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A Brief Review of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, from *The Atlantic*, August 1, 1960

By Phoebe-Lou Adams

Two other novels have turned up which may be classified as respectable hammock reading, if anybody reads in hammocks anymore. *Walk Egypt* by Vinnie Williams is well-written soap opera, and Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* is sugar-water served with humor. . . .

To Kill A Mockingbird is a more successful piece of work. It is frankly and completely impossible, being told in the first person by a six-year-old girl with the prose style of a well-educated adult. Miss Lee has, to be sure, made an attempt to confine the information in the text to what Scout would actually know, but it is no more than a casual gesture toward plausibility.

The book's setting is a small town in Alabama, and the action behind Scout's tale is her father's determination, as a lawyer, liberal, and honest man, to defend a Negro accused of raping a white girl. What happens is, naturally, never seen directly by the narrator. The surface of the story is an Alcottish filigree of games, mischief, squabbles with an older brother, troubles at school, and the like. None of it is painful, for Scout and Jem are happy children, brought up with angelic cleverness by their father and his old Negro housekeeper. Nothing fazes them much or long. Even the new first-grade teacher, a devotee of the "Dewey decimal system" who is outraged to discover that Scout can already read and write, proves enduring in the long run.

A variety of adults, mostly eccentric in Scout's judgment, and a continual bubble of incident make *To Kill A Mockingbird* pleasant, undemanding reading.

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