Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Method 2

Theory 3

Historical context 3

Harper Lee 6

Feminist aspect 10

Racist aspect 14

Classism aspect 18

*To Kill a Mockingbird* and its topics 23

A brief summary of the novel 23

Scout and her understanding of femininity 24

The racism in Maycomb 43

Maycomb’s hierarchy 52

How does this all tie-in together? 61

Perspective 67

Conclusion 69

Bibliography

**ABSTRACT**

# 

# Introduction

“‘You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view (…) until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.’” (Lee 2010, p. 33) Atticus says to his young daughter Scout at the beginning of the novel. With this the tone of the novel has been set; a novel about understanding where others are coming from no matter their social standing, gender or race. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was published in 1960 by Harper Lee and it is a brutal portrait of racism and sexism in 1930s Alabama. The novel has survived for so many years because of its depiction of the dangers of racism and comment on gender oppression. The novel has been part of junior high and high school curriculums for many years because the social issues in the novel are still as relevant as ever. With the latest civil rights movement in America, the Black Lives Matter movement, some activists have quoted *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Others ask that quotes from white people be left out and instead use relevant quotes from black people. But the reason the novel is mentioned is because it is one of the best examples of racism that is tangible and accessible to most Americans. Lee wrote the novel during the 1950s, a time of extreme change for the civil rights movement. Clearly inspired by the uproar of blacks Lee began her novel and chose a small town in the south as the setting for her novel. Much of the novel is autobiographical and Lee built many of her characters around the people in her own life. Such as Atticus who is based on her own father A.C. Lee, and Dill who is based on her childhood friend Truman Capote. The novel goes deep into the problems of a small town when a black man is accused of raping a white woman. The novel explores how natural racism is in Maycomb and how this mentality is hardly challenged. It gives a critical look into how the town functions and how the issues are allowed to exist. Lee uses her character Scout to help the reader experience racism and sexism for the first time. Scout’s innocence is supposed to make the reader be outraged at the injustices that is the American justice and social system.

This master’s thesis will investigate the three main topics of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and ask why the novel is an enduring classic. The first is the feminist aspect, the second the racist aspect and finally the classism that exists. These topics will be examined individually and then be compared to one another. This comparison will help the understanding of why *To Kill a Mockingbird* is still popular both in schools, universities and popular culture.

# Method

The method used for the analysis is a close reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird* with an emphasis on the three main topics: sexism, racism and classism. *To Kill a* Mockingbird will be read on its own without any reading, interpretation or comparison to the prequel *Go Set a Watchman* from 2015 or the film adaptation from 1961. This choice has been deliberate to make a “pure” reading without any contamination. The theory section is structured with a mix of historical background, a section about the author, then the theory sections on the three main topics. To better understand why the novel was published an investigation into the historical context is important. Since slavery and racism are complex and have many different periods of time the emphasis will be on a brief summary of slavery and what lead up to the Jim Crow segregation. The novel can be classified as autobiographical; therefore Harper Lee’s background will be explored. Her background and family relations are explored and contextualized in terms of the themes of the novel. Furthermore Lee’s inspiration and motivation for writing the novel are also explored.

The theory section of the novel is split into three categories: a feminist aspect, a racial aspect and a classism aspect. These three categories are the main topics of the novel and will be explored further in the analysis section. For the feminist aspect the theory section focuses on what is expected of a woman in the south. For this we look into the ideals of The Southern Belle and True Womanhood to understand the femininity that exists in the south. In contrast to these ideals we look into Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*. Her theories on gender and sex are important to help contrast the ideals of southern femininity and how rigid these expectations are.

In the racial aspect we look into the racism that exists in the town of Maycomb. We explore how racism began and then have a contemporary look into racism in America during 2014-2016. This is to highlight that racial issues still exist.

Now a new civil rights movement is in action. It shows that black will not accept the racism that is deeply ingrained into the American systems.

In the classism aspect we explore the hierarchy of Maycomb. Social standings are of great significance in the novel and we explore why. We explore the Finch, Cunningham and the Ewell families to understand how they interlink with each other.

These subjects will be discussed individually and finally brought together in a final chapter, to discuss how they are related to each other and impact the novel. We explore how the topics of gender, race and classism create Maycomb and uphold its structure. At the end there will be a perspective of what has changed and how the novel, despite being released in 1960, is still relevant.

# Theory

## Historical context

From the very moment slaves from Africa were brought to America a long battle for freedom and equality began. The first slaves arrived in America in 1625 and were treated as inferior creatures by the white population. This mentality dates back to imperialism. Scientists “proved” that blacks were inferior intellectually. They claimed that their intellects were similar to a child by being less rational than whites. Slave owners claimed that slaves were happier than freed blacks, as the slaves had shelter, were fed and given work. Pro-slavery advocates even went as far as claiming that blacks had no feelings, they were similar to cattle, women did not care if their children were taken and sold, and the men would rape white women if they were able to. Family simply did not matter to them; they were incapable of creating bonds and feelings. Abolitionist and author Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1852 in order to disprove this. Her novel focused on Uncle Tom a kind black man who sacrifices himself for his fellow slaves. He ultimately dies by flogging from his master and forgives him despite the torture. The novel was a huge success and created the sympathy and outrage at the treatment of slaves that Stowe had wanted. However, the novel also emphasized racial stereotypes.

Much was done in order to end slavery. One of the most drastic measures was The Civil War. It was fought from 1861 to 1865. Slavery was one of the main causes for the Civil War. The North wanted to abolish slavery and the South was against this. This was mainly because their economy relied heavily on slave work in agricultural work such as rice, sugar, and cotton plantations (Matson 2006, p. 65). As a result the south had little industrialization. In contrast the north chose to work on industrialization and less on agriculture. But they still benefitted from the textile products using cotton from the south. Therefore it would be more devastating for the south to loose its slaves and manpower and a gain for the north. This was because slaves would migrate to the northern states. The reliance on slaves and the undeveloped industrialization left the south financially weak. The south experienced poverty more intensely than the north did after the Civil War. When the economy relied heavily on slaves it was also devastating when slaves and freed blacks migrated to the north. Slaves and freed blacks did this to avoid the extreme racism of the south. For instance freed blacks could be forced back into slavery. The migration also meant that blacks were more likely to fight on the Union’s side during the civil war, as few blacks were sympathetic to the South’s cause. President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. He stated that if the Union won the civil war slavery would be abolished. In 1865 the 13th Amendment was ratified and slavery was outlawed. Though slavery was over racism was still intact. In 1883 the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional. The court ruled that the 14th Amendment prohibited states, but not citizens, from discrimination (Jim Crow Museum 2014). Which meant that citizens were free to discriminate without any legal repercussions. Later in 1896 during the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case the Supreme Court established the “Separate but Equal Doctrine”. Stating that legal racial segregation did not violate the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment (Jim Crow Museum 2014). The “Separate but Equal Doctrine” was meant to create “separate but equal” conditions. But in reality it created the segregation that is present in *To Kill a Mockingbird* such as separate facilities, services and opportunities. These were also known as the Jim Crow laws. This referred to the black character in a song from 1820 and blackface stereotypical character performed by Thomas Dartmouth Rice (Jim Crow Museum 2014). This system was designed to keep blacks in a subordinate status by denying them access to facilities. And ensuring they lived apart from the white population (Lawson 2010). With no laws to protect them the blacks were frequent victims of hate crimes such as lynching. The Ku Klux Klan became popular and had 3 million members in 1925. It became a place where racist white people could join together and terrorize blacks (Jim Crow Museum 2014). The end of segregation began in 1938 with the Supreme Court’s *Gaines v. Missouri*. Themandate stated that the constitutionality of segregation laws were “wholly upon the equality of the privileges which the laws give to the separated groups within the State (…) a privilege has been created for white law students which is denied Negroes by reason of their race” (Johnson 2001). The case refers to a black student, Lloyd Lionel Gains, who was rejected from a white law school and referred to the higher school of education for blacks. The case was important. It was the beginning of unsegregated schools in America. After *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, and a series of other decisions, the Supreme Court stopped legal segregations of public schools (Thomas 2011, p. 2). Finally, all segregation was put to an end with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Much happened during the 1950s and 1960s in terms of debates about racism and civil rights. During the 1950s many of the well know civil rights activists began to emerge. In 1955 Rosa Parks famously refused to give her bus seat up for a white passenger. She was arrested and paid a fine of 10 dollars (U.S. History 2016). At the same time Martin Luther King Jr. became the front figure of the civil rights movement. He used Mahatma Gandhi’s strategy of nonviolent action and civil disobedience when fighting against the system. Inspired by Rosa Parks King organized a boycott of Montgomery busses. This began a chain reaction of similar boycotts throughout the south. As a result the Supreme Court voted to end segregated busing in 1956 (Levine 2011, p. 120). In 1963 King went to Birmingham, Alabama, one of the most racist cities in America. Here King arranged boycotts, sit-ins and marches. It was also here that police officers used fire hoses and dogs on demonstrators. The incident was broadcasted on national television. In 1963 King gave his famous *I have a Dream* speech. It was about King’s vision for the future of America. After the Civil Rights Act of 1964 King focused on getting blacks in the south registered to vote. In 1965 King lead the marches in Selma. The marches turned violent when police officers used tear gas, cattle prods, and clubs on the otherwise peaceful protesters. President Johnson ordered the National Guard to protect the protesters. After this King was able to lead the march from Selma to Montgomery (U.S. History 2016). King was assassinated in 1968 and his death became a symbol of the corrupt system (May 1993, p. 57). King had used nonviolence throughout his career, yet he was met with a violent end. The dead of King showed that even peaceful black leaders were considered a threat to the establishment. Even after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 racism still exists even if racism is illegal. The struggle continues and the newest movement of civil rights is the Black Lives Matter Movement. It focuses on the rights blacks have and the injustices they face on a day-to-day basis. The increasing focus on bias from the police is creating debates. It is a testament to blacks dissatisfaction at being treated as second-class citizens even in 2016.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* was written during the 1950s and published in 1960. During these years there were many racial debates in America about the civil rights for black people. There was a growing dissatisfaction of being treated as second-class citizens. The novel takes place during the 1930s, a time where America was faced with the Great Depression and only years away from World War II. It was a tumultuous time and an era of beginning change. The financial state of the county affected Maycomb. Since its economy was based on agriculture the rest of the town suffered from the lower prices on crops. The influence of the racial debates is clear in the novel. Though it takes place during the 1930s in Maycomb, which is not as progressive as other places in America. It showcases the injustices and how important it is to be aware of racism and ultimately to stand against it. *To Kill a Mockingbird* shows how natural racism and segregation seem to the adults in the novel. The Finch children learn of it and come to understand its meaning. And they are shocked to see the reality of their otherwise friendly home.

## Harper Lee

Nelle Harper Lee was born April 28, 1926 in Monroeville, Alabama. She died February 19, 2016 at 89 years old. She was best known under her penname Harper Lee. She used a penname because she hated having her name Nelle pronounced as Nellie. She was the youngest of four children of lawyer A. C. Lee and mother Frances Cunningham (Finch). Her relationship with her father was good and Lee idolized him. Her mother was distant and sick for many years, towards the end of her life she became mentally ill (Blakemore 2010, p. 118). Lee grew up in Alabama and spent her summers with her brother Erwin and childhood friend Truman Capote. She published *To Kill a Mockingbird* in 1960. In 1961 she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, the Alabama Library Association award, and the Brotherhood Award of National Conference of Christians and Jews. For many years *To Kill a Mockingbird* was Harper Lee’s only novel. She did not enjoy the spotlight or the process of writing. As a perfectionist she called herself more of a “rewriter” than a writer (Altman 2008, p. 29). Lee rarely participated in interviews but in one of the few she commented on her success:

“I never expected any sort of success with *Mockingbird*. I was hoping for a quick and merciful death at the hands of the reviewers but, at the same time, I sort of hoped someone would like it enough to give me encouragement. Public encouragement. I hoped for a little, as I said, but I got rather a whole lot, and in some ways this was just about as frightening as the quick, merciful death I'd expected.” (Madden 2009)

In 2015 *Go Set a Watchman* was released. It had been intended as part of a trilogy, but Lee changed the *To Kill a Mockingbird* many times. In the end *Go Set a Watchman* become obsolete. There are speculations as to why it was released in the first place. It seems that Lee never intended to publish the novel. There are rumors that Lee suffered from dementia. Her publicist took advantage of this and persuaded her to release the novel. Ignoring that Lee had previously been against it. For this master’s thesis I have chosen not to include references to the *Go Set a Watchman* or the film adaptation. The focus is solely on *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Lee was inspired to write the novel based on the experiences she had while growing up in Alabama. Here she saw the racial injustices blacks faced. One of them was injustice in court and legal matters. When Harper Lee was five-year-old the famous Scottsboro trial began in Alabama. Here nine black men were accused of raping two white girls. All nine men were convicted and retrials continued for six years. Each time it became more apparent that justice for blacks was different than justice for whites (May 1993, p. 64). It is important to note that the novel is set during 1935. Which was the midpoint for the Scottsboro case. Another incidence where Harper Lee saw racial injustice was when her father, A. C. Lee, defended two black men accused of murder in 1919. Her father was an inexperienced lawyer and ultimately the court found the two men guilty and they were hanged. After their deaths their bodies were mutilated and sent to the victims son as proof that “justice” had been served. Lee’s father never accepted another criminal case after this (Shields 2006, p. 24). Many attribute this case to be the reason Harper Lee wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird* and based the character of Atticus on her own father. Both cases heavily impacted Harper Lee’s understanding of justice. From an early age she was made aware of the racial differences and disadvantages. During the 1950s there were many incidences that caused the civil right’s movement in the 1960s. One of them was the case of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till. In 1954 he was murdered by two white men for whistling at a white woman. The killers were acquitted and even bragged about the murder to various media (Shields 2006, p. 25). In 1956 Autherine Lucy attempted to enroll in the university of Alabama. The university Lee herself attended. But the violence on the campus forced her to flee. In response the Alabama state senator J. M. Bonner wrote:

“I call now on every Southern White man to join in this fight. I proudly take my stand with those students who resisted, and who will continue to resist the admission of a negree named Lucy.” (Shields 2006, p. 25)

The Ku Klux Klan forced the cancellation of the annual Monroeville Christmas parade in 1959. By threatening to kill any members of the all-Negro Union High School band who participated. Afterwards the Ku Klux Klan vandalized businesses owned by blacks (Shields 2006, p. 25). These are some of the examples of racism which all occurred in the south. Most importantly in Lee’s home state.

Lee started writing the novel in 1957 and finished it three years later. The popular reception of the novel shows just how much it resonated at the time. It dealt with the issues many Americans could identify with. The novel has one narrator with two voices that alternate between narrating the story. The first voice is the adult Jean Louise (Scout) who has hindsight and maturity to explain what the second voice cannot. The second voice is the 6 to 9 year old Scout. She narrates the story as it takes place and explains what she observes with her limited knowledge and child-like perception of things. The two voices alternate and when the young Scout observes something the older Scout can comment on it with the understanding of an adult. Often the adult Scout appears when she can explain things in hindsight “and it was not until many years later that I realized he wanted me to hear every word he said” (Lee 2010, p. 98). The usage of two voices is interesting because it gives a broader understanding of the story. It creates a contrast between young naïve Scout and the knowledgeable older Jean Louise. During the writing process Harper Lee struggled with which type of narrator to choose. She had written the novel using the third-person narrator. Then she rewrote the novel with a first-person narrator. Finally she decided to make a mixture with one narrator and two voices (Shields 2006, p. 29). The compromise has been widely discussed. Some critique the novel stating that Lee chose the easy way out. Others applaud the outcome Lee chose. The reception of the novel was a huge success. A year after its publication the film adaptation began. While the novel was well received there were critical critique among peers. Phoebe Adams dismissed the story as “frankly and completely impossible, being told in the first person by a six-year-old girl with the prose style of a well-educated adult”. Granville Hicks wrote that “Lee’s problem has been to tell the story she wants to tell and yet to stay within the consciousness of a child, and she hasn’t consistently solved it”. Finally W. J. Stuckey attributed Lee’s “rhetorical trick” to a failure to solve “the technical problems raise by her story and whenever she gets into difficulties with one point of view, she switches to the other.” (Shields 2006, p. 28). As it was stated before Lee did find it hard to settle on a point of view. Though some criticized the novel others applauded it such as R.A. Dave who wrote:

“Lee has made an epic canvas against which is enacted a movingly human drama of the jostling worlds – of children and adults, of innocence and experience, of kindness an cruelty, of love and hatred, of humor and pathos, and above all of appearance and reality – all taking the reader to the root of human behavior.” (Altman 2008, p. 21)

Reviewers agreed that Lee’s novel was a worthwhile interpretation of the South’s existing social structures during the 1930s. Some suggested it was a young adult literature or that it belonged in adolescent collections. The novel was not meant to be studied by college students. Southern literature’s critics rarely mentioned it. Few university professors found it noteworthy enough to “teach” (May 1993, p. 56). By the mid-sixties the novel was part of the reading curriculum in junior and senior high American literature studies and the novel is taught in colleges all over the world. Parents were concerned about the content of the novel and lawsuits to ban the novel from school use have occurred many times. Some of the lawsuits were from southern conservatives who disliked the portrayal of whites. Blacks also tried to censor the novel during the seventies and eighties claiming that the novel “does psychological damage to the positive integration process and represents institutionalized racism” (May 1993, p. 58).

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is still an influential novel that has stood the test of time. The fact that it is still being used in junior and senior high schools and colleges testifies to this. The topics of the novel are still relevant. The moral is to understand others and fight against oppression. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a part of pop culture with the standing joke that it is not actually about killing mockingbirds. While that is true it has lessons of not hurting those who are innocent. The novel is written in a language that is easily understood and it makes it accessible. It makes it point without losing its meaning in complicated sentences. The language and the blatant racism is something anyone can understand and be upset by.

## Feminist aspect

One of the prominent aspects of the novel is the topic of feminism and the understanding of what it means to be a woman in the south during the 1930s. The novel follows Scout from the time she is 6 years old until she is 9 years old. The reader is able to follow Scout’s growth from a young child who is unaware of how the world works. She is ignorant of topics such as racism and sexism. As she grows older Scout learns how the world works and she questions what she sees around her instead of simply accepting it as presented to her. In order to analyze this we will investigate the ideal of the southern belle and southern white womanhood, the ideals of femininity, and lastly Judith Butler’s theories about gender and performativity.

Many of the ideals of southern femininity can be traced back to the antebellum period around 1812. Here the ideal of “true womanhood” held the four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness (Hedrick 2007). During the Victorian south the term southern belle arose. It referred to young women from the upper socioeconomic class in the south who embodied these virtues and were considered beautiful because of these qualities (Seidel 1985, p. 3). The southerners were strongly against corruption of their society. Which occurred during the time of the Industrial Revolution where materialism, greed and poverty were the negative side effects. In order to counter this, the southerners’ homes became their refuge from the corrupted world. It became a sacred place of values and virtues. The wife became the guardian and had to repel “revolution, prostitution, and atheism” (Seidel 1985, p. 4). The southern belle satisfied this need for order and decency which society demanded. It suited the southern moral to have the southern belle be sheltered from the world in her family home. This was often the case for the women who lived on plantations. She would learn to read, write, sew, ride on horses, and prepare herself for marriage (Seidel 1985, p. 5). The belle was depicted as a pure maiden when she stayed on the plantation. Female assertiveness could be dangerous. Ultimately her virtues would be protected under the care of her parents and later her husband (Seidel 1985, p. 6).

The ideal society of the south represents a solid patriarchal construction. The white southern family, gentry and superior by birth the white men especially, and the women were put on a pedestal (Titus 2005, p. 179). In order to stay pure the women of the south had to repress their sexual desires. Sex was only discussed when producing offspring and otherwise it was something forbidden. This led many of the women to repress their sexual feelings. They were forced to compose themselves in order to maintain the image of purity (Titus 2005, p. 179). Mayella Ewell can be seen as an example of such sexual desires. She commits the taboo of kissing a black man. What the courtroom focuses on is not the incestuous relationship between Mayella and her father. But on the alleged rape by Tom Robinson a black man. While the court punishes Tom Robinson for the incidence it is clearly Mayella Ewell who instigated it. Her father felt that he had to restore order by beating Mayella, possibly raping her, and then accusing Tom Robinson. In a roundabout way punishing Mayella and asserting himself on the top of hierarchy.

This leads to the ideal of southern white womanhood. As the novel takes place during the 1930s much has changed in regards to the southern belle. But some things remain: the ideal purity of women and the ideal of women as the guardians of the home. Aunt Alexandra embodies this well. She is well educated, cares deeply about her family history, and her family’s image in the public eye. Especially Scout does not fit into the ideals of southern womanhood and its definition of femininity. Some describe Scout as a tomboy who wears overalls and plays outside, and dislikes wearing dresses. Scout does not necessarily reject the notions of femininity. She simply does not agree with the femininity that her aunt Alexandra represents. Aunt Alexandra constantly critiques Scout’s way of dressing, behavior, or the way Scout plays saying that she grows “progressively worse every year” (Lee 2010, p. 90). Scout is upset with this but ultimately she decides she can ignore it, as her father Atticus accepts her for who she is. The understanding of what a woman or a girl is and is not is something Scout also learns.

Scout quickly learns that there is something wrong about behaving like a girl. Her brother Jem often comments on how girls are embarrassing, hateful and frivolous, and when Scout is scared or defiant towards him, he refers to Scout as a girl: “‘I swear, Scout, sometimes you act so much like a girl, it’s mortifyin’’” (Lee 2010, p. 42). Despite not understanding completely what it means when she acts like “a girl”, Scout does understand that it is not positive. Similarly Scout notices the same thoughts in church where the reverend talks about sin, and women are mentioned, the idea that women and girls are wrong is once again confirmed:

“His sermon was forthright denouncing of sin (…) he warned his flock against the evils of heady brews, gambling and strange women. Bootleggers cause enough trouble in the Quarters, but women were worse. Again, as I had often met it in my own church, I was confronted with the Impurity of Women doctrine that seemed to preoccupy all clergymen.” (Lee 2010, p 134)

The sexism takes different forms when dealing with the distinction of girls and women. Girls are frivolous and are hated for being nuisances. Fallen women are considered worse than illegal bootleggers. Because by being sexual beings outside of marriage women are impure and have lower morals than men. So the arguments the southern men present are: girls are hateful and women are immoral if not kept under observation.

Scout does not see herself as different from Jem and Dill. For the most part she does not considers herself to be a girl or a boy. It is only when it is mentioned that Scout feels that she is a girl. But there is a limit to how much Scout can act like a boy e.g. when Jem and Dill swim naked in the creek. Scout is left at home in the company of other women. It is worth mentioning that Scout does not have any female friends her own age. Her closest female friends are Calpurnia and Miss Maudie. They are also Scout’s most important female allies. They teach her valuable life lessons and help Scout understand the world around her. Since Scout has no female friends her own age she has grown up playing with Jem, and later Dill. She does identify herself as part of the group without really seeing herself as girl, except when Jem points it out. This leads us to talk about gender theorist Judith Butler who suggests that gender is not something one *is*, but something one *does* (Salih 2002, p. 55):

“Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender.” (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2002, p. 43-44)

Butler believes that gender is a social construct, rather than inherent, and it impacts the life a person leads. If one is born a female, one is automatically a woman, and will thus be feminine, have feminine interests, and be sexually interested in men. In the quote above Butler states that gender is learned through *a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame*. This means that previous assigned assets of gender are repeated: women like feminine things and are given dolls to play with, and then continue to do so, and give their own daughters dolls to play with. Butler works with the idea that gender is performativity. That rather than gender being part of our nature we act it out. As evident with Scout who is unaware of how to act “like a girl” and is able to live freely, thanks to Atticus, without being pushed to act. When Aunt Alexandra comes to stay with them that is when Scout beings to consider acting more like what is expected of a girl.

The inhabitants of Maycomb would most likely disagree with Butler’s theory. They believe that gender is fixed and the gender spectrum consists of men and women. However, Scout does not consider herself to belong to a certain category of woman. She resists the notion that women have to be A, B, or C in order to be considered a “real woman”. It can even be argued that Scout perhaps rejects the notion of being a woman completely. She hardly feels that she can identify with the high society women of Maycomb. However, she is able to relate to her father and other men. It can be argued that Scout feels this way because what Maycomb perceives as a real woman, is someone who is a hypocrite, asks seemingly harmful questions that are in fact laced with malice, and having to behave in a way that seems foreign to Scout.

“This globalizing gesture has spawned a number of criticisms from women who claim that the category of “women” is normative and exclusionary and is invoked with the unmarked dimensions of class and racial privilege intact. In other words, the insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category of women has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of “women” are constructed” (Butler 2002, p. 19)

This quote by Butler illustrates that not all women fall into the same definition of “women”. What Scout considers to be normal behavior for herself is something which Aunt Alexandra considers poor manners and lack of a motherly figure. Aunt Alexandra embodies the expectations of the south for girls and women. She even lives with the Finch family in order to “correct the damage” and turn Scout into a young lady. Aunt Alexandra’s definition of women is narrow and she in unable to understand why anyone who does not fit the label. She herself is part of the *repeated set of acts* and tries to raise Scout as she was. Scout will try to adapt to Aunt Alexandra’s ways. But ultimately when the fine ladies of Maycomb come to visit and Scout wears her dress. She still wears her overalls underneath as a source of comfort in an uncomfortable and unknown situation (Lee 2010, p. 253).

## Racist aspect

Racism has always existed in America. From the time the first immigrants came to the country and killed the Native Americans for their land. The type of racism that will be discussed here is the racism against black people. As it was covered earlier America divided itself into whites and blacks. It used segregation to keep the blacks subordinate while whites maintained the power structure that is also relevant today. The racism in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is clear and is presented as the natural way of Maycomb. The “usual disease” as Atticus puts it (Lee 2010, p. 98). It is clear in the way that the blacks live together on the outskirts of the town. While the whites live closer to the center of the town. There are prejudice against the black in the town and it become evident during Tom Robinson’s trial. Racism is not discussed before the trial. But afterwards the prejudice the white community holds against the black community becomes clear. Tom Robinson’s case is not unusual. While accusations of rape need to be taken seriously the underlying problem of the trial is the racial bias. The cause of the outrage is not simply just the accusation of rape. But that it is an interracial rape. It is the sexual relation between a black man and a white woman. White men established segregation to keep black men from having sexual relations with white women. It was an attempt to keep their superior race to themselves and to avoid mixed children. The result was often black men being lynched for allegedly raping white women. In doing so the white men exercised their control over black men but also over white women. By reinforcing segregation the white men attempted to maintain the virtue and chastity of their wives and daughters. This also reinforced their patriarchal roles as husband, father, and guardian of their community (Lawson 2010). Ironically white men did not have this standard for themselves and black women. Had Tom Robinson been white the case might not have had the same exposure as it did. In fact the case might have been ignored because of the victim, a poor girl on the lowest level of the social hierarchy. However, since Tom Robinson was black and the victim was white the victim’s social standing did not matter. It was more important that it was a black man transgressing on a white woman. Robinson could not possibly have beaten Mayella Ewell on the right side of her face with his deformed left arm. This is a logical counter yet Robinson was still found guilty. Majority of the white residents of Maycomb agreed with the verdict and Scout’s teacher declared, “it’s time somebody taught ‘em a lesson, they were gettin’ way above themselves” (Lee 2010, p. 272). In order to highlight the racism Lee draws the comparison between the blacks and Jews. During 1935 Hitler started his aggressive campaign against Jews in Europe. Scout’s teacher addresses this in class and explains that the persecution against Jews is awful. Because the Jews help businesses, are clean, and pious. This leads Scout to wonder as the same teacher had been expressed a racist attitude towards blacks, “‘Jem, how can you hate Hitler so bad an’ then turn around and be ugly about folks right at home –?’” (Lee 2010, p. 272). The criticism Lee has is that white people can sympathize with the Jews and feel that their persecution is unjust. Yet at the same time ignore the struggles that take place in their own town and fail to see the similarities of their situation. Additionally, the commentary is said by a teacher someone who has the ability to influence children. She is unable to see her own racial prejudice and the irony of advocating for justice for one group of people yet deny it to another. It perfectly illustrates how deeply racism is ingrained in the American society. It illustrates how segregation is seen as natural and the community thought it created harmony between races (Shields 2006, p. 24).

Segregation is an important part of the novel. While the white community maintains the order i.e. they enter the courthouse first and sit on the first floor. After they have been seated the blacks can enter and sit on the second floor. It is also important to note that when Scout recalls her days in school she never mentions any black children attending. We learn that Calpurnia has taught many of the black church attendants to read, including her own son, using a book she borrowed from Atticus. But many from the black community are illiterate (Lee 2010, p. 137). Calpurnia explains that there was no school when her son, Zeebo, was a child so she taught him herself. This means there are many others who never attended school or had access to a teacher. It would either seem that there are two schools in Maycomb one for whites or one for blacks. Or there is one school for white children only and the blacks are self reliant to educate themselves. By segregating the white and black children they have no way of interacting with each other. Scout does not have stories about playing with black children and is therefore unaware of their situation. If the children are not given the same opportunity for education as their white counterparts they are less likely to advance in society. Even though segregation and racism are considered natural by most of the white citizens of Maycomb there are people who fight against this mentality. This includes Judge Taylor, Atticus Finch, the Finch children, and Miss Maudie. Though they are outnumbered they fight for the rights of blacks even though Atticus believes it is not a fight they can win in his lifetime (Lee 2010, p. 242).

While the message of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is to fight against oppression it also has the realistic representation that a case like Tom Robinson’s is important. It is however also easily forgotten in a town like Maycomb. Shortly after the trial the town forgets about the uproar it caused and forgets about his death. It is a cruel reminder that the white populace will forget what it does not deem important. That is why people such as Atticus and Scout have to persevere and stick to their convictions in order to combat this mentality and be prepared to fight similar battles. Though *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a work of fiction its lesson can be applied to real life. The racial debates that occur in America today are not being ignored. The Black Lives Matter movement has gained such popularity with young people occupying social media outlets and commenting, sharing, and being critical of black racial injustice. From smaller injustices such as being watched by employees in stores – suspected of being a potential thief, to the fatal incident where a 12-year-old was shot for carrying a toy gun (Lowery 2015). The growing outrage of the black community reached a boiling point in August 2014 when unarmed 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot and killed by officer Darren Wilson, in Ferguson, Missouri (Sherwell 2015). The reason for the outrage was that Brown was unarmed and the police officer Darren Wilson shot him multiple times. The critique was that it was excessive and could have been handled differently. Another element was that Wilson was not fired from his job as many protesters had advocated for. This was another example of white privilege and many in the black community were outraged that there were no further repercussions.

Afterwards riots broke out in the Ferguson. Shortly after the Justice Department began investigating the Ferguson police to see if there were records of racial bias. The results were clear. There were clear signs of racism at nearly every level of Fergusons law enforcement system (Horwitz 2015). Ferguson is a city where the black citizens make up 67 % of the population and they accounted for 93 % of all arrests between 2012 and 2014. According to the Justice Department’s investigation 76 % of the black population had outstanding arrest warrants. Among the stop and arrests the black population made up 85 % who were subject to a vehicle searches, 90 % who received a citation, and 93 % who were arrested. Other offences were petty such as the “manner of walking in roadway” charges which were made up by 95 % of the black population (Horwitz 2015). Attorney General, Eric. H. Holder Jr., addressed the investigation in a press conference. Holder said there was an "implicit and explicit racial bias" that accounts for the hostile relations between law enforcement and residents (Horwitz 2015). Ferguson is one of many cities in America that has such a high rate of racial bias and it is still a national problem. Shortly after the case in Ferguson Eric Garner was attacked by an officer in New York. Suspected of selling loose untaxed cigarettes and resisting arrest. The officer held Garner in an illegal chokehold. Bystanders caught the incident on camera where Garner said 11 times, “I can’t breathe” (Long 2015). Garner died due to the chokehold and it created an outrage on the Internet. In February 2015 the F.B.I director, James B. Comey, gave a speech on the difficult relationship between blacks and police officers. Comey addresses the issue and says that something needs to be done to improve the relationship between law enforcement and its citizens. He goes on to explain that police officers suffer from cynicism and influence from the environment. Which causes them to assume that all blacks are equally inclined to law breaking:

“Something happens to people in law enforcement. Many of us develop many different flavors of cynicism that we work hard to resist because they can be lazy mental shortcuts. (…) After years of police work, officers often can’t help but be influenced by the cynicism they feel. A mental shortcut becomes almost irresistible and maybe even rational by some lights. The two young men on one side of the street look like so many others that officer has locked up. Two white men on the other side of the street, even in the same clothes, do not. The officer does not make the same association about the two white guys, whether that officer is white or black. And that drives different behaviors.” (Schmidt 2015)

Comey suggests that an open and honest discussion of what the relationship is today, what it could be, what it should be is what is needed in order to establish trust between the two parties. The fact still remains that the racism against black people is in every level of law enforcement. It creates disproportionate numbers of crime committed by black people and this reflects onto the rest of society. Racism in America is so ingrained in the culture and though there is no longer any segregation or rule of separating white and blacks. Racism still exists.

The cases of Michael Brown and Eric Garner are two of many other cases that are seeing the light of day. Most importantly they are being broadcasted nationally and globally. The civil rights movement has once again become a central focus point. Many blacks share their dissatisfaction with the blatant racism, racial profiling, and the fear of death from law enforcement. Statics show there are more black people in prison in the US than white. But the result of this is more than blacks being more prone to violence. It is systematic racist carried out for years. It is a vicious cycle blacks are paid less at their job, they cannot afford to live in nicer parts of town and live in ghettos, the children attend school which are subpar, they do not get the same education compared to their white counterparts, which leads to poorer work opportunities (Gabriel 2010). And so the cycle continues.

## Classism aspect

The town of Maycomb has a hierarchy and it has persisted for many years. At the top are Judge Taylor and Atticus, at the next level are most of the towns people, women, children, next are the poor farmers, such as the Cunningham’s, then the Ewell’s and at the very bottom the colored people such as Tom Robinson and his family. It can be argued that some see the Ewell family at the lowest. Since people like Calpurnia and the Robinson’s work hard to provide for their families, unlike the Ewell’s. However, as it is proved many times there is racial prejudice and white people still consider themselves superior above the blacks. As Maycomb has a rigid class structure conflict occurs. Throughout the novel the importance of this structure is pointed out and it seems impossibly to break the status quo. The Finch family is notably one the old families. Atticus and his brother Jack are the first to leave Finch Landing. They are highly respected in the community and their sister Alexandra holds onto this social standing. Atticus on the other hand does not really consider himself be above others. Instead he sees himself as a common person and just as poor as everyone else in town. Alexandra and Atticus contrast each other in this regard. Alexandra tries to maintain the balance of what used to be and Atticus being indifferent and ultimately becoming aware that change needs to happen. The novel deals with the Southern Romance that advocates for the “Old South”. That is an outdated sociological structure such as the caste system, or hierarchy, the division of class, and sexual taboos (Erisman 1973, p. 36). Lee promotes a “New South” without the hierarchy. Which she proves through her novel is outdated, harmful, and serves no purpose other than to create distance and misunderstanding between people. The characters in the novel fall into different classes such as the “old aristocracy” represented by Alexandra, to the poor white trash represented by Bob Ewell and his children, who have been “the disgrace of Maycomb for three generations” (Erisman 1973, p. 40). Maycomb is a poor town it is a farming town. Due to the Great Depression many farmers were unable to produce crops, make a profit and use that profit in town in order to make the economy flow. Since the economy is poor it means that the rest of the town is poor as well. Many of the children have no shoes or lunches at school (Lee 2010, p. 28). Even Atticus Finch who is a lawyer and is in a position where he can earn a good deal considers himself poor. The dentist, doctor, and lawyer are the only ones who bring an income to the city. The doctor even charges a sack of potato for a baby delivery from some families. That is the only way to pay (Lee 2010, p. 23). The town of Maycomb has its own workings and norms in terms of what can and cannot be done. Atticus understands these norms and the people well and navigates the structure of Maycomb. For instance, Atticus conducts business based on how his client is used to conduct business. For example sitting on the back porch instead of in the living room. Some clients find the living room is a too formal setting and a back porch is more informal and that is simply the way some clients prefer it. This attests to the fact that Atticus knows that there are some social conventions that must be met. For example that Cunningham’s never accept anything they cannot pay back. They will pay back but not always with money. At first Scout’s teacher does not understand this. Even though Scout explains succinctly, “he’s a Cunningham”. The teacher who is from another town does not understand how this can explain anything. But all the other children understand what it means. This is simply how life is in Maycomb (Lee 2010, p. 22). Another example is how the Ewell children only go to school the first day of the year and are absent the rest of the year. Again Scout’s teacher attempts to make Burris Ewell stay but the other children advise against it. They know the family and its history, “‘Let him go, ma’am,’ he said. ‘He’s a mean one, a hard-down mean one. He’s liable to start somethin’, and there’s some little folks here’” (Lee 2010, p. 29). The town knows that the Ewell family does not find it necessary for all the children to go to school and learn to read when one of them knows and can teach the others. No one can force the children to go to school and no one intervenes in order to make sure they get a proper education. Instead it is widely regarded that the Ewell’s have their ways and to let them handle it as they see fit. The Ewell are such outcasts of society that no one truly tries to help them. Instead the town believes they are a lost cause.

As it was stated above the Ewell’s are considered a disgrace in Maycomb. They are beyond salvation. Everyone feels that they are above the Ewell family in terms of social standing. The hierarchy of the is explained by Jem, “‘The thing about it is, our kind of folks don’t like the Cunninghams, the Cunninghams don’t like the Ewells and the Ewells hate and despise the coloured folks’” (Lee 2010). There is a clear divide between these groups of people who live differently. One of the characters who lives entirely separate from others is Boo Radley. He is a recluse who never exists his house. He is the subject of much speculation and mystery to the children of the town. The Finch children reenact the parts of his infamous story. He stabbed his father in the leg with a pair of scissors and would leave the house only to eat cats and other small animals. The adults of Maycomb know this to be untrue and know the truth behind it that is was really in the claim of “honor”. When Boo Radley was young he was part of a group of teenage boys and got into trouble and was accused of using obscene language in the presence of a lady. Mr. Radley claimed the right to protect the family name, and took Boo home and kept him in the house. Later when Boo attacked him, Mr. Radley once again asked for family privileges. Boo returned home and this time was to never surface on the porch or in the yard during daylight hours (May 1993, p. 63). This again highlights the importance of influence and connections in Maycomb. In order to save the family name Boo is kept inside and at first the Finch children wonder why he never comes out. They begin to understand that he does not want to reenter the world.

There are many social issues in Maycomb including racism and social imbalance. Theodore R. Hovet and Grace-Anne Hovet argue in their essay *Contending Voices in Mockingbird* from 2001 that what some might see as “virulent” southern racism Lee says is something that is not characteristic of the South as a whole. But it is something created by, and sustained by, a backward element in the rural South represented in the novel by the Ewell family. They are unable or unwilling to use modern agricultural practices or to educate themselves and the children in more modern forms of labor. They mistakenly blame their increasingly marginal position in society on blacks who will not accept their second-class citizen status (Hovet and Hovet 2001, p. 114). Hovet and Hovet believe that the strategy of placing responsibility for America’s intolerance and injustice on the poor was so successful that is has become a cliché in popular culture. The poor, uneducated, and ignorant characters often play the antagonists (Hovet and Hovet 2001, p. 115). The “white trash” scenario worked because the accused were natural scapegoats. Mostly uneducated and without a voice in the media the poor rural whites were unable and helpless to counter the negative stereotypes that were created by the southern apologists and perpetuated by national media. The result being that “they were demonized into the “other” by civil rights advocators and progressive southerners” (Hovet and Hovet 2001, p. 115). However, Scout crawls into Bob Ewell’s skin and walks around in it. She gains a more realistic understanding of the Ewell’s than Atticus has. She understands and explains to the reader that Bob Ewell does not see the social structure and hierarchy of Maycomb the same way Atticus does. Ewell identifies with the “common people” with those like himself. Those who are held down by a wealthy white ruling class who manipulate blacks in order to keep poor whites like himself in their place (Hovet and Hovet 2001, p. 120). Ewell then tries to strike back at “those bastards who thought they ran this town” (Hovet and Hovet 2001, p. 121). Hovet and Hovet believe that Atticus has a misunderstanding of what it means to be “common” since he himself is well educated and has a high-ranking job. He is still better off despite his low salary due to the financial crisis. Atticus’ understanding of common people includes everyone in his tier then the Cunningham’s, and at the bottom the Ewell’s. The Hovet’s interpretation can work, however, throughout the novel Atticus consistently disagrees with his sister about their family heritage and their social standing. Therefore it can be argued that he does not care about his social standing at all. What Atticus finds disagreeable about Ewell is his negligence of his children. He uses his relief cheque on alcohol and is given a special permit to hunt off-season in order to feed the children. Regardless of their opinion of Atticus the Hovet’s are right when they say that it is easy to use the truly poor and uneducated as scapegoats. Bob Ewell can be seen as the face of the most violent racism in town. He used his own daughter in order to destroy a black person and used the trial to his own benefit. But it would be wrong to assume that Lee only used Bob Ewell as the antagonist of the story. Bob Ewell is the symptom of a corrupt system where blaming a black person for a crime they did not commit, and ultimately had them found guilty and killed, is considered natural and just. The true antagonist is the racism that lives in the citizens that agree that blacks are bad and that segregation is the answer.

Bob Ewell is not one dimensionally villainous. Though racism does play a part it is not the only problem of the novel. The other is the treatment of the Ewell children in particular Mayella Ewell. Her desire to be touched with love and not violence and not from a drunken family member lead her into this situation. The patriarchy shows itself clearly here. Bob Ewell sexually assaults her, to what extend is not know. She is sheltered from the rest of society. She does not attend school and instead takes care of her younger siblings. Mayella is attracted to Tom Robinson and kisses him. When her father catches her, he beats her, possibly rapes her, and then blames it on Tom Robinson. It is clear that Ewell is not protecting her purity, he has ruined that himself, but instead he is “protecting” her from interracial relations. In a roundabout way Ewell is attempting to save Mayella’s womanhood and sexual purity at least in the public eye. He believes that blaming Tom Robinson for what happened will exonerate Mayella’s previous indiscretions. In a similar way Dolphus Raymond is like Mayella. He lives with a black woman and has mixed children. He is the town drunk and everyone pities him and the mixed children. But somehow it is “socially acceptable” for Dolphus to live with a black woman and have mixed children, because he plays drunk in public, than it is for Mayella to have kissed a black man (Baecker 1988, p. 109). Again this it the evidence, that was discussed previously, that segregation was created in order to protect white women, not black women, and it was done in order to control the white women. Mayella is unable to admit to her desire for Tom Robinson. Instead claiming that she was beaten and raped by him to avoid social stigmatization for her attraction.

Lee’s point throughout the novel is that the old values of the South are unsustainable. The caste system or hierarchy that exists in Maycomb has its fallbacks. She exemplifies this with Scout. As stated before by Jem the people like the Finch family do not like the Cunningham’s. Yet after Scout beats Walter Cunningham up Jem invites him to have lunch at their house. Here Atticus speaks kindly to Walter and treats him as he would any other guest. Walter pours syrup over his food and Scout asks what he is doing and this embarrasses Walter. Calpurnia explains to Scout that he is a guest and all guests should be treated with respect. The night before Tom Robinson’s trial Atticus sits outside his cell in order to dissuade the mob who come to lynch Tom Robinson. Scout walks into the mob unaware of what is about to transpire and tells Cunningham that Walter is “a good boy” (Lee 2010, p. 169). The tension is palpable and the mob disperses. This is all thanks to Scout. By not honoring the social code of Maycomb and by accepting Walter and treating him as an equal she is able to prove to grown men with murderous intent that a little humanity goes a long way. Lee’s commentary is that if Scout had honored the social norm of treating Walter Cunningham as a Cunningham and not a person Tom Robinson would have been killed. “‘You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view (…) until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.’” (Lee 2010, p. 33) Atticus said at the beginning of the novel. It is true only when Scout learns this she is able to understand Boo Radley, Bob and Mayella Ewell. She also realizes that the system needs to change and exemplifies the “New South” Lee also advocates for.

# *To Kill a Mockingbird* and its topics

## A brief summary of the novel

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is the story of young Jean Louise (Scout) Finch and her life in the southern town Maycomb. The story takes place from 1933 to 1935. Over the course of these years Scout learns a lot. At the beginning of the novel Scout, her brother Jem, and friend Dill explore Maycomb and are fascinated by the mysterious Boo Radley. Scout learns about the intricate dealings of what it means to be a woman in the south and how she fits into this. During one of their summers a black man, Tom Robinson, is accused of raping a poor girl, Mayella Ewell. The case and trial cause outrage in the town. The other children harass Scout and her brother because their father, Atticus, is the defense lawyer for Tom Robinson. Atticus proves at the trial that Tom Robinson could not have beaten Mayella Ewell and concludes that her father did it. Despite the overwhelming evidence of Robinson’s innocence he is found guilty. In an act of retribution for his humiliation Bob Ewell attacks Scout and Jem. Boo Radley sees the commotion and saves the children by stabbing Ewell. In the end Scout is able to understand her fathers life lesson of climbing into another persons skin and seeing things from their point of view.

## Scout and her understanding of femininity

The main character of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is Scout Finch. She is a bright young girl who is discovering life and bringing the readers along. Scout is interesting because she 6 years old when the story begins and many of the influences of society have not yet taken hold in her. She enjoys reading and whenever she has a question she will always get an answer from her father Atticus.

The novel focuses on Scout’s education. Not just her institutional education but true-life education that begins in the home. At the start of the novel Scout has her first day at school. It is not a success. Her teacher does not appreciate that Scout is already to read, “‘Now you tell your father not to teach you any more. It’s best to begin reading with a fresh mind. You tell him I’ll take over from here and try to undo the damage – ’” (Lee 2010, p. 19). Scout’s first introduction into the institutional life of Maycomb is disappointing. It is important however, because it illustrates how Scout has lived her life perfectly content before being admitted into institutional care. It also signifies that the Maycomb system will continue to disappoint and let her down. Instead of rewarding and encouraging Scout’s growth Miss Caroline is upset that Scout is more advanced than her classmates. Miss Caroline is not the one who implements the knowledge of “how” to learn, read, and write. What is also significant is that because Scout has been taught so much about respect and kindness from home, she is not easily influenced by what her teacher says. Such as when her teacher feels sympathetic towards the Jews for being persecuted but fails to see the similarity to her own treatment of blacks (Lee 2010, p. 270). Her classmates might only feel sympathetic to the Jews, but Scout is able to put it into a wider context and compare the two. Therefore much of her education is not taught in school but instead at home. However, Atticus did not teach Scout to read he “ain’t got no time” and instead it is Calpurnia, her black housekeeper, who has taught her. Calpurnia made her write the alphabet then copy a chapter of the bible beneath it. If she did this well she was rewarded with a sandwich with butter and sugar (Lee 2010, p. 20). School hardly impacts Scout in terms of knowledge. If anything it shows her how ignorant others are. Most of it is the teacher Miss Caroline who does not understand the people of Maycomb. Scout tries to explain that Walter Cunningham will not accept the teacher’s money. Cunningham’s never accept anything they can’t pay back (Lee 2010, p. 22). However, Miss Caroline does not understand and hits Scout’s hand with a ruler 12 times (Lee 2010, p. 24). This further exemplifies Scout’s negative experience with school. Because Scout knows better she is punished. Her teacher might have thought Scout was making fun of her, when in reality Scout was trying to help. Had the teacher been from Maycomb she would not have offered to lend Walter Cunningham money. Furthermore Scout is not used to physical punishment from home. Instead they try explain what was wrong and what to do the next time. In order to get back at Walter Cunningham for making her look bad, she attacks him in the schoolyard. This is really a reaction to the bad day she has had, and since she cannot attack her teacher she will settle for Walter. Jem dissolves the fight and asks Walter to join them for lunch at home. At lunch Walter pours syrup all over his food. Scout questions this out loud and embarrasses Walter. Calpurnia brings Scout to the kitchen to explain that all company has to be treated with respect.

“‘He ain’t company, Cal, he’s just a Cunningham – ’

‘Hush your mouth. Don’t matter who they are, anybody sets foot in this house’s yo’ comp’ny, and don’t you let me catch you remarkin’ on their ways like you was so high and mighty! Yo’ folks might be better’n the Cunninghams but it don’t count for nothin’ the way you’re disgracin’ ‘em – if you can’t act fit to eat at the table you can just set here and eat in the kitchen!’” (Lee 2010, p. 27)

Calpurnia insists that disrespecting your guests is rude and Scout has to treat Walter kindly when he is their home. Also contrary to Miss Caroline Calpurnia knows Maycomb. She understands people like Walter Cunningham and his ways, and she needs Scout to understand as well. Everyone deserves to be treated with respect no matter who they are. This remark is something that stays with Scout. To treat others with respect is something Atticus also emphasizes. His famous advice of climbing into another’s skin and walking around in it teaches Scout about the importance of empathy. This is not something her teacher at school seems to understand. Scout wants to quit school but Atticus suggests they compromise. Scout will go to school and she and Atticus will read every night like always. But she must not tell anyone at school. Atticus understands the importance of education. What truly makes a person move forward in life is education, and Atticus knows that Scout is smart enough to go far in life. He also understands that Scout will be miserable if she is unable to read for 3 years in school. He seems to be aware that the school system is less than perfect, and offers Scout a deal so she will continue her formal education. It can easily be said that Scout’s education comes from those around her and the experiences she makes. As mentioned she is a bright girl who questions what she observes. She is unwilling to sit still and simply wait for a chance to learn. She pushes her boundaries and upsets the system by not fitting into it.

Similarly Scout does not fit into the expectations that southern society has for women. Scout wears overalls and dislikes wearing dresses. She enjoys climbing tress and other physical activities. She never plays with dolls and tea sets like it is expected of a girl her age. Instead Scout enjoys being outside and hardly thinks about “feminine activities”. She is by no means a southern belle and could be defined as a tomboy. The characteristics of a southern belle are piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness all of which Scout does not possess (Hedrick 2007). There is nothing submissive about Scout’s character. She defies expectations and does not let anyone boss her around. Furthermore, as Scout has never been interested in tea parties or other “domestic” plays she does not embody the domesticity of a southern belle. Instead Scout is the polar opposite of what is expected of a southern belle. Even though Scout has the pedigree to be one, she is simply not interested in what is means to be a girl in the south. It seems likely that Scout does not really consider gender and gender representation at all. It is only when Jem says that she acts like a girl that she becomes of aware of her sex. The same happens when Aunt Alexandra enters her life. Scout becomes aware that there is a certain way to behave if one is a girl. Aunt Alexandra constantly reminds her that she does not act the correct way. We turn to Judith Butler and her theories on gender that is “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame” (Butler 2002, p. 43). Butler has her theory on gender performativity that rather than being a part of our nature we act it out. This is evident with Scout who is unaware how to act “like a girl”. During her early life she was able, thanks to Atticus and Calpurnia, to act freely without any pressure to perform her gender. This changes when she grows older and is made aware that girls and women behave a certain way. Jem talks about it as a negative thing, and Aunt Alexandra talks about it as the most important thing of all. Scout has not had *a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame* pushed upon her by her family. But as she grows older her previous behavior cannot continue according to her Aunt. Scout begins to consider acting more like what is expected of a girl, but she does not feel entirely comfortable doing this. Her own perception of her gender is not a rigid as others’. Scout considers herself to be part of the boys group for the most part. During their first summers together the children play together with their friend Dill. But Scout is not truly completely integrated in Jem and Dill’s plays because when she acts out she is called “a girl”. When the boys get older they begin to exclude Scout. She cannot join them when they swim naked in the creek. This happens when Jem hits puberty and is symbolic of the changes that separate them. Jem is growing into an adult and as such he understands that men and women are different. It is an invisible difference between them now. Jem regards himself as an adult and part of society. He understands that as an adult your behavior cannot be the same as a child’s. Jem begins to separate himself from Scout and spends more time alone with Dill. And this creates a void in Scout’s life. She has no other friends her own age. So instead she visits Miss Maudie, their next-door neighbor, and Calpurnia.

Though Scout does not have many friends her own age she has many adult female allies. These women each impact Scout’s life in different ways. At first we have Calpurnia who is a maternal figure in Scout’s life. Her own mother died when she was young and Scout cannot remember her. Calpurnia is in charge of much of the children’s upbringing. As with the example of Walter Cunningham Calpurnia does not tolerate Scout’s rudeness. She is strict on Scout to the point where Scout feels that she cares more for Jem than for her (Lee 2010, p. 28). But as strict as she is Calpurnia still cares greatly about her. An example of this is when Scout comes home upset from school and Calpurnia kisses her and says she missed her. “She had wanted to make up with me, that was it. She had always been too hard on me, she had at last seen the error of her fractious ways, she was sorry and too stubborn to say so” (Lee 2010, p. 32). Though Calpurnia and Scout argue it is clear that Calpurnia cares for her. Calpurnia is strict because politeness is considered important in the south. Without a mother in the home it is Calpurnia’s job to make sure that Scout grows up and is raised properly. As strict as she is on Scout, she seems to think that Scout is on the right track. She has a healthy dose of strict upbringing and love. She also teaches Scout valuable life lessons such as reading and writing, and is considered an important presence in the household. When Aunt Alexandra insists that Calpurnia should leave the household Atticus comes to her defense.

“‘Alexandra, Calpurnia’s not leaving this house until she wants to. You may think otherwise, but I couldn’t have got along without her all these years. She’s a faithful member of this family and you’ll simply have to accept things the way they are. (…) We still need Cal as much as we ever did.’” (Lee 2010, p. 150)

“‘Besides, I don’t think the children’ve suffered one bit from her having brought them up. If anything, she’s been harder on them in some ways than a mother would have been… she’s never let them get away with anything, she’s never indulged them the way most coloured nurses do. She tried to bring them up according to her lights, and Cal’s lights are pretty good – and another thing, the children love her.’” (Lee 2010, p. 151)

Atticus does not interject much into Calpurnia’s upbringing of the children. As it is stated in the quote above he is more than thankful for her services to the family. It is also likely that Calpurnia also taught Jem to read when he was younger. Since Atticus’ parenting is more hands-off and being able to answer any questions the children might have. Calpurnia takes care of the day-to-day tasks. She allows Scout to run around outside in her overalls and play how she wants. She does not admonish Scout for her attire and understands that Scout wears overalls for practical reason. However, there are times when overalls are not acceptable. For instance when Jem and Scout have to visit her church one Sunday.

“Next morning she began earlier than usual, to ‘go over our clothes’. (…) She had put so much starch in my dress it came up like a tent when I sat down. She made me wear a petticoat and she wrapped a pink sash tightly around my waist. She went over my patent-leather shoes with a cold biscuit until she saw her own face in them.

‘It’s like we were goin’ to Mardi Gras,’ said Jem. ‘What’s all this for, Cal?’

‘I don’t want anybody sayin’ I don’t look after my children,’ she muttered.” (Lee 2010, p. 130)

For Calpurnia there is a clear difference between home and public. It might be all right for a girl to wear overalls at home. But in public there are other rules and norms. Calpurnia takes pride in her job and makes sure that Jem and Scout are presentable. Scout’s attire is important because she is in a position where her appearance matters. Scout has to reflect Calpurnia’s work efforts while also appearing presentable. Wearing her Sunday best Scout becomes a representation of the southern ideal. Calpurnia understands that Scout could not show up in her overalls at church. Girls have to present themselves a certain way. Calpurnia has been raised with the knowledge that the ideal for white girls and women is the southern belle. There is a limit to how freely Scout can act because social conventions are also important to Calpurnia. Gender conformity is present and important. Scout wears overalls at home but soon as she is in a more formal situation she has to adapt to her environment.

Calpurnia is also the link between the white community and the black community in Maycomb. She is responsible for showing the Finch children the black community. When they are in church the children are fascinated by the “linin’” they do – one person says what to say and the rest of the congregation sings it. Calpurnia explains that few from the black community are literate (Lee 2010, p. 137). Jem and Scout are not aware that this is a problem. They have been taught to read at a young age and it seems odd to them that there are people who are illiterate. In a way Jem and Scout have a childhood with naïve assumptions that anything is possible. And while it is true that Jem and Scout have the potential to do many things the reason they are able to do so is because they are white. They have access to education unlike many of the blacks who either cannot read or are taught by someone who has been fortunate to learn. The children note that Calpurnia speaks differently around her black acquaintances. Normally when Calpurnia speaks to the children she has excellent grammar, except when she is upset then she slips back into her “black grammar”. Jem and Scout do not understand why Calpurnia uses incorrect grammar when she is able to use it perfectly otherwise.

“‘Cal,’ I asked, ‘why do you talk nigger-talk to the – to your folks when you know it’s not right?’

‘Well, in the first place I’m black –’

‘That doesn’t mean you hafta talk that way when you know better,’ said Jem.

Calpurnia tilted her hat and scratched her head, then pressed her hat down carefully over her ears. ‘It’s right hard to say,’ she said. ‘Suppose you and Scout talked coloured-folks’ talk at home – it’d be out of place, wouldn’t it? Now what if I talked white-folks’ talk at church, and with my neighbours? They’d think I was puttin’ on airs to beat Moses.’” (Lee 2010, p. 139)

Calpurnia is aware of the different sides of herself. She acts a certain when she is with the Finch family and differently when she is around her black friends and family. Scout is fascinated by the idea that there is more to Calpurnia than she knows. She has never considered that Calpurnia has an existence outside of their lives. Scout simply thought that the way Calpurnia acts in their house would be similar to the way she acts in public or in her own home.

“That Calpurnia led a modest double life never dawned on me. The idea that she had a separate existence outside of our household was a novel one, to say nothing of her command of two languages.” (Lee 2010, p. 138)

Calpurnia navigates between two worlds: as black women in a white world and as a black woman in a black world. She acts differently in the two worlds in order to fit into either one. In the black world she has to talk a certain way in order not to stick out too much. Or worse seems as though she is trying to show off or “be better” than the others by assimilating to the whites. In the white world she will always be black no matter how she talks. But Calpurnia actively chooses to speak with proper grammar because that was what she was taught to do by Scout’s grandfather. The reason it fascinates Scout so much is because she has never considered that Calpurnia does live in two worlds. Calpurnia truly introduces Scout to a new world one where the harsh reality of racism exists. At church the reverend calls upon the congregation to help raise 10 dollars of Helen Robinson wife of the accused Tom Robinson. Scout asks why they have to collect money for Helen. She is told that normally blacks can bring their young children to work and play in the shade. But the reverend explains that no white person wants to hire Helen because of the accusations against Tom Robinson (Lee 2010, p. 135). The notion is that since Tom Robinson has committed a crime it must mean that Helen is associated or on par with him. Many of the white residents of Maycomb believe that blacks are bad deep down. Therefore segregation is needed and justified. Scout also finds out that while the white community is against Atticus’ involvement in the Tom Robinson case, the black community is more than happy. No defense lawyer in the history of Maycomb has truly fought to prove the innocence of a black man. There is a consensus among the white residents that all blacks are guilty no matter what. Therefore they are never truly innocent or worth attempting to defend properly.

Calpurnia teaches Scout many lessons and the most important one is to respect everyone. This lesson aligns with the lesson Atticus taught her about seeing things from other’s point of view. In this case Scout had never considered how blacks lived. She was never aware that there was such a gap between whites and blacks in their town. Without Calpurnia Scout would never have met so many black people and seen how they live. Scout does take these lessons to heart and tries to understand everyone in order to understand why people behave as they do.

Another important female ally in Scout’s life is Miss Maudie Atkinson. Miss Maudie is the widow who lives next door to the Finch family. She and Atticus grew up next to each other as children and she is easily one of Atticus’ best friends. She is also an important friend to Scout. And just like Calpurnia she accepts Scout for whom she is and does not reprimand her for acting unladylike. Scout values Miss Maudie because she has an acid tongue but she never tells on her and Jim (Lee 2010, p. 49). She cares about Scout. Miss Maudie is also on the Finch’s side during the trial of Tom Robinson. She is also against the racism and unfair justice in Maycomb. After the trial the Finch children visit her. Jem is especially furious that the system is unjust and feels that they have no allies.

“‘Wish the rest of the county thought that.’

‘You’d be surprised how man of us do.’

‘Who?’ Jem’s voice rose. ‘Who in this town did one thing to help Tom Robinson, just who?’

‘His coloured friends for one thing, and people like us. People like Judge Taylor. People like Mr Heck Tate. Stop eating and start thinking, Jem. Did it ever strike you that Judge Taylor naming Atticus to defend that boy was no accident? That Judge Taylor might have had his reasons for naming him?’” (Lee 2010, p. 238)

Miss Maudie helps the children put things into perspective. To show them there are those who fight against the corrupt system and want change. She is not condescending to the children and explains the situation in a way they will understand. Scout values and respects Miss Maudie because she will always get an explanation. Miss Maudie also respects Scout and looks out for her. An example of this is when Aunt Alexandra has the fine ladies of Maycomb over for tea. Scout has to put on her dress which makes her feel uncomfortable. The ladies ask her seemingly harmless questions but they insult Scout.

“‘You’re mighty dressed up, Miss Jean Louise,’ she said. ‘Where are your britches today?’

‘Under my dress.’

I hadn’t meant to be funny, but the ladies laughed. My cheeks grew hot as I realized my mistake, but Miss Maudie looked gravely down at me. She never laughed at me unless I meant to be funny.” (Lee 2010, p. 253)

Miss Maudie understands that Scout is uncomfortable and does not remark on her attire. She understands that Scout still wears her overalls in order to feel secure in an unfamiliar situation. She does not laugh at her discomfort but instead reassures Scout non-verbally that she is her support, “Miss Maudie’s hand closed tightly on mine, and I said nothing. Its warmth was enough” (Lee 2010, p. 254). Scout needs a strong white female ally in her life. This is because while Calpurnia is a big influence and source of strength she is unable to interact with Scout in the company of other white women. Therefore Scout needs someone who can help her in these situations. Her aunt Alexandra would not understand that Scout needs her hand held. She would likely laugh along with the comment and be embarrassed by Scout. Miss Maudie does not conform to the same gender rules and societal norms as Alexandra. Maudie may be one of the finer ladies of Maycomb but she is not a snob about it. She understands that Scout is not interested in dresses and dolls. She simply lets Scout express herself as she wants. Maudie also understands the pressure Scout is under in order to conform. She herself never pressures Scout to change her behavior and believes that Atticus and Scout can manage fine on their own. She recognizes that Scout is an independent person who will do well. Maudie simply lets her be and find her place in the world without further pressure.

On the opposite end of Maudie and Calpurnia we have Aunt Alexandra. She embodies the spirit of high class and upper social class. She is interested in keeping things as they always have been. She does this by maintaining her high class and admonishing Atticus for his poor job of raising Scout. Alexandra has “boarding-school manners, and knows not of self-doubt” and “is never bored and will exercise her royal prerogatives: arrange, advice, caution and warn” (Lee 2010, p. 142). She points out shortcomings of others to the greater glory of their own family. Unlike many of the other characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird* Aunt Alexandra is a simple character, she is not a round or nuanced. One is able to understand her reasoning but there is not much to her character beside her pride in her legacy. She is the opposite of Scout who has a deep, rich character and wants to better herself through the story. Alexandra stubbornly refuses to change her ways and tries to implement her own education onto Scout, because her ideas of femininity are so rigid. Therefore the two often clash because Scout is also headstrong, stubborn and unwilling to change for anyone or anything. Aunt Alexandra embodies the southern ideal of the southern belle. As part of the upper socioeconomic class she has the privilege, purity, domesticity and considers herself the guardian of the home. All of the qualities fit in with the southern belle and the ideals of true womanhood. She has been raised to believe that all girls and women should act as she does. Especially Scout who also belongs to the upper socioeconomic class. Alexandra has also been raised to behave like a stereotypical girl such as learned so sew; take care of the house, and family. This is an example of *repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame* as Judith Butler discusses. Alexandra has been raised as a feminine girl with tea parties and what is expected of a girl. For Alexandra her way of life is natural. In Alexandra’s worldview it is Scout who acts out of order and upsets the carefully constructed system. Alexandra has such a rigid view on what a woman is that she cannot comprehend that others might not want to live similarly to her. Contrary to Alexandra Atticus does not care about their family history. Alexandra constantly emphasizes that their heritage is important but Atticus rejects the notion. Atticus seems more interested in creating a name for himself through his own actions. Rather than what his forefathers did. Alexandra does not have any accomplishments of her own. She has no job and her own husband is useless. They have no other prestige than their home and family name. Scout and Jem discuss this.

“‘Atticus said one time the reason Aunty’s so hipped on the family is because all we’ve got’s background and not a dime to our names.’

‘Well Jem, I don’t know – Atticus told me one time that most of this Old Family stuff’s foolishness because everybody’s family’s just as old as everybody’s else’s.’” (Lee 2010, p. 250)

The classism of the south is deeply ingrained in Alexandra. She believes in the hierarchical structure of Maycomb and tries to maintain it. She does not want Scout to associate with Walter Cunningham because she considers him to be trash (Lee 2010, p. 248). Alexandra is not tolerant to those she deems beneath her or those she thinks upset the system. Scout is under constant scrutiny by her. Alexandra points out many times how much trouble Scout is, how much she upsets her father, and how she’s never be a lady if she continues her current behavior.

“Aunt Alexandra was fanatical on the subject of my attire. I could not possibly hope to be a lady if I wore breeches: when I said I could do nothing in a dress, she said I wasn’t supposed to be doing things that required pants. Aunt Alexandra’s vision of my deportment involved playing with small stoves, tea sets, and wearing the Add-A-Pear necklace she gave me when I was born.” (Lee 2010, p. 90)

Alexandra is hard on Scout because southern femininity is so deeply ingrained in her. Scout’s behavior conflicts with Alexandra’s view of femininity. As Jem puts it, “‘You know she’s not used to girls, (…) leastways, not girls like you’” (Lee 2010, p. 249). It seems that Alexandra expects her berating and constant antagonizing will make Scout into a lady. But it has the opposite affect Scout feels as if she is constantly being attacked for who she is. Alexandra refuses to understand that Scout is not interested in typically feminine activities and Scout is headstrong and refuses to give in. Their situation becomes more complex when Alexandra moves into the Finch home in order to help them out.

“‘Jem’s growing up now and you are too,’ she said to me. ‘We decided that it would be best for you to have some feminine influence. It won’t be many years, Jean Louise, before you become interested in clothes and boys –’

I could have made several answers to this: Cal’s a girl, it would be many years before I would be interested in boys, I would never be interested in clothes… but I kept quiet.” (Lee 2010, p. 140)

Scout’s mother died when she was young Alexandra blames the lack of feminine influence on Scout’s tomboy ways. But Calpurnia has been a part of the family for many years as Scout mentions in the quote above. Calpurnia could easily teach Scout how to talk to boys or curl her hair when the time came. But Alexandra values her family too greatly to leave it to their black maid. Alexandra blames Scout’s lack of “girling” on Atticus and Calpurnia for not providing a proper upbringing for a young girl. The ideas of dainty, gentle and careful girls are what Alexandra understands. She likely never climbed trees as a child. If she did she would know that wearing a dress while doing so is impractical. Her struggle against Scout is based on misunderstandings. Alexandra tries throughout the novel to form Scout into a lady. But even when Scout wears dresses she still does not embrace the mentality of a lady. Both of them are too suborn to change their minds and compromise. Something changes between them when Bob Ewell attacks Jem and Scout.

“She brought me something to put on, and had I thought about it then, I would have never let her forget it: in her distraction, Aunty brought me my overalls. ‘Put these on, darling,’ she said, handing me the garments she most despised.” (Lee 2010, p. 291)

Alexandra has subconsciously found Scout’s overalls instead of a dress. This scene is significant because the children have suffered a trauma. Their world is not the same after the assassination attempt by Bob Ewell. Jem is left disabled and has to be reminded of the origin for all time. They are forced to mature more rapidly than their peers, they know of a darker place and how cruel others can be. It is significant that Aunt Alexandra finds Scout’s overalls because it means that she does not have to act like a girl. Scout can simply be a hurt child who needs to be comforted and cared for. Appearances and etiquette do not matter because everyone is shocked that Scout and Jem almost died. It also signifies that on some level Alexandra acknowledges that the overalls are part of Scout’s identity. Even if this is unconsciously done it is important. While Alexandra may not acknowledge it verbally she begins to accept Scout for who she is.

The final summer the novel takes place is a significant one for Scout. She truly begins to question what it means to be a girl and a woman. This question was not something Scout wondered about before. During her aunt’s party for the fine ladies of Maycomb Scout begins to really contemplate what femininity is and how she fits into it. Since Scout did not grow up with her own biological mother her closest motherly figure was Calpurnia. Though Calpurnia teaches her much she is unable to truly teach her how to navigate the world as a white woman in a white world. Scout is therefore completely unable to decipher what goes on in the world of white women.

“There was no doubt about it, I must soon enter this world, where on its surface fragrant ladies rocked slowly, fanned gently, and drank cool water.

But I was more at home in my father’s world. People like Mr Heck Tate did not trap you with innocent questions to make fun of you; even Jem was not highly critical unless you said something stupid. Ladies seemed to live in faint horror of men, seemed unwilling to approve wholeheartedly of them. But I liked them. There was something about them, no matter how much they cussed and drank and gambled and chewed; no matter how undeletable they were, there was something about them I instinctively liked… they weren’t –

‘Hypocrites, Mrs Perkins, born hypocrites.’” (Lee 2010, p. 258)

During the party Scout is asked seemingly benign questions that are actually insulting. She feels uncomfortable in her dress and wears hers overalls underneath in order to feel secure. She feels entirely out of place and compares the experience to being around men. In their world she feels more comfortable. As Scout says men do not try to trap her with seemingly innocent questions. They do not make fun of her unless she does something truly stupid. Scout feels that the world of women has a hidden side to it that she does not understand. The world of men seems more straightforward and accessible. Scout’s view is a bit black and white and childishly naïve. Both worlds have more to them than what appears at first glance. But for Scout it is clear that she feels more comfortable in a man’s world. What needs to be said is that Scout feels this clear divide between herself and women such as her aunt Alexandra. When she is with Miss Maudie or Calpurnia she does not feels as alienated. This has to do with the expectations of her gender performance. We turn again to Judith Butler who points out that gender is something that is a repeated set of actions. This means that in order to be considered a female one must do feminine actions and repeat them. Aunt Alexandra believes that Scout can only be a girl if she acts according to what Aunt Alexandra perceives as feminine. But Scout does not fit into the ideal of femininity that Alexandra has. The finer ladies of Maycomb and Alexandra represent the conventional understanding of femininity. They are taught and trained from a young age to be ladies. This includes being a socialite and attending get-togethers with other fine ladies. There are many things that go unspoken in the elite group of women. They discuss cultural topics such as the Mrunas but they never appreciate the culture. They simply talk about how depraved they are and never consider their way of life. They do as Alexandra does and insult others to raise their own status. There is a lack of understanding and no attempts to understand those outside their own group. The women are also unable to understand why their black staffs are upset about Tom Robinson’s trial. There is an unwillingness to reach out to others especially those who are different. Scout has been raised to be considerate of others. She mingles with different social groups and by doing so gains an insight into different ways of living.

The same process of understanding others is something Scout also has to apply to Aunt Alexandra. Scout has made few attempts to understand her aunt. She seems to believe that their differences cannot be reconciled. They both seem too headstrong to truly reach a compromise. But true to the novel’s message of understanding Scout begins to understand Aunt Alexandra. This occurs at the party for the Maycomb ladies. Atticus suddenly returns with the news that Tom Robinson is dead. Calpurnia and Atticus have to leave to tell Helen Robinson. Miss Maudie, Aunt Alexandra and Scout are left to attend to their guests. During this Aunt Alexandra finally caves in and lets her careful composure slip. Finally they have to rejoin the party even though they are all shaken up.

“She took her handkerchief from her belt and wiped her nose. She patted her hair and said, ‘Do I show it?’

‘Not a sign,’ said Miss Maudie. ‘Are you together again, Jean Louise?’

‘Yes ma’am.’

‘Then let’s join the ladies,’ she said grimly.” (Lee 2010, p. 261)

Scout learns a valuable lesson about women. They have to keep themselves together even though they want to fall part. Miss Maudie and Aunt Alexandra have a responsibility to the guests in the other room. Scout also learns the important lesson of solidarity and the importance of allies (Shaffer 1994, p. 140). Scout also learns that there is a hierarchy and a pecking order among the women. This is exemplified when one of the guests makes racist comments and snide remarks about Atticus. Miss Maudie quickly replies:

“‘His food doesn’t stick going down, does it?’

(…) ‘Maudie, I’m sure I don’t know what you mean,’ said Mrs Merriweather.

‘I’m sure you do,’ Miss Maudie said shortly.

She said no more. When Miss Maudie was angry her brevity was icy. Something had made her deeply angry, and her grey eyes were as cold as her voice.” (Lee 2010, p. 257)

Mrs. Merriweather has been put in her place. Her ignorant comments are not allowed. Scout previously thought it was something that was not discouraged. It is clear that the rudeness is not tolerated for different reasons. The first is that it is Atticus’ house, and making implicit rude comments about him is considered impolite and a show of bad manners. The second is that Miss Maudie is clearly one of the high-ranking members of the finer ladies. She speaks on behalf of Aunt Alexandra who gives

Miss Maudie “a look of pure gratitude”. This also confuses Scout. Since the two women had never been especially close. It is an unspoken rule that hosts cannot be rude to their own guests, but since Miss Maudie is a guest in the Finch home she is able to put Mrs. Merriweather in her place. Scout begins to understand that there is more to being a woman than just looking the part. There are many intricate ways in which women operate. Even though Alexandra and Miss Maudie do not see eye to eye on many things their loyalty to Atticus is something they agree upon. Scout makes a decision to compromise at the party. She wants to be mature like her Aunt and Miss Maudie.

“Aunt Alexandra looked across the room at me and smiled. She looked at a tray of cookies on the table and nodded at them. I carefully picked up the tray and watched myself walk to Mrs Merriweather. With my very best company manners, I asked her if she would have some. After all, if Aunty could be a lady at a time like this, so could I.” (Lee 2010, p. 261)

This shows that though Scout is not interested in being a lady she begins to understand what it entails. Scout decides to make a compromise. It is much like the compromise she made with Atticus, where she would still go to school and read in secret. This time her compromise is that she will behave like a lady when it is needed, but not change her opinion or her ways. Scout can act the part without changing her own character for anyone. Scout resilience is one of her greatest assets. During the previous encounter in the kitchen it seems that Scout understands that they need to keep their composure. They need to avoid upsetting the guests and to keep on pretending that everything is normal. That Scout is willing to cooperate with her Aunt despite their differences shows her growth and maturity. She is willing to set aside her own grudges for a moment. Because she can see that the other women need her.

It is also important to note that it is not only the women that impact Scout’s life. The other people who influence her are Atticus and Jem. Scout is impacted from every direction of what it means to be a girl. She is taught from a young age that there is something wrong about behaving like a girl. Jem often comments on how girls are embarrassing, hateful, and frivolous. These remarks are often used when Scout is either afraid or defiant. Jem himself never elaborates on what exactly he means by acting like a girl. But he never uses it in a positive way. Scout does not understand completely what it means when she acts like “a girl”. Though it is often said in relation to acts of courage such as retrieving their tire or sneaking into the Radley place at night.

“I was not so sure, but Jem told me I was being a girl, that girls always imagined things, that’s why other people hated them so much, and if I started behaving like one I could just go off and find some to play with.” (Lee 2010, p. 43)

In this quote Scout is unsure if it’s wise to continue to bother Boo Radley, because Atticus most likely knows and disapproves of this. Jem is using “girl” as an insult to imply that girls are frivolous. If she continues to act accordingly she will not be allowed to play with him anymore. Jem’s attitude stems from the idea that being a girl is something negative. It might be that he thinks so subconsciously or it is likely that he copies the attitude he sees the other boys at school have. The result is that Scout thinks that being a girl is something she has to suppress around Jem. But what Jem perceives as “a girl” is different from what Scout experience as a girl is. Meaning that Jem thinks girls are cowardly, embarrassing, and are hated for this and acting in the normative sense of the word “girl” is negative. Scout’s experience of being a girl is different because she does not see the difference between herself and Jem. It should also be noted that Jem is three years older than Scout. When he asks her to get the tire from the Radley place it is because he is too afraid to get it himself. When challenged he does retrieve it. Scout is more worried about consequences than Jem and whether Atticus approves or not. But Jem perceives this anxiousness as cowardly. Even though he as the older sibling should know better.

Scout does consider herself to be part of the boys. But as the story progresses it becomes apparent that this is not always the case. Jem understands that being a girl is something negative and as he grows older begins to alienate Scout. Even Dill starts to treat her like a prize. The boys start to treat her as a girl and all it includes. During the summers they spend together Dill becomes infatuated with Scout. He asks Scout to marry him and then forgets about it.

“He staked me out, marked as his property, said I was the only girl he would ever love, then he neglected me. I beat him up twice but it did no good, he only grew closer to Jem.” (Lee 2010, p. 46)

Dill sees her as an object something to own. He has claimed her as his own even if he neglects her. Scout is against this notion of being treated as property. She cares for Dill but does not want to belong to anyone. In their different ways the boys are treating Scout similarly: like a girl. They treat her as if she is different from them. Jem berates her when she complains, Dill wants her to be his, ignores her, and still expects her to be there when he returns. Jem steps into the realm of adults and treats Scout as a young child and creates clear boundaries between them as boys and girls. Dill might not have minded playing with Scout but he now prefers Jem’s company. They exclude Scout from their games and only ask her to join them when they need a third party in their games. Scout finds their treatment unfair. Even if she spends her time with Calpurnia and Miss Maudie it is not the same as having friends her own age.

One of the most influential people in Scout’s life is her father Atticus. He always set an example of how to be a good person and how to respect others. Atticus thinks that Scout is on the right track in life and respects her for who she is. During Aunt Alexandra’s stay the tension is high and Scout feels an immense pressure. But during these times Atticus supports her.

“I should be a ray of sunshine in my father’s lonely life. I suggested that one could be a ray of sunshine in pants just as well, but Aunty said that one had to behave like a sunbeam, that I was born good but had grown progressively worse every year. She hurt my feelings and set my teeth permanently on edge, but when I asked Atticus about it, he said there were already enough sunbeams in the family and to go on about my business, he didn’t mind me much the way I was.” (Lee 2010, p. 90)

Atticus’ approval matters greatly to Scout. If Atticus supports her, it does not matter what others say. Scout’s healthy characteristic stems from the love and support she gets from home. She is able to be herself because her support system is so strong. It is also important that Atticus is progressive in terms of upbringing. He lets Scout dress and play how she wants without enforcing gender stereotypes onto her. There is no gender performativity for Scout because she is not forced to act a certain way. Atticus simply lets her be. He protects Scout’s innocence and lets her be a child without worrying too much. Atticus generally does not care much for gender stereotypes either. The ideal of the gentle, dainty southern belle is not something Atticus endorses.

“‘Who started it?’ asked Atticus, in resignation.

‘Jem did. He was tryin’ to tell me what to do. I don’t have to mind *him*, do I?’

Atticus smiled. ‘Let’s leave it at this: you mind Jem whenever he can make you. Fair enough?’” (Lee 2010, p. 152)

Atticus encourages Scout’s independence and her own assertiveness. Even though Scout has to be respectful to her aunt, because she is an adult, it does not apply to Jem. It is also a good lesson for Jem to learn as well. Just because he is on the cusp of manhood does not mean he can boss his little sister around. Atticus generally has a hand-off approach to his upbringing and instead guides and lets the children find the right answer themselves. The quote above is a rare exception where he has to physically intervene to separate Jem and Scout.

The final male character that impacts Scout’s life is Arthur “Boo” Radley. First and foremost Boo has an interest in Jem and Scout, but mostly he is interested in Scout. It is a purely innocent, childlike interest and not a sexual interest. He seems to recognize the innocence in Scout and wants to protect it. He leaves presents for the children in the knot-hole in his tree and observes their games during the year. He is a gentle and protective person. During the fire at Miss Maudie’s house he places a blanket onto Scout to keep her warm. He is a non-invasive person in Scout’s life. He does not wish to make any verbal contract and instead leaves gifts and a blanket. But when Bob Ewell attacks the children Boo comes after him with a knife. It is the ultimate form of protection that Boo can give. When compared to Atticus there are some similarities. Both men want to protect Scout and her innocence. In Boo’s case it is the childlike imagination, her playfulness and perhaps he does not want her to grow up just yet. Boo does not want to be an active part of her life, more of a passive force that observes and protects from a distance. Had Boo not been looking after Scout both she and Jem would have died. It seems that Boo and Atticus take care of Scout in different areas of her life. Atticus can protect her at home and Boo can protect her outside.

The final aspect of Scout’s understanding of femininity is the limitations that women have during the 1930s. The women in her life are quite reasonable and Scout believes that some of the smartest people she knows are women, such as Calpurnia and Miss Maudie. Therefore it surprises her when she finds out that women are not allowed to serve as jury. Calpurnia is unable to serve because she is both a woman and black (Lee 2010, p. 244). When Scout asks Atticus why women cannot serve he replies:

“‘I guess it’s to protect our frail ladies from sordid cases like Tom’s. Besides,’ Atticus grinned, ‘I doubt if we’d ever get a complete case tried – the ladies’d be interrupting to ask questions.’” (Lee 2010, p. 244)

Atticus’ answer can be interpreted in two ways. Either he seriously believes women are incapable of serving on a jury, or he is being sarcastic and finds the system ridiculous. The latter seems more likely. Atticus raises his own daughter to do to what she wants. It does not make sense for Atticus to want her to have limitations. Atticus is even pleased when Jem and Scout figure it out, as he also believes that this is nonsense. The idea of protecting “frail ladies from sordid cases” is typical of the southern society. Once again the fragile women must be protected. The irony is that women are often the victims of sexual assaults. Therefore they would already know the “sordid” details. But the patriarchal need to shelter and protect women shines through. It is ironic that by protecting women they are in fact limiting them. Also, it is a condescending attitude that women would not be able to participate without interrupting. Scout does think of the example of old Mrs. Dubose who would interrupt. But women such as Miss Maudie would listen and evaluate just as well as any man could. It is a clever move by Harper Lee. She introduces the topic through Scout, having her discover the limitations of her sex. Scout is entirely young, naïve, and unspoiled by society. She learns about these things and brings the reader along. Her reactions are the same reactions the reader should have. It does not make sense for women to be as limited as they are. There should be more to being a lady than just socializing, parties, and dresses. But the system is created so that women are supposed to stay ignorant. Scout refuses this. She upsets the order by not conforming to gender stereotypes and refusing to limit herself. More importantly her closest allies support her decision in this. Scout is the front figure for rebellion. She questions what she sees and does not uphold previous traditions.

## The racism in Maycomb

Another important topic of the novel is the matter of racism. The consensus in Maycomb is that blacks are the lowest of the lowest. Their experiences and existences hardly matter to the white population. It is also important to note that racism, sexism and the social structure are what makes and sustains Maycomb. These three topics intersectional combination are important to the town. Without racism whites would not be powerful, without sexism men would not be powerful, and without the hierarchy the previous two would not exist. These structures are maintained in order to create stability and order. The “Old South” advocates for this. For this section we are discussing the racism in Maycomb. Interestingly there are two types of racism; racism against blacks and the racism against the white-trash Ewell family, who are almost trashy enough to be black. To elaborate the Ewell’s are a low social standing family whose only asset in life is being white. But they ways are so disgraceful that they live close by the blacks of the town and hate them more than anyone. This is of course in order to protect their own position in Maycomb.

Racism is the cause of the biggest conflict of the novel that Tom Robinson is accused of raping Mayella Ewell. The incidence goes as follows, Mayella claims that Tom Robinson came to see her. He pushed her to the ground, beat her and raped her. Her father, Bob Ewell, claims he saw Tom Robinson on Mayella. Tom Robinson’s side of the story is different. He claims that Mayella asked him to help her inside the house. She said she wanted to kiss him and did so. She forced herself onto him and Tom tried to get away. Her father returned, saw them, and Tom Robinson ran out. A few hours later he was arrested.

It becomes clear when the conflict is introduced that the trial will not go quietly. It is a high profile case in the town and everyone is talking about it. The reason the case receives so much attention is because Tom Robinson is black and the victim is white. It is an interracial rape. Neither Atticus nor the black population believes they have a good chance of winning the trial. The black reverend says, “I ain’t ever seen any jury decide in favor of a colored man over a white man” (Lee 2010, p. 61). That is the ultimate challenge of the trial is to prove that a black man is innocent. In this case it is a black man’s word against a white woman’s word. What is interesting is that both of them are considered the lowest level of the hierarchy. Tom Robinson is considered so because he is black. Whereas Mayella is marginally better because she is white but she belongs the poorest, most disgraceful family in Maycomb. If Tom Robinson had not been black the trial might not have had the exposure it did.

The evidence of Tom’s innocence is clear. His left arm was disfigured in a childhood accident; and Mayella was beaten on the right side of her face. Tom would be unable to beat her on the right side of her face. The prosecution tries to argue that since Tom is strong enough to help Mayella move furniture he should also be strong enough to overwhelm her. Tom tries to explain that he helped because he felt sorry for Mayella. This upset the court that a black man would feel sorry for a white woman. They find it ironic because black people should not pity white people, it should be the other way around. Tom’s predicament is as such, “he would not have dared strike a white woman under any circumstances and expect to live long” (Lee 2010, p. 215). Tom is trapped by society and he knows that it is not going to end well for him. And in the end Tom is still found guilty. Though the outcome is not ideal there is a slight improvement compared to previous cases. The jury evaluated Tom’s case longer than they would normally do. Normally cases like these would be processed in minutes not several hours. Even though Atticus lost the trial the black community is still grateful. As mentioned earlier no defense lawyer in the history of Maycomb had truly done everything to defend a black person. The commitment and seriousness Atticus displayed is therefore greatly appreciated. Many members of the black community send food and other goods to the Finch home as a token of appreciation, even though food resources are scarce (Lee 2010, p. 235). The gratitude of the black community testifies to the lack of basic decency and respect from the white community. Had a different lawyer been assigned Tom Robinson’s case it would have ended quicker and with no proper cross-examination of the witnesses. Atticus defended Tom Robinson as well as he would have defended a white client. But ultimately the jury agreed that Tom Robinson was guilty. Even as Atticus presented the possibility that Bob Ewell beat his own daughter, and possibly raped her, Tom was still judged as guilty. Most adults knew that outcome of the trial was in favor of the Ewell’s. Atticus tries to explain to Tom Robinson that they can appeal the case and they stand a good chance of winning that one. But Tom Robinson knows how unfair and biased the legal system is. Even with Atticus’ reassurance he is still anxious and upset. In order to spare himself the inevitable he makes an attempt to escape prison and is shot dead. Atticus feels at a loss after Tom’s death. They would have had a good chance if they appealed the case. But he can understand that Tom did not have the same faith in the system as he does.

The legal system is rigged as such. As the reverend previously stated courts are not likely to be in a black man’s favor. There might have been a chance that Tom’s case could be won. But during the 1930s in the Deep South it seems almost impossible. The trial of Tom Robinson proves that even with reasonable doubt the court and jury would favor the white person. Lee’s argument is that if people such as Atticus, Miss Maudie, Jem, and Scout had been on the jury the outcome might have been different. The repercussion of not allowing women on the jury is also a critique of this. Instead of levelheaded people it is bigoted racist who control the outcome. Had judge Taylor not appointed Atticus the outcome of the trial would have been the same. But at least by appointing Atticus as the defense lawyer Tom Robinson was treated to a more fair trial. Judge Taylor is a progressive person in the city of Maycomb. He must have seen many cases like Tom’s and understood that the system was in dire need of reformation. Lee has chosen to have the highest-ranking person of law, also the top tier of the Maycomb hierarchy, be the one who advocates for racial equality. It is a clear message that in order to reform the system those at the top need to be part of it. It is also a strategically clever move for Taylor to employ Atticus. The southern etiquette of politeness and respect are deeply ingrained in him. Atticus treats whites and blacks equally and is one of the best lawyers of the town. Usually cases like Tom Robinson’s would go to a younger inexperienced lawyer who would need the experience. But by assigning Tom’s case to the experienced and socially aware Atticus the chances of success are higher. Judge Taylor has the same views as Atticus on the trial; Tom Robinson could not have committed the crime and that Bob Ewell is the culprit. As it is known in the town the Ewell’s are not known for their honest work and good behavior. This does not mean that the beating and rape of Mayella Ewell should be dismissed. It simply means that the Ewell’s should not be able to pin the blame on another socially exposed group. Maycomb has such a strict set of ways that it seems almost impossible to change. But there are those who will fight for the change. Judge Taylor who is using his office of power for the better, Atticus using his skills to give a fair trial, Miss Maudie who stands by Atticus, and even the children. Having the children witness the trial and the unfairness is important. Jem had been so sure they would win since they had the evidence. But the children experience the tremendous letdown of an unjust system that dismisses all of these. The children’s reactions should reflect how everyone’s reaction should be. Meaning that the children experience these injustices for the first time. The case seems to only have one conclusion but the systems deems it differently. The reader should be as outraged as the children are even if the reader is aware of the existing system.

The town still remains passive, racist and indifferent after the trial ends and Tom’s death. Even if people like Atticus, Taylor, Maudie, and the children exist there will also be those who might see the need for change but who do not interact. Atticus can do the dirty work and be the ridicule of the town. His children get harassed at school and even attacked by Bob Ewell.

“‘I mean this town. They’re perfectly willing to let him do what they’re too afraid to do themselves – it might lose ‘em a nickel. They’re perfectly willing to let him wreck his health doing what they’re afraid to do, they’re –’” (Lee 2010, p. 260)

The critique is that there are more people who see the racist, bigoted ways of Maycomb but are unwilling to do something about it. They let Atticus be the front figure of the resistance and let him be the scapegoat as well. Lee’s point is that in order to create change more people need to come together. There is strength in numbers as proven by the mob who want to lynch Tom Robinson. If the reverse were possible other mobs would not be able to continue. But as it stands Maycomb is still bound by its hierarchy and its set ways.

Hypocrisy also flourishes in Maycomb. For instance, Scout’s teacher Miss Caroline feels bad for the Jews for being persecuted by Hitler, yet is happy that the blacks are taken down a peg.

“‘Well, coming out of the court-house that night (…) she was talking with Miss Stephanie Crawford. I heard her say it’s time somebody taught ‘em a lesson, they were gettin’ way above themselves, an’ the next thing they can do is marry us. Jem, how can you hate Hitler so bad an’ then turn around and be ugly about folks right at home –?’” (Lee 2010, p. 272)

The comparison is a deliberate one from Lee. There has always been sympathy towards Jews especially during the 1930s and especially after World War II. Therefore it is ironic that the Americans fail to see this comparison when it comes to the persecution in their own country. Blacks have always been mistreated. There has been no point in time that blacks have had the upper hand or played at a level field as whites. The fact that Miss Caroline fails to recognize her own ironic statement is proof of this. She is unable to understand that blacks are the persecuted ones in America, and that white people are essentially like Hitler. This comparison would not be taken well. But the prejudice the whites have is intense and deeply ingrained.

“‘You know how they are. Easy come, easy go. Just shows you, that Robinson was legally married, they say he kept himself clean, went to church and all that, but when it comes down to the line the veneer’s mighty thin. Nigger always comes out in ‘em.’” (Lee 2010, p. 265)

This quote speaks to how natural racism is in Maycomb. No matter how kind blacks may act their true nature will come out. This rhetoric can be traced back to the days of slavery. And as we looked into earlier the idea that blacks have to be kept under heavy control is still intact. The mentality that blacks are inherently violent and dangerous is still a stereotype that exists. The fear that free black men will rape white women when given the chance is also an existing fear among whites. “Nigger always comes out in ‘em” is a powerful statement. It insinuates that blacks have some deeper instincts that the polite southern society cannot reform them from. Blacks can act proper and polite but ultimately they cannot be trusted. That is what the general consensus is in Maycomb. Atticus addresses this concern when he gives his final speech to the jury.

“‘The witnesses for the state, with the exception of the sheriff of Maycomb County, have presented themselves to you gentlemen, to this court, in the cynical confidence that their testimony would not be doubted, confident that you gentlemen would go along with them on the assumption – the evil assumption that *all* Negroes lie, that *all* Negroes are basically immoral beings, that *all* Negro men are not to be trusted around our women, an assumption one associates with minds of their caliber.’” (Lee 2010, p. 225)

Atticus is correct when he says it is an “evil assumption” to believe that all blacks are inherently deceptive and destructive. The racism that is the basis of this assumption is that no matter what a black person does they will be inherently bad and have to be detained. A case like Tom’s fuels the fear white people have and it enforces segregation. If segregation were outlawed would more people like Tom Robinson commit crime? Since no black person can truly be trusted segregation seems vital in order to protect the white population. The racism is so inherent in Maycomb and this mentality is not questioned at all. The fear that whites have of black people is similar to the fear blacks have of white people. Because as Tom Robinson exemplifies no matter how good a black person is, if a white person contradicts or says otherwise their life is over. Tom Robinson knew he stood no chance of winning the trial because the victim was white. The law of Maycomb has no exceptions; black people will always be bad person underneath. The fact that a teacher said the first quotation is also extremely unnerving. This shows that children are not only taught this mentality at home but also in school. Miss Caroline herself in unaware of her prejudice but they come out perfectly clear to the children. There is no critical learning in school and the children will simply copy what their teachers and parents say. With no one to challenge their thinking there is no progress and no change happens.

The lack of understanding and ability to understand how wrong the system is creates a lack of sympathy for blacks. During the party Aunt Alexandra hosts some of the finer ladies complains that their black staff members are upset about Tom Robinson’s verdict. It had a big impact on Tom Robinson’s and his family’s life but it was also significant for the black community. They had high hopes that perhaps this case could turn things around. But the reality is that it might not be the case. Some of the Christian women hold the belief that it is not necessary to stir up trouble.

“‘(…) but some of’ em in this town thought they were doing the right thing a while back, but all they did was stir ‘em up. That’s all they did. Might’ve looked like the right thing to do at the time, I’m sure I don’t know, I’m not read in that field, but sulky… dissatisfied… I tell you if my Sophy’d kept it up another day I’d have let her go. It’s never entered that wool of hers that the only reason I keep her is because this depression’s on and she needs her dollar and a quarter every week she can get it.’” (Lee 2010, p. 257)

This is what one could expect to hear from the residents in Maycomb. The general idea of keeping the status quo and not disrupting the system that is already in place. Mrs. Merriweather, who said the quote above, cannot empathize with the black people and understand why this trial was important. It seems that as long as the system benefits the whites they are content with it. As Mrs. Merriweather says she keeps Sophy for her benefit not because she herself needs a housekeeper. It is an entitled and arrogant attitude. But it is a common to hold such beliefs that whites are above blacks and the system that exists is beneficial to both parties, when in fact the system only benefits the whites. The whites feel unsettled by the change the trial brought about the town. If the trial had gone differently the conditions for the blacks would improve and they would not be content to live with the same conditions as before. This change would upset the natural order of Maycomb and that is the last thing the whites want. But even though women such as Mrs. Merriweather are unable and unwilling to understand the blacks there are some who do. Such as Mr. Link one of the white men in town. Since no white person in town is willing to hire Helen Robinson after her husband’s trial she has no means of earning money. Mr. Link however does not adhere to this. He has known Tom since he was a child and therefore he creates a job for her in order to help Helen and the children. He even goes as far as to protect her when Bob Ewell taunts her, stalks and harasses her. It proves that while Maycomb have unsympathetic people who do not care about anyone else, there are still those who do care.

All in all the trial of Tom Robinson is similar to the ones Harper Lee encountered as a child. The character of Atticus can be seen as Lee’s portrayal of her own father A.C. Lee. But where her father was inexperienced and lost his case, and his clients lost their lives, Atticus is experienced. He has the ability to win the case and safe Tom’s life. In a sense this can be seen as Lee trying to redeem her father’s previous failure. She tries to prove that if her father had had more experience, and had fought on instead of quitting, he might have been like Atticus. Tom Robinson choosing suicide by escaping proves that the thought of winning in any appeal case seems impossible. The same thing that happened in A.C. Lee’s case would likely happen to Tom. He would be made into an example by being hanged. By choosing to die by suicide he avoids this ending. Even if Atticus thought the appeal case could be won there is also the possibility that they would lose that as well. It might be years before Tom would be a free man if ever. Tom seemed to have less faith in the system than Atticus. The possibility that he would be able to be free is one thing but the stigmatization of the town is another. Even if Tom were acquitted would the town forget the charges? They remember that Tom beat a white man who tried to stab him which “proves” he has a history of violence. The town would not likely forget the accusations of rape even if they could be proven wrong. There would always be the shadow of a doubt that he might have done it. Lee took the cases she experienced as a child to heart and wrote her novel with the premise that it would be a town similar to her own. It would have the same type of structure and yet there would be those who fought wholeheartedly for change. Scout can be seen as Lee herself experiencing her own childhood. The trial impacts Scout, Jem and Dill immensely and while others may forget the trial they do not.

The message Lee has is to fight actively against injustice. Taking an active stance for what one believes is right can do this. Scout has been taught to treat everyone equally. This lesson is crucial for the novel because it is because of her that Tom Robinson is saved from lynching. She addresses Mr. Cunningham directly and reminds him that they are all people not just white versus black, innocent versus guilty. Mr. Cunningham is also the reason why the jury deliberates for as long as it does. He is the one who stands in defense of Tom Robinson. Scout has made him realize that everyone deserves a chance and that includes Tom Robinson. He listens actively to what Atticus says during the cross-examinations and evaluates it. But in the end he agrees with the others that Tom Robinson is guilty. However, it is significant that he was able to keep his stance for such a long time without changing it. Despite how adamant he was about Tom Robinson’s guilty beforehand, enough to kill him.

Lee’s point is that everyone deserves to be treated equally. Had Tom Robinson not been black and the victim white the trial would not have been as exposed as is was. The evidence of his innocence would have been enough to acquit him if he were white. But because of his race he was harshly punished. Had judge Taylor not appointed Atticus as his defense lawyer he would never have stood a chance. Tom Robinson chose to end his own life in an attempt to have control over it. He knew that he would likely die either way and chose to end it himself. The vision of a better and equal future is something many of the characters share. And while progress has been made there are still biased, racist individuals in law enforcement. This means that the system is as corrupt as it was during the 1930s. The need to protect Mayella Ewell’s purity from her alleged attacker is so strong for the white men. They want to charge Tom Robinson for her injuries so much that they have tunnel vision. They neglect to look at Bob Ewell who is the culprit and do not grasp that Mayella still has to live with him. She is still in danger with her father even if Tom Robinson is in jail. Her purity is not protected because her father has already ruined it. The court, jury, and community also forget that Tom has a family and the white community is alienating them. There are no winners in this situation other than Bob Ewell. He has successfully framed an innocent black man for being kissed by his daughter. But he feels that justice has to be served. Had Bob Ewell not reported the assault no one would have noticed. Mayella would likely have stayed inside until the bruising disappeared and never talked to Tom Robinson again. But Bob Ewell wanted to save her honor and the only way to do so was to frame Tom Robinson for assault and rape. Ewell likely did not see any faults on his own part. He beat his daughter for kissing a black man, put her in her place, and made sure it would never happen again. He removed the temptation.

Lee is showing the cruel reality. She could have let Tom Robinson be found not guilty and it would have been a success and triumph for the black community. But instead she shows the most realistic possibility that he would be found guilty. All because the jury is white, racist, and biased and the system is flawed. Her argument is that if reasonable, unbiased individuals and women, blacks and other races could jury the outcome would be different. Now, in 2016, we have juries with every demographic, but a system that is still racist. Much has been done but even more needs to change before the system is completely fair and equal. Lee’s ideal of having a system of fairness where the officers of law are unbiased and work with no cynicism is still an ideal today. As previously said in the theory section the director of the F.B.I. James B. Comey addressed the bias, racial prejudice, and cynicism many police officers have. The investigation of the Ferguson’s police department shows racism at every level of law. Lee’s hope or ideal for the future has still not been realized. There is however more focus on corruption and bias than ever before. Blacks and allies are not content to have a system that dismisses them and views them as less than whites. Lee’s criticism of the racism in Maycomb can still be applied to many other areas in America even today. Though racism is illegal it still exists because the mentality of racism is not easily discarded.

## Maycomb’s hierarchy

The hierarchical structure of Maycomb plays a central role in the novel. As established earlier the town relies heavily on the status quo. Change in the established system is not welcomed. The clear divide between social groups creates the structure that exists and also some of the tension of the novel. It is as Jem Finch describes it:

“‘The thing about it is, our kind of folks don’t like the Cunninghams, the Cunninghams don’t like the Ewells and the Ewells hate and despise the coloured folks.’” (Lee 2010, p. 249)

Harper Lee advocates that this attitude is dangerous. As it was previously mentioned Scout demonstrates that only by accepting and understanding others can this hierarchy be broken. Scout’s willingness to accept Walter Cunningham saved Tom Robinson from being lynched. Mr. Cunningham felt so moved by Scout’s acceptance that he changed his mind about Tom Robinson’s guilt and made a small impact on the case. But even though these are good examples of understanding and acceptance there are still those who argue against it. Aunt Alexandra believes strongly in social orders and advocates for socializing within these social groups.

“‘But I want to play with Walter, Aunty, why can’t I?’

(…) ‘I’ll tell you why,’ she said. ‘Because – he – is – trash, that’s why you can’t play with him. I’ll not have you around him, picking up his habits and learning Lord-knows-what. You’re enough of a problem to your father as it is.’” (Lee 2010, p. 248)

Aunt Alexandra clearly views the Cunningham’s as less than the Finch Family. Her argument is that no matter how nice Walter may be he is still a Cunningham, and they are trash and worth less as people. This goes entirely against Scout’s education where kindness, respect and understanding are the cornerstones. Alexandra refuses to acknowledge anyone who is beneath her. Scout might behave like Walter after associating with him and that is Alexandra’s worst fear. She does not want their pedigree family to become mixed with other families of lower caliber. The purity of classes is what led to segregation. Lee’s argument is that if one cannot respect others there will never be any progress. The message of the novel is to demolish hierarchical structures because all people should be equal.

However, there is a long to way to go before the system can be dismantled. Therefore the importance of family and its significance are still in order. Maycomb does have different categories of families, the old families like the Finches, then the Cunningham’s and finally the Ewell family. These all have different interactions with each other as the quote with Jem states. There are some internal feuds and hardly anything is done to create better bonds. The Ewell family is on one of the lowest tiers, or arguably on the lowest. They have been the disgrace of Maycomb for generations and no one can change their ways. They contribute little to the community and have their own ways of living. The children attend the first day of school and then never show up again (Lee 2010, p. 28). There is no need for all of the children to attend school when two people in the household can read. Instead of going to school the children are put to work. Scout describes the family as such:

“Every town the size of Maycomb had families like the Ewells. No economic fluctuations changed their status – people like the Ewells lived as guests of the country in prosperity as well as in the depths of a depression. No truant officers could keep their numerous offspring in school; no public health officer could free them from the congenital defects, various worms, and the diseases indigenous to filthy surroundings.” (Lee 2010, p. 187)

Everyone agrees that the Ewell’s are the disgrace of Maycomb. They do not contribute to the society they are the “white-trash” of Maycomb. Bob Ewell also has special privileges. He is the only person in Maycomb who is allowed to hunt outside of the reason. This is because he uses his welfare cheque on alcohol and without the hunting outside of the season the children would have no food (Lee 2010, p. 34). Therefore Maycomb made an exception to the rule in order to help the children, as Bob Ewell is unwilling to change his ways. The Ewell’s live in a “negro home” behind the garbage dumps on the outskirt of town, next to the blacks. The location of their home testifies to their social status. They are the outcasts of society. They live next to the blacks who are also considered the lowest of society. But the difference between the two groups is the willingness to change and work. The blacks often have respectable jobs, as respectable as it can be for a black person during 1933-35. They provide for their families and educate themselves. The Ewell’s do none of that. Bob Ewell refuses to use modern agricultural devices in order to modernize and upgrade his farm. Instead he clings to the traditions he was taught and never moves forward and with the times. He blames his failures of the blacks, claiming that they are stealing his work. The reality is that he is simply behind on technology and uses the black community as a scapegoat. In order to make himself and his family superior he hates the blacks more than anyone. This is because while the Ewell family is a low status family, the blacks are even lower than them. The Ewell’s white trash ways are not admired in Maycomb but they are white. Their race makes them superior to one social group. The Ewell’s will never have true power in Maycomb, or respect for that matter, but they can assert their power over one group. This is also what prompts Bob Ewell to press charges against Tom Robinson. He lost control the moment Mayella kissed Tom Robinson, but he was able to regain that control by giving an inevitable death sentence to Tom Robinson. Bob Ewell is the disgrace of Maycomb and only by proving that he brought his family justice is he worth something. After the trial Bob Ewell does get his recognition by the town. He is able to get a job but is soon fired from it. As time passes so does his fame.

“I suppose his brief burst of fame brought on a briefer burst of industry, but his job lasted only as long as his notoriety: Mr Ewell found himself as forgotten as Tom Robinson.” (Lee 2010, p. 237)

The end result that Bob Ewell is once again a nobody and the town’s disgrace. He was able to gain some praise by trying to get justice for Mayella, even though he caused it. But ultimately his lacking work ethic gets in the way and he goes back to his old ways. In order to feel in control Bob Ewell begins to harass those he felt ridiculed him during the trial. He stalks and harasses Helen Robinson in show the power he has over her. This is put to an end when Mr. Link threatens him. Next he stalks judge Taylor, cuts his sliding door with a knife as a warning of what’s to come. He spits in Atticus’ face in the town square (Lee 2010, p. 239). The worst crime he commits is when he attacks Jem and Scout with the intent to kill. Ewell had sworn revenge and the Finch children had been afraid of what he might do. But Atticus did not think that Ewell would really do anything. The children believe that Ewell is serious and are afraid and are ultimately proven right. Boo Radley interferes and kills Ewell before he kills the children. If Scout had not worn her pageant ham outfit she would have been crushed to death. Ewell broke Jem’s arm by the elbow leaving it slightly deformed and shorter than his other arm. The sheriff understands this kind of violence Ewell attempted. It is similar to lynching in that it strikes at a minority that cannot strike back. It also creates terror in law-abiding citizens that is more potent than courtroom justice. It shows that southern honor has been consistently dealt with outside the courtroom (May 1993, p. 63). Had Ewell been successful it would have sent a powerful message. It would have shown that he did everything he could to get “justice”. Instead of going after Atticus Ewell attacked two defenseless and innocent children. It would serve as a reminder for Atticus that he should not underestimate him. Ewell would have asserted himself as the most powerful one. But his plan failed. Sheriff Heck Tate rules that Ewell’s death is a suicide. Even his death is completely dismissed by the community. He states that if the town knew what really happened the perpetrator would be celebrated for getting rid of a nuisance of the community. That Ewell tried to kill two children is an extreme low. It is one thing to harass Atticus because he is an adult and was his adversary in court. Though matters should have ended in the courtroom that is not case. Ewell felt that his social position was pushed down even further. He was made a fool of and felt that the only way to set the score was to take something from Atticus. The logic of the act is not entirely sound and thought through. What would have happened if Ewell had succeeded would he not be found as the perpetrator? He had made public threats against Atticus so he would be the likely suspect. But for Ewell it was not much of an elaborate plan but instead a crime of anger and retribution. Another thing that is important to consider is that Maycomb will be happy to lose such a disgrace and nuisance, but what about the Ewell children? After Ewell’s death the children are not discussed and no one seems to mind them. The likely reality is that the cycle will continue. Since the majority of the children have no education they will likely never advance in society. There is a possibility that one of the boys will take Bob Ewell’s place and become the new head of the family. The only Ewell who seems to want to change is Mayella. The Ewell’s live by the dump but there are “six chipped-enamel slop jars holding brilliant red geraniums, cared for as tenderly as if they belonged to Miss Maudie Atkinson” belonging to Mayella Ewell (Lee 2010, p. 188). She lives a completely isolated life where she only has her family. She can read but does not have an education she was most likely pulled out of school to help her father. She has to take care of her seven siblings by herself. She has nowhere to go. What is important about Mayella’s character is that she is also a victim. It is said that her father sexually abuses her, kisses her (Lee 2010, p. 214). She has become a substitute for her own deceased mother. It is a tremendous task for a nineteen year old to take care of her siblings by herself, and furthermore be molested by ones father. It is only natural that she would want some company. She is isolated on her family’s property and the only person she has contact with is Tom Robinson. Mayella does find him attractive and he pays attention to her. She keeps finding tasks for him and because Tom pities her he helps her. Though Mayella is a victim of the circumstances but she also doomed Tom Robinson and refuses to accept the responsibility. What is problematic about the case is that Mayella could have told the truth from the beginning. She could have stated that she initiated the kiss; her father beat her, and possibly raped her. Even during the trial when Atticus pushes her with his questioning she could have caved in and told the truth. But Mayella is deeply ashamed that she kissed Tom Robinson. It almost seems like she does not care about the repercussions of what happens to Tom Robinson but is more concerned with her own safety. Her own father, who beat her for kissing a black man, threatens her safety. As discussed earlier Bob Ewell beat her and pressed charges against Tom Robinson in a strange way of protecting Mayella’s purity. Mayella’s desires are extremely taboo in the Deep South. The Southern Belle trope still has its roots in Maycomb and the principles of purity and repressed sexual desires are key elements. Bob Ewell fails to recognize that his own transgressions against his daughter ruin her sacred purity. Instead he views her natural desires as the ultimate danger. Mayella is attracted to a young black man and that she acts on her own desire is also extremely out of line.

After her father’s death Mayella is completely on her own. The responsibility of taking care of the children will rely solely on her. As mentioned one of the brothers might take their fathers position, and likely become a copy of him. Mayella is still trapped in the same cycle. The fact that the novel does not focus on the Ewell’s after Bob’s death is a reminder that society will also forget about them. Life will continue in the same rut and Mayella will never be able to leave it.

Another important character that exists in Maycomb is Arthur “Boo” Radley. His existence is somewhat separate to the hierarchy of Maycomb. His family is somewhere in the middle but he himself is an oddity that does not really fit anywhere. His story is infamous and he is the boogey man of the neighborhood. The adults know that story of why he never leaves his house, but the children do not understand entirely and make up stories about him. The mystery that surrounds Boo, the rumors that he drinks the blood of squirrels and cats are fascinating to the children. But the truth is that Boo is a normal man who chooses to be a recluse and stay inside his house. There is something interesting about Boo because he does not fit into the structure of Maycomb. As previously discussed in relation to Scout, Boo Radley is interested in the children. This might have to do with the proximity of their homes, they can see each other’s houses, and the children walk past the Radley residence on their way to school. Boo can therefore observe as the children play outside during the summer, can laughs when Scout goes into his front yard in a tire (Lee 2010, p. 45). He tries to reach out to them as well non-verbally by leaving presents in the knot-hole in the tree outside his house. The children also enjoy these small gifts yet they are a bit scared because they know that Boo leaves the gifts for them. However, the gifts end when Nathan Radley cements it shut, explaining to the children that the tree is sick. Afterwards Atticus says that the tree is still healthy. This is all because Nathan Radley finds Boo’s interest in the children unsettling and disturbing. The Radley family is not discussed much in the novel. It is explained though that Boo was in a gang as a teenager, and arrested for indecent behavior. Later on Boo allegedly stabbed his father in the leg, what prompted him could be the isolation he experienced in the home. Instead of going to prison Mr. Radley made a deal with the sheriff and Boo was allowed to stay at home, never to resurface again. The Radley’s also adhere to the social structure of Maycomb. Mr. Radley used his privilege and influence to prevent Boo to go to an asylum. The Sheriff “hadn’t the heart to put him in jail alongside Negroes, so Boo was locked in the court-house basement” (Lee 2010, p. 12). Once again white privilege is in play and Boo was later returned home. Though the deal of keeping Boo inside at all times does not really benefit Boo in the beginning. It seems that the attack on the father might have to do with being kept inside and isolated for too long. The Radley household could have been an abusive one and Boo used a drastic measure in a desperate situation. Perhaps Boo protected his mother from his father, the same way he protected Scout. Boo remains a mystery because there is little legitimate information about him; most “facts” are rumors and stories told by children, blacks and gossipy white women. What is interesting about Boo’s story is that he completely isolates himself from the outside world. The children speculate why he stays inside and as they grow older they understand he does not want to leave. It seems that Boo is also one of the characters who understands how terrible the world is and refuses to reenter society. It might be that Boo feels that the system has let him down. It seems that no one visits him or that the authorities care much about him. Atticus states that he knows Boo and has seen him, but hardly makes an attempt to explain Boo’s situation to the children. Boo lives with his parents and brother, the mother passes away and so does the father. It is now the two brothers living alone in the house. It seems likely that Nathan Radley has been taught to keep Boo isolated; otherwise he would not care about the knot-hole and the presents. By closing the knot-hole Nathan eliminates the only outside communication that Boo has.

It becomes clearer through the novel that Boo does not want to reenter society. He has been inside since he was a teenager and has likely lost desire to go back outside and interact. But Boo does go outside at night, according to the rumors he eats animals but in reality he is likely just enjoying the fresh air. During the fire at Miss Maudie’s house Boo came outside to wrap a blanket over Scout. He probably watched the fire from his house and noticed that Scout and Jem had moved close to his house. In order to protect Scout he put the blanket over her to keep her warm. He is shy because he did not introduce himself, even though he had attempted to make contact with his gifts. It seems that he expects his relationships to be one-sided. As discussed earlier he cares for Scout, he only wraps a blanket over Scout not Jem. Maybe it is because he understands that Jem is the one who comes up with the plans to antagonize him, and Scout goes along even though she is not always sure about it. But the children’s innocence, especially Scout’s, is something Boo tries to protect.

Boo even kills Bob Ewell in order to protect the children. Boo is able to save Scout and Jem, though Jem is injured before Boo can get to them. He carries Jem back to the house and stays with them because he understands that the sheriff will have questions. The act of saving the children is in a sense an act to save their innocence. Though the childish and naïve innocence will be gone after the attack, Boo saved their lives and protected the innocent victims. Bob Ewell was looking for revenge and chose to attack with the intent to kill two children. Had Boo not been there Scout and Jem would have died. When sheriff Heck Tate comes to the Finch house they discuss how to proceed. The sheriff wants to rule Ewell’s death as a suicide; he slipped on his own knife. They both know that Boo would not be shamed for killing Ewell, instead Maycomb would be happy. The metaphor of the sin of killing a mockingbird is used to describe Boo, “‘Well, it’d be sort of like shootin’ a mockingbird, wouldn’t it?’” (Lee 2010, p. 304). Boo would not want this kind of attention even if it were positive. It would go against his reclusive nature and would destroy the peace he had built for himself. Therefore the sheriff and Atticus agree to bend Atticus’ principles this once, and let Boo Radley go free. This is way Atticus chooses to repay Boo for saving his children.

Why is Boo Radley such an important character in *To Kill a Mockingbird?* Boo is the symbolism for the perceived danger of Maycomb. At the beginning Boo Radley seems to be the antagonist of the story; he is a dangerous person who lives in the friendly town. Yet at the same time the children cannot help but be intrigued by him. To the children he is the biggest threat in the town; the school children do not dare to eat any nuts or berries that fall from the tree on the Radley property into the schoolyard. It is not until the Tom Robinson trial that the children discover that the real dangers are racism and ignorance. It would be easier if this were like a fairytale and Boo were the true monster that had to be slain in order to achieve peace. But the reality is that Boo is nothing more than the personification of what the children think evil is. As they grow older the Finch children learn that Boo does not eat animals, his trees and fruit are not poisoned and most of all that Boo is human. He is a human who choses to isolate himself because the world is cruel. He laughs at the children’s antics, gives them gifts in order to show that he is not a monster, he fixes Jem’s pants because he will need them, and he saves Jem and Scout. This is all because he cares, but from a distance. Therefore to compare Boo to a white knight and Bob Ewell to the monster is not too far off. Ewell symbolizes racism and prejudice, and he tries to kill innocent children for his own revenge. Boo on the other hand only wants to protect the children, and by doing so defeats the monster. This is of course a very black and white comparison but Boo does represent something pure. He is childlike in his approach to the Finch children leaving candy, coins and soap carvings for them. Almost the same way any other child would interact with them. He is also shy, and Scout has to take him home, because he might be afraid of the dark. The fact that he only appeared in plain sight to Scout in order to save her shows that he gave up his principle of keeping to himself. Atticus might protect her during the day, but at night Boo protects her. Boo is fascinating to the children because there is so much mystery surrounding his character. Much of their “information” is rumors and tale told by other children. Boo has become an infamous legend to the children of Maycomb. It is easier for the children to believe that Boo is crazy than the reality that he simply does not want to interact with society. The children’s understanding of Boo is also significant. At the beginning of the novel the children believe that Boo is a monster. As the summer progresses they learn that their perception of him might be off, as he leaves gifts for them. They begin to understand that Boo stays inside because he might not have anywhere to go and chooses to stay inside on his own volition. Finally, at the end Scout is able to walk in Boo’s shoes and see things from his perspective.

## How does this all tie-in together?

During the analysis we dealt with the three main topics of sexism, racism, and classism. It is now important to ask how these three topics tie-in together. *To Kill a Mockingbird* creates a complex view of one small town in the Deep South. The three main topics are interlinked with each other because they all make up what Maycomb is. Women have to behave with rigid conduct in order to be considered proper and decent women. Their femininity is the most important part of their lives. They are considered the guardians of the household, as discussed in relation to the southern belle. Their jobs are to make sure the family is safe, homely and wholesome. Women are limited in terms of work and are not allowed to serve on juries, which have societal impact. The roles of women are limited to the home. The patriarchy creates a pretense of protecting women when in reality it patronizes and holds women back. Women are portrayed as weak and unable to handle to world in order for men to justify their policing of their agency. The patriarchy also has a rigid stance on women’s sexuality and their expression of such. Mayella Ewell did the unspeakable when she kissed a black man. Her father punishes her for this and then blames Tom Robinson for his daughter’s desires. Mayella’s testimony is motivated less by shame than by fear not of Robinson but of her father. Atticus calls her a victim of “cruel poverty and ignorance,” but what she is most clearly a victim of is incest and physical abuse. What motivates her scheme is the desire to be touched with love rather than violence (Baecker 1988, p. 109). Her situation is then contrasted to Dolphus, the town “drunk” who lives with a black woman and has mixed children. He is portrayed as far more sympathetic. He pretends to be drunk in order to give the townspeople a reason for his behavior. The town accepts is as “just his way” and lets him be. Clearly it is more scandalous for a white woman to kiss a black man, than for a white man to openly live with a black woman. Patriarchy in the south is more interested in protecting white women. White southern fears of black sexuality, especially black men, drove the south to super-impose the semiotics of Jim Crow upon the white female body. As Lillian Smith, an antiracist Southern writer born in 1897, said:

“Now, parts of your body are segregated areas (that) you must stay away from and keep others away from. These areas you touch only when necessary. In other words, you cannot associate freely with them any more than you can associate freely with colored children.” (Sundquist 1995, p. 124)

The Patriarchy clouds the men of Maycomb’s minds. They want to lynch an innocent black man and rationalize this as the defense of Southern White Womanhood. Tom Robinson and Boo Radley are locked away in order to protect women. Boo Radley is suspected of aberrant sexual behavior, as a juvenile he was accused of “using abusive and profane language in the presence and hearing of a female” (Abernathy 2003, p. 97). The patriarchy reinforces the pressure of femininity onto women. Therefore Maycomb has such a rigid understand of what femininity is and there is no room to be different. Even Scout who is stubborn about her own gender presentation has to give into societal expectations. Such as wear a dress when attending church or when there is company. It is significant as well as symbolic. Throughout the story Atticus and Calpurnia fail to put Scout in dresses and it is evidence of their failure to train her to be a lady (Shaffer 1994, p. 138). Aunt Alexandra has to temporarily move in to help train Scout. It is considered of most importance that Scout is raised correctly in order to a lady. By not conforming to the system in Maycomb Scout threatens the system. Even when asked to wear a dress, Scout still wears her overalls underneath. Her constant defiance against the social norms is a contrast to her aunt, who wants nothing more than to conform and abide by the norms and unspoken rules. Scout threatens the system because she does not give in to the pressure and only acts “like a lady” when there is a desperate need for it. Most importantly Scout’s closets friends and family support her decision. Without them she would likely have to give into the gender expectations and live a life she did not want to live. Scout is also greatly contrasted in terms of Mayella Ewell. Mayella’s world is circumscribed and terrifying which is contrasting to Scout’s pre-adolescent freedom and wonder. Scout has the potential to do whatever she wants. There are naturally the restrictions of her gender, but overall Scout is able to live a life that she chooses to live. Mayella on the other hand has server limitations both due to her gender but also due to her socioeconomic position. Mayella has been forced to be an adult early on in her life, she has to work hard and take care of her siblings. She is a pseudo wife to her father and pseudo mother to her siblings. After her father’s death there will be an even greater pressure on her to help her family. She is forever a Ewell and will likely never advance in society. Scout is already at the top of the hierarchy and will be able to utilize this later on in her life. She is respected and well liked because she is a sweet child and because of whom her father is. Mayella will never excel because of her father. She has to work harder to shake off the reputation that Ewell’s have. Mayella also does not have the same support system as Scout. Throughout the novel Scout has learned that allies are important to have. Scout is fortunate and understands that not everyone has the same opportunities in life (Shaffer 1994, p. 146). Scout can empathize with Mayella and understand that she is incredible lonely, because of her status in Maycomb and her family. Scout at least has the opportunity to create her own person, whereas Mayella is forced to be a Ewell. Scout becomes a symbol of this new sense of freedom where anything is possible. The novel ends with Scout having acquired a new knowledge of justice and inequality. Scout will likely continue to fight against oppressing and likely become a lawyer, much like father and as Harper Lee originally set out to do.

Some things are hard to change in Maycomb, such as the racism that has existed for years. When the verdict for Tom’s trial comes Scout, Jem and Dill see the white southern world for what it is: a world of hypocrisy, a world burdened with old racist attitudes which have nothing to do with humanity (Baecker 1988, p. 59). The children’s reactions are crucial to the novel. They had had a naïve and hopeful understanding of the world, where evil was stopped and good triumphed. But they now learn that when it comes to racism this is not the case. Another issue is that racism is never explicitly called racism but instead referred to as “something” or “it”. Atticus explains to Jem that the jury “saw something come between them and reason… There’s something in our world that makes men lose their heads – they couldn’t be fair if they tried” (Hovet & Hovet 2001, p. 119). This inability to name what is going on is also a problem. By refusing to accept what is happening there can be no advancement or solutions to the problem. Similarly is the issue of Atticus’ involvement in the case. He has been hailed as progressive individual but Atticus did not choose to defend Tom Robinson. It was judge Taylor who appointed him. Atticus did not volunteer for the job, but he accepted it despite hoping he could avoid such a case. Similarly judge Taylor could have overruled the jury’s decision. But such an act would not go well in Maycomb, at least not at the time of the novel. Segregation is also never addressed but it helps maintain the structure and creates “Maycomb’s usual disease” (Lee 2010, p. 98). Blacks and whites live “separate but equal” lives in Maycomb. This is no true because the blacks are severely repressed by the white population. They live on the outskirts of town, they have no means of education, and they are considered to be lowly individuals. No matter what they do, they will always be on the bottom of the society. It is believed in the current social order that segregation is natural and creates harmony between races. It is not a point even worth discussing the blacks and whites are different. The inability to voice racism and to view it as something destructive for a social group is dangerous. Racism is so natural for Maycomb that most inhabitants do not realize that is it wrong. Those who are against it have a hard time fighting it, because there is so much resistance. In order to create real change it is necessary for more white people to stand up against the system.

But this change is hard to achieve when the old structure is rigid. The Southern Romance advocates for “Old South” with an outdated sociological structure involving a caste system, class divisions, and sexual taboos. Harper Lee instead promotes a “New South” where these are removed (Erisman 1973, p. 36). Her argument is that change is inevitable but in order to create change everyone in the community has to participate. The burden of change cannot rest on the shoulders of one person, and then that person has to take the fall. It has to be a collaboration with every demographic to create true equality. In order achieve this “New South” Atticus is presented as someone who is at the top of society, yet not some archetypal southerner like his sister. He agrees that everyone should be treated equally and does his best to defend Tom Robinson. Atticus inspires those around him, because he is well respected both as a person and in his profession. He inspires Scout to be respectful to everyone. Therefore she goes to the mob to address Mr. Cunningham directly to talk about Walter Cunningham. By addressing Mr. Cunningham she reminds him that they are all humans, and that this rationalized protection of Southern White Womanhood is a bit overboard. Her approach also helped persuade Mr. Cunningham that Tom Robinson might not be guilty. He is member of the jury who takes the longest time to decide on his vote, but ultimately gives in. Scout and Atticus have been able to spark a change in the community, but it does not last long. After Tom Robinson’s death the whites quickly forget the trial. Similarly it seems that the progress the characters have made regresses. This is the case with Jem, who enters the adult world at the end of the novel. Scout points out the contradiction of her teacher pitying the Jews but failing to see the comparison to the blacks. Instead of supporting her viewpoint Jem silences her, “‘I never wanta hear about that courthouse again!’” (Lee 2010, p. 272). Scout observes that Jem had acquired an alien set of values and was trying to impose them on her (Hovet and Hovet 2001, p. 122). The moment is significant because it signifies that Jem, who now identifies as an adult, has adopted Maycomb’s way of thinking. The conclusion is that Maycomb is returning to the racist, sexist and classist norms that existed before the trial. It is also significant because Jem had been more invested in the trial than any of the children. He was so sure Atticus would win, and the loss was devastating for him. Perhaps the scene can also be read as Jem rejecting the painful moment and hopefully keeping his previous passion for equality. What is significant is that Scout is aware of the change in Jem. But unlike Jem she does not lose her way and still does not cower because of the trial. Instead she is more aware of the injustices, now that she has learned they exist, and is willing to point these out. Her activism is just starting, and that proves Lee’s point of the “New South” where people like Scout need to exist.

Together these three elements create Maycomb an “old South” society where everyone has a place in a rigid hierarchy. Women and men have to behave according to rules and norms, in order to fit in and keep their place in the hierarchy. Sexism keeps women in their place and leaves the men to be powerful. Racism helps maintain the system as well, when living as slaves blacks would benefit the southern economy greatly. As freed individuals they are now the lowest in the hierarchy because whites have been taught for many years that they are above them. Even the Ewell family who is almost on par with blacks is still above them, and that is the only source of power they have. By maintaining the systematic sexism, racism and classism Maycomb is able to function. Everything is clearly divided into neat boxes and no one is allowed to break the boxes. However, characters like Scout and Boo threaten the system because they do not fit in. They almost exist outside of the spectrum and this upsets the carefully maintained system of oppression. This also why the trial of Tom Robinson caused such uproar. Atticus intended to defend Robinson to the best of his ability and with his skillset; he might have been able to win. Maycomb is upset that Atticus “defends niggers” seriously, because it means they are treated on the same level as whites. Had Tom Robinson won it would have been revolutionary for Maycomb. Real equal rights might happen in the town and blacks would be treated to fair trials. The fact that the established order could have been changed is what the inhabitants of Maycomb are upset by. What if blacks did not accept their second citizen status any longer and rebelled, what would happen to Maycomb? The white inhabitants work hard to maintain the order and status they have, as well as their racial superiority. It would be unacceptable for blacks to try to create change.

It seems that Harper Lee is more of an advocate for the changes for gender and race. Her point seems to be that in order for equality these things must change, but is seems that classism is not something she truly believes can be changed. It might have to do with the women’s rights and the civil rights movement that make it seem as though there is a possibility to change those. Whereas classism had not had much done to actively change it. But Harper Lee has focus on the importance of politeness. It works as a social lubricant that keeps the gears in the town operating smoothly. Aunt Alexandra explains, “‘I didn’t say not to be nice to him. You should be friendly and polite to him, you should be gracious to everybody, dear. But you don’t have to invite him home.’” (Lee 2010, p. 247). This is the very basis of manners in Maycomb, to be polite to everyone but keep the hierarchy in mind. Whites can be polite to the blacks, but it will not improve the conditions of the blacks. The intention is to keep them in their place and to avoid riots. But interestingly Scout learned her manners from her black housekeeper Calpurnia. Thereby Scout has never had a truly divided upbringing, much of what she knows was taught by a black woman. Her good manners are not taught by her white father, but instead of the lowest of Maycomb. Scout defies the expectations of Maycomb and will likely do so in the future as well.

Previously we asked why *To Kill a Mockingbird* continues to be a classic that withstands the test of time. The answer is mixtures of different elements first of which is the textual part of the novel. The novel itself is easy to read without losing its content. The fact that the novel has the two voices of Scout also impacts it. It means that while the young Scout experiences things for the first time the older Scout is able to contextualize, elaborate and add hindsight to the experience. Such as when Atticus talks about the trial and how difficult it will be and young Scout overhears it. The older Scout is able to understand that Atticus had wanted her to hear everything he said, because he knew it would impact her. The fact that the novel is easy to read makes it easy to teach to students in junior high and high school. This also leads us to the second element, which is the accessibility of the novel. Many schools have *To Kill a Mockingbird* on their curriculum and this way many young people are exposed to the novel. As discussed earlier the message of the novel is easy to understand and the characters are easy to empathize and sympathize with, this makes it easy to be involved in the story and plot. As the reader follows Scout’s experiences the reader should also be outraged by the limitations of women, the racism and the systems of Maycomb. The reader should be able to empathize and understand the struggles that take place. The final element is the timing of the publication. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was written and published amidst the most significant and conflict-ridden social change in the south since the Civil War. The conflicts were pushed by an aggressive civil rights campaign led by the NAACP and the changing socioeconomic and political conditions (Hovet and Hovet 2001, p. 113). The demand for a novel that spoke about civil rights issues was high. Harper Lee published during one of the most important moments, which is also the reason for its success. The very next year the movie adaptation was published, a testament to how popular the novel was. Soon after sporadic lawsuits arose, often times it was by conservatives who disliked the portrayal of whites (May 1993, p. 56). The censor’s reactions to the novel were reactions to issues of race and justice. Their moves to ban the novel came from their own perspectives of the novel’s theme. Their “reader’s response” criticism, usually based on one type of reading of the novel, was personal and political. They needed to ban the novel because it told them something about American society that they did not want to hear (May 1993, p. 65). This is important because *To Kill a Mockingbird* is brutally honest in it’s depiction of racism and sexism. Similarly to what Bob Ewell did to Tom Robinson, conservatives tried to destroy the novel because they did not like they truth behind it. But the fact that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is still taught in schools and universities proves that its message is still relevant.

# Perspective

For the end it is relevant to ask has anything really changed since 1960? The answer is ambivalent because on one side much has been done for the civil rights for blacks, and at the same time there is still much do to. The most recent wave of the Civil Rights Movement called Black Lives Matter movement has gained popularity after police brutality against blacks has been exposed on social media. Black Lives Matter began in Ferguson 2014, with the death of Michael Brown. During the riots in the city people showed their sympathy on social media. As stated before quotes from *To Kill A Mockingbird* have been applied to the situation.

“‘How could they do it, how could they?’

‘I don’t know, but they did it. They’ve done it before and they did it tonight and they’ll do it again and when they do it – seems that only children weep.’” (Lee 2010, p. 234)

The famous quote is the conversation between Jem and Atticus after the lost trial. The quote resonates because it comments on how ingrained racism and injustice are and that only innocent children are affected by it. While the quote was posted on many platforms as a sign of sympathy black protesters were against it. The argument against it was that many blacks have written similar quotes, and to use those instead of a quote from a work of fiction. The reason so many white allies used the quote is because *To Kill a Mockingbird* is taught in junior high, high school, and universities and is therefore the most tangible example many white people have. It is easier to resonate with a novel where the moral is clear. In real life traditional media often tries to twist stories around. Such as the example of Michael Brown who was described as a “thug” and “he was no angel”, in order to excuse his death (Eligon 2014). People consuming media are introduced to conflicting sides of the story and no news media are truly objective. At the same time traditional media in the US tends to be biased and often times many stories about oppression against blacks do not make headlines. But with social media such as Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook users are able to share their experiences and have a larger audience with no censorship.

Regarding the sexism of the novel the answer is similar to the answer of racism. Yes, progress has been made to ensure equality but sexism still exists. The patriarchal policing of women, their behavior and bodies are still intact and something that women fight against. But there are more possibilities now than ever. In terms of equal rights for the characters Scout would have been able to serve on a jury in Alabama in 1966 (McCammon 2012). It shows that progress takes time but ultimately progressive initiatives are being made. Similarly to the Black Lives Matter movement feminists now uses social media as a platform to tell their experience. The different waves of feminism all benefit women globally, but once again the focus is on the US. Girls like Scout now have the option of being anything they want. If Scout is, as it might be hinted at, is transgender or non-binary her choices would be more accepted than previous. Judith Butler’s theory that we are born with no gender that society chooses it for us is popular theory that is wide accepted. There is a consensus that these forced and rigid stereotypes of what men and women do is simply outdated.

These days Internet and social media give an opportunity to understand and relate to different demographics. The means broadcast social issues and show injustices to a wider audience are more available than ever. Harper Lee would be thrilled these social issues are being dealt with once again on such a wide scale.

# Conclusion

Through the analysis it can be concluded that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a complex novel that deals with multiple issues. The issues of sexism, race and classism all interlink and intertwine with each other. Maycomb is a town that relies heavily on these structures in order to function. The patriarchy plays a huge role in keeping sexism intact. There is a pressure on women to act according to strict rules. They have to behave according to norms and not change what is established. Women are not allowed to be on juries, hear about cases like the Robinson trial and they are not allowed to be sexual beings. By controlling these aspects of women’s lives the patriarchy keeps women from advancing in society. They are enabling the growth of society. The same can be said about racism. Segregation is used to keep the blacks in place and to keep them from mingling with whites. Blacks are oppressed and are kept on the bottom of society. Whites make sure to keep it this way and make sure that blacks know their place. Robinson’s case gives hope to the black community. If he were to win it would change much for the community. But Maycomb is strict in its racism and hardly anything changes after the trial. Finally the hierarchical structure of Maycomb keeps the classes divided. Everyone belongs to a certain tier and is limited because of it. But is there truly a difference in power when everyone is poor? Maycomb would argue there is. These three topics combined create a town where sexism, racism and classism rule. No one should step out of line and unsettle the system. Yet characters like Scout and Boo Radley exist. They challenge the system by not fitting in. Scout questions what she sees and does not accept the injustices. She wants change and she understands that others need to join the cause.

Similarly, Lee advocates for reformation of the system. She wants the old system, the “Old South”, with its caste system, sexism and racism to be broken. She advocates for a “New South” where sexism, racism and classism are discarded and true equality can occur. However, she is realistic and does not fully believe that this is possible, at least not in her time. The message of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is to empathize with others. To consider things from their point of view and see how they experience the world. Only through understanding can real change happen. Everyone deserves to be treated with respect. It is important to understand that we are all humans, living on the same planet and that sexism and racism does nothing to benefit us as a species. Harper Lee’s novel is still as powerful today as it was in 1960. Its topics are still relatable which is one of the reasons it is so popular even today. As the newest wave of the civil rights movement is on-going *To Kill a Mockingbird* has been used to contextualize it. As previously stated it is because of its reliable message and its accessibility. The novel has the message of standing against oppression, and to see it thorough no matter how tough it is. The novel will continue to be used in school’s simply because the messages are still relevant even 56 years after its publication. That is the mark of a classic that it can keep inspiring no matter how much time goes by.

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