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Harper Lee's Latest Novel and Its Literary Context

Román Harper Leeové v kontextu literatury amerického Jihu

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Anotace

Práce se bude zabývat kontextem americké jižanské literatury a soustředí se na dílo spisovatelky Harper Leeové, především na okolnosti vydání jejího posledního románu *Go Set a Watchman* v roce 2015. Práce nejprve představí román *To Kill a Mockingbird*, kde nastíní základní témata morálky, rovnoprávnosti a rasové diskriminace v kontextu společenských vztahů maloměsta amerického Jihu. Jádro práce se zaměří na okolnosti vzniku a vydání románu *Go Set the Watchman*, srovná jeho tematiku s prvním románem Harper Leeové a pokusí se dílo začlenit v rámci poetiky próz amerického Jihu ve srovnání s dalšími autory dané provenience.

Abstract

The thesis deals with the Southern literature and its literary context and focuses on work by Harper Lee, primarily on her latest published novel *Go Set a Watchman* from 2015. The thesis first introduces a novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, outlines the basic themes of morality, equality and racial injustice in the context of social relations of a small town in the American South. The core of the thesis focuses on publishing history of the novel *Go Set a Watchman*, then compares its themes with Harper Lee's first novel and attempts to integrate the novel within the poetics of prose of American South in comparison with other authors of given provenance.

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1. Introduction

This thesis concentrates on literary work of an American writer Harper Lee and her two published novels *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Go Set a Watchman*. Harper Lee, born and raised in the South, built her success and literary career on a single published novel and *To Kill a Mockingbird* has become an integral part of American classic literature. Her works of fiction went beyond the Deep South and gained importance not only in literary world, but also significantly influenced culture and society and raised public awareness about many social issues.

The aim of this thesis is to examine and define certain features of southern literature occurring in her two novels. After shortly describing the background situation in the American South at the beginning of the 20th century and defining a southern author in general, two significant generations of writers of southern literature will be introduced.

In the next chapters, the thesis outlines a basic definition of terms 'Southern Gothic', 'Grotesque' and 'Bildungsroman', which are closely connected to both novels. Next part of the thesis deals with a chapter describing Southern literature. It consists of several selected features frequently occurring in southern writing. These features will later serve as a supportive material for further analysis of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Go Set a Watchman*. Subsequent chapters deal with a brief biography of Harper Lee and publishing history of her novels.

Finally, the thesis then gradually summarizes and analyzes the two key novels, taking in consideration all theoretical chapters mentioned above with emphasis on selected features of southern writing. The part dealing with *Go Set a Watchman* also focuses on analyzation of the plot and selected features and additionally compares certain elements that similarly occur in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

2. The Southern Temper

The literary critic H. L. Mencken described the American South in the late 1910s as a place that is *“almost as sterile, artistically, intellectually and culturally, as the Sahara Desert.”*¹ The South was a wasteland and it was a place with such dreary atmosphere where arts possibly cannot prosper.

2.1. A Southern author

During the first half of the twentieth century, a major reawakening of literary activity, termed as the Southern Renaissance, took place in the American South. This writing encompassed fiction, poetry, drama, literary criticism, memoir and journalism. The Southern Renaissance involved a critical re-examination of southern history and its traditional racial and gender roles, social conditions and an examination of the role of the southern writer in relation to the southern community.²

There are several significant writers who form literary development of the Southern Renaissance. Generally speaking, a Southern author is *“a writer who was born and has lived his formative years within the Southern area and who therefore to some degree displays in his work the so-called Southern temper.”*³

Almost at once, two important generations of writers entered the literary scene and expanded literature in the South. The first generation came during the inter-war period. The most prominent figure was William Faulkner. His work influenced the southern letters on a great scale. Other authors were poets John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate. He described the grim atmosphere in the South as the “perfect literary situation” for writing. Other representative artists were Thomas Wolfe, Katherine Anne Porter, Lillian Hellman, Erskine Caldwell and Cleanth Brooks.

¹ Bassett 1997, p. 284

² Flora 2002, p. 835

³ Procházka 2002, p. 225

The second wave of writers, which came in the early 1940s and 1950s and is often named the generation “in search for love”, includes Tennessee Williams and Truman Capote. Other remarkable writers forming the Southern Renaissance were women, such as Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Flannery O’Connor⁴ and also Harper Lee.

The southern writers from younger generation did not form any kind of organization or manifesto and they met only occasionally. However, two attempts to unite occurred and significantly influenced the intellectual atmosphere of its time.

2.2. The Fugitives

In 1922, a group of professors and students at Vanderbilt University, led by John Crowe Ransom, founded a magazine called the Fugitive. They began publishing poetry as well as criticism and created a new literary tradition that was consciously Southern. The Fugitives were getting positive reviews and introduced a group of new poets. However, the members were eventually becoming more involved in other projects and the magazine ended in 1925.⁵

2.3. The Agrarians

In 1930, a group of Twelve Southerners reacted to the situation (the Great Depression period) in the South in a manifesto called *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and The Agrarian Tradition*. The Agrarians maintained that a return to Old South⁶ values and traditions could save the South from the fast changing modern world. Some of the writers realized that the South’s most useful literary resource was its negative identity and history, such as marginality, failure, guilt, shame and poverty.

⁴ Procházka 2002, p. 225

⁵ Flora 2002, p. 285-286

⁶ The term refers to the period spading the beginning of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the Civil war.

3. Southern Gothic

Southern Gothic is a genre of Southern writing that evolved from Gothic literature that dates to the early 19th century. It combines horror and the bizarre and explores themes that given society denies or does not want to know or admit, such as taboo, incest, violence, murders and death. It also focuses on feelings of anxiety and fear.⁷

The characters in the stories are often described as damaged and deeply flawed. Some of these characters not only accept their limitations but also sometimes promote these social ills as their best characteristics.⁸ It is also rooted to the southern region and its repressed history, mainly focusing on slavery, racism and patriarchy.

4. The Grotesque

If not determining, then certainly the all penetrating feature of Southern literature is a sense of the grotesque. The Grotesque and the Gothic elements usually, but not necessarily, overlap. In literature, the term Grotesque is applied to anything abnormal, fantastic, bizarre, unnatural or ugly and appears in many forms. The crucial element is the contrast between two opposite elements. For example, such unpleasant appearance or horrific event, which is usually described matter-of-factly and in great detail, also includes the intrusion of the comic element that feels totally out of place and inappropriate.⁹

Characters with physical deformities, such as limbs or crippled limbs, feature heavily in the Southern Grotesque. They serve as markers of a corrupt moral compass, but also can invoke compassion or humour. The Grotesque themes may be also used as a device of satire or in order to shock out the reader and induce the sense of fear.¹⁰

⁷ <http://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-304>, accessed on Tuesday, December 4, 2018

⁸ Flora 2002, p. 311-312

⁹ Flora 2002, p. 321

¹⁰ <http://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-304>, accessed on Tuesday, December 4, 2018

5. Bildungsroman

A bildungsroman, also known as a coming-of-age story, focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the main character and follows their journey of transition from childhood to adulthood. Usually, the plot depicts a conflict between the protagonist and the values of given society. The main character possesses a clearly defined personality and exhibits growth of self-awareness during the course of the story. This transformation usually comes with struggling, pain or suffering and by the book's end the main protagonist reaches a higher level of maturity and a greater sense of self-awareness, but has not achieved adulthood.¹¹

Many southern writers also use their own childhood memories as a great source of inspiration and experience for their writing, partly blurring the lines between fiction and autobiography.

¹¹ <https://literarydevices.net/bildungsroman/>, accessed on Wednesday, November 28, 2018

6. Southern Literature

There are many distinctive features of Southern culture and literature. Some of them can be found in other literary works as well, but some define given work as clearly southern.

The first important feature is a strong historical consciousness, which is very closely connected to an awareness of place. Traditionally, Southern literature has been firmly grounded in a strong sense of place, particularly a small town and the countryside in South. Furthermore, it explores Southern ways of life with an emphasis on individuals living there and their tight relationships as a community. Southern fiction focuses on individuals who do not leave the community but integrate themselves into it. Most of them still maintain their individuality and dignity, without being completely subsumed by the community.¹²

People living in a typical Southern community know each other for generations, for families rarely move away to a new place and thus they are deeply grounded and rooted to their homeland. This applies both to the characters and the authors who tell their story, but the degree of attachment these authors feel quite vary. Nobody, even the handicapped people, be it a physical or mental handicap, is excluded from the community. Everybody occupies a given space or role placed upon them since birth and it is very challenging and fundamentally impossible to escape this.¹³ The southern towns are described as small and sleepy, where time is held back by the places themselves and they resist any progressive change or development.

Another feature, the historical consciousness, is perhaps the determining factor why the Southern literature differs from the rest of American literary work. The characters are deeply tied to history of their country and the burdens of history still remain a part of it. They must be faced up to deal with, for not to

¹² Brinkmeyer 2000 p. 4

¹³ Procházka 2002, p. 236

do so, to believe that one can step outside history and responsibility and simply ignore it is to live in a dream world.¹⁴

The existence of an oral story-telling tradition, closely connected to rumor, also represents an important feature. In the South, it is not only the event and the facts of it, but the storyline of the event itself that matters more than context. These stories are told for the sole purpose of retelling and reliving the event, whether it is amusing or tragic, in most cases both. This tradition can also help the readers to see the inner lives of others¹⁵ and expand their views in hope to save them from ignorance and self-absorption.

Tense relationships between the blacks and the whites and strict system of racial segregation are an inherent part of southern writing. Even though slavery was abolished a long time ago, it does not mean the concept vanished for good and the tension still lingers. Although organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan are no longer able to operate with impunity or general public approval, racial hatred still represent a contemporary social issue which cannot be taken lightly or ignored.

There is also the ubiquitous presence of black and southern dialects. However, this feature is harder to define in writing as many elements of speech, especially pronunciation, are better to be heard. Usually, the writers use this trait to strengthen the reader's sense of place or in order to make the characters stereotypes or ridicule.

Another important feature is a strange concept of God and responsibility to family, home and region. The Southerners are deeply religious, but their faith is sometimes slightly modified. The church represents a place for worshipping God, but also for social gatherings.

¹⁴ Brinkmeyer 2000, p. 11

¹⁵ Flora 2002, p. 863

The family is not portrayed in the traditional sense of perfect harmony. The families are either incomplete or disintegrated and not functioning very well.¹⁶

Rather than a responsibility toward family, the characters feel a responsibility to their communities. Besides the church, a courthouse also represents an important place in a community. This institution functions not only as a place for legal affairs or to witness justice in action, but also as a gathering place for swapping rumors and discussing weather, politics or life in general.¹⁷

¹⁶ Procházka 2002, p.234-235

¹⁷ Flora 2002, p. 176

7. Harper Lee

Nelle Harper Lee was born on April 28, 1926 in Monroeville, Alabama into a family of Frances Finch Cunningham Lee and Amasa Coleman Lee as the youngest of four children. She attended Huntingdon College and studied law at the University of Alabama to become a lawyer, just like her father, but did not finish her degree. In 1949, she moved to New York City to pursue a career in writing.

Lee's close family and friends always referred to her by her first name Nelle, which is a backward spelling of the name of her grandmother Ellen, but the possibility it might be mispronounced¹⁸ always bothered her; hence she omitted it and simply chose 'Harper Lee' as her penname.

After the success of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Lee was asked about her next writing goals. Her undeniable literary potential promised a great writing career and she aspired to be the Jane Austen, her literary idol, of south Alabama. However, Harper Lee was not excited about the spotlight and withdrew from the public eye.

Little is known about her personal life. She fiercely protected her family life and treasured her privacy. She refused to give interviews to the press and did not attend many formal events, except when being given an honourable award. She signed her books only for children and rarely gave a permission to be photographed. Many writers tried to publish her biography, but she never cooperated with any of them, as she believed that no living person should be the subject of a biography. Though she lived into the age of personal computers and social media, she fundamentally rejected to use them, believing them merely alternative ways of invading people's privacy and corresponded mostly in written letters.¹⁹

¹⁸ The name Nelle is in Alabaman accent pronounced as 'Nail'.

¹⁹ Flynt 2015, 3

Besides of the two novels *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Go Set a Watchman*, Lee only published a few essays —*Love-In Other Words* and *Christmas to Me* in 1961, *When Children Discover America* in 1965 and *Romance and High Adventure* in 1985. She also did a considerable amount of research for a novel *In Cold Blood* (1966), written by her childhood friend Truman Capote. However, he did not fully acknowledge her contribution to his novel, causing this to be one of the reasons they drifted apart.

Harper Lee received many awards and honors, not only for her published book, but also for advancing racial understanding and social justice, such as the Birmingham Pledge Foundation's Lifetime Achievement Award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom and an honorary doctorate from the College of Arts and Sciences in 1990.

In April 2007, she suffered a stroke and isolated herself at a rehabilitation facility for nearly six months. She slowly recovered, but her declining health forced her to give up her second home in New York City and move back to her hometown to an assisted living facility in Monroeville, where she lived until her death on February 19, 2016.

8. Publishing History

8.1. To Kill a Mockingbird

To Kill a Mockingbird was first published in 1960 and became instantly successful. It won numerous awards, including the Pulitzer Prize in 1961, and was adapted into a motion picture in 1962. It was translated into more than forty languages, sold over forty million copies worldwide and was voted as one of the most influential books in history, second only to the Bible.

Contrary to its positive success, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is one of the most challenged books in the U.S. The novel was repeatedly banned or removed from several required reading lists for the depiction of violence, rape and the use of racial slurs.²⁰

For decades, there was also an ongoing rumor doubting Lee's true authorship of the book. Her childhood friend Truman Capote implied in an interview that he wrote a good part of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but this controversy was finally put to rest in 2006, when a letter from Capote addressed to his aunt, dated 1959,²¹ occurred. Lee expressed her offence, stating that Truman was a bitter compulsive liar and envied her success, as she managed "...something Truman could not forgive: I wrote a novel that sold."²²

Harper Lee undoubtedly created a novel that engraved itself into literary history and the audience all over the world still appreciates it for its humor, but also for realistic portrait of life.

²⁰ <https://bannedbookweek.org/banned-spotlight-to-kill-a-mockingbird/>. Accessed on Monday, September 10, 2018

²¹ <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5244492>, accessed on Wednesday 5, 2018

²² Flynt 2015, 60

8.2. Go Set a Watchman

For decades, *To Kill a Mockingbird* remained the only book Harper Lee has ever written and no one thought of the possibility that she would publish anything else in her lifetime. However, in February 2015, Harper²³ publishing company announced an upcoming release of a newly discovered book by Harper Lee titled “*Go Set a Watchman*.”²⁴ This unexpected announcement caused heated debates and controversy among literary critics and readers all over the world.

The original manuscript of the novel was considered to have been lost until fall 2014, when Tonja Carter, Harper Lee’s lawyer, discovered it in a secure location alongside with an original typescript of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. As it turned out, *Go Set a Watchman* was Lee’s first attempt at publishing a novel and an earlier draft of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She wrote the book in 1957 and proposed it to her publisher. However, the draft was rejected and Lee was asked to write another story from the point of view of young Scout.

Before the official release of the book, certain doubts arose, questioning Harper Lee’s ability to give informed consent to the publication of the lost manuscript, but after investigation all anonymous charges were refuted.²⁵

The book was published on July 14, 2015 and received mixed reviews. Most of the critics dismiss the novel as not ‘polished’ enough and in overall, it did not live up to expectations, even though it definitely became a commercial success and set several sales-records.

²³ an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

²⁴ <https://www.harpercollins.com/corporate/press-releases/recently-discovered-novel-from-harper-lee-author-of-to-kill-a-mockingbird/>, accessed on Monday, November 26, 2018

²⁵ Flynt, 194

9. To Kill a Mockingbird Analysis

This part of the thesis deals only with the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* and its aim is to outline the basic plot and to examine the occurrence of certain elements of southern writing described in the chapters above. Harper Lee wrote a novel that is perceived as a carefully crafted masterpiece and a unique work in its genre. By literary critics, the novel is defined as a work of Southern Gothic and a Bildungsroman, also known as a coming-of-age novel. Due to the fact that *To Kill a Mockingbird* remained Harper Lee's only published novel for so many years, it is quite hard to compare it to the works of other southern authors, who created many interesting books during their lifetime and their writing evolved with time.

The plot of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is set into a fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama, the seat of Maycomb County. The story is told from a point of view of a six-year-old Jean Louise Finch, nicknamed Scout. The first person narrator makes the reader more involved in the story, even though at times Scout can be perceived as an unreliable narrator, due to the fact that she is not present to every event that occurs in the book. The story focuses not only on one individual, but also many other characters.

Scout lives with her widowed father Atticus Finch, a brother Jeremy, nicknamed Jem and a black cook named Calpurnia. The children's mother died when Scout was just a baby and Atticus never remarried. Later, Aunt Alexandra moves in with them to help Atticus raise the children and maintain the house.

The first part of the book describes the town and its residents. The story of the novel is very complex and the narration shifts between the present and Scout's early childhood memories.

In Maycomb, the Southerners live in a slow time and also in time of poverty. *"People moved slowly then...took their time about everything. A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County."*²⁶

Although Maycomb was not directly affected by the Civil War, there still lingers a feeling of it and some residents hold on to the remains of it, unable to completely cut off history and move forward. One of these people, who represent the remains of the Old South, is old Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose. She lives near the Finches, never leaves her house and also never passes up the chance to point out the children's lack of good behaviour or Atticus's decisions about his personal life and work. Despite all of this, Atticus still respects her, for even though she is considered to be the most unpleasant lady in Maycomb, she overcomes her morphine addiction before she finally dies. She, as many other people living in town, has certain grotesque and eccentric characteristic traits.

Most days in Maycomb are described as idyllic warm days spent on a front porch drinking cold lemonade, while the wind slowly breezes and the mockingbirds sing cheerfully. However, this description is occasionally disturbed by inserting gothic and grotesque elements. For example, the idyllic atmosphere mentioned above is disturbed by a mad dog, which slowly creeps down the street and then everything gets deadly still. The doors on the whole street are tightly shut. Nobody dares to speak or even move; everyone's eyes are focused on the scene in the middle of the street. A local sheriff Heck Tate tries to kill the dangerous dog, but then rather hands the gun to Atticus. He faces the dog, takes a deep breath and fires from the gun. The catharsis of one single shot breaks the silence and the dog drops dead. After that, the street slowly comes back to life.

²⁶ Lee 2010, p. 6

In southern literature one often encounters traditionally respected judges or lawyers who serve as the moral consciousness of a given work.²⁷ In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch is portrayed as a lawyer, the embodiment of moral good and a man of honour.

Scout and Jem refer to him only as 'Atticus' or politely as 'sir'. They idealize him as unflawed man with strong moral principles and as someone they consult their problems with if needed. On the other hand, they also perceive him being quite boring, as he mainly just works in the office, reads books and does not possess any bad habits such as playing cards, drinking or smoking. Atticus tries to raise his children in the best way possible and in some aspects he leaves them to explore the world around them on their own.

²⁷ Procházka 2002, p. 236

9.1. Racial and Social Injustice

Discussing the theme of racial and social injustice is one of the most important features in southern writing. The second part of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and also the main story line revolves around a court hearing and deals with the exact problem.

Atticus has been appointed to defend a black man, Tom Robinson, who has been charged with raping a white girl named Mayella Ewell. Although many critics and academics indicate the story may have been based on the Scottsboro case or the Walter Lett case, because the two took place at the same time *To Kill a Mockingbird* was set, Lee described it as a coincidence.²⁸

Before the trial, Atticus faces several unpleasant incidents initiated by hateful people in town, but despite all of this, he is ready to defend Tom Robinson with everything he has and stand against prejudice and racism deeply rooted in the South.

A courthouse represents an important place in a southern community, in this case in Maycomb. Forthcoming promise of an interesting court hearing is an exciting event for the whole town and treated as an opportunity for public entertainment and an awakening from its sleepiness. The children are used to watching his father during trials, but this time Atticus does not want them to be present, due to the fact that the case involves rape. Little Scout, her brother Jem and their friend Dill secretly watch the trial anyway. The whole scene at the courthouse is described matter-of-factly and in a simple way that even the children can understand the severity of the situation. Unlike the rest of the novel, this scene lacks any kind of humor or comical elements.

Mayella's father, Bob Ewell, is interrogated as the first one. He sounds very confident in his testimony, claiming that Tom Robinson has beaten up and raped his daughter. Mayella Ewell is interrogated as the second one and basically confirms everything her father has said. However, Atticus's careful and clever

²⁸ Flynt, p.93

questions make it obvious to everyone that they are both lying and are not to be trusted.

The atmosphere toward the hearing's end equals to people sitting in church. Interrogation of Tom Robinson brings up an undeniable proof of his innocence. As a result of accident, he has only one arm and thus he could not hurt Mayella.

Although Tom Robinson gets a chance to tell his side of the story in front of the court and the whole town, it is all in vain from the very start as he was already doomed and sentenced to death the very moment Mayella Ewells opened her mouth and started screaming during the attack at her house. She put an innocent man's life at stake, all in an effort to get rid of her own guilt of breaking a rigid and a time-honored code of society and also to divert rage of her father. She accused a black man of raping her, but in fact she tried to rape him. Tom Robinson never stood a chance, as any jury never before decided in favor of a colored man over a white man.

Atticus's impressive speech to the jury and, ultimately to the whole town present, brings a great opportunity for a change of these obsolete rules and prejudices. However, society as a whole undergoes development very reluctantly and the voice of reason of an individual is in the end overruled by the blinded and prejudiced majority. Despite unambiguous evidence of his innocence, Tom Robinson is found guilty and later mercilessly shot dead while trying to escape from prison, even before Atticus tries to appeal. From the very start, the whole case represents an example of racial and social injustice. Some of the characters are shaken by his unfair trial, especially Jem and Atticus. However, most of the town is unbothered by the whole event and once the excitement is gone, they simply forget and move on. They do not consider the trial being unfair, mostly because they were raised that way and it is a common custom.

The town thrives on rumor. Most of the events are passed down by gossip. Especially Miss Stephanie Crawford takes pure pleasure in rumor and she is delighted to inform everyone who is willing to listen about other people's

business. This feature is a part of the southern history and most of the characters treat rumors as facts. It is also connected to the story-telling tradition.

The novel deals with themes such as alcoholism, rape, violence and murder. Handicapped people or those who suffer from some kind of mental disorder are not locked up in the asylums. The only people being send away in disgrace and hidden from the public eye are young girls who got pregnant, most often as the result of being raped. Another social taboo mentioned in the novel is incest. Although the novel is told from a child's point of view, everything mentioned above is described very realistically.

9.2. Family and Class

The Finch family represents a high aristocracy, but only Aunt Alexandra is obsessed with family history and preoccupied with heredity. She wants Scout and Jem to behave like a proper lady and gentleman, but to her distaste, her niece prefers running around in overalls. Their family might be viewed as dysfunctional and not portrayed in a traditional sense, due to the fact that the children's mother died when Scout was two years old and Atticus never remarried. However, Scout rarely feels the need of a mother and her father, brother and Calpurnia are the only family she truly requires.

Even though the novel heavily focuses on racial injustice and topics related to this, the blacks do not get much space to speak out for themselves, mostly because they are not directly involved in children's lives, but also because the black community is seen as the bottom of the class system. The most examined black character in the novel is Calpurnia, who has lived with the Finches since Scout was a baby. She represents a dear friend and a mother figure to children and raises them as her own. She is treated as a family member.

Ewells are considered to be the lowest 'white trash' every southern small town has. They live on the edge of town and also at the very bottom of the society. Bob Ewell has no desire or any considerable skills to move up the imagined class scale. He lives off of town's money and takes great pride in it. His

despicable and vicious personality traits, such as beating his own children, lying and drinking, fully unravel during the court hearing, where he falsely testifies, and also later when he attacks Scout and Jem on their way home after a school play and tries to kill them to get revenge on Atticus.

Another family living in Maycomb, the Cunninghams, is also described as being very poor, but in contrast to the Ewells, they are hardworking and honest. Even though they do not have money, they pay off their debts in other way and do not take anything for granted.

9.3. The Concept of God

The church and the Sunday school figure as a place for worshipping God, but also as a social event. The Finches go to a Methodist church regularly, as is the custom. One time during Atticus's absence, Calpurnia takes the children to her church congregation on Sunday. The blacks worship God in their church in Quarters outside the town every Sunday, but white men gamble in it on weekdays. Even though Scout and Jem are firstly convinced that they are not welcomed there, the community warmly accepts them. The sermon itself quite differs from what they are used to, for the church does not have any ecclesiastical items, such as the piano, organ or church program. There are also no hymn-books in sight, as none of the blacks can read, except four of them. To children's bewilderment, they simply repeat the hymns, but it does not make them faithful any less. The whole event gives Jem and Scout an interesting insight into life of the blacks, but also Calpurnia's, for she behaves differently than they are used to. They also learn more about the situation of Tom Robinson's trial and his close family.

Considering given space, little Scout and her brother Jem move only around Maycomb. They roam freely around, partly blurring all boundaries set by society, carefully being watched and judged by constantly vigilant neighbors. During summer, their territory for movement is limited even further only to the hearing distance of Calpurnia. The exception to this rule is their friend Dill, who visits her aunt in Maycomb during summer breaks. He represents an outsider,

lacking any grounded place or real home and pushes other children to cross the lines of their set boundaries in order to lurk out a peculiar neighbor Boo Radley. The character of Boo Radley depicts another interesting point of view. He is basically trapped inside his own house as his family presumably refuses to let him out.

9.4. Southern Gothic and Boo Radley

The novel and the characters carry a lot of features that can be defined as Southern Gothic and grotesque. The most peculiar and mysterious character in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is Arthur “Boo” Radley and subtle mentions of his persona occur repeatedly. He represents a grotesque character surrounded by scary and mysterious atmosphere, which is a common feature in Southern Gothic.

In Maycomb’s eyes, he depicts a malevolent phantom living in an old house and the only proof that he is still alive is the fact that nobody has seen his body being carried out of the house yet. He is blamed for any small inconvenience or crime and a target of local rumors.

To the children, he represents a curiosity and a mystery that needs to be unraveled and they are tempted to lure him out of the house, even though Atticus repeatedly urges them not to bother him. Boo Radley tries to befriend the children by leaving small gifts for them in a tree outside the Radley house.

During one tragic night, Miss Maudie Atkinson’s house burns down in flames. While the children stand nearby and watch the whole tragedy, Boo silently crept out from the shadows and put a blanket around Scout’s shoulders, but to her great disappointment, she does not even notice.

The most grotesque scene occurs at the end of the novel. It is also the moment when Scout finally meets Boo in person. On Halloween night, Jem and Scout go back home from a school play. They cannot properly see where they are going, due to the fact that it is pitch dark outside, but they feel and hear that someone follows them. Everything around gets very still and they are both terrified. Suddenly Bob Ewell attacks them with a knife from behind and tries to

kill them. However, Boo Radley appears out of nowhere and saves them. He takes unconscious Jem and runs with him to the Finch's house. Bewildered and shocked Scout, still partly trapped in her comical costume of a ham, follows them.

During the whole scene in Jem's room, Boo Radley, pale as a ghost, stays hidden in the shadows, and does not say a single word, but rather communicates by simple gestures and Scout eventually learns to understand him.

The sheriff Heck Tate examines the crime scene in detail and finds a dead body. He fundamentally refuses to blame Jem or Boo Radley for killing Bob Ewell, as it would equal to killing an innocent mockingbird and declares the whole situation as Ewell's own fault. After this, Boo finally speaks and in a silent whisper asks Scout to take him home. Instead of Scout simply leading Boo back home by the hand, she accommodates to him and he escorts her, as any proper gentleman would do.

After he vanishes inside his house, she stops at Radley's front porch and sees the whole town spread out in front of her. This represents another interesting point of view, as Boo Radley had an opportunity to watch the whole town from afar during the years of his solitude. Even though she never sees him again, Scout realizes that he is no longer a scary phantom living in the house next door, and perceives him as someone who deserves to be recognized and not forgotten.

9.5. Main Protagonist and a Coming of Age Story

To Kill a Mockingbird is defined by the literary critics as a Bildungsroman, also known as a coming of age story. In the course of the novel, the character of Scout, unlike some others, grows up and learns a lot. It is not easy being a child and there are many obstacles Scout has to overcome. The hardest part for her is the inevitable transition from a howling tomboy into a young lady, but also understanding the world and society around her.

At first, Scout prefers solving all her problems with a fistfight, but Atticus's influence reverses her to rather rational thinking and she learns to react more wisely. Although Scout is still a child, she is portrayed as quite matured person from the start and sometimes the reader feels that she observes the situation around her more like an actual adult.

She goes through a lot of problems and faces many challenges, but luckily she is surrounded by people who genuinely care for her and are always willing to help. However, some of these obstacles she must endure alone in order to become strong and independent individual.

Scout's brother Jem also undergoes a great character development. A few years older than his sister, he perceives the world around him more maturely and definitely understands more than little Scout, but at the beginning he still preserves an innocence of a child, unharmed by the cruelty of the world. That is also the reason why he seems to be more affected by the outcome of the trial and his faith in justice is crushed.

10. Go Set a Watchman Analysis

The aim of this part is to outline the basic plot of the novel *Go Set a Watchman* and to provide examples of features of southern literature. It is important to stress again that Harper Lee wrote *Go Set a Watchman* first and later used some of its content in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Both novels have completely different plot and are meant to carry out different lessons. However, they also undoubtedly share certain similarities.

Go Set a Watchman also includes many traits that can define the novel clearly as southern, but in comparison with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, these features are described more subtly. Rather, it is a story about a little girl growing up into a young woman, a story about love and the power of father-daughter relationship. The story also focuses more on a politic situation in the South. Even though the main protagonist has already reached adulthood, the novel can be defined as a coming-of-age story, for Jean Louise undergoes a dreadful journey from girlhood to womanhood. She experiences loneliness and alienation. Her transition into a woman feels like a tragedy to her, something the main protagonist tries to put up a fight against, but her fate is inevitable. The novel also focuses more on the characters and their conversations and especially on the flow of the main protagonist's inner monologues.

The plot of *Go Set a Watchman* is set into the same town as the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but takes place in the 1950s. The story begins with twenty-six years old adult Jean Louise returning home to visit her family in Maycomb. On her way by train, she watches the changes in the environment of the country she grew up in and explains the founding history of the southern town and its facts. However, these facts, related to the historical consciousness and awareness of place, were probably heavily modified, because as Jean Louise also says: "*recorded history's version does not coincide with the truth, but these are the facts, because they were passed down by word of mouth through the years, and*

every Maycombian knows them."²⁹ People in town rather rely on the tradition of storytelling and rumor.

When Jean Louise finally arrives home, accompanied by her boyfriend Henry Clinton who picked her up at the train station, she greets her father Atticus Finch and her Aunt Alexandra. Jean Louise's father is portrayed as a seventy-two years old lawyer with slowly decreasing health. He reluctantly accepts help from others, least from his daughter and rather prefers to suffer in silence with stubborn determination not to let his illnesses beat him. As well as in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Jean Louise refers to him only as 'Atticus' or politely 'sir' and never uses the word 'father' aloud. Shockingly, in a heated argument at the end of the novel, she calls him 'you old son of a bitch'³⁰.

Not only as a child, but also as an adult Jean Louise undergoes a great character development, even though much later in life and during a shorter period than Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In *Go Set a Watchman*, she is no longer going by Scout and mostly only her father reverts back to her childhood nickname, when sensing disapprobation. However, to her embarrassment, some people in town still remember her as "*a Scout Finch, juvenile desperado, hell-raiser extraordinary.*"³¹ Considering her physical appearance, "*she had turned from an overcalled, fractious, gun-slinging creature into a reasonable facsimile of a human being,*"³², but she has no desire to become a southern belle.

Jean Louise's family can also be defined as non-functional in a traditional sense. Each of its members possess several traits of eccentric behavior, for example Uncle Jack detests leaving his old house and does so only in order to walk his cat on a leash or go to church, and Jean Louise smokes cigarettes and is considerably obsessed with coffee. Furthermore, their family carries a certain 'Family Resemblance', originating from the fact that their ancestors married each other. Compared with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the story about death of Atticus's

²⁹ Lee 2015, p.9

³⁰ Lee 2015, p. 253

³¹ Lee 2015, p. 49

³² Lee 2015, p. 13

wife is described in more morbid detail. Two years after Jean Louise was born, Atticus found his wife on the floor of the front porch dead and the chair from which she had fallen was still rocking. She died of a congenital heart condition, which also killed her son Jem twenty-two years later. Her death forced Atticus to hire a black cook Calpurnia in order to help him with children and manage the house. Although the children in both novels have a strong parental figure and Atticus never refuses to play with them, Jean Louise suffers from a lack of a mother during her teenage years in *Go Set a Watchman* and Calpurnia has to substitute.

Some parts of the story are told in retrospective narrative³³, meaning that Jean Louise recalls her memories and experiences from her early childhood. These episodes are usually divided from the present by slowing down time. "*Time stopped, shifted, and went lazily in reverse.*"³⁴ The most vivid and grotesque memory in the whole novel is probably the time she tried to commit suicide. However, it lacks a feeling of complete terror that was thoroughly described in *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the scenes involving Boo Radley. When Jean Louise was twelve years old, a boy kissed her after school. Due to being misinformed and completely oblivious to the facts how the human sexuality works, she comes to a wrong conclusion that she got pregnant and rather than disgracing her family and being sent away in shame, she decides to commit suicide by jumping off the water-tank. On her due date that she wrongly calculated, she embarks on a dreadful journey through the town. As she goes, she silently parts with it in despair. Even though she is only twelve years old, she thinks about her own funeral and family she is leaving behind and resigns to her fate. However, a moment before she pushes herself off the edge, she is saved by Henry Clinton, making this a starting point of their bond and relationship. After this point, Calpurnia also explains to her the changes her body is going through, which Jean Louise finds hard to accept.

³³ <https://penandthepad.com/definition-retrospective-narrative-1983.html>

³⁴ Lee 2015, p. 54

Adult Jean Louise, even though she lives in New York City, cannot escape her Southern origins, which is often the case of Southern literary heroes. Jean Louise views Maycomb as her home and the world she knows very well, but also subconsciously feels that if she would stay in Maycomb for good and married her boyfriend Henry, who proposes to her several times, she would lose her mind. Her Aunt Alexandra, who has moved in the house with Atticus after Jem died and Calpurnia retired, urges her to move back home and take care of her elderly father. On the other hand, Atticus wants her to be more independent and to be able to take care of herself. He has also tried to raise her in such a way so she could become her own person, but Jean Louise idealizes him to the extent that she confuses him with infallible God rather than a human being with character flaws.

Atticus represents father figure not only to Jean Louis and her deceased brother Jem, but also to Henry Clinton, Jean Louise's boyfriend. He supported Henry through his studies and treats him like his own son so he can become a successful lawyer too and work as his successor. Henry was injured during his serving in war and returned home with a scar running down his face and six false teeth. This grotesque feature simply describes his appearance and does not define him as a hideous monster. He is also considered to be the finest gentleman in the County, someone who overcame the background and poverty he was born into. Despite having a good reputation among people in town, he still represents the white trash that carries a burden of a drinking streak running in the family and thus, according to Aunt Alexandra, bad suit for Jean Louis, who comes from a good and respected family because of its origin going back to plantation times.

The main storyline twist occurs half way through the novel, when Jean Louise finds a pamphlet with a slogan *The Black Plague* printed on the cover among Atticus's stack of books. Its text contains hate propaganda directed against the blacks. Jean Louise finds out that her father and boyfriend Henry, until this point the kindest and the most honest people in her life, are part of the Maycomb County Citizens' Council, a group of white supremacists who support segregation

and believe that they are superior to Blacks. She follows them to the meeting at the courthouse and, secretly hidden, listens to a white man deliver a racist speech against the blacks. She is disgusted by her father's and Henry's involvement and cannot believe it. During the speech, Jean Louise recalls one criminal case her father took when she was younger. Atticus once defended a young black man accused of raping a white young girl, but the whole case is mentioned only briefly and does not evolve further into any important story line and, unlike the case of Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, this trial has led to an acquittal of the defendant. His name is not specified, but there is a mention of him having only one arm, as the other was chopped off in a sawmill accident.

After this retrospective episode, Jean Louise pulls herself back to the present and she can no longer listen to the most respectable men in Maycomb County spread such hatred. After she leaves the Citizen's Council meeting, she wanders through town in disbelief and does not recognize it anymore. This represents a turning point for Jean Louise. Her whole life and beliefs start to fall apart in front of her eyes. She suddenly feels lost and utterly betrayed by everyone she deeply loves and cares about.

Interestingly, Jean Louise confronts not only her father, boyfriend and other close relatives, but also the town as a whole, as if it itself represents another living and breathing individual in her life that dreadfully deceived her beyond repair. *"She looked at Maycomb, and her throat tightened: Maycomb was looking back at her. Go away, the old buildings said. There is no place for you here. You are not wanted. We have secrets."*³⁵ Suddenly, the town perceives her as a hostile intruder, even though she was born and raised there. This also strongly induces Jean Louise's feeling of sudden alienation.

One of the most shocking facts about Atticus revealed in *Go Set a Watchman* is that he is conceived as a bigot, a character flaw that was lately completely dropped in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. He has also attended a Ku Klux Klan meeting once. This revelation is mostly the reason why the readers do not enjoy the book

³⁵ Lee 2015, p. 111

that much, because it entirely destroys the idea of a beloved and morally strong Atticus they know from *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Later, the story revolves around another case that involves a black man, more precisely Calpurnia's grandson Zeebo. He had killed a pedestrian, a local drunk old Mr. Healy, while speeding in his car. Atticus decides to help Zeebo and defend him in court. However, his motivation to do so is mostly in order to stop the NAACP, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, from getting involved in town's business. The upcoming case is also only mentioned and an actual court hearing does not take place in the novel. The important message of ongoing racial injustice and a lesson not to judge and mistreat others based on their race occurs in both novels. However, in *Go Set a Watchman*, it seems that Jean Louise is the only one who realizes it.

There should be a difference between Jean Louise's and Scout's perception as an adult and as a small child, for children in general seem to be more clueless and innocent about the issue of race and other social matters until they subconsciously take over the views and prejudice from the society they live in and that surrounds them. However, adult Jean Louise, even though she has already reached adulthood, perceives the world around her quite blindly and in some ways she is as innocent as little Scout and she cannot see her hometown and its residents in its true nature.

The feeling of complete betrayal and alienation lingers in her for a long time. At this point, the only person in her life that did not utterly betray her yet is her Uncle Jack. He is described as a retired doctor and also Jean Louise's mentor, who devoted his life to Victorian literature, "*a pursuit that in itself earned him the reputation of being Maycomb County's most learned licensed eccentric.*"³⁶

She goes to his house for an explanation. However, to her astonishment, Uncle Jack just confirms everything she has seen at the courthouse. He also explains to her that Maycomb was always racist, but she simply did not see it, for

³⁶ Lee 2015, p. 89

she did not pay enough attention. This realization destroys Jean Louise even more, but she tries to cope with it. *"The Lord never sends you more than you can bear – That was an ancient Maycomb phrase employed by its fragile ladies who sat up with corpses..."*³⁷ In the face of so much despair and disbelief, Jean Louise internally turns to God for some help or guidance from above. Here, Lee also projected a subtle reference to the Old South and its fragile southern ladies. Although no one in the novel actually lives with a corpse in their home, this grotesque feature occurs in other southern writings, for example in William Faulkner's short story *A Rose for Emily*.

As in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, there are three churches in town - Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian - and dog days in Maycomb mean at least one revival. Little Jean Louise, her brother Jem and their friend Dill liked to play pretend and to parody a Baptist revival for their entertainment during summer. During one of these plays, which adult Jean Louise remembers as another childhood memory, the children came up with their own, quite strange and hilarious, version of Hell and Heaven.

*"Jem reversed his field and tackled heaven: heaven was full of bananas (Dill's love) and scalloped potatoes (her favorite), and when they died they would go there and eat good things until Judgement Day, but on Judgement Day, God, having written down everything they did in a book from the day they were born, would cast them into hell."*³⁸

At one point, Jean Louise even compares Maycomb to imagery of hell (*"Hell was and would always be as far as she was concerned, a lake of fire exactly the size of Maycomb, Alabama, surrounded by a brick wall two hundred feet high."*)³⁹. This description also perfectly reflects Jean Louise's feeling about Maycomb, a place full of suffering, after she discovers the ugly truth about it.

³⁷ Lee 2015, p. 142

³⁸ Lee 2015, p. 65

³⁹ Lee 2015, p.61

In reality, the children might be scared of God's will, but they do not fully understand the concept and its meaning. They only imitate what they hear in church and basically take the Lord's name in vain. This enrages people in the neighborhood, but Atticus finds their plays hilarious.

Generally, people in Maycomb go to church every Sunday to worship God and to purify themselves from sins. Some accustom faith to their own liking, but none of them ever questions God's existence. According to tradition, Maycomb had always sung the Doxology in one way only, but during Jean Louise's visit, the music director changed the rhythm and thus confused and upset the whole congregation, for they detest any changes or improvement. During the sermon, a minister preaches a text from the Bible. In this case, it is from the twenty-first chapter of Isaiah, verse six: "*For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth.*"⁴⁰ The second line plays an important symbolic role later in the novel. It is also directly related to the title of the book itself - *Go Set a Watchman*.

Church represents a place where Jean Louise does not feel the crushing sense of complete isolation. She fits in with the rest of the sinners from Maycomb, mainly because she has no other choice as they all find themselves gathered at one place for one hour each week. Jean Louise usually daydreams during Sunday school, but her aunt Alexandra loves these meetings, as she and other Methodist ladies sit in auditorium and conduct a symposium Jean Louis calls '*the news of the week in review*'.⁴¹ This meeting gives the ladies from Maycomb more time for gossip while sipping tea.

Aunt Alexandra remains the same character in both novels and represents a typical southern lady. "*The southern lady is a durable figure in southern literature. Ideally a privileged white woman, she possessed great skill in the domestic sphere, running kitchen and nursery and overseeing the household in all area.*"⁴² Aunt Alexandra accepts her husband's eccentric, therefore in the

⁴⁰ Lee 2015, p. 95

⁴¹ Lee 2015, p. 88

⁴² Flora 2002, 413

public's eye unforgivable, behavior (he once retreated to the woods and never came back), for his departure does not involve an affair and thus she can preserve straight face in front of God and people in town. She got married for beneficial and practical purposes rather than based her marriage on romantic love. She devotes herself to church and community and good manners and etiquette are engraved to the core of her very being.

She is used as a secondary character in order to highlight the character of a woman who is not a proper lady and these two are implicitly measured against each other as a contrast of old and new ideals in the South. Her greatest fear is her niece becoming a target of town's rumor. She and Jean Louise cannot hold a conversation for long without eventually falling into argument due to their irreconcilable points of view.

Jean Louise has a grounded place in her hometown. What she does not realize is her privilege to run around freely as she pleases, without any significant disturbance. Jean Louise's relationship with her boyfriend Henry also undergoes a significant and dramatic change. At the beginning of the novel, she has considered him to be a decent, honest man she loves dearly, even though she was reluctant to marry him, mostly because of her own fear of settling down. At the end of the novel, she detests him for his involvement with the White Council and bigotry.

During their final conversation in a drugstore, he accuses her of being naïve and privileged. Unlike him, she can parade around town in her dungarees barefooted and nobody bats an eye at the sight of her, simply because of the fact that she is a Finch. He tries to justify his involvement in the citizens' council and claims that Maycomb has given him a good living and now the town requires certain things in return. It is his duty to serve Maycomb, even if it means losing one's own conscience. Jean Louise cannot bear it and accuses him of being a hypocrite.

After this, she has a long argument with Atticus about the situation she has witnessed at the meeting and also about a current political situation in the South. Instead of understanding, Jean Louise feels only more confused and decides to leave town in order to finally free herself from all the emotional turmoil. She never wants to see anybody from Maycomb ever again, be it her relatives, neighbors or even the undertaker. However, after the last heated conversation with her Uncle Jack, she reconsiders and decides to stay.

For as her Uncle put it, her moral compass and conscience, that encourages her to stand up against evil and injustice and do not stay silent in the face of violence, could serve as a Watchman in Maycomb or wherever it is needed.

11. Conclusion

The main aim of this thesis was to analyze the novels *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Go Set a Watchman* by Harper Lee and compare occurring similar features of southern writing.

Both novels clearly describe the historical consciousness and an awareness of place. Considering the awareness of place, the plot takes place in the South, specifically in a small fictional town Maycomb and focuses on a small community. *Go Set a Watchman* slightly differs at the start of the novel, for adult Jean Louise arrives to town from a modern city. She also has more experience with living outside her home and thus extended point of view in comparison with Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird* who roams only around the neighborhood.

The theme of racial and social injustice occurs in both novels and it is undoubtedly part of both stories and even though the execution of it slightly varies, it does not reduce the importance of one or the other. While Atticus Finch portrayed in *Go Set a Watchman* rather talks about the issues, the other Atticus in *To Kill a Mockingbird* takes action. The false accusation and the trial of an innocent black man definitely resonate more in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Both novels present different issues, such as racism, sexual violence, addiction, suicide and murder, that are relevant to this day, but it is hard to tell if they also provided any definite solutions. It certainly raises several points to think about and it is up to the readers how they manage such task.

Both novels portrait a lot of characters with grotesque features and eccentric behavior, but *To Kill a Mockingbird* provides further details about almost all of them. *Go Set a Watchman* slightly lacks the ubiquitous grotesque atmosphere, mainly because the narration does not describe the environment in greater details and rather focuses on lengthy dialogues of the characters or on inner monologues of the main protagonist.

Even though the concept of God occurs in both novels as well, *Go Set a Watchman* undoubtedly examines faith and beliefs of an individual in more

detail. Furthermore, the church represents a more important place to Jean Louise than to Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but she never visits Calpurnia's congregation.

Feature of oral storytelling tradition also occurs in both novels, as well as the characters' need to spread rumor. While in *Go Set a Watchman* it is mainly Aunt Alexandra who cannot restrain herself to do so, the other enthusiastic neighbors beat her to it in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, especially Miss Stephanie Crawford.

Lastly, both novels were defined as a Bildungsroman. The main protagonists undergo a journey of coming-of-age and grow up a lot, physically but also mentally. They start as innocent, partially blinded and untouched by heavy events or issues concerning society. The stories also switch between the present and the past, in order to remember childhood memories. This narrative is used more clearly in *Go Set a Watchman*, for adult and far older Jean Louise has experienced more events to recall. Both of them experienced several traumatic incidents that harmed them deeply and although they suffered, it subsequently changed their perception of the world around them, in both cases for the better.

In conclusion, the two novels carry the same features of southern writing to the significant extent, which is not surprising at all, given that both were written by the same author and as it was already mentioned some content, for example the setting, certain themes and characters, was later used in *To Kill a Mockingbird* after the first draft of *Go Set a Watchman* was rejected and rewritten.

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