

The lack of virtue as portrayed in harper lee's book, to kill a mockingbird

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Loss of Innocence

In a coming of age story, a bildungsroman, a character must go through a loss of innocence which forces them to realize that the world is not the utopia they believe it to be. This previously naive character is changed, positively or negatively, when truth and reality finally sink in. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Dill is a character that encounters this loss of innocence. Dill's loss of innocence, that transformed him from a childish and somewhat ignorant boy into one that was rebellious and a little pessimistic, began with his rough home life and was completed by the challenging court case he witnessed.

When Dill first arrived in Maycomb, before his loss of innocence began, he came across as a naive child with a wild imagination, that often got him into trouble. His interactions with Scout and Jem show a side of him that is full of childish curiosity and a strong sense of adventure. It doesn't take long for Scout to recognize this trait in him and comment on it by calling him " a pocket Merlin, whose head teemed with eccentric plans, strange longings, and quaint fancies" (Lee 10). Dill loved the idea of an adventure or mystery, and once he got wind of one, he wouldn't let it go until he knew everything about it. The unknown intrigued him and made him desperate to know more. Scout explained this well when she noted that " the more we told Dill about the Radleys, the more he wanted to know, the longer he would stand hugging the light-pole on the corner, the more he would wonder" (Lee 15). One little spark could set fire to Dill's imagination and curiosity. This was one

of Dill's character flaws and often got him in trouble because, as we all know, "curiosity killed the cat".

As the book progresses, a change begins in Dill that starts with his acknowledgement of his rough home life and is finalized by the unfair trial of Tom Robinson. When Dill runs away from home he goes directly to the Finches with a story of his horrible home life. While his story is a little far-fetched and very exaggerated, one part seems true; he says that his parents did not like him and didn't pay much attention to him. Because of this, Dill begins to see that the world is not perfect and is, most of the time, very broken. This is when Dill starts to lose his innocence; he begins to wonder why things are falling apart for him. During the trial, he has another experience with an imperfect world and this one sets him over the edge. In the middle of the trial Dill has to leave because he cannot bear the stress anymore. He watches as Mr. Gilmer mocks Tom and treats him like he is worthless. Dill is appalled with "that old Mr. Gilmer doin' him thataway, talking so hateful to him" because he can not understand why anyone would treat a person that way (Lee 265). Dill is forced to see that hate exists and blinds people from seeing the truth; this is when he realizes that racism is real, though he may not know it by that term yet. When Tom Robinson loses the case, that is the end. All hope for the world has vanished, as far as Dill is concerned. He has seen that life is not fair and he does not like it one bit. The world is no longer a beautiful fantasy for Dill; he now sees it for what it is: a flawed and, often, hateful place.

After Dill loses his innocence and realizes that he was wrong about the world, he acts rebellious and pessimistic. Dill has seen that the world is not a kind and loving place and that hate really does exist in everyday life. He no longer believes that there is nothing wrong with the world because he has seen the reality. Dill's view of the world has become negative, and at times dark. At one point in the book he makes a comment about Miss Rachel and Aunt Alexandra tells him, " Don't talk like that, Dill. It's not becoming to a child. It's cynical" (Lee 287). Aunt Alexandra, the queen of critical and hateful thinking, saying his words were " cynical" shows us that Dill has changed his view of life from " everything is great" to " everything is wrong." Though Dill keeps his imagination and love of stories through his loss of innocence, there is an evident change in the way he tells them. His stories are no longer just cute fantasies; they have become oddly morose. After Dill runs away, he explains his decision by telling them what his home life was like. His story was that his new father hated him and would lock him up in the basement to die, but he would sneak food from a passing farmer. This hardly seems believable and it is easy to discern that this is another one of Dill's famous tall tales, but this is a lot different than his story about his dad who worked with trains and had a beard. When his view of the world changed, so did his stories. Dill had also become angry at people for not trying to fix the broken world; after the court case he comments about the people in the town saying that " everyone of ' em oughta be riding broomsticks" and this shows that he sees them as " witches" who are full of evil. He is angry and bitter that the people did nothing to help Tom during the court case.

In conclusion, Dill's loss of innocence sparked a transformation in him that was drastic. He lost his ability to see the world as a happy place and began to see the world as flawed and extremely broken. His once childish and playful demeanor changed to rebellion and anger towards people. His home life began this journey and the racist town ended it. However, the end was not positive for him; it was very negative. The racism of the town morphed him into someone who could rarely find the good in anything.