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# Harper Lee's To Kill A Mockingbird and the Spectacle of Society

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# Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* and the Spectacle of Society

**RIPLEY**  
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“Dans le monde *réellement renversé*, le vrai est un moment du faux”

(Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* 6).

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# Introduction

Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* is part of the canon for most high school readings in the United States, praised for its engaging commentary on prejudice. At the time it was published in 1960, TKM was admired for its consideration of social issues such as racism and because this issue continues today, the novel is still relevant and still embraced. However, there exists minimal academic analysis of Lee's only novel, and much criticism for its weak narrative and one-dimensional characters. It is often written off as a popular "feel-good novel" because of its melodramatic storyline. This paper addresses these ideas firstly in the fact that it is an academic analysis, and secondly in suggesting that the exaggerated elements, the flat characters and the melodrama of the novel are present in order to emphasize the idea of the novel as a spectacle.

All definitions of the term *spectacle* include some sort of reference to vision, sight, and what is seen with the eyes: "A *visually* striking performance or display;"<sup>1</sup> "a performance or event that is very impressive and exciting to *look at*;" "a *sight* or *view* that is very impressive to look at."<sup>2</sup> In his thorough critique of the society of spectacle, Guy Debord develops a much more complex definition of the term. More than just a sight, a spectacle can be grand enough to encompass an entire society. Though he acknowledges that a spectacle is based on appearance, a spectacle that encompasses an entire society, an entire way of life, and entire way of thought, must include more than just appearance. It must include, for example, the capability to impose ideas and beliefs that in turn foster the spectacle, and help it continue perpetually. Based on this concept, this paper will analyze TKM not only in the literally visual sense of the term *spectacle*, but in a more abstract notion of the term in its opposition to *truth*.

Considéré selon ses propres termes, le spectacle est l'*affirmation* de l'apparence et l'affirmation de toute vie humaine, c'est-à-dire sociale, comme simple apparence. Mais la critique qui atteint la vérité du spectacle le découvre comme la *négation* visible de la vie ; comme une négation de la vie qui *est devenue visible*. (Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* 6)

For the purpose of the present paper, I propose that *spectacle* be defined as a demonstration which affirms social human life as mere appearance; I propose that *truth* be defined in

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<sup>1</sup> *New Oxford American Dictionary*

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*

opposition to *spectacle*: reality; the life which is negated because of the existence of the spectacle.

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TKM was adapted into an Oscar-winning film in 1962 and was adapted into a play in 1990. This is not surprising given the number of dramatic and theatrical elements present in the novel. These elements will aid in demonstrating the visual aspect of TKM as a spectacle. A quote that succinctly sums up the visual potential of the novel provides inspiration for the present paper: “(Lee) unfolds the wide panorama of Maycomb life in such a way that ... the readers ... get transported in that world within a world ...” (Dave 2). The two worlds referred to in the quote are Maycomb and America. As the idea of TKM as a spectacle is explored, and eventually a particular spectacle within the spectacle that takes the form of a trial scene, parallels with American society will naturally appear. Unfortunately, because there is so much potential material for discussion regarding Maycomb as a microcosm of America, it is infeasible to address it in the present paper. Instead, this paper will explore TKM as a spectacle in itself and as a representation of the spectacle of society, then investigate the idea of *la vérité* introduced by Debord in opposition to the spectacle, and its presence in the novel. Finally the trial scene will be analyzed as a spectacle within the spectacle: a demonstration of a particular aspect of society’s spectacle in relation to *la vérité*.



# ***I. To Kill a Mockingbird as a spectacle***

“ ... the spectacle’s self-celebratory narrative ... ” (Moritz).

## **A. Creating the illusion of drama**

The term *drama* describes a literary genre designed for the theatre. Because TKM belongs to another literary genre, that of *the novel*, I propose to use the phrase *illusion of drama* when describing the elements present in the novel that transport the reader to a visual interpretation of the novel. The illusion of drama created by the elements of suspense and theatricality allow one to consider TKM as a dramatic novel, a novel that represents a spectacle.

### **1. Suspense**

Suspense is abundant in TKM, contributing to the spectacle and illusion of drama. “For a short story to create the illusion of drama, the scene evoked must be ‘spectacular,’ i.e. suggest that it is worth watching by an audience” (Lepaludier 22). Though not a short story, TKM creates the illusion of drama through spectacular scenes. The town of Maycomb itself, however, is not spectacular: conversely, life in the small town is boring and banal. Therefore it is in the suspense of the dramatic events that occur in the life of narrator Scout that contribute to the spectacularity of the novel.

Suspense appears in Jem and Scout’s adventure into the Radley garden to fetch Jem’s lost pants – a dangerous expedition into the unknown. Suspense appears in the mob scene – the reader questions the safety of Atticus, Tom, and the children. Suspense appears in the trial scene – will an innocent man be found guilty because of a racist jury’s decision? However, suspense is presented most vividly in the children’s walk home from the pageant when Bob Ewell attempts real physical harm on them. Scout prepares the reader for the exciting scene at the end of Chapter 27: “Thus began our longest journey together” (254). This is a perfectly thrilling scene, complete with a creepy setting (a long walk home in the dark with talk of the spooky Radley house), the frightening action of being attacked, and the added element of terrifying suspense in the fact that Scout is trapped in her ham costume and is unable to see anything. The chapter ends in a strikingly dramatic fashion when the sheriff Mr. Tate describes in an expressive and dragged out scene what had happened to the children. He slowly states what he found at the crime scene, pausing to inspect the mantelpiece before

climatically revealing his most interesting piece of information: it was Bob Ewell who had attacked the children. The chapter ends by Mr. Tate announcing theatrically: “He’s dead, Mr. Finch” (266).

Suspense is manifested in the presence of the Radley house. Nobody knows what goes on in the house. This allows for exciting rumors and for imaginations to run wild. Any attempted explanation for the unconventional ways of the Radley family is mere speculation. The spooky description of the house contributes to the frequent categorization of TKM as a work of American gothic fiction:

The house was low, was once white with a deep front porch and green shutters, but had long ago darkened to the color of the slate-gray yard around it. Rain-rotted shingles drooped over the eaves of the veranda; oak trees kept the sun away. The remains of a picket drunkenly guarded the front yard ... (8)

There are vivid descriptions of the outside of the house, and vivid descriptions of the townspeople’s thoughts, but no action inside the house is made known to the reader. This adds an interesting commentary to the analysis of the spectacle, demonstrating that the absence of action can be just as captivating as its presence (Pandora’s box is a good example of this phenomenon).

## **2. Theatricality**

It is of no surprise that TKM was adapted to a very successful screen version, since the novel not only provides vivid descriptions of character, setting and conflict, but also a structure that is compatible with a theatre or movie production. Dave calls Harper Lee a “maker-see”; he notes her “remarkable gift of storytelling,” stating that “her art is visual, and with cinematic fluidity and subtlety we see a scene melting into another scene without jolts of transition” (Dave 2). The reader is comically led into Chapter 23 with an ironic statement by Atticus: Bob Ewell has just spat in his face and he acknowledges the incident simply by saying, “I wish Bob Ewell didn’t chew tobacco” (217). Many chapters end in eloquent ways, whether with a foreshadowing statement (Dill’s utterance at the end of Chapter 14 foreshadows the children’s eventual sympathy for Boo Radley [144]), or a moving articulation that encapsulates one of the novel’s themes (the African American community’s respect for Atticus is demonstrated in the last line of Chapter 22 [211] and Scout’s simple salutation to Boo Radley at the end of Chapter 29 captures the girl’s compassion finally overcoming fear of the unknown [270]).

Envisioning the novel as a spectacle is instinctive, due not only to the structure but also the theatrical writing style. The use of “quick cues” throughout TKM “creates the impression that the scene is being performed on stage. There is a sense of actuality, as though the short story had shifted from a narrative type of mimesis to a dramatic one” (Lepaludier 23). These “quick cues” are plentiful in TKM with vivid dialogue and abrupt, ironic statements introducing everything from social issues like education reform, to the beginning of a new chapter. An example can be found in the opening pages of the novel when Jem and Scout meet Dill. The dialogue is realistic, short and sweet, as is any first meeting between children:

“Hey.”

“Hey yourself...”

“I’m Charles Baker Harris...I can read.”

The use of the southern dialect makes the narrative seem even more realistic, coming alive in the reader’s mind:

“Lord, what a name.”

“ ’s not any funnier’n yours” (7).

Elements such as “quick cues” and regional dialect make TKM seem to come to life, as if it is being played out on a stage.

If one imagines the novel being played out in a theatre, the vivid ending of the novel is easily visualized as the final scene of a play on a stage. As Scout walks home, a dreamlike thought precedes a series of flashbacks: “Daylight...in my mind, the night faded” (279). This enunciation allows the scene to melt into a surreal medley of final thoughts and appearances of characters. We see several townspeople throughout several flashes of Maycomb in every season before the scene fades back to Scout walking home at night in the rain. Many a similar final scene ends theatrical productions in which the audience sees a number of secondary characters one final time before curtain call and bows. This scene in TKM is a sort of curtain call, or “final number” for the novel.

TKM is presented in two parts. The first half establishes order then introduces conflict, and the reader is provided with an opportune pause before embarking on the second half. The reader uses this pause as a moment to reflect on the narrative thus far and to speculate on what is possibly to come. Whether in a theatre or reading a book at home, this break signals that the spectacle is put on pause. In a theatre, one chats with other spectators; at home, one goes to

the kitchen for a beverage. As true for most productions, the break arrives after a dramatic scene: a pseudo-climax cleverly placed to give the reader/spectator a desire to continue to the next part. In TKM, Jem's distressed relationship with Mrs. Dubose comes to a climax after her death, when we witness him finally starting to view the grouchy old lady in a different light, tenderly touching the flower that he had seen as a spiteful gift (112). The powerful scene contributes to the development of a major theme: the loss of innocence.

### **3. Victims, villains and heroes**

Certain characters create the illusion of drama in the role that they play in the spectacle. In a melodramatic fashion, TKM presents several victims, villains and heroes throughout the novel's sub-plots. The story regarding Boo and the children's fascination with the uncanny personage comes to a climax in the scene after the pageant at the end of the novel. The children are the victims, attacked by the villain Bob Ewell. Boo Radley courageously saves the day by killing the villain.

In the story regarding Tom Robinson's trial, Tom is the victim. He dies: an innocent man imprisoned, handicapped, and weaponless, shot while trying to escape American "justice." The Maycomb society and its racist value system represent the villain. In relation to Tom, Boo, the Finch children, and the community of Maycomb, Atticus is the model of dignity: the hero. A hero is defined as a character who is "admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievement, or noble qualities."<sup>3</sup> He steadfastly demonstrates his courage throughout the novel in his dedication to justice. His wise and patient character is full of integrity and conveys a sort of stoicism when suffering from Maycomb's ridicule for defending Tom. He tries to instill this pseudo-stoic conduct in his children, insisting that they do not react with violence when harassed by the townsfolk for his work.

Atticus' heroism is demonstrated logistically in the spectacle through the narrator. The film version of TKM uses voice-over to relay selected narrator commentary, "designed to emphasize the heroic stature of Atticus" (Shackelford 3). This is an interesting point to consider when reflecting on Atticus' heroic character in the novel since adult Scout speaks to the reader and provides the descriptions and actions of her father. During these theatrical moments of narration, one imagines the spectacle being performed on a stage, with the descriptions being relayed from an off-stage voice – soothing but powerful. One can imagine

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<sup>3</sup> *The New Oxford American Dictionary*

narrator Scout separating herself from her father, daring only to talk about him from afar, unworthy to discuss his character in his presence. The image of Atticus as a hero is emphasized by Scout's admiration for her father in passages where she talks with him about school, Maycomb occurrences, an increasingly moody Jem, and when she climbs into his lap to read the paper with him every night.

In addition to the theatrical "voice-over" moments in which the narrator describes her father, the reader comes to see Atticus as a valiant and courageous character in a much more subtle manner. Scout's initial description of her and Jem's feelings for Atticus is dry and suggests not so much adoration as it does apathetic contentment: "Jem and I found our father satisfactory: he played with us, read to us, and treated us with courteous detachment" (6). The reader eventually indirectly understands that Scout's feelings for her father are stronger than "satisfactory," through the fact that she does not get along with Calpurnia and greatly dislikes Aunt Alexandra (the two other parent figures in her life). The reader develops the image of Atticus as a hero by solitarily piecing his valiancy together throughout the novel: he has strong morals, he is humble, he loves his children, he is hardworking and dedicated to his job.

## **B. Négation de la vie**

The elements that create the illusion of drama can be considered elements that bring about a visual interpretation of the novel, as if it were being performed on a stage. Therefore, these elements are ones that bring the scenes of the novel to life: vivid descriptions and dramatic suspense that stir up emotions in the reader. On the other hand, the spectacle being performed is artificial: the text, the setting, the characters and the dramatic storyline are prearranged. Therefore, one must also consider the fabricated elements of the spectacle which illustrate *la négation de la vie* that is manifested.

### **1. Narrative**

The narrative is a prearranged element of the novel, and when considering TKM in terms of Genette's narrative discourse, one can establish the time of narration, the narrative level, and the person<sup>4</sup> (Genette 227). The use of the past tense marks a temporal distance between the story and the narration, thus leading one to conclude that the time of narration is categorized as ulterior. The last two categories are identified in TKM as intra-diegetic (first

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<sup>4</sup> Genette describes the term *personne* as the relation between the narrator and the story he is telling (227).

person narration from inside the text) and homo-diegetic (the narrator is a character in the story). The presence of the narrator enforces the novel as a representation of a highly structured spectacle, artificial and absent of natural life.

The narrative voice is that of Scout, recounting events from her childhood. Young Scout is a character in the story. Therefore, the reader is exposed to young Scout's first-hand experiences and thoughts on the events of the novel as they occur, as well as grown-up Scout's more mature commentary and reflections years later. Since the narrator is also a character in the novel (at a different age), it is necessary for the character to be present in every scene in order to describe the action taking place. This is why young Scout seems to follow the action in the novel. "Then I'm goin' with you" is a phrase that Scout repeats several times (56 & 149). The phrase is a sort of weak attempt to justify the narrator's ability to recount a particular event first-hand when realistically, she would not have been there to witness it. Therefore the narration sometimes seems forced; the notion of split narrator/character (grown-up and young Scout) is a fabricated element, adding to the emphasis of the novel being an artificial spectacle in which real life is negated.

The spectacle opens with descriptions as well as opinions ("I maintain that the Ewell's started it all" [3]), and since the narrator often speaks directly to the reader, the illusion of reality is challenged. On page 171 an explanation for the sentiments of lawyers' children begins, "Perhaps I'd better explain something now." Genette interestingly suggests that "certains emplois du présent connotent bien l'indétermination temporelle" (Genette 228). This is perhaps the case when considering the narration in TCM: it is certain that the time of narration is some point after the action of the story took place, but similar to the place of narration that is rarely specified, the "now" in the phrase on page 171 is ambiguous. The "now" is the moment that the reader comes upon the word, "now."

Another way in which the illusion of reality is challenged and the *négation de la vie* enforced is the fact that there is no direct action. Through the use of the past tense, dialogue and events are recounted by the narrator. Any conjured images in the head of the reader are part of a spectacle. When the reader becomes absorbed in the action and at some point forgets that it is simply a story being told, the narrator quickly brings one back to the spectacle by addressing the reader or inserting a personal reflection: "In the long hours of church – was it then I learned? I could not remember ..." (17) .

## **2. Chorus and its value system**

A dramatic narrative will open by establishing some sort of normal society. The society is held together by “shared rules” and a shared “value system” (Johnston) that is pre-arranged and static for the duration of the spectacle. In TKM, Maycomb is the society. Its townspeople adhere to a value system that places African Americans in the lowest social class (even below the poorest and most despicable white citizens). The longer a white southern family has occupied one particular piece of land the more respectable they are. Shared rules in Maycomb include an insistence on females to act like ladies, males to act like gentlemen, and no fraternizing between races.

The use of a theatrical term is appropriate to describe the townspeople of Maycomb who enforce the society’s value system. “These Maycomb women are quite funny. They are the comic characters in a tragic world; they play the *chorus* in the novel” (Dave 4). Although the majority of the townspeople who speak in defense of the morally conservative value system are women, the term *chorus* includes all townspeople who support the status quo. Vocal members of the chorus include Mrs. Dubose, Miss Stephanie Crawford, and Mrs. Merryweather, who expresses to the missionary circle her discontent with a “sulky darky” (232) after the trial. In a theatrical production or spectacle, the chorus’ role is to present a value system and defend that value system as part of the conflict in the production. The caricatured townspeople of Maycomb hold up the old-fashioned values of Southern politesse and a system that relies on and fosters racism.

After the society’s value system has been established, “something unusual and often unexpected happens to upset that normality” (Johnston). In TKM, the unexpected appears in the form of Atticus. This lawyer decides to defend the African American Tom Robinson who has been accused of raping a white girl. Up until his decision, Atticus is respected by the Maycomb community. But his compassion for a black man is deemed disgraceful by the Maycomb chorus. This conflict is at the heart of the novel; a conflict in value systems. Maycomb values white citizens over blacks, no matter what the situation. Atticus values justice and is determined to fight for Tom because he is innocent.

## **3. Community and text are static**

Since drama begins with order in a society, it is important to look at how order is established in Maycomb. In TKM, the novel opens with a detailed description of the town of

Maycomb. This provides us with the setting of the spectacle. Maycomb is described as a “tired old town” where the courthouse “sagged in the square.” The simple past is used to detail the descriptions of the hot days and their effects. Dogs “suffered,” collars “wilted,” people “moved slowly”(5). The use of the simple past in these descriptions emphasizes the repetitiveness and habits of everyday life: a sort of normalcy in the society of Maycomb. This contributes to the notion of the spectacle as a prearranged text.

The next few chapters are crowded with introductions to the townspeople. The reader meets the Radleys (town outcasts), Miss Stephanie (town gossip), the Cunninghams (a poor but respectable family), the Ewells (poor “trash”), Mrs. Dubose (grouchy and critical old woman) and Miss Maudie Atkinson (a loveable widow). The characters immediately commence to demonstrating their somewhat exaggerated, stereotypical small-town personalities. Even if the society and its members are rather caricatured, they successfully establish a sense of order and normalcy in Maycomb. In doing so, these town characters become a part of the setting: static and prearranged.

*La négation de la vie* is demonstrated in the fixedness of many elements of the novel. The town of Maycomb is considered to be the setting of the spectacle: the buildings are old, stationary and unchanging. The secondary characters demonstrate the stereotypical behavior of bored inhabitants of a small town. They too, are rigid and unchanging in their ways. The Finch family’s presence in Alabama dates back to the time of Andrew Jackson’s battles in the south. This pronounces the fact that the family descends from several immobile generations and are well established in the society of Maycomb. The family of focus is therefore presented as a static part of the spectacle as well.

There is routine in the Finch house: Atticus works late and reads the paper every evening. Jem and Scout are outside everyday in the summer while Calpurnia is in the kitchen. Across the street, the widow Miss Maudie Atkinson tends to her garden. Two doors to the north, Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose spends her time yelling at the children from her porch. This backdrop of routine not only demonstrates the immobility of the setting, but it also represents a *négation de la vie* in the spectacle.



## II. Opposing the spectacle: moments of truth

“The very same spectacle designed to impede critical thought can be reversed in the construction of an oppositional situation within it” (Moritz).

The racist value system found in the spectacle of TKM which manifests the *négation de la vie* is meant to shock and scandalize the reader. The “critical thought” that is obstructed by the spectacle is one of justice, progress, and challenges to the status quo. Moments of truth that represent the life that is negated in the spectacle do, however, appear in several instances throughout the novel.

### A. Challenges to the antagonist’s value system

At the heart of the diegesis of TKM is the conflict between the chorus of Maycomb (as stated above, the chorus includes all Maycomb townspeople who support the status quo) and Atticus and his supporters (his children, the African American community, Miss Maudie, etc.). The story is “patterned...after the model of a morality play with a distinct line of demarcation between good and evil, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly” (Dave 4). Because the implied reader is meant to be scandalized by the racism integrated in the chorus’ value system, one can conclude that the chorus is the antagonist – the “evil,” of the novel. The antagonism of the chorus’ value system is epitomized in the talk of the townspeople after Tom is shot and killed by prison guards while trying to escape:

Typical of a nigger to cut and run ... You know how they are. Easy come, easy go. Just shows you, that Robinson boy was legally married, they say he kept himself clean, went to church and all that, but when it comes down to the line ... The Nigger always comes out in 'em. (240)

Just as glimpses of “good” are expected to appear in a morality play in opposition to the “evil,” challenges to the antagonist’s value system represent glimpses of truth that appear in TKM in opposition to the spectacle.

#### 1. Maycomb’s grotesques: Tom and Boo

Most studies of the novel conclude that two characters represent the mockingbird referred to in the title: Tom Robinson and Boo Radley. These two are symbols of innocence – innocent victims tortured by society. When Tom is killed, his death is likened to the killing of

a songbird, a bird that “don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy” (90). Boo is ostracized and criticized throughout the novel for his mysterious refusal to leave his house. When he saves the children from Bob Ewell, the sheriff Mr. Tate refuses to acknowledge his heroic act in public, saying that dragging a shy being like Boo into the limelight would be a sin. Scout adds it would be “sort of like shootin’ a mockingbird” (276). While one mockingbird is killed, another is saved, but throughout the novel, both are victims of the chorus’ value system in the spectacle.

Considering that these two characters embody the mockingbird of the title, it is interesting to note that they are generally kept “off the stage; invisible while the prolonged tensions between the protagonist minority and the antagonist majority shake the small world of Maycomb” (Dave 3). The first time that the character of Tom Robinson speaks is in Chapter 15 and he isn’t even seen – he speaks from inside his jail cell. Boo, making his presence known solely by obscurely reaching out to the children through kind gestures and gifts, does not make an appearance in the novel until the final climactic scene in Chapter 28, and is not identified until the end of Chapter 29. It is true that when looking solely at the diegesis, it is the conflict between the protagonist (Atticus) and the antagonist (chorus of Maycomb) that takes center stage. But when considering TKM as a spectacle with the chorus of Maycomb striving to uphold the value of the status quo, one regards Tom and Boo as agents to the disruptions of this value, and suddenly the fact that they are hidden away and kept out of focus takes on a new possible meaning: Tom and Boo represent the anti-spectacle, the life that the spectacle negates.

Tom does not interrupt Maycomb’s value system in the simple fact that he is an African American. Black Maycomb citizens have a place in society: the lower class. Tom is more or less dragged into the conflict not only by being wrongfully accused of rape, but because the respected lawyer defending him is causing a ruckus by insisting on defending an African American. Still, the chorus views Tom as a grotesque, an inferior Negro with a withered arm, who dared to suggest that he “felt sorry” for a white girl, as if he was in a higher place in society to look down on her in pity (197). Boo is a grotesque through his absence. He does not perpetuate the status quo as society would like by attending church and town events and engaging in small talk with the townspeople. Instead, he remains shut inside his house, causing the people of Maycomb to concoct gruesome stories that sustain the image of Boo as a grotesque. The legend is that he stabbed his father with a scissors and thus needed

to be locked up. To them, he is a “malevolent phantom” who watches people sleep through their windows and commits “morbid nocturnal events” like mutilating pets and chickens (11). Though seen as grotesques who interrupt the status quo by the chorus of the spectacle, the reader sees Tom and Boo in opposition to the faux society represented in Maycomb.

## **2. Disruptions to the chorus’ value system**

As demonstrated in the first part of this paper, the chorus of Maycomb and its old-fashioned value system are elements of the spectacle of TKM. Atticus’ confrontation with the value system is at the heart of the novel, so what is to be said about the grotesques, Tom and Boo? They are moments of truth. No amount of insistence on upholding southern values will change who Tom and Boo are. Their grotesqueness challenges the comfortable, pre-arranged setting in the spectacle. Their presence cannot be explained nor supported by the chorus. This is similar to several other instances of the grotesque that appear in Maycomb. Mrs. Dubose is the loudest advocate for southern values. She shouts from her porch, insisting that Scout should wear dresses and insulting Atticus for defending a Negro (102). But the reader soon learns that the southern lady is battling a morphine addiction and the physical description of her is grotesque:

Her face was the color of a dirty pillowcase and the corners of her mouth glistened with wet...Her bottom plate was not in, and her upper lip protruded; from time to time she would draw her nether lip to her upper plate and carry her chin with it. This made the wet move faster. (106)

The grotesque appears in another form and interrupts the chorus’ value system: the Ewell family. Even though the family is destitute, and commonly known as “trash,” the town prefers to believe Bob Ewell’s lies and convict Tom, therefore upholding their value that African American citizens are beneath white citizens – *any* white citizen. Atticus himself states, “The jury couldn’t possibly be expected to take Tom Robinson’s word against the Ewells” (88). But the truth is that Bob Ewell is the one who raped his daughter. The truth is that he commits incest, a grotesque act. In the spectacle, the chorus of Maycomb ignores this fact, because it would cause contradiction in its value system. Bob Ewell’s incestuous acts are an example of a truth that appears and disrupts the spectacle, as well as Mrs. Dubose’s morphine addiction.

Another moment of truth that challenges the chorus’ value system appears in the form of Mr. Dolphus Raymond. The chorus of Maycomb attempts to uphold a society based on

old-fashioned southern values. One of these southern values is that white people are part of a higher class than blacks and it is considered disgraceful for whites to fraternize with blacks. This is why Atticus' decision to defend a Negro causes such a stir in TKM. Mr. Dolphus Raymond is not only friendly with the African Americans of Maycomb, he lives with them. He lives with a black woman and fathers several "mixed chillun" (161). The chorus is able to ignore this disruption to their spectacle because Mr. Raymond pretends to be a drunk, giving them a simple way for their minds to rationalize why he spends all of his time with Negroes. Mr. Raymond is an example of life – a moment of truth – that interrupts the value system of the chorus. The reader is witness to this moment of truth, but the chorus is not.

## **B. Challenges to the protagonist's value system**

In the conflict concerning Tom Robinson's trial that takes center stage in the novel, it is Atticus and his non-racist dedication to justice that challenges the status quo supported by the chorus. As stated above, Atticus' family, the African American community, and the few townspeople who support Atticus' decision to defend an innocent Negro are also defenders of the protagonist's value system. But as Atticus is the most vocal and active defender of justice and advocate of progress (epitomized in the trial scene which will be analyzed in the last part of the paper), one can consider Atticus alone to be the protagonist of the novel.

When regarding TKM as a spectacle, it is essential to note the moments of truth that appear in opposition to the protagonist's value system. Atticus' values are meant to be in accordance with those of the implied reader (Iser): tolerance, justice, etc. Therefore, one might wonder why challenges to this system appear in the novel. But it can be shown that these challenges enforce the notion that TKM represents a spectacle: like that of the antagonist, the value system of the protagonist is static and prearranged, and the disruptions to this value system appear as moments of truth that reveal the artificiality of the spectacle.

### **1. Mr. Underwood**

A principal element to Atticus' value system is justice through non-violence. This is demonstrated when Atticus guards Tom's cell all alone, intending to protect him from a mob peacefully and without violence. The mob that comes to kill Tom dissipates because of the charming and naïve narrative by Scout. This is a touching scene in the novel and contributes an element of emotional drama to the spectacle. But the sweet, melodramatic display ends abruptly when Mr. Underwood appears in the window above his newspaper office with a

double-barreled shotgun. “(His) voice cut crisply through the night ... ‘Had you covered the whole time, Atticus’” (155). If Scout had not succeeded in dissolving the mob, Mr. Underwood was ready to use violence to justly protect Tom.

## **2. Atticus**

Chapter 10 is a revealing chapter in the diegesis of TKM because the reader learns about a surprising hidden talent of Atticus: good aim with a gun. In the plot, this is a pivotal chapter because the children’s vision of their father is changed. The fact that the docile man has an excellent shot is surprising in the diegesis. However, when viewing TKM as a spectacle, with the static value system of Atticus being one of non-violence, this scene is exceptional because it reveals a moment of truth. The dog that appears in the street is loved. He was given the name of Tim Johnson by his owner, a bus driver. He is also loved by the whole town, described as “the pet of Maycomb” (92). But when he appears in the street twitching, he is deemed mad and the neighbors take cover. Most images of rabid dogs are similar to the description that Scout gives, thinking that “mad dogs foamed at the mouth, galloped, leaped and lunged at throats.” But Tim Johnson is shakily advancing down the street in a slow and dazed manner. Though seemingly harmless at the moment in the novel, the dog is potentially dangerous. The mob in front of the jail was also potentially dangerous but Atticus chose to remain faithful to his non-violent values. This time, Atticus takes a gun, just as Mr. Underwood had taken a gun in the mob scene. Atticus shoots and kills the dog that “didn’t know what hit him” (94).

In the novel, the death of a beloved dog is mournful, but the irony of Atticus with a rifle is almost comical. His static value system is punctured when he himself uses violence to actualize justice. Though the dog is known and loved, and perhaps seen more as a friend rather than just a pet since he has a human name, the safety of the people of Maycomb is more important than the life of the dog. Therefore, justice means killing a sick animal that has the potential to harm a human. Atticus physically carries out this justice with violence. In this moment, he is no longer playing his role as the peaceful lawyer who insists on fighting for justice in a non-violent manner. This moment reveals an instance of truth in the spectacle.

## **3. Boo**

A final glimpse of truth appears in the climactic scene where Boo saves the day: the finale. Once again, this scene takes on different meanings depending on whether it is looked

at as a part of the diegesis or as an interruption to the spectacle. In the novel, Boo saving Jem and Scout is the epitome of the children's acceptance and appreciation of the social outcast. This is a crucial scene in the theme of approaching adulthood, giving a tangible reason why the children should be compassionate to those who are different. At the beginning, the children and the townspeople fear the strange personage of Boo to the point of practically mocking him. Little by little, they see that he is gentle and kind, epitomized at the end when he saves the children's lives.

The novel glosses over the fact that Boo brutally *killed* Bob Ewell with a kitchen knife. The characters decide to keep this fact a secret because it is considered to be so heroic that the town would erupt with praise, "knocking on his door bringing angel food cakes" (276). The fact that Boo killed Bob Ewell is never even directly uttered, only alluded to when the sheriff says that he "prevent(ed) a crime from being committed." This is all understood as being emotionally moving in the diegesis, with compassion for Boo finally being demonstrated. But when viewed as a spectacle, we see once again an attack on Atticus' value system. This moment is a truth that appears in the pre-arranged text of Atticus' endorsement of non-violence. Atticus thanks Boo for saving his children. His gratitude implies gratitude for a violent act.

Atticus' insistence on justice through non-violence is first presented when he sternly warns Scout to refrain from fighting other children, even if they refer to her father as a "nigger-lover" (83). He reacts in good humor when Mrs. Dubose insults him and when Bob Ewell spits in his face. His dedication to non-violence is reinforced when he sits outside the jail cell of Tom Robinson, intending to protect him without a weapon. But in the moments of truth that appear throughout the spectacle, Atticus' idea of non-violent justice is challenged. Mr. Underwood has a shotgun, Atticus kills a dog with a rifle, Boo kills a man with a knife, and all situations end in Atticus' favor.

#### **4. Ambiguous heroism**

Atticus plays the role of the hero, for the purpose of perpetuating the allure of the spectacle. As demonstrated above, the hero's value system is disrupted. This shatters the expectation of the hero and his adherence to his value system to remain intact throughout the spectacle, thus proving that the heroism in the novel is ambiguous rather than static.

This ambiguity is demonstrated through the fact that Atticus' heroism is ironized. One expects a hero to be handsome and strong. Atticus is old, nearly blind in one eye, and not in good enough shape to play football. Instead of being presented as successful and powerful, his competency as a lawyer is questioned in the first few pages of the novel. "His first two clients were the last two persons hanged in the Maycomb County jail" (4). Instead of demonstrating the fearless defense of an heroic warrior, Atticus responds to criticism, ridicule, and outright harassment with comedy.

Though irony surrounds Atticus' heroism, his actions are eventually celebrated in the novel as the themes of prejudice and justice develop. Knowing he could not win the trial, he defends Tom anyway, staying true to his idea of justice, fulfilling his role as hero. Still, the idea of heroism remains ambiguous because of the challenges to the hero's value system that appear in the spectacle. Uncertainty arises as the question of both "true and false heroism" (Scofield 45) is confronted in TKM. For example, according to Atticus' value system, violence is not a factor of heroism. He uses Mrs. Dubose's battle with morphine to demonstrate to his son that courage isn't a "man with a gun in his hand" and states that Mrs. Dubose was the bravest person he knew (112). According to Atticus' values, a *true* hero does not use violence. But this idea of non-violent heroism is subverted in the final scene when Boo receives an heroic status for having killed the antagonist, Bob Ewell. The reader is left to wonder: which is a case of true heroism and which is a case of false? If the value system of the spectacle is static, the two opposite forms of heroism cannot appear simultaneously.

The ambiguous heroism in TKM is similar to the heroism demonstrated in Stephen Crane's short story, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky." Like TKM, the classic work creates a "sense of theatrical spectacle ... [T]he mixture of tragedy and comedy, violence and humor corresponds to these elements in the theatrical genre" (Scofield 45). Cradled in the entertaining theatrics of the spectacle, one finds an analysis of true and false heroism; the impertinent questioning of heroism as violence or non-violence.

In "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," Jack Potter represents a new kind of hero and the transition into a new world - a new beginning of sorts for America. This is reiterated in the way in which Scratchy looks at Potter's wife "like a creature allowed a glimpse of another world" (Crane 324). The other world opposes the past world of violence and gun fights. The new world is a world of non-violence, placidness and *family*. Potter enters into this new life by marrying and remaining peaceful when confronted with violence. In the past world, Potter

had a gun and heroically fought Scratchy on a regular basis. Now, with a symbol of family in the form of his wife by his side, he makes the transition to non-violence.

Atticus is the literary heir to Potter. His past-life includes an element of violence: known as “One-Shot Finch,” Atticus was so handy with a gun that in his time he earned the reputation of having “the deadest shot in Maycomb County.” But Atticus no longer uses guns. Miss Maudie speculates that it is because he realized that he had an “unfair advantage over most living things” (98). But her use of the word “civilized” best describes the present Atticus. He married, had children, and in raising his family adopted a value system based on non-violence. He transitioned from a world of guns and savage killings to one of civilized peace.

The hero’s new value system of justice through non-violence succeeds in “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky.” Potter insists that he is unarmed and Scratchy walks away, perplexed, but without inflicting any harm on the marshal and his bride. As demonstrated in this paper, non-violent heroism fails continuously throughout TKM. The diegesis remains undisturbed by this fact in order to maintain the fixedness of Atticus’ value system. Mr. Underwood intended to use violence against the mob if necessary, but violence wasn’t necessary. Atticus shot and killed a dog, but he did it because the dog was sick and potentially dangerous. Boo stabbed Bob Ewell to death, but he did it in order to save Atticus’ children. All of these examples of violence are accepted by Atticus and glossed over in the spectacle. This is because they subvert the non-violent value system and present moments of truth that disrupt the spectacle.

The non-violent hero is perhaps most vividly ironized in the comparison of his pacifism to demasculization. It is possible to view Potter’s lack of gun as a lack of masculinity; his placidity as a mark of cowardice. He has entered into a world of ideals and diplomacy; a world that greatly contrasts the violent gun fights of the past. Similarly, Atticus’ masculinity is questioned throughout TKM. The narrator bluntly declares, “Atticus was feeble” (89). Scout and her brother believe the fact that their father is old reflects on his masculinity. They are bothered that Atticus doesn’t hunt, fish, play poker or drink like other fathers. Shackelford states, “Despite his position as a respected male authority figure in Maycomb, he seems oblivious to traditional expectations concerning masculinity” (Shackelford 5). He is criticized for never remarrying after the death of his wife, opting to live in an untraditional way: a bachelor raising his children with the help of a cook. The fact that Atticus’ masculinity is challenged demonstrates the ironic and obscure nature of his heroism.



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Thus far, the theatrical and artificial elements that enforce the idea of TKM as a spectacle have been demonstrated, as well as the disruptions to the spectacle that reveal moments of truth. Because of its artificiality, the spectacle can be seen as destructive. For example, when considering the consequences of Atticus' insistence of justice through non-violence, one is confronted with a family who is endlessly taunted by a community, and an innocent African American man who is shot dead. When considering the subversions to Atticus' value system of non-violence (moments of truth), one beholds a town saved from a mad dog, and two innocent children saved from an angry drunken man. But the spectacle glosses over these moments of truth, hindering critical thought. The spectacle that ignores truth dominates the novel, and this is epitomized in the trial scene.

### **III. The trial scene: a spectacle within the spectacle**

“...the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth...”

It can be said that TKM contains two stories: one centers around the children’s relationship with Boo, and the other centers around Atticus’ defense of Tom Robinson in his rape charge and the resulting conflicts with the chorus of Maycomb. The climax of the first story is considered to be the attack of the children by Bob Ewell and the revelation that it was Boo who saved them. The climax of the story concerning Atticus’ defense of Tom is recognized as the trial scene.

#### **A. The play within the play**

The trial scene of TKM is so climatic and so dramatic, that the resulting spectacle (taking place within a spectacle) can be compared to the theatrical notion of the *play within the play*. This dramatic technique is said to be employed when “at least one actor, who is part of the outer play, becomes temporarily the spectator of the inner play” (Bionda 6). Since the idea of TKM as a spectacle has already been established, one can easily envision the characters of TKM as the actors in the spectacle, the “outer play.” During the trial scene (the “inner play”), several “actors” of the “outer play” (Scout, Jem, Dill, etc.) become spectators. The spectacle that they attend is performed by Atticus, Mr. Gilmer, the judge, the jury, Mr. Tate, Bob Ewell, Mayella Ewell, and Tom Robinson.

The structure of the trial scene in the novel is comparable to that of a play. Each testimony can be seen as a separate scene within the spectacle, with a distinct pause, or break, between them. Like during any live performance, the spectators use the breaks to take a moment to ponder what they have seen so far, discuss it with neighbors, stretch; the spectators seize the opportunity to step away from the spectacle. After Mr. Tate’s testimony, “heads turned, feet scraped the floor, babies were shifted to shoulders, and a few children scampered out of the courtroom” (169). Whispers were heard as the momentary pause was used to discuss the proceedings thus far. Scout profits from the break after Bob Ewell’s scene to reflect on her father’s progress in the trial (178). When Mayella Ewell finishes testifying, the crowd uses the pause as an opportunity to stretch (188). Spectators Dill and Scout, as well as the reader of TKM, experience an intermission during the trial. Dill begins to cry and he and Scout go outside. The children take a break from the spectacle, drinking soda and sharing

opinions on what they have seen with Mr. Dolphus Raymond (200). In addition to its structure, the trial scene resembles a play within the play because of the spectacular elements and dramatic performances it presents.

### **1. Spectacular elements**

The trial is described as a “gala occasion” (160) and upon seeing the crowds of people making their way to the courthouse, Miss Maudie compares the event to a “Roman carnival” (159). In general, the people who attend the happenings in the court (trials, hearings, jury selections, etc.) are called “spectators” (163). This is fitting when considering the particular trial of Tom Robinson as a spectacle that takes place within the spectacle of TKM. The association with the idea of a spectacle or show is demonstrated in the descriptions of Scout, Jem and Dill receiving “front-row seats” (164) to watch the trial.

One can see the trial scene as a spectacle in the descriptions of the actors. Mr. Tate was “dressed for the occasion” (169) and the jury is described as “dressed-up” (164). Atticus as an actor in the spectacle is nervous before the show. Scout describes a change that she sees in her father days before the trial. “It was a quiet digging in, never outright irritation. There was a faint starchiness in his voice ...” (157). Several actors are nervous during their performance. Mr. Tate fumbles when performing his part by stuttering: “I was fetched by Bob – by Mr. Bob Ewell ... I was just leaving my office to go home when B – Mr. Ewell came in ...” (166). Mayella is so nervous that she bursts into tears before even beginning her testimony (179).

Bob Ewell is the clown of the spectacle. He “strut[s]” to the stand and “crow[s]” when swearing his oath (170). He mocks Mr. Gilmer by calling him “cap’n” (171) and makes the crowd laugh several times by joking about the fidelity of his dead wife (172) and by making reference to the relief checks that everyone in Maycomb knows he relies on (177). The spectators’ entertainment is evident in their whispers and chuckles, and Scout assumes that they are all thinking to themselves “what a card [Bob Ewell] was” (177).

The crowd is permitted to laugh at another moment in the spectacle when Bob Ewell is leaving the witness stand after his testimony with Mr. Gilmer. Eager to end his performance, he “made a hasty descent from the stand and ran smack into Atticus, who had risen to question him” (175). This example of physical comedy demonstrates the aspect of entertainment in the spectacle of the trial.

It is spectacular to watch the characters of the performances, particularly the dissimilarity between Atticus and Mayella. The exaggeration of their roles in the spectacle is perhaps epitomized in their encounter during Mayella's cross-examination. Atticus' polite and well-spoken character is contrasted with the rustic and unsophisticated manners of Mayella. Atticus calls Mayella "Miss Mayella" and addresses her as "ma'am" (181). Mayella speaks in a much cruder manner ("cussin' me an' sayin' dirt;" "I don't remember too good" [180]) and believes that Atticus is mocking her when using common courtesy to address her: "Your fancy airs don't come to nothin' – your ma'amin' and Miss Mayellerin' don't come to nothin' ..." (188). The exaggerated mannerisms of the characters add to the spectacularity of the performance, but also reveals the artificiality of the spectacle. The fact that Mayella's testimony is referred to as her "recital" (181) enunciates the fact that the spectacle of the trial scene is a prearranged dramatic text.

## **2. A dramatic performance**

Scout describes the first scene of the spectacle as "utterly dull: nobody had thundered, there were no arguments between opposing counsel, there was no drama" (169). She feels as if the lack of drama is received as a great disappointment to all of the spectators. But dramatic elements eventually appear during the spectacle of the trial, proven by the fact that nobody moves during the recess initiated by the judge. The fact that the spectators do not profit from this potential intermission suggests that everyone in the courtroom is too fascinated with the proceedings to necessitate a break. When Scout learns that it is four o'clock, she realizes that the clock had struck the hour at least twice but she did not hear: she was too absorbed in the dramatic elements being performed before her (189).

Atticus purposely creates several dramatic moments when building his case to prove Tom Robinson innocent. The first comes during Bob Ewell's cross-examination. Proving Bob's left-handedness is a crucial piece of evidence supporting Atticus' implication that it was not Tom who beat Mayella, but Bob. Therefore, Atticus reveals Bob's left-handedness in a dramatic performance, perhaps to impress the critical information in the memories of the jury. Atticus asks Bob to write his name: moving "leisurely," he takes an envelope from his vest pocket, unclips a fountain pen, unscrews the cap and places it on the table, shakes the pen, and hands the pen and the envelope to Bob (177). The marked and deliberate movements are meant to build up the anticipation of the spectators. They are intrigued by the visual

display, and eager to learn of its purpose. The aim of the performance is revealed when Bob writes his name and the judge announces, “You’re left-handed, Mr. Ewell” (177).

Atticus’ defense relies on another dramatic visual display to prove that Tom Robinson could not have hurt Mayella. After having testified that he hit her, grabbed her neck, choked and raped her, Mayella points to Tom when asked to identify the man who hurt her. Atticus then asks Tom to stand up. When the man rises, it is revealed to every spectator in the courtroom that he is crippled: his left arm is a foot shorter than the right, with a shriveled hand at the end of it. The arm “hung dead” and it was clear “that it was no use to him” (186). The courtroom remains riveted by the performance when it is Tom’s turn to testify. When asked to describe the events of the day in question, “the spectators drew a collective breath and leaned forward” (192), anxious for the next part of the spectacle.

Tom recounts the events in an earnest and sincere manner. Having already dramatically demonstrated Tom’s physical handicap, Atticus’ case for Tom’s innocence seemed to be made. But the turning point in the trial arrives when Tom unmindfully utters a phrase that is instantly understood as a grave mistake: the black man states that he felt sorry for the white girl. “... [T]he damage was done” (197). The dramatic testimonies had steadily culminated, each side having presented its case, but Tom’s defense plummets after this fatal phrase. Mr. Gilmer mercilessly lances a continuous stream of questions at Tom, who solemnly replies, “No suh” (197). The prosecutor addresses the defendant as “boy,” perhaps in an attempt to remind the jury of the low position held by Negroes as accepted by society. Two spectators refrain from witnessing the decline of Tom’s defense by leaving the courtroom: Scout accompanies Dill’s exit when he begins to cry, overcome by the spectacle before him.

After an intermission from the spectacle, Scout and Dill return in time to behold Atticus’ final dramatic performance. His closing argument is very theatrical; the uninterrupted speech stretches across three pages of the novel and strongly resembles a monologue. The articulate and passionate lawyer relays a moving discourse, complete with dramatic pauses (wiping his glasses with his handkerchief), pleas to emotions by referring to the defendant as a “quiet, respectable, humble Negro” (204), and a forceful ending proclamation: “In the name of God, do your duty” (205). It is easy to imagine this speech being played out in a theatre, with Atticus’ character pacing dramatically about the stage. The powerful speech is not only formulated to demonstrate Atticus’ skillful rhetoric, but also his noble determination to fight

for justice in an unjust society. Through this chivalrous dedication, Atticus' heroism is displayed.

The spectacle of the trial scene closes in an appropriately dramatic fashion. When the jury enters the courtroom to announce the verdict, Scout falls into a dazed state:

... in a dream I saw the jury return, moving like underwater swimmers, and Judge Taylor's voice came from far away and was tiny ... I shut my eyes ... Judge Taylor was saying something ... Dimly, I saw Atticus pushing papers from the table into his briefcase ... Someone was punching me ... (211)

The devastation felt by Scout upon the guilty verdict being announced is demonstrated by the dreamlike way in which the subsequent movements occur. This represents the falling action of the spectacle, ending the trial scene (the inner spectacle) and ushering in the final scenes of the outer spectacle.

## **B. Subverting truth**

### **1. The danger of illusion**

The dramatic technique of the play within the play demonstrates the notion of illusion in the spectacle. "... [T]he fact is that illusion is everywhere and will even become all that matters ... Illusion in the end can be used for restoring order, that is to say, truth" (Bionda 13). The restoration of truth through illusion (the play within the play) is evidenced in one of the most famous examples of the play within the play, "The Murder of Gonzago" in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In the tragedy, the theatrical device of the play within the play serves to create truth, to reveal Claudius as a murderer. But TCM subverts this idea because truth is not revealed in the trial scene: Tom is found guilty.

The subversion of truth that results in the spectacle of the trial scene demonstrates the destructive nature of the spectacle and the danger of illusion. The spectacular elements and dramatic performances distract the spectator from critical thought; the static value system of the spectacle's antagonist dominates. Atticus accepts the spectacle of the trial as a way of revealing truth: "Illusion means danger and yet, even the men who are on the side of the truth are obliged to cope with it. They learn how to use it for the restoration of order, that is to say, truth" (Bionda 72). Atticus, already exposed as an ambiguous hero in the spectacle who possesses an artificial value system, attempts to use the illusion of the spectacle to restore

truth by proving Tom's innocence. He is dedicated to creating a strong case for Tom, he delivers a dramatic performance in the trial scene, and he even begins planning for an appeal immediately after the truth fails to be revealed. He copes with the spectacle; he plays by the rules. But following the rules of the justice system does not reveal the truth. Instead, the subversion of truth resulting from the spectacular search for justice affirms the fact that it is the spectacle that reigns.

## **2. A spectacle of justice**

The domination of the spectacle is rampant in TKM, and the epitome of its power over truth appears in the trial scene. The purpose of a trial is known to the anticipated reader: its purpose is to reveal truth and enforce justice. However, as represented in TKM, this is not always the case. "Le pouvoir du spectacle ... s'indigne assez souvent de voir se constituer, sous son règne ... une justice-spectacle" (Debord, *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle* 17).

One could consider justice to be one of the central themes of the novel, but this motif is equally important when regarding the text as a spectacle. The central conflict is the clash of value systems between Atticus and the chorus, and at the heart of the two value systems are opposing ideas of justice. Atticus believes that race should not be a factor in determining one's guilt or innocence whereas the society of Maycomb deems an African American's word fundamentally inferior to that of a white man's. Atticus advocates non-violence (guarding Tom's cell unarmed) whereas Maycomb demonstrates the use of violence in serving justice (the mob intends to kill Tom, and later in the novel, the prison guards shoot and kill him to prevent him from escaping). These two opposing views demonstrate the ambiguity of justice.

Yet the U.S. justice system relies on the fairness of courtroom trials to serve justice. The process is represented in the novel, but it is only the ambiguity of justice that is demonstrated. The trial in the novel is a spectacle in which everyone searches to demonstrate their own concept of guilt and innocence. Bob and Mayella Ewell make a mockery of the justice system by lying, but the trial is technically fair because it is the jury who decides the verdict based on their own conclusions of guilt and innocence. Rather than reveal the truth, the jury adheres to the artificial value system of the spectacle's antagonist: the spectacle reigns. "Le gouvernement du spectacle ... règne partout; il exécute ses jugements sommaires" (Debord, *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle* 20).

Still, Atticus declares his faith in the justice system during his performance in the trial.

He states:

... there is one way in this country in which all men are created equal – there is one human institution that makes a pauper the equal of a Rockefeller, the stupid man the equal of an Einstein, and the ignorant man the equal of any college president. That institution, gentlemen, is a court. (205)

Adhering to his artificial value system of non-violence, Atticus seeks justice for Tom peacefully. He acknowledges the U.S. justice system as the only option for revealing the truth of Tom's innocence and thus follows the rules. He works hard to prepare a sound defense for the trial, and when the verdict is unfavorable, he immediately starts planning for an appeal.

Failing to create truth, the justice system is revealed as mere spectacle through the trial scene. Though Atticus is devoted to the principle of non-violence in Tom's trial, this is not the case when Bob Ewell is killed after having attacked his children. In the final scenes of TKM, Atticus challenges his own concept of justice by lying about the true facts surrounding Bob Ewell's death. In the diegesis of the novel, deciding to lie in order to protect "a mockingbird," (Boo), is a reaction to the loss of another "mockingbird," Tom, due to the injustice of the "justice" system. But in the spectacle of TKM, this act is an example of Atticus disrupting his own value system by taking justice into his own hands. This is a final demonstration of the domination of the spectacle over truth.



## Conclusion

TKM is a representation of the spectacle of society. The novel works as a spectacle in considering both the literal concept of the term as well as Debord's theory. The illusion of drama creates a spectacle in the novel through the elements of suspense and theatricality, and the presence of classic dramatic personages like victims, villains, and heroes. The artificiality of the spectacle presents itself in the narrative, the static text and value systems.

*La vérité* that the spectacle attempts to conceal appears throughout the novel, as a reassurance that *la vie* still exists, even in the artificial presentation of the spectacle. The moments of truth disrupt the artificial value systems of both the antagonist and the protagonist. The heroism of the protagonist is challenged as well, in the demonstration of the ironic and ambiguous state of the hero and his value system.

The revealed instances of truth throughout the novel provide a hope that truth can possibly overcome the spectacle in the trial scene. But the trial itself is revealed to be a spectacle within the spectacle, not only in the presence of spectacular elements and dramatic performances, but in the fact that truth is subverted and it is the spectacle that reigns. The final representation of the power of the spectacle is Atticus' reaction to the murder of Bob Ewell by Boo. He disrupts his own value system by supporting a violent act, and lying to cover up the person responsible for the act. Realizing that spectacle dominates truth, he himself creates a spectacle that conceals an inconvenient truth (he lies and is therefore able to ignore the fact that a violent act saved his children).

The reigning spectacle represented throughout the novel questions the idea of truth. The subversion of truth demonstrated in the trial scene ignites a commentary on the implications of the justice system and its supposed allegiance to truth, perhaps not just as demonstrated in TKM, but in the reality of American society.

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**Keywords:** *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Harper Lee, spectacle, truth, play within a play

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the elements that transform Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* into a spectacle considering several senses of the term: both the dramatic and artificial notions of the term are examined, as well as Guy Debord's broader interpretation in relation to society. The concept of truth is explored as the antithesis of the spectacle in its appearances throughout the novel, representing life that the spectacle attempts to negate. Finally, this paper analyzes a particular example of a spectacle that appears within the spectacle in the trial scene, and its implications in relation to truth and justice.

## **Résumé**

Ce mémoire explore les éléments qui transforment *To Kill A Mockingbird* de Harper Lee au spectacle en considérant plusieurs sens du terme : les notions dramatiques et artificielles du mot sont examinées, ainsi que l'interprétation vaste de Guy Debord par rapport à la société. Le concept de la vérité est exploré comme l'antithèse du spectacle dans ses apparences tout au long du roman ; ces moments représentent la vie que le spectacle tente à nier. Finalement, ce mémoire analyse un exemple particulier d'un spectacle qui apparaît dans le roman sous forme de la scène du procès, et ses implications par rapport à la vérité et la justice.