

TKAM – TIME Magazine Original Review

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Boo Radley Comes Out

To Kill A Mockingbird. Maycomb Alabama, was a tired old town in the '30's.

"Grass grew on the sidewalks, the courthouse sagged in the square. Somehow,

it was hotter then. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three o'clock naps,

and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum.

People moved slowly. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go,

nothing to buy and no money to buy it with. But it was a time of vague optimism.

Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself."

Whoever said that was dead wrong. In her famous first novel, which won the

Pulitzer Prize for 1960, Harper Lee found quite as much to fear as she found to love

in Maycomb County—and by Maycomb county she obviously meant the South. Of

what was fearful she framed an Alabama melodrama that etched its issues in

black and white. Of what was lovable, on the other hand, she made a tomboy poem

as full of hick fun as Huck Finn, a sensitive feminine treatment to the Great American

Childhood. In this film Director Robert Mulligan and Scenarist Horton Foote have

translated both testament and melodrama into one of the year's most fetching and affecting pictures.

Scout (Mary Badham) is six when the story begins, and her brother Jem (Phillip Alford) is ten. Their mother is dead, and they live with their father (Gregory Peck), a lawyer named Atticus Finch. One day they hear a peculiar squeak in Miss Rachel Haverford's collard patch.

"Hey," it squeaks, and the children turn to stare at a tiny boy (John Megna) with huge buck teeth.

"Hey yourself," says Jem.

"I'm Charles Baker Harris. I can read. Thought you'd like to know. You got anything needs readin' I can do it."

"How old are you—four and a half?"

"Goin' on seven."

"Shoot, you look right puny for goin' on seven."

"I'm little," says Charles Baker Harris, "but I'm old."

He is also curious, and for hours he sits staring at the Radley place—just in case Boo Radley should come out. Boo is the village loony, and he hasn't been seen for 15 years. Never mind.

Every child in town knows that he stands six foot six and has a long jagged scar on his face.

His teeth are few, yellow and rotten. His eyes pop, and most of the time he drools. He eats raw squirrels and all the cats he can catch, and whenever an azalea bush dies in Maycomb, everybody knows why—Boo breathed on it.

While the children are busy playing peek-a-Boo, Atticus acquires a more substantial

nightmare. He agrees to defend a Negro (Brock Peters) accused of assaulting a white girl.

"Whuh kine a man aw yew?" the girl's father (James Anderson) snarls at Atticus. In court, he proves his client's innocence, but the jury convicts the Negro anyway; and when he tries to escape, a guard shoots him dead. Nor is the nightmare ended even then. The girl's father, a vicious redneck with more whiskey in his stump-hole than brains in his head, goes stalking Scout and Jem with murder in his mind, and one night....But just then Boo Radley decides to come out.

Mockingbird has nothing very profound to say about the South. Sometimes, in fact, its side-porch sociology is simply fatuous: the Negro is just too goody-good to be true, and Peck, though he is generally excellent, lays it on a bit thick at times—he seems to imagine himself the Abe Lincoln of Alabama. But the children are fine. John Megna, who played in Broadway's *All the Way Home*, has talent as well as teeth. Mary Badham and Phillip Alford, a couple of nice kids the producer found in Birmingham, don't have to act right—they just are right.

Mary, in fact, provides the best bit in the picture. Ordered by the cook to sit right down at that table young lady and eat your breakfast you're going off to school this morning whether you like it or not, the young lady drops herself into the chair as though she were dropping a dead mouse into the garbage. Then she stares at her egg as though it had hair on it. Finally she favors the cook with what is surely one of

the dirtiest looks ever looked.

On her, it looks hilarious. Imagine a crocodile wearing a pinafore.