

"To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee is a classic novel, applauded for its unconventional views and thought-provoking themes. **But it is often known that personal and historical context of the author can often be the foundation for a significant part of the novel, including events, characters and settings within the novel's context.** Specifically, Lee's personal and historical context has influenced the depictions of Atticus Finch, Alexandra Finch and the Cunninghams.

The historical and personal context of Lee's time directly contributed to the characterisation and representation of Atticus Finch in "To Kill a Mockingbird". This is displayed through the Atticus' dialogue: " 'Scout,' said Atticus, 'nigger-lover is just one of those terms that don't mean anything—like snot-nose. It's hard to explain—ignorant, trashy people use it when they think somebody's favouring Negroes over and above themselves. This quote is essential in representing Atticus Finch, whose character was regarded as unconventional and starkly contrasting to the overall view of racism for his time. The Jim Crow laws ensured that racial segregation was second nature to US people in the 1930s. Atticus' world-weary and bitter tone in the quote suggests that he is likely alone in his 'backwards' thinking of racial equality, and is tired of it not being so. This quote also emphasizes that despite Atticus being a prime example of a moral and honourable person in Lee's life, those attributes don't get him far, and his legal case is since lost in favour of a white woman, despite the evidence being clear. Therefore, it can be seen that the Jim Crow laws and associated racial prejudices are a prime example of how Lee's historical context had impacted her representation of characters in her novel.

The historical and personal context of gender roles directly impacts the characterisation and representation of the female characters in the novel, specifically Aunt Alexandra. This is demonstrated mainly through the musings of Scout: 'Aunt Alexandra was fanatical on the subject of my attire. I could not possibly hope to be a lady if I wore breeches when I said I could do nothing in a dress, she said I wasn't supposed to do things that required pants. Aunt Alexandra's vision of my deportment involved playing with small stoves, tea sets, and wearing the Add-A-Pearl necklace she gave me when I was born; furthermore, I should be a ray of sunshine in my father's life...' This dialogue is significant in emphasizing how rigid the gender roles were in the 1930s and how they enforced associated stereotypes. Women had to act a certain way - be clean and polished, tend to men and not burden them with negative emotions, and be at home in the kitchen. Even from a young age, Scout was being pressured by her aunt to be more like her and conform to society's norms. Aunt Alexandra is the perfect example of a Southern woman, as she's well-mannered, fashionable and poised. She also insists on wearing heavy makeup and wearing a corset, even in the humidity and heat associated with the deep south. Aunt Alexandra encourages Scout to be something she isn't and hasn't had experience with. The quote highlights just how different the two women are, and what they value in terms of social status and conformity. The diction of certain words has been utilised so the reader knows clearly what Scout thinks of the whole subject of gender roles. The word 'fanatical' insinuates how much Scout's aunt wanted to change, or 'fix', Scout's attire to be more 'lady-like' as if it was of most importance. Aunt Alexandra's 'vision of my (Scout's) deportment' also implied that in order to be a housewife and cook, Scout had to learn proper Southern etiquette early, to likely ensure that it was instilled into her as second nature later in life. The metaphor 'ray of sunshine' was also used in the quote to emphasize the gender expectations set upon Scout that said her job was to make happy, and not be a burden on, the men in her life. This helped enforce the gender expectations of that time that strongly suggested that women's lives were created to please men and care for them, as well as bring up a family. Because of this evidence, it can be concluded that Lee's historical and personal context of gender roles directly influenced the characterisation and representation of women, specifically Aunt Alexandra.

The historical context of the Great Depression directly contributed to the characterisation and representation of the Cunningham family in 'To Kill A Mockingbird.' Their socioeconomic status is learned within the novel, highlighting just how hard key events like the Great Depression hit the family. In the novel, Atticus tells Scout that "He (Walter Cunningham) had probably never seen three quarters together at the same time." Additionally, he states that "The Cunninghams are country folks, farmers, and the crash hit them the hardest." The crash refers to the economic crash of stock markets in 1929, which impacted millions worldwide. Of all occupations, farming was hit the hardest. It was the only way people like the Cunninghams could live, but during the Great Depression, people weren't prone to spending money as carelessly, especially on agricultural products. Because of this, the income for farmers was greatly reduced, and they had to choose between keeping up their farms or desperately trying their hand at something else. Colloquial language was utilised in the quote to show how common being poor was for that time and how roughly some were affected by it. Atticus' factual, if slightly pitying tone suggests that being poor and going without has become a common thing for the Cunninghams, and it allows them to reset their priorities in terms of income and what is important, yet they never give up their pride by taking charity. Therefore, the Cunninghams' representation and characterisation were greatly impacted by historical context such as the Great Depression.

The personal and historical context of Harper Lee contributed to the characterisation and representation of many significant characters within 'To Kill A Mockingbird.' Her personal context reflected that of Atticus Finch and how his personal values were in opposition to the Jim Crow laws of that time. Aunt Alexandra was also influenced by Lee's personal and historical context, highlighting the rigid gender roles enforced upon women of that time. Additionally, the Great Depression directly affected the representation of the Cunninghams and their economic status. Therefore, it can be seen that Lee's personal and historical context significantly affected the characters and events within her novel.