Queer Children and Representative Men: Harper Lee, Racial Liberalism, and the Dilemma of "To Kill a Mockingbird"

Author(s): Gregory Jay

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Queer Children and Representative Men: Harper Lee, Racial Liberalism, and the Dilemma of *To Kill a Mockingbird*

*Gregory Jay**

The "American Dilemma" . . . is the ever-raging conflict between, on the one hand, the valuations preserved on the general plane which we shall call the "American Creed," where the American thinks, talks, and acts under the influence of high national and Christian precepts, and, on the other hand, the valuations on specific planes of individual and group living, where personal and local interests; economic, social, and sexual jealousies; considerations of community prestige and conformity; group prejudice against particular persons or types of people; and all sorts of miscellaneous wants, impulses, and habits dominate his outlook.

Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*

Queer lives and queer feelings scribbled over but still just visible—you can half make them out in the dark.

Heather Love, "Introduction: Modernism at Night"

Both for its cultural influence and abiding popularity, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) continues to rank among the most important US novels of the twentieth century. No text since *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) commands the exalted place in the history of liberal race fiction held by Lee's novel, and no discussion

*Gregory Jay is a professor of English at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee and the author of three books, including *American Literature and the Culture Wars* (1997), as well as recent essays on the analysis of race in literature and visual media.

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of that literary history could plausibly avoid it.[1] *Mockingbird*, however, presents an odd case, since after its publication, the author claimed that it was never primarily intended as a work of racial protest fiction. Indeed, the book's most famous, oft-quoted lines are a generic, even platitudinous dictum about empathy, delivered early in the novel by Atticus Finch to his rebellious daughter Scout: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view. . . . Until you climb into his skin and walk around in it" (39). Lee's mega bestseller and its high-wattage 1962 film adaptation, with Gregory Peck earning an Oscar as the liberal icon Atticus, rely upon and are limited by this sentimental epistemology. In Atticus, we will see how the Southern liberalism that Lillian Smith, among others, critiqued gets rehabilitated to eventually become a model of the American Creed for whites during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Yet his paternalism must share the front porch with the nascent feminism and counter-normative sexual politics disturbing the surface of Scout/Jean Louise's narrative. This raising up of Atticus as the standard bearer of a nationalized US racial liberalism explains much about the book's function in popular culture and schools, and why it would be a mistake to categorize it as only a story about the South. Peck plays Atticus almost without a Southern accent, his standard English only ornamented occasionally by a colloquialism. That eloquent performance reinforces his character's claim to the status of representative American man, an idealized embodiment of white male normativity updated for modern liberalism but still rooted firmly in the tradition of the founding fathers and of Transcendentalism's allegiance to higher laws.

The consensus interpretation of the novel, generally confirmed by how it has been taught in schools, focuses on the moral lesson of empathy as the cardinal virtue and urgent program of racial liberalism. Recently, this consensus has been interrupted by critical analyses of "sexual otherness" in the novel and its many sly ways of subverting gender normativity.[2] Such critiques, added to those that object to the book's white-savior plot, African-American stereotypes, and nostalgic portrayal of the segregated South suggest we should reconsider why Lee's novel commands the influence it continues to exert. To that end, my essay explores the origins and development of Lee's racial liberalism and places it in dialogue with the novel's counter-normative voicings of sex/gender identity. The novel's "destabilization of heterosexuality" leads to a crisis for the strategy of empathy, since that strategy depends on an imagined sharing of normative identity that doesn't survive the novel's exposure of hidden lives and queer desires (Richards 115). The ensuing confusion about how to determine the novel's central focus challenges the long-held priority given to race in its interpretation. More generally, this

revisiting of an American classic, in turn, highlights how historical changes in the cultural politics of race and gender during the middle of the twentieth century shape the book's gestation and reception as well as the internal contradictions it exhibits. While a close reading of the text's own workings will be vital, a study of this kind also draws substantially on understanding the cultural work done by, and for, this classic of popular race fiction. It also puts weight on the biographical facts and historical contexts elucidating the novel's engagement with modern racial liberalism along with its concern with changing gender norms.

1. Popularity and Pedagogy: *Mockingbird* on Screen and in the Classroom

According to Jodi Melamed, the novel of racial liberalism after World War II stressed "sympathetic identification" and transracial understanding, while tending to "marginalize economic interpretations of racial dynamics" (71, 73). Ever since liberalism's origins with Immanuel Kant and Thomas Jefferson, notes Richard Schmitt, "liberals have supported the maintenance of racist institutions and practices in spite of their avowed belief that all should have equal liberty" (24).[3] Myrdal's study spelled out this complicity of liberalism with institutional racism, acknowledged the need for structural changes, but ultimately concluded that simply upholding the liberal principles of freedom and equality was insufficient, given how racial prejudice undermines the everyday workings of democracy, justice, and equal opportunity. Building on John Rawls's analysis of liberalism, Schmitt concludes: "A liberal society must not only have and enforce laws against racist exclusions, but its citizens must recognize their moral obligation to respect everyone as individuals and to treat them as competent and worthy unless they show themselves to be otherwise. Nothing less than complete eradication of racist beliefs and attitudes will do for a liberal society" (21). But as US history demonstrates, this call for moral uplift can quickly become a substitute for establishing the requisite "laws against racial exclusion," so that preparation of the white heart for conversion takes priority over desegregation of schools, voting rights, or interracial sex.

Beginning in the early 1940s, an ideology and literature of moralizing racial liberalism sought to address the dilemma the US faced as its own history and practice of racism contradicted claims to leading the "free world." Lee's book deploys many of the now standard tropes of that era's protest fiction, especially its emphasis on the moral education of white consciousness, delivering a cry for justice that has never lost its power over readers. Yet the popularity of

neither the book nor the film has led to an outpouring of academic and critical study, as Claudia Johnson points out in *To Kill a Mockingbird: Threatening Boundaries* (1994). Two decades later, scholarship on Lee's book has grown considerably, as have the controversies about its treatment of racial, sexual, and gender issues. Richards observes an "evolution of critical approaches from initial fanfare at publication to general dismissal to one informed foremost by race," with a recent turn toward examining the "array of sexual otherness" in the novel (119).

Such an account, however, does not accurately represent the novel's *popular* history: the fanfare for the book has never subsided among general readers, schoolteachers, and students (the film was even rebroadcast with a testimonial from President Obama on the occasion of its 50th anniversary). This enduring embrace of the novel by US readers reflects, I believe, its well-crafted use of a pedagogical narrative that positions the reader as an addressee of moral lessons, lifting the confrontation with racism out of a historical and political context and placing it within a more consoling (or even self-congratulatory) story of what Fred Hobson calls "racial conversion narratives": "works in which the authors, all products of and willing participants in a harsh, segregated society, confess racial wrongdoings and are 'converted,' in varying degrees, from racism to something approaching racial enlightenment" (2). As Hobson observes, this tradition has its roots in evangelical Protestant Christianity and includes originating texts of racial liberalism such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Huckleberry Finn* (1885).[4] Moreover, such narratives do not simply represent the conversions of characters within the novels; they also, through fictional identification, draw the reader into his or her own imperative enactment of the same epiphany. Most schoolchildren are still taught the primal scene of Huck's conversion, when he chooses to help Jim rather than send him back to slavery: "All right, then, I'll *go* to hell."[5] Of course, Huck's irony is that acting on true and right moral principles entails condemnation by society's social and religious gatekeepers. The heroes in novels of racial liberalism, like Atticus, are always rebels, even if in their marginalization they are, as in the lawyer's case, also held up for begrudging esteem.

As Lee began composing her own contribution to this didactic tradition, her treatment of race in the South was inevitably influenced by, and eventually discussed along with, the defining events of the civil rights movement. Although Lee had moved to New York City in 1949 to pursue her writing career, she visited home often and kept informed about events in Alabama during the eight years leading up to the first drafts of her famous novel (which we now know, with the publication of *Go Set a Watchman* [2015], used a contemporary setting). The years immediately preceding serious work on the book

witnessed Autherine Lucy's failed attempt to integrate the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa (which Lee had attended), the murder of Emmett Till, and the Montgomery bus boycott. As she struggled to find an overarching framework for the episodic sketches of Monroeville that Lee first shared with her agent, the Tom Robinson plot proved a successful solution, knitting the scene, characters, and issues together in a story that had drama and unity and that resonated with current events. The plot of racial injustice, moreover, could mask, even as it expressed, Lee's unyielding concern with the other and outsider. Indeed, Johnson groups together such concerns as "threaten[ed] boundaries" linked to the repressive sexual politics of the time, though few initially understood Lee's novel as exploring queer desire.

In interviews, the author leaves the impression that exposing racism was not truly her central concern. As she put it during a publicity tour for the soon-to-be released film, "I tried to give a sense of proportion to life in the South, that there isn't a lynching before every breakfast. I think that Southerners react with the same kind of horror as other people do about the injustice in their land. In Mississippi, people were so revolted by what happened, they were so stunned. I don't think it will happen again" (qtd in Shields 222). Here, Lee refers to the white rioting in Oxford that fall after the federal government forced the University of Mississippi to enroll James Meredith; actually, too few Mississippi whites were "revolted," and subsequent white violence against civil rights workers, including the assassination of Medgar Evers in Mississippi the following year, would prove Lee's optimistic hopes unfounded.

In one of her last public interviews, in 1964, Lee expressed her ambition for her never-to-be-finished future novels in language reminiscent of her 1962 remarks:

> I would like to leave some record of the kind of life that existed in a very small world. I hope to do this in several novels—to chronicle something that seems to be very quickly going down the drain. This is small-town middle-class southern life as opposed to the Gothic, as opposed to Tobacco Road, as opposed to plantation life. . . . I would simply like to put down all I know about this because I believe that there is something universal in this little world, something decent to be said for it, and something to lament in its passing. (qtd in Newquist 412)

These musings also illuminate Lee's mission in *Mockingbird*, though we need remember that some degree of irony was always her style. The nostalgia here, however, and the sentimental attitude appear quite distant from the mocking irreverence that had been the characteristic feature of Lee's personality and early writings, and that

still runs deftly and comically through much of *Mockingbird*. Continuing disagreements about how to interpret the novel find one origin in this shifting stance about the book's focus on race and region. The ambiguity thus allows some readers to extol the novel's combination of local color and antiracism, while others find its liberalism problematic, contradictory, and unconvincing, or even just a stance that ultimately perpetuates white supremacy. Lee might be said to pen an encomium to the very Southern liberalism that Lillian Smith's 1949 *Killers of the Dream* targeted as self-deluded, a verdict that perhaps overstates the case against *Mockingbird*, since it ignores the subversive lessons to be learned from the naïve Scout and acerbic Jean Louise.

As biographer Charles Shields sees it, Lee wanted to be "a Southerner satisfied with joining the tradition of regionalist writers south of the Mason–Dixon Line" (190). Readers almost immediately fastened their attention instead on the story of racial injustice and the dramatic courtroom scenes of Tom Robinson's unjust conviction (a kind of legal lynching), not its affectionate, even defensive, evocation of small-town Southern life. Nor did they wonder much about the counter-normative sexual and gender dynamics of the novel, which have only recently received sustained attention from scholars.[6] The film version exacerbated the shift in focus toward race, as increased time was devoted to Atticus and the trial. Gregory Peck's production notes argued insistently that footage of the children's escapades be reduced, with the result that Atticus (and Peck) emerges as the film's powerful center at the expense of Scout and Jem. Although Lee was reportedly told to recast *Go Set a Watchman* by telling the story through young Scout's perspective, most of the novel is told by the adult Jean Louise, who riddles its pages with her irony, sarcasm, and social criticisms. Unseen, as if closeted or a ghost, Jean Louise remains occluded by the very visible preadolescent Scout. The film virtually eliminates Jean Louise's voice, relegating her to six brief voiceovers in a sentimentalizing Southern lilt evacuated of any of the author's mocking wit. We are left with the children and the overpowering Atticus, the film losing the balance of perspectives that Jean Louise's tone imparts. The trial, with its sensational inquiry into interracial sex, gains considerable space in Horton Foote's screenplay, from 15% of the book to 30% of the film, further enhancing the depiction of paternal wisdom (Shields 218). As Colin Nicholson gages the impact of the changes, "several themes developed in the narrative space of the novel are necessarily compressed in the film's option to concentrate upon the central theme of racial hostility towards blacks by Southern whites" (65).

Assessing the place of *Mockingbird* in the tradition of racial liberalism is obscured by the differences between the novel and the

Hollywood classic, along with the popular images of both and the less celebratory analyses that academics after the 1980s produced. The ensuing interpretive contradictions present major dilemmas for those studying and teaching the novel, and for situating its place in US literary history. Is it the masterpiece that bravely indicts racism? Or is it, as Hernan Vera and Andrew Gordon argue, yet another example of white people as "screen saviors," displacing their own guilt by telling themselves a story in which the white hero saves the benighted world? (42–44).[7] Or is it a sly deconstruction of the difference between these competing versions, undertaken by a woman who was equally concerned with the injustice and injury done by normative sexual and gender expectations? In the novel, readers experience Scout as the focal point for moral education and social critique, though these often actually come from the adult Jean Louise, always ready to skewer the town's provinciality, hypocrisies, and cruelties. As she says of her education, for example: "I knew nothing except what I gathered from *Time* magazine and reading everything I could lay hands on at home, but as I inched sluggishly along the treadmill of the Maycomb County school system, I could not help receiving the impression that I was being cheated out of something" (44). Readers coming to the book from the film may be surprised by Scout/Jean Louise's comic tone and the irreverence that was a consistent feature of Lee's style as a person and a writer. While Scout's perspective encourages the idealization of her father's moral rectitude, it also entertains a skeptical scrutiny of his adequacy as a role model for social progress. Plus, we have other odd characters and stories that rivet our attention and offer complicating contexts for understanding the racial melodrama and its tie to the story of Scout's reclusive neighbor Arthur "Boo" Radley. Returning to the novel from the film, we will find more evidence, I argue, for how to connect Boo's story to Tom's and Scout's, as well as how to appreciate the difference Jean Louise makes as a narrator, and in that way can discover more connections between the novel's plots of race and the plots of sex/gender queerness.

For the film seems to take literally rather than ironically Atticus's statement to the jury that "This case is as simple as black and white" (271). Underscoring the point, the movie is shot in black and white, heightening the sense of melodrama and gothic fears of blackness and otherness and setting up Atticus to be the center of enlightenment. "The American white male," observes Nicholson, "cast here in the heroic figure of a progressive liberal lawyer fighting for the civil rights of a black man falsely accused of raping a young white woman, dominates the action" (66). In giving racial liberalism such an unquestioned heroic figure, the film short-circuits the kind of self-questioning, moral agonizing, and ethical struggle common to

earlier protagonists of racial liberalism in novels by Clemens, Laura Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947), and Smith, *Strange Fruit* (1944), and which Scout/Jean Louise in Lee's novel shares to some degree. "Lee's vicious social satire," comments Blackford, "seems disarming because she devotes much of the novel to irony against young Scout herself. When she turns the technique against Maycomb, the result resembles Twain's Huck, who can calmly and without awareness of humor point out discrepancies in culture" (198).

Lee's Atticus is a more complex figure than Peck's, a man who tolerates Scout's repudiation of feminine norms, justifies breaking "laws for the sake of the needs of specific individuals," puts up with racists (like Walter Cunningham and Mrs. Dubose) as basically "good" individuals who just make mistakes, naively brushes aside the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, and exercises his class privilege in trying to counter white supremacist injustice while also invoking class prejudice in his treatment of the Ewells (Fine 65). Asked by Scout "Do you defend niggers?" Atticus first instructs her "Don't say nigger, Scout. That's common" (*Mockingbird* 99). Perhaps because she's just a child, he doesn't tell her it is wrong, shameful, evil, or racist. By invoking a well-understood distinction between being "common" and being well mannered, Atticus uses what is implicitly a class prejudice to ward off a racial, and moral, one. Pressed by Scout on whether all lawyers defend Negroes, he assuredly responds: "Of course they do, Scout" (100). Now Atticus, if he is a lawyer in the South in 1935, knows this is a lie, and that the entire history of US jurisprudence demonstrates the contrary. His own defense of Tom is by appointment, not something he initiated. Again, we might excuse his lie as the appropriate idealizing sentiment to instruct a child, but this episode detracts noticeably from his integrity, and one may wonder what the adult Jean Louise intends in reporting it. Christopher Metress finds the novel and its hero "morally ambiguous or, at worst, morally reprehensible. Nowadays, he continues, many readers will likely emphasize Atticus' complicity with, rather than his challenges to, the segregationist politics of his hometown, and as a result Lee's novel is beginning to lose its iconic status" (147).[8] Doubtless critical accounts of Atticus and Lee have grown more negative, but there seems little evidence that the novel is losing its cachet, if we judge by its sales, use in schools, treatment in popular press accounts, and anecdotes from readers.

For her 2011 documentary, *Hey, Boo,* Mary McDonagh Murphy interviewed contemporary writers, historians, and celebrities about *Mockingbird*, with each testifying passionately to its importance in their lives and reading a favorite passage. All agree on the centrality of the book's treatment of racism, though in an outtake Oprah Winfrey says she did not "realize the depth of the racial

implications of the book" until she saw the movie.[9] With the exception of Anna Quindlen, none dwell on Scout's struggle with gender norms or discuss the book in feminist terms. In another outtake, however, novelist James McBride comments that descriptions of Lee as "brave" by other writers today strike him as "odd":

> I think she's a brilliant writer. I think Martin Luther King was brave. Malcolm X was brave. James Baldwin, who was gay and black in America and had to move to France, was brave. I think by calling Harper Lee "brave," you kind of absolve yourself of your own racism. . . . We kind of absolve ourselves of our own responsibility in terms of what we are doing now, in terms of our own racism, in terms of our own socioeconomic classism, in terms of what we need to do now, today. (qtd in Murphy)

There's clearly a difference, for McBride, between the risks a liberal white writer faces and the risks that black activists undertake, suggesting that the feel-good identification with Atticus is a temptation to be avoided.

The gap between more recent academic criticism on *Mockingbird* and the traditional public perception of its virtues can partly be explained by the book's form: in adopting a plot hinging on a father's edifying pedagogy and featuring young people trying to understand the complex social issues of the adult and public worlds, the novel seems destined for the classroom, despite Lee's satiric representation of schoolteachers. One cannot fully appreciate the cultural work that the text has performed over the past four decades without highlighting the dominant role of liberal humanist ideology in the way students are taught to read it. The interpretation of *Mockingbird* in schools unsurprisingly flattens the novel into simplistic moral and universalizing platitudes, avoids much of the historical context involving racism and lynching and class struggle, and ignores Lee's subversions of gender norms. James Kelley notes that teachers' answers to student questions in online forums mainly reflect training in New Criticism, a text-focused approach that sidelines historical analyses and avoids the kinds of interpretive disruptions that feminist, Marxist, new historicist, or deconstructive approaches, for example, render. Notable are teacher comments that override the novel's satire of gender normativity by insisting on reinserting Scout into the very narrative of conformity she resists. For one teacher, Scout "moves through her tom boy[*sic*] stage"; another sees her as having "developed from a little rascal to a young lady"; while another explains that Scout "has grown from a naïve tomboy to a sensitive and compassionate young lady" (15). Wittingly or not, these homophobic comments ignore how the stance of the tomboy is

not an error to be left behind but the very epistemological and social counter-normativity making Scout see the world critically and helping her to act more freely within it.

The 2012 eNotes introduction to the novel's "Lesson Plan" states that "Atticus reigns as the most noble parent ever brought to life." This guide reflects an emphasis in the current scholarship on referencing the major historical events and legal cases of the civil rights movement in the 1950s as well as the "searing tyranny of the Great Depression." These nods toward historicization, however, merely precede the Plan's return to a more ahistorical, universalizing pedagogy of moral norms. After recognizing the book's publication "during a time of great social change," the Plan emphasizes "the issues of fairness, justice, and the mutability of human nature" and "the horrors of bigotry." In sum, "the story taps into the most universal truths inherent in our very humanity—innocence, corruption, prejudice, hatred, curiosity, fatalism, respect, courage, and compassion." However well meaning, these guidelines for teachers and students dehistoricize the text, replacing the questions it raises about the legacy of plantation slavery, sharecropping, intraracial class conflict among whites, segregation, legal lynching, and oppressive gender regulations with abstract "universal truths." They proceed as if Jim Crow laws and widely tolerated racism were not the cause of these practices; instead such "horrors" are the inevitable "universal truths inherent in our very humanity," and thus not the fault of structural discrimination or patriarchal regimes. If this is so, then injustice cannot be eradicated or substantially ameliorated, seeing as it is simply a fact of human nature rather than the social and political byproduct of real human choices and acts that could, or can, be changed. In promoting this humanistic fatalism, such pedagogy unintentionally echoes Atticus himself, who declares from the outset that his defense of Tom Robinson is doomed to fail, an admission many readers greet as a sign of his wisdom. Perhaps, but it also indicates an inadequate political response to racial injustice, settling for a rhetorical one that carefully balances the expression of social critique with an absolution from responsibility for changing the outcome.

As with *Huckleberry Finn*, some readers and educators have objected to the pervasive adoption of *Mockingbird*. In one controversy in Canada, Isaac Saney protests that the book "used abusive and racist language and perpetuated demeaning stereotypical images and generalisations" that were especially damaging for students of color (100). The word "nigger," for example, is used 48 times, often casually in ways that make it feel normative (the count for *Huckleberry Finn* is 219). For Saney, the symbolic equivalence of black people with harmless singing mockingbirds redoubles the novel's overall depiction of African Americans as at best victims, useless and

passive spectators to their own oppression, requiring a white savior to guide them. Lee's paternalism can be galling, as is her failure to depict any of the black lawyers and activists, businessmen and professionals, and ordinary citizens, who organized and fought for racial justice in the first half of the twentieth century, in both the South and the North (though perhaps not so actively in Monroeville). In a nicely balanced account, African-American critic Gerald Early compares his experience of Lee's novel with his subsequent reading of Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938): "I did not cease to like or admire *To Kill a Mockingbird* when I read Richard Wright's stories, but it was with a degree of astonishment that I actually read a book that told me how black people in the South felt, not how white people thought they felt or what white people thought they were or how badly some white people felt about their mistreatment" (98). African-American criticisms of the novel contend that although the book is designed to move and educate white people, it also reinforces their paternalistic attitude and their convictions of cultural superiority and political privilege.

Such problems plague Louel C. Gibbons's instructional guide *To Kill a Mockingbird in the Classroom: Walking in Someone Else's Shoes* (2009). Gibbons provides this typical statement of pedagogical liberal humanism: "As teachers, we understand that the appeal of timeless, classic literature lies in its ability to tap into the universality of human experience and convey feelings and situations to which readers of all ages and eras can relate" (13). As her subtitle suggests, Gibbons puts *Mockingbird's* empathic agenda front and center in her pedagogy as well as her interpretation. Her championing the novel's "timeless themes of tolerance and acceptance" puts us on a slippery slope, beginning with the necessary recognition of racism's enduring prevalence across history and degenerating eventually into a platitude that lets us ignore the actual people and practices of a time and place that really do produce intolerance and bigotry (xiv). Throughout the novel, we witness many incidents of injustice, unfairness, and cruelty arising from discrimination based on race, class, and gender. It is highly questionable whether these could be addressed or ameliorated primarily by acts of empathy, since their first cause is not a lack of feeling but an exercise of power.[10] A rehistoricized approach would help students, teachers, and readers recognize the function of specific discriminatory practices within a social system which is not "timeless" and that apportions wealth, power, and privilege on the basis of such distinctions. Institutionalized, legalized, and culturally reinforced ideologies of discrimination belong to a different category than personal prejudice or bigotry. A personal prejudice may be immoral or unethical, but unless it is codified in law (or winked at by judges and lawyers) or made customary by social and economic

norms, its possible harm and influence are relatively minor as compared to systemic discrimination. This distinction between prejudice and structural oppression needs emphasis, or else we will fall into the trap of believing that changing how one feels is enough (apologies to Harriet Beecher Stowe).

The trouble with describing *Mockingbird* as a novel about "intolerance and acceptance" is that bigotry and intolerance are not the cause of racism (Gibbons 14). Racism is the cause of bigotry and intolerance, which are the instruments racialization fashions for its social, political, and cultural implementation. The words "acceptance" and "tolerance" allow us to talk about more generalized issues rather than the structural oppression of people by skin color and other differences of ancestry or physiognomy. At least in the examples from Gibbons's classroom, the shift prompts students to talk about almost every kind of prejudice except racism, which makes them too uncomfortable. That rhetoric also naturalizes racism as the inevitable product of human nature rather than as the social construction of an empowered class. This de-politicizing humanist rhetoric proves even more misleading when we consider that "racism" itself is a code word, at least in the US context, for white supremacy, a point Smith makes repeatedly. Imagine the effect in the conversation, among students or general readers, if asked to discuss *Mockingbird* as an analysis of white supremacy or white privilege, much less as an exploration of queer desire, rather than a novel about empathy, moral courage, bigotry, or intolerance. The curricular themes of *Mockingbird* pedagogy help explain its canonical status and popularity insofar as its dominant interpretation keeps readers from confronting the history of white supremacy, its institutions, and their functional dynamics. Like the film, this theme shifts attention toward a universalist discourse that, in making the novel's issues "timeless," absolves us of responsibility for the unique and historic injustices of racism in the US.

Such instances of a liberal humanist approach abound in the novel, especially in Atticus's various speeches. Discussing the jury's verdict with Jem, Atticus tells him "you saw something come between them and reason. You saw the same thing that night in front of the jail. When that crew went away, they didn't go as reasonable men, they went because we were there" (295). Jem can be forgiven for finding this statement puzzling. What does "we were there" mean? Does it mean that the empathy Scout invokes during her dialogue with Walter Cunningham causes him and his ilk to leave? Atticus had explained to Jem earlier that the children's presence "made Walter Cunningham stand in my shoes for a minute. That was enough" (210). If so, why did empathy then fail in the trial, where the jurors were drawn from the same social class as the would-be lynchers? The Maycomb jury delivers its unjust verdict because these 12 white men, however poor

and marginalized, are substantially invested in what W.E.B. Du Bois (and David Roediger) analyzes as the "wages of whiteness." They are not motivated, as Atticus avers, by some irrational bigotry, but by the very real advantages that the practices of racial discrimination confer—advantages all the more important, given their beneficiaries' relative poverty. Atticus betrays the limits of the racial liberal's position when he diagnoses racism as simply an irrationality or lapse in empathic imagination rather than as a systematic machinery of sociopolitical power and capital acquisition. His failure also illustrates a point made by critics of racial liberalism: equal inclusion in such legal rights as trial by jury avails little when white supremacy and racism bias the jury's decision. The adult Jean Louise pronounces this harsher verdict: "in the secret courts of men's hearts Atticus had no case. Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed" (323). The jurors do not feel the proper liberal sentiments because it is not in their racial interest to do so. Atticus, after all, does not directly challenge the town's racial codes and white supremacy, however distasteful or even wrong he might find them. He constructs a world of privately nurtured and publicly displayed moral exemplarity and teaches it to his children through the discourse of empathy. Instead of changing the world, he learns, and teaches, how to feel what it is like for the oppressed other to suffer in that world. Atticus's actions, in defending Tom and preventing his lynching, are noble but futile. The idealization of Atticus that the film promulgates and schools sustain, may hinder our ability then to distinguish the sources of liberalism's dilemmas in addressing racism in the South, and America.

2. Historicizing Lee: Racism and Rights at Midcentury

If approaching *Mockingbird* through searches for timeless truths and experiences of empathy is at best short-sighted and misleading, what does a more historically contextualized reading offer? In sustaining a triple focus on Lee's plots of race, gender, and sexuality, we might consider how both the rise of the civil rights movement and the emergence of feminist and gay and lesbian voices influenced her personal and intellectual development in the 1940s and 1950s. Lee's 1949 move to New York means she was not living in Alabama during the 1950s when the civil rights movement exploded on the national scene. The impact of these historic events on the novel's composition is unclear (though it appears they received more treatment in the earlier *Go Set a Watchman*). Of course, she must have followed them in the news, through contact with her family, and during annual trips back to Monroeville. Scholars have recognized the influence of the Scottsboro trials, *Brown v. Board of Education*, the murder of

Emmett Till, and the Montgomery bus boycott so tumultuously unfolding just 100 miles from her Alabama home.[11] Yet no one in the novel, including the studious Atticus, the sheriff, and the judge, mentions Scottsboro or similar cases, which seems implausible even given the provinciality of Maycomb and the use of a child's point of view. The traumatic events of the present historical moment can't be mentioned, of course, if we accept the novel as only taking place in 1935. But Jean Louise narrates retrospectively, from around 1960. She knows what has, and is, happening, and could easily refer to any contemporary incident. Lee's focalization through the adolescent Scout, however, allows Jean Louise to naturalize the absence of such controversial allusions, though these may be buried in ironic commentary. For example, she reports how Atticus mistakenly contends "Way back about nineteen-twenty there was a Klan. . . . The Ku Klux's gone. . . . It'll never come back" (196). Jean Louise, and Lee, know better. Lee and Jean Louise also know about recent challenges to gender and sex conventions. Richards speculates that activism around homosexuality in the 1950s, which included the creation of the Mattachine Society and an ensuing debate over radical versus integrationist approaches to gay rights, might have influenced Lee's depictions of sexual otherness, perhaps emboldening her queer voices and making her particularly suspicious of the rhetoric of "the closet as a site of darkness, death, and decay" (155). As we will also see, Lee's life in New York and her friendship with Truman Capote likewise suggest the plausibility of reading *Mockingbird* within the context of emergent dissident voices on the topics of women's roles, gender transitivity, and same-sex desire.

By 1960, Lee surely realized that even a novel intending to lament the passing of small-town Southern life would have to include the subject of racial injustice. Her apparent acceptance of an editor's suggestion to set the novel in the 1930s, however, contributes to its estrangement from the politics of the 1950s, which were more at the center of the previous draft, published in 2015 as *Go Set a Watchman*. In *Mockingbird*, we do not encounter organized, educated African Americans working for their freedom, though they had been doing so for a century. Their very absence accentuates the book's focus on white people and their individual moral consciousness. For the white reader in the early 1960s, time spent in Maycomb is time spent away from the conflicts in the streets, away from televised images of protesting Negroes and their pressures for integration. Bus and store boycotts by protesting blacks seem unimaginable in Lee's Maycomb. The African Americans she depicts are a marginal, largely passive audience to their own oppression.

Lee's support for the civil rights demonstrations was decidedly centrist. Since, to echo Myrdal, she regarded the "Negro Problem as

a Moral Issue," she was publicly uncomfortable with the growing call for political action and civil disobedience. Unlike Smith, Lee did not endorse the Freedom Riders or other more radical activists: "I don't think this business of getting on buses and flaunting [*sic*] state laws does much of anything. . . . I think the Reverend King and the NAACP are going about it in exactly the right way" (qtd in Shields 223). Perhaps contrary to the author's intention, it would be readers, reviewers, and later on teachers who would join the film in making the story of racial injustice the primary focus of *Mockingbird*. While acknowledging this disconnect between the novel Lee wrote and the novel that has become legendary, I contend that their linking depends on the universalizing tale of ethical education, embodied in the relation of the pedagogical Atticus to the precocious Scout, at the book's center. At the same time, the often-caustic observations of both Scout and Jean Louise, and scenes of empathic understanding for queer characters that appear to exceed the boundaries of Maycomb's little world, repeatedly decenter this normalizing moral discourse. Asked by Uncle Jack "You want to grow up to be a lady, don't you?," Jean Louise recalls "I said not particularly" (105). Noting the town's class prejudice toward the Ewells, she observes, "Maycomb gave them Christmas baskets, welfare money, and the back of its hand" (257). These are not the words of a child. This very adult, satiric strain in Lee's work dates back to her early college writing, where she honed it in reviews and essays, notably when treating the topics of race and sex.

It's difficult to say when or where Lee developed the opinions animating the novel's representation of Southern norms, though some scholars postulate the influence of her father, Amasa Coleman Lee, whose life offered materials evidently used in creating Atticus Atticus. Yet the record suggests that A. C. Lee held pretty standard conservative views on race until well into the 1950s; it may even have been Harper's influence that changed her father, rather than vice versa. Although there's nothing in Shields' biography that indicates how or when Lee was exposed to racism and racial violence in her youth, the first stories she wrote and published in college (in 1945) show "the rather daring choice of subject matter: racial prejudice and justice" (79). "Nightmare" tells of a child's fright at seeing a lynching. In another story, "A Wink at Justice," a judge resembling her father administers peremptory judgment on a group of black men accused of gambling, letting go the ones who work in the fields (whom he spots because of the calluses on their hands) and jailing the smooth-palmed gamblers who are professionals.

Lee wrote these vignettes during her brief time at Huntingdon College in Montgomery. After transferring to the University of Alabama, she sought opportunities at the campus newspaper, *The*

Crimson White, and found a place at the campus humor magazine, *Rammer Jammer*, eventually becoming editor. Evidence that contemporary Southern fiction was shaping her views is found in a review she penned in October 1946 of a recent novel, *Night Fire* by Edward Kimbrough, who had also been a student at Alabama. Wrote Lee in her review: "Almost since the time the first slaves were shipped into the South by the Yankees, various authors have taken it upon themselves to probe, explain and hash over the problems that came with them. The South has repeatedly been embarrassed by the Smith [*sic*], Faulkners, Stowes, et al, who either wrote delicately of the mint julep era or championed the dark eddies of 'niggertown'" ("Alabama Authors"). Lee's passing references to these race novels are tantalizing; we can't tell from the evidence, however, if she's actually read them, especially given the confused way she talks about their attitudes. College-student Lee repeats the Southern apologist line blaming slavery on the North and writes a confusing sentence in which novelists critical of Southern racial society seem also to be accused of also offering up mint-julep stereotypes more often associated with the likes of Margaret Mitchell. She prefers *Night Fire* for its exposure of the "incompetents" elected to enforce the laws of the South, something she will correct in her portraits of Atticus, Judge Taylor, and Sheriff Tate. But *Night Fire* also features a plot in which a white Southern moderate and debauched plantation scion, Ashby Pelham, tries to prevent the lynching of an innocent black man, though this hero's distinct lack of other moral virtues starkly contrast with Atticus. She also praises another character, Bevo Banes, as "the epitome of the small Southern industrialist, acutely aware of the labor and racial problems which hamper the economic development of the South, and who strives to work out the best possible solution to them." Lee also notes the strong portraits of women in Kimbrough's book, black and white, and its fascinating array of "dozens of minor characters" (2). While Lee doesn't say so, these women are not Southern belles or mammies: white heroine and love-interest Laurel is a smart, independent, and physically courageous soul, and Tilda is a black woman bent on justice. Moreover, Lee's reference to the author of *Strange Fruit* suggests that she was also familiar with its subplot of the oppressed lesbian Laura and her thwarted love for Jane.

Lee's praise for Kimbrough's novel is fascinating, given that *Night Fire's* critique of Southern racism confirms most of the major themes Smith treated in her own writings of the 1940s: the cynical schemes by rich plantation owners and Northern capitalists to divide black and white laborers from each other through the myth of white supremacy; the corruption of the law and government by the practices of white power; the oppression of both white and black women by the system of white male patriarchy; the psychological perversions

installed by the ideology of white supremacy, including the tortured conscience of the impotent liberal (though Pelham is remasculinized in the course of the novel as he fights to save his own life and that of his black employee when the lynchers try to burn them out of the swamp). Other than the plot featuring the pursuit of an unjustly accused black man, *Mockingbird* shares little with *Night Fire*. The latter is patently an adult novel with frank depictions of sexuality and racial violence. Lee's college writings suggest that her rebellious younger self felt more inclined to Smith-like criticisms of this milieu than the Lee who later published *Mockingbird*. Even as the direct action of political protest gained momentum in the streets of the mid-1950s South, Lee retreated to the 1930s and a possibly nostalgic fable of liberal consciousness-raising that issues no overt threat to the sociopolitical status quo. Yet in Jean Louise's narrative, we hear much satirical critique of Southern ladies and their rules, enjoy many subversions of normative male roles, and witness a reversal of standard racist mythology as an African-American man is wrongly accused of rape when a white girl acts on forbidden interracial desires. This style of embedding social critique in sometimes covert satire is one that Lee developed during her college years, though then her strokes were far broader.

October 1946 also saw the publication, in *Rammer Jammer* and under the name of "Nelle Lee," of a brief one-act play titled *Now Is the Time for All Good Men*. The play satirizes the use of voter literacy laws to restrict African American and poor white suffrage, specifically the Boswell Amendment, which was set to appear on the Alabama state ballot for November 1946. In 1944, the US Supreme Court, in *Smith v. Allwright*, had ruled that the use of "whites only" Democratic primaries was unconstitutional. The case, argued by Thurgood Marshall, was a major victory in the effort to end the disenfranchisement of African Americans. In response, the Boswell Amendment required voters to understand and explain any passage of the Constitution to the satisfaction of the local registrar of voters. The amendment passed despite widespread opposition. This obvious effort to restrict the franchise was eventually also found unconstitutional in 1949, though a subsequent 1951 law passed by the Alabama legislature imposed new voter qualification rules that would stand until the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In Lee's satiric piece, the Hon. Jacob F. B. MacGillacuddy chairs the Citizens Committee to Eradicate the Black Plague. His opening rant denounces the "goddam yankees" of the present day as new "carpet-baggers": "Telling us how to vote and how to run our business, and yea—even influencing our colored friends to turn against their benefactors who helped get them readjusted after the Great War Between the States" (7). Evidently, the modest steps that

Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman took to address segregation, and the incessant pressure of NAACP legal challenges (masterminded by Marshall), were already producing reactionary rhetoric in the 1940s more often associated with the resistant white South in the period after *Brown v. Board of Education*.

MacGillacuddy is harassed by a group of University of Alabama students labeled "COMMUNISTS" who are advocating that "Wallace" be appointed president of the University. The reference is obviously to Henry Wallace, vice-president under Franklin Roosevelt and Secretary of Commerce under Truman until he was fired in September 1946—a month before the publication of Lee's satire. Wallace was a liberal New Dealer whose appointment to the ticket in 1940 many Southern Democrats opposed. At the 1940 Democratic convention, Wallace received 626 votes; his main opponent, Speaker of the House William Bankhead of Alabama, received 329 votes. In 1942, Wallace gave a controversial speech, "The Century of the Common Man," an alternative to Henry Luce's "American Century" that Southerners defending the status quo would not have appreciated. Wallace opens with an analogy to the Civil War: "This is a fight between a slave world and a free world. Just as the United States in 1862 could not remain half slave and half free, so in 1942 the world must make its decision for a complete victory one way or another" (369).

Wallace's positive statements about the Soviet Union after a visit there, along with his left-leaning political views, led to the association with Communism that Lee jokes about. Wallace was indeed unusually progressive in opposing segregation, especially his statements on racial injustice, as in the speech he gave in Detroit in the wake of the white-instigated race riots there in 1943:

> We cannot fight to crush Nazi brutality abroad and condone race riots at home. Those who fan the fires of racial clashes for the purpose of making political capital here at home are taking the first step toward Nazism.
>
> We cannot plead for equality of opportunity for peoples everywhere and overlook the denial of the right to vote for millions of our own people. Every citizen of the United States without regard to color or creed, whether he resides where he was born or whether he has moved to a great defense center or to a fighting front, is entitled to cast his vote. ("America Tomorrow" 240)

Controversies over Wallace led Roosevelt to drop him from the 1944 ticket; thus, his availability, in the students' eyes, for the position of

president of the University of Alabama—something perhaps only someone of Lee's satirical intellect could have imagined.

MacGillacuddy condemns the "evildoers . . . who want to tear down all barriers of any kind between ourselves and our colored friends," especially the labor unions (7). In order to further restrict the voting rights of "all the white trash and colored folks" who can currently meet the minimum requirements, he proposes a new stipulation that registrars test prospective voters on their ability "to interpret passages of the Yew-nited States Constitution" (17). Literacy tests had been used in many states since before the Civil War but had become a primary vehicle for disenfranchising African Americans in the South. Registrars were notorious for their discriminatory application of the tests. Lee makes fun of this outrage when MacGillacuddy, who hasn't voted for 50 years, himself tries to register a year later. "I haft interpret some of the Constitution, don't I?" he asks. The registrar gives him the following passage to read: "No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States." "It means just what it says," answers MacGillacuddy. The registrar, at the behest of a "Local Boss," says "Naw, that ain't it," and sends him away (17). Lee had begun the law school program at the University of Alabama that September, and so she knew well that MacGillacuddy was reading the second sentence of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, one of the so-called Reconstruction Amendments whose intention was to guarantee the freedom, citizenship, and equal legal treatment of the freed African-American slaves. The tables have turned on MacGillacuddy, who takes his plea to the Supreme Court: "My civil liberties are being threatened" (17). Shaking their heads, the justices wonder "How can the state of Alabama be so presumptuous as to require an ordinary voter to interpret the Constitution when we can't even interpret it ourselves?" (18). But they don't have time to write an opinion, and MacGillacuddy goes home to start the Citizens' Committee to Restore Civil Liberties.

Lee's little college satire shows that her thinking about racial issues was already channeled along legal lines and that despite gender expectations for women writers, she was persisting in creating a dissident style of social critique. By dint of family background and reading about current events, she recognizes the legal hypocrisies of a segregated US and the importance that the Fourteenth Amendment would have in addressing them, beginning with its citation by the Supreme Court in deciding *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. Thus, knowing about this play, we might expect *Mockingbird* to feature a courtroom drama about the failure of the legal system to protect the civil liberties and rights of African Americans. That is the drama more centrally featured in the film than the novel and that

shapes many people's memories of what *Mockingbird* is all about. But in the more than 10 years that separate these college stories from the novel's completion, Lee took her writing in a different direction, placing the story of Scout and Jem's education in empathy at the book's center, suggesting that a moral education in justice is as important, or more so, than any reminder of the need to administer the Constitution fairly. Moreover, in her central as well as auxiliary characters, Lee populated Maycomb with individuals whose odd behavior often violated the norms of even the mainstream liberals of the era.

In dramatizing the defeat of Southern liberalism by the entrenched forces of racism, Lee mirrored what the nation had seen in the battered face of Emmett Till in the pages of *Jet* magazine and in the grins of his murderers, and what it would ultimately see televised from the streets of Birmingham when Bull Connor turned police dogs and water cannons on the civil rights marchers. The resistance to desegregation had been building to a hysterical level since 1955, creating a surging stream of violent acts that would eventually help turn the tide against legal discrimination. Rather than try to imagine what a victorious white challenge to racial apartheid would look like, Lee captured a portrait of the passing of Southern liberalism. Atticus's defeat and Tom Robinson's death could focus readers on the terrible power of a racism that so obstinately ignored the truth, acted so cruelly, and subverted the rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. The acquittals of Till's arrogant killers arguably stands as the most recently notorious model, perhaps even the actual inspiration for Maycomb's courthouse defeat of racial justice. That failure is what Lee's novel represents as the situation in the South in 1960, filtered through the storybook fable of the 1930s and the more consoling portrait of a child's moral education.

The 1960s were a decade when the exposure of war and social conflict on the front pages of newspapers and magazines and in the newly dominant glow of the television screen played a key role in changing America's image of itself. Both Lee's novel and its film version enter the national imaginary almost immediately as a shaping narrative of the contemporary moral crisis: its story of racial injustice becomes viscerally intolerable, though racism gets largely projected onto morally degenerate white trash, while the white middle-class looks into the mirror of its own tragic idealism. *Mockingbird* was propelled to stardom by mass media and popular culture as the spread of technologies of representation and the enormous growth of enrollment in schools and colleges enabled it to achieve a power of influence not seen since *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *Gone with the Wind* (1936). World War II had been given a cultural meaning as the war for democracy against fascism and racism (Melamed 18–26). Accurate or not, this ideological consensus was so powerful that it became standard for the

generation that fought the war and for the children who grew up in its light. The idealism it expressed, however unmatched by American realities of continued racism, contributed to that of the counterculture of the 1960s when millions would, like Scout, rebel against the norms of their communities. The national imaginary during the 1960s remained caught in Myrdal's "American dilemma," between demands that the US actually live up to the promises of liberty and freedom articulated in its founding documents and the stark evidence that these were denied arbitrarily to whole social groups on the basis of race or ethnicity, and later gender and sexual orientation.

It was this liberal imagination of US promises and their betrayal that *Mockingbird* evoked and spoke up about. That a child stood at its center was predictable, since the US imaginary had always liked to see the nation as young, new, and seeking independence from the ways of the old world and the sins of the fathers. So Scout is not only Huck Finn, but Nick Carraway too, a narrator who confronts the corruption of the American Dream while remaining in love with its promise. Lee must have Atticus quote (however ineffectually) the Declaration of Independence's "all men are created equal" in his closing argument, for the story (especially in the film) identifies him with what the nation imagines as its original ideals. Critics have shown that Atticus does not in practice live up to these ideals all the time, but that failure only reinforces his representative role: his character dramatizes how US liberalism has always been compromised by a certain amount of bad faith—self-interest, class prejudice, gender inequality, and political corruption. Allegorically, if Scout stands for the US imagination of itself, then her relation to her father stands for the ingenuous way Americans often think about the founding fathers, overlook their flaws, identify with their virtues, and ultimately confront their limitations and the responsibility to go beyond them. The popularity of *Mockingbird* stems from its disturbing way of giving the American imaginary a view of liberalism that at once dissects its failings and demands that we do better. Thus, the book and film both inspire and outrage, comforting audiences with banal platitudes and timeless familial sentiments, even as they impart a host of counter-normative lessons in the necessity for civil disobedience. All the while, the novel's articulation of dissidence depends on empathies with otherness that extend beyond the publicly embraced drama of racial liberalism.

3. Queer Identifications

Little is known about Lee's life in New York during the 1950s, or with whom she was close, what she read, or how she socialized, at

least until she began working with agents and publishers seriously in the mid-1950s. She tried her hand at stories based on small-town Southern life and absorbed the cultural influences of New York's modernism, where avant-garde ideas and subcultures flourished in various states of invisibility and repression. No doubt she met a diversity of people far different from the citizens of Maycomb, yet in writing about understanding odd characters she looked back to the eccentrics of home. One could argue that Lee, perhaps searching for a great theme to unite her episodic fragments, made a fundamental mistake in placing empathy at the center of the book's rhetoric at key moments, since empathy may not be the most effective key to the systematic approach to eradicating structural racism or sex/gender oppression. But this increasingly popular focus on ethical psychology was the one Myrdal had advocated in his influential study. Once the argument is made that "the Negro problem" is "primarily a moral issue of conflicting valuations" concerning democracy and equality among everyday people, he asserted, then we must give "*primary* attention to what goes on in the minds of white Americans" (lxxv). Teachers and critics, then, are not altogether misreading Lee when they emphasize empathy, for clearly the text steers them that way at times. In explanation, one might conjecture that Lee had two main stories on her mind. One had to do with racial injustice and the exposure of a small town's backwardness during the advent of the New South and the dawn of Southern liberalism, a time that could roughly be compared to the beginning of the civil rights movement in the mid-1950s when she drafted it. That is the story of Tom and Atticus. The other story is Scout's bildungsroman, including her rebellion against society's norms for gendered behavior, and particularly her groping for ways to connect her experiences of queer folks in town, including the strangely secluded Boo Radley. Both stories have autobiographical roots, and both place Scout/Jean Louise in various forms of oppositionality and compromise. But they are not the same, except perhaps in commonly endorsing nonconformity. Reacting to Aunt Alexandra's effort to rein in her tomboy ways, Jean Louise recalls (in decidedly adult language): "I felt the starched walls of a pink cotton penitentiary closing in on me, and for the second time in my life I thought of running away" (182). That penal reference also implies her identification with Tom's fate (and perhaps echoes Huck Finn's vow to light out for the territory). The novel's repeated, sometimes heavy-handed maxims about empathy bridge these two stories and equate the issues within them. But that strategy may be a miscalculation, for the equation doesn't hold up. In the race story, the nonconformity of Atticus, as critics have noted, is of a transcendentalist kind: like Emerson and Thoreau, he walks to the beat of a different drummer because he believes himself to be obeying higher laws.

Myrdal describes a similar dynamic in analyzing how the "American Creed" both celebrates the principles of enlightened social order and validates regular rebellions against it in the name of natural or higher laws (16). As in much liberal idealist writing, the rebel against authority turns into authority's reembodiment and society gets recast as the actual outlaw and sinner. "The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule," says Atticus, "is a person's conscience" (*Mockingbird* 140). Thus, the reader is positioned to gain moral uplift through identification with this rebel turned heroic instantiation of the good.

In the story of Scout/Jean Louise's nonconforming gender and sexual identity, however, the higher law is more obscure. The freedoms Scout seeks in wearing overalls and being a tomboy are not ones that Finch's courtroom citations of the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution summarily evoke. Dominant culture labels such disobedience as perverting natural law and such unsanctioned sexual identities as illness rather than transcendence. Yet as critics have noted, the novel lacks virtually any representation of successful heteronormative relationships or marriage, so it remains unclear to what utopia Scout may aspire if she obeys Aunt Alexandra and chooses to become a "lady" after all. Alternatives also appear disguised or hard to discern in the unconventional performances of the female sex like Maudie Atkinson's and Mrs. DuBose's. The sad situation of Dolphus Raymond, who pretends to be a drunkard so society can excuse his creating a family with a black woman, doesn't augur well for unconventional desire. We know nothing of the adult Jean Louise's life; she never mentions having a husband or partner or children. This silence may suggest that, unlike Atticus, she cannot make her life visible or fully express her beliefs, much less act upon them, without risking condemnation or violence. Even when attending an African-American church service, recalls Jean Louise, Scout suffered through a misogynistic sermon: "I was confronted with the Impurity of Women doctrine that seemed to preoccupy all clergymen" (162).

For all his nonconformity, Atticus can be a hero to the blacks and to the town itself, which reluctantly relies on him to be the conscience of the community. The townspeople will tolerate a "nigger-lover" because their community's survival depends to some degree on the plausibility of its claim to be a democratic society based on the principles of the founding fathers. This paradox resonates with the Cold War American dilemma, when racism at home undermined the nation's imperial mission to spread its democratic ideology, and political power, around the globe. Atticus imparts that plausibility, and so enables the hypocrisy to continue, to the extent that the rhetoric of equality gets sequestered in high-minded phrases, while the business of everyday discrimination goes unchecked. No such embrace for a queer or lesbian heroine, however, appears forthcoming. The

specificity of same-sex desire remains unspeakable, veiled behind the theme of universalized empathy for "others." Some shoes are more difficult to walk in than others and crossing the boundaries of sex/gender can be even harder than those of race. Yet even the film invites us into that forbidden territory in the exquisite scene where, after the attack on the children, Scout tells Boo that he can go ahead and "pet" the unconscious, bedridden Jem. As Boo's gentle hand moves across the screen to touch Jem's forehead lightly, we can be excused for reading into the gesture a lifetime of repressed desire.

Critic Holly Blackford joins the chorus of those who find the jurisprudence, moral posturing, and parenting skills of Atticus problematic: "Atticus's lessons about stepping into the skin of another" should not be swallowed whole for "the novel demonstrates the overwhelming limits of his worldview" (12). The jury does not respond to his plea that they understand the incidents at the Ewell house from Tom's point of view. "Mass adoption of *Mockingbird* for school-aged youth," suggests Blackford, has prevented wide recognition of the book's counter-normative elements, including its resistance to uncritical worship of the mainstream liberalism Atticus offers (13). Is *Mockingbird*, then, a far more subversive book than readers imagine? Attention to the book's split narration complicates efforts to stabilize its interpretation. On the one hand, we have Scout, a child observer whose debunking of town and family truths is accompanied by an equal amount of blindness and misunderstanding, and a heavy dose of paternal idealization; on the other hand, the adult Jean Louise interjects ironic commentary highlighting Scout and Atticus's limitations but doesn't give voice to a fully achieved adult consciousness or understanding of gender and race politics. That we often can't quite tell whether we are hearing Scout or Jean Louise compounds the problem. Psychological dramas haunt the surface of Scout's childhood, too: her issues with abandonment and maternal absence; the sexual threat of men; the wounded limbs of both her brother and Tom; the distorted mirror that is Mayella Ewell; the contrast between her father's reluctant assertion of masculine prowess in shooting the dog; and the revelation of his impotence and emasculation in trying to defend Tom Robinson.

Why *does* a story ostensibly focused on racial injustice in the courtroom begin and end with a gothic tale involving frightened children, a closeted neighbor, and an attack at night by a predator who has apparently already abused his own daughter physically and perhaps sexually? These disturbing elements of unconscious fear and desire take place at a register that seems to exceed the comprehension of Atticus and that mocks the psychology of empathy, at least in the form he offers up. When memory and human subjectivity are revealed to be so divided by unconscious drives, fantasies, and

traumas, empathy can gain limited purchase. The philosophical case for empathy rests on a theory of identification that runs into trouble when encountering the unconscious drives and fragmentations of the self. Rather than seeing Scout's interactions in terms of empathy, Laura Fine finds that "Lee furnishes her novel with characters with whom Scout can identify and who likely act as projections of her own unacceptable desires and fears" (62). Fantasy, not empathy, may be the predominant subjective instrument in Scout's education, which would accord with her sleepiness and better explain her investment in the fates of Mayella and Boo Radley. Identification may also be a performance, and thus not all that it seems.

Blackford sees the trajectory of the novel as taking Scout from an unselfconscious rebellion against social norms to a self-conscious ability to masquerade as one of the ladies, a journey parallel to Lee's gradual transition from New York literary rebel of the 1950s to her performance of the role of Monroeville lady spinster in the years after *Mockingbird*, burying her former outlaw sexual and gender self in the process. Shields maintains that even in college "Nelle was surprisingly knowledgeable about the topic of same-sex love" (96). One of her *Rammer Jammer* satires makes the point in parodying the famous "Yes, Virginia, There Is a Santa Claus" column from the *New York Sun*. As Shields quotes her piece: "Believe in Santa Claus! You may as well believe in fairies! Of course, there are fairies, but not the kind you read about in Anderson's fairy tales. . . . I saw two of them huddled together reading *The Well of Loneliness*" ("Revision" qtd in Shields 96). It is somewhat surprising to come across a reference to Radclyffe Hall's novel of tragic lesbian love in a column by a college student in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in 1945, though Hall's 1928 book had by then become notoriously popular among gay readers, many of whom found their first literary recognition of lesbian identity and desire in its pages. However comically intended, Lee's image of "two of them huddled together reading" the text of outlawed desire may have drawn from her own experience of finding, through reading, a world of "inverts" somewhat similar in character to the youth she spent with Truman Capote, which in turn becomes the model for Scout's time with the queer Dill (Blackford 245). If Lee had indeed just read *Strange Fruit*, however, as her college review suggests, she would have encountered another representation of frustrated same-sex desire in the character of Laura Deen, with whom she might have felt some identification or projective fantasy. Reading Hall, the creator of Scout would have taken especial interest in the character of the mannish Stephen Gordon, who is something of a Victorian tomboy and later a cross-dresser. When interviewed, acquaintances from Lee's college days remarked on her performance of gender-bending: "Everything about her hinted at

masculinity. I think the word *handsome* would have suited her," recollected Mary Tomlinson (qtd in Shields 77). Lee, writes Shields, in her "brown leather bombardier's jacket. . . cut a figure that blurred gender distinctions" (77). Shields also provides a friend's recollection that she preferred tackle football to touch, the latter being a "'sissy'" game (62). Other acquaintances at the University also noted Lee's performance of gender-bending behavior. "She was a little mannish-looking," recalled one friend. As Shields reports, Lee "was still chain-smoking, and she preferred men's pajamas over frilly gowns. . . . No one recalls seeing her with a beau" (85, 86). Perhaps Lee was thinking of those years by having the novel's children erect "an absolute morphodite in that yard" (91).[12]

To Kill a Mockingbird was not the first novel to depict a queer coming-of-age story in a small Southern town. In 1948, Truman Capote had published the best-selling *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, a semiautobiographical novel drawn from the years he spent in Monroeville as a childhood friend of Nelle Harper. The novel's homoerotic theme was widely discussed, with both acceptance and denigration. *Mademoiselle* fiction editor George Davis remarked "I suppose someone had to write the fairy *Huckleberry Finn*" (qtd in Richards 40).[13] *Other Voices* includes a tomboy character, Idabell, based on the young Lee. A wild child in overalls, Idabell, who resembles Scout, suffers criticism for her physical exuberance and lack of feminine attire. Unlike Scout, she has no patriarchal figure to turn to for guidance or restraint, though she also recalls Huckleberry Finn in her outlandish adventurousness and effort to run away from home. The Capote character, Joel Knox, involves her in a game called Blackmail, a voyeuristic activity of peering into windows to see the secrets going on, such as a naked girl waltzing or "two grown men standing in an ugly little room kissing each other" (65). Such queer secrets of closeted lives are somewhat reminiscent of the hidden mystery of Boo Radley's house.[14] More importantly, Joel's identity crisis and eventual affirmation of his own homosexuality (mirrored to him by the transvestite and Oscar Wilde-ish cousin Randolph) presents an outcome starkly different from the tragic conclusion that popular mythology usually prescribes for gay characters. Widely credited for its progressive if somewhat gothic and phantasmal representation of queer identity, the novel established Capote's literary reputation even as some reviewers and moralists criticized its sexual politics.

Although young Capote had left Monroeville in 1936 to live in New York and Connecticut with his mother and stepfather, he returned for summer visits and kept in touch with Nelle. Determined to become a writer, Capote went down to Monroeville for about three months in the fall of 1943 (when Nelle was a high school senior) and

again in the fall of 1944, periods when he could have seen her and talked with her about the fiction he hoped to write. In the preface to *Other Voices,* Capote famously recounts a walk he took outside of Monroeville in December 1944, which brought back recollections of his youth there and of "Idabel, or rather the girl who was the counterpart of Idabel" (xix). Rushing home, he wrote the book's opening passage. Nelle Lee had enrolled at nearby Huntingdon College that fall and would have been home for Christmas break at the time of this incident. Moreover, she was probably among the first to hear Truman's now legendary story of the book's inspiration. Lee's familiarity with the theme of Capote's new work can be inferred by her satire, "Some Writers of Our Times," published in the fall of 1945 in *Rammer Jammer*. She presents a paragraph about "a blonde young gentleman" writer, mimicking "the genteel intonation of his vowels" as he criticizes his teacher, Edward Kimbrough. He laments: "Honey, I'm thuck. My novel ith about a thenthitive boy from the time he'th twelve until he ith a gwowm man" (14). Perhaps this caricature owes something to Capote, as Shields concludes, though *Other Voices* does not track Joel's life to adulthood, and Capote was never a student at the University of Alabama (97). But given their lifelong friendship, one can surmise that Lee read the book and discussed it with Capote, if not during its composition, then in New York after her move there in 1949. Shields reports that Lee's father "suspected that Nelle's desire to emulate Capote was what was drawing her to New York" (17). She would have been keenly interested in how he used the experience of their childhood in Monroeville and obviously found some inspiration for her own exploration of queer gender identity in Idabel and Joel. The peeping-tom game seems an obvious source for some of the Boo Radley plot, and the parallel supports an interpretation insinuating a sexual dimension to his reclusive life. Unfortunately, neither Capote nor Lee left behind any documents from their New York years that would help nail down how their conversations might have affected Lee's writing of *Mockingbird*, but the parallels support the kind of thesis about the novel's queer affect that has lately been advanced.

Identification with either normative male or female roles or structures of desire seems out of the question for the gender-transitive Scout, and still a problem for the adult Jean Louise as she explores her young tomboy self. Is she looking back in recognition of two fairies (Scout and Dill) who become the "children" of a closeted ghost? Jean Louise offers a justification of her male-identified subjectivity during her recollection of the meeting of the ladies' missionary circle, which not-too-subtly exposes the racism and hypocrisy of Maycomb's matrons. In her adult voice, the narrator says:

> But I was more at home in my father's world. . . . Ladies seemed to live in faint horror of men, seemed unwilling to approve wholeheartedly of them. But I liked them. There was something about them, no matter how much they cussed and drank and gambled and chewed; no matter how undelectable they were, there was something about them that I instinctively liked. . . they weren't—
>
> "Hypocrites, Mrs. Perkins, born hypocrites," Mrs. Merriweather was saying. "At least we don't have that sin on our shoulders down here. People up there set 'em free, but you don't see 'em settin' at the table with 'em." (*Mockingbird* 313)

In a superb example of Lee's narrative stratagems, she appears to switch suddenly from Jean Louise's retrospective assessment to the abrupt interruption of voices from that past scene (Scout's present). This "was saying" marks the transition from a moment of distracted thought back into the scene of action, but does that moment belong to the mind of Scout back then, or to the interpretation of Jean Louise in the narrative present? Jean Louise comically uses Mrs. Merriwether's clichéd criticism of Northern hypocrisy about race as the conclusion for her own interpretation of gender distinctions (men may be uncouth but, unlike ladies, they are not "hypocrites"). The story also could apply to what Lee discovered when she left the provinciality of Monroeville for the presumed cosmopolitanism of New York City, only to discover that same-sex desire could not speak its name there either without harsh consequences. But if we are doubtless meant to laugh at Mrs. Merriwether's deluded rhetoric, is her opinion about the difference between North and South really less defensible than the essentialist evaluation of women's superior integrity? It's a difficult passage to interpret, for we have to wonder to what degree Jean Louise is affirming the young Scout's preference for men and to what degree satirizing or reinterpreting it. The context of the missionary circle certainly strengthens the perception of the women's hypocrisy, but this doesn't hold true for women such as Aunt Alexandra and Miss Maudie, who have already criticized Mrs. Merriweather when she blithely eats the food at the Finch household while criticizing Atticus for defending Tom.

Taken skeptically, the reminiscence points to how the childish Scout identified with men insofar as she perceived them as free to disobey social norms, indulging their desires and ignoring decorum. They obeyed the higher laws of their rebellious masculinity in disobedience of the expectations policed by the ladies. What makes women hypocrites in her eyes, we can surmise, is that they too have the same outlaw desires of expression and the body yet pretend

otherwise, suppressing or repressing themselves in the performance of Southern womanhood. Oddly, the men who "cussed and drank and gambled and chewed" don't seem to represent her father's world, since Atticus is not that kind of man. Young Scout becomes a tomboy in a fantasy search for the freedom that heterosexual hypocrisy denies to her. Something unpersuasive, however, lingers in Jean Louise's attempt to distance herself from a "horror of men," given the prominence of the attack on her by Mayella's father, Robert E. Ewell, and the abuse inflicted on Mayella. These episodes suggest that men's unbridled desires are indeed to be feared and that female companionship may be more "delectable."

The novel's drama of desire peaks during the trial, when Atticus, in tones of stern compassion, interrogates Mayella until she, like many real rape victims, feels as if she is the one on trial. That's understandable, for the only way Atticus can exonerate Tom Robinson is by exposing Mayella's violations of racial and sexual conventions. "She was white," Atticus tells the jury, "and she tempted a Negro. She did something that in our society is unspeakable: she kissed a black man. Not an old Uncle, but a strong young Negro man. No code mattered to her before she broke it, but it came crashing down on her afterwards" (272). Scout/Jean Louise sees in Mayella the mirror of her own codebreaking, and a vague but strong linkage along the axis of "unspeakable" desires. Mayella desires freedom from patriarchal abuse and to be the active agent of her own sexual pleasure, which significantly targets a forbidden object. The film version presents her as the grotesque nightmare obverse of the chaste Southern maidenlady: she is abjected as a twisted, hideous creature—puppet of her father's maleficence.

Atticus' questioning leads to this central point: "Who beat you up? Tom Robinson or your father?" (251). Confronted with the demand to tell the truth, which could include both interracial desire and incest, Mayella delivers her closing harangue reasserting that it was that "nigger yonder that took advantage of me," a line made politically correct but ambiguous in the film, where she simply says "he." Mayella joins the cohort of codebreakers with whom Scout/Jean Louise may in fantasy identify: "it came to me that Mayella Ewell must have been the loneliest person in the world. She was even lonelier than Boo Radley, who had not been out of the house in twenty-five years" (256). The passage establishes the chain of subconscious identification uniting Scout with Mayella and Boo. Mayella's class position is represented through a comparison, moreover, that conflates sexual and racial otherness: "She was as sad, I thought, as what Jem called a mixed child: white people wouldn't have anything to do with her because she lived among pigs; Negroes wouldn't have anything to do with her because she was white" (256).

In a description that more believably belongs to the adult Jean Louise than the child Scout, we then read: "Tom was a black-velvet Negro, not shiny, but soft black velvet. The whites of his eyes shone in his face, and when he spoke we saw flashes of his teeth. If he had been whole, he would have been a fine specimen of a man" (257). Jean Louise can see Tom as Mayella does—through a discourse of sensual desire, though limited by a repetition of the reminder of his obviously symbolic arm injury, which again functions to limit the threat his sexuality would otherwise offer.

What Scout witnesses from the black balcony (where she is symbolically identified with the point of view of the abject), and what may be driving her to unconsciousness in the form of drowsy sleep, is not only Tom's forbidden attractiveness, but how Mayella's gender and sexuality make her vulnerable twice over—probably molested by her own father and now abused again by the criminal justice assault of her, led by Scout's own father. The obvious parallel between these two girls without mothers who have such dominating father figures is doubtless intended to dramatize difference, but a psychoanalytic reading would readily explain the vilification of Bob Ewell as the necessary fantasy that allows Scout to moderate or defend against her own excessive desire for Atticus, which makes the spectacle of his cross-examination of Mayella all the more traumatic for her. While the Southern liberal perspective intends us to see father and daughter as the degenerate, backwoods representatives of a dirty, low-class whiteness that is to be blamed for the racism perpetuated in Maycomb, a deconstruction of the scene leads to a less melodramatic interpretation, one in which the roles of good and evil, or saint and sinner, are less clear, especially as Scout/Jean Louise's empathic identifications and desires shift queerly among the protagonists.

In the novel's final pages, after Scout has returned Boo to his own well of loneliness, Jean Louise invokes the lesson of empathy one more time after referring to the young people as "Boo's children": "Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough" (374). Given the novel's plot focus on Tom's trial and the issue of racism, Lee's decision to give such prominence to a concluding scene of empathic identification between Scout and Boo deserves attention. The scene reinforces the linkage of Tom to Boo made in the references to innocent mockingbirds and the didactic lesson of walking in the shoes of outsiders and the oppressed. This series of queer identifications also suggests that Scout, or Jean Louise, too is the prisoner of a closet of invisibility. Why is the Radley porch the privileged epistemological standpoint, rather than the porch of the Atticus or Robinson homes or the courtroom gallery where Scout sat watching the trial from the

African-American point of view? What Boo sees from the Radley place when he peers out, we imagine, is a normative world from which he has been excluded, an alienation that perhaps motivated his violent attack on his own father (symbol of patriarchy) and made of him a thing to fear and repress. It isn't Tom Robinson, finally, who occupies Scout and Jean Louise's subjective fantasies, but Boo Radley.

The alignment of the plots of Tom Robinson and Boo Radley along the empathic axis of tolerance/intolerance unites them in a general program of liberal humanism that readers easily recognize and scholars endorse. Fear of the other is the common denominator of their respective incarcerations. In a fine extended consideration of whether Boo's character should be read through what Eve Sedgwick analyzed as the "epistemology of the closet," Richards resists completely conflating Boo's reclusiveness with the condition of being closeted, though he notes many parallels that make the comparison highly relevant. However, he concludes: "In its generic form, this narrative is one often championed as the ideal for the advancement of social tolerance. The cultural outsider is known only in the abstract and accordingly demonized for his or her rumored differences until prolonged or heroic interactions establish reassuring commonalities for the cultural insider and ultimately ensure acceptance" (153). While this generic narrative belongs to the framework of racial liberalism applied in the novel, "acceptance" is not forthcoming for Tom or even for Boo, except in the reader's converted heart.

After closing the book on its triumphant note of empathy, one may wonder why Scout leads Boo back into his house of detention, as if the novel's ending reverses the "coming out" announced on the book's first page. One could read Scout's performance as her coming out as a "lady" under the tutelage of Aunt Alexandra and Miss Maudie, a debut represented as she strolls arm in arm with the gentlemanly Mr. Arthur. Interpreted thus, Scout graciously but firmly puts Boo back in his place and at the same time establishes her own coming out into proper gendered identity. Alternatively, Richards reads the scene as the culmination of the novel's many "parodic images of heterosexual courtship." Here "Scout intentionally orchestrates her interactions with Boo to replicate the contours of a heterosexual courtship," thus appeasing the community and negotiating some degree of freedom "for Boo when she crafts the illusion of his normative heterosexuality" (142). One can't help observing that Boo isn't liberated by this performance, but sequestered once again. This masquerade becomes the text's ambiguous conclusion: as if in a fantasy, these two renegades stroll down the street, highly visible, and their queer secrets hidden by their imitation of propriety.

Perhaps her performance as Southern lady also reflects what Scout concludes from Bob Ewell's treatment of Mayella and his aborted assault on her—that normative heterosexuality carries with it the danger of a violent masculinity that is best avoided by the assumption of the protective mask of proper femininity, beneath which can be safely hidden another character of unlawful desire. This less uplifting reading matches better with the analogous plot of Tom's fatal imprisonment: his attempted rebellion or act of trying to leave the jail of racism ends in his killing by the zealous guards. Comparing these two conclusions, we might reasonably judge that Boo's willingness to return to his incarcerated invisibility, and Scout's performance as handmaiden to this reestablishment of normativity, constitutes the novel's actual lesson and final ironic commentary on the difficulty of believing in the viability of a queer life. In these twinned images of fatal rebellion and return to the closet, Lee exposes the constricting finalities whose implication subverts the triumph of liberalism that dominates the book's surface lesson espousing the virtue of empathic moral consciousness-raising.

Heather Love discusses the inevitable tendency of oppositional cultural histories, such as those focused on homosexuality or race, to highlight loss, tragedy, and abjection. Queer theory, on the other hand, attempts to salvage positivity from that history. "Pride and visibility offer antidotes to shame and the legacy of the closet; they are made in the image of specific forms of denigration. Queerness is structured by this central turn; it is both abject and exalted, a 'mixture of delicious and freak'" (*Feeling Backward* 2–3).[15] In *Mockingbird*, the race narrative remains largely one of tragic loss, both for Tom and Atticus. The queer narrative of Scout (and Dill, and perhaps even Jem) offers an at-times delicious send up of dominant sex/gender role demands, verging on camp. All that tomboy play suggests that even if Scout is seen as a freak, her queerness is not simply a story of loss, but rather the achievement of an alternative epistemology and sex/gender ontology that has much to teach us. "The emphasis on damage in queer studies," says Love "exists in a state of tension with a related and contrary tendency—the need to resist damage and to affirm queer existence" (3). Love's book eschews the project of celebratory queerness, however, turning instead to reading the darkness of mostly tragic homosexual narratives.

These are precisely the type—Smith's story of Laura in *Strange Fruit* and Hall's story of Stephen Gordon's in *The Well of Loneliness* (1928)—that Lee knows yet doesn't repeat, instead following Capote into an affirmative, if oblique, depiction of the odd Scout and her queer cohort. In Lee's time, representation of a queer or homosexual adult usually mandated the tragic narrative—a prescription Capote

notably refused to fill. While readers are following the predictably tragic race story in *Mockingbird*, a different if related story of alternative subjectivity expresses itself in the divided narrative of Scout/Jean Louise, who survives, after all, to tell the tale. The often ambiguous splitting of the story-telling voice is crucial. Queerness is made visible through the fantasy figure of Scout the tomboy, the child whose refusal of normative sex/gender roles enables social critique. But the tomboy figure is traditionally interpreted, and defended against, as immaturity, the failure to grow up, even a pathological incapacity for adulthood and its heterosexual obligations. Meanwhile the no-less unconventional Jean-Louise comments on Maycomb and its doings acerbically from the protectively secluded space of her indeterminate present.

As seems implied by the novel's ending the tomboy, though, is also tolerated, even enjoyed, as a figure whose violation of norms, along with the insights it brings, is accepted precisely because s/he will grow out of this stage eventually. Perhaps Scout does accede to the mandate to become a Southern lady, though I suspect most readers doubt it. What becomes of her? The adult Jean Louise never appears in any particularity and is, indeed, unrepresented except by her voice. She remains in the closet, even as she empowers the portrait of her childhood self to articulate the counter-normative agenda. Scout remains at liberty, but, as I have suggested, that freedom depends on projecting the condition of the closet, along with its shame, loneliness, and stigmatizing, onto Mayella and Boo. That episode confirms the role Boo has secretly played in the text's unconscious all along, making it logical that he is the agent of Scout's salvation from the assault by Bob Ewell—as the one who, in absorbing the displacement of the narrator's queerness, allows her to roam unbound.

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Notes

1. Early in 2015, Harper Lee's lawyer discovered a copy of an earlier manuscript by her, set in the 1950s, telling the story of Maycomb from the adult Jean Louise's point of view. The announcement of its coming publication made headlines across the nation.

2. See Johnson, Richards, and Blackford.

3. For excellent debates over racism and liberalism, see the essays collected in Stokes and Meléndez, which includes a symposium on the "racial contract" theory of Charles Mills. See Mills, *The Racial Contract* (1997) and *Racial Liberalism and the Politics of Urban America* (2003), eds. Stokes and Meléndez.

4. Hobson's chapter on Lillian Smith, Harper Lee's forerunner in the fiction of Southern racial liberalism, discusses the relevance of Smith's lesbian perspective to her treatment of race in ways that can also illuminate *Mockingbird.*

5. Arthur N. Applebee's 1992 article documented the preeminence of Twain and Lee in US high school curricula. Still widely taught, challenges to them and efforts to diversify the canon have probably lessened their prevalence, though they remain among the most popular offerings. See Applebee, "Stability and Change in the High-School Canon." *English Journal* 81:5 (1992): 27–32.

6. See Fine; Dean Shackelford, "The Female Voice in *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Narrative Strategies in Film and Novel." *Mississippi Quarterly* 50.1 (1997): 101–13; Richards; and Blackford.

7. See Rachel Watson, "The View from the Porch: Race and the Limits of Empathy in the Film *To Kill a Mockingbird*," *Mississippi Quarterly* 63.3/4 (2010): 419–43.

8. See also Malcolm Gladwell, "The Courthouse Ring: Atticus Finch and the Limits of Southern Liberalism," Meyer 57–65.

9. Extended transcripts were later published by Murphy in book form as *Scout, Atticus, and Boo: A Celebration of Fifty Years of To Kill a Mockingbird* (2010). Quotations here are my transcriptions from the broadcast documentary version.

10. See Katie Rose Guest Pryal, "Walking in Another's Skin: Failure of Empathy in *To Kill a Mockingbird*." Meyer 174–89.

11. See Patrick Chura, "Prolepsis and Anachronism: Emmett Till and the Historicity of *To Kill a Mockingbird*." *Southern Literary Journal* 32 (2000): 1–26; and Eric J. Sundquist, "Blues for Atticus Finch: Scottsboro, Brown, and Harper Lee," *The South as an American Problem* (1995), eds. Larry J. Griffin and Don Harrison Doyle, 181–209.

12. See Blackford 212–13.

13. Richards sees Capote's flamboyant effeminacy in the years after *Mockingbird*'s publication as influencing readers' interpretation of Dill (122). My concern is with the evidence that Lee knew well the story of same-sex desire and sexual otherness in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* and had that inspiration in mind when drafting her own novel. In Richards' reading of Capote's novel, representations of gender transitivity (effeminate boys, masculine girls) are signals of, or conflated with, same-sex desire and homosexuality, and so perhaps typical of the social construction of gay images in the post-World War II period upon which Capote's own performance of gayness played expertly (31–40). In *Mockingbird*, argues Richards, gender transitivity should not always be interpreted as equivalent to same-sex desire.

14. See Blackford's comparison of the novels on 226–45.

15. The quote is from Carson McCullers's novel *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), about another young Southern queer, 12-year-old tomboy Frankie, the book's narrator and frequently mentioned by critics as a predecessor to Scout.

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