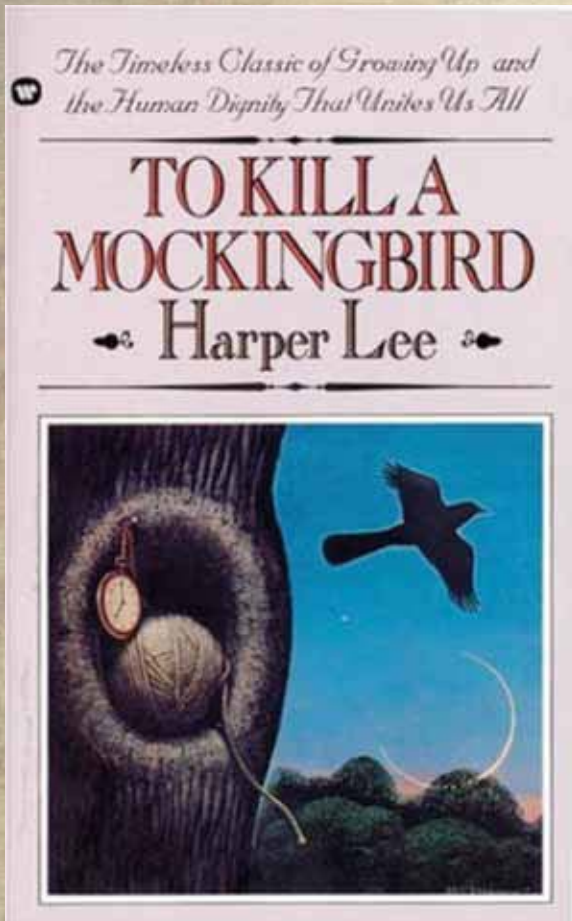


To Kill A Mockingbird



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Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a classic of American Literature, the story is set in a fictional town of Alabama, Maycomb, during the 1930s. The novel reveals the inequality between the black and the white, and how racism leads to tragedy; also it shows how borders and boundaries are built up because of the ignorance of the people. In this essay, I will discuss the events where borders and boundaries occur and the importance of learning to cross the boundaries.

In Maycomb County, racial discrimination is very severe. The white are the superior while the black are the inferior. In the case of Tom

Robinson, who is a black man and is accused of raping a white woman, Mayella Ewell, he is convicted guilty no matter how his lawyer, Atticus Finch, raises evidence to prove that he is innocent. As Atticus says, the jury has "evil assumption" (204) that "all Negroes lie" and "all Negroes are basically immoral beings". (204) Rape is a capital offense in Alabama, once Tom is convicted guilty, he knows that he will die certainly. Therefore he chooses to end up his life by escaping from the prison and let the guards shoot him. There is a clear image of crossing the boundary when Tom "[breaks] into a blind raving charge at the fence and [starts] climbing over". (235) Tom feels hopeless; he "[is] tired



of white men's chances and [prefers] to take his own". (236) He thinks it is time for him to make his decision as a black man. Rather than being defeated by the State, he takes some power in his hand and ends up his life with dignity.

In the case of Atticus, he is also crossing the boundary as he agrees to defend Tom. In Maycomb, many people think that it is not proper for a white lawyer to defend black men against any accusations. There is a border between the white's world and the black's world and no one should exceed this border. Also Francis says Atticus is a "nigger-lover" (83) and what he is doing is "a ruination of the family". (86) The censure about Atticus makes Scout mad; however, he has once told her to "hold [her] head high and keep those fists down". (76) Since no one in Maycomb concerns the black and no one is willing to help them, Atticus acts like a representative for the blacks, he fights for their rights. Atticus says if he does not defend Tom, he "[cannot] hold up his head in town", he "[cannot] represent this county in the legislature", and he "[cannot] even tell [Scout] and Jem not to do something again". (75) Atticus is a just man, though he knows that he is not going to win, he still defends Tom because he thinks that "every lawyer gets at least one case in his lifetime that affects him personally". (76)

The Radley House is acting like a boundary in the novel. The Maycomb people believe that inside the house lives a "malevolent phantom" (8) and "[a]ny stealthy small crimes committed in Maycomb [are] his work". (9) No one in Maycomb dares to walk near the house; however, the Radley Place fascinates the children. At first, it is their curiosity that urges them to know more about Boo Radley, but slowly their attitude towards him changes; they begin to empathize him. Also, after many things that have happened to the children, "Boo Radley [is] the least of [their] fears", (243) even at the end he is the one who saves Scout and Jem, the protagonist and his brother. By the time when Scout stands on the Radley porch, she realizes that actually Boo knows everything

that happens in the town. Because of the prejudice of the Maycomb people, they are “unwilling to discard their initial suspicions”, (9) which makes Boo become a white ghost and he is trapped inside the house. When Jem enters the Radley yard, he crosses a forbidden boundary and enters a taboo square. However, in crossing the boundary, the passion of the children melts Boo and he is humanized. He changes from a “malevolent phantom” (8) to a person whose feelings the children seek to understand.

Mr. Dolphus Raymond is a rich white man, but he prefers the black to the white, he even crosses the boundary to marry a black woman. He “[cries] about the hell white people give colored folks, without even stopping to think that they [are] people, too”. (201) He knows what happens in Maycomb, but he presents to be alcoholic because he does not want to see the evil faces of the Maycomb people.

Learning to cross the boundaries is of significance in the novel and is worth thinking about. In crossing the boundaries, most of the preconceptions and misunderstandings can be replaced by communications and understanding: the life of the black people, especially Tom Robinson will not be blighted by tragedy; Boo Radley will not be trapped in the house and treated as an outcast. Whenever there is prejudice and ignorance, discrimination will take place inevitably, and hence borders and boundaries are built up. Therefore being able to step beyond the boundaries is important.

Work Cited:

Lee, Harper. To Kill a Mockingbird. New York and Boston: Warner Books.

