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Audience and *Mockingbird*: A Narrator's Guide

Charisse Baxter

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Megan Sanborn Jones, Chair
Joey Franklin
Kimball Jensen

Department of Theatre and Media Arts
Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

Audience and *Mockingbird*: A Narrator's Guide

Charisse Baxter
Department of Theatre and Media Arts, BYU
Master of Arts

While adaptation research possesses longstanding applications and ample material for study, seldom has a data set proven to be as iconic and culturally relevant as the various iterations of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Novel to film to stage play, and then nearly 60 years later to a second stage play, the story has resonated with audiences in a range of performative variations. A defining characteristic of Harper Lee's tale is her use of a narrator; this characteristic provides an effective entry-point in examining the two stage adaptations by way of their interpretation of the narrator. A study of the respective presentations of the narrator(s) employed by the two official theatre versions of *To Kill a Mockingbird* demonstrates that while both are appropriate to and reflective of the time in which they were initially produced, Aaron Sorkin's script offers a divergence from the standard form of the narrator and produces insight into the original novel as well as innovative potentialities for the performance of a memory play. This examination has been conducted through observations collected at live performances, individual playscripts, theatre reviews, and printed interviews, as well as academic articles and books. Sorkin's introduction of three narrators and compression of the presented timelines to create a state of "present consciousness" in both the narrators and the audience offers a range of new opportunities for the employment of the accepted narrator trope as well as the engagement of the audience with the world of the play.

Keywords: adaptation, narratorial role, audience engagement, present consciousness

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Introduction

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee is both a staple of classic literature and source material for a wide range of adaptations. From memes and t-shirts to literary references, pop-culture shorthand to name-dropped London bars to songs and books and plays (to name just a few), the novel has demonstrated an enduring presence and resonance for audiences from all walks of life. This cultural capital, while certainly generated in large part due to the influence of Lee's enduringly popular novel, may also be attributed to wide acceptance of the performative adaptations of the piece that have established themselves in the wider social consciousness. These particular works have a clear source thread: first the iconic 1960 novel by Harper Lee, followed closely by the perhaps equally iconic 1962 film starring Gregory Peck, and within a few years the 1969 stage play by Christopher Sergel that widely and consistently made the rounds of educational and community theaters through the decades that followed.

These three versions, introduced to the public within nine years of each other, offered a tidy closed data set for the investigation of characteristics of adapted works, especially as they translate from one performative medium to another. A new stage play, however, written by Aaron Sorkin and opening on Broadway fifty-eight years after the book was first published, brought a whole other context for performance research to the forefront. This most recent version of *To Kill a Mockingbird* allows for expanded examination of the features of an enduring classic: the novel has been a staple of educational programs for decades¹, the film is regularly assigned to 'best of' lists, and the Sergel play has been near-constantly in production somewhere in the world since its introduction. Sixty years later, what could a new live-performance adaptation show audiences that hadn't been seen before? For all that the various iterations of *To Kill a*

Mockingbird had each become institutions in their respective mediums, what might a second stage play now have to say?

Theories around the ways audience members receive stories and information have long been a compelling area for research. Pieces adapted from a well-known original source offer particular interest for dramaturgs and adaptation research scholars as they potentially contain similar components that can be used to track traditional presentation and reception of performance, as well as adjustments made to literary and performative tropes.² *To Kill a Mockingbird* iterations create an exemplary opportunity to examine Dudley Andrew's consideration of "the explicit, foregrounded relation of a cinematic [and theatrical] text to a well-constructed original text from which it derives and in some sense strives to re-construct" that "provides the analyst with a clear and useful 'laboratory' condition."³ Andrew's ideas on adaptation, though here formulated around film, can additionally be expanded through the series that includes Harper Lee's novel as the initial "pre-established presence," followed by multiple related sign systems represented in both the cinema and twice in stage scripts. The laboratory condition for a *To Kill A Mockingbird* project is excellent, particularly in the current era of accessible live performances as well as video recordings.

As the "locus for analysis"⁴ for considerations of *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s adaptations, this article focuses on the stage versions, and specifically within those on the performative experience of the role of the narrator. For two pieces based on the same source text and professing similar goals via live performance, the interpretation of that role has shifted dramatically between Sergel's initial adaptation and Sorkin's reworking. Today's audiences live in a society moderated by narrators: from social media platforms to news outlets to editorials and beyond, people are constantly producing and receiving narrated, contextualized, and re-

contextualized stories. Performances of *To Kill a Mockingbird* provide an interesting opportunity for the study of narrators and narration, as they tick boxes for both “adaptation” and “uses (a) narrator.” Insights gained by interrogating these theatrical texts and their stage presentations could potentially be applied in some of the wider social settings mentioned above. This case study may begin to address some of the following questions: how has the role and function of a/the narrator evolved? How might creative license be applied specifically to narratorial positioning and point-of-view? What is the effect of re-contextualization when one script is adapted from the same source as another, decades later? And does the attempt at a ‘faithful’ (whatever that is defined to mean) interpretation of original source material as relates to the presentation of a narrator help or hinder current reception of an adaptation in performance?

Naturally, the premise of an adapted work, particularly when that adaptation shifts performance modes, is that the new piece will be unable to create a completely accurate recreation of its source text.⁵ Christopher Sergel’s 1969 script draws heavily on both the novel and the 1962 film, particularly in positioning the gaze of the work exclusively through the narrator. In this context Sergel’s play relies on structure offered by an assumed narrational role that does not reproduce Lee’s composition of her narrator beyond the inclusion of the role in his text. Laura Fine suggests in the 2007 article “Structuring the Narrator’s Rebellion in *To Kill a Mockingbird*” that the key to understanding Harper Lee’s seminal work is acknowledging the “skillful mixing of her adult and child perspectives” since shifting “between the boundaries of the adult and child perspectives is a safe way to make piercing criticisms of small-town southern society.”⁶ Without this acknowledgement of both the methodology behind the implementation of the narrator (layered outlooks and timelines in one character) and the inherent invitation to the audience to occupy a similar reflexive space while investigating the story’s societal concerns, the

adapting author misses the opportunity to employ valuable tools provided by the original. Sergel's focus on creating an educational and community-based theatre adaptation that resembled traditional narratorial models may have precluded him from recognizing Harper Lee's insight into the composition of her narrator figure, or possibly had him choosing to disregard it in favor of a more obviously performative structural form.

In contrast, Sorkin's theatrical translation expands upon accepted concepts of the position and performative role of the narrator, as well as capturing in visual and aural embodiment the presumed intent behind the narratorial role that is incorporated into the novel. Therefore, an examination of the evolution of the role of the narrator as employed by the two official stage adaptations of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is likely to demonstrate that while both are appropriate to and reflective of the time in which they were initially produced, Aaron Sorkin's version illustrates that divergence from the accepted form for a stage narrator can produce greater insight into the motivations and themes of the novel in addition to offering a truly innovative mode for performing a memory play.

Advocating for the Narrator

An established feature of any recognizable performative iteration of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is the employment of a narrator. The story's perspective is presented through the character of Jean Louise Finch as she looks back on her childhood in the deep South and examines particularly impactful incidents. In Harper Lee's original 1960 novel her narrator introduces and then comments on the story throughout in an accepted literary style – employed specifically to designate point-of-view. The reader is made clearly aware from the start that this memoir will be recited from the perspective of the adult Jean Louise, even as they become

acquainted with the character's younger self (nicknamed "Scout"). They quickly engage with Scout as she participates in the action being reflectively filtered through Jean Louise's seamless commentary.

To Kill a Mockingbird thus establishes a somewhat unusual narratorial conceit: rather than framing the story with a narrator's/point-of-view prologue and ending with an epilogue (both of which are frequently presented as out-of-timeline with the central action), the novel integrates the older and younger versions of the main character into one entity with layered, and simultaneous, perceptions and perspectives. The imagination required to fully engage with the world of the book is key to the functionality of this specific narrational mode, as it allows the reader to recognize the offered storytelling mode as natural and instinctive. Generally speaking, people tell stories by compressing timelines (a sequence of hours or days may be related as "a little while later," for example) and layering plot and commentary together (i.e., contextualizing events with commentary while relating them). Audiences are inherently comfortable with the way Scout presents the story, as narrating past experiences through the filter of age and perception is common practice in everyday conversation.

The novel begins, "When he was nearly thirteen, my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow," immediately referencing an event that will appear later in the story and providing dramatic context and impetus for the recitation of the full sequence of events. After a few pages of description of the town and the Finch family, Scout and Jem meet a summer visitor:

"Folks call me Dill," said Dill, struggling under the fence.

"Do better if you go over it instead of under it," [Scout] said. "Where'd you come from?"

Dill was from Meridian, Mississippi, was spending the summer with his aunt, Miss Rachel, and would be spending every summer in Maycomb from now on.⁷

Here Harper Lee consciously uses her narrator to communicate events organically, moving easily from Dill and Scout's young perspectives and literal voices to adult Jean Louise's reminiscence and contextualization. Rather than using the narrator role as a framing device, Lee rejects this artificial method of distancing the audience by separating them from the story to be told. Jean Louise answers Scout's question to Dill; Lee's narrator is engaged and conversational. Point-of-view is established along with the understanding that reflection and commentary will be offered throughout the story.

In the theatrical (or performative) milieu the role of narrator likewise has an understood purpose, though here the definition becomes somewhat less specific. Film and television frequently present point-of-view as associated with (a) certain character(s); they also regularly employ voiceover as framing devices or commentary, or to provide context.⁸ Such usage may direct the audience towards point-of-view, even as they are voiced by side characters and serve to literally narrate the action. On stage in live performance, however, designating point-of-view becomes less vital to comprehension of the presented narrative thanks to the spatial relationship between performers and audience. Rather, when a narrator is deployed by a play script they usually function as a type of interactive tour guide to the story, describing and contextualizing the performance space and acting as a bridge between the audience and the narrative itself. Direct address opens the door; acknowledgement of the audience by the narrator ushers participants into the world of the play. The exchange between live audience and live performers

is the vital element, and the reason why the narratorial role functions differently in theatre than it does in television, film, or publication.

Thus, in “Thinking Through the Audience” Paul Kosidowski describes theatre as maintaining a balance in “tension between unity and fracture,” where the art form is based on “the act of seeing itself – the gaze dividing the community into the seen and the seeing.”⁹ The inclusion of a narrator, as a role or character (or both) that both sees the audience and makes evident the audience seeing the production, can serve as an effective tool for holding this balance. The narrator here creates or opens up space where the audience can “buy in” to the story unfolding before them. For Bert States, the balance involves a “main idea: to break down the distance between actor and audience and the give the spectator something more than a passive role in the theatre exchange,” and here we may see the narrator as primarily a figure who “plays a character who lives in a world that includes the audience.”¹⁰

In addition, and perhaps most relevant to a discussion of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the narrator role is key to Kosidowski’s balance as it allows a live performance piece to reference itself. The story of the play serves as the production’s primary referent when contextualized through the lens (and embodied direction to the audience to acknowledge the performance as such) of the narrator.¹¹ In other words, the narrator is both a part of the piece and separate from it; the narrator can both discuss the story of the performance and participate in the action as it unfolds. For Jean Louise/Scout, the ability to speak directly to the audience about the story being (re)enacted on the stage is an identifying component of the narrative itself; without the referentiality made possible by the narrator’s role it would be a different story entirely.

Of course, the applications of these narratorial facets vary widely by type and genre of performance and text. The educational trend in plays has been to avoid using a narrator

altogether so as to maintain pacing and levels of action (i.e., showing vs. telling). However, the practice of employing a narrator has a long history, appearing in the ancient theatre of the Greeks as the Chorus speaks to the audience, and showing up through Shakespeare's use of a narratorial Chorus (*Henry V*) or other audience-engaged figures (Iago in *Othello*, the prologue from *Romeo and Juliet*). The trope remains popular and present in musicals currently playing today, such as *Hamilton*, *Hadestown*, and *Six*, following practices established in the 1960's and 70's in shows like *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Cabaret*, *Pippin*, and *Into the Woods*.¹²¹³ *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s two stage plays do not stand alone. Classic works that are contemporary to *Mockingbird* include *Our Town*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Man for All Seasons*, and *Amadeus*; all these function as stellar examples of stage works that incorporate narratorial roles.¹⁴ Later modern plays such as *Mindgame*, *The Penelopiad*, and *Alabama Story* (to name only a few) along with a wide range of children's theatre scripts continue to make effective use of the conceit to speak to and engage with the audience, while also commenting on the story itself.¹⁵

As noted above, the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* presents an integrated, dualistic narrator that guides the reader and determines point-of-view. The 1962 film adaptation,¹⁶ directed by Robert Mulligan with a screenplay by Horton Foote, deviates from this model somewhat: the movie just maintains narratorial point-of-view directive by introducing sparsely used voiceover from the grown-up (never seen on-screen) "Scout as an Adult" which directs the audience toward the re-enacted character of six-year-old "Scout." In doing so the film splits the reminiscence from the action, as the voiceover narration happens only a couple of times early on and then does not return to comment or add context. The story unfolds almost exclusively in Scout's childhood present. Sergel's 1969 script also incorporated this dual-character model, though his version

expanded from the adult voiceover to instead employ two onstage actresses taking the separate (older/younger) iterations of Jean Louise Finch.

Alternatively, Aaron Sorkin's presentation of the narrator figure rejects the split-character concept of the previous adaptation, re-incorporating the older and younger perspective layers of the novel's character back into one entity. In his script a single adult actor embodies both Jean Louise and Scout onstage. Sorkin further deploys an innovative split in the narrational position by promoting the characters of Jem and Dill as narrators to connect directly with the audience alongside Scout. This deviation from the novel's structure serves to conversely support the effectiveness of the form and gives greater performative flexibility by creating space for challenges and clarification of the narrative within the narration itself. For example, as the trio of narrators embody both their older (or future) and younger (or past present) selves, they are able to both re-enact and reflect upon story elements, as well as provide clarification of their respective understanding of those elements.

SCOUT: ...It happened on the last night of summer. We can agree on this fact.

JEM: Nope.

SCOUT: Evidently we can *not* agree on this fact.

JEM: It *happened* on the last night of summer but it began much earlier.

SCOUT: Jem means it began with the trial of Tom Robinson.

JEM: No.

SCOUT: That is not what Jem means.

DILL: It began when I said we should make Boo Radley come out of his house.¹⁷

While establishing that the three narrators will argue about and discuss (past) story elements with each other, this early sequence provides interrelational context, begins to establish situational specificity, and piques audience engagement. The scene then transitions to the trial setting in

which the tone and historical period of the action (rather than the memory of) is determined. This narratorial mode allows these characters to remain fully conscious of their positions in the audience's present (the characters' "future" in relation to the re-enacted story of the play, and current existence in relation to the audience) and the past (meaning the "present" of the characters' younger selves as the story elements are enacted) throughout the entirety of the performance, which consequently creates a path for the audience to follow through the slippage in past and present timelines.

Narrator as Present Consciousness

Christopher Sergel was a playwright and publisher, and by 1970 served as president of the Sergel family's Dramatic Publishing Company. In connection with the novel's and film's public reception, Sergel requested permission to adapt *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a play intended for schools. With Harper Lee's agreement Sergel's script was first staged in 1969, and officially published in 1970. Lee stipulated that the adaptation be offered only to amateur groups, with performance rights reserved primarily for educational and community theaters. As such, the script was rarely the subject of printed reviews, and there are very few available records of productions from the play's first 20 years. Wider public notice began to be taken once the piece was staged at the Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey in 1990, with reviews and responses becoming more common from that point forward. Between 1970 and 1990 Sergel frequently subjected the play to adjustments and rewrites, including transferring the narrator role from Jean Louise to Miss Maudie Atkinson.¹⁸ One of the most frequently produced scripts in the world for the last several decades, including an annual community staging in Monroeville, Harper Lee's

hometown, Sergel's script has toured widely but has never been performed on Broadway or London's West End.¹⁹

Though Sergel's adaptation is easily recognizable in tone and content as relating closely to both the original novel and to the 1962 film, it also deviates from these two forerunners in translation to the stage. The text, somewhat ironically, breaks the narratorial contract established by the novel (by splitting the main character into two figures as mentioned above) while at the same time offering a traditional live performance mode with a narratorial role that would have been commonly understood and accepted by theatre audiences of the day: i.e., a figure that speaks to the audience, breaks into the action to add context and commentary, and directs audience response without participating much, if at all, in the story itself. In so doing Sergel's adaptation is likely to have perpetuated and strengthened perceptions of onstage narratorial positioning, since the play was presented nearly-exclusively in educational and other amateur settings. This context surely built subconscious expectations around what a narrator *should* do for its younger and community-based audiences.

Harper Lee's novel presents a unified, if dualized, figure of the narrator throughout the book: in layering together the consciousnesses of both child Scout and the grown-up Jean Louise the author seamlessly incorporates the past-present and reflective perspectives into one voice. Horton Foote's screenplay focuses instead on Scout, differentiating between child and adult and only giving Jean Louise a few lines as a voiceover at the beginning of the film (no embodiment). Point-of-view is established, with Scout's the primary perspective in the movie, but without Jean Louise's overarching framework any reflection or commentary is left very briefly up to a few minor characters within the action – or to the audience themselves. Largely due to the nature of

film, the narrator does not have opportunity to acknowledge an audience of any kind. The book's distinctive narratorial form is given only the barest of nods, and then discarded.

In dramatizing for the stage, however, Christopher Sergel took the film's character division of Scout and Jean Louise and pushed the separation further. He transferred the voiceover-style contextualization and the novel's reflective tone and merged them into a separate, embodied figure to represent "Jean Louise", while his Scout (still arguably the main character) presented only the perspective of the six-year-old child. Stylistically and functionally, this was a reasonable approach; theatre has historically employed narrators, and live performance relies on bodies on stage looking back at the audience in a way that film does not. Sergel's interpretation was therefore both insightful (the stage is better suited to embodiment than to disembodied voices, as well as a valid expression of the storytelling intent of the novel) and creatively non-innovative; though useful and easily acceptable from an audience standpoint, his narrator mode physically removed the layering created by Harper Lee by making Scout/Jean Louise's inherent dualism into a literal split.

In performance, Sergel's Jean Louise serves as a practical fix to the compression of time in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a necessity for adaptations of novels to the stage (exemplified by other productions such as *The Wizard of Oz*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Treasure Island*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Teahouse of the August Moon*,²⁰ etc.). Jean Louise as narrator speaks almost exclusively in the past tense, filtering context for the audience from a child's perspective through that of a reflective adult. When she is onstage Jean Louise is unnoticed by any of the other characters (with one early, incongruous exception and one later, slightly vague exception); like the audience, she observes the action but does not take part. Sergel does suggest that Jean Louise has the potential to participate, however – within the first moments of the first scene Miss Maudie's

neighbor character addresses a responsive comment to Jean Louise as she delivers exposition to the audience:

JEAN: ... When he [Atticus] gave us air rifles, he asked us never to kill a mockingbird.

(MISS MAUDIE ATKINSON has come out on her porch.)

MISS MAUDIE (to JEAN LOUISE): Your father's right. Mockingbirds just make music. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs; they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out...²¹

The dialogue then moves to away from Jean Louise and onward to Scout and Miss Maudie, who does not again engage with Sergel's narrator. This direct(ed) acknowledgement of an otherwise unacknowledged character creates a momentary breach in the performance contract by implying that Jean Louise has presence and potential volition within the re-created past timeline. The breach becomes a momentary glitch, rather than an element of the performance, as the concept of Jean Louise's existence within that timeline stays largely unexplored in the following text – with one additional possible deviation.

Later in the same scene Miss Stephanie Crawford enters and has a longer conversation with Jean Louise, as the figures onstage discuss Boo Radley:

JEAN: I'd have to ask – as she intended. (To her.) Miss Stephanie, what happened fifteen years later?

MISS STEPHANIE (delighted to continue): Boo Radley was sitting in the living room cutting some items from The Maycomb Tribune to paste in his scrapbook. As his father passed by, Boo drove the scissors into his parent's leg, pulled them out, wiped them on his pants and resumed his activities. Boo was then thirty-three. Mr. Radley said no Radley was going to any insane asylum. So he was kept home, where he still is to this day.

JEAN: How do you know? How can you be sure he's still there?

MISS STEPHANIE (as she goes into her house; emphatically): Because I haven't seen him carried out yet. (She exits.)²²

While the previous conversational shift from Jean Louise to Scout implies that Miss Maudie is aware of the narrator, this exchange with Miss Stephanie does not indicate in which timeline Miss Stephanie is speaking (Jean Louise's "future," or Scout's present). Miss Stephanie could conceivably be speaking with her young neighbor; Jean Louise, however, is clearly acting as the grown-up narrator by shifting from addressing the audience to speaking with Miss Stephanie in the past timeline.

Additionally, near the beginning of Act Two, while the children take a break from observing the trial of Tom Robinson (a scene during which Jean Louise is offstage), Jean Louise enters and speaks directly to Scout and Dill. This is the only other moment in the script in which the actors are directed in regard to Jean Louise: Scout's direction reads "(apparently not aware of JEAN, but reacting to what she said)," and a few lines later Dill is instructed "(not noticing JEAN; speaking to SCOUT)."²³ This is also the only other instance during which Jean Louise speaks in the present tense rather than the past. While the exchange could present the implication that Jean Louise is overlapping/layering onto Scout's timeline, such an idea is highly subtle and unsupported by any other similar happenings. These exceptions and their lack of repetition may suggest that Sergel does not envision Jean Louise having any direct engagement with the action occurring in the re-created past onstage, but the reality of their presence does offer a hint that such an option is at least possible. The anti-specific conditions of these exchanges leaves Sergel's intent vague and somewhat confusing, with their acknowledgement and clarification in performance becoming the responsibility of the individual production.

In Practice

While performance elements (direction, choreography, design, etc.) can certainly be applied to any script, the establishment of the narrator's engagement with the audience and the story being told is determined primarily by the way that engagement is shaped in the text. A production of the Sergel script could implement design elements such as the current Aaron Sorkin productions' skeletal set(s), but the earlier script itself is hampered by inconsistent messaging in regards to the narrator's functionality. In Sergel's play, Scout has a moment of direct audience address which she interjects into Jean Louise's description of Atticus Finch. This instance of Scout "(speaking forward)" occurs within the first minute or two of dialogue, and then does not happen again. The playwright's intent may have been to break up the first long narrational passage, and/or to indicate that Scout and Jean Louise are the same character (or at least interconnected, story-wise), but any effectiveness is diluted due to the exchange's singular incongruity. Deliberate direction could potentially smooth over the oddity of Scout's solo audience engagement, or subtextually reinforce its intent by adding later non-speaking interactions between the non-narrator character and the audience. However, such direction would only serve to disguise or bridge the narrational glitch given in the script's audience contract, not fully repair it.

Sergel addresses and removes the textual singularity of Scout speaking to the audience in subsequent versions of the script in which the character of Jean Louise is deleted entirely, with narrational duties turned over to a character originating in Harper Lee's novel named Miss Maudie Atkinson.²⁴ Miss Maudie is the Finch's neighbor, appearing as a steady adult figure in the 1962 film as well as Sergel's initial stage adaptation. The official version of Sergel's script available for purchase as of 2019 is a reproduction of the original 1970 play and features Jean

Louise as the narrator; a notification on Dramatic Publishing's website as of August 2022 indicates that the script currently available for purchase and performance is the adjusted version that employs Miss Maudie as the narrator instead.²⁵ Removing Jean-Louise-as-narrator is a notable deviation from the novel, though the presentation of a distinctive and separate adaptation is perhaps not too surprising if the goal is to differentiate current community and educational productions from the stagings of the Sorkin script currently being performed on Broadway, in London, and on tour.²⁶

In Sergel's alternate, current version, the performance is divorced from Jean Louise's adult perspective and separated from its former conception as Scout's future memory play. This narrational reassignment creates an audience engagement contract in which Miss Maudie serves both as a present proactive figure in the story (though one who does not affect the action in any way) and as a non-present relational figure who speaks directly to the audience. Miss Maudie exhibits very little recognizable slippage between times; she exists solely as a character from the story's era, one who happens to speak to the audience. She does not comment or reflect on the action, but instead merely provides information.

Logistically, assigning the narrator role to a separate character makes sense: it expands the world of the play by introducing another actor and named character, offers a perception of objectivity, and reduces potential confusion by locating that character as entirely separate from Scout/Jean Louise. And for anyone unfamiliar with Harper Lee's novel or the film version it affords no conflict, presenting as it does another standard example of a narrator on stage. For some who are familiar with the book and/or movie and the script's status as an adaptation this change may still be effective, as it incorporates a named character from the novel into the world of the play (moreover one given additional influence by her presence in the film).²⁷ However, the

narratorial shift also moves the adjusted stage version even further away from its original source material.²⁸ Identification with Scout's event perception by way of her adult self is a key component of Harper Lee's story. Presenting Miss Maudie, a close neighbor who is invested in the manner of small Southern towns but not actively involved in the story's events, as the narrator creates an even less reliable audience contract than the one offered by employing Jean Louise as a split character. The textual relationship becomes both too close for objectivity and too removed for accuracy; Miss Maudie is neither a godlike observer nor centered in the action, either of which positions may be more frequently and effectively attributed to a narrator.

Traditional functionality and accessibility remains a hallmark of Dramatic Publishing Company, Sergel's family business and sole publisher of his version of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as the organization has maintained a focus on educational and children's theatre throughout their existence. Sergel's adaptation fits securely in that wheelhouse. His narrator Jean Louise rhetorically questions other characters, her younger self, and even her father, but she does not interrogate her own perceptions or conclusions; in fact, the playwright shows the character actively resisting any such questioning. During some early exposition, Jean Louise hints at events that will be shown in the play, then comments:

“But that isn't what I want to remember. That's not why my mind's come back here... There's something I have to do – something my father wanted. Probably enough years have now gone by – enough so I can look back – perhaps even enough so now I can do the one thing my father asked... No – there was one other thing. When he gave us air rifles, he asked us never to kill a mockingbird.”²⁹

The theme and title of the play are successfully introduced, but the character's driving motivation to tell the story is never fully explored. Jean Louise resumes commentating and contextualizing, adding “... that's part of what Atticus wanted us to do – part of why I'm trying to remember it all now”³⁰ as an interjection regarding their ill neighbor, Mrs. Dubose, during a

scene in which the old woman harangues Scout and Jem. But which part? And why only ‘part’ of what their father wanted? Jean Louise adds no further explanation. The narrator’s final moment in the play includes Jean Louise’s realization that the children had learned to “stand in other people’s shoes! The thing you wanted, Atticus” and then immediately diverts to “But – did you ever know?”³¹ The directive never to harm a mockingbird is recalled, and the play is brought full circle without discussing the effects of the various outcomes of the plot, or any of the character’s way forward, or what brought Jean Louise to that particular moment of recollection in her years-later life. If the narrator’s role is to serve as a bridge to the audience, a way of bringing them in to a story whose purpose in the telling is to examine the outcome, then Sergel possibly missed the mark by not allowing that theatrical, embodied narrator to recognize and question the results, and adjust future trajectory – or even to acknowledge the value of the retelling of the story itself. Jean Louise, overall, is remarkably un-self-aware for “a character who lives in a world that includes the audience.”³² Alternatively, the next adaptation (60 years later) would provide narratorial figures highly aware of both self and the present audience.

Innovating the Narrator

In 2015, five years after the 50th anniversary of the publication of Harper Lee’s novel, playwright and director Aaron Sorkin began working on a new adaptation of the text with the intent that the story would, for the first time, open on Broadway. Sorkin had a few stated goals: one was that he would bring Atticus up to the same level of protagonist as Scout, the novel’s primary lead;³³ another, as noted in an interview with Vulture writer Sara Holdren, was to “speak audibly about 2018”³⁴ through the filter of this great American story. During the run-up to the production’s opening in December of 2018 much was made of Sorkin’s decision to “humanize”

Atticus Finch – meaning, from the playwright’s perspective, to acknowledge the character’s faults in order to allow him to change between the beginning and ending of the play.³⁵ The play opened “not as an homage, or an exercise in nostalgia,”³⁶ but as a new work that understood and processed issues of its current audience’s lives and worldview. Sorkin gave Atticus Finch additional complexity and space beyond that of untouchable icon, including room to learn and change. His version more fully communicated perspectives and expanded the roles of the main Black characters, and manipulated the timeline to allow the story to move back and forth between events in a less-linear structure. “There’s no event that occurs in the play that doesn’t occur in the novel,” Sorkin states, “but the play takes a new look at some of those events because things have happened in the past 58 years. The book hasn’t changed; we have.”³⁷

This focus on presenting a more nuanced Atticus Finch additionally allowed for a very important shift away from the standard narrator trope offered by both the film and Christopher Sergel’s stage script.³⁸ As Holdren noted in her 2018 interview with Sorkin, “it’s exciting to hear a writer speak clearly about intent — and about that intangible but incontrovertible sense of present consciousness that a piece of theater owes to its moment.”³⁹ The phrase “present consciousness” is an excellent description of the methodology used by the playwright in his deployment of the narrator, Scout, as well as in delegating associated duties to the characters Jem and Dill. Instead of following the mode set by the 1962 film and 1969 play, in Sorkin’s script “Jean Louise” is removed from the cast list. Child Scout and adult Jean Louise are no longer split into isolated selves. Sorkin also does not delineate between reminiscence and re-created action in illustrating the story, as was previously done by Sergel by staging the narrator outside of the forward action, looking in. Rather, Sorkin layers the states of memory and the past present together simultaneously. All three of his narrators, portrayed by adult actors, are present in both

the audience's present and the characters' re-enacted childhood pasts. Dill openly states: "Like the others, I'll be narrating while also part of the narrative. Like a story written in the first person instead of the third."⁴⁰ Their bodies are used to bridge transitions between events and years, even inhabiting the audience's space while "ghosting" (or observing from within) their own re-created past at the same time.

The production directed by Barlett Sher and designed by Miriam Buether consciously reinforced this specific aspect of Sorkin's script. When the London version opened in March 2022 at the Gielgud Theatre in the West End, Buether was asked about design influences for this and the New York production. She described the initial inspiration of a 1930's-era "crumbling decayed warehouse" to be implemented as a "holding space for telling the story in." Buether continued, "*To Kill a Mockingbird* is a story written in the '60s which is remembering the '30s and we wanted to create a modern space through which all these different memories could travel and in which they could resonate."⁴¹

As the protagonist of the novel and primary point-of-view of subsequent adaptations, Scout has served as the main touchpoint for memory resonance and the audience's connection to the story's present consciousness. Sorkin's adjustment to the narratorial position of the amalgamated Scout-as-both-grownup-Jean-Louise-and-young-Scout is a valuable point of analysis. Though some critics were skeptical about what they saw as the ouster of Jean Louise from the hub of the narrative, Sorkin offered this in response:

Never has Scout had such a large role in what's going on. Never has she had so much to say or been such a part of the entire story, which is organized around something that doesn't exist in the book. Scout is trying to sort out the loose ends

of what happened to Bob Ewell the night he died. She's coming to grips with the truth.⁴²

Here, the purpose of Sorkin's Scout is to spend the play trying to solve a mystery. Sergel positioned Jean Louise as attempting to remember something important her father had taught her; Sorkin incorporates the memory aspect while presenting a more active interpretation based on the character's work at discovery. Scout's positioning in Sorkin's play is also an effective encapsulation of what may be a subconscious motivation for Scout (or rather, Jean Louise) in Harper Lee's novel: the need to discover and actively examine the truth rather than merely recollecting it.

By activating motivated discovery while layering together past and present consciousness, Sorkin raises the stakes, allows the play to blend plot lines and enables smooth timeline/scenic transitions, and offers an extraordinary performance opportunity for the adult actors portraying Scout, Jem, and Dill. It is a neat narrative trick to simultaneously embody both the older and younger versions of a performer's character. Indeed, 41-year-old stage veteran Celia Keenan-Bolger won the 2019 Tony award for Best Actress in a Featured Role in a Play with the part.⁴³ Sorkin's script explicates complexities of innocence and maturity, along with ignorance, questioning, and recognition, that the novel (and its readership) takes for granted. And in employing adult actors the audience is given subconscious reassurance that everyone involved will be capable of managing these complexities as well as the impacts of the themes and events of the play.

Scout, as the expected narrator, is further given expanded narratorial action through interaction with Jem and Dill as co-tour guides, incorporating them into the mystery and engaging with them through the same layered past/present construct as they take their own turns

speaking directly to the audience and offering a contextual path. For example, this early expositional section from Sorkin's script begins to set up both the story and their relationships to the performance and each other:

JEM: Maycomb had recently been told the only thing it had to fear was fear itself but Boo Radley scared the holy hell outa me. Not as much as Scout's description of the electric chair just did, but still, Boo Radley scared the holy hell outa *everyone*.

SCOUT: He did.

(DILL enters.)

DILL: And this is where I come in.

JEM: No it isn't.

DILL: Okay.

(DILL exits.)

JEM: Boo Radley is a crucial piece of this puzzle, but you're not likely to see him. No one has, not in a long time.⁴⁴

The three narrators also process events out loud in a narrative construct that subconsciously invites the audience into that same processing, such as when Scout remarks to the audience, "You're thinking that if Bob Ewell didn't fall on his knife, it means someone else in this story was responsible."⁴⁵ This innovation of dividing up while still maintaining the centrality of the role of the narrator(s) serves the added bonus of simplifying performance logistics with performer/character consolidation, and helps to keep the audience engaged more fully with a trio acting as dramatic collaborators. It should also be noted that while the trio model allows for quick pacing and witty repartee along with challenges to assumptions and assertions, it additionally makes the narrators at least slightly unreliable. Their interactions dispute any subconscious claim of total objectivity or omniscience.

Tennessee Williams, writing in the stage directions for *The Glass Menagerie*, said that "the narrator is an undisguised convention of the play. He takes whatever license with dramatic

convention is convenient to his purpose.” Williams may as well have been talking about Scout (and Jem, and Dill) when he said of his narrator, Tom Wingfield:

He is not simply an objective observer who serves as a point of view; he is a major character and even playwright. The setting of the play is in his memory, and in the opening speech he casts himself as artist-magician: “Yet, I have tricks in my pockets, I have things up my sleeve. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion.”⁴⁶

Scout and her co-narrators are a little more subtle, but the three of them do indeed establish themselves at the outset of Sorkin’s play as narrators, major characters, and facilitators through the action of the story. They occupy their positions more fluidly than Tom, pushing their given “license with dramatic convention” further than *Menagerie*’s narrator does: Tom moves wholly between time settings, without overlap, while *To Kill a Mockingbird*’s three frequently straddle their timelines with one (or all) turning to offer commentary and explanation to the audience even in the middle of ongoing scenes. After an initial courtroom scene Dill remarks:

DILL: Now you may be wonderin’ what all this has to do with Bob Ewell fallin’ on his knife. (beat) What does all this have to do with Bob Ewell falling on his knife?

SCOUT: He didn’t fall on his knife.

JEM: He did, so why don’t you accept the –

SCOUT: Just keep movin’ it forward. It was two weeks before the trial when Jem decided the night was right.⁴⁷

This exchange references both the initial question of the play in regard to Bob Ewell as well as foreshadowing the final events in the story, additionally allowing the narrators to reset the internal timeline of the action onstage. Sorkin’s expansion on the narratorial convention brings

the audience further into the play, as the narrators are allowed space and time onstage to question, challenge, comment and process these events – standing in for the experience of the audience in the house before them.

David Sims of *The Atlantic* mentioned character adjustments that emerged in Sorkin's adaptation:

Sims: You've given [Jem, in particular] a more defiant dynamic with Atticus.

Sorkin: Well, if Atticus is going to have all the answers, let's ask him tougher questions.⁴⁸

In order to position Atticus more convincingly as a protagonist, Sorkin determined that the character must be opened up further to the audience's understanding. Allowing Atticus's son to do some of that prying open becomes even more effective when said son also functions as a narratorial liaison between the production and the audience – essentially, Jem becomes a stand-in for the audience being part of that exploration of “tougher questions”:

ATTICUS: I want to explain something you need to understand. Make sure you hear this. The South got badly beat. Conquered. It's not ancient history.

JEM: The war? It was 70 years ago.

ATTICUS: It was yesterday and it'll always be yesterday. Men like Bob Ewell carry that humiliation with them like it was handed down. Every Negro face he sees walking free is a reminder. Remember what I said. A man will have his dignity.

JEM (pause): That's a bad excuse.

ATTICUS: Well it's not an excuse.

JEM: You're trying to excuse those jurors.

ATTICUS: Explain. I'm trying to *explain* why they – so you can understand – I'm trying –

JEM: They don't deserve an explanation and I already understand.

ATTICUS (pause): You're not a boy anymore.

JEM: No.⁴⁹

This example represents a turning point in the story, for both Atticus and Jem. Jem exhibits a more nuanced purpose, and the “son who looks up to and also challenges his father” is a character development that sits safely within the parameters of Harper Lee’s original creation. For Sorkin, the added emphasis on Jem’s perspective could be viewed as an echo of the reverence with which so many have come to view the character of Atticus Finch over the years (generally picturing him looking and sounding like Gregory Peck), as well as the reminder to Jem’s audience to challenge even those figures that seem most pure and saintly. Jem’s promotion to narrator and dualistic “present consciousness” (as well as Dill) along with Scout offers greater nuance for Atticus, Jem, and for the audience as well.

In the opening sequence of the play, Scout, Jem, and Dill speak directly to the audience and each other, establishing the narrator/audience contract. Within the first three minutes of dialogue the narrators direct and describe the courtroom scene arriving onstage, a major departure from the extended exposition of Christopher Sergel’s script. As characters appear they are introduced by the narrators, another standard function of the role. Then in connection with the beginning of the trial of Tom Robinson, Scout introduces the thematic “All rise” injunction with a speech addressed directly to the audience that begins: “Back then I imagined we were being summoned to do more than just stand...”⁵⁰ She speaks to a future-present audience, from a position of reflective memory, while moving through a space occupied by portrayals of the narrative past.

In an effective directorial choice, the narrators remain on stage in each trial set-up; not tucked away to blend in with the ensemble, but standing and walking through the courtroom

while unobtrusively observing as well as commenting upon action from positions they could not have feasibly occupied as their child-selves. This integration of embodied narrator and past narrative removes any sense of voyeurism, as the audience has been associated with the narrators and instructed to use them as a conduit into the space of the world of the play. The initial trial setting then transitions into the next scene, where Scout, Jem, and Dill comment on what the audience has just watched. This section also involves the participation of Scout's younger self as the characters establish tandem positions of story actors along with their narrational roles.

This pattern of narration and narrative action, with the trio slipping between older and younger selves, continues through the performance. Near the end of the second act, as the text comes back to the opening question of "How did Bob Ewell fall on his knife?," Dill, who has been excused from the past narrative as his character has left town, returns as reflective narrator and states: "This is the part I missed."⁵¹ He then narrates the concluding action of the play while Scout and Jem participate in the scene. In every other version of *To Kill a Mockingbird* when Dill has exited the stage (or screen) he does not reappear, but the establishment of three narrators offers the flexibility to continue the narratorial device even as the other two narrators/characters are centrally involved in the action.

Curtain

Christopher Sergel's and Aaron Sorkin's adaptations of *To Kill a Mockingbird* have, in turn, provided examples of effective, functional traditionalism and creative innovation in their depictions of the story's narrator onstage. The former has presented a literally divided Jean Louise and Scout to represent older and younger perspectives, and in so doing tracked accepted staging norms while also deviating from Harper Lee's layered conception of re-creation and

liveness within a singular character. The latter has alternatively taken the unprecedented step of multiplying the narratorial role, creating a trio of figures rather than one, while allowing all three to move seamlessly between “then” and “now” and simultaneously maintain their individual sense of unified selves.

A close look at Sergel’s original and subsequent versions of his script clearly shows the playwright’s reliance on a standard narrational form: his narrator presents point-of-view, speaks directly to the audience, and offers commentary on the action without contributing significantly (if at all) to that action. His interpretation is accessible and cohesive within itself, though the adaptation is less cohesive in relation to the source material; Sergel’s performative methodologies created opportunities for narrative “glitches”, or unsupported singularities within the text. Still, his approach has offered an interesting, effective, and impactful initial template for translating Harper Lee’s narrator to the stage, as well as provided a useful research model for adaptation tracking. Sergel’s working model of *To Kill a Mockingbird* for live performance has proven to be practical, consistently playable, and exemplary of the influence an adaptation can have on a wide audience.

An academically valuable contrast is found in Sorkin’s interpretation of the standard narrational form that also manages to innovate and expand upon existing expectations. His narrators present an innovative mode for constructing layered timescapes on stage, allowing the characters – and, by extension, the audience – to exist in more than one era at the same time (or at least seamlessly transition between periods), creating a surprisingly effective translation of novel’s tone and given use of the narratorial role. Of the two, Sorkin’s version comes closest to accurately representing the feeling of the book, arguably exceeding the effect established in the novel of layering timescapes thanks to onstage embodiment. The implementation of three adult

actors who also manage to portray their younger selves creates even greater opportunity for the piece to reflect upon itself (by way of multiple narrators instead of one) and encourages additional audience association, engagement, and reflection as a consequence.

Of course, both adaptations offer potential methodologies for authors working from established source material in translation for the stage. Writers may emulate Sergel's model as a standard for effectively interpreting a literary narrative for the stage. Questions will continue to be asked about further ways to implement Sorkin's narratorial process and innovation, such as: is Sorkin's *To Kill a Mockingbird* narratorial model appropriate only to memory pieces, or can it be successful in other genres? How necessary is the 'time' component and layering of future/past perspectives to his narratorial configuration? Can the type of innovative effect achieved with the three narrators be deliberately replicated elsewhere? And what are some of the options to be developed for greater diversity onstage by way of innovative approaches to narrator interactions and story framing?⁵² (To name just a few.) These and other possibilities will provide playwrights and adaptation dramaturgs with any number of avenues for future theatrical exploration of versions of stories onstage – and ways to communicate those stories.

The theatre has always been a vehicle for investigating and engaging with narratives and experiences, and for introducing subversions of established practices in sharing those stories. By examining the role of the narrator and its relationship to the audience in plays based on immediately recognizable source material, the opportunity is given to better understand the relative ubiquity of the narrator trope and the reasons for its usefulness. Additionally, we might consider: if serving as a metaphorically/physically realized bridge between the audience's future present and a play's present past becomes the new normal, where does the narrator go from there? John Green has noted that Lee's "combination of nostalgia and criticism makes

Mockingbird both endearing and enduring”, and re-interpreting and opening up the role of narrator for Jean Louise ‘Scout’ Finch may help us all to better understand the “endearing and enduring” nature of adaptations yet to come.

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NOTES

¹ A New York Times poll published on Dec. 28, 2021 indicated that TKAM was voted by participants of the U.S. as well as 67 other countries as the best book of the last 125 years.

² Initially, this project was intended to investigate the evolving effects of the role of the narrator by way of the narrator's relationship with the audience. The narrator is one of the defining features of *To Kill a Mockingbird* after all, and the presence of that role has been a key identifier for each work adapted from the novel. Additionally, the availability of two certifiably successful stage scripts with which to examine the relationship of the given narrator to the audience in a live performance setting appeared to create a feasible study possibility. However, after attending performances of Sorkin's play in New York in 2019 and 2021 (directed by Barlett Sher, Schubert Theatre) I determined that there was very little chance of collecting quantifiable results pertaining to the audience side of the relationship equation by observation alone. Without extensive field work that included questionnaires, interviews, surveys and other types of feedback, the project would be unable to collect sufficient evidence to support or disprove the hypothesis. As well, restrictions and caution regarding the state of the coronavirus pandemic beginning in 2020 made designing an effective audience-based study for performances of Sorkin's or Sergel's texts even less feasible.

³ Dudley Andrew, "Adaptation," *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. by Braudy, Leo and Marshall Cohen, Oxford University Press. 2016, 331.

⁴ Ibid, p. 331.

⁵ This is of course less applicable when transferring a complete or nearly complete text from one visual medium to another; a film that takes a play script for its screenplay will be much closer to the play itself, though it could arguably also be considered not an actual "adaptation" as the performable text remains the same.

⁶ Fine, Laura Fine, "Structuring the Narrator's Rebellion in *To Kill a Mockingbird*," in *On Harper Lee: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Alice Hall Petry, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press. 2007, 67.

⁷ Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Ebook: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014, Amazon.com, location 125 (Kindle). Parentheses with character names added.

⁸ For example, adaptations of fairy tales often involve the classic "Once upon a time...", while television series such as *Gossip Girl* and *Veronica Mars* (and many others that do not include Kristen Bell) build voiceover narration into the structure of their episodes.

⁹ Paul Kosidowski, "Thinking Through the Audience," *Theatre Topics* 13, no. 1 (2003): 83.

¹⁰ Bert O. States, "The Actor's Presence: Three Phenomenal Modes," *Theatre Journal* 35, no. 3 (1983): 365.

¹¹ Mária Minich Brewer, "'The Thought of Performance': Theatricality, Reference, and Memory in Herbert Blau," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 21, no. 1 (2006): 98.

¹² *Hamilton*, music/lyrics/book by Lin-Manuel Miranda, directed by Thomas Kail, New York (Richard Rodgers Theatre), 2015. *Hadestown*, music/lyrics/book by Anaïs Mitchell, directed by Rachel Chavkin, New York (Walter Kerr Theatre), 2019. *Six*, music/lyrics/book by Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, directed by Lucy Moss and Jamie Armitage, New York (Brooks Atkinson Theatre), 2021. *Fiddler on the Roof*, music by Jerry Bock, lyrics by Sheldon Harnick, book by Joseph Stein, New York (Imperial Theater), 1964. *Cabaret*, music and lyrics by John Kander and Fred Ebb, book by Joe Masteroff, New York (Broadhurst Theatre), 1966. *Pippin*, music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, book by Roger O. Hirson, directed by Bob Fosse, New York (Imperial Theater), 1972. *Into the Woods*, music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, book by James Lapine, directed by James Lapine, New York (Martin Beck Theatre), 1987.

¹³ The popularity of narrators in musicals (specifically from the mid-twentieth century through to today) may be because musicals create extreme breaches in reality by nature of their format, and the incorporation of a narrator as a bridge or connecting element with the audience helps to stabilize comprehension of the narrative. Also, it could just be that musicals have so many additional elements added that direct narration can be used to simply conserve the audience's time and energy. Specific as well as wider effects of the use of narrators in musicals would be an excellent companion project, though they will not be examined further here.

¹⁴ *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder, *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams, *A Man for All Seasons* by Robert Bolt, *Amadeus* by Peter Schaffer.

¹⁵ *Mindgame* by Anthony Horowitz (1999), *The Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood (2006), *Alabama Story* by Kenneth Jones (2012).

¹⁶ 1962: Brentwood Productions; Universal Studios. The film has won numerous awards, including 1962 Academy Awards for Best Actor (Gregory Peck) and Best Screenplay (Horton Foote).

¹⁷ Aaron Sorkin, "To Kill a Mockingbird," (in press), MS, 2019, p. 2.

¹⁸ This situation is discussed in more detail on pages 15-17.

¹⁹ As of December 2021 performance rights to Sergel's script are highly restricted due to the new adaptation by Aaron Sorkin in production in New York City, as noted on Dramatic Publishing Company's website. This clarification is likely to be in response to the events of 2019 that saw community theatre productions of Sergel's *To Kill a Mockingbird* abruptly cancelled across the country when the Broadway production opened in late 2018, and to the backlash that followed. As an example, rights issued to a Salt Lake City production were pulled just a few weeks into rehearsal for their production in 2019. As a gesture of reconciliation SLC's Grand Theatre Company were subsequently offered the unpublished Sorkin script the following year, the staging of which was also cancelled during the rehearsal process due to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic. I was working as dramaturg for this SLC production, which afforded me access to the unpublished script.

²⁰ *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum (many adaptations), *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens (many adaptations), *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson (many adaptations), *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck (adapted by Steinbeck for Broadway; other

adaptations include a musical theatre version, an opera, and a ballet), *The Teahouse of the August Moon* by Vern Sneider, adapted by John Patrick (Tony Award for Best Play, 1954).

²¹ Christopher Sergel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Illinois: Dramatic Publishing, 1970, pp. 6-7.

²² Ibid, p. 9.

²³ Ibid, p. 62.

²⁴ *To Kill a Mockingbird*, written by Christopher Sergel and directed by John Sweeney, Sandy UT (Hale Centre Theatre), 2017.

²⁵ “To Kill a Mockingbird,” DramaticPublishing.com.

²⁶ Incidentally, Miss Maudie does not appear as a named role in Sorkin’s script.

²⁷ As a point of interest, in the film Miss Maudie has more lines and screen time than Calpurnia, the Finch’s Black housekeeper who is a fundamental element of the novel.

²⁸ Whether or not this move is indicative of a “successful” adaptation is most likely a matter of preference; Sergel’s script has been popular and produced frequently since it’s introduction, and could certainly be considered a financial success.

²⁹ Christopher Sergel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Illinois: Dramatic Publishing, 1970, p. 6.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 28.

³¹ Ibid, p. 84.

³² Bert O. States, “The Actor’s Presence: Three Phenomenal Modes,” *Theatre Journal* 35, no. 3 (1983): 365

³³ Sara Holdren, “Aaron Sorkin’s To Kill a Mockingbird Adaptation Walks the Walk,” *Vulture*, Nov. 25, 2018, <https://www.vulture.com/2018/12/theater-sorkins-to-kill-a-mockingbird-walks-the-walk.html>

³⁴ Holdren, *Vulture*, 2018.

³⁵ Harper Lee approved Aaron Sorkin to write his play just three weeks before she died; it is an interesting twist that the celebrated author personally vetted the film and both stage adaptations of her work. In March 2018 the estate of Harper Lee sued Aaron Sorkin and Scott Rudin (producer) because they felt the new script strayed too far from the portrayal of characters in the novel, particularly that of Atticus Finch. The playwright and producer disagreed; Rudin even offered to preview the play for the judge and jury. In May 2018 the suit was settled out of court. Specific issues with Atticus’ behavior – cursing, handling a rifle, and openly drinking alcohol – were removed by Sorkin in exchange keeping the additional lines and expanded character profiles he had planned for Tom Robinson and Calpurnia. (Gizzo, “Legal Drama Surrounding ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’,” 2019.)

³⁶ Holdren, *Vulture*, 2018.

³⁷ Holdren, *Vulture*, 2018.

³⁸ “While Aaron Sorkin categorically refused to read the Sergel adaptation in developing his own script, he was admittedly influenced by many, many viewings of the 1962 film.” (Charisse Baxter, “Adaptation and the Great Character of *To Kill a Mockingbird*,” Brigham Young University (unpublished), 2020, 2.)

³⁹ Holdren, *Vulture*, 2018.

⁴⁰ Aaron Sorkin, “To Kill a Mockingbird,” (in press), MS, 2019, p. 23.

⁴¹ Jeremy Mark, “A Space to Hold Memories,” 2022 Gielgud Theatre programme

⁴² Nardine Saad, “Aaron Sorkin’s ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ breaks box-office record for Schubert Organization,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2018. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-to-kill-a-mockingbird-shubert-record-20181226-story.html>

⁴³ “The roles were potentially too difficult for child actors.... So we asked Celia Keenan-Bolger to read Scout and Will Pullen to read Jem. (Gideon Glick joined them a little later as Dill.) We’d told them it was a one-time thing and they wouldn’t be moving on with the play, but as they read, it all just seemed... right. Even inevitable. It was a memory play narrated by the three kids as they tried to work through the lingering questions surrounding the death of Bob Ewell. With only an afternoon’s worth of rehearsal, the three of them made the subtlest adjustments to their posture and their voices, slipping easily back and forth between the children they were and the adults they became. It simply worked, and what had been an expedient solution became the right idea.” Aaron Sorkin, Holdren, *Vulture*, 2018.

⁴⁴ Aaron Sorkin, “To Kill a Mockingbird,” (in press), MS, 2019, p. 21.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, New York: New Directions Publishing. 1999. 4.

⁴⁷ Aaron Sorkin, “To Kill a Mockingbird,” (in press), MS, 2019, pp. 40-41.

⁴⁸ David Sims, “A New Way of Looking at *To Kill a Mockingbird*,” *The Atlantic*, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/12/aaron-sorkin-finds-new-edge-to-kill-mockingbird/603652/>

⁴⁹ Aaron Sorkin, “To Kill a Mockingbird,” (in press), MS, 2019, p. 102.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 108.

⁵² An example of diversity opportunities occurred in the Broadway production when it re-opened in 2021 after the pandemic shutdown. The part of Link Deas, the factory owner who testifies on behalf of Tom Robinson, was played by a deaf actor, and this characteristic was incorporated into the performance. While the staging and text remained essentially the same as the original version of the production, the inclusion of narrators displaying present consciousness altered the method of audience interaction. For example, as Mr. Deas was testifying during a courtroom scene he would speak some of his lines and use sign language for others; the signed dialogue was then translated out loud by one of the three narrators. In creating a space for actor diversity, the performance reinforced the layering of timelines by having the narrators participate in the action

in locations that would not have been occupied by their younger selves. The model continued in Link Deas' second scene, during which he comforts Dill and tells the three children some of his story. In performance the narrators took turns translating signed passages for the audience. Throughout both scenes the actors adjusted their voices to differentiate between the delivery of sign language translation dialogue and their child characters, sometimes with only a breath in-between. Another effect of this diversifying approach is that of subconsciously normalizing the presence of deaf individuals in the world of the story, as well as knowledge of sign language in order to communicate. It is a remarkably innovative application of the layering and embodied integration that makes up the model for the narrators' role in Aaron Sorkin's adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and one that may serve as an inspiration for further expansion, creativity, and inclusivity in bridging the space between theatrical productions and all kinds of audiences. This specific performance shift is deserving of its own, separate, evaluation and study. While the London production that followed the re-opening of the New York production did not continue this same representational choice, the subsequent US touring production cast a deaf actor in the role and re-invigorated the opportunity for diversity outreach.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/theater_dance/in-mockingbird-a-deaf-actor-finally-gets-his-wish-not-to-be-defined-solely-by-deafness/2019/11/13/b5fe3ede-0579-11ea-8292-c46ee8cb3dce_story.html