

The Themes in To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

The novel To Kill a Mockingbird succeeds in portraying the lifestyle of a relaxed southern town in the

early 20th century. It shows the families, feelings, and bigotry of the time. There are three main themes in the novel,

which are: justice is not blind, mob rule is not the way to solve things, and that you shouldn't fear or resent

something that hasn't done anything to disturb life. These themes are true in the novel and are also true in everyday

life.

[Nelle] Harper Lee was born and raised in the heart of the south. Lee's life and time period influences her

writing. Like her father and Atticus Finch, Lee went on to study law. She left school in 1950 so that she could go to

New York and become a writer. "Her law studies proved to be 'good training for a writer' because they promote

logical thinking and because law cases are an excellent source for story ideas" (Matuz 239). When her father

became ill, she was forced to split her time between New York and Monroeville, Alabama. "In her native town she

was surrounded by the setting of her novel; an old house where a mysterious recluse might live, the courtroom, and

the lawyer's office" (Matuz 239). This environment and her southern background proved to be the perfect

combination for writing a story about life in a quiet town in Alabama. The only way to be a good writer is to write

from experience, and since she lived most of her life in the setting of the story, her writing proved to be good. The

timing for the release of To Kill a Mockingbird could not have been more perfect. "In a time of the burgeoning civil

rights movement, her book was met with popular acclaim and was later adapted for film" (Matuz 240). To Kill a

Mockingbird to some extent is based on Lee's childhood. "Scout was based upon Lee's own upbringing...the

mischievous Dill was recently found out to be based upon Lee's childhood companion, Truman Capote" (Bryfonski

341). One of the ideas that Lee tried to put across in the novel was the fact that there will always be prejudice in one

form or another. Harper Lee has written only one novel in her life, but she made that one count.

Racism is still alive in modern society. No matter the amount of advances people have made to end racism,

there will always be a portion of the population that fears and hates anything that is different from their own. In our

advanced, yet somewhat bigoted society, there is one place that is supposedly 'color-blind'. That is the court

system. Unless the jury is made up of non-humans, the court system will always be bigoted. In the novel, the jury is

all white and all male, and when the defendant is somebody like Tom Robinson, he hasn't got a chance. "Lee writes

about a time when whites were the head honchos, and blacks were only counted as three-fifths, but that three fifths

didn't amount up to anything as far as rights went" (Magill 1680). Before the case even went to trial, Atticus knew

that there was no way that he would win this. "'Are you gonna win this case Atticus? Nope.'" (Lee 147). No matter

how much evidence Atticus had in his favor, even if there was video tape of the incident, the outcome of the case

would have been exactly the same. The way that Atticus presented the information in a way that obviously made a

few of the jurors think about the final ruling. "He was just happy that the jury deliberated for two hours instead of 5

minutes" (Lee 181). Racism seems to be the most highly concentrated in the south, which is odd seeing as how

that's where a very large percent of the black population is located at. "The way that she describes the southerners'

views and ideas about other races is not too different from some peoples' views today" (Matuz 246). The jury's

decision was practically like mob rule. Justice will probably never be color-blind in this lifetime.

Mob rule is when a large, angry group of people decide the outcome of something, usually using brute

force to reach that outcome. Harper Lee is very much against mob rule. In the novel, Atticus is sitting at home one

night when a mob comes along, "In Maycomb, grown men stood outside in the front yard for only two reasons:

death and politics" (Lee 147). Lee uses Scout as a way of breaking up the mob,

and shows her dislike towards

mobs and points to "the importance of law and order," (Magill 1680). Atticus represents the people in this world

who see mob justice as an excuse for anarchy. People like Atticus who defend the court systems, want everybody to

get a fair trial, whether they be white or black. "That boy might go to the chair, but he's not going till the truth's

told" (Lee 148). Atticus is the type of person that people should look up to. The man believes in what is fair and

what is right, and that is admirable. "Only a few courageous people, such as Atticus, are willing to do what they

know is right" (Magill 1680). Mobs are scared of what they don't quite understand. Mobs have never solved

anything.

People are sometimes scared by what they don't understand. Scout and Jem didn't understand Boo Radley,

so they feared him. They let their imaginations run wild when they thought of him. "Boo was about six and a half

feet tall; he dined on raw squirrels and any cats he could catch...and he drooled most of the time (Lee 17). Jem and

Dill used to make bets to see if one of them would touch the house or look through a window, to see the monster

within. "Lee points out that to try to overcome our fears, we try to act macho and show off, but that usually just

makes things worse" (Bryfonski 342). In actuality, Boo was just a normal guy who just happened to be cooped up

in his house for a couple of years. "The monster of neighborhood legend is revealed to be a shy, childish man who

saved Scout and Jem by killing Bob Ewell" (Matuz 240). After Boo saves the kids, they realize what he really is.

Just like when people are afraid, when they confront their fear, they see that it's not so bad, and the overcome it.

"He was real nice...most people are, Scout, when you finally see them" (Lee 284). Nothing is as bad as it

originally seems.

There are a few important messages in To Kill a Mockingbird that carry over into everyday life. Lee's

basic messages are: try not to prejudge people, confront your fears, and don't join a mob. Follow those rules and

you'll live a long and fruitful life.