

Camden Kimura

Collection: **I Know That Town: *To Kill A Mockingbird***

Essay

I had people for years after the movie opened come to me and say,
“I know exactly where you shot that...I know that town.”

Robert Mulligan

When I was nineteen, I worked in England for a short time. I did not cope with it well. Although I had many friends where I worked, I felt alone and wanted nothing more than to go home. One evening while walking alone down a major shopping street where I lived, I stopped in a bookstore. On a display was a shelf of books from Vintage Classics, a UK imprint of Random House. One of books was *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. *To Kill A Mockingbird*, the story of the effect of a trial on a fictional town in the South, carries a lot of personal significance in my family despite the fact that our lives bear very little resemblance to the book. It has always reminded me of home: it is the only book my father's ever read twice, it was a book my father handed to me at 14 when I told him I was bored and had nothing to read, and my sister and I were almost named Scout and Calpurnia after the narrator and housekeeper in the story. I seized a copy of the book and bought it immediately. It became my emblem of home overseas.

My collection of copies of *To Kill A Mockingbird* started from that initial copy and the feeling of safety and love that I felt when I first bought it. Since I bought my first copy in England in 2008, I've read the book at least once a year. The concept of book collecting was one that had to be introduced to me and, once I understood the reasons why people collected books, I began to collect paperback copies of *To Kill A Mockingbird*. The book made me happy; wasn't that a good enough reason to start a collection? It was the fiftieth anniversary of the book's publication and there were more than enough modern paperback releases with which I could start a collection. I decided that it would be a collection of releases of *To Kill A Mockingbird*--simple

as that. I was particularly excited to get to the point where I could see how the covers changed from decade to decade.

The nature of this collection changed during a search on the popular marketplace website Etsy. I was browsing and hit upon the idea of searching for *To Kill A Mockingbird* ephemera for fun. I didn't expect to find any copies of the book, but I was wrong. I found a copy of *To Kill A Mockingbird* that had been "recovered" by an Australian artist who had found a copy of the book at a garage sale and decided to restore it. She stripped the book of its cover and made a new one from recycled paper. I could tell before I even bought the book that a lot of care had gone into the creation of the book and asked if she wouldn't mind including a note about her relationship with the book. She wrote that "it is a very old copy, with that lovely vintage book smell embedded in between its pages...I thought I'd give it a second life by recovering it."

I realized that this collection had the potential to become more than just me surrounding myself with copies of my favorite book to make me happy. It had the potential to be about other people's reactions to the book as well. It is a book that inspires a sense of familiarity and home in those who love it. As Robert Mulligan, director of the movie adaptation of *To Kill Mockingbird*, remarks during the DVD commentary, "people...come to me and say, 'I know exactly where you shot that...I know that town.'" The movie was shot in a backlot in Universal Studios and yet people continued to think that they knew the town, that they'd been there; they had a real relationship with a place they'd never been. This was my reaction to the book too--my life is nothing like the lives of the citizens of Maycomb but I still felt as though the town was part of my family's history. My realization that other people have personal relationships with the book on par with my own changed the direction of the collection.

This is very much a collection in progress. Since that first “recovered” book, I have bought ephemera as well as books. I bought a tiny copy of the book that is meant to be used in a children’s dollhouse. I bought an art print of Atticus Finch suited up like Superman. In my college dorm room, I, at one point, had a DVD of the movie on top of a stack of three paperback copies of the book. My favorite part of the collection is the paperbacks. Paperback copies are where I started with this collection and they took on extra meaning as the collection redefined itself. If this collection is about the reader’s relationship with *To Kill A Mockingbird*, then the heart of it is the paperbacks; we all begin somewhere with this book and more likely than not, our first read will be with a paperback release. Paperback releases (both new and old) of *To Kill A Mockingbird* are widely available in book stores. Not everyone may be able to buy a leatherbound copy of the book, but many people are able to afford a falling-apart copy of the book at a garage sale.

As this collection grows, I will continue to collect ephemera as well paperback releases and editions of this book. I want this collection to fully encompass the experience of reading and loving *To Kill Mockingbird*. I believe that this is best represented through an equal balance of those paperback copies that first draw us into *To Kill A Mockingbird* and the ephemera that celebrates and examines our relationship to “that town.”

1. Crispy-Gypsy. *Atticus Finch*. 2010.

This fanwork of *To Kill A Mockingbird* was found and bought on popular art-sharing website DeviantArt. The artist identifies herself as Crispy-Gypsy. The fanwork is an illustration of Atticus Finch in black pulling open his shirt to reveal a red, yellow, and blue undershirt (in the style of Superman) with an A across the front. At the top of the work is the text: "ATTICUS FINCH / GREAT AMERICAN HERO." At the bottom of the work are the words: "REAL COURAGE / & PERSEVERENCE." There is a short blurb accompanying the picture: "Was feeling slightly down but Atticus makes me feel better. Just a damn great character from a damn great book. One of the great American heroes, and he can't even fly."

2. Delaney, L. *Miniature To Kill A Mockingbird*. n.d.

This is a 1.25 inch model of *To Kill A Mockingbird*. The cover is a reproduction of the original cover of the book. The creator intended this model for use in a dollhouse and wrote in the description: "Books add life and character to a room! There isn't a miniature scene that this book would not look fantastic in---libraries, studies, attics, bedrooms, living rooms." I find it telling that she would choose to make a *To Kill A Mockingbird* reproduction of a book that, more likely than not, no child would have heard of yet. It is more than a book to fill a bookcase of a dollhouse; it is the first introduction a child would have had to the book.

3. Hinata-teh-Lefty. *-Isolation-Boo Radley*. 2009.

I found and bought this fanwork on DeviantArt. It was created by an artist who identifies herself as Hinata-teh-Lefty and is an illustration of Boo Radley lying on the floor on his side in front of a window. It is raining outside and he is alone. Correspondence with the creator revealed that she made the picture for a class presentation in school. She wrote, "I really don't care much for reading...but [it was] among my favorites that we read. It's hard for me to say why I love it so much...It was just a very good book and a very good movie."

4. Foote, Horton. *Three Screenplays*. New York: Groove Press, 1989.

This is a collection of three screenplays by writer Horton Foote. Foote is the writer of the screenplay for the *To Kill A Mockingbird* movie. This anthology is important to the collection not only because it contains an adaptation of the book but because of its foreword in which Foote writes, "I felt understood the world of Harper Lee's novel and its people. The town of the novel was not unlike the town I was born and brought up in" (xii). It is a similar reaction to the ones that director Robert Mulligan received years after the movie was released; it is a reaction that is one of the main reasons people relate to the book.

5. Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. New York: Popular Library, 1960. Print.

This is a fairly beat-up copy of *To Kill A Mockingbird* that includes a quote from Gregory Peck on the second page. The official release date is unknown but the quote suggests that it was published after the release of the movie. The cover is red and black text on (what was) a white background with the notable line: "Over 12,000,00 copies sold." It is copy that is significant on a strictly personal level; it is the copy that my father owned, the first copy

that my sister and I both read.

6. Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. New York: Popular Library, 1962. Print.

This is a copy of the book which has been recovered by Lucia Fischer of Sydney, Australia. The creator found it at a garage sale in her town. The cover is a collage of brown and blue recycled paper with a ripped page of a book (not from *To Kill A Mockingbird*) and has been sealed with decoupage sealer. The text block is sturdy but well worn and, with the new cover, could withstand many more readings.

7. Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. London: Vintage, 2005. Print

This has the distinction of being my only foreign copy of the book. It was bought in London at an independent bookstore. The cover is teal with red and brown text and has a still of the famous trial scene in the *To Kill A Mockingbird* movie at the bottom. The still features Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch and Brock Peters as Tom Robinson sitting in the court room. This copy is very worn and is also significant on a personal level; it is the copy that I bought while I was abroad.

8. Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006. Print.

This is a trade paperback of *To Kill A Mockingbird*. The cover is a partial reproduction of the original cover but has been updated for the fiftieth anniversary of the book. The date of publication inside the book is incorrect; the cover bears a circle celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the book, which was not until 2010.

9. Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2010. Print.

This is a massmarket paperback with an illustration of Scout looking up at a tree on the front cover and Jem leaning against the tree on the back cover. This paperback can be found in stores that are not known for bookselling. This copy, for example, was bought in a Target.

10. Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 2011. Print.

This is a leatherbound copy of the book. The front cover has a green and purple illustration of Scout looking in the tree and the back cover has an illustration of Jem, Atticus, and Scout walking hand in hand. This release is notable for being one of the few leatherbound releases of the book that are available today and it is surely the most affordable.

Wishlist

1. Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. New York: Penguin Books, 1965. Print.

I would like to enhance the paperback portion of my collection with this 1965 paperback. I want it mainly because of the cover, which is covered in critical praise that is written in a brightly colored child's scrawl. The cover looks like it is meant to recall the opening titles of the movie, particularly the sequence where Scout plays with crayons.

2. Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Trans. Claire Malignon. Reinbeck: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verla, 1978. Print.

This is a German translation of *To Kill A Mockingbird*. I would like to expand my collection of foreign paperbacks so that I can understand the visual context (the covers) from which foreign readers are approaching the novel. This cover features a man shown from the side and staring down at the title. I believe the man is Tom Robinson and that is another reason why I would like to have the book as part of my collection--Tom Robinson is rarely featured alone on the covers of *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

3. Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Trans. [یناضم‌رری م‌ن‌ی‌دل‌ار خف](#). Tehran: س‌وت‌ت‌اراش‌ت‌ن‌ا, 1991. Print.

This is a Persian translation of *To Kill A Mockingbird*. This book would also help me expand my collection of foreign paperbacks of *To Kill A Mockingbird*. The cover bears some similarities to the 1965 Penguin copy listed above and I would like to be able to compare them to see if this might be an intentional choice on the part of the Iranian publisher.

4. Meyer, Michael J., ed. *Harper Lee's To Kill A Mockingbird: New Essays*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010.

This anthology of essays was released during *To Kill A Mockingbird*'s fiftieth anniversary year. The essays range from critique of social justice in the novel to teaching the book in schools. Critical essays are another way that people engage the novel and such an anthology would fit well with my collection.

5. Murphy, Mary McDonagh. *Scout, Atticus, and Boo: A Celebration of Fifty Years of "To Kill A Mockingbird."* New York: HarperCollins, 2010. Print.

Though this book has received mixed reviews, I feel my collection can only benefit from the inclusion of *Scout, Atticus, and Boo*. In this book, Murphy interviews a number of celebrities about the impact of *To Kill A Mockingbird* on their lives. The content would reflect "personal relationship" aspect of my collection.