



Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee

By Charles J. Shields

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Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee By Charles J. Shields

The colorful life of the remarkable woman who created *To Kill a Mockingbird*--the classic that became a touchstone for generations of Americans

To Kill a Mockingbird, the twentieth-century's most widely read American novel, has sold thirty million copies and still sells a million yearly. Yet despite the book's perennial popularity, its creator, Harper Lee has become a somewhat mysterious figure. Now, after years of research, Charles J. Shields has brought to life the warmhearted, high-spirited, and occasionally hardheaded woman who gave us two of American literature's most unforgettable characters--Atticus Finch and his daughter, Scout--and who contributed to the success of her lifelong friend Truman Capote's masterpiece, *In Cold Blood*.

At the center of Shields's lively book is the story of Lee's struggle to create her famous novel. But her life contains many other highlights as well: her girlhood as a tomboy in overalls in tiny Monroeville, Alabama; the murder trial that made her beloved father's reputation and inspired her great work; her journey to Kansas as Capote's ally and research assistant to help report the story of the Clutter murders; the surrogate family she found in New York City.

Drawing on six hundred interviews and much new information, *Mockingbird* is the first book ever written about Harper Lee. Highly entertaining, filled with humor and heart, this is an evocative portrait of a writer, her dream, and the place and people whom she made immortal.

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Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee By Charles J. Shields Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Few novels are as beloved and acclaimed as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and even fewer authors have shunned the spotlight as successfully as its author. Although journalist Shields interviewed 600 of Harper Lee's acquaintances and researched the papers of her childhood friend Truman Capote, he is no match for the elusive Lee, who stopped granting interviews in 1965 and wouldn't talk to him. Much of this first full-length biography of Lee is filled with inconsequential anecdotes focusing on the people around her, while the subject remains stubbornly out of focus. Shields enlivens Lee's childhood by pointing out people who were later fictionalized in her novel. The book percolates during her banner year of 1960, when she won the Pulitzer Prize and helped Capote research *In Cold Blood*. Capote's papers yield some of Lee's fascinating first-person insights on the emotionally troubled Clutter family that were tempered in his book. Shields believes Lee abandoned her second novel when her agents and her editor—her surrogate family in publishing—died or left the business, leaving her with no support system. There's a tantalizing anecdote about a true-crime project Lee was researching in the mid-'80s that faded away. Sputtering to a close, the final chapter covers the last 35 years in 24 pages. It's also baffling that this affectionate biography ends with three paragraphs devoted to someone slamming her classic work. (June 6)

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—Shields takes on the elusive writer in this first-ever biography of her. Without direct input from his subject, the author's extensive research combines sources in local-history collections, interviews and correspondence with Lee's acquaintances, and Internet resources to piece together the details of the writer's life. Starting with Lee's childhood in Monroeville, AL, Shields depicts the people and events that inspired *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s characters. A picture develops of a girl who would face down any bully, a nonconformist whose sorority roommates kicked her out after one semester but who made an impact on the campus with her presence, a woman with a wicked sense of humor and a writer with a voice and themes of prejudice and justice that resonate. Students and curious fans alike will find material here to further their understanding of her work and life. Extensive source notes and a student-friendly bibliography are included.—Charlotte Bradshaw, San Mateo County Library, CA

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Charles J. Shields, who writes biographies for young adults, makes it clear with his subtitle that his book falls short of a full-scale biography. Since the 81-year-old Lee refused to aid Shields's work, he resorted to the next best option: he acquired more than 600 interviews with Lee's friends and associates as well as any correspondence he could. Many reviewers attribute the mixed success of the book to Lee's publicity bubble, but a few critics fault the biographer's imagination, and perhaps frustration, for making *Mockingbird* less than a pleasure to read. If he doesn't adequately delve deeply into Lee's personal life, at the very least, *Mockingbird* "lays a strong foundation for Lee scholarship, and turns up some marvelous ephemera" to tide scholars over (*Salon*).

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Deanna Ratliff:

Often the book *Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee* will bring someone to the new experience of reading the book. The author style to clarify the idea is very unique. In case you try to find new book to learn, this book very appropriate to you. The book *Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee* is much recommended to you to see. You can also get the e-book through the official web site, so you can more readily to read the book.

Andria Miguel:

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Catherine Kuntz:

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