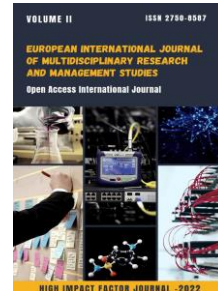


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### MOCKINGBIRD SURVIVES

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#### ABOUT ARTICLE

**Key words:** Gothic, racism, equality, freedom, values, symbolism, criticism.

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**Abstract:** "To Kill a Mockingbird" is more than a story of a colored man, wrongly accused of having taken advantage of a white woman; it is the truth about the political and cultural landscape of the US in the early twentieth century, a description of an ideal American citizen in the character of Atticus, and a book of morality and thorough reflection. The article illustrates the reasons why this book should continue to be taught at schools.

#### INTRODUCTION

The book is written in Southern Gothic genre which illustrates "racial injustice and the destruction of innocence"<sup>1</sup>. "To Kill a Mockingbird" was published in 1960 while Civil rights movement was going on in the US when racism was at its peak. The Author, Harper Lee frames the fictional town, Maycomb in Alabama to give a general view of diverse and unequal community and living standards in the South of the US in her book. The reason why she chooses to illustrate the South is that slaveholding lasted longer in its extreme degree in the South than it did in the North.

Literature review. For the whites in the South it looked impossible to accept the undeniable truth that the African-Americans who had once been their slaves (property) were actually were free people with natural rights (the right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness). The place is described as it follows: "People moved slowly then. They ambled across the square, shuffled in and out of the stores around it, took their time about everything. A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people: Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself"<sup>2</sup> (pp. 11).

The plot is narrated by a six-year-old child, Scout who reaches the third grade at school as the novel goes on and that gives an innocent tone to the language of the book. "They live on the main residential street in town- Atticus, Jem and Scout, plus Calpurnia their cook" 2 (pp.9) Atticus as a role model for his children gives them moral lessons throughout the book. It is significant to mention that he has conversations with children on serious topics and wants them to be global citizens. Especially, his teachings about judgement is noteworthy: "Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. 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"2 (pp.45). Thereby, his little Scout learns to embrace diversity and equity. Furthermore, he makes his son Jem visit Mrs. Dubose and read for her every day for a month for having destroyed all of her Camellia bushes.

There is a general description of multiplicity of existing classes in Maycomb Country with different types of families with variety of values inside. Upper class Whites which are depicted with the characters, Miss Maudie, Atticus Finch, Mrs. Dubose, Nathaniel Radley, and so on are not that wealthy but they are not as highly affected as the lower class whites by The Economic Turmoil in the early twentieth century.

Scout's teacher Miss Caroline Fisher has trouble to understand different types of folks in the South because she is from the North. Scout describes her class: "most of the first grade had failed it last year"2(p. 22). Cunninghams, who do not take anything from anything for they have to pay back, Ewells who come to school first day every year and then leave are described as lower class whites and they live in extreme poverty. Atticus simply defines them as the folks who cannot be forced into a new environment2(pp. 22).

## DISCUSSION

The lowest class was colored folks, African-Americans who did not get education at Public schools and all gathered to pray in an "ancient paint-peeled frame building, the only church in Maycomb for Colored folks with a steeple and bell, called First Purchase because it was paid for from the first earnings of freed slaves. Negroes worshiped in it on Sundays and white men gambled in it on weekdays"2(pp. 61). The children of parents from different races, mulattos, are even more oppressed in Maycomb country. They are not accepted by neither Whites nor the colored community. Jem defines them to Scout as it follows: "They don't belong anywhere. Colored folks won't have 'em because they're half white; white folks won't have 'em cause they're colored, so they're just in-betweens, don't belong anywhere". However, nearly the same description is given for poor Ewells, for example Mayella Ewell who slanders Tom

Robinson cannot find a friend in her community because “white people wouldn't have anything to do with her because she lived among pigs; Negroes wouldn't have anything to do with her because she was white”<sup>2</sup>(pp. 286).

Racism is at its peak in Maycomb which obliterates the idea “Black lives matter”. When children Jem and Scout with their friend Dill visits the Radley place late at night, Mr. Radley shoots from a gun but it does not fortunately hurt children. Nevertheless, people guess, “someone shot a negro” and neither investigate the murder, nor jail the murderer the next day. It becomes impossible for Helen Robinson to find a job to feed her family after her husband has been wrongly accused<sup>2</sup>(pp. 183) Moreover, Tom gets seventeen bullet holes when he is trying to escape from the camp while one shot is enough for a person to stop<sup>2</sup>(pp.349). In a stark contrast, Mr. Radley's son never gets sentenced for his wrongdoings, the Court of Maycomb satisfies with the promise of him about keeping his son at home locked. In the end, Boo Radley kills Mr. Ewells to protect the children of Atticus but Sheriff simply neglects it. Would he do the same if a colored man killed a white man? On top of that, Atticus loses his status and good-name in his community because of defending Tom Robinson and his children are bullied for being the children of “nigger-lover”. Atticus does not give up at all costs and tells his children ‘As you grow older, you'll see white man cheat black man everyday of your life, but let me tell you whenever a white man does that to a black man, no matter who he is, how rich he is, or how fine a family he come from. That white man is trash’<sup>2</sup>(pp. 328).

In “To Kill a Mockingbird” Harper Lee also focuses on issues related to the religion in the US in the early 1900s. Miss Maudie describes baptistery “primitive” and remembers pious people coming out of the woods on Saturday and calling her quite sinful because “she spends too much time in God's outdoors and not enough time inside the house reading the Bible”. Miss Maudie defines them the foot-washers who “believe anything that's pleasure is a sin”. That religious group thinks “women are sin by definition”. Harper Lee reveals her ideas with the character Miss Maudie and shows conservative and fanatic population as the reason of the destruction in the society: “There are just some kind of men who who're so busy worrying about the next world they've never learned to live in this one, and you can look down the street and see the results.”<sup>2</sup>(p. 67-68) The writer wants to comment on this topic because in the early twentieth in addition to racism, the religious intolerance was widespread in the United States. “A number of conservative Americans tried to rekindle old values. They did not like the influence of cinema and jazz, or the new way in which women dressed and behaved. There was a growing divide between the modern city culture and the more traditional rural areas. The

Fundamentalists believed strongly and literally in everything the Bible said, and in the Bible Belt they condemned any other beliefs”<sup>3</sup>.

While Atticus does not force his daughter to meet the societal expectations of their era, Aunt Alexandra challenges Scout to be a proper Lady of their time. Atticus does not interfere with Mrs. Alexandra though. Despite the fact that feminine way of life seems quite strange and difficult to adopt at to Scout, she eventually says “if Aunty could be a lady at a time like this, so could I”<sup>2</sup>(pp. 352). Aunt Alexandra throws parties for women and makes Scout join them. Women of upper-class white families are depicted in fancy dresses with full make-up and they gather together quite often to gossip, show off, and spend their lives doing nothing for their community except bearing children and entertaining their men. Scout is being challenged to alter herself to become like them eventually.

It is also noteworthy to highlight symbolism in the novel. Atticus has a nearly blind left eye and wears glasses and stares at things with his right eye when he needs an accurate vision. Harper Lee seems to refer to his righteousness, virtue and morality through this symbolism<sup>4</sup>.

“To Kill a Mockingbird” which is known as “Southern Gothic Bible”, translated into some 40 languages, sold more than 40 million copies worldwide and awarded with “Pulitzer Prize”<sup>5</sup>, has constantly been under criticism and even banned from some schools. One of the reasons is that its plot involves a rape trial; even though it was solely blame on a colored man, it actually refers to seduction<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, it repeats an insulting “Negro” word 48 times which is highlighted “N-problem” and teachers usually have trouble teaching the book to students<sup>7</sup>. Last but not least, there are number of cases depicting child abuse in the novel, for example drunkard Bob Ewell abuses his children and Scout is also treated unfairly by Calpurnia and her aunt Alexandra<sup>8</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

In light of the facts given above, "To Kill a Mockingbird" has a significant role in world literature. It is not only a work of art but also a book in which people can learn about history, morality, psychology, and humanity. The problems found in "To Kill a Mockingbird" seem more like an undeniable reality of the period of time framed in the story. There is a proverb, "History repeats itself," which means being aware of the truth in the past can be of great benefit to a young generation of global citizens.

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