

The portrayal of class conflict in harper lee's to kill a mockingbird

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



Harper Lee depicts the concept of Marxism throughout the novel 'to kill a mockingbird'. She focuses on the representation of class conflict and the reinforcement of class distinction between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Atticus is subjected to defend a black man charged with the rape of a white girl. He fights strongly for equality between white and black people which is one of the beliefs of the Marxist system. The characters somewhat do rely on the social consciousness in determining their existence. Walter Cunningham he relies on his status within society hence why he doesn't take the money that he is offered. This keeps the class system strongly divided as it is not challenging the norms. For example 'it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but their social existence that determine their consciousness.'

This theory is relevant to the text as the character Tom Robinson who is a black individual within society come in contact with many hardships because of his race as he is sentenced with a charge for rape. In the novel 'to kill a mockingbird' there is a clear distinction between the bourgeoisie, who are the finches, Dolphus Raymond, Miss Stephanie Crawford and Miss Maudie Atkinson and the proletariats, who are the white lower class they are the Cunningham's and Ewell. Tom Robinson is a black proletariat who is valued less in society as the novel endorses the powerlessness of black people and how they are portrayed as worthless. It is clear in the novel that the Bourgeoisie only accept the white lower class because of their colour. The Cunningham's are seen as "country folks farmers" and "Atticus came from a set breed of men" This portrays that there is class inequality in Maycomb as there are individuals that have a higher position or status such as Atticus

who is a lawyer, he come from a “ set breed of men”, which illustrates Atticus wealth and status, he can't change his social status as he was born into its not malleable. This allows a Marxist interpretation such as “ the base of the society determines its superstructure.”

This theory is relevant to the text because they are dividing distinctly men ‘ into a breed’ that allows society to direct people into particular category of people depending on duty within society this solidifies the superstructure. However, he does not conform to this type of class inequality, as he aids the proliferate and blacks with his goodwill. Although Atticus finch may be warm-hearted his sister Alexandra finch despises and criticises the lower class when she calls the Cunningham’s “ trash” this indicates how social classes separate individual, even if they are from the same county. Marxist perspective shows how class is a main element in society and the inequality and barrier to prosperity. Throughout the novel the Cunningham’s, unlike the Ewell’s, are presented as generous, respectful and don’t take advantage of black men, they refuse to accept charity from other people and manage with what they have.

Moreover, Harper Lee conveys class inequality through the character Tom Robinson. He is denied justice because he is black. A Marxist theory shows “ since capitalism didn’t happen overnight he will not find a clean break” this conveys it’s hard to break away from the class system as false allegation is made against Tom Robinson in which he denies them in court but because of his race and social status he is incapable of removing these blames hence why he’s defensiveness resulting in his death. In addition, Harper lee wrote

her novel in the time of the great depression, civil rights protest and the period of abolishing black slavery, it was set in 1930 where blacks were continued to be discriminated but the novel was published in the 1960s. Marxist critics might assert that Lee's choice of subject matter in 'to kill a mockingbird' could have been influenced by her upbringing when she was young, as she tells the story of two white women who falsely accused nine black men of raping them. Before the civil war millions of black men were opposed the freedom and the rights to vote, but white men of lower class were granted that right. Also, Lynching was introduced in 1920, where black people were hang and the police had to watch them suffer this shows the lack of equality within society.

Additionally, Marxist theory focuses on the concept such as alienation and loss of identity. In 'to kill a mockingbird' alienation is demonstrated through the use of Arthur (Boo) Radley, Tom Robinson. Throughout the novel there are many occasions of social discrimination towards these individuals. Arthur Radley feels alienated in society because the folks of Maycomb reveal stories about him when he is not present and feel dread and fear at the thought of him, he is alienated within society because for so many years he kept himself isolated from the outside world. Tom Robinson is also alienated from society because of his race. From a Marxist perspective they note "The oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class are to represent and repress them". This represents that Tom Robinson is seen to be oppressed because of his skin colour and the racism that follows him around Maycomb.

Additionally, Harper Lee explores the idea of 'loss of identity' through the protagonist Scout Finch. Scout explores the issue of racism and discrimination in Maycomb County. The main protagonist presents a loss of identity as she is innocent at the start of the novel, however towards the end she is exposed to what's good and what's evil as well as losing her innocence. In this novel we see how Harper Lee presents Boo Radley as an outcast to society. He alienates himself from everyone in Maycomb, people would be fearful of him and children would run past the Radley house. It is apparent that people of Maycomb talk about Arthur Radley behind his back. Here Lee uses deathly imagery to evoke the 'malevolent phantom' of Arthur Radley. Harper Lee creates a sinister image in the reader's mind of how Arthur Radley may appear to be like. This gives off the impression that Arthur Radley only feels isolated because people of Maycomb cowered in fear of what they thought he looked like.

We see this when Jem gives a foreboding like description of Arthur Radley by mentioning that he is 'six and a half feet tall [with] a long-jagged scar [that] ran across his face' the sinister imagery indicates for the rest of the novel Scout has this vivid image of Boo and believes he is an unpleasant and detestable man, who wants to harm the neighbourhood. Moreover, Tom Robinson is alienated from the white community in Maycomb because of his colour. The black people in Maycomb are constantly being isolated by others, we see this in the court hearing when the black men, women and children are seated at the balcony away from the white folk of Maycomb as they are seated at the front of the court room. Marxism argues that 'capitalism

alienate workers' this suggest the exploitation of the upper class toward the lower class suggesting they are unable to recognize their position to even carry out of an act to prosper " mighty polite to do all that chopping and hauling for her weren't you boy?". This portrays that Tom Robinson is being exploited for doing something good by helping out his neighbour but is criticising him because of his low status. Moreover, Mr. Gilmer continuously calls Tom a " boy" this reveals he is downgrading Toms status and him as a person. We can also see in the novel when Tom Robinson is on trial for the rape of a white women. He tries to defend himself in court but the white community of Maycomb disregarded his chance of freedom ' below us no one liked his answer'.

Through a Marxist perspective this shows how those higher control the lower class " four negroes rose and gave us their front row seats" the black people in the balcony of the court room gave away their seats to Jem, Scout, Dill and Reverend Sykes which indicates the lack of power the proletariats have suggests their oppression. Furthermore, Scout is exposed to problems such as gender inequality and racial discrimination, which she struggles to comprehend, thus making her look innocent in the eyes of the readers. We see this in the novel " the Radley place fascinated Dill, it drew him in" the kid's Scout, Jem and Dill accept Maycomb tales and have a clear image between good and bad. Atticus wants to keep Jem and Scout hidden from the racism and violence of the trial " get your supper and stay home" he does not want them to be exposed to the evil world that consumes some of the folks of Maycomb. Moreover, in the early twentieth century when the ' Jim

crow law' was yet not abolished the black which were subjected to that type of law were denied their right and value, the whites and blacks where ordered segregation in public schools, transport, and places, with these laws black people felt the pressure of prejudice.

Conversely, racism is the key factor that triggers alienation and conflict. Without racism the themes alienation and conflict wouldn't really be there, so race is essential. However, Atticus Finch he doesn't show any sign of racism towards anyone in Maycomb. We see this when he decides to defend Tom Robinson in his trial. In conclusion, Harper Lee depicts the concept of Marxism throughout the novel 'to kill a mockingbird'. She focuses on the representation of class conflict and the reinforcement of class distinction between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Marxist theory focuses on the concept such as alienation and loss of identity. In 'to kill a mockingbird' alienation is demonstrated through the use of Arthur (Boo) Radley, Tom Robinson.