True Courage

“Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.” This famous quote from C.S. Lewis implies that without courage, all other virtues mean nothing. In Harper Lee’s historic fiction novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, this definition of courage is demonstrated. A main character, Atticus, father and lawyer in the city of Maycomb, Alabama, has taken a court case where a black man has been wrongly accused of raping a white woman. Atticus has taken the case to show his children that persistence is required to triumph in an act of courage. Lee uses the circumstances of Dolphus Raymond, Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose, and Atticus Finch to demonstrate her message of courage. *To Kill a Mockingbird* tells a theme of how true courage takes complete devotion and selflessness.

Harper Lee’s most obscure image of courage was Mr. Dolphus Raymond. To the public, Mr. Raymond was “in the clutches of whiskey” (268). Raymond’s outward appearance was a white alcoholic who married a black woman because he was not in his right mind. However, as the story progresses, the reader learns that he is not a drunk but a fraud. He pretends to be a drunk to protect his family from prejudice. Following the revilement of Mr. Raymond’s true character, he states: “I try to give ‘em a reason, you see. It helps folks if they can latch onto a reason.” (268). Although Mr. Raymond’s act is selfless, he is not committed to taking the stress of fully standing up to the social problem of prejudice that has a horribly foul effect on his children. He simply lies to the public so they will leave him and his family alone. Even if Dolphus Raymond is not a perfect example of courage, Harper Lee has shown that selflessness creates an influence on those around us.

As seen in Harper Lee’s novel, courage takes more than one form. Another from is seen in Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose, a long term morphine addict who succeeded in getting clean of her addiction before her very painful death. It would have been much less painful to stay a slave to the painkiller. However, Mrs. Dubose believed that life only had meaning if one left “beholden to nothing and nobody” (148). Mrs. Dubose’s belief shows she wanted to die in charge of her own life even though it would be excruciatingly painful. She felt this was the right path to a meaningful life. Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose is the great example of devotion; however she lacks selflessness outside of physical selflessness. Her brave ending had little effect on any other person but herself. Even though Mrs. Dubose did not help anyone else, Harper Lee’s example shows that complete devotion in a painful situation is an example of courage.

Throughout the entire novel, Atticus shows consistent courage. Because of this courage, his social dilemma is strongly revealed and his goal of being a good example to his children is obtained. The greatest example of Atticus Finch’s bravery was when he did not fail to accept and legitimately fight for Tom Robinson’s case. Since Tom Robinson was a black man living Alabama during the 1930s and was accused of raping a white woman, the generally racist city did not want Robinson’s innocence proven. The city’s population seemed willing to do anything to keep it from being so, even trying to murder Robinson before the trial. Yet Atticus states while speaking to one of his children: “if I didn’t hold up my head in town…I couldn’t even tell you or Jem not to do something again.” (100). Atticus is explaining to his young daughter that if he does not take the case, he could not respect himself enough to parent his children. After Atticus’s intentions are known to the community, many members of the Finch family decide that they do not agree with Atticus and go against him just as Maycomb does. Atticus’s intentions are not even slightly swayed by their opinion. This defines Atticus by showing his devotion to his morals. Even after dishonor from friends and family, Atticus did what he felt was right because he would not be able to live with his decision if he had not. By the end of the novel, Atticus Finch is seen as a perfect image of courage. He was completely devoted to his cause, and did not hide from the toughest dilemmas as Mr. Raymond did, and his cause had an impact on people around him such as his children, unlike Mrs. Dubose.

True courage is putting what is always right before what is always wanted. Harper Lee creates several scenarios of courage using the unlikely characters of Mr. Dolphus Raymond, the crude last days of Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose, and the selfless father Atticus Finch. Closely analyzing the affect that Atticus’s courage and Mrs. Dubose’s courage had on Atticus’s children, it is seen that courage is what breaks the social curses of ignorance and prejudice. If no person ever went against what is thought to be normal, knowledge would never be obtained. Even though going against society is always more laborious than following, it is the only way to progress humanity.