

Review of Harper Lee's book '*To kill a Mockingbird*'

One day I went to the Eastridge Mall in San Jose and browsed the bookstore Barnes and Noble and picked up a bound edition of Harper Lee's book , *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I liked the printer's layout with the much appreciated large type. On the first read, the book appeared to be a collection the minutia of minor events that had no relation to each other, neither in time nor space. I read the short introductory statement by the author. Mrs. Lee insists that it doesn't need a preamble. This book has 31 chapters, one for each day of the month. I had no idea on how to navigate this book or what the author's point in writing this book. Yet it is one of the classic treasures of the literary world.

I have seen both the stage and screen versions of the story. The motivation for reading the book is out of curiosity and for political, historical and for propaganda purposes.

The book has this curious title: *To kill a Mockingbird*. It implies that something or someone got killed or there was a conspiracy to kill. Reading the book, it certainly not about a bird killing. The book title is a figure of speech. The mockingbird in this story is Mr. Bob Ewell who is father of the "rape victim", Mayella Ewell. He is one that Jem Finch, son of Atticus Finch, is suspected of murdering. Mockingbird is mentioned in chapter 30, after the killing of Ewell. The bird species is known to emulate the sounds of other creatures. Why Mr. Lee chose the mockingbird theme is unknown. I thought originally that the mockingbird would be the Tom Robertson character who was persecuted for the rape of Mr. Ewell's daughter. Tom being a black man in Maycomb, Alabama would receive a death sentence by the court system at that time in history, because of the prejudice of apartheid. He would have died by electrocution for the rape of a white woman. He was sent to a prison camp where the guards shot him with 17 rounds. He didn't survive.

The beginning chapters of the book describe the goings on of kids playing round. There is talk of a strange haunted house (Radley house) that is between the school and where Jem and Scout Finch (Jean Louise Finch) live, the son and daughter siblings of Atticus Finch who is an attorney. Then there is this old lady's Miss Maudie Atkinson's house, where the kids disturb frequently. Dill Harris is a friend that accompanies Jem and Scout. Scout Finch is a tomboy.

The elementary school and teacher are described and Miss Caroline Fisher is the teacher which has a classroom full of first grade repeaters, only one pupil can read and only because of outside help from attorney Finch whom taught her. Miss Fisher didn't like Finch helping the pupil, as if she wanted a classroom full of illiterates or to have control of the lives of the students.

A description is given about the history of the Finch name and how Atticus became a lawyer. In the knothole of a tree near the Radley house, Scout discovers a small cedar case with treasures a kid could love.

In the middle chapters of the story, we learn about the rape of white girl Mayella Ewell and the accusation against black man Tom Robertson. At school Jem and Scout are being harassed because their father attorney is defending the negro, Tom Robertson. Tom ends up getting convicted on false testimony and rigged jury. The book mentions Mrs. Dubose who likes to throw insults every time Finch kids pass the house. Jem gets angry and vandalizes some bonsai. At Atticus' insistence Jem must apologize in spite of the fact Mrs. Dubose is very rude.

In the last chapters, it shows the kids are starting to grow up and Scout is becoming more of a lady. On Halloween she is in the costume of a ham and it is dark and Mr. Ewell attempts to stab her with a knife and Jem is with her. Jem breaks his arm and Boo Radley intervenes and Mr. Ewell, whether by accident or intent gets killed. It is not clear if it was intentional or if so, who would be the perpetrator, Boo or Jem. Scout says, "It's like killing a mockingbird".

This novel, is a series of stories. The stories are not related to each other. If there is a story it is how people react to others in different situations consistent with their beliefs and prejudices.