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Literature, American Literature



Kevin Dinh 11/12/13 Period: 4 Too much Compassion puts oneself in danger

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee tells the story of a little girl, Scout, growing up in a small town south of Alabama during the 1930's. Scout, with her brother Jem and friend Dill, grow up in a town that has prejudice, racism, and hierarchy. Along the way, they learn how bad racism and prejudice can get. Atticus, the father of Jem and Scout, teaches the children about right and wrong. Atticus gets assigned to a case about a negro, Tom Robinson, convicted of rape. Through Tom Robinson, Atticus Finch, and Boo Radley, Lee suggests that when compassion for another becomes greater than the consideration of self, will endanger one's life and ruin his/her reputation. Because of Tom Robinson's compassion for Mayella Ewell, he gets convicted of rape and dies for it. Tom Robinson decides to help out Bob Ewell's daughter, Mayella, since she looks like she needed help. He helps her chop chiffrarobes and kindling every time Tom passes her house. During the trial, as Mr. Gilmer questions Tom Robinson, Mr. Gilmer asks Robinson, " Why were you so anxious to do that woman's chores? " and Robinson responds, " Looked like she didn't have nobody to help her..... I felt sorry for her, she seemed to try more'n the rest of ' em" (197). Mr. Gilmer then replies, " You felt sorry for her, you felt sorry for her? " (197). Clearly Tom has endangered his life ever since he started helping Mayella. When Mayella asks Tom to help her chop her chiffrarobes and kindling, Tom accepts to help her without thinking that Dinh 1 he might be endangering his life because of his strong compassion for her. Also, when he said I felt sorry for her, he said it without thinking about what would happen to him. Because of his great compassion, he gets himself a one way ticket to danger and has no chance of winning the

trial when he realizes that saying “ I felt sorry for her” was the wrong thing to say. Tom’s wife, Helen Robinson, has a hard time finding work. Reverend Sykes says, “ To tell you the truth, Miss Jean Louise, Helen’s finding it hard to get work these days..... ”(123). Calpurnia says to Scout, “ It’s because of what folks say Tom’s done..... folks aren’t anxious to- to have anything to do with any of his family” (123). Reverend and Calpurnia indicate that Helen, Tom’s wife, has trouble finding a job. Because of Tom’s compassion for Mayella, it hurts his reputation and hurts his wife, Helen, from finding a job just all from being married to him. Also, society makes an unreasonable decision that Helen won’t be hired for their business because of being Tom’s wife and that he gets convicted of rape. Since Tom’s compassion for Mayella is strong, he gets his reputation damaged badly and ultimately dies like a savage. Atticus, having great compassion for Tom Robinson, defends Tom of being convicted of rape and because of this his reputation worsens and puts himself in danger. Atticus decides to defend Tom from being convicted of rape, endangers himself of getting killed and worsens his reputation. Mrs. Dubose shouts to Jem and Scout, “ Your father’s no better than the niggers and the trash he works for! ” (102). What Mrs. Dubose said gives a hint that Maycomb’s society despises Atticus since he is defending a black man. Ever since Atticus took the case, society made a decision that Atticus is worse as a nigger and his reputation is damaged. After taking the case, Atticus decides to protect Tom from getting attacked before his trial comes. Atticus decides to go to the jail where Tom is held and about a dozen men enter the prison to where Atticus and Tom are at. A man says to Atticus, “ You know what we want... step aside from the door..... Heck’s bunch’s so deep

in the woods they won't get out till mornin' " and Atticus responds "..... Well then that changes things doesn't it? " another man responds " It do" (152). These men who despise negro are going to hurt Tom and would use force to finish their objective. Atticus refuses to let the men through to Tom and puts himself in danger. The conversation between Atticus and the group of men indicates that they will hurt Atticus in order to get to Tom. Because of Atticus having compassion for Tom, he gets threatened by a group of men and society says he's worse as a nigger. Because of Boo Radley, having great compassion for Jem and Scout, saves the children and endangers his life greatly for them. Jem and Scout gets attack by an unknown man on their way home from a performance that Scout is in. While being attacked Scout and the unknown man " Suddenly he was jerked backwards and flung on the ground, almost carrying me with him" (262). When Scout reaches her house and gets inside to Jem's room, Scout says to the man who saved her, " Hey, Boo" (270). Scout then identifies the man who saved her as Boo and knows that he saves them even though with he can die while trying to save them. Atticus tells Boo, " Thank you for my children, Arthur (Boo)" (276). This confirms that Boo was the one who killed Bob and saves the children even though risking himself of being convicted of murder and going to jail and die. Since Boo had great compassion for Jem and Scout, he rushes out to save the children without thinking about the possibilities that he can die trying to save them. Tom, having great compassion for Mayella Ewell, endangers himself and ruins his reputation. Atticus having compassion for Tom, gets his reputation as low as a negro and gets Dinah threatened by a group of men. Boo, having compassion for Jem and Scout, rescues the children even though

he endangers his life. Lee suggests that when compassion for another becomes greater than the consideration of self, will endanger one's life and ruin his/her reputation. Through Tom Robinson, Atticus Finch, and Boo Radley, Lee proves this point.