

TED ANKARA COLLEGE FOUNDATION HIGH SCHOOL

ENGLISH B
EXTENDED ESSAY

Candidate's Name : Cansu Tanatmıř

Candidate Number : D1129054

Supervisor's Name : Mine Maviođlu

Word Count : 4000

Research Question: In which contexts is the concept of injustice exposed in the novel "To Kill A Mocking Bird" by Harper Lee?

Abstract

Race relations, gender roles and class discrimination are the main issues of Deep Southern life in 1930s that are widely exposed in the novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee in her one and only 1961 Pulitzer Prize winner book. The novel still maintains its place in reading lists of high schools and colleges due to its real life relation and universal issues. This study examines the concept of injustice exposed in the novel within the contexts of neighborhood, school, house and court that are included in Maycomb County where the story takes place.

Harper Lee reveals the message of importance of justice by placing characters into different contexts and making them act in certain circles that are determined by Maycomb's strict social codes and taboos developed over many years. Each context harbours different examples of injustice that have become usual within the course of events because of the prejudice formed in the minds of people of Maycomb. The reader is shown the concept of injustice with Lee's warm, innocent and naive way of reflecting events. However, as the novel proceeds, the concept of injustice starts to be exposed more densely via attempts made in the court to remove scales of injustice from society's eyes. As Lee states in one interview: "People are people anywhere you put them.", the reason she highlights the significance of justice is its invariable importance everywhere at all times.

Word Count: 235

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction	
	I.a. Harper Lee.....	4
	I.b. The Concept of Injustice.....	5
II.	Analysis.	
	II.a. Neighborhood.....	6
	II.b. School.....	9
	II.c. House.....	10
	II.d. Court.....	12
III.	Conclusion.....	15
IV.	Bibliography.....	16

I. Introduction

I.a. Harper Lee

Harper Lee, (b. April 28, 1926, Monroeville, Ala., U.S.), American writer nationally acclaimed for her one novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960).

Harper Lee was the daughter of Amasa Coleman Lee, a lawyer who was by all accounts apparently rather like the hero-father of her novel in his sound citizenship and warm-heartedness. The plot of *To Kill a Mockingbird* was based in part on his unsuccessful youthful defense of two African American men convicted of murder.

Lee attended the University of Alabama but left for New York City before obtaining her own law degree. In New York, having received financial aid from friends, she started writing full time and transformed a series of short stories into *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

To Kill a Mockingbird received a Pulitzer Prize in 1961. In 2007 Lee was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.¹

The time and setting of the novel, *To Kill A Mocking Bird* is Harper Lee's visionary town in Alabama, Maycomb in 1930s. Since the town Monroeville in Alabama, where Harper Lee was born and grew up in, resembles to Maycomb with its small and quiet town time, the novel is thought to be based on Lee's childhood to some extent.² The conservative structure of South in 1930s, states maintaining their traditional values, also indicates the similarity between Lee's hometown and her visionary town, Maycomb.

¹ <http://www.britannica.com/EB/checked/topic/754578/Harper-Lee>

² <http://www.davidclaudon.com/Mockingbird/mockingbird2.html>

I.b. The Concept of Injustice:

The small town life in Maycomb introduces some rigid unwritten rules such as gender and class rules for its society via its unquestioned tradition. The traditions and taboos of this Deep Southern life shape the concept of injustice in the course of time and form the plot of the novel. The strict moral codes that have been accepted by the entire town cause the class system and racial injustice to maintain its existence.

Maycomb, drawing an image of slow moving, calm, untroubled and decent life, contradicts with itself when it comes to the conscience of the town. The conscience is formed of barriers towards justice that result in prejudice towards every aspect of life, mainly race, gender and social class.

“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.”³(pg 6)

Through the contexts; neighborhood and school life in Maycomb County, inside of the Finch house and court scene of Tom Robinson, the concept of injustice can be analyzed. The absurd attitudes of Maycomb society in daily life, baffled expressions of a new teacher when she meets with Maycomb’s weird aspects, the predetermined decision of the jury at the court and Atticus’ presence as a role model of rationality, conscience and open-mindedness, reflect how the concept of injustice is exposed in the novel.

³ p.6, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

II. Analysis

II.a. Neighborhood

Neighborhood is a significant context in the novel in which injustice is exposed to the reader by Lee's reflection of attitudes and responses of characters who has lived side by side for years and years in Maycomb. Since neighborhood includes face to face interactions between the members of the society, it is the main factor that creates common values and moral environment. The coordinate small town life of Maycomb welcomes gestures and expressions that are identical in each generation. Therefore, it becomes dangerous to fall by the wayside and depart from the straight and proper road which the society puts you into. The neighborhood in which Scout, Jem, Atticus and their black cook Calpurnia live in has a very influencing effect on their life because they are in close relations with their neighbors whose houses are two doors north or three doors to the south of them. The harmony of social relations within the town creates an atmosphere of perfect peace and quietude. However, as the stream of events move along, Maycomb's righteous illusion becomes shattered. As the lines indicate: "...another thing alien to Maycomb's ways...", "...a predilection unforgivable in Maycomb.", "According to our neighborhood legend..."⁴(pg 10), the intolerant side of Maycomb people leads the reader to see that conscience of Maycomb society is filled with prejudice. Therefore, the small town life of Maycomb starts to lose its portrayal of gentility as the novel proceeds.

The most obvious sign of injustice in the context of neighborhood is the social class system in Maycomb County. In the novel, four kinds of folks in social hierarchy of Maycomb are present; common folks (Finch family is of the common folks which occupy the highest status among other classes), the Cunninghams (the uneducated farmers of the town), the Ewells(regarded as "trash" by the townspeople) and colored folks (accepted as the most below level within the classes). Each member of the society accepts the class distinction in its accustomed way. They lead a steady life in their circle of acquaintance that consists of neighbors from the same social class, except Raymond. Raymond marries a black woman and prefers black people to white people. The reason why he chooses black people over white people is not explained in the novel, similar to white people who never reveal any reason for their hatred towards black people. His preference of black people and having half-blood

⁴ p.10, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

children result in his exilation by the society. The injustice between the classes of the same neighborhood can be displayed with the example: Ewells' permission of breaking the rules. "In certain circumstances the common folk judiciously allowed them certain privileges by the simple method of becoming blind to some of the Ewells' activities."⁵(pg 34) Due to the Ewells' different life style; their houses being out in the woods and their unconcerned point of view towards education, not only the obligation to attend the school but also hunting in certain seasons is not mandatory for them. However, as Atticus once says to Scout: "You, Miss Scout Finch are of the common folk. You must obey the law."⁶(pg 34) people who are not from the Ewells are strictly not allowed to break the rules.

The Maycomb ladies' customary tea parties uncover their prejudiced minds and show the unjust social structure of Maycomb County. The missionary tea parties always consist of white women. During these parties, black women serve in white women's kitchen. When Aunt Alexandra invites her missionary circle, the real side of "good-natured" ladies pretending to be concerned about black people who live in Africa but not concerned about black people who live in their own town comes to the scene. "Mrs. Merriweather's large brown eyes always filled up with tears when she considered the oppressed."⁷(pg 254) and Mrs. Merriweather: "Gertrude, I tell you there's nothing more distracting than a sulky darky."⁸(pg 256) The female characters who gather at missionary tea parties symbolize the typical, fragile-looking women in Maycomb. They always look alike with their preference of corsets, powdered but unrouged faces and soft and delicate tone of voice. However, their comments on Scout's boyish way of clothing and her outside activities that cover her in dirt and their negative attitudes towards Atticus' struggle for saving Tom indicate their racist and biased viewpoints under their highly powdered figure.

The church which Calpurnia takes Scout and Jem as her company is called First Purchase Africa M.E. Church. Its name comes from the slaves who got free and paid their first earning for the building of the church. "You ain't got no business bringin' white chillum here – they got their church, we got our'n. It is our church ain't it, Miss Cal?"⁹(pg 131) As the lines reflect, the racial discrimination, which is rooted in way back, still maintains with its initial

⁵ p.34, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

⁶ p.34, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

⁷ p.254, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

⁸ p.256, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

⁹ p.131, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

idea in Maycomb people's minds. Though the church is the place to forgive sinful background stories and gain understanding towards every different aspect, it is seen that racial intolerance is still a main issue for Maycomb County.

The common conception towards half blood children in Maycomb society shows the bitter side of racial injustice. Children who are the future generation of the world are isolated from the society in a way that they grow up with a feeling of deep resentment. "They don't belong anywhere. Coloured folks won't have 'em because they're half white; white folks won't have 'em 'cause they're half coloured, so they're just in between, don't belong anywhere."¹⁰(pg 177) The rejection of half blood children from both white and black people cause the problem of racial injustice to remain unchanged and makes it tougher to destroy the barriers of prejudice in people's minds.

The general attitude of the town towards Tom Robinson's wife Helen shows the unjust perception of Maycomb people. They form a common policy of not hiring Helen as an act of protest without considering her condition of spiritual and material collapsing.

Through the mysterious existence of Boo Radley, Lee creates a way of showing how injustice seriously harms people and even turns them into non-living entities. Non-existing Boo Radley turns into a public figure that becomes a matter of common knowledge with the neighbors' never ending fictitious predictions. The life of Boo Radley almost becomes the subject of an investigation throughout the neighborhood which depends on no reliable data but only made up stories. In addition, each member of the society and even children of Maycomb always have something to say, when it comes to talk about Boo. "People said he went out at night when the moon was high, and peeped in windows. When people's azaleas froze in a cold snap, it was because he had breathed on them. Any stealthy crimes committed in Maycomb were his work."¹¹(pg 9) In one of the unfortunate events of Maycomb, people directly got suspicious about Radleys due to their pets getting damaged. Because of the rumors all over the Maycomb neighborhood and unjust consideration of prejudiced minds of townspeople, Boo Radley turns into a ghost. He gets punished in a very harsh manner by the society. All the different characteristics that do not fit Maycomb's social life, convict Boo to an absolutely

¹⁰ p.177, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

¹¹ p.9, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

isolated environment from outer life and leads him into an unfair world where he is caged into numbness.

II.b. School

From the first day of the school, the development of children from childhood to adulthood is shaped by experiencing the just and unjust sides of their town in a school atmosphere. The theme of education, steeped in injustice and prejudice, is one of the main topics of the novel.

Scout gets the idea that school is different from her house from the first day of school. When Miss Caroline, a young new teacher in the school, introduces herself to the class, a murmur surrounds the class. Because that she is from North Alabama, a place whose reputation is not approved from the Maycomb County because of its drinking habits, children in the class meet her with negative impressions formed in their minds. This reflects that children are influenced by adults to a great extent even from their very early age. They directly accept the values right for the society and form their perspective of life according to these values.

The class system of Maycomb society is exposed through different status of children from different social classes in the school. Though this class discrimination is considered quite normal by the children of Maycomb, Miss Caroline, a character who does not have knowledge about Maycomb County's social structure, usually gets baffled with differences in Maycomb people's perception and has difficulties with understanding strict distinction between social classes. For example, when Miss Caroline asks the class to take out their lunch, Walter Cunningham, who is a member of country folks, farmers, couldn't take his lunch out due to his lack of money. When Miss Caroline tries to give him a quarter, he doesn't accept it. When Scout explains the reason why Walter does not accept the money and Cunninghams' habits about not accepting anything from anyone that they can't pay back, Miss Caroline gets angry with Scout. This shows that Miss Caroline, an eye out of the box, out of Maycomb's rigid boundaries, believes Maycomb's social manners are interpreted in a wrong way.

Miss Caroline's shocked response when she sees lice crawled out of Burris Ewells' hair and Burris' rude reaction towards Miss Caroline can be considered as another example showing how Miss Caroline is a stranger towards Maycomb people's usual habits and unique way of living according to their classes. "They come first day every year and then leave... You're

supposed to mark'em absent the rest of the year.”¹²(pg 30) This indicates that injustice between social classes is a problem that can't be solved by pushing people, who are able to break the rules easily, to act according to the rules. This act of forcing people to obey the rules of society results in no solutions. Therefore, the general idea of giving some privilege to specific classes of the society, Ewells in this case, arises in Maycomb people's minds.

II.c. House

The concept of injustice is exposed widely in the context of house, through the relationship among Atticus, his children Scout and Jem and Aunt Alexandra. The moral education of Scout and Jem is developed by Atticus and his moral voice at all times. He teaches his children to face the cruel side of injustice and to breast it without losing understanding and sympathy towards life. Atticus shows that each person has a right to mind their own business and it is not necessary to meddle in other people's affairs. His way of treating his children reflects Atticus' democratic side. The empathy Atticus expresses towards every kind of person throughout the novel highlights the importance that he gives to justice and his belief of giving equal importance to each person. By being a moral backbone of the novel, Atticus chooses to defend Tom Robinson and though entire town doesn't approve Atticus' behavior of defending a black person charged with the rape of a white girl, he never gives up on his principles. “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view until you climb into his skin and walk around it.”¹³(pg 33)

Aunt Alexandra is another character in the house, who introduces the concept of injustice through her points of view towards people who are not common folks like Finch family. She tries to impose her own beliefs to Scout and Jem, especially Scout. Aunt Alexandra's condemnation of Scout, because of her tomboyish style and unwillingness of wearing fussy clothes, shows her tabooed vision towards life. She constantly attempts to remodel Scout and make her look similar to her. She doesn't think that a girl image covered in mud is appropriate. Her image of a decent girl includes a girl in presentable form, who periodically participates in tea parties. This indicates her vision about gender discrimination. She accepts some social codes that stand for women's role in society. The conversations between Scout and Aunt Alexandra reflect the conflict between an adult's and a child's perception of life

¹² p.30, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

¹³ p.33, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

which actually introduces the concept of injustice from the eyes of adults and children's baffled reaction when they first meet with unjust happenings of Maycomb. Aunt Alexandra's presence at the house doesn't fit the general atmosphere of the house where Atticus has raised his children according to his moral values, which mainly differ from the Maycomb County's values. The arguments that occur between Atticus and Aunt Alexandra about Scout asking the permission to go to Calpurnia's house or Atticus' choice of defending the case of Tom Robinson reflect the clash of opinions in the house. "Aunt Alexandra fitted the world of Maycomb like a hand into a glove, but never into the world of Jem and me."¹⁴(pg 145) This indicates the difference between the social codes in the Atticus' house and in the rest of Maycomb County. For instance, an instantaneous gap between Atticus and his children occurs when Atticus tries to make a speech to Scout and Jem because of Aunt Alexandra's strong willingness. "She asked me to tell you you must try to behave like the little lady and gentleman that you are. She wants to talk to you about the family and what it's meant to Maycomb County through years, so you'll have some idea of who you are, so you might be moved to behave accordingly."¹⁵(pg 147) This speech makes Scout and Jem frustrated because of their father's unexpected way of speaking but they understand the fact that Aunt Alexandra is the basis of this speech. According to her, family is the driving force of one's behaviors and attitudes. One should act bearing in mind his or her background and not step out of the tight circle that determines her lifestyle full of social rules accumulated within years and years.. "Atticus told me one time that most of this Old Family stuff's foolishness because everybody' family's just as old as everybody's else's."¹⁶(pg 250) Jem's words towards Scout show how Atticus and Aunt Alexandra think separately about the concept of family and backgrounds. According to Atticus, judging someone referring to his or her family is unjust because family is a concept that goes far long into past and it is nearly impossible and wrong to compare people according to their backgrounds. "The thing is, you can scrub Walter Cunningham till he shines, you can put him in shoes and a new suit, but he'll never be like Jem. Besides, there's a drinking streak in that family a mile wide. Finch women aren't interested in that sort of people."¹⁷(pg 247) As it can be understood from these lines, Aunt Alexandra is a member of Finch family who builds up the concepts of class discrimination

¹⁴ p.145, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

¹⁵ p.147, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

¹⁶ p.250, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

¹⁷ p.247, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

and gender discrimination. Owing to the fact that Finch family is from a background of respected land owners, Aunt Alexandra believes that they are certainly above some classes of the society. Therefore, she doesn't want any member of the Cunninghams to get into their house. She always wants Finch family to keep company with people who are in the same status with them. However, Atticus always tries to impose being understanding to his children and never judge anyone before considering points from his point of view, regardless of his social status. Atticus' indulgent and tolerant side can be seen when Walter Cunningham comes to Finch house as a company. He accepts Walter in his house with pleasure, without hesitating or bearing in mind the possibility of getting criticized by the entire town. In addition, Calpurnia's furious response when scout says: "He ain't company, Cal, he's just a Cunningham."¹⁸(pg 27), reflects fair side of another character in the context of house. Even though Calpurnia is black and therefore, she could have deep resentment towards white people, she acts in a sensible way and appears as a role model to Scout and Jem, disburdening Atticus' task. Walter's comfortable behavior at the table and the conversation about crops between him and Atticus indicate that humans are the same everywhere. "By the time we reached our front steps Walter had forgotten he was a Cunningham."¹⁹(pg 26) As Scout says: "Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them."²⁰(pg 308) shows how people from different social status can actually join the majority.

II.d. Court

The verdict of the jury in Tom Robinson's trial displays the crude facts of Maycomb with respect to injustice. Tom Robinson being found guilty, in spite of the obvious untrue statements of Ewells and Atticus' hearty defense, is a concrete example of injustice in Maycomb within the context of court. Tom, exhibiting the weight of Southern history about racism, is one of the most important characters whose faith is victimized by the concept of injustice in Maycomb, similar to Boo Radley. Harper Lee, reflects the bias of people of Maycomb by creating a jury consisting of twelve people who can never discharge someone if he is black when there is a white person opposing him. "In our courts, when it's a white man's word against a black man's, the white man always wins. They're ugly, but those are the facts

¹⁸ p.27, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

¹⁹ p.26, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

²⁰ p.308, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

of life.”²¹(pg 243) The general view point of people of Maycomb which accepts all black people are untrustworthy and they are the evil side in every event, causes blacks to get accused in each case if they get into trouble. This fear of being victimized in each case, leads black people into an isolated life where they never associate with white people. For instance, the seats in the courtroom which white people and black people sit separately and the act of white people taking their seats in the first place and black people waiting for them show the injustice between two races.

As Atticus questions Mayella Ewell and tries to show the jury what kind of a social life Ewells have, it is seen that Ewells are convicted to a life in which they are seen as under the norms of Maycomb’s social structure. “She was sad, I thought, as what Jem called a mixed child: white people wouldn’t have anything to do with her because she lived among pigs; Negroes wouldn’t have anything to do with her because she was white.”²²(pg 212) The economic condition of Ewells and their lack of significant background disable them to join the rest of the members of society who proceed a steady town life in Maycomb. This shows the old-standing and inconvertible doom of Ewells, due to deeply rooted injustice.

Harper Lee explicitly reveals the absence of sense within the social rules of Southern life to the reader by Atticus’ last speech in the trial. “She has committed no crime, she has merely broken a rigid and time-honored code of our society, a code so severe that whoever breaks it is hounded from our midst as unfit to live with. She is the victim of cruel poverty and ignorance, but I can not pity her: She is white.”²³(pg 224) These words of Atticus reflect his opinions upon Maycomb’s social life. According to him, both sides of the case are actually not guilty but because of Maycomb’s commonly accepted social rules, one side, which is the same side in each case, Tom Robinson in this case, has to be punished. Besides Atticus’ democratic behaviors throughout the novel, his words: “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 and white. But this is a truth that applies to the human race and to no particular race of men.”²⁴(pg 226) underline his fair character objectively. From the context of

²¹ p.243, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

²² p.212, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

²³ p.224, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

²⁴ p.226, Lee, To Kill A Mockingbird

court, it is seen that unbreakable social codes and as a result of them, prejudice is the main factor that builds up the concept of injustice in Maycomb.

III. Conclusion:

Through the contexts of neighborhood, school, house and court, it is seen that injustice is a major problem of Maycomb that has rooted deeply into its social structure throughout history. Since the majority of the town embraces prejudiced habits caused by social and moral rules of the society, the concept of injustice remains as a problem and continues to victimize innocent people who are not steeped in the evil side of injustice. Although confounded responses of Scout and Jem show how attitudes of adults can sometimes be irrational in a straight out way, adults cause children to grow up in an environment of injustice where injustice is automatically accepted by children within time. This prevents the awareness and conscience about the concept of injustice to be built in the society. Therefore, the hazardous consequences of injustice continue to serve its actions until people of Maycomb are spiritually reeducated.

IV. Bibliography

Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mocking Bird*. Arrow Books, 2006.

Britanica. "Harper Lee". Web. 10 Jan. 2010.

< <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/754578/Harper-Lee>>

David Claudon. "*To Kill a Mocking a Bird*." davidclaudon.com. Web. 14 Jan. 2010.

< <http://www.davidclaudon.com/Mockingbird/mockingbird2.html> >