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Exploring Literature and Writing

October 4, 2015

***“Scout’s Dynamic Characteristics”***

“Act more grown up,” what does that even mean? Why have people all of a sudden cared about how mature you are? We hear this statement from virtually everyone we talk to, but why? In the standpoint of a child in the 1930’s, like Scout an eight year old girl in the town of Maycomb*,* it was considered inappropriate to talk to an adult as if you were their equal. Children should act like children, and adults should act like adults. This philosophy does not sit in favor of Scout’s point of view, as she becomes rebellious against this thought process. Her father, Atticus Finch, is not against Scout’s opinion, however, he does get criticized for letting her be so “different.” Scout Finch in Harper Lee’s novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird,* becomes extremely dynamic and mature throughout the text because of the key events within the the book that have shaped her character, the element of age that factored into her view of reality, and the arrival of Charles Baker Harris, AKA, Dill.

The key events in Scout Finch’s life that are within the text of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is one of the main points behind the progression of Scout’s dynamic characteristic throughout the novel. One of the most significant examples in the book is when Atticus gave the advice “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view,” “until you climb into his skin and walk around in it” (Lee 39). This quote shows that Scout has learned and will later apply the skill of viewing a particular subject from another person’s point of view. During Chapter Three, Atticus planted this idea into Scout’s head, which subsequently caused

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Scout to use this skill in the following chapters of the book. An example of Scout applying this advice was in Chapters Six and Seven, when Jem had to retrieve his pants from the Radley yard. He had to do this because he would disappoint his father and Jem would have a great deal of regret if he disappointed his father. Jem’s Pride overcame the risk of punishment from his father and he insisted on going no matter what the consequences. Then, something occurred that caused a change in Jem’s persona that night, and Scout noticed it the most out of anyone. Scout attempted to understand this by utilizing skill that Atticus had thought her. She tried to “climb” into Jem's skin and walk around in it to obtain a better understanding of Jem's perspective and thought process. Scout’s progressing dynamic characteristic within the text of *To Kill a Mockingbird* was a result of her acquiring so much information during each key event, that it caused her to develop a new perspective on everyday things. Such as her view of local surroundings, personal matters, and many other subjects. However, the key events in Scout’s life ate not the only motives for her becoming such a dynamic person throughout the novel.

In *To Kill a Mockingbird,* the time period is between 1933 and 1935. Meanwhile, Scout Finch was growing and developing her own opinions about the world around her. In the beginning of this book, Harper Lee portrays Scout as a young naïve tomboy who likes to run around, play in trees, and imagine whimsical things about the world with her brother Jem. As the book progresses, however, Scout gradually becomes detached from Jem. As a result, she adapts to Maycomb’s ambiance and she becomes more aware of the town’s surroundings. Scout shifts her dependent attitude, to independent. This is the element of age, which accounted for Scout’s dynamic characteristic which transforms throughout this book. For instance, one of the first times this component was revealed in the text was when Scout Finch’s aunt, Aunt Alexandra,

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demanded of Scout not to go and mingle with the Finches’ house maid, Calpurnia, who was in fact black. “Aunt Alexandra had spoken. I was reminded vividly of the last time she had put her foot down. I never knew why. It was when I was absorbed with plans to visit Calpurnia’s house I was curious, interested; I wanted to be her ‘company’, to see how she lived, who her friends were. I might as well have wanted to see the other side of the moon” (Lee, 247). What Scout did not know at the time, was that Aunt Alexandra was under the innate belief that multiple races should not interact. Scout lacks the maturity to completely decipher the differences of what she sees and hears. Therefore, she placed inquiry into this event, since she could not interpret Aunt Alexandra’s prejudice for herself. This later changes as the trial of Tom Robinson, a local black pedestrian.

Mr. Gilmer: You're a mighty good fellow, it seems—did all this for not one penny?

Tom: Yes, suh. I felt right sorry for her, she seemed to try more'n the rest of 'em-,

Mr. Gilmer: You felt sorry for her, you felt sorry for her?

Mr. Gilmer seemed ready to rise to the ceiling. The witness realized his mistake and shifted uncomfortably in the chair. But the damage was done. Below us, nobody liked Tom Robinson's answer. Mr. Gilmer paused a long time to let it sink in.

(Lee 263-264). Scout has a fundamental and reasonable sense of justice at this point of the book, therefore, when the aspect of inequality comes into play, like in Robinson’s trial, there is disruption and shock in Scout’s way of thinking. In this section of the story, Scout is old enough to be enlightened on what the world was really like in the south during the 1930’s, and she learns to deal with the injustices of the southern society’s conditions, about which she cannot do much.

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Another example of Scout’s adaptation to the constant change in her life is when Jem begins to go through puberty, causing mood swings, which slowly distanced the two from each other. “Jem was twelve. He was difficult to live with, inconsistent, moody. His appetite was appalling, and he told me so many times to stop pestering him I consulted Atticus: “Reckon he’s got a tapeworm?” Atticus said no, Jem was growing. I must be patient with him and disturb him as little as possible.” (Lee 153). In this quote, Scout realized that Jem was just growing out of his childish ways. Therefore, as Jem sways away from Scout, Scout just sways towards someone else, Aunt Alexandra, who at the time, began to live with them. Aunt Alexandra believed that Scout was old enough to develop and manipulate her feminine side, and that was what Alexandra intended for Scout in the first place. Consequently, Scout was encouraged to spend more time with Alexandra, such as tea parties with fancy dresses and female discussions with Aunt Alexandra’s friends. One instance of Aunt Alexandra attempting to change Scout is in Chapter 24, when Aunt Alexandra said, “Stay with us [at her missionary circle], Jean Louise,” she said. This was a part of her campaign to teach me to be a lady” (307). This is an ideal example of Aunt Alexandra striving to make Scout more lady like, which ultimately contributed to Scout’s dynamic character from that point on in the course of the book. From the starting point to the end of this novel, Scout Finch changes a great deal when it comes to her awareness of the local surroundings, and a large part of that is because of the aspect of age.

A friend of the Scout and Jem, Dill, or Charles Baker Harris, arrived near the beginning of the book in Ms. Rachel’s back yard. He exhibited that he could read, he is quite short for his age, and he is a bit older than Scout. Ever since his arrival, Scout has been changing and

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adapting to the way that he effected her. An example of Scout adapting to Dill’s arrival is in this quote:

Dill would be leaving for Meridian tomorrow; today he was off with Jem at Barker’s Eddy. Jem had discovered with angry amazement that nobody had ever bothered to teach Dill how to swim, a skill Jem considered necessary as walking. They had spent two afternoons at the creek, they said they were going in naked and I couldn’t come, so I divided the lonely hours between Calpurnia and Miss Maudie.

(Lee 305). This quote is exemplifying how Scout is tossed away by Jem and she has to occupy her time elsewhere. A similar thing also happens when Dill thought of the idea to go and peek into Boo Radley’s window. “Okay,” said Jem. “Why don’t you go on home, Scout?” “What are you gonna do?” Dill and Jem were simply going to peep in the window with the loose shutter to see if they could get a look at Boo Radley, and if I didn’t want to go with them I could go straight home and keep my fat flopping mouth shut, that was all” (Lee 68-69). Jem, once again, pushes Scout aside in favor of Dill. Scout, however becomes persistent, and forces Dill and Jem to take her, even though she originally advised them not to go. Between the time of these two quotes, Scout realizes that she can not take Jem’s “tyranny” anymore and that she has to stand up for herself. This is one, of many examples of Dill truly affecting Scout’s constant change in her life throughout the text.

Harper Lee’s novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird,* portrays Scout as a dynamic character who is constantly changing as a result of the key events in the the text that develop her character, age that contributed to her view on reality, and Dill’s arrival to Maycomb. As Atticus said, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view,” “until you climb into his skin and walk around in it” (Lee 39). This was one of the the main turning points

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and learning curves in Scout’s within the novel. Although Scout Finch is only eight years old, this event ultimately lead to the development of Scout’s dynamic characteristics over time.

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Works Cited

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. ed. Hugh Van Dusen. New York: Grand Central Publishing, July 11, 1960. 39-307. Print.