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“To Kill a Mockingbird”: A production analysis

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TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD: A PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this academic thesis is to study and analyze a production of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (novel by Harper Lee, stage adaptation by Christopher Sergel). This study includes pre-production research that explores the similarities and differences in plot, timeline, characters, and themes between the novel and play, as well as the historical significance and contemporary relevance of the story. Notes and evaluation from the production at the University of Texas Pan American are included.

DEDICATION

I dedicate the completion of this thesis to my mother, Mattie Sue Edmonson and to the memory of my father, Jack Willis Everett Edmonson.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Marian Monta, chair of my thesis committee, for her mentoring, advice, encouragement, and willingness to share her depth of knowledge about the theatre.

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In addition, I would like to thank Gayle Sergel and Linda Habjan of Dramatic Publishing Company and Wendy Norris and John Calhoun of the New York Public Library for aiding in the research of this thesis.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: PRE-PRODUCTION RESEARCH

The purpose of this thesis is to prepare myself fully to direct the play *To Kill a Mockingbird* at the University of Texas Pan American.

Within Chapter I, I have compared and analyzed two texts: *To Kill a Mockingbird,* the novel, and *To Kill a Mockingbird,* the stage play. The first text is the landmark, Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Harper Lee, originally published in 1960. The second text is the powerful, poignant, critically-acclaimed stage play by Christopher Sergel, adapted in 1970. In regards to analysis, both texts have been broken into parts to examine their nature and investigate their key elements. Both texts have been studied to determine similarities and differences, as well as to determine the authors' reasoning for various inclusions and exclusions. A comparative analysis of the two texts of *To Kill a Mockingbird* should prove to be worthwhile and useful because, according to my research, it has *never* been done before. In consideration that I am working toward a Master of Arts degree in Theatre, it is important for me to focus on the two texts of *To Kill a Mockingbird*: novel and play. I am particularly interested in looking at the theatrical elements and dramatic construction of the pieces. As a director and writer, it is important that I understand its transformation from one form to another.

Film is not my particular area of expertise or interest in this study. However, in light of the film's success and its own historical importance, it may be necessary to make reference to the film's writing and its other technical aspects from time to time.

Chapter I also serves to further enhance my own understanding of the story's history, its author, and any historical and contemporary relevance the piece may have.

With these research purposes in mind, this chapter will help me understand the piece I have proposed to direct. The findings of this research will most likely affect my vision of the production, and the way in which I intend to direct it. It is important to me that I understand the historical and political atmosphere of 1935 Alabama. Finding meanings and uncovering the themes of this story will most likely prove to be very beneficial as I lead the large cast and crew through to the fruition of my vision.

Unfortunately, while doing this research for *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I discovered that Christopher Sergel, adaptor of the play, had passed away in May of 1993. Christopher Sergel's family founded the renowned Dramatic Publishing Company, in Woodstock, Illinois. He also adapted such plays as *The Outsiders*, *Black Elk Speaks*, *Cheaper by the Dozen, Fame, and Meet Me in St. Louis.*

I was, however, able to contact Christopher Sergel's wife, Gayle Sergel, who still works at the Dramatic Publishing Company. She was married to Chris for many years, but after he had adapted the play. She provided me with the following information:

> "Chris Sergel used only the novel as his source material. He had one meeting with Harper Lee to discuss his approach to the play. Upon completion of the script, he presented it to her for approval, which she gave with no reservations."

Ms. Sergel also went on to say, "…the play has had hundreds of professional and amateur productions with wonderful reviews and great box office results."

The first production of the play *To Kill a Mockingbird* apparently took place in 1971, a year after its publication. It was a production at Midland Community Theatre (MCT) in

Midland, Texas. This is the earliest evidence of a production I can find. A copy of the program for this show is located in the Billy Rose Theatre Division of the New York Public Library.

Evidently, there has never been a Broadway production of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. There is no mention of it or record on file in the Billy Rose Theatre Division or the Theatre on Film and Tape Archive at the New York Public Library, the Internet Broadway Database, or the Lortel Archives.

An Off-Off Broadway production took place in 2002 or 2003 at The Sargent Theater at American Theater of Actors on 54th Street (www.spoontheater.org). A significant production took place at The Paper Mill Playhouse in Millburn, New Jersey in 1990. It was this production which reworked the original Sergel script to create a revised edition, featuring the character of Miss Maudie as the Narrator, instead of Jean Louise Finch. This revised edition is also available at the Dramatic Publishing Company.

There have also been many other successful productions of *To Kill a Mockingbird* at the following theatres:

The Seattle Children's Theatre, Seattle, Washington, 1980 - 1981

The Mermaid Theatre, London, England, late 1980's

Barter Theatre, Abingdon, Virginia, 2002

Virginia Stage Company, 2005

Alley Theatre, Houston, Texas, 2007

Intiman Theatre, Seattle, Washington, 2007

Hartford Stage Company, Hartford, Connecticut, 2009.

Of course one of the most famous is the production which takes place annually in Harper Lee's hometown of Monroeville, Alabama. The show is held in and around the town's

courthouse and has been a yearly tradition since 1990. The first act is staged outdoors, amid the three houses. The second act takes place in the courtroom, where 12 audience members – always white men, for authenticity – are seated as jurors. It runs for about four weeks each spring and draws a sellout crowd of 250 every night. The characters are always portrayed by local amateur actors from the community. Harper Lee's friend, Reverend Butts, says she is "not entirely enchanted" with the tradition – she has never attended a performance – but she tolerates it (Wilson 82).

As the director, it is important for me to consider the two different versions of the stage play for *To Kill a Mockingbird.* Christopher Sergel's first adaptation was published in 1970. When the show was revived in 1990, he wrote a second version of the script in collaboration with two celebrated directors – Chris Hayes, director and producer of the show during its run in England, and Robert Johanson – director of the Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey. Below, I have included Christopher Sergel's acknowledgments from his latest version.

> "This play, of course, begins and ends with Harper Lee's extraordinary Pulitzer Prize book.
>
> Along the way, there has been important help with the play, initially with the editor Maurice Crain and later with two directors.
>
> The first of these is Chris Hayes who produced and directed a production that toured regional theatres in the United Kingdom for nine months and then played seven months at the Mermaid Theatre in London.
>
> Then director Robert Johanson of the Paper Mill Playhouse gave this playwright some creative suggestions that helped shape the final form of the play."
>
> --Christopher Sergel

The 1990 text is virtually identical to the previous script, the main difference however being that the character of Miss Maudie acts as the Narrator of the story. (An older Jean Louise Finch, remembering the events of her childhood, acts as the Narrator in the 1970 version.)

Some of the lines were slightly changed, or given to a different character. Some sequences of events and entrances and exits were also slightly rearranged.

For example, when Reverend Sykes arrives to collect money for Helen Robinson, Tom Robinson's wife, a small church choir is present, singing along behind him, in the newer version.

An example of line changes is found in the two contrasting passages below and the outright use of the word "raping." In the 1990 version, when Scout asks Calpurnia what Tom Robinson did, Calpurnia responds in the following way.

CALPURNIA. You mean what do they *say* he did? Old Mr. Bob Ewell accused Tom of raping his girl and had him arrested and put in jail.

SCOUT (*scornfully*). But everyone in Maycomb know what kind of folks the Ewells are.

(*JEM has come back on, hearing the last of this*.)

JEM. What's the singing?

SCOUT. Jem – what's rape?

JEM (*after short consideration*). Ask Cal.

CALPURNIA (*even shorter consideration*). I think you better ask your father. (*Going*.) We'll be eating soon.

SCOUT. I'd just like to know--

(*SCOUT stops as DILL is entering*.)

In the original 1970 stage version, the lines read this way:

CALPURNIA. You mean, what do they say he did? Old Mr. Bob Ewell accused Tom of attackin' his girl and had him put in jail.

SCOUT (scornfully). But everyone in Maycomb knows the Ewells. You'd think folks would be glad to hire Tom's wife.

CALPURNIA (briefly). That's what you think.

SCOUT (not satisfied). What does it mean – he attacked her?

CALPURNIA. You'll have to ask Mr. Finch about that. You hungry?

SCOUT (lighting up as she sees someone coming). I have to see Atticus. There's Dill!

(CALPURNIA re-enters house.)

This change is script perhaps reflects a change in society. Mr. Sergel undoubtedly took into consideration his writing for a more subtle and conservative audience in 1970, as opposed to a more forthright -- and perhaps more de-sensitized -- audience of 1990 and beyond.

This information furthers the idea that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is still a viable, relevant piece of literature whether read or presented as a stage production. Fifty years after the novel was first published, it still has something important and illuminating to say about our society and human relations.

The play *To Kill a Mockingbird* is divided into two acts. However, the acts are not divided into specific scenes. Therefore, for the purpose of this research and my direction of the show, I have divided the acts into the following scenes; listed alongside are their coinciding chapters from the novel.

Act One, Scene 1 (1.1) *Introductions*, pages 5 – 13; novel Chapters 1 – 6

1.2 *Touch the House*, pages 13 – 21; novel Chapters 7, 8, 9

1.3 *Mad Dog*, pages 21 – 27; novel Chapter 10

1.4 *Mrs. Dubose*, pages 27 – 37; novel Chapter 11

1.5 *Tom's Jail Cell*, pages 37 – 42; novel Chapter 15

1.6 *The Trial Begins*, pages 42 – 46; novel Chapter 16

Act Two, Scene 1 (2.1) *Bob Ewell*, pages 47 – 50; novel Chapter 17

2.2 *Mayella Ewell*, pages 50 – 55; novel Chapter 18

2.3 *Tom Robinson*, pages 55 – 63; novel Chapter 19

2.4 *Closing Remarks*, pages 63 – 67; novel Chapter 20

2.5 *The Verdict*, pages 67 – 71; novel Chapter 21

2.6 *After-effects*, pages 71 – 75; novel Chapters 22, 23

2.7 *Big Changes*, pages 75 – 78; novel Chapters 24, 25, 27

2.8 *Attacked and Saved*, 78 – 85; novel Chapters 28, 29, 30, 31

To review, Kerry Madden, in her book *Up Close: Harper Lee*, gives an apt summation of the plot:

> "Told through the eyes of a child, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is the story of Scout Finch growing up in the fictionalized town of Maycomb in the 1930s, during the Great Depression. Scout's brother, Jem, is her constant companion, and their best friend is Dill, a boy who lives next door with his aunt Stephanie during the summers. Scout, Jem, and Dill play together, acting out dramas and games from books they've read until they finally turn their attention to a ramshackle house where a recluse, or "haint," named Boo Radley lives. Neighborhood legend says that he is more than six feet tall, eats raw squirrels, and roams the streets at night.
>
> Atticus Finch, the father of Scout and Jem, is one of the most beloved characters in American literature. He is a lawyer, assigned to defend a black man, Tom Robinson,

who is accused of raping a white woman, Mayella Ewell. Scout and Jem endure vicious taunts and ridicule from both peers and adults in the town because of their father's decision to take the case and defend his client. The evidence is overwhelming that Tom Robinson could not have committed the crime, but the all-white jury finds him guilty and sentences him to death. During this period in the South, no jury would ever believe the word of a black man over a white man or woman. Although Atticus intends to appeal the verdict, Tom attempts to run away and is shot and killed by a prison guard. Mayella Ewell's father, Bob Ewell, remains so outraged by Atticus' belief in Tom Robinson's word over his own that he seeks revenge and sets out to kill Scout and Jem one night after the trial. It is Boo Radley, the boogeyman, who comes to their rescue" (Madden 24-25).

The action from the novel is essentially structured in an identical fashion within the stage version. However, there are a number of pronounced events the novel elaborates upon that the stage version does not. They are: Scout's classroom scenes and her relationships with her fellow classmates and teachers; Maycomb's unusual snowfall and Miss Maudie's house catching fire (Chapter 8); Scout and Jem visiting Calpurnia's church (Chapter 12); spending every Christmas with Atticus' family and, in particular, Scout's relationships with Uncle Jack and Aunt Alexandra; after Tom Robinson's trial, the African American community showers Atticus with food gifts; Miss Rachel is depicted as an alcoholic; the argument for women's rights (Chapter 23); one man on the jury, a Cunningham relative, wanted to acquit Tom; a Hitler and Jew discussion in the classroom (Chapter 26); and Atticus' appointment to the state legislature (Chapter 26).

The main reason for the omission of these events is the issue of time on the stage. Most audiences typically only sit through two hours of performance. If these events were written into

the stage version, the play would perhaps become too tiresome for the audience because of the length or too cumbersome because of the details.

There are some major characters in the novel that are not present in the play. The following are the four most prominent:

Aunt Alexandra – Atticus' sister who comes to live with him to help raise Scout and Jem because it is "What Is Best For The Family" (pg. 147) and to give Scout "some feminine influence" (pg. 145). She is married to Henry Hancock and they have a son named Francis, whom Scout fights with during a Christmas gathering. Aunt Alexandra is a good cook and a fanatic about the proper attire, manners, and socialization for Scout. She is generally judgemental and disapproving. She is very concerned with the Finch legacy of heritage and breeding and has hopes of ousting Calpurnia from the household. She frequently attends and hosts afternoon teas for the ladies in her missionary circle. Many of Aunt Alexandra's lines are given to Calpurnia in the stage version.

Uncle Jack -- Atticus' younger brother, John Hale Finch. He is a little strange, has a long-time crush on Miss Maudie, and is well-liked by Scout and Jem. He, too, is concerned about Scout's upbringing…he urges her to stop cussing and fighting. He is a doctor of medicine, well-versed with guns and rifles, and he owns a cat named Rose Aylmer. Every year, he spends a week at Christmas with Atticus, Scout, and Jem. He is only briefly mentioned in the play on page 19, as the one who will have to teach Scout and Jem how to shoot their air rifles.

Cecil Jacobs – Scout's nemesis at school. Scout fights him because he announces in the schoolyard that "Scout Finch's daddy defended niggers" (page 85). Cecil's exact lines are used in the play, but are only noted in Scene One as a Boy's Voice, calling from offstage. He is also the character in the novel who jumps out of the darkness and scares Scout and Jem while they are

on their way to the Halloween pageant; and they think it is he who is following them on their scary way home.

Raymond Dolphus – a white man who "has a colored woman and all sorts of mixed chillun" (page 183). He is sympathetic to each man's plight, and prefers to socialize with the black community. He comes from a real old family and owns one side of the river bank. He is constantly drinking Coca-Cola from two straws out of a bottle in a paper bag, and most townspeople assume it is whiskey he is drinking. When Dill leaves the trial crying, it is Raymond who offers him a sip to settle his nerves. He delivers a poignant line in the novel, "Cry about the hell white people give colored folks, without even stopping to think that they're people, too." Raymond Dolphus is never seen nor referenced in the stage version.

Besides these four characters, it is notable to mention that Helen Robinson, Tom's wife, is given much more attention in the novel. For example, there is a dramatic scene when, after Tom is shot and killed in prison, Atticus and Calpurnia go to her house to tell Helen what has just happened: she drops to her knees in sorrow and disbelief. Conversely in the play, Helen comes running to the Finch house to tell Atticus the same news.

In addition, the part of Walter Cunningham, Jr. is given more attention in the novel. He is Scout's classmate and even though they have a scuffle, they latter become friendly. In both the play and the novel, however, Scout refers to her friendship with Walter, Jr. to Mr. Cunningham and the maddening crowd in the jail scene. It is this reference that helps detour Mr. Cunningham and the rest of the crowd from busting into the jail at that moment and lynching Tom Robinson.

Also, the character of Link Deas is more pronounced in the novel. He is bitterly opposed to Bob Ewell and very outspoken against him. Finally, Dr. Reynolds (the family physician) also has more of a presence in the novel.

Additional characters that are mentioned / developed in the novel but not in the play are: Miss Gates, Miss Caroline Fisher, Miss Blount (all teachers); Burris Ewell (Bob's son); Zeebo and Lula (Calpurnia's church friends), Cousin Lily Brooke, Cousin Ike, Crazy Cousin Joshua (an author who was rumored to have tried to shoot the University president but the gun blew up in his hand); Uncle Jimmy; Mrs. Grace Merriweather (Aunt Alexandra's close friend); Mrs. Crenshaw (the pageant seamstress); Eunice Ann Simpson, Tutti and Frutti Barber, Chuck Little, Mr. Conner, Braxton Underwood, and Sam Levy (townspeople).

I believe most of these characters and their various lines from the novel were omitted in the play for the obvious reason – time. There just simply is not enough time to bring in and develop so many characters in a two-hour stage production.

One of the main themes in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is to put yourself into another person's place, see the world as they see it, and walk around in their shoes for awhile. Many references are made to this theme throughout the novel and the play.

The first time we hear mention of this theme in the novel is in Chapter 3 when Atticus addresses Scout's day of misfortunes and disagreements at school:

> "First of all," he said, "if you can learn a simple trick, 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—"
>
> "Sir?"
>
> "—until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

The next time we hear this theme mentioned is in Chapter 7, when Jem returns, trembling, after retrieving his pants that had gotten stuck on the fence wire at the Radley place:

"Jem stayed moody and silent for a week. As Atticus had once advised me to do, I tried to climb into Jem's skin and walk around in it…"

This theme is touched upon again at the end of Chapter 11 / Part One in the novel, when the cantankerous Mrs. Dubose dies. We find out that she was so evil because she had been weaning herself off of her morphine addiction. Atticus expresses his empathy to Mrs. Dubose, despite her repeated calling him a 'nigger-lover,' in the following passages.

> "I certainly am. I do my best to love everybody…I'm hard put sometimes – baby, it's never an insult to be called what somebody thinks is a bad name. It just shows you how poor that person it, it doesn't hurt you. So don't let Mrs. Dubose get you down. She has enough troubles of her own."
>
> "…She had her own views about things, a lot different from mine, maybe…son, I told you that if you hadn't lost your head I'd have made you go read to her. I wanted you to see something about her – I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. Your rarely win, but sometimes you do. Mrs. Dubose won, all ninety-eight pounds of her. According to her views, she died beholden to nothing and nobody. She was the bravest person I knew."

Next we see this theme in Chapter 23, after Atticus is threatened by Bob Ewell. Atticus replies to Jem:

> "Jem, see if you can stand in Bob Ewell's shoes a minute. I destroyed his last shred of credibility at that trial, if he had any to begin with. The man had to have some kind of comeback, his kind always does. So if spitting in my face and threatening me saved Mayella Ewell one extra beating, that's something I'll gladly take. He had to take it out on somebody and I'd rather it be me than that houseful of children out there. You understand?"

Again in Chapter 23, after discussing the backgrounds and education of her fellow classmates and townspeople with Jem, Scout resolves: "Naw, Jem, I think there's just one kind of folks. Folks." Here, Scout has clearly realized each one is a person and at the base of each personality is common humanity.

In Chapter 31, the final chapter of the novel, Scout learns the ultimate lesson of putting yourself in someone else's shoes after the mysterious Boo Radley winds up saving her life. This lesson is echoed in the last few lines as Scout and Atticus discuss the story of *The Gray Ghost*:

> "An' they chased him 'n' never could catch him 'cause they didn't know what he looked like, an' Atticus, when they finally saw him, why he hadn't done any of those things…Atticus, he was real nice…"
>
> His hands were under my chin, pulling up the cover, tucking it around me.
>
> "Most people are, Scout, when you finally see them."

Both texts seem to be didactic in matters of truth, justice, and prejudice. The themes I have previously mentioned in Section 4 further solidify the idea that *To Kill a Mockingbird* appears to be teaching us a moral lesson.

The novel and the play may both be perceived as a protest against prejudice and racism. Scout / Jean Louise, in particular, through her first-hand experiences and her reactions to them,

awakens the reader or audience to these issues. Speaking with a child's innocence, honesty and confusion, we travel with Scout through her moral revelations. The most significant being that there are very grave ramifications to the social and racial prejudices that prevail in her own Maycomb community.

This most significant lesson is emphasized two-fold in the story: through Tom Robinson and Boo Radley. Scout witnesses Tom Robinson being accused and convicted of a crime he did not commit, and she visibly recognizes how eager the community is to convict him. Scout also comes to realize that Boo Radley is a real person, not just a mysterious source of adventure for herself and the other children. She gains sympathy for his life, even showing affection by holding his hand as she walks him back to his house in the final scene. In both cases, she has climbed into the skins of these characters and walked around in them.

Robert Butler, in his essay *The Religious Vision of To Kill a Mockingbird*, puts it this way:

> "…Scout realizes that Maycomb often sins by empowering its mad dogs and harming its mockingbirds. This perception wounds her psychically just as Jem's broken arm wounds him physically. But the novel is not centered finally in childhood disillusionment and adult despair. Rather, it provides a vision of measured Christian hope. Like Flannery O'Connor and Alice Walker, Lee is able to make important affirmations by drawing upon her region's religious traditions. *To Kill a Mockingbird* presents a vision of life that emphasizes mankind's fallen condition while carefully rejecting the nihilism of much modern literature. Indeed, the novel reaffirms the Christian concept of the Fortunate Fall. That is, man's fallen condition should not be

cause for despair, as it provides a genuine basis for hope: the experience of evil and suffering can lead to moral healing and spiritual growth" (Petry 129).

Since the character of Scout has been suggested as being very close to Harper Lee herself, one may have the tendency to believe Lee upholds similar beliefs and morals. Kerry Madden, in her book *Up Close: Harper Lee*, states:

"When Nelle was a child, church was the town's principal recreation – church picnics, church socials, and football games between the Baptists and Methodists. Even today, seventy-five churches dot Monroe County alone. Alice [Nelle's sister] is very involved in the Methodist Children's Homes in Alabama, including group homes in Dothan and Huntsville" (Madden 177).

In his book, *Mockingbird: a Portrait of Harper Lee*, Charles J. Shields describes A.C. Lee (Nelle's father) this way:

"On Sundays, Lee the public man took a few moments to be alone with his thoughts during services at the Monroeville Episcopal Methodist Church. Congregants noted that he preferred to sit in front, by himself. Later during the service, in his capacity as deacon, he would rise to lead his fellow worshippers in long improvised prayers, tapping the pew with his penknife to create a cadence for his deep, somnolent voice.

His beliefs were rather hidebound, at least in midlife, built as they were on the conviction 'that the destiny of this world in the years before us is very largely in the hands of the rather small percentage of mankind that have come to accept the Christian religion, and have recognized that in reality this is our Father's world, and that the way of life He has provided is the only way that holds any promise of endurance. And that way of life includes the acceptance of his rules and regulations for all creation, including

mankind.' Few people studying one of the most influential men in the community while he was speaking about God and obedience in such terms could have guessed correctly what kind of parent he was" (Shields 58).

In another section of Charles J. Shields' book, he quotes a speech A.C. Lee delivered to the Methodist church in 1952. It was entitled *This Is My Father's World* and it described, in A.C.'s opinion, how the church and the world intersect:

> "It is in and through the church that we study and inform ourselves about God's way for us, and fortify ourselves with the necessary faith and courage to go forth into our other relationships of life and there apply the rules and regulations God would have us recognize at all times and in all situations. If we have learned well what it is our privilege to learn in the church, it will not be so difficult to us to deal with all the problems of life, including our governmental problems, and to dispose of them as God would have us do" (Shields 121-122).

Knowing these things, we can assume Harper Lee heard such sentiment and discussions growing up. However, we cannot assume that she herself subscribed to such beliefs and took on such similar attitudes. It was more so her intent to describe folks with these belief systems, and the community they belonged to. In a letter of rebuttal on book-banning, Lee commented: "*To Kill a Mockingbird* spells out in words of seldom more than two syllables a code of honor and conduct, Christian in its ethic, that is the heritage of all Southerners" (Johnson 215). This is a defense of the story and its themes, but Lee does not come out and say that these are her specific beliefs.

There are various references to religion and church within the texts of the novel and play. For example on page 25 of the play and in Chapter 10 of the novel, we first see Calpurnia's faith

expressed when Atticus is aiming to shoot the mad dog. "Sweet Jesus, help him," she whispers. Later, in Chapter 12 of the novel, we are introduced to Calpurnia's church: First Purchase African M.E. Church in the Quarters outside of the Maycomb town limits. Scout and Jem attend Sunday morning service with her, and they are impressed about how everyone is so dressed up and by how everyone sings the hymns so beautifully, on key and in harmony, without a piano. However, they are surprised when one of the members, Lula, expresses her disdain for Calpurnia "bringin' white chillun to nigger church" and the Reverend Sykes will not let the congregation go home "till we have ten dollars" (for Helen Robinson).

Through these examples, Harper Lee may be trying to further illustrate the irony and hypocrisy that often pervades church and religious society. The main example of this idea is illustrated in the novel through the character of Aunt Alexandra, who will not tolerate any semblance of integration between cultures and races. She resists acquiring any personal knowledge or understanding of the black population in town, despite the fact that she herself constantly attempts to preach morality through disciplining Scout and leading the local women's missionary circle.

A secondary example of this idea is the conversation between Miss Maudie ("who loved everything that grew in God's earth") and Scout in Chapter Five of the novel. They discuss the reclusiveness of the Radleys:

> Miss Maudie settled her bridgework. "You know old Mr. Radley was a foot-washing Baptist—"
>
> "That's what you are, ain't it?"
>
> "My shell's not that hard, child. I'm just a Baptist."
>
> "Don't you all believe in foot-washing?"

"We do. At home in the bathtub."

"But we can't have communion with you all—"

Apparently deciding that it was easier to define primitive baptistery than closed communion, Miss Maudie said: "Foot-washers believe anything that's pleasure is a sin. Did you know some of 'em came out of the woods on Saturday and passed by this place and told me me and my flowers were going to hell?"

"Your flowers, too?"

"Yes, ma'am. They'd burn right with me. They thought I spent too much time in God's outdoors and not enough time inside the house reading the Bible."

My confidence in pulpit Gospel lessened at the vision of Miss Maudie stewing forever in various Protestant hells. True enough, she had an acid tongue in her head, and she did not go about the neighborhood doing good, as did Miss Stephanie Crawford. But while no one with a grain of sense trusted Miss Stephanie, Jem and I had considerable faith in Miss Maudie. She had never told on us, had never played cat-and-mouse with us, she was not at all in terested in our private lives. She was our friend. How so reasonable a creature could live in peril of everlasting torment was incomprehensible.

"That ain't right, Miss Maudie. You're the best lady I know."

Miss Maudie grinned. "Thank you ma'am. Thing is, foot-washers think women are a sin by definition. They take the Bible literally, you know."

"Is that why Mr. Arthur stays in the house, to keep away from women?"

"I've no idea."

"It doesn't make sense to me. Looks like if Mr. Arthur was hankerin' after heaven he'd come out on the porch at least. Atticus says God's loving folks like you love yourself—"

Miss Maudie stopped rocking, and her voice hardened. "You're too young to understand it," she said, "but sometimes the Bible in the hand of one man is worse than a whiskey bottle in the hand of—oh, of your father."

This idea of church and religious hypocrisy is at times *felt* in the play, but the idea is not elaborated upon in detail, as in the novel.

Other passages in the novel that infer morality / religion include the following.

Chapter 1: Miss Stephanie Crawford said he was so upright he took the word of God as his only law, and we believed her, because Mr. Radley's posture was ramrod straight.

"There goes the meanest man ever God blew breath into," murmured Calpurnia, and she spat meditatively into the yard.

Chapter 2: She [Calpurnia] would set me a writing task by scrawling the alphabet firmly across the top of a tablet, then copying out a chapter of the Bible beneath.

Chapter 3: "What's a Hot Steam?" asked Dill.

"Haven't you ever walked along a lonesome road at night and passed by a hot place?" Jem asked Dill. "A Hot Steam's somebody who can't get to heaven, just wallows around on lonesome roads an' if you walk through him, when you die you'll be one too, an' you'll go around at night suckin' people's breath –"

Chapter 9: Uncle Jack says to Atticus, regarding the upcoming trial, "Let this cup pass from you, eh?"

Chapter 25: I [Scout] learned more about the poor Mrunas' social life from listening to Mrs. Merriweather: they had so little sense of family that the whole tribe was one big family. A child has as many fathers as there were men in the community, as many mothers as there were women. J. Grimes Everett was doing his utmost to change this state of affairs, and desperately needed our prayers.

However, there has been a fair amount of criticism about the novel in regards to its moral implications. Jill May in her essay, "In Defense of *To Kill a Mockingbird,*" notes that when *To Kill a Mockingbird* was first published in 1960, *Booklist's* reviewer called the book "melodramatic" and noted "traces of sermonizing," but the book was recommended for library purchase, commending its "rare blend of wit and compassion" (Nicholas, Burress, Kean 476).

Robert Butler responds to criticisms this way:

> "Although early critics faulted Lee's novel for straining verisimilitude by ascribing adult thoughts to a child narrator, it is important to remember that Scout tells her story in retrospect from the point of view of an adult who is able to 'look back' on the novel's events when 'enough years had gone by' (9) to understand them" (Petry 129).

Another significant finding is that lawyers often refer to *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a source that has inspired them; a source that implores them to uphold moral principles and convictions within their profession. Lawyers also study the format and formula of the trial and Atticus' remarks. According to Jennifer J. Ator, a practicing public attorney, "Fiction is full of lawyer-heroes, some based on real people and some created in the minds of leading contemporary American authors. The quintessential lawyer-hero is Atticus Finch from *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee" (Ator 1).

Steven Lubet, another practicing attorney, wrote about the character of Atticus Finch in this 1990 article for the Michigan Law Review:

"Atticus Finch.

No real-life lawyer has done more for the self-image or public perception of the legal profession than the hero of Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. For nearly four decades, the name of Atticus Finch has been invoked to defend and inspire lawyers, to rebut lawyer jokes, and to justify (and fine-tune) the adversary system. Lawyers are greedy. What about Atticus Finch? Layers only serve the rich. Not Atticus Finch. Professionalism is a lost ideal. Remember Atticus Finch.

In the unreconstructed Maycomb, Alabama of the 1930s, Atticus was willing to risk his social standing, professional reputation, and even his physical safety in order to defend a poor, black laborer falsely accused of raping a white woman. Serving for no fee, Atticus heard the call of justice. His defense was doomed to failure by the very nature of Southern life, but Atticus nonetheless succeeded in demonstrating both the innocence of his client and the peculiar sickness of Jim Crow society. Through his deft, courtly, and persistent cross examination, Atticus made it apparent to everyone that Tom Robinson was being scapegoated for a crime that had not even occurred. He even made Tom's innocence apparent to the all-white jury, which deliberated for an unprecedented several hours even though the judgment of conviction was a foregone conclusion.

So Atticus Finch saves us by providing a moral archetype, by reflecting nobility upon us, and by having the courage to meet the standards that we set for ourselves but can seldom attain. And even though he is fictional, perhaps because he is fictional, Atticus serves as the ultimate lawyer. His potential justifies all of our failing and

imperfections. Be not too hard on lawyers, for when we are at our best we can give you an Atticus Finch" (Lubet 1339-1340).

This feeling that Harper Lee has created a literary icon for the legal profession is stated further in the Harvard Law Review:

> "In the ongoing debate over the appropriate standards for legal professionalism, critical attention has tended to focus on the age-old dialogue between those who defend the traditional position of lawyers as morally neutral agents of their clients and those who advocate a more activist role. This dialogue has expanded and developed in myriad directions, including one that stresses *empathy* as a key attribute of true professionalism. Lending support to the pro-empathy school is a sector of the law and literature movement that focuses on narrative literature as a means of improving the moral character of the law and the lives of lawyers. Narrative criticism of the law is predicated on the capacity of narrative to reveal voices that would otherwise by suppressed or ignored under the supposed impartiality of the law and to elicit feelings of empathy for those voices. This Note concentrates on the role of empathy by considering Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a well-known novel that has influenced many lawyers' professional ideals through its ability to arouse empathy.
>
> This Note contends that the book merits critical reexamination, not because it fails to live up to the empathetic ideal that its canonical status suggests, but because its treatment of empathy, particularly in relation to the opposing principle of professional *detachment* is more complex than it may initially seem. The narrative's mediation between empathy and detachment is shaped by the larger arc of *ritual* that spans the entire novel. Ritual offers a way of bringing empathy successfully in to one's

professional conduct and of drawing the line between the professional and personal spheres: the professional can and does intersect fruitfully with the person, not by dint of the mere ability to empathize, but through the rigorous channeling of empathetic feeling in ritual forms. Reinterpreted in this manner, *To Kill a Mockingbird* may have new implications for the discourse of professional responsibility" (HLR 1682).

Tim Dare, in his article *Virtue Ethics, Lawyers and Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird*, has insight about the particular choice Atticus makes not to tell others that Boo Radley is certainly Bob Ewell's killer. He writes:

"Atticus Finch…has been adopted as an exemplar by advocates of a virtue ethics approach to legal ethics. When Atticus condones a departure from the rules of law in order to spare Boo Radley a trial these theorists argue, he displays practical wisdom, or phronesis, and shows that the good lawyer gives priority to judgement and character over rules and principles. Yet Atticus can be understood in a quite different way as a tragic figure who, when faced with the possibility of a tragedy in Boo's case, abandons the commitment to law which earlier was a central part of his character. From this perspective, Atticus' lesson for legal ethics is not about the priority of judgement and character, but instead about the value of the rules and principles he abandons" (Dare 81).

When Professor Monroe Freedman wrote an article declaring that Atticus Finch was no model for lawyers, he experienced a windfall of backlash from his readers:

"He went on to inform the paper's readers of the reaction to his criticism of Atticus, declaring that in the two years of writing his very controversial column, he had never received such outraged objections as he had to the column on Atticus Finch. He concluded by saying that readers of his column, arguing that Atticus Finch was not a

good role model for law students, responded as if he were attacking Mother Teresa, Ghandi, God and Bambi all at once" (Johnson 194).

It appears that it was not at all by chance or luck that Nelle Harper Lee wrote this book. Perhaps, as if by divine appointment, Lee (with her real-life and first-hand experience of watching her father's trials) was the only one who could have written a novel like *To Kill a Mockingbird* with a lawyer-hero like Atticus Finch – at a time when America so needed it.

In 2008, Lee was awarded an honorary law degree from the Alabama Bar Association for creating the character of Atticus Finch who "has become the personification of the exemplary lawyer in serving the legal needs of the poor" (Madden 181).

So then, it may be argued that the character of Atticus Finch could be seen as a Christ-like figure: he is one who stands up for what is right, defends the poor, and saves those who are in need. Atticus displays goodness, wisdom, and reminds the community of what its deepest commitments are. These protagonist qualities may seem to paint a too-good-to-be-true picture of Atticus. The argument may be made that, particularly in the play, this makes for a lack of complexity in the character.

I would be remiss in my research if I did not mention the absence of a mother in *To Kill a Mockingbird.* Calpurnia and Miss Maudie act as motherly figures with motherly traits, dispensing knowledge and discipline. In both texts, the Narrator tells us, "My mother died when I was two, so I never felt her absence." In real life Harper Lee's mother, Francis Finch Lee, suffered from mental illness, possibly a bipolar disorder that went undiagnosed. Francis would spend hours playing the piano, knitting, crocheting, or reading; her moods would change from silent and distant to fits of endless gossip. These nervous episodes, combined with conflicting personalities, may be the reasons for the omission of a mother in Lee's story. The omission may

also be a display of Lee's regard for privacy – her mother's and her own; writing about such issues could prove to be painful and disrespectful. Harper Lee choosing "Finch" as the family's last name in the story could perhaps be seen as a kind of tribute to her mother.

Today, one way Lee's sense of morality may be seen is through her regular philanthropy. According to Don Collins, a former Methodist minister in Alabama, Lee has funded scholarships over the years. "Many have attended college without knowing she was their benefactor" (Shields 285).

The reasoning for Harper Lee's sense of humility is most likely two-fold: part innate and part learned. But despite her natural shyness and yearning for privacy, she still lives a very active life. Tom Radney, a lawyer with whom she had done research, said of her:

> "I found Nelle Lee to be warm, charming, and extremely intelligent. She is not a recluse by any means. I think the reason she doesn't like publicity is, to her, that would be flaunting her success. And she's not that type" (Madden 183).

So, whether or not Nelle Harper Lee or Christopher Sergel precisely meant to influence society's attitudes, beliefs, and morals with their own beliefs is unclear, but the fact that they most certainly did influence many of us is clear indeed.

It is a hard and lonely job because "you depend entirely upon yourself and no one else…but then I guess any kind of creative work is like that," she concluded (Petry 148).

Those were Harper Lee's words about writing. Lee was very frank about how difficult creative writing can be. She said she would often spend up to 12 hours per day writing on a "make-shift table," which she herself constructed by nailing an "old door" onto legs (Petry 147). Her first drafts were written in long hand, using a pen, and not bothering with an outline. In 1963, she admitted, "I am more of a rewriter than a writer" who produces "at least three drafts"

of everything (Petry 148-149). Although she reportedly found it difficult and time-consuming to write and revise *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it was a feat well worth her every effort.

In 1957, Harper submitted her manuscript to the J.B. Lippincott Publishing Company as a series of short stories. It was recommended that she string the short stories together, and rewrite it as a novel.

Much critical acclaim and awards accompanied Lee's first novel, most notably The Pulitzer Prize for Literature in April of 1961. She was the first woman to win the prize since Ellen Glasgow received it in 1942. She has also received the Bestseller's Paperback Award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and honorary doctorates from Mount Holyoke College, Spring Hill College, and the University of Alabama.

Here are some notable words of praise for the novel:

> "That rare literary phenomenon, a Southern novel with no mildew on its magnolia leaves. Funny, happy, and written with unspectacular precision, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is about conscience – how it is instilled in two children, Scout and Jem Finch; how it operates in their father, Atticus, a lawyer appointed to defend a Negro on a rape charge; and how conscience grows in their small Alabama town." –*Vogue*

> "All of the tactile brilliance and none of the precocity generally supposed to be standard swamp-warfare issues for Southern writers…Novelist Lee's prose has an edge that cuts through cant, and she teaches the reader an astonishing number of useful truths about little girls and about Southern life…Scout Finch is fiction's most appealing child since Carson McCullers's Frankie got left behind at the wedding." –*Time*

> "A first novel of such rare excellence that it will no doubt make a great many readers slow down to relish more fully its simple distinction…A novel of strong contemporary national significance." –*Chicago Tribune*

Since its original publication, *To Kill a Mockingbird* has been translated into more than forty languages, sold more than forty million copies worldwide, and been made into an enormously popular, award-winning movie. It was also named the best novel of the twentieth century by librarians across the country (*Library Journal*). The Library of Congress asked people which book made the greatest difference in their lives: *To Kill a Mockingbird* ranked number two, after the Bible (Wilson 82).

The novel is also celebrated by teachers and students of all ages. Professor Alice Hall Petry, in her essay *Harper Lee, the One-Hit Wonder,* writes "I've had the pleasure of teaching Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* at the undergraduate and graduate level for many years now, and the reaction is always the same. My students love the novel. They find it charming, disturbing, funny, nostalgic, and deeply moving" (Petry 144).

Claudia Durst Johnson, in her book *To Kill a Mockingbird: Threatening Boundaries*, compares the novel to an expression of song:

> "The subject of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is also song, that is, expression: reading and literacy; both overt and covert attempts at articulation; and communicative art forms, including the novel itself. The particulars of setting in the novel are children's books, grade school texts, many different local newspapers and national news magazines, law books, a hymnal, and the reading aloud of Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe.* Much of the novel's action is actually reading, for as the locals and the children believe, that is Atticus Finch's only activity. These expressions are not only attempts to have the self broadcast

and realized; more significantly, they are attempts to establish connections beyond or through boundaries.

Contrary to the notion that language and art are cold (for example, the Dracula Theme frequently expresses the cold tendency of artists to sacrifice everything, even their own humanity, for their art), in TKM, language and art are usually borne of love and linked to expressions of charity and affection. The Gothic degeneracy of TKM derives from love's opposite – imprisonment and insularity, producing, in the extreme, incest and insanity, a gazing in or a gazing back. Its opposite is the social self, which is civilized in it s high and positive sense, and reaches out in the love that overcomes ego in language and art" (Johnson 107-108).

William T. Going, in the foreword to *On Harper Lee*, has this to add to the artistic argument:

"And so after some forty years and a fresh rereading of *Mockingbird*, I am convinced it is a classic before its time. Of course, if a classic is really something written by a long-dead author that has somehow lasted the years, we shall have to wait a bit more to be sure of its status. But one thing at least is certain: *Mockingbird*, with over 30 million copies in print, is not just a popular novel about southern race relations that is safe for high school students to read" (Petry x).

Furthermore, Charles J. Shields relays these facts in *Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee*: "By 1988, the National Council of Teachers of English reported that *To Kill a Mockingbird* was taught in 74 percent of the nation's public schools. Only *Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth,* and *Huckleberry Finn* were assigned more often" (Shields 271).

Harper Lee clearly is blessed with an ability to express the human condition artfully. She writes in such a way that eloquently speaks to our intellectual and moral selves.

Thankfully, Christopher Sergel was able to capture that same eloquence when adapting his version to the stage. The play has met long-standing success in stock, provincial, and regional theatres in the U.S. and England.

Here are some rave reviews about the stage production:

"(This) adaptation of Harper Lee's novel of violent events in a small town in Alabama in 1935 is holding packed houses in rapt attention." –*The Times*

"It is a stirring evening on a theme which now erupts in South Africa and isn't far from any of us." –*Daily Telegraph*

"As Atticus says: '*They've done it before, they'll do it again, and when they do, it seems that only children weep.*' I think most of the audience wept too. The final scene of this remarkable production takes us into this terrifying zone, and recreates the moment when Scout surfaces from the clear morality of childhood into the injustices of the adult world." –*The Financial Times*

"Miss it and you've missed something important." –*Birmingham Evening Mail*

Christopher Sergel was artfully gifted at adapting novels and stories to the stage. Mr. Sergel's family founded the Dramatic Publishing Company in Woodstock, Illinois in 1885. A master at his craft, he also adapted *The Outsiders, An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge, Black Elk Lives, Cheaper by the Dozen, Fame, and Meet Me in St. Louis.*

Director Kyle Donnelly noted "what sets the Sergel adaptation apart from the 1960 novel and 1962 screenplay is the use of the adult Scout, or Jean Louise, as a narrator woven into the story, at some moments reliving it herself. There are more passages from the novel (than in the

film), descriptions of things you don't see, which makes the evening very theatrical" (www.umich.edu/performances).

To Kill a Mockingbird has become one of the most performed shows in the nation. It is performed in May each year in Harper Lee's hometown of Monroeville, Alabama, by local actors in conjunction with the Monroe County Heritage Museum, which is located in the Monroeville Courthouse.

According to Linda Habjan, Acquisitions Editor for Dramatic Publishing Company, the total number productions of *To Kill a Mockingbird* for 2011 are: 98 amateur licensed performances and 12 possible amateur licensed performances; for stock, five licensed performances.

The story of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is similar to true life events, history lessons which should not go forgotten. Much of Harper Lee's writing was based on the Scottsboro Trials. Looking at this piece of history, one can reflect on the prevailing attitudes at the time. There was much social and economic distress in America when the Scottsboro Trials unfolded. To summarize the trials, a white woman, Victoria Price, was riding the rails from Tennessee to Alabama and claimed she had been assaulted and raped by nine black men who were riding in the box car next to her. However, during the trials it was determined that Victoria's white male friends instigated a fight with the black men, insisting that they ride in another car or get kicked off. Once the fight ensued and the police came onto the scene, Victoria concocted this story in hopes of avoiding arrest herself. She had been riding the rails illegally and she was a known prostitute. Both the real-life case and the fictional case have substantial similarities. Both took place in Alabama during the 1930's. In both cases, the defendants were African-American men and the accusers white women. In both instances, the charge was rape.

Both texts remain relevant in today's society. Segregation may have disappeared but prejudice has not. There are still social, political, and economic divides among people in America, and societies in general. However, that is precisely why *To Kill a Mockingbird* is relevant in 2011: there are enough subtle forms of racism and prejudice lingering in hearts of mankind for these pages to still resonate.

So, the question is…has this book changed our lives? Has *To Kill a Mockingbird* changed our view of the world? And will it continue to do so?

William T. Going wrote in his foreword to *On Harper Lee*: "We should rejoice, therefore, that we have *Mockingbird* to read and reread, to reconstruct and deconstruct" (Petry x).

In 2006, filmmaker Sandy Jaffe made a documentary about a production of *To Kill a Mockingbird* that was a joint collaboration between two high schools in Alabama, one predominantly white and one predominantly black. Jaffe gave this insight:

> "The idea of being unjustly accused because of one's race still resonates with young people today. An Arab student from a Boston high school talks about how he identifies with Tom Robinson – describing the terrorist attacks of 2001 when he was unjustly accused of being a terrorist just because his family was from Saudi Arabia" (Madden 172).

Jill May, in her essay *In Defense of To Kill a Mockingbird*, wrote:

> "When discussing literary criticism, Theo D'Haen suggested [in *Text to Reader*] that the good literary work should have a life within the world and be 'part of the ongoing activities of that world.' *To Kill a Mockingbird* continues to have life within the world; its ongoing activities in the realm of censorship show that it is a book which deals with

regional moralism. The children in the story seem very human; they worry about their own identification, they defy parental rules, and they cry over injustices" (Karolides, Burress, Kean 83-84).

Harper Lee started an essay contest for Alabama high school students. Discussing these students in an interview in 2006 for The New York Times, Lee herself acknowledged: "They always see new things in [the book]…And the way they relate it to their lives now is really quite incredible" (Madden 171).

CHAPTER II

PRODUCTION

The stage play *To Kill a Mockingbird* was performed July 7th, 8th, 9th at 8:00 p.m. and July 10th at 2:00 p.m. in the Albert L. Jeffers Theatre at the University of Texas Pan American. This show was part of the University's summer theatre program, known as Pan American Summer Stock (P.A.S.S.). The year 2011 marked the 37th anniversary of P.A.S.S. Another show was on the bill as well: *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill, directed by Cynthia Santos, a graduate colleague.

Preparation and planning began for me almost a year earlier as I began pre-production research and wrote my directing proposal. Once my directing proposal was officially accepted by the appropriate University faculty, I began planning meetings with the technical designers and working out dates for the auditions. Cynthia Santos and I collaborated on the audition dates; they were held simultaneously on May 26th and 27th, 2011 from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. I found it necessary, however, to add another audition date on June 6th, 2011 for my show. This additional audition date was imperative because I was still in need of several actors.

Casting *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the Rio Grande Valley proved to be more challenging than expected. I initiated a rather aggressive audition campaign, keeping in close communication with the box office manager, Elva Galvan. Multiple email notices and reminders were sent out, approximately 400 notices were posted, and local newspapers and television stations were notified of the upcoming auditions. Word of mouth greatly helped to spread the

news and enthusiasm for the production. I visited coffee shops, restaurants, supermarkets, businesses, dance studios, schools, churches, the Weslaco Tower Theatre and the Camille Lightner Playhouse in Brownsville to post fliers and spread the word. I spent two evenings plastering fliers at restaurants and bars on McAllen's 17th Street (the downtown "party" district), posting them to doors, walls, windows, above urinals…anywhere management would let me. Despite an extremely well-advertised campaign, after the first set of auditions, I was still in dire need of key characters – namely, Jean Louise Finch, Bob Ewell, and all four African American roles.

Before the final auditions, I became bolder at approaching possible candidates to ask if they would be willing to audition. With flier in hand, I would humbly walk up to random strangers and plead my cause. One such venture proved to be worthwhile: I approached an African American woman while we were both working out at the gym. She responded enthusiastically and actually showed up to audition! As luck would have it, I had found my Calpurnia.

Also prior to the final audition, I called Dr. Marian Monta to see if she would be interested in playing the role of Jean Louise Finch. She agreed to audition -- but she also suggested bringing along a friend of hers who she thought would be good for the role. It was her friend who was to be cast as Jean Louise Finch.

The night of the final auditions, panic began to rise within me as no African American men had shown up. Within the last hour, a seasoned regular of the UTPA theatre came in who would fit nicely into the role of Reverend Sykes. Now, I was in search of a Tom Robinson. In frustration, I jokingly said to my Assistant Stage Manager that I was going outside to wrangle people in from off the street. What began as jest, turned out to what must have been Divine

Providence: as soon as I walked outdoors, a young African American man in a bright pink shirt was walking down the sidewalk talking on his phone. I waved to him, ran up to talk with him, and he agreed to audition at that very minute. As we walked into the auditions together, the look on my Assistant Stage Manager's face was priceless. It turned out the young man was an exchange student from Ghana and he became the character of Tom Robinson in the show.

Another seasoned regular of the UTPA theatre came in that night, and he was cast as Bob Ewell. However, I was still in need of someone to play the role of Helen Robinson, Tom Robinson's wife.

Nonetheless, the cast list had to be posted the next afternoon, with the role of Helen as "TBA." The initial cast list was posted on June 7th, and consisted of twenty-five members. However, some would leave, others would be added, and the show would not be cast in its entirety until June 21st.

On the evening of June 7th, rehearsals began. The stage managers and I were calling everyone on the cast list to make sure they could attend that evening. We began the process of rehearsing by reading the play together while seated at desks arranged in a circle in the Studio Theatre (the small, black box theatre adjacent to the Jeffers Theatre).

Rehearsals lasted from June 7th through July 6th. We generally rehearsed from 3:00 p.m.to 6:00 p.m. every weekday and Saturdays 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The cast had every Sunday off within that rehearsal period. Since the first show to go up was *Top Girls*, they always had priority to rehearse on the main stage in the Jeffers Theatre. We continued to rehearse in the Studio Theatre for every rehearsal until Monday, July 4th. Even though it was Independence Day, I insisted we rehearse from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., and the cast and crew graciously agreed. Prior to that day, we were only able to hold one rehearsal in the Jeffers (necessary for the actors

to get a good sense of what the space feels like), as the *Top Girls* cast and set crew were always working there.

Rehearsals quickly moved into full swing. I decided to rehearse the scenes in the order in which they take place within the play; this made it fairly simple for my stage manager and me to orchestrate a schedule. The trickiest part of scheduling rehearsals was finding exact times when several of the supporting actors, who had also been cast in *Top Girls,* were available to rehearse. Our total cast of characters was now at twenty-four and getting everyone there at the same time, and the same place, quite frankly, did not happen until the week of opening.

One of the most difficult things about rehearsing this production was getting everyone to commit to be there, on time, for every rehearsal they were required to be at. Despite giving my speeches about work ethic, how I like to start and end on time, and how they should let me know ahead of time if they must miss or be late to a rehearsal, there were consistently a number of late arrivals and absences throughout the rehearsal period.

I wound up cancelling just one rehearsal within the five-week period, due to a severe storm. The storm lasted for several hours, consisting of frequent lightning and thunder and torrential downpours. The campus and surrounding communities quickly became flooded. For the safety of the cast and crew, and considering the fact that there were older people and children in the show, I decided it was best to cancel. My stage managers and I quickly made calls at 2:30 p.m. to let everyone know the 3:00 p.m. rehearsal was cancelled.

The biggest obstacles I had to overcome were several issues with actors. First, the Bob Ewell I had cast decided he needed to drop out of the production for personal and family reasons. I scrambled around, asking anyone I could if they knew of someone else who could play this role. Elva Galvan recommended that I call on a long-time local actor she knew. About a week

into our practice, he came to an evening rehearsal and responded to me in an email later that week that he would have to bow out due to his psychological and physical problems. Finally, another actor was recommended to me by cast members who concurred they knew someone who would be very good for the part, but he was acting in another show at the time and could not join our rehearsals until June 21st. The third time around, however, proved to be a charm and I was finally able to permanently cast the role of Bob Ewell.

I decided the role of Helen Robinson should be played by Vivianna Rodriguez. I thought she would be very good in this role, even though she was not an African American. She is a very good actor, and I had initially considered her for the role of Mayella Ewell after auditions.

The next obstacle to deal with was the role of Jean Louise Finch (old Scout and Narrator of the play). The woman cast in this role was older and had health problems. It turned out she could not stand for long periods of time, was diabetic with dizzy spells, and had substantial trouble remembering her lines and blocking. This was a problem because she had a number of lengthy monologues and her character had many entrances and exits from various parts of the stage. I was greatly troubled by this and began considering switching her role with another role (for example, she switch with Mrs. Dubose), or replacing her altogether. I briefly considered resorting to the use of Christopher Sergel's second adaptation of the play, with Miss Maudie acting as Narrator. However, that would require the purchasing of all new scripts and such major changes in casting and blocking so far into rehearsals would undoubtedly adversely affect the cast. I conferred with my stage manager, costumer, and Dr. Monta about the situation. After collaborative brainstorming, I made the decision to have some of her lines on voice-over and have her writing in a journal while sitting at a desk on the side of the stage for the majority of the

show. Fortunately, this worked out just fine and various people told me it actually added to the clarity of the show.

It was at this point in the rehearsal process that I realized I needed to devise an understudy list. I came up with a list of particular characters which I felt could be important to have. Understudy roles were assigned for the following characters: Jean Louise Finch, Scout, Atticus, Miss Maudie, Mrs. Dubose, Miss Stephanie, Mayella Ewell, and Tom Robinson.

The most stressful obstacle, when working with the actors, was dealing with an egotistical and temperamental leading actor. This actor was consistently late and refused to join the group warm-ups. When I confronted him, emphasizing the importance of warming up our voices and bodies and the importance of building cohesiveness within the ensemble, he became irate and threatened to leave the show. He said he was older than everyone there, and did not need such things. I wanted to tell him off and kick him out of the show, but my mind told me to reason with him – it was a week before we opened and finding a replacement could have been impossible. He eventually calmed down, and I made sure he would not be asked to join the group for warm-ups again. However, almost every evening he presented some kind of issue: arguing with the stage managers, denying the use of certain props, delaying the curtain by refusing to go to "places" at the beginning of a show, and even breaking character onstage.

Within the cast, there were a number of actors with little or no experience in theatre. I found myself taking on the role of teacher, as well as director, when leading rehearsals. The children in the show, as well as several adults, had never acted before and needed coaching on how to project their voices, how to use their bodies effectively onstage, and how to create and build a character. This was not a chore for me, but rather an enjoyment.

About ten days before our opening, I began coaching the actors on the use of a proper southern Alabama dialect. Prior to this day, I had insisted they lines be read with no accent at all. I emphasized how crucial it was that the accent not sound forced or exaggerated. I used the book and compact disc *Acting With An Accent: American Southern,* by David Alan Stern, Ph.D., provided to me by Professor Trey Mikolawsky. I played excerpts from the compact disc for them twice in rehearsals, and then we would practice various lines from the show orally. Practicing our accents also became a standard part of warm-ups before each performance.

I asked Kate Dirrigl, who played the character of Mayella Ewell, to lead warm-ups every night before the performances. She was very good at working with the children and knew a lot of good verbal, physical, and impromptu exercises. To my surprise, there were quite a few phrases or words in the script that virtually everyone (regardless of race or first language) had trouble pronouncing. They included: Mayella, Maycomb, Ewell, Bufords, Dubose, Pinkham, and unmitigated temerity. These words were also incorporated into the nightly warm-ups.

Another element I decided upon was the addition of an old church hymn being sung by fellow congregants, as Reverend Sykes makes his entrance asking for donations for Tom Robinson's wife. I thought this added a warm, surprising touch to the scene which would contrast nicely to following scene when the Ewells entered for the first time. I chose the hymn "There Is a Fountain," by William Cowper. I had the congregants stand and sing and hum offstage, just inside the main doors to the theatre. Luckily, we had a number of gifted singers in the cast who were available to join in the chorus at that point in the show.

During the final week of rehearsals, it was no surprise that our biggest challenge would come in the form of working in all of the final technical elements (lighting, sound, costuming) in such a short amount of time. Mr. Tom Grabowski did an amazing job at designing and building

the set. Our technical rehearsals were Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. On Monday and Tuesday nights, very little technical additions were made, much to my dismay. I became increasingly frustrated because I knew we needed to accomplish much more than we had, especially because Wednesday night was to be a preview night for family and friends. I had my suspicions that the proper preparations and work had not been sufficiently accomplished by the light and sound personnel, the reasons for which were never communicated to me.

To add ambiance to the show before, after, and at intermission, I chose to have period music played, photographs of country scenes hung in the lobby (taken by my friend Caleb Camacho), and a concessions stand in the lobby. I organized a group of volunteers from the P.A.S.S. class to be on a concessions committee. Mr. Tom Grabowski suggested we call it "Scout's Lemonade Stand." I agreed the name sounded perfect. He built a wonderful stand on which to set up everything, with a coinciding sign. There was a bit of red tape to get a concessions stand approved by the University, but we eventually succeeded, and lemonade and old-fashioned cookies were served at every performance. Donations only were accepted for the refreshments; the monies collected were donated to the Latino Theatre Initiative group, who were raising funds to attend two major play festivals.

CHAPTER III

EVALUATION

Looking back at this production of *To Kill a Mockingbird,* I am overall very pleased with the way it turned out. There are always things that could have gone better, things I could have changed, or things I could have said or not said. Of course, in life and theatre, hindsight is always 20/20.

In regards to contemporary relevance, I have several questions to ponder. Did the audience fully understand it? Could the audience identify with the struggles of the characters? Was the casting, acting, design, and execution of the show effective? Was the audience able to take any of the messages and lessons from the play and apply them to their own lives? Of course, these things may never be fully known without having administered detailed surveys and conducting personal interviews with the audience after the show. However, after having watched the show as an audience member four times in a row, I was able to hear certain comments that audience members made.

A significant remark I heard several times was, "I want to read the book now." This was a bit surprising to hear because each person who said it was a teenager or young adult. This comment lead me to believe that they were inspired and had a desire to find out more details about the story, a longing for a deeper connection with its characters, and perhaps even a reflective search for truth in their own lives. I appreciated this remark because what it said to me

was that this was an important story, and it is important enough for them to read more about it. These notions speak loudly in this day and age, because reading a novel is not always a priority (there are too many other electronic and various other entertaining distractions, especially for young people) and because this further solidifies the idea that theatre itself is still an important and viable entertainment form, which probably carries with it an intellectual and educational importance, such as introducing a new generation to great literary works.

Regarding the casting of the show, I was pleased with the choices I had made in the end. However, about two and a half weeks into rehearsals, I started questioning my casting decisions about Jean Louise Finch, Atticus, and even Scout. Jean Louise for health and memorization reasons, Atticus for personality reasons, and Scout for her age, inexperience, and tendency to question every direction. If I had had the time and resources needed, I would have made the decision to replace Atticus after he threatened to walk off the show. I began to wonder if I should have made some different casting choices from the four dozen plus actors that had come to the auditions. I may have cast more experienced actors: in particular, a Mr. Carlos Garza as Atticus and a Miss Bianca Mujica as Scout.

Casting family members within the show turned out to be a good thing. I cast a mother – daughter team: Tisha Jones as Calpurnia and her daughter Sophia Jones as the Reverend's Daughter/Townsperson. I also cast a brother – sister team: Joseph Palacios as Jem and Catherine Palacios as a Townsperson/Scout's Understudy. I feel these were good casting decisions because mother and daughter could spend more time together and mother did not have to find a babysitter for daughter. Also, brother and sister would not be hurt if one was cast and not the other and their parents could easily drop both of them off and pick them up at the same

time and place. Plus, all of these family members were able to share and learn together in, what was for them, a new theatre experience.

Casting Vivianna Rodriguez as Helen Robinson turned out to be fantastic. She brought true emotion to each scene she was in, and no one even questioned my decision to cast her in what is typically an African American role.

The cast was instructed to be off-book two weeks into rehearsals. Some actors still did not have their lines down, and continued to carry their script onstage with them, including a leading actor, in particular. At this point, I realized just how excruciatingly frustrating it is for a director to watch their actors struggle with lines and blocking. I watched the actors question their faith in themselves, the show, and even me as a leader. I had to wonder if they trusted me and my vision of the production.

In reference to dealing with late arrivals to rehearsals, I will, from now on, take Dr. Marian Monta's advice. She recommended that however many minutes the actors are late at the beginning of rehearsal is the same number of minutes they will stay late at the end of rehearsal. This gives a penalty to those late-comers in terms of time, but also in terms of having to bear the scorn of their peers. I will implement this practice into any future directing projects.

Staging the end of the trial, when the black attendees and the rest of the courtroom spectators stand up as Atticus walks out, was a bit challenging. Scout is overwhelmed with disbelief and does not notice that everyone else is standing until Reverend Sykes prompts her. This is a significant dramatic moment in the show and I wanted it to come across as such. I had Scout look down with her head in her hands, the spectators rising one by one, and Atticus taking his time gathering his papers and thoughts. The trick was to get the actors into the moment, and to take their time with it. I longed for more African American cast members at this point, as I

thought it would make the scene more dramatic. Looking back, I would have insisted the actors take even longer in this moment for emphasis. However, by Sunday's final performance, it appeared the cast had gotten it down and understood the sentiment: they received applause from the audience for the first time after this scene.

In the technical realm of things, I found my Stage Manager, Valerie Villarreal, to be exceptionally helpful. Her only faults were being late a few times without prior warning and making it known to myself and others that she believed I should not give notes to the actors once we were into performances. However, that is what I do as a director and I will continue to practice this because I believe that an actor should never stop working to improve upon the life of his / her character and the well-being of the production.

As is typical with most theatrical productions, properties and costume pieces were being added up through opening night. The Properties Manager and Costume Designer did very commendable work.

I was for the most part very pleased with Mr. Tom Grabowski's set design. And he was very gracious to do things a little out of the ordinary; for example, my use of the first two rows of house left audience as a spectators' sitting area and the use of the first row of house right audience as Jean Louise's writing desk area. There are only two elements of the design I would have changed in the end. I requested these changes, but to no avail, I assume because of the shortage of time. Foremost, I wanted a more detailed and life-like tree; the one used was wrapped loosely in burlap, had no leaves, only two branches, and just looked lifeless. Secondly, I suggested we have a raised judge's bench that, when turned around, could also act as the jailhouse platform.

The other thing that could have been improved upon was the sound. I asked several times that the sound designer and sound crew come to rehearsals prior to tech week to become as familiar with the show as possible. Once we were into tech week, I had misgivings about their knowledge of the script (Did they read it?) and whether or not they knew what sounds we needed and where the sounds belonged in the show. Even into the final performances, there were some sound cues and some light cues that were incorrect.

A suggestion I would definitely make to the Box Office Manager and House Manager is to shrink the number of seats in the reserved seat section. Audience members were turned away because the general admission seats were sold out – yet there were dozens of seats left empty in the reserved seat section. There really must be a logical solution to this: willing theatre patrons should never, ever be turned away, if at all possible. A full house is a company's bread and butter, and an actor's dream.

I was very excited when Friday night's show sold out. One of the reasons this production was successful is because many people in general are familiar with the novel or film. In Appendix A, I have included the total attendance and sales for the show. Box Office manager Elva Galvan commented that the totals were excellent, especially for a summer show that was student-directed: the total attendance for *To Kill a Mockingbird* was the highest of any P.A.S.S. show in the past decade. As a director, I was also very pleased to see the show receive standing ovations at the Friday, Saturday, and Sunday performances.

In conclusion, this directing experience allowed me to reinforce and expand my directing skills. Additionally, seeing a production of the play (or watching the iconic film) helps to reinforce the impact of the book's success. The play will never replace the book, but seeing the play or film stimulates interest in reading the book, making it a valuable educational tool.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

BOX OFFICE TOTALS

House Count and Ticket Sales For To Kill a Mockingbird (PASS 2011) July 7 – 10, 2011		
Day	**House Count**	**Ticket Sales**
Thursday	135	578.00
Friday	245	986.00
Saturday	148	653.00
Sunday	180	659.00
Total	**708**	**2876**

Scout's Lemonade Stand – Donations	
Thursday	68.09
Friday	73.23
Saturday	66.05
Sunday	102.78
Total	**310.15**

FYI – Dr. Nelson (UTPA President) and his wife attended Sunday.

This document created by Elva Galvan, Box Office Manager.

APPENDIX B

REVIEW

'To Kill a Mockingbird' deserves a college play's Academy Award

Tuesday, July 19, 2011 10:11 pm

By JIM McKONE Your Valley Voice / Edinburg Review

EDINBURG – If you missed the four performances of "To Kill a Mockingbird" at the Pan American Summer Stock, you missed one of the top 10 of many hundreds of plays.

The university had four different names starting in 1926 to the present.

Now the University of Texas-Pan American has explored one of the greatest plays of the whole bunch.

In the opinion of this play reviewer, who started the volunteer job dating back to the 1950s, this proved the most violent, yet one of the funniest of all those plays I have seen in Edinburg.

Director Richard D. Edmondson led a cast of 24 to stunning, shocking and funny triumphs that made this unique from the hundreds-plus plays I have reviewed in Edinburg.

The cast all deserved, and got, standing ovations. Here are a few fine bits of what you might see again in some future performances in Edinburg or the Valley.

The top three roles to me were Lassiter Holmes as the lawyer who tried to save a black man in the Deep South while keeping sane under great pressure, Benjamin Senyefia as Tom Robinson, who faces a jury that is on stage in part of the play, and youthful Jaden Allen, a sixth-grader who plays Scout, a smart girl who faces danger and also provides great laughter on the lighter side.

This cast all deserves a mention for their terrific roles. These include Danna Skipping as Jean Louise Finch, who plays the piano as she did in many great plays; Thomas Ray Henning, 11, as Dill, another child in the play; Fredo Garza Jr. as Judge Taylor; Amanda Sasser as Miss Maudie Atkinson; Tisha Jones as Calpurnia;

Aaron Stidwell as Rev. Sykes; Daniel Maldonado as Heck Tate; Homero Saenz Jr. as Arthur (Boo) Radley; Kate Dirrigl as Mayella Ewell; Rob Garcia, a senior in theater, as Bob Ewell; Willie Camina, who has directed and played strong roles in many productions as Walter Cunningham; Joel A. Garza, who played Duke in "Man of La Mancha," as Mr. Gilmer; Viviana Rodriguez, who plays Helen Robinson, a theater performance major at UT Pan American;

Joseph C. Palacios in his first acting role as Jem; Billie Padilla as Miss Stephanie in her fifth stage role; Selina Alvarado as Mrs. Dubose; Gonzalo Bazan as Nathan Radley; David D. Hernandez as Link Deas and Farmer; Sophia Jones, Ramon Sanchez and Catherine Palacios as townpersons. Palacios was also understudy to Scout.

Stage manager was Valerie Villarreal and approximately 30 others in the production staff also did a great job. Anyone who saw this will be talking about it to the unfortunate who didn't see it for as long as anyone will listen, because they too probably consider it one of the best ever staged in Edinburg.

APPENDIX C

PHOTOS


Scout's Lemonade Stand


EXIT

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Richard D. Edmonson received his B.A. in Theatre Performance from West Texas A & M University in Canyon, Texas and his M.A. in Theatre from the University of Texas Pan American in Edinburg, Texas. He has worked in professional, community and collegiate theatre for over twenty-five years. Richard now resides at 1008 English Avenue, Apartment A, Edinburg, Texas, 78541.