

Reimagining To Kill a Mockingbird: Family, Community, and the Possibility of Equal Justice Under the Law. By Austin Sarat and Martha Merrill Umphrey (editors). Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013. 196 pp. \$24.95 paper.

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In *Reimagining To Kill a Mockingbird: Family, Community, and the Possibility of Equal Justice Under the Law*, Austin Sarat and Martha Merrill Umphrey provide a series of essays that interrogate the cultural and esthetic logic through which the 1962 film adaptation of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* became a cultural icon. Through the interdisciplinary lens of law and humanities scholarship, these essays submit both the film and the novel to pressing and contemporary questions about the affective dimensions of legal logic, the human/animal divide that so often informs that logic, and the sacrifices made in the name of justice. As several of the contributors demonstrate, many of these questions remain central yet unresolved in Lee's original novel. As such, they haunt the film in surprising, often counter-intuitive ways.

As the editors make clear in their introduction, this collection complicates without fully rejecting the mythologizing impulse that led to the film's iconicity. It begins on a note of humanist optimism that it shares with the film itself. The first essay, which is authored by the editors, raises important questions about the temporality of justice that resonate throughout the collection. Set in the 1930s, the film was released in 1962, after *Brown v. Board of Education*, but before the 1964 Civil Rights Act. It narrates an Alabama town's response to the wrongful conviction of a black man from the perspective of Scout Finch, whose father was the man's lawyer. What does the 1930s setting do for the 1960s audience? How does the film invite viewers to link past to present? And why does it continue to resonate today? These questions force readers to contend with the dangerous sense that we have somehow overcome the issues that the story frames. To what extent do we occupy the future that the film imagines? In response to this question, Sarat and Umphrey examine the overlapping roles of lawyer and father within the esthetic logic of the film. Focusing as much on the failures of the father/lawyer figure, Atticus Finch, as on the heroics that have made him iconic, this first essay presents the film's coupling of law and fatherhood as suggestive of a legal mechanism that looks forward rather than backward by conjuring "a normative world of becoming rather

than being” (19). This reading also allows for the displacement of an older model of father/law as infallible judge with one for which the question of legitimate authority overrides that of raw power.

Like many of the essays that follow, this opening essay frames the film’s mingling of the familial logic that binds kin and clan with the strict rationalism that, for judges and lawyers, renders the law itself coherent. As Linda Ross Meyers writes in a similarly hopeful reading of the apparent clash between law and loyalty in the film, “Atticus is a towering figure not so much because he stands for equality, universal principle, and cool reason against tribal loyalty, but because that very tribal loyalty has taught him to have faith, perhaps even an absurd faith, in the possibility that his fellow southerners will come around” (60). What the essays in this first half of the collection share is a faith of their own in the redemptive potential of Lee’s tale, a faith that itself emerges from a humanist logic that refuses to place the formal structures of law above the daily rituals of embodied care and attachment. To the extent that these very rituals are the source of our longing for more just legal outcomes, they are also the source of the law’s potential. Imani Perry’s skillful reading of Lee’s original novel as a queering of the classically American protest novel marks the radical high point of this humanist logic.

Not all of the essays are so hopeful, though. As the collection progresses, it focuses increasingly on the film’s presentation of a moral economy that is dependent on a sacrificial logic that renders certain beings dispensable for the sake of a singular collective futurity. Here the essays by Ravit Reichman and Colin Dayan stand out for their penetrating analysis of the scene in which Atticus Finch shoots a rabid dog in order to protect the broader community. This scene, argues Dayan, prepares us for the film’s ultimate disposal of the impoverished accuser as well as the accused. These latter essays, which are also the most trenchant in their analysis, work to remind us that there is such a thing as reasonable violence as well as violent reason. Exposing the extent to which dichotomies like loyalty versus justice are themselves too schematic, they turn to the human/animal boundary to isolate the exclusionary logic that is endemic to the law itself.

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