

The coming of age of jeremy finch: to kill a mockingbird



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

People can develop through the ages quite rapidly sometimes; taking on contrasting values and becoming virtually different people. It is a common feature in the entire of humankind, that during the course of extreme change or difficulties, people change their qualities to adapt. Similarly, in Harper Lee's renowned novella *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Jem Finch goes through such changes. The story set in a small and quiet town in Alabama in the 1930s, revolves around the existing racial prejudice and how it affects the Finch household.

A trial involving an innocent and poor black man who has been accused of rape by a white woman who lives her life as a social outcast shakes the moral conscience of the whole town. The emotions, judgments and rage threaten to boil over and lead to disintegration of the unity of the town and the innocent lives of Jem Finch and his sister, Scout. In the light of these troubles, Jem loses the innocence of his childhood and becomes more adult-like.

Facing many different experiences and challenges force certain changes in Jem's character which makes him develop and mature beyond his years. Jem goes through several changes in his perception of people and his attitude towards them. As a young child, Jem had a false view of Boo Radley based on what he had gathered of him from the talks and gossips of other people. "Jem gave a description of Boo.... Boo was about six and a half feet tall.... what teeth he had were yellow and rotten; his eyes popped and he drooled most of the time"(Lee 13).

This shows that he had gathered a very negative view of Boo Radley and that as a child; he was easily convinced to believe whatever he heard about him. He shows that he is very gullible and he views Boo as some sort of a maniac even though he has never met him before. However, after certain experiences and learning more about Boo, he starts to view him in a different manner and think of him as a normal person.

“ Scout, I think that I’m beginning to understand why Boo Radley’s stayed shut up in the house all this time... t’s because he wants to stay inside” (Lee 227). Having seen the injustice all around, he starts to speculate why he has never come out of his house and develops an understanding of Boo and why he chooses to stay covertly. Rather than looking at him as eccentric, he starts to sympathise with him and develops a more positive image of him. This growth of a feeling of compassion for Boo Radley marks a change in Jem and his perception of others. The idea of courage takes a different meaning for Jem as he starts to grow up.

As a child with no real experience of the outside world, he regards courage as something of not much importance and views dares imposed upon him by Dill as something which required courage. When Dill challenges Jem to touch the front gate of the Radley house, Jem treats it as a job requiring real courage as he needs to overcome his fear of the Radleys. “ Jem wanted Dill to know once and for all that he wasn’t scared of anything” (Lee 14). This portrays the shallow image of courage in the eyes of a young child such as Jem and how he viewed courage as an alternative to being a coward.

Conversely, as he grows up, he strikes an enmity with Bob Ewell and has to take the responsibility of protecting Scout from him. Eventually, they get cornered by Bob Ewell and Jem fights against him managing to save himself and his sister while in the process of breaking his arm. " They tussled some more and then there was this funny noise - Jem hollered ... " " That was Jem's arm" (Lee 270). Jem hence forgets all about his tender age and size compared to Ewell and decides to clash against him in order to save his sister.

This duel of Jem's against a dangerous and drunk adult fervent for revenge shows how Jem's view of courage changed from essentially being branded as a coward to squaring up against someone superior to him in order to protect his sister. Jem's final steps towards maturity come as he leaves his childhood and the innocence and simple beliefs attached to it to become much more adult- like with logical thinking. Like every child, Jem also had his own beliefs, thoughts and views about different things.

These represented his innocence and pureness of heart. " A hot steam's somebody who can't get to heaven, just wallows around on lonesome roads an' if you walk through him, when you die you'll be one too" (Lee 37). This shows us the world from the eyes of a young Jem who still has not come to terms with the reality of the world and lives his life in the realms of imagination. He appears to have strong belief in certain ' untrue ' things and as a child, lives his life based on these foolish beliefs of his.

However, as he grows up, he starts to move on from this make believe world of his and starts to get a clear and logical mind. He moves on from the little

games and activities of his early days and takes a much more serious approach towards life itself. “ You oughta let your mother know where you are.... [And] then he rose and broke the remaining code of our childhood” (Lee 141). This quote from Scout gives the ultimate proof of the fact that Jem has finally shed his childhood. At seeing, Dill who had run miles from his home, his first reaction was to inform his mother.

This concludes the fact of Jem’s coming of age as he doesn’t react with any glee or happiness at meeting his old friend but decides to inform his father about it. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Jem transforms completely and enters a stage of maturity in the face of troubles and changes around him. He opts to hold a true opinion about people rather than perceive them based on other people’s judgements. He gains a different meaning about courage and its significance and he also finally sheds his childhood and everything related to it to enter a far grimmer adult world.

Thus, with his world changing all around, Jem enters his teenage years and goes through many changes. Coming out of it all, he is a much different person compared to the one before and accepts the reality of the world and adapts his character to it. This depicts a huge alteration in the life of a young child who faces difficulties and manages to successfully come out of it. This is not an alienated character in such respects as many people in today’s world come across such complications, struggling to find their true personality but eventually achieve to do so.