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**THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE MOCKINGBIRD IN
HARPER LEE'S NOVEL «TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD»**

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The article dwells on how the symbolic meaning of the mockingbird is revealed in the novel «To Kill a Mockingbird» written by Harper Lee.

Harper Lee (1926–2016) achieved big literary success after her novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* was published in 1960. Along with other works belonging to the same period, such as *In the Heat of the Night* (1965) by John Ball (1911–1988) and *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967) by William Styron (1925–2006), the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* highlights the theme of racism and prejudice. The book received mostly positive reviews from critics and a number of literary prizes and awards.

The mockingbird is the central symbol of the novel. The name of the bird is not only used in the title, but also mentioned in several crucial scenes of the novel. Besides, many characters have a certain symbolic connection with this type of bird.

Tom Robinson is one of the characters that is used in the novel to reveal the symbolic meaning of the mockingbird. He never intended to harm anybody but yet became a victim of cruel treatment: he was arrested and falsely accused of raping Mayella Ewell. It was obvious that Tom was not guilty and consequently didn't deserve punishment but because he was black his destiny had been determined long before the trial began: «Atticus had used every tool available to free men to save Tom Robinson, but in the secret courts of men's hearts Atticus had no case. Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed» [1]. As

a result, Tom Robinson was killed which can be compared to killing the innocent bird.

The symbolic link between Robinson and the mockingbird can also be easily traced in the obituary written by Mr. Underwood, the owner and printer of *The Maycomb Tribune*: «Mr. Underwood didn't talk about miscarriages of justice, he was writing so children could understand. Mr. Underwood simply figured it was a sin to kill cripples, be they standing, sitting, or escaping. He likened Tom's death to the senseless slaughter of songbirds by hunters and children...» [1]. Such a poetic comparison depicts well the features of innocence and harmlessness which are common for both Tom and the mockingbird.

The emergence of the mockingbirds in the narrative before the sentence is passed on Tom Robinson is also symbol-laden: «The feeling grew until the atmosphere in the courtroom was exactly the same as a cold February morning, when the mockingbirds were still, and the carpenters had stopped hammering on Miss Maudie's new house, and every wood door in the neighborhood was shut as tight as the doors of the Radley Place. A deserted, waiting, empty street, and the courtroom was packed with people» [1]. Here the mockingbirds represent all the Negroes who gathered in the courtroom and were waiting for the sentence to be delivered. They knew that this decision would not only determine the fate of one black man but it could have an impact on future race relations on the whole. Besides, in this passage the author emphasizes the role of the mockingbirds in creating the atmosphere of coziness and peace in the rural South. When the birds become silent a feeling of anxiety arises and the street seems to be deserted and uninhabited.

Another character who incarnates the mockingbird in the novel is Arthur Radley, nicknamed Boo. Like the mockingbird Boo doesn't harm anybody but nonetheless he becomes an object of ridicule. They consider Arthur dangerous and disposed to do evil basing only on him being different: «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. Once the town was terrorized by a series of morbid nocturnal events: people's chickens and household pets were found mutilated; although the culprit was Crazy Addie, who eventually drowned himself in Barker's Eddy, people still looked at the Radley Place, unwilling to discard their initial suspicions» [1]. From this extract it can be concluded that for most people in the town the opposition «*I–the Other*» is the main basis for making judgments of Radley.

It should also be noted that the allusion to the mockingbird in the portrayal of Tom Robinson and Arthur Radley is similar in its symbolic meaning. Both characters are used by the author to reflect on the problem of xenophobia in society, because hatred and fear of the unknown are the main reasons for the bias and prejudice towards Radley and Robinson. In this aspect Radley becomes «strange» in other people's perception due to his unusual lifestyle, whereas Robinson due to his race.

The children in the novel are also important in revealing the symbolic meaning of the mockingbird. The events of the novel are depicted through the children's perception of the world. Children are affected by prejudice and preconception to a lesser degree than adults. That is why it is hard for a child to understand people's

intolerance to each other: «If there's just one kind of folks, why can't they get along with each other? If they're all alike, why do they go out of their way to despise each other?» [1]. It is the child's naivety that can be associated here with the mockingbird and as events of the novel unfold adults «kill» this naivety in children and their perception of the world suffers from contacting with ignorant people.

There are a number of episodes in the novel where the child's perception of human relations is opposed to adult conflicts. One of these episodes takes place in the courtroom where Atticus' children, Jem and Jean, watch the trial of Tom Robinson's case. Having no prejudice against people based on race, the children see an acquittal as the most likely result of the trial. However, the jury finds Tom guilty and such decision evokes strong emotions in children: «It was Jem's turn to cry. His face was streaked with angry tears as we made our way through the cheerful crowd. "It ain't right," he muttered, all the way to the corner of the square where we found Atticus waiting» [1].

Another episode that shows opposition between the child's naivety and conflicts of adults happened when several local men came to the jail to lynch Tom Robinson and apparently Atticus as well. Jean found herself in the middle of the action but she could not fully understand the core of the conflict between adults and their behaviour seemed very strange to her. She realized what had really happened only some time after the incident: «The full meaning of the night's events hit me and I began crying» [1]. Thus, the changes in the child's perception of conflicts between adults are depicted in these episodes.

It should also be noted that Atticus attempts to bring up his children in such a way that they could understand the complexity of human relationships at the right time in their lives: «This is their home, sister, said Atticus. We've made it this way for them, they might as well learn to cope with it» [1]. But at the same time Atticus attempts to preserve in his children the purity of intentions and also to invoke the feeling of justice and impartiality towards other people: «The older you grow the more of it you'll see. The one place where a man ought to get a square deal is in a courtroom, be he any color of the rainbow, but people have a way of carrying their resentments right into a jury box. As you grow older, you'll see white men cheat black men every day of your life, but let me tell you something and don't you forget it — whenever a white man does that to a black man, no matter who he is, how rich he is, or how fine a family he comes from, that white man is trash» [1]. From this passage we can conclude that in the portrayal of Atticus there is also a symbolic reference to the mockingbird. His motives are pure but despite that he is subjected to disrespectful and cruel treatment. Besides, Atticus did not have the typical lifestyle of a southerner and did not fit the common stereotype of a southerner and therefore was regarded as a "foreigner": «He did not do the things our schoolmates' fathers did: he never went hunting, he did not play poker or fish or drink or smoke. He sat in the livingroom and read» [1]. Such depiction draws a stark contrast between Atticus and other inhabitants of the town. In this regard the Ewell family can be seen as the exact opposite of Atticus and his family. The Ewells lack education and intelligence which leads to confrontation and acts of violence towards Atticus and his children.

Thus, the symbolic meaning of the mockingbird is revealed in the novel chiefly through the main characters that can be associated with the mockingbird on a number of distinctive features such as innocence and harmlessness. Besides, these characters are often exposed to aggressive and violent behaviour of a certain strata of society. The reasons for this kind of behaviour are hatred and fear of the unknown and different from the usual which, in its turn, is caused by lack of education and a superiority feeling. In this regard we can conclude that the symbol of the mockingbird, as a symbol of purity and innocence, is used in the novel to disclose the themes of racism and xenophobia.

REFERENCES

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