

FOREWORD

The Story Behind This Story

By Melissa Fay Greene

A few giants towered above the others on the fiction best-seller lists in the early 1960s: James Michener, Irving Wallace, Herman Wouk, Irving Stone, Saul Bellow, John O'Hara, Leon Uris, their titles flashing their authors' intentions to loosen their ties, put down their bourbons, tamp out their cigarettes or pipes and confront their Smith Corona typewriters long enough to chisel truth from granite: *Advise and Consent*, *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, *The Ugly American*, *The Source*, *Armageddon*. Into this manly realm with its scent of Old Spice and Aqua Velva, in the summer of 1960, tiptoed a young slip of a book with an artsy cover and the odd name *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It told, in an elliptical and poetical and round-about way, the coming-of-age story of a motherless little Alabama white girl whose daddy, a country lawyer, defies Depression-era social convention and takes on the case of a local black man falsely accused of rape.

No one had heard of the author, who turned out to be—despite the mannish name of Harper Lee—a tallish southern white woman in slacks, a tucked-in button-down shirt with an open collar, flat shoes and a short hair-cut. She'd moved to New York City from Alabama a decade earlier to work as an airline reservation agent. Nelle Harper Lee (she dropped

the "Nelle" for publication, fearing Yankees would bungle the name) was born in Monroeville, Alabama, in 1926, when the population of the town numbered about 1,300 citizens and would soon include a boy one and a half years her senior named Truman Streckfus Persons. He would become her lifelong friend and would publish *his* books under the name Truman Capote.

Nelle's mother was a homemaker and her father a state legislator and country lawyer who once defended two black men accused of murdering a white storekeeper; like Atticus Finch, the hero of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Amasa Coleman Lee proved unable to protect either his clients' good names or their lives. The author's beloved much-older sister, Alice Finch Lee, was a principled small-town lawyer too, who, like their father, and like the fictional Atticus Finch, attempted to appraise the folks of thoroughly segregated Alabama by the content of their characters.

"I never expected any sort of success with *Mockingbird*," Harper Lee told one early interviewer. "I was hoping for a quick and merciful death at the hands of the reviewers, but at the same time, I sort of hoped someone would like it enough to give me encouragement."

While a few early readers sniffed at the book disparagingly (Flannery

O'Connor tartly noted, "It's interesting that all the folks that are buying it don't know they are buying a children's book"); and some mocked Atticus Finch's relentless goodness and homespun homilies; and others, years later, would lament that this creation of the late 1950s lacked the social enlightenment and moral bravery of true civil rights activism, the author still managed to eke out that bit of encouragement from the book's reception. *To Kill a Mockingbird* eventually won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1961 and rode the best-seller lists for over 80 weeks. Translated into more than 40 languages, selling over 40 million copies, it would become one of the best-selling novels of the 20th century. In the 21st century, it sells a million copies a year. The book was promptly adapted into a beautiful and wildly popular movie in which Gregory Peck immortalized Atticus Finch, won the Academy Award for Best Actor, and became a friend to the author; the movie was nominated for a total of eight Academy Awards and won three. Atticus Finch would be named the American Film Institute's premier movie hero of the century and would inspire generations of idealistic young people to flood into law schools to become public interest advocates. *Mockingbird* would pop up at or near the top of every English-language Great Books list composed

OPPOSITE: GREGORY PECK'S original script from the 1962 movie *To Kill a Mockingbird*, with

his notations, and above that, a photograph showing Peck as the lawyer Atticus Finch, studying the

script with actress Mary Badham, who played Finch's daughter, Scout, in the movie.

from the year of its publication on—occasionally beating out the Bible for the No. 1 spot.

After more hoopla than a person could reasonably handle, Harper Lee avoided the spotlight while continuing to live in New York and regularly visiting her family in Monroeville. Miss Nelle (as she's known locally) moved home for good in 2007 after suffering a stroke and resides in an assisted-living facility.

Following the death of her sister Alice, it was announced that the manuscript of *Go Set a Watchman* had been found, a find that begat all the current news. The best news may be that people have been redirected to the great book, Harper Lee's urtext. Let's spend some time here with *To Kill a Mockingbird*—the reason, and a good one, that we are paying attention to the new book.

Even if you don't pick up *To Kill a Mockingbird* for a clever mid-century southerner's fictionalized look back at racial injustice in the 1930s, start by reading the book—or, more likely, rereading it—for the poetry and for the humor. You likely missed those when you first confronted it as a teenager.

Yes, certainly: *To Kill a Mockingbird* is one of the most frequently assigned novels in grades nine through 12 in these United States. Raise your hand if you ever wrote an MLA-formatted paper in response to one of these prompts: (a) *The Scout we meet at the beginning of the novel has changed by the end of the novel. Discuss.* (b) *When Atticus hopes that his children won't catch "Maycomb's usual disease," what disease is he referring to? Discuss.* (c) *Why is it a sin to kill a mockingbird? Discuss.* Now: Raise your hand if you ever participated in one of these group projects: (a) *Design two front pages of The Maycomb Tribune—one just after the trial of Tom Robinson and another after the death of Bob Ewell. Include a news article, feature, editorial, advice column and illustrations with captions.* (b) *Create an annotated scrapbook for Scout of at least 10 pages. On each page, paste in something that reflects some aspect of Scout's experience growing*

up. Make sure that at least two items are written—for example a letter from Dill, a newspaper article, or a diary entry. Annotate each entry as Scout, explaining why she is saving this item. (c) *Pick a judge, prosecutor, defense attorney, defendants, jury and courtroom observers and reenact the trial.* In having learned to read *Mockingbird* with an eye toward thesis, argument, conclusion, topicality and the group project due this coming Friday, you missed the fun. Which, in any case, you were too young to appreciate.

Among the many astonishing elements of *Mockingbird's* triumph, both as a work of conscience and a work of art, is its languid, deeply southern and slyly comic prose. Where on earth did this alumnus of Monroe County High School, who never finished college, learn to write like this? On the page, Harper Lee is as fluent, confident, witty, expansive and cocky as she would turn out *not* to be in public. Unlike the Great Men who straddled Modern American Fiction, in their argyle socks and Florsheim wingtips, as though they owned it, Harper Lee did not seek or want the limelight. No happy hour or after-hours she-nanigans for her. From the mid-1960s on, she tried her hardest to decline every interview, with her older sister often running interference. No ma'am, no sir, what the author had to say was already there on the page, the ladies pointed out, politely (if Alice answered the door) or not so politely (if the Author Herself was bestirred to dispatch a caller), and indeed it was—lavishly, warmly and comically.

"[Atticus's] first two clients were the last two persons hanged in the Maycomb County jail," nine-year-old Scout recites without irony as she gets her story underway. "Atticus had urged them . . . to plead Guilty . . . and escape with their lives, but they were Haverfords, in Maycomb County a name synonymous with jackass." Scout's first-person narrative will maintain this mix of received off-kilter local wisdom, plain-out honesty and descriptive powers far beyond her years (the gifts of the adult narrator looking back) for the length of her tale.

"Somehow it was hotter then," she

remembers of her childhood summers with her older brother, Jem, when they were being raised by their widowed father, Atticus, and their African American housekeeper, Calpurnia. "A black dog suffered on a summer's day; bony mules hitched to Hoover carts flicked flies in the sheltering shade of the live oaks on the square. Men's stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three-o'clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum."

The debut of Dill is simply one of the great introductions in American literature (especially if you can hear his voice in your mind as the tremulous, high-pitched, southern drawl of a too-small and too-self-important nearly seven-year-old, something like, "Ah kin *raid*"). Scout and Jem, hearing a noise, discover the boy sitting in Miss Rachel Haverford's collard patch next door.

"I'm Charles Baker Harris," he said. "I can read."

"So what?" I said.

"I just thought you'd like to know I can read. You got anything needs reading I can do it . . ."

"You look right puny for goin' on seven," . . . said Jem.

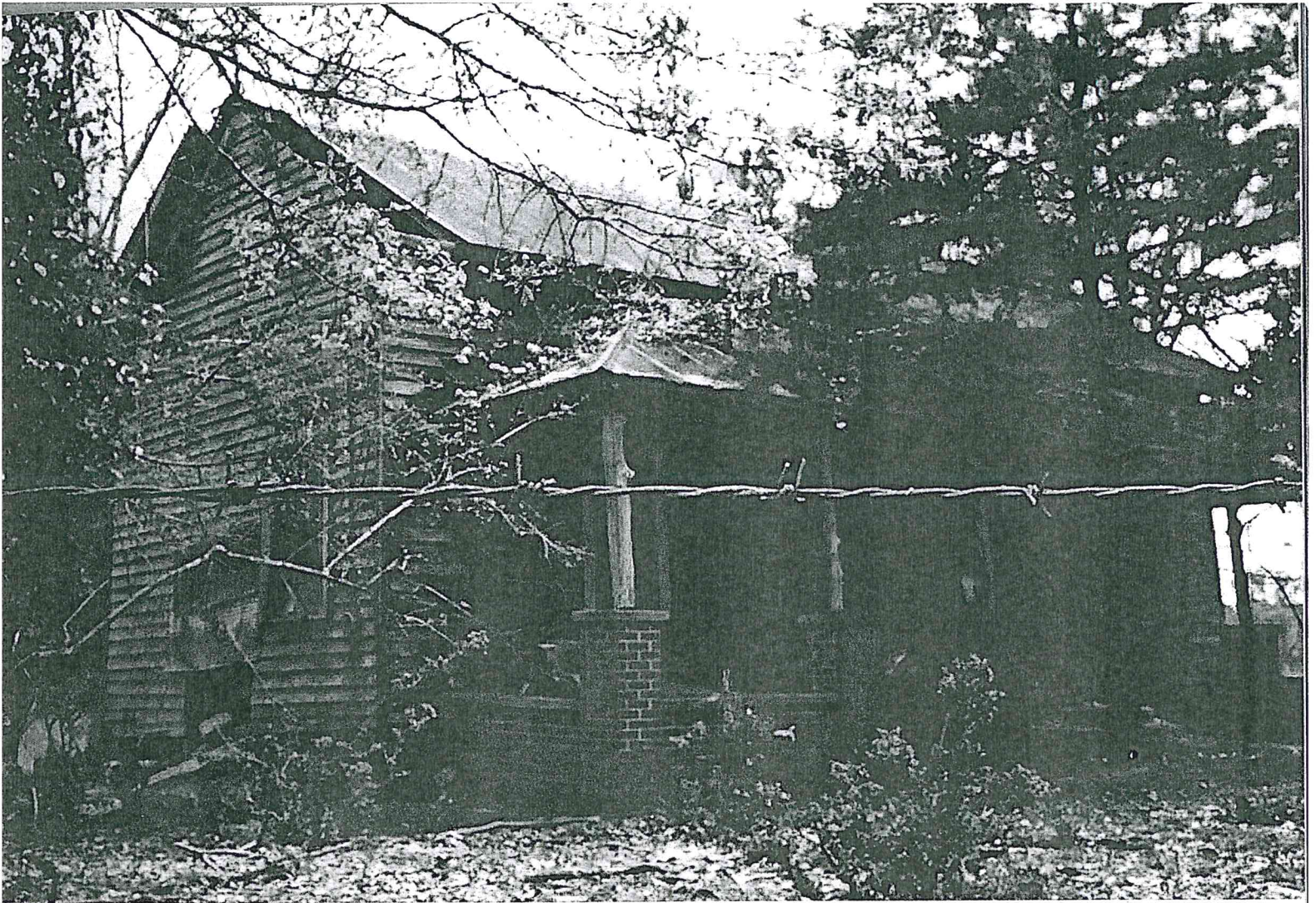
"I'm little but I'm old," he said."

Upon hearing the pipsqueak's full name, Jem echoes, "Charles Baker Harris . . . Lord, what a name."

"Dill was a curiosity," Scout observed. "He wore blue linen shorts that buttoned to his shirt, his hair was snow white and stuck to his head like duck-fluff; he was a year my senior but I towered over him."

The wonderful scene is made even more delicious by the revelation that the character of precocious little Dill was based on Truman Streckfus Persons. Soon after the book's publication, Truman Capote wrote to a friend: "Yes, my dear, I *am* Dill."

"Aunt Alexandra was positively irritable on the Lord's Day," Scout observes when her father's sister moves in with them, to help the family weather hard times ahead as the trial date for Atticus's client, Tom Robinson, approaches. "I guess it was her Sunday corset. She was not fat,



ONE OF THE MANY candidates for the Radley house—in Melissa Fay Greene’s words “the ultimate haunted house of American childhood”—in Monroeville. Please see pages 20 and 34 for further fun information about this house and others: “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 . . .”

but solid, and she chose protective garments that drew up her bosom to giddy heights, pinched in her waist, flared out her rear, and managed to suggest that Aunt Alexandra’s was once an hour-glass figure. From any angle, it was formidable.” Scout observes Aunt Alexandra and her visiting friends as from a world where “fragrant ladies rocked slowly, fanned gently, and drank cool water.”

One of Scout’s recitations of local lore goes like this: “The older citizens . . . were utterly predictable to one another: they took for granted attitudes, character shadings, even gestures, as having been repeated in each generation and refined by time. Thus the dicta No Crawford Minds His Own Business, Every Third Merriweather Is Morbid, The Truth Is Not in the Delafields, All the Bufords Walk Like That, were simply guides to daily living.”

And Harper Lee gets childhood. She remembers the hot, buggy, still,

boring, endless, precious hours between breakfast and supper all summer long, when all there is to do is poke around in the dirt yard and examine your mosquito bites and improve your tree house and annoy Calpurnia and act out stories from adventure books and hope to goodness that *something* will happen somewhere. “We strolled silently down the sidewalk,” says the narrator of a summer night, “listening to porch swings creaking with the weight of the neighborhood, listening to the soft night-murmurs of the grown people on our street.”

You have to have been paying attention your whole life, beginning in earliest childhood, and you have to have hoarded everything you saw, smelled, tasted, heard, touched and thought so as to be able to summon to your mind ladies like soft teacakes, a boy’s hair like duck-fluff, an aunt’s flared-out rear end, porch swings creaking on a summer night, and



ROB McDONALD/ANZENBERGER/REDUX

“The Truth Is Not in the Delafields.”

You would have to have been, in Henry James’s phrase, “one of the people on whom nothing is lost.”

So come to *Mockingbird* (come back to *Mockingbird*) for the poetry and the humor. Then stay for the scary show.

The book plays with elements of the Southern Gothic novel, a sub-genre of 19th-century European literature’s fascination with decay and morbidity, evil and the supernatural, spooky castles and the moors at night.

Like their progenitors, Southern Gothic novels took dark and ominous routes past graveyards and insane asylums, shuttered plantation houses and marshes shrouded by mist, on their way to unmasking the physical and moral deterioration of a fallen aristocracy, in their case: the white elites of the Confederacy. These novels swarm with characters warped in mind or body and harboring evil intent, shut-ins and incestuous fathers, drunks and snake-handlers, bootleggers and gamblers, carnival hawkers and escaped convicts. William Faulkner and Flannery O’Connor

THIS IS THE VIEW from the balcony of the Monroeville courtroom—where writer Harper Lee observed her own father practicing law—that inspired the scenes in which the kids are watching Atticus at work.

were great practitioners of the form, as were Carson McCullers, Tennessee Williams, and Erskine Caldwell, while movies including *Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte; Deliverance; Cape Fear* and *Midnight in the Garden of Good & Evil* bought into the myth.

The Southern Gothic mood-setting in *Mockingbird* is the prelude to the introduction of the Monster, for there are also elements here of one of humankind's oldest stories, the archetypal plot known as Overcoming the Monster. "The realm of storytelling contains nothing stranger or more spectacular than [the] terrifying, life-threatening, seemingly all-powerful monster whom the hero must confront in a fight to the death," writes Christopher Booker in *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*. "The essence . . . is simple. Both we and the hero are made aware of the existence of some superhuman embodiment of evil power. This monster may take human form (e.g., a giant or a witch); the form of an animal (a wolf, a dragon, a shark); or a combination of both (the Minotaur, the Sphinx). It is always deadly, threatening destruction to those who cross its path or fall into its clutches . . . So powerful is the presence of this figure, so great the sense of threat which emanates from it, that the only thing which matters to us as we follow the story is that it should be killed and its dark power overthrown."

Across the millennia of world literature, this "night creature" threatens the town, the village, the kingdom, the country or the planet, and must be conquered by the hero or heroine if the populace is to survive. From *Beowulf* to *Jaws*, from the Greek myths to *King Kong*, from *Hansel and Gretel* to *The War of the Worlds*, listeners, readers and moviegoers, children and adults, have squirmed and screamed in terror as the hero or heroine, in the final battle, is forced down, toward surrender or death, and everything seems lost. Epic monster-slayers and opponents have included Zeus, who overthrew the Titans; Odysseus, who blinded one-eyed giant Polyphemus; Theseus and the Minotaur; Beanstalk-climbing Jack and the Giant; David

and Goliath; Dorothy and the Wicked Witch of the West; James Bond and Goldfinger; Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader; Frodo and Saruman; and the characters played by Will Smith and Jeff Goldblum versus the alien destroyers of *Independence Day*.

To Kill a Mockingbird pits a nine-year-old tomboy named Scout, her big brother, Jem, and their friend Dill against a monster threatening to devour the civilized people of Maycomb, Alabama.

And here is one of the great bait-and-switches in American storytelling. For who and where is this monster?

He lives a few doors down from the Finches, to hear the kids tell it, and the description is so chilling, so gothic, that "the Radley Place" has entered popular culture as the ultimate haunted house of American childhood.

"The Radley Place jutted into a sharp curve beyond our house," says narrator Scout. "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 . . . oak trees kept the sun away . . . Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom . . . People said he went out at night when the moon was down, and peeped in windows. When people's azaleas froze in a cold snap, it was because he had breathed on them. Any stealthy small crimes committed in Maycomb were his work . . . Radley pecans would kill you. A baseball hit into the Radley yard was a lost ball and no questions asked."

The younger Radley boy, Arthur, as a teenager, had gotten into mischief with some Cunninghams and had been charged with disorderly conduct and disturbing the peace. He was locked up for a time in the courthouse outhouse. Arthur's father, old Mr. Radley—"a thin leathery man with colorless eyes"—had asked the judge to let him take the boy home for punishment rather than see him sent to the state industrial school. The judge agreed. Nothing was seen or heard of Arthur Radley for many years, until one evening, while he was sitting on the floor cutting up newspapers, he

randomly stabbed his father in the leg with a pair of scissors. He was 33 years old. That was the last—as far as Scout knew—anyone had seen him since. And no one referred to him as Arthur anymore. He was "Boo."

"Nobody knew what form of intimidation Mr. Radley employed to keep Boo out of sight, but Jem figured that Mr. Radley kept him chained to the bed most of the time," Scout says.

"Wonder what he looks like?" said Dill.

"Jem gave a reasonable description of Boo: Boo was about six-and-a-half feet tall, judging from his tracks; he dined on raw squirrels and any cats he could catch, that's why his hands were bloodstained—if you ate an animal raw, you could never wash the blood off. There was a long jagged scar that ran across his face; what teeth he had were yellow and rotten; his eyes popped, and he drooled most of the time.

"Let's try to make him come out," said Dill."

And thus their summer—and the three-year-long story that will take Scout, Jem and Dill from innocent, playful, mischievous schoolchildren to initiates into a murderously cruel adult world—cranks into action.

While the children are still under the delusion that the Monster hides out at the Radley Place, gnawing on the bones of squirrels with his blood-stained hands and face, a real monster begins to stir under the town. We knew it had to be there. Any book about small-town Alabama during the Great Depression that *didn't* include this invisible, ravaging monster would have to be a fairy tale.

It's a shape-shifter, this monster. The children are on the lookout for it, especially after they've disobeyed Atticus and trespassed at the Radley Place, where Jem lost his pants trying to crawl under a fence and get away. They skedaddled home and now Scout lies awake in her bed, in wild terror: "Every scratch of feet on gravel was Boo Radley seeking revenge . . . insects splashing against the screen were Boo

Radley's insane fingers picking the wire to pieces."

But they're on guard facing the wrong direction. A gleam of the monster's incisor appears in the form of stout Mrs. Merriweather, a guest at the Finch's house when Aunt Alexandra hosts a ladies' tea. Scout, compelled to wear a dress (she's got her pants on under it) and to respond to her given name of Jean Louise, is making a command appearance so that she can begin to adapt to the world of ladies she must one day enter. "[Mrs. Merriweather's] voice soared over the clink of coffee cups and the soft bovine sounds of the ladies munching their dainties," Scout observes. "I tell you there's nothing more distracting than a sulky darky. Their mouths go down to here. Just ruins your day to have one of 'em in the kitchen. You know what I said to my Sophy . . . ? I said, 'Sophy,' I said, 'you simply are not being a Christian today. Jesus Christ never went around grumbling and complaining,' and you know, it did her good. She took her eyes off that floor and said, 'Nome, Miz Merriweather, Jesus never went around grumblin' . . . I tell you if my Sophy'd kept it up another day I'd have let her go. It's never entered that wool of hers that the only reason I keep her is because this depression's on and she needs her dollar and a quarter every week she can get it."

Scout's mind wanders, but it snaps back when Miss Maudie, a beloved neighbor, briskly reproves Mrs. Merriweather. Scout doesn't understand what was said, but she sees plenty: "When Miss Maudie was angry her brevity was icy. Something had made her deeply angry, and her gray eyes were as cold as her voice. Mrs. Merriweather reddened, glanced at me, and looked away . . . [Aunt Alexandra] gave Miss Maudie a look of pure gratitude, and I wondered at the world of women. Miss Maudie and Aunt Alexandra had never been especially close, and here was Auntie silently thanking her for something. For what, I knew not."

The Monster is more fully revealed the night Atticus sits on an office chair, holding a newspaper under a dangling light bulb, outside the county jail where

Tom Robinson sits imprisoned. Tom Robinson is Maycomb County's definition of evil: either he, a well-spoken young African American man, raped a white woman, or (as emerges in his testimony at trial) he felt sorry for her. Either way, it's an affront to white womanhood. Either way, he's doomed. A rough group of country white men pulls up in their cars and assembles around Atticus. Jem, Scout and Dill spy on the midnight scene from outside the hardware store: "He in there, Mr. Finch?" a man said. 'He is,' we heard Atticus answer, 'and he's asleep. Don't wake him up' . . . 'You know what we want,' another man said. 'Get aside from the door, Mr. Finch.'" They are feverish with the self-righteousness of do-gooders; they feel called to extinguish this evil with their bare hands and to get it done tonight.

The men shuffle closer, threateningly. This is a lynch mob. The children rush to their father's side, thinking he'll be pleased as punch at their arrival, but Scout is silenced by what she sees in her handsome father: There's a flash of fear in his eyes, and he's moving as deliberately and carefully as an old man, and when he puts down his newspaper, his hands are shaking. The mob rudely rebuffs the children. "All right, Mr. Finch, get 'em outa here,' someone growled. 'You got fifteen seconds to get 'em outa here.'" A stranger grabs Jem roughly, and Scout kicks the man and then leaps to her father's side. Confused, she scans the crowd, looking for a familiar face. "There was a smell of stale whiskey and pigpen about, and when I glanced around I discovered that these men were strangers . . . Hot embarrassment shot through me: I had leaped triumphantly into a ring of people I had never seen before . . . Some wore hats pulled firmly down over their ears. They were sullen-looking, sleepy-eyed men who seemed unused to late hours. I sought once more for a familiar face, and at the center of the semicircle I found one.

"Hey, Mr. Cunningham." (It's one of my favorite lines, in book and movie. It's the Sword being pulled out of the Stone. The hero is about to discover her powers.)

"Don't you remember me, Mr. Cunningham? I'm Jean Louise Finch. You brought us some hickory nuts one time, remember?"

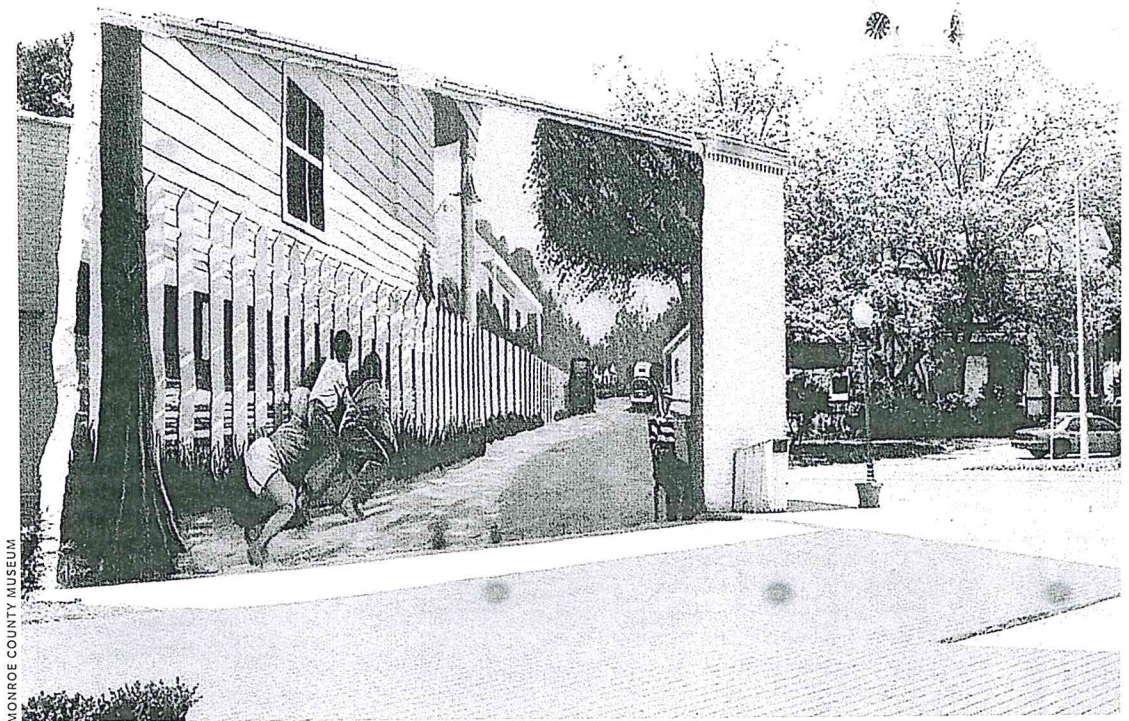
There's a stand-off of agonizing discomfort. The men are essentially being disrobed by the child. No longer an anonymous gang looking to hang an innocent black man in fealty to The Lost Cause of the Confederacy, they suddenly seem to include in their number . . . the father of a young schoolboy. The lawyer's little girl keeps wheedling: "I go to school with Walter . . . He's your boy, ain't he? Ain't he, sir? . . . He's in my grade . . . and he does right well. He's a good boy . . . a real nice boy. We brought him home for dinner one time. Maybe he told you about me, I beat him up one time but he was real nice about it."

The skirmish is over. The Monster hasn't won or lost the war, but it has lost this battle and will slink off in retreat. Deferral. "I began to feel sweat gathering at the edges of my hair," says Scout. "I could stand anything but a bunch of people looking at me. They were quite still. 'What's the matter?' I asked. Atticus said nothing. I looked around and up at Mr. Cunningham, whose face was equally impassive. Then he did a peculiar thing. He squatted down and took me by both shoulders. 'I'll tell him you said hey, little lady,' he said. Then he straightened up and waved a big paw. 'Let's clear out,' he called."

The child's naivety and good intentions have recalled the men to their best selves, their non-murderous selves, in a way that the lawyer's decency and composure were failing to do that night. "A soft husky voice came from the darkness above: 'They gone?' Atticus stepped back and looked up. 'They've gone,' he said. 'Get some sleep, Tom. They won't bother you any more.'"

Atticus Finch's soothing words to Tom Robinson won't hold true for long. Falsely charged and wrongly convicted of the rape of Mayella Ewell (while the whole town knows it's her father who abuses her), the young man survives that night

IN 1998, the Monroeville City Council commissioned the *Maycomb Mural*, painted by Baldwin County artist Bill Harisson with the help of the art department students from Alabama Southern Community College in Monroeville. Maycomb, fictional, is of course Monroeville, and Scout, Jem and Dill, peeking through Boo Radley's fence, are based on Nelle; a combination of her brother, Edwin, and her friend Truman Capote's cousin Jennings Carter; and then Truman.



but won't outlive the Monster. Nor will the Monster look kindly on the innocence of children when he comes after them in the form of Mayella Ewell's low-life father. He'll chase down the children to kill them. And he would have killed them, too, had not an unlikely force for good intervened.

By the night Scout and Jem are caught up in their Final Battle, they and Dill have already awakened to the reality of the small-mindedness, meanness and cruelty afoot in Maycomb. Dill breaks down weeping at Tom Robinson's trial and has to be taken outside by Scout. "Ain't you feeling good?" she asks him as they reach the bottom of the steps and then go away from the courthouse. It's the way the prosecutor is cross-examining Tom Robinson that's making him sick, Dill tells her. "That old Mr. Gilmer doin' him that-away, talking so hateful to him . . . it was the way he said it made me sick, plain sick . . . The way that man called him 'boy' all the time an' sneered at him, an' looked around at the jury every time he answered—"

Scout interrupts: "Well, Dill, after all he's just a Negro."

Like Huckleberry Finn before him, Dill is struggling to make his own

sense of the adult world, to take what has been handed down to him as the natural legacy of white children and put it up against what he *feels* is right, even if it means disrespecting authority. Dill, sobbing under the huge live oak tree in the park across from the courthouse, is the first to put into words his child's instinctive sense of unfairness, despite what most of the adults in town pretend to see as right and wrong, good and evil.

"I don't care one speck. It ain't right, somehow it ain't right to do 'em that way. Hasn't anybody got any business talkin' like that—it just makes me sick."

So now the children know what the Monster is. Dill has put his finger on it. "It ain't right, somehow it ain't right to do 'em that way." The only thing left to figure out is what kind of squirrel-eating window-screen-scratching daddy-stabbing-with-scissors creature lives in the Radley Place. As with everything else they're discovering, the truth is a far different thing than the gothic local lore that has titillated and terrified them. There is evil in the world and there is goodness in the world, but the children aren't

finding either one among the usual suspects. They've realized that some of the upstanding citizens described as upstanding citizens have more than a hint of blood lust in them; but what about the creature described as bloodthirsty? They've tried their darnedest for three years to make the monster come out and show himself. Now, in the Final Battle between Good and Evil, he emerges. He shows himself to be on the side of the Good and he saves the children's lives.

Briefly the world seems topsy-turvy to the children—Good is Evil and Evil is Good—and then it does not. For, while the archetypal forces of bigotry, greed and violence move through Maycomb, decency, kindness and love exist here, too. Scout and Jem Finch are lucky enough to share a roof with one exemplar and to live a few doors down from another.

For 55 years, *To Kill a Mockingbird* has encouraged its readers to get a couple of things straight: Know the true identity of the Monster in your midst—and don't be misdirected by folks who have something to gain by pointing you down the street in the wrong direction—and then the identities of some of the heroes in your midst may surprise you.