

500 Words or Less Reviews: To Kill a Mockingbird (Film)

In 1960, Harper Lee published her masterpiece, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It has since become one of the most beloved books of millions of readers. The movie adaptation of the book bearing the same name was released just two years after its original publication. One might have thought that since the movie was released so quickly after the book's first appearance it would be extremely good at best, but it is debatably the greatest movie adaptation of a book ever. (To be honest, there are several others that are very close contenders. Nevertheless, TKaM gets my vote.)

In the year it opened, *To Kill a Mockingbird* garnered eight nominations at the Oscar's, winning three of those. But moviegoers recognized that it was more than merely one of the best movie of the year; both critics and audiences rightly saw it as one of the greatest movies of all time. It has maintained that status.

I don't think anything made by mankind is ever perfect. Things that we do and make can always be perfected in some way. But I do admit that there are some things pretty close to perfection. This particular work of art directed by Robert Mulligan fits well in that category.

There is so much to appreciate here, from the mastery of the music, the directing, the writing, the cinematography, etc. Everything clicks, everything turns like a well-oiled movie machine, a projector, if you will. A good argument could be made that the acting is the film's most outstanding feature. This is particularly true of its three main actors: Gregory Peck (Atticus Finch), Mary Badham (Scout Finch), and Phillip Alford (Jem Finch). This is Peck at his award-winning and iconic finest, which is actually no surprise. Peck is always

so good at his profession that he could probably out-act most actors at acting while gagged, tied, and encased in a coffin—and still win an Oscar. No, the actual surprise here is the acting of Badham and Alford, neither of whom had been previously trained but who both did a superb job carrying most of the movie alone.

To Kill a Mockingbird is set in a quaint little town and looks at the world from the young vantage points of Scout and Jem. The story is a coming of age one of sorts. Along their young journey they get their first real glimpse into the adult world filled with its selfish pride, racism, death, and hatred. In the midst of this stands the pillar that is their father, Atticus, a lone bulwark of wisdom and mercy and grace and love.

Along the journey, they will adventure with their best friend Dill Harris, and encounter unforgettable characters like Boo Radley (portrayed by Robert Duvall in his debut film appearance), Tom Robinson, Calpurnia, Mayella Ewell, Bob Ewell, and many other wonderful and colorful people.

Lastly, a final shout-out to legendary composer, Elmer Bernstein, for the film's haunting, beautiful, utterly timeless soundtrack.