Conspectus Borealis

Volume 4 | Issue 1 Article 5

11-3-2018

In Another Person's Skin: Adaptations of To Kill a Mockingbird and the Characterization of Scout Finch

Eric A. Pitz
Northern Michigan University, ericanthonyp@gmail.com

In Another Person's Skin

Adaptations of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the Characterization of Scout Finch

The history of racism and intolerance in America permeates its literary canon, with works such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), functioning as seminal pieces that not only engage with that history, but also capture white attitudes towards black people at each time of publication. In one of the most celebrated works within the canon, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), Harper Lee constructs a character whose feistiness, youthful innocence, and tomboyish charm helps her readers understand the injustices towards black people in the southern United States, as well as what it means to grow up more generally. Using 1930s Alabama as her setting, Lee vividly encapsulates the world in which her heroine, the six-year-old Jean Louise "Scout" Finch, grows up, portraying every character in the text with a distinct personality that inevitably aides her development and understanding of the world beyond her town.

Due to the success of Lee's novel, quickly after its initial publication, Hollywood producer Alan Pakula and director Robert Mulligan approached her with the idea of adapting *Mockingbird* for the silver screen. Certain film studios initially met the proposition with hesitance due to a changing dynamic within American cinema at the time. These changes made it nearly impossible to get the film produced, as studios did not want "a black-and-white film containing no sex, no rough language, no violence," nor "a film where the dramatic high point of the story came in a long courtroom speech" (Santopietro 46). However, Robert Mulligan's 1962 cinematic adaptation became a critical success, with the American Film Institute eventually

naming it one of the most important and inspiring courtroom dramas, and Gregory Peck's Atticus Finch as the greatest hero in the history of American film.

In 2018, a theatrical performance of *To Kill a Mockingbird,* directed by Nigel Shawn Williams and written by Christopher Sergel, made its debut at the Stratford Festival in the city of Stratford, Ontario. Starring a young Clara Poppy Kushnir and Irene Poole, with one playing the inquisitive and innocent Scout; the other, an older, wiser Jean Louise, respectively – this adaptation targets how Lee's text resonates in a contemporary society where cries of racial injustice ring loudly yet still find themselves unheard by many of those in power. The changes in this dramatic adaptation to Lee's original text differ both radically and subtly from Mulligan's film version. The Stratford dramatic interpretation is still more radical as it strives for relevance and constantly "question[s] why it is [being] stag[ed]" (Nestruck). This aspect of the production remains visible by means of the aforementioned and omnipresent adult representation of Jean Louise "Scout" Finch.

Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* hinges on utilizing Scout's voice as a first-person perspective. One of the most ingratiating aspects of doing so makes the audience privy to the events of the novel through her point of view and thus heeds one of the novel's main themes, as summarized in Atticus' line "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" (33). We gain through Scout's thinking an intimate portrayal of her mental processes and the changes that she went through while growing up in the fictional Maycomb, Alabama, and subsequently an in-depth understanding of her character. Because of the level of knowledge given within Scout's inner monologue about herself, the adaptations wrestle with incorporating this aspect of the novel in different ways. The task of incorporating a now matured Scout Finch into the visual

medium, however, remains a difficult undertaking – one in which a balance must be struck in order for it to flow naturally but still to retain the integrity and depth of both the novel and the performance.

The filmic and theatrical iterations of *To Kill a Mockingbird* interpret Lee's story in different ways, creating dynamic variations on its characters and plots by choosing to place emphasis on certain elements of the plot and the characters' personalities while omitting others. These choices subsequently present audiences with portrayals that change the overall perception of the characters and what they represent. For instance, Robert Mulligan's filmed version begins by showing its credits over imagery associated with youth in the 1930s – presenting a battered and worn cigar box, accompanied by the sounds of a little girl (Scout, played by Mary Badham) humming, being opened. Once the box opens, objects such as broken and stubbed Crayola crayons, coins, jacks, marbles, dolls, a mechanical pencil, and a pocket watch appear. The next shot shows one of Scout's hands grabbing the thickest crayon to make an etching of the film's title, and after finishing this task, Scout continues drawing. As she does so, the sound switches from her humming to that of the ticking of the watch, and then proceeds to Elmer Bernstein's orchestral score. After panning through the cigar box's contents and providing an emblematic portrait of our young protagonist, Mulligan reveals that Scout has drawn the titular mockingbird. Mulligan then shows another shot of the pocket watch accompanied with more ticking noises, which then fades to a different drawing of a mockingbird, this one scribbled out. Scout subsequently rips the paper with the picture in half. By initially presenting the contents of the cigar box, Mulligan encapsulates the everyday activities of the 1930s six year old, and thus captures the youthful tone of the film. The watch and its ticking, of course, indicates the passage of time, and when juxtaposed with the tearing of the scribbled over mockingbird drawing,

represents the loss of innocence over time. The action of symbolically killing the mockingbird, which in Lee's novel Atticus calls "'a sin'" (103), foreshadows the death of childlike wonder and purity that inevitably permeates the film, and presents the theme of growing up as its central focus.

The Stratford production, on the other hand, begins with a bang – that is, the sound of the gunshot which killed Martin Luther King, Jr. – accompanied by projected images and videos of the civil rights movement, subsequently "firming up the reason for adult Scout's walk down memory lane" (Nestruck). These projections include leaders such as MLK, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X, as well as moments involving the Little Rock Nine, Montgomery bus boycotters, the Greensboro sit-ins, and other demonstrations of civil disobedience from the period. As well, images of lynching and police brutality towards black people emblazon the projection screens, giving us the central reason as to why this performance must continue to exist in 2018. The current political discourse regarding the killings of young black people in the United States, as well as the racial inequality in the United States justice system, embodies the core of the production. Rather than centralizing on the loss of innocence, the theatrical production focuses Scout's experiences on becoming aware of the injustice that consumes her town, as the assistant director of the Stratford adaptation claims "*To Kill a Mockingbird* isn't just a languid coming-of-age story set in the southern sun; it's a story about the lasting trauma of segregation" (Vingoe-Cram 13). Basing the production on this idea of trauma demonstrates how necessary the story of Scout Finch is to the 1968 setting of the production as to our society in 2018, as it must utilize her naïveté to not only progress Scout's journey toward awareness, but ours as well. In her comments on *To Kill a Mockingbird*, playwright Donna-Michelle St. Bernard writes:

> When we tell a feel-good story about how far we've come, we must be careful not to invisibilize [sic] struggles that do not impact us personally, struggles that we have the capacity to shift into the margins of our perspective and then declare nonexistent. We are constantly surrounded by folx [sic] deeply impacted by realities outside of our awareness… In revisiting *To Kill a Mockingbird,* we are forced to question yet again what layers of humanity remain invisible to us… (12)

St. Bernard identifies the need for "wokeness" (a slang term meaning an awareness of social and racial justice issues) to tell of the need to stay vigilant in the pursuit of true equality, while also relating *Mockingbird*'s key theme of attempting to actively identify and seek knowledge of the experiences of others. It also asks us to reflect on how we marginalize others, and asserts that we must put more consideration into our actions and examine how they affect those around us. Williams therefore puts the trauma of segregation on the stage as a visual aid to the audience while the older Jean Louise narrates the scene and introduces us to her younger self.

Because of the omnipresence of the Jean Louise character in Williams' Stratford iteration of *To Kill a Mockingbird,* she remains a constant reminder of the images from the beginning of the performance and begs us to watch as the injustices surface on the stage. This presence differs from Mulligan's film, which, by minimalizing the role of the older Jean Louise, takes the route of portraying Scout's development and Atticus' nobility by presenting a story driven by the integrity of the characters rather than making a socio-political statement. The film declares itself as a story of childhood, placing more emphasis on the mischief made by the children (Scout, her brother Jem, and their friend Dill) than the implications of putting a black man on trial for a crime that he did not commit. Mulligan's film tends to veer more towards the curiosity and lore of the Finch's neighbor, Arthur "Boo" Radley, including scenes from the novel such as Dill's

daring Jem to touch the Radley house. To carry out this scene, Mulligan interpolates a segment in which Scout rolls in a tire only to accidentally crash into their front porch to create precedence as to why the children stand in front of the house in the first place. After pulling his sister away from the Radley home, Jem runs up to the front door, slams it, and sprints home, yelling, "Run for your life, Scout! Come on, Dill!" (Mulligan). Significantly, this moment demonstrates both the fear the children have of their unknown neighbor, and traces the development of courage in them, particularly Jem. The motif of the children's fascination with the Radley house continues in a later scene when they leave late in the evening to attempt to capture a glance of Boo by crawling under the Radley's fence and sneaking onto their porch to peer inside. While Jem kneels and looks into the house, a large, ominous shadow of a man emerges, walking slowly and menacingly toward him as its hand appears near Jem's throat. The shadow then moves away, giving Jem and his cohorts the opportunity to flee the property; however, Jem loses his pants as they latch onto the fence during his escape. Terror pervades the scene, but Jem's courage shines as he runs back to retrieve his pants and we watch as Scout counts the seconds before her brother returns and then hear a gunshot, immediately after which Jem makes his return to Scout. Thinking of Jem as a prowler, Mr. Radley shoots at him. This element to the film helps demonstrate why the children fear him, and subsequently shows that their terror regarding the Radley house has validity.

Williams' Stratford production tends to dismiss all of the curiosities surrounding Boo Radley, seeing him as a secondary figure to the plot. With the exception of the initial indoctrination of the myth of Boo that the Finch children give Dill when they first meet, the only other references toward him until the end of the play present themselves during the segments in which Scout looks in the Radley tree's knothole and discovers the gifts laid out for them. The

elder Jean Louise accompanies her past self while admiring these mysterious treasures, and as Scout looks at them, Jean Louise metaphysically pauses the play to peruse each item, offering no comment on any of them. Stratford's play offers little substantial basis for the fear of Boo Radley, nor any real development in Scout's feelings pertaining to him, as its goal does not hinge on how the protagonist grows from child to young adult, but instead on how she changes from unaware to hyperaware.

Neither the film nor the Stratford iterations of *To Kill a Mockingbird* consider a scene central to Lee's novel in which Jem and Scout venture off with their housekeeper, Calpurnia, who invites the two to visit her church one Sunday. Going to the black church – one of the most physical manifestations of putting oneself in another's shoes and understanding the world in which she lives – presents itself as one of the most dynamic experiences in the development of Scout as a young woman with awareness to the world around her. Before going to the church, Scout and Jem learn of the Southern black culture. They ask why Calpurnia needed to bathe them to the extremes and gussy them up and, learning why as she approaches the church. Scout claims to be welcomed by "the warm bittersweet smell of clean Negro" (Lee 135). Calpurnia, in both an effort to make it clear that "'[she] don't want anybody sayin' [she] don't look look after [her] children'" (134), and to make sure the two look presentable, invites them into her own world. Once entering the church, a woman, Lula, verbally attacks Calpurnia for bringing the two, saying, "'I wants to know why you bringin' white chillum to nigger church'" (135). Jem, uncomfortable with Lula's attack, says to Calpurnia "'They don't want us here'" (136), and Scout mentally agrees with him. The importance of Jem and Scout's discomfort in the scene relates to the notion of placing themselves in the eyes of black people, who endure the same

verbal abuse on a daily basis. Both Finch children, due to their white privilege, experience these attacks for the first time, and learn the feelings of those constantly on the receiving end.

In another short segment about how white privilege permeates the black church, Reverend Sykes personally escorts Jem, Scout, and Calpurnia to the front pew (the optimal seating area), an arrangement that mirrors the segregation of busses that eventually led to the Montgomery bus boycotts. The scene also reveals Scout's ignorance towards the lack of literacy within the black community of Maycomb, depicting her as she asks Calpurnia why no hymnals reside within the church, and Jem asking why Calpurnia talked in a different way with other black people than she does with them. Scout recognizes her brother's revelation by telling us, "the idea that [Calpurnia] had a separate existence outside our household was a novel one" (143), showing that she was not only unaware of the daily lives and experiences of black people in Maycomb, but also that Scout held a more centralized and unworldly viewpoint. Abstaining from the inclusion of this scene from both the film and the theatrical production inhibits them from showing some of the most dynamic realizations of both Scout's developing mind and the call for the audience to become aware of the realities of the daily life of the Southern black person beyond their association with white people. Regarding the theatrical style of Williams' production, the inclusion of the elder Jean Louise in this scene offers limitless potential, possibly using her to freeze the stage and point out similarities between the imagery on stage and that beheld by the social unrest of the 1960s. Mulligan's choice to skip over the scene to focus on the world immediate to Scout shows that although she continues to change and attempts to consider the perspective of others, she does not do so physically and instead remains ignorant to the world beyond small town, white faced Maycomb.

One of the pivotal scenes in To Kill a Mockingbird centers on the children sneaking out one night to follow Atticus as he dons the role of jailhouse guard during Tom Robinson's occupancy. The children then bear witness to a mob of townsmen gathered with the intent to raid the jailhouse and lynch Tom, with presumably only Atticus to impede their goal. Both the novel and the film present this scene as Scout describes:

> The men were dressed, most of them, in overalls and denim shirts buttoned up to the collars. I thought they must be cold natured, as their sleeves were unrolled and buttoned at the cuffs. Some wore hats pulled firmly down over their ears. They were sullen-looking, sleepy-eyed men who seemed unused to late hours. (Lee 173)

These men appear as typical members of the Maycomb community – as far as their attire, nothing seems out of the ordinary. In contrast, Williams' Stratford production makes the decision to reveal the inner natures of the members of the mob through their clothing by dressing them in costumes that evoke fear and represent intolerance more than almost any in the history of the United States – the white, sheet-like regalia of the Ku Klux Klan. Utilizing such controversial wardrobe, a decision that made the play's Canadian audience gasp in horror upon the mob's entrance, crystallizes the people of Maycomb's bigotry and ingrains it into the minds of the viewers. The imagery of the white supremacist group tells us that the director wants the audience to see the truth behind the mob's intentions, without room for interpretation, in order to make his statement about the societal attitudes towards black people during the Great Depression era and today.

In the literary and filmic representations of this scene, Scout sees the men's faces as they attempt to move Atticus from his post, scouring over the crowd until she reaches the face of a

man whom she recognizes – Mr. Walter Cunningham, the father of her classmate and a former client of Atticus. The theatrical production, due to the conical masks of the Klansmen outfits covering the men's faces, approaches the recognition factor through another of the five senses, as Scout hears and remembers Cunningham's voice. While the mediums of the novel and film capture the idea of innocence as Scout inquisitively asks Cunningham about his legal fairs and his son, what the staged performance does differs starkly. In addition to Scout's questions, the symbolic nature of her recognizing Cunningham's voice under the sheet goes much deeper than the novel. By showing her ability to identify the man under the sheet, Williams also presents her ability to identify the human within Cunningham, to see him as the father of her peer and the client of her father. Observing this moment from Scout's perspective permits the poignancy of the scene, as when Cunningham removes his hood, we see the look of shame he carries on his face as he tells the rest of the Klan members to leave the scene. The idea that Williams attempts to portray on the stage states that Cunningham, and the rest of the mob, are better people than their previously attempted (and now abandoned) actions represent. In doing so, Williams says that we as a society must acknowledge that we are better than our own actions represent. Williams begs us to look at the consequences of our actions and at the injustices we cause unto others, with particular emphasis on black Americans. As Scout speaks to Cunningham, she indirectly speaks to his core of fundamental human decency, and allows him to realize that the court must make the decision regarding the fate of Tom Robinson, as well as the injustice that is convicting and lynching a man before his trial. This scene allows Williams the medium to articulate the issues regarding the apparent 'shoot-now, question-later' mentality in police culture in the current era, and voice his own criticisms towards that issue. Before the mob departs after Cunningham undergoes his change of heart, Bob Ewell reveals himself and attacks Scout,

yanking on her arm as she struggles against him, an act of violence represented in neither Lee's text nor Mulligan's film. Another character holds onto Scout's other arm, and she plays the role of damsel in distress during a match of human tug-of-war. Adding this segment provides explicit imagery of the immense amount of power held by the white man in 1930s Alabama, and foreshadows that the upcoming legal battle will prove challenging.

While Mulligan's film continues by depicting Scout and Jem walking home from their school's Halloween pageant, we see Scout barefoot and wearing her ham costume rather than her dress, claiming that she "can't find" her dress and shoes (Mulligan). Jem and Scout begin their walk home in the pitch-black woods, when Jem suddenly stops him and his sister, saying, "Thought I heard something.'" The pair cautiously continue on their journey when a figure (Bob Ewell) grabs Jem by the neck and throws him to the ground, and Scout falls over, struggling to get back up without the use of her arms while Jem yells at her to run. Jem rushes over to help her up as Ewell yanks him by the hair and Jem accidentally pulls Scout down to the ground. She then attempts to stand as Ewell throws the now unconscious Jem into a pile of brush, and proceeds to charge at Ewell, who grabs hold of her. Another set of unknown hands (later revealed to belong to Boo Radley) enters the frame, placing Scout in the middle of the tussle until the two men push her aside. We watch the fight happen as struggling arms enter the shot, but never actually see the entirety of the two figures and instead, Mulligan provides a visual that only film has the capacity to provide – the extreme close-up shot following the movement of Scout's eyes. Providing perhaps the most terror-induced shot of the film, we experience the tension rise as we watch Scout's eyes pull away from the eye hole of the costume in fear as the hands get closer, her inquisition as to the result of the fight, her eyes enlarge at the death of Bob Ewell, and how her eyes close to reflect on what she just saw. Coupled with the incarceration and death of Tom

Robinson, Mulligan gives the idea of Scout's loss of innocence by depicting a man's fatal stabbing before her own eyes and learning of the noble nature of Boo.

As the Stratford production reaches its end with Scout and Jem's walk home from the pageant and the subsequent attack from Bob Ewell, we see Scout (and Jean Louise) cowering at the foot of the stage while Ewell attempts to harm Jem. In the darkened theater, the audience only sees the silhouette of their struggle with one another (choreographed similarly to Mulligan's film), but Boo Radley runs on the stage, pulling Ewell off Jem. By providing the imagery of Scout and her older self hiding in fear during this event, Williams fosters his idea of inescapable and continually felt trauma, as the attack still makes Jean Louise feel the fear she felt in her youth. Although Williams' production exists within the memory of Jean Louise, the mental and emotional scars still have not healed from this event, and thus creating real terror from her reliving of the past. Framing the stage in this manner shines upon Williams' core theme of trauma and its effects on the victims, fitting into the realm of discussion not only when Jean Louise introduces us to the beginning of the play in 1968, but also the reason why this particular adaptation exists within the year 2018. As the production comes to its conclusion and every other character has left to their homes, it leaves a lone Jean Louise on the stage to state, "Now I know how to walk in other peoples' shoes" (Williams). While the play definitely gives windows into instances where Scout puts herself into the positions of others, it never goes into much depth with them, so the line does not seem fully earned and instead feels patronizing both to the audience and the character of Scout herself. Because Atticus already teaches Scout (and at the same time, the viewer) to consider the perspectives of others, it seems moot to restate it, and makes it feel as though Scout and the audience were not intelligent enough to understand the underlying theme of Lee's work.

The 1962 motion picture, on the other hand, having made the decision to omit the majority of the narration given in the novel, opted to use an off-screen Kim Stanley to introduce the film, describe the passage of extended amounts of time, and eventually bid the audience farewell as the camera pans away from the Finch household. This limited use of the narrator (so minimal, in fact, that Stanley's role in the film goes uncredited) denies the possibility of an intimate comprehension of the innermost thoughts and fears that the protagonist harbors. Coupled with such limited narration, Jean Louise's lines serve little purpose towards delving into the internal growth of Scout, as the screenwriter, Horton Foote, writes the character more as a tool used to establish the setting and the tone found in the novel. The only semblance of depth that comes from the lines of the film's narrator comes at the end of the film itself, when Jean Louise gives the closing remarks:

> Neighbors bring food with death, and flowers with sickness, and little things in between. Boo was our neighbor. He gave us two soap dolls, a broken watch and chain, a knife and our lives. One time Atticus said you never really knew a man until you stood in his shoes and walked around in them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough… I was to think of these days many times, of Jem, and Dill and Boo Radley and Tom Robinson… and Atticus. He would be in Jem's room all night and he would be there when Jem waked up in the morning. (Foote 82)

In Mulligan's film adaptation, this narration provides some of the only reflection from the older Scout on how the events that take place over the course of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, yet it serves to show how both Boo and her father molded her identity.

The recognition of Boo as Scout's neighbor, and her association of Boo with the aspect of giving, shows her growth from the initial moments of the film. Her initial perceptions of Boo as a mysterious entity evocative of fear within the neighborhood transform into her realization that Boo was just as much a neighbor to her as anyone. Although he continued to observe Scout and Jem from afar, he did so with the same amount of care for the two of them as somebody of Maudie Atkinson's caliber. Jean Louise's declaration that "just standing on the Radley porch was enough" – while coupled with the image of her younger-self escorting Boo home, and afterwards briefly peering into his house – subtly presents her understanding of Atticus' lesson. This moment from the film shows Scout actively looking into the house, and thus looking into his life, in an attempt to learn more about her evasive neighbor. But, instead of lingering, Scout turns to leave and return to her own home, satisfied with accepting Boo's reclusive ways, having already seen the goodness in his heart. As the camera follows Scout and the off-screen Jean Louise continues the narration, recalling the people she remembers from that time in her life. The camera then fades to an image of Scout climbing and settling into her father's lap, holding him as Jean Louise says his name. The film chooses to emphasize the image of Scout and Atticus as its penultimate shot in order to depict how much Scout has developed and grown to appreciate him beyond his duties as a father, and recognizing him as the person worthy of the respect and admiration of his peers. As the camera pans back to reveal the Finch household and Jean Louise tells of her father's insistence on staying with Jem until he awoke the next morning, it suggests that Scout's love and affection for her father continues eternally, as if permanently locked within the still of the house that concludes the film.

After Williams' theatrical interpretation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* concludes and the theater awakens with the dawning of the house lights, the 2018 Childish Gambino (a.k.a. Donald

Glover) song “This is America” blares through the loudspeakers. The song features lyrics such as, “This is America/Don't catch you slippin' up/Look at how I'm livin' now/Police be trippin' now,” “Guns in my area/I got the strap/I gotta carry 'em,” and “America, I just checked my following list and/You go tell somebody/You mothafuckas owe me/Grandma told me/Get your money, black man.” Using a song that, via the aforementioned lyrics, comments on the problems of police brutality and excessive use of force, gun violence, and slavery reparations, attempts to connect the Stratford production to the current year, and show the work’s relevance to the young adults of modern society. However, until this point, the play does nothing to deserve this connection. Having begun the play with images of the 1960s civil rights movement, this production decidedly associates itself with baby boomers, an age group that grew up during the era. Initially, there is nothing inherently wrong with presenting fifty-year-old images of great black Americans fighting for what they believe in, as well as the images of the violence against black people, as those actions help to present the central ideas the play holds regarding the history of oppression faced by black people in America. But where the production falls short is the omission of black American leaders such as Barack Obama and Oprah Winfrey, and images of more recent attacks of police brutality. Where is Philando Castile? Where is Michael Brown? Where are Eric Garner, the victims of the Charleston church massacre, and Trayvon Martin? The play does not even include the footage of Rodney King’s 1991 beating by police officers, one of the most significant events regarding police brutality in the years between the civil rights movement and the present. Williams’ production, in its attempts to be socially and culturally aware by presenting the audience with its initial images, shows just the opposite – an unaware and tone deaf representation of the persisting problem of racial injustice in the United States. Gambino’s music video portrays the needless killing of unarmed black men and women and riots

caused by those killings, and then cuts off the music in the middle as Gambino (representing the police) draws an invisible gun and positions his hands as such. As he draws the non-existent gun, expressions of fear overtake the faces of the black dancers around him, and they run as if their life depended on it – because, in reality, it does. The imagery of the invisible gun encapsulates the current black American's fear that, at any moment, they may be subjected to police violence on account of their racial ethnicity. To finish the play with this song without directly expressing any regard for the contemporary problem insults the memories of the victims, as it ends up portraying these issues as those which, while once prevalent in the past, no longer need to be worried about – in other words, the opposite of its objective. By presenting to a largely Canadian audience that "This is America," yet only using imagery of the past with no connection to the present, the play contradicts its own goal of highlighting the injustices faced by black Americans and how they continue to maintain their existence in contemporary society.

As Harper Lee's original novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* continues to maintain its status as one of the great American novels, we may see countless other interpretations in the future, all with different objectives and agendas. Robert Mulligan's 1962 film, which asks its audience to watch as Scout develops as she loses her innocence and sense of childhood, does so with minimal problems, as it shows how her community continues to mold her identity and shape her perceptions of others. Williams' Stratford production, on the other hand, fails at achieving its goal of connecting *Mockingbird* to the present and representing contemporary issues of racial injustice. For a play that supposedly constantly asks itself why it is being staged, it does not seem to provide any substantial answers, instead opting to dwell on the problems of the 1930s setting of Mockingbird, the 1960 publication of the novel, and the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. While it does a fine job at addressing those periods, the Stratford production offers no

attempts at commentary on the fifty years since King's assassination, with the exception of playing "This is America" after the play comes to its conclusion – a decision which, by itself, does nothing to bring forth Williams' vision of portraying the continual problem of racial injustice in America. Omitting recent events as Williams does negates the reason why this production must exist in 2018, and instead makes it feel dated and disconnected with the racial tensions and problems currently plaguing the United States.

Works Cited

"AFI's 100 Years... The Complete Lists." American Film Institute, 2007, www.afi.com/100Years/.

Glover, Donald. Childish Gambino - This Is America (Official Video). YouTube, YouTube, 5 May 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYOjWnS4cMY.

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. HarperCollins, 1960.

Mulligan, Robert. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Performance by Gregory Peck, and Mary Badham, Universal Studios, 1962.

Nestruck, J Kelly. "Stratford's Powerful To Kill a Mockingbird Delivers a Built-in Rebuttal." The Globe and Mail, Phillip Crawley, 6 June 2018, www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/theatre-and-performance/reviews/article-review-stratfords-powerful-to-kill-a-mockingbird-delivers-a-built-in/.

Santopietro, Tom. *Why* To Kill a Mockingbird *Matters*. St. Martin's Press, 2018.

St. Bernard, Donna-Michelle. "Looking Through a Bifocal Lens." *To Kill a Mockingbird - Stratford Festival Program*, 2018, pp. 9–12.

Vingoe-Cram, Laura. "Beyond Black and White?" *To Kill a Mockingbird - Stratford Festival Program*, 2018, pp. 13.

Williams, Nigel Shawn. "To Kill a Mockingbird." 23 Aug. 2018, Stratford, Ontario, Festival Theatre.