

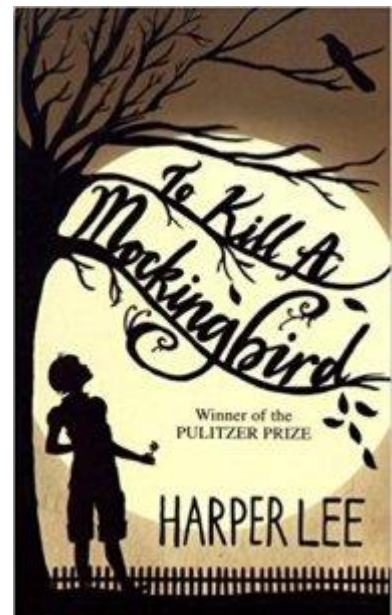


To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee: A Review

Harper Lee's first and until its recent sequel, only book, became a world-wide classic and bestseller, so popular, that it has never gone out of print, after it was published in 1960. The plot of the book relates to the complex issues of prejudices and racism, in of the fictional town of Maycomb, in the southern state of Alabama, around the time of the Great Depression, as seen through the eyes of an ordinary little girl named Jean Louis "Scout" Finch, which struck all the right chords in our hearts.

Readers should note that it was a bleak period in the history of America, just after two of its bloodiest wars, the Civil War and World War I. The former of led to the emancipation of slaves; however even though the southern states (the Confederates) lost, their mindset towards "coloured" people took a long time to change. This led to a period of "American Apartheid" (the specious attitude being "we are equal, but separate") entailing separate schools, hospitals, churches and houses for the blacks as well as unwarranted suspicion, disgust and hatred from their white neighbours, which is clearly reflected in this book.

There are two main plotlines throughout the book - the first is about a recluse called Arthur "Boo" Radley, who hasn't shown his face outside his old creepy family house for more than 30 years, and thus is a subject of curiosity marked by over-imaginative, improbable theories among the children. He as well as his family are regarded with fear and contempt, by the other citizens of Maycomb, who all love to gossip about their



"abnormal" behaviour (consisting of keeping mostly to themselves, not going to church or joining any social circle, etc.) among other things, as in any small town. The other plotline, decidedly more serious, is about the defense of a young black man named Tom Robinson, accused of raping by a white girl, by Scout's father - Atticus Finch, who is his attorney. In this case too, the white citizens try to condemn Mr. Finch into abstaining from defending a "negro". The story is narrated by Jean Louise in the future, of her colourful experiences from age 5 years till 9, which made a great impact on her views and opinions, later on. She lived with her father and elder brother Jeremy "Jem" Finch, and was taken care of by their black housekeeper called Calpurnia "Cal", after her mother's death. Scout is very smart and brave, but quick to anger, and this quality lands her more often than not into trouble. Her brother Jem loves and cares for her and tries to protect her from the harsh realities of life, despite acting superior with all the solemnity of an older sibling. Their father, seemingly distant at times, teaches them to think for themselves, to not judge others based on gossip and rumours, and the most important lesson of all to stand by the innocent, no matter what. The titular phrase of the book as told by him - "Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird" is a metaphor meaning that it is a sin to destroy the ones who mean no harm to us and who improve our lives by being in them. Varied characters like Miss Maudie, Calpurnia, Mr. Raymond, etc. all influence Scout's attitude in their own way; but the main architect is her father whom she looks up to. Also seen is a notable rich characterization, by the author, in the portrayal of Judge Taylor, Dill Harris, Mrs. Dubose, Aunt Alexandra, adding their own unique flair to the narrative.

There are sarcastic undertones sprinkled with anecdotes of then famous events like mentions of Ku Klux Klan, the start of Hitler's oppression against Jews and his rise to power, missionary Grimes J. Everett trying to convert the African Tribe Mrunas into Christianity, etc. which add a touch of black comedy as well as lend an authentic note to the story. This book reflects the horror of living as a non-white person in a country, which previously enslaved him, due to desperation for survival, the hypocritical attitude of people who preach equality but also think it's perfectly alright to buy & sell particular humans as goods, the innate goodness in a person's heart irrespective of the atrocities committed on him and also a hope that things may look dismal now but slowly and surely even the rigid conservative opinions which were passed on for generations can

change, if a single person takes a stand. In conclusion this book is definitely worth reading for kids and adults alike, coming across as one of those rare ones whose story remains with you long after you have finished the book.

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