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To Kill a Mockingbird - Book Review

Introduction

“To Kill a Mockingbird” is a novel written by Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Nelle Harper Lee. Along with the Pulitzer Prize she has won a profuse number of other awards such as the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In her lifetime she published a total of two novels. Her first published novel being “To Kill a Mockingbird”. This novel was originally published in the year 1960 and since then, has been sold over 40 million times. It additionally has been translated into over 40 different languages.

This novel represents the racial oppression and social injustice found in the setting of a small town known as Maycomb in the state of Alabama. It follows Scout, a small girl who acts often in a

tomboyish manner, as she discovers different deep-rooted prejudices of her “seemingly close-knit” society.

This novel is portrayed in a realistic fashion and much of it is actually depicted off of Harper Lee’s childhood. There are instances where some characters directly reference people who Harper Lee grew up with such as a character named Dill who was based on her neighbour Truman Capote.

This book contains many vulgar words such as racial slurs and aside from that it shows themes of: sexism, intoxication, abuse, prejudice, etc.

Summary

This novel is written in the first-person perspective of Scout as she and her brother Jem along with their close friend Dill learn about the families and the prejudices found in the Maycomb society. It shows the interactions between characters develop and the tensions between characters arise as Scout and Jem’s father, named Atticus, takes a stand to defend a black man going to court for the charge of rape of a white girl.

Atticus is another prominent character in this novel. He’s one of the major reasons for Scout and Jem’s character development evolving over the course of the novel. Throughout his parental guidance Scout and Jem are able to have a broader understanding of certain prejudices of the town and certain ways they must interact with specific people. This can be compared to the quite different parenting style of his sister, a character referred to by Scout as Aunt Alexandra. The character of Aunt Alexandra helps us to understand the sexism prejudices which were widespread at that time. Scout, often being tomboyish, fell victim to these insults and comments based on her appearance and actions.

Even though Atticus’s role played an immense role in developing Jem and Scout’s understanding, we could also trace some of the help from another lovely character Miss Maudie who provides a voice of reason to the children and is often shown defending certain characters from harmful prejudices. Though not a direct relative of Scout, she can be seen as a type of mother figure in Scout’s life.

Besides Scout, another significant character who I believe is designed on the basis of harmful prejudices is a character with the name “Boo Radley”. Boo Radley is described as mysterious, dangerous, and for Jem and Scout, terrifying. In the town of Maycomb, the Radley’s are a family which the society didn’t exactly like. Like in most societies there are “unwritten rules” which in

the Maycomb society refers to following certain religious practices like going to church or simply just being extremely welcoming. When the Radley's showed their differences to these "societal norms", the Maycomb society was quick to form prejudices. There were prejudices formed with little to no basis, specifically about Boo Radley. As a victim of these concerning prejudices, it's interesting how the character of Boo Radley develops and how he interacts with our main characters.

Apart from the Radley family there were plenty of other families in the town that are pivotal for this novel's plot. One being the Ewell family. The Ewell family is one of the lower-class white families. Filled with many kids, no mother figure, and an intoxicated abusive father, this family also has the character of Mayella Ewell, who is none other than the white female who was allegedly raped by a black man named Tom Robinson.

Analysis

The main plot is centred around a few specific prejudices, yet the main one among all is racism. The leading theme of racism is prevalent when going into the court case. Though we see glimpses of how racism is already normalised in the small town, it begins to really form the plot as we dive into the court case.

In the town of Maycomb, we see racial prejudices being spoken about within many white families. It becomes normalised to the point where even our main narrator repeats a certain prejudice, she herself had heard. Moreover, this novel mentions the segregation based on race happening in a church and also explains about the entitlement regarding the way many white people had treated black people and people like Atticus who had sympathised with black people. Within the trial we could see how the jury made decisions more personal opinion based rather than based on evidence. In a later chapter we also get a long discussion between Atticus and Jem about the unfairness of the jury.

In the discussion we also hear about how sexism is prevailing in this society. This is shown in ways like in general the stereotypes that Scout faces on having to be a dainty lady, but it also goes deeper into the rights of women and that time. In the discussion of Jem and Atticus it mentions how women aren't allowed to simply be in the court jury because of their gender. In this way we can understand the prejudices against women and the theme of sexism prevalent in this novel.

Additionally, another recurring theme of this novel is intoxication and abuse. The intoxication and abuse are a prominent factor of the Ewell Family, as the father, Bob Ewell, is both often shown to be intoxicated and abusive. In a later chapter during the court trial, we often see Bob Ewell and Atticus butting heads, at one point Bob Ewell even taking the liberty to spit in Atticus' face. Atticus, a calmer and much more mature individual, does not react severely to Bob Ewell doing this, when asked about it, Atticus even says "He had to take it out on somebody and I'd rather it be me than that houseful of children out there." Him saying this shows his courage and provides a brilliant example for his children.

However, the Ewell Family is not the only family in which intoxication is mentioned. Dill often mentions how even if he informs that he's going somewhere "that woman drinks a pint for breakfast every morning— know she drinks two glasses full. Seen her." Though we can't entirely deduce Dill was abused, he certainly was ignored enough to run away.

Recommendation

This novel can really expand our knowledge of these prejudices and how far racism can go. It helps us to learn about segregation and how badly coloured people were treated. Furthermore, it teaches lessons like "don't judge a book by its cover" in the sense that we shouldn't judge someone by prejudices and rumours about said person. All in all, this novel was a factual and impactful story. It provides heart wrenching points and can bring information on racial slurs, the history behind them, and why we shouldn't use certain words unless we belong to a certain community. Nonetheless, if one is too immature to deal with these deep topics, then I would certainly not recommend this novel to said person. I believe that this novel is a factual read for those who intend to learn about the history of racism as this explains in a whimsical yet profound way. Personally, I thoroughly enjoyed the narrative of the novel, however I disliked how the conversations would be so long, it felt as if some parts were elongated. Likewise, there were many characters who had minor roles, with all these characters it can often become confusing for the readers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this novel was very informative and it helped enlighten us about different social issues and harms of prejudices. It had several elaborate themes and had an interesting plot

structure. Though some chapters and dialogues felt unnecessarily lengthy, I still enjoyed it and its message, similarly I feel as though other people will find this read fascinating as well.