Mockingbird’ is introduced early into the book, with Atticus quoting: “Remember, it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.” This is followed up by Scout asking what Atticus means by this to Miss Maudie in which she replies: “Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy… but sing their hearts out for us. That’s why it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.” Harper Lee leverages this metaphor by making Tom Robinson similar to a mockingbird, he helps with the odd jobs of what Mayella asks him, and he asks for nothing in return, but instead, he is killed (both metaphorically and literally) after helping her. The effect of this metaphor is to make the reader feel empathy for both Tom Robinson and Mayella Ewell, as she is being forced by Bob Ewell to make a trial and lie in court to get Tom Robinson imprisoned as he is a witness to the beatings that he regularly gives to his daughter. This is primary to the book, as it is also the feeling of which Harper Lee gives Scout after this scene.

Another topic that Harper Lee explores in the book, Justice, is also not commonplace in Maycomb. There are many forms of justice, with the main being Legal and Social. It was uncommon back in the 1930s that the people of colour would be justly acted upon, compared to white peoples, not only in courts but also in everyday life. Some examples of this injustice in the book include Tom Robinson's Court Case, prejudice against uncommon ideas, the abuse that Boo Radley received from his father causing him to be trapped inside, Scout being unfairly treated by her teacher for being educated, and Dill running away from home after the lack of care from his parents.

The main theme in the book that shows the injustice of Maycomb is the prejudice of many things. The most obvious prejudice is rampant racism. There are are many examples of prejudice racism, such as the court-case between Tom Robinson and the Ewells.

Although Tom Robinson is the obvious victim of this prejudice, there are more who are affected by this. For example, word gets out that Atticus is the defendant for Tom Robinson, and he gets called names and seen as an outsider because of his view that whites are no better than blacks. An example of this hate towards Atticus is when Mrs Dubose quotes that Atticus is "a nigger lover and no better than the trash he works for". Jem and Scout are aware that this is wrong, as they have been taught by Atticus that no one is better than anyone else. This was an uncommon view in the south, and even members of their own family had called them 'nigger lovers'.

Another form of prejudice is forming an opinion without all of the facts. There are many examples of this within the book, the time of Harper Lee, and the current day.

A example of this is from the beginning of the book, where Boo Radley, a character that at first is seen and displayed as a monster by the children, later in the book becomes one that they respect after he saves them from Bob Ewell, who attempts to murder them in order to get payback on Atticus. Boo symbolises Scout and Jem's realisation of the adult world. At the beginning of the book, Boo seems almost fictional to them, then they consider him as real, and jump to conclusions that he is a monster, similar to everyone else's thoughts on Boo. Their thoughts later develop into seeing Boo as an intelligent, normal person, after he saves them from Bob Ewell's attempt to murder them in a form of payback to Atticus for defending Tom Robinson. Boo Radley is not trialled for the murder of Bob Ewell as Atticus and Heck (the sheriff) agree that this is justice for the court case. This symbol shows that Atticus' views have been embedded into the children's thoughts, that they see everyone as equal.

'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.' - Jem

Jem describes Boo out of her imagination, it shows how they saw him as a monster, as this was the common thoughts of him, despite nearly nobody in Maycomb ever actually meeting or seeing him. This idea of a monster came from the opinion and gossip of others based on Boo's early life, therefore forming their own opinion of him. Boo Radley was so sheltered and unknown because of the unjust abuse he received from his father, and after his father died, his brother, Nathan, continued this abuse. This is shown by Boo Radley's only source of communication to the outside world, the knothole in the tree out the front of the Radley Place is cemented by

Nathan and played it off as a way to keep the tree from dying.

An example of this in the current day is Eric Garner's unjust death. Garner was put into a chokehold by a New York Police Department (NYPD) officer. This officer was Daniel Pantaleo, who continuously lied about the leading up events of the death. Garner was suspected of selling 'loosies', single untaxed cigarettes, and had objected to being handcuffed. This ended in Garner being tackled to the ground and put in a chokehold, which is against NYPD policy. Mr Garner's death was supposedly caused by his asthma, a health condition that he had among any others. Mr Garner's asthma was onset by Pantaleo's chokehold, where Garner stated that he could not breathe 11 times on video before he died. Moments after the realisation of the choking, a police lieutenant had sent a text message saying 'It's not a big deal'. A court case was opened, that quickly became a cover-up for the police officer. One of the people who was thought to be one of the last people who had communicated with Garner before his death James, he declined to have a statement in the disciplinary hearing as when he asked what would happen to the officer if he was found guilty, they replied that he could lose vacation time or his job. James was outraged that all the police officer who murdered an innocent person could suffer is a loss of vacation time. He was surprised that nothing had come of what was an obvious misuse of power. This relates to Bob Ewell leveraging the fact that his word was more powerful than Tom Robinson's to cover up his crime against his daughter.

The hearing revealed that a police supervisor recommended that internal charges be filed, but the department's unit did not apply them. This is also very similar to the jury in the court case, as, despite the considerable amount of evidence showing that Tom could not have possibly caused the injuries to Mayella, the jury threw this evidence aside, finding Tom guilty.

Harper Lee used 'To Kill A Mockingbird' to display and bring attention to the issues of her time living, and these relate to current issues. It was an important book for Harper Lee to help her show her thoughts and views on society as a whole, such as the rampant racism, and injustice within her time, and the current.