Maycomb's society in "to kill a mockingbird"

Literature, American Literature

Throughout the world, individuals are stereotyped and misinterpreted by the society which can have drastic consequences on one's lifestyle and the way they engage with the world. In To Kill a Mockingbird, author Harper Lee creates a unique novel to explore inequality and the impact of societal views in the segregated community of Maycomb, Alabama. Told through the perspective of Scout Finch, her father Atticus Finch, is an attorney who desperately attempts to prove the innocence of a black man unfairly convicted of sexual assault named Tom Robinson.

Arthur Radley, a mysterious neighbour, is portrayed as a monster in society's eyes and saves Scout and her brother Jem from being killed. Dolphus Raymond, a wealthy white man, is viewed as an outcast in Maycomb's society for associating with black people and having several mixed children. In this novel, the overarching social stigma results in the destruction of its victim's lives as it limits Maycomb's society to view people in a prejudiced nature.

The community of Maycomb believes Arthur Radley to be a " malevolent phantom" (10) and decide to prominently call him " Boo Radley." (10) This view destroys his life. First and foremost, due to societal views, Arthur is damaged by his father's ruthless penalty of imprisonment and emotional abuse. Arthur has been involved in disreputable crimes as a teen because he became acquainted with the wrong crowd. His father, a " foot-washing baptist" (59) emotionally detriments him as he holds him in the basement of his house. Arthur's father does not want the disgrace to his family in the eyes of society and tries to make him into his view of an ideal person. Society's negative views partly instigate Arthur's father to brutally punish his

child. He isolates his son for 15 years in his house. His long forced isolation stimulate psychological problems such as social anxiety because he continues to be reclusive after his father's death. Furthermore, as his father abuses him and prevents him from social interaction, it shows that there is no indication that his family cares for him. His brother " had filled our [Scout, Jem, and Arthur's] knot-hole with cement" (83) where Arthur used to leave gifts for the children. His sadistic personality is shown as he cuts off Arthur's only real connection to the outside world, with Jem and Scout. The harsh behaviour of his family was incited by the negative societal views because they believed that it might transform him into a better person. In reality, he is nothing like how society has characterized him to be. He is compassionate and humane as he leaves trinkets for Jem and Scout and saves the defenceless children's lives from the attacks of Bob Ewell. Society's unilateral views immediately portrayed Arthur as at first, a disobedient, wild teen to a monster, who stabbed his own father, which was the cause of the destruction of his life.

In addition to Arthur, Tom Robinson has suffered many consequences due to the views of society which were biased due to his appearance. During the trial, when he was convicted of sexual assault of Mayella Ewell, he was not perceived as an individual person but a black man. In Maycomb, all black men belong to the general stereotype of criminals, fraud, and assaulters. Although it was evident that Tom Robinson did not perpetrate sexual assault, he was convicted because of the stereotype that the majority of the society refused to disregard. Scout said, " Tom Robinson was probably the only person who was ever decent to her [Mayella Ewell]." (257) Scout, as a child

who has not been influenced by the racially prejudiced mindset, can recognize that Tom Robinson has an empathetic and mellow personality. Much of the society of Maycomb has racial prejudice that clouds over the people's consciences. Moreover, this prejudice negatively changes Tom's life because, in addition to being wrongly convicted of sexual assault, he is also gruesomely murdered by Bob Ewell. The society is indifferent to Bob committing murder as they regard Tom to be a criminal. Since the punishment for sexual assault is death, Bob was more inclined to harm Tom Robinson. He also thought that the town would be unstirred by his death which was proven true as " Maycomb was interested by the news of Tom's death for perhaps two days." (322) This shows how societal views that have racial prejudice, cost Tom Robinson death, and shame of committing sexual assault.

Another character who was greatly impacted by societal views is Dolphus Raymond. Dolphus becomes shunned from society due to his terrible reputation so he makes himself more infamous to give society a reason for his controversial actions. He pretends to drink alcohol in a paper bag when in reality, he is drinking Coca-Cola. Mr. Raymond is thought of as " an evil man." (267) He is so infamous in Maycomb society that " folks can say Dolphus Raymond's in the clutches of whiskey that's why he won't change his ways. He can't keep himself, that's why he lives the way he does." (268) Because of this tragic history where his wife commits suicide, and his family of a black mistress and biracial children, the society severely scrutinizes him. He " deliberately perpetrated fraud against himself" (268) to " give em [Maycomb's society] a reason" (268) for his actions. A reason would reduce

the graveness of Mr. Raymond's unorthodox life decisions in the eyes of society. He does not want to be completely outcasted from society and puts the blame on alcohol, rather than his own choice. Furthermore, Dolphus is one of Maycomb's outsiders. In order to avoid criticism in Maycomb, Dolphus " lives by himself way down near the country line. He's got a colored woman and all sorts of mixed chillun." (214) The people of Maycomb do not like to associate with Dolphus because of his notorious reputation. This shows how lonely he must feel because the only people that he associates with is his family. Mr. Raymond's unconventional family has caused him to be greatly judged in the eyes of society who have racial prejudice and believe in segregation between the white and black population of Maycomb.

The negative societal views, which form due to social stigma and prejudice, have the potential to destroy one's life. Arthur Radley suffered from mental problems and lack of love and care from his family due to the negative views of society. They formed because of his unfortunate history of associating with bad influence and rebelling against his father by stabbing him with a pair of scissors. Additionally, due to the omnipresent racial prejudice in Maycomb, Tom Robinson gets unjustly convicted in a sexual assault case and loses his life to the father of the girl he supposedly raped. Further, Mr. Dolphus Raymond gets outcasted from society due to his biracial family. In order to get less victimized by the societal views, he pretends to be a drunkard and demolishes his own reputation. Societal views have a major impact on many people's lives and have the ability to destruct or ameliorate one's life.