

Good and evil: "how to kill a mockingbird" harper lee

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



Good and evil go hand in hand. The relationship between good and evil can be seen in the Bible, through the stories of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel. The correlation between good and evil is seen throughout history, through mediums such as literature and the media. Neither good nor evil can exist without the other. The coexistence of good and evil is portrayed in Harper Lee's "To Kill A Mockingbird" when the characters of Jem, Dill and Scout come across good and evil through Maycomb society.

Jem is placed in situations where he is exposed to both good and evil in Maycomb.

This is shown when Jem encounters good and evil through the closing of the knothole, the jury's unjust verdict, and Mrs. Dubose. Jem is portrayed as a more mature character in this book but there are many instances in which he shows his ignorance to the evil in Maycomb. Jem is exposed to evil when Nathan Radley plugs the knothole with cement.

Jem feels that, in a way, Nathan Radley is breaking the only connection between Boo and the children. The reader can see that the cementing of the knothole really affects Jem in the following quote, "When [the children] went in the house [Scout] had seen [that] [Jem] had been crying" (Lee pg. 63).

The closing of the knothole is perhaps the first time Jem realizes that Maycomb is not the perfect town he has always perceived it as, because it has both good and bad. Jem starts to understand that there is a lot more going on in Maycomb than what is seen on the outside. Another example of Jem's exposure to the good and evil in Maycomb society is seen when the jury convicts Tom Robinson. Jem's reaction reveals his emotions, as seen in

the following passage: "[Scout] peeked at Jem: his hands were white from gripping the balcony rail, and [Jem's] shoulders jerked as if each " guilty" was a separate stab between them" (Lee pg. 211).

Jem's body language shows the thoughts and the feelings he has towards the jury's verdict. Jem put a lot of faith into the jury, thinking that they would produce a fair verdict but he was let down when they all said " guilty", even the Cunningham who had at first opposed the rest of the jury. This is another encounter Jem has that reveals both the good and evil in Maycomb. Finally, Jem faces both good and evil in the form of Mrs. Dubose. His initial reaction to her rudeness is anger, which is described in the quote, "' Not only a Finch waiting on tables but one in the courthouse lawing for niggers! "' Jem stiffened. Mrs. Dubose's

shot had gone home and she knew it.... Jem was scarlet" (Lee pg. 101-102). All Jem can see in Mrs. Dubose is an evil old woman. The only time he sees something more than evil is when Atticus reveals to him that Mrs. Dubose was an ex-morphine addict. This changes his view of Mrs. Dubose. Jem sees a new side of Mrs. Dubose that he had never seen before. Jem starts to see that although she was grumpy and crude, she possessed courage, and in her own way, was good. Through the knothole incident, the verdict, and Mrs. Dubose, Jem starts to see the relationship between both good and evil and he understands that nothing is ever all good or all evil.

Another character that has to face the reality of the coexistence of good and evil is Dill. Dill is still young and innocent. Through encounters with both good and evil in society, Dill gains experience and grows mentally and emotionally. Dill finds good and evil in the trial, the way his parents treat

<https://assignbuster.com/good-and-evil-how-to-kill-a-mockingbird-harper-lee/>

him, and Mr. Dolphus Raymond. Dill compares the roles that Atticus and Mr. Gilmer play in the trial. He becomes sensitive to the good of Atticus and the bad of Mr. Gilmer, the prosecutor. When Mr. Gilmer is cross-examining Tom Robinson, Dill feels that Mr. Gilmer is treating Tom Robinson unfairly. Unlike Atticus, Mr.

Gilmer shows no respect for Tom and Dill empathizes with Tom. Dill's feeling towards the unfairness is seen in the following passage: "' That old Mr. Gilmer doin' [Tom] thataway, talking so hateful to [Tom]'" (Lee pg. 198). Dill feels that it is wrong for Mr. Gilmer to treat Tom like he is inferior just because he is black. In seeing the comparison of Atticus and Mr. Gilmer in the way they carry themselves in the trial, Dill is starting to see the coexistence of good and evil. Dill feels that his parents are sometimes good and sometime bad. Dill feels that in many ways his parents are evil because all they do is ignore him.

We see that he feels unwanted when he says "' The thing is what I'm tryin' to say is - they do get on a lot better without me.... They buy me everything I want but it's now-you've-got-it-go-play-with-it'" (Lee pg. 145). Dill explains why he ran away from home and in his description of the way his parents treat him, there is a connection between good and evil. It can be classified as good that Dill's parents buy him everything he wants. On an emotional level Dill feels detached and unimportant to his parents because once they buy him his toy, they leave him by himself. In his relationship with his parents,

Dill feels that there is both good and evil. Lastly, Dill encounters both good and evil when he meets Mr. Dolphus Raymond. Mr. Dolphus Raymond shows his " evil" side to the community in Maycomb but shows his humanity when

taking care of Dill during the trial. This is seen in the quote, "" Cry about the simple hell people give other people - without even thinking" (Lee pg. 201) Through Mr. Dolphus Raymond, Dill sees that there is always more than what is seen on the surface. Though Maycomb society sees Mr. Dolphus Raymond as a drunk, and therefore " evil", Dill and Scout witness the good in him.

In a way, Mr. Dolphus Raymond has more good than most people in Maycomb because he understands the way things should be. This influences Dill because he realizes that even though Mr. Dolphus Raymond is thought of as evil, he is actually good. Through Dill's experiences with the trial, his parents, and Mr. Dolphus Raymond, Dill is exposed to the coinciding of good and evil. In this book, the person most exposed to the good and evil in society is Scout. In the course of the story, Scout is exposed to good and evil through the mob, the fire, and Boo Radley.

Scout finds out that all people have good and bad sides, When Scout sees Atticus confronted by the mob, she at first feels that they are ready to hurt him, and in her eyes, the gang must be bad. Scout tries to stop the confrontation and in doing so, wakes up the good in Mr. Cunningham, the supposed mob leader. The reader sees that Scout changed something within Mr. Cunningham in the next quote: " Then he straightened up and waved a big paw. ' Let's clear out,' he called" (Lee pg. 154). Mr. Cunningham acts humanely, unlike the way he acted within the mob. It is as if the mob as a whole is bad but each individual is good.

Scout brings out the individual in the mob, bringing out the good from the bad. Another example of Scout's encounter with good and evil is during the fire. In Maycomb County, there are a lot of stereotypical and prejudiced

<https://assignbuster.com/good-and-evil-how-to-kill-a-mockingbird-harper-lee/>

views. Scout is exposed to Atticus' way of thinking of all people as equals, and to Scout this is good and the prejudice in Maycomb citizens is bad. During the fire, Scout sees that although there are people in Maycomb whose views are wrong, they were still at the fire, helping, proven in the following quote: " The men of Maycomb, in all degrees of dress and undress, took furniture from Miss Maudie's house" (Lee pg. 69).

Maycomb society shows solidarity during the fire, which is good, though sometimes that very solidarity used for good is turned into a prejudiced view shared by most of the citizens of Maycomb, which is bad. Through the fire scene, Scout sees that although sometimes Maycomb is evil because of its racism and chauvinism, the community shows goodness when coming together to help Miss Maudie. Finally, Scout sees good in Boo Radley even though society portrays him as evil. When Bob Ewell tries to kill Jem and Scout, Boo saves them by killing Bob Ewell.

Although murdering Bob was bad, Boo was doing good because he was protecting the children. The following quote shows that Scout knows Boo was trying to protect her: "' Mr. Tate was right' ... ' Well, it'd sort of be like shootin' a mockingbird, wouldn't it? '" (Lee pg. 276). Scout understands that sometimes there is good even in the vilest of actions. Scout finally realizes that Boo Radley is indeed human and although he has always been portrayed as a monster, there is good in him.

Through the mob, the fire and Boo Radley, Scout learns that there is always good where there is evil and vice versa. The theme of the coexistence of good and evil is emphasized in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Throughout the novel the reader sees the different events that characters

<https://assignbuster.com/good-and-evil-how-to-kill-a-mockingbird-harper-lee/>

are exposed to, thus affecting the way they perceive good and evil. One must start to realize that nothing is ever all good or all evil. The coexistence of good and evil can be seen everyday, out on the streets, in our schools, and in our homes.