A Series Of Critical Readings Of "To Kill A Mockingbird"

Series Editor: Robert Lecker, McGill University

Written in an easy-to-read, accessible style by teachers with years of classroom experience, Masterwork Studies are guides to the literary works most frequently studied in high school. Presenting ideas that spark imaginations, these books help students to gain background knowledge on great literature useful for papers and exams. The goal of each study is to encourage creative thinking by presenting engaging information about each work and its author. This approach allows students to arrive at sound analyses of their own, based on in-depth studies of popular literature. Each volume:

- Illuminates themes and concepts of a classic text
- Uses clear, conversational language
- Is an accessible, manageable length from 140 to 170 pages
- Includes a chronology of the author's life and era
- Provides an overview of the historical context
- Offers a summary of its critical reception
- Lists primary and secondary sources and index

My Personal Review:

Claudia Durst Johnson points out that despite the popularity of Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird," it has not really been the subject of serious academic study. In fact, you are more likely to find it being analyzed in law journals rather than literary magazines. Johnson is out to rectify this problem in this look at the novel in terms of "Threatening Boundaries." The first part of this book looks at the literary and historical context of the novel in three chapters: (1) Racial Climate in the Deep South focuses on both racial tension during the Depression, which is both the setting of the novel and the time of the trials of the Scottsboro case as well as in the mid-century, when Lee was writing the novel and the Civil Rights movement was gaining momentum; (2) The Importance of "To Kill a Mockingbird" talks about not only the way the novel has resonated with readers but the
attempts to censor it in school libraries and the controversy in the legal community over Atticus Finch's defense of Tom Robinson; and (3) The Critical and Popular Reception of "To Kill a Mockingbird" looks at both the newspaper and magazine reviews as well as the published legal criticism. These entire section provides an excellent background to Lee's novel, not only for better understanding its social origins but its place in American culture. What makes this book a different approach to the novel from most literary criticism is that the idea of "boundaries" translates in five different "readings" of the text: (1) a discussion of the technical boundaries Lee establishes to advance her narrative in terms of plot, point of view, setting, and metaphor; (2) a look at the novel's use of the Gothic tradition, explored as a fictional construct of a castle's walls; (3) in a similar vein, a consideration of the walls of difference separating the various characters; (4) a treatment of the boundaries of law and code; and (5) an exploration of the relationship of art and expression in terms of the other boundaries discussed. Consequently, Johnson presents a series of readings, looking at the novel from various perspectives without being overly concerned with how everything fits together. This is advanced literary criticism, useful more for college classes than secondary schools, although certainly teachers could take some of Johnson's arguments and make them palatable for their students. I think the idea that real life lawyers would argue about whether Atticus Finch did the right thing would be fascinating to younger readers, who usually consider him to be one of the noblest characters in American Literature. My final piece of advice is not to read this book at one setting, especially the five readings in the second part. Each one reflects a serious change in perspective and you really need to clear the decks of your mind before you move from one reading to the next.

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To Kill a Mockingbird: Threatening Boundaries (Twayne's Masterwork Studies Series) (No 139) by Claudia Durst Johnson - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!