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Bakalářská práce

Témata a motivy americké jižanské literatury

Motifs and Themes of the Literature of the
American South

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Anotace

Bakalářská práce se zabývá kontextem amerických jižanských literatur a soustředí se zejména na spisovatelku Harper Lee a její román *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Cílem práce je vytyčit základní témata a motivy díla a zároveň najít aspekty příznačné pro období a literární tradici autorky. Nedříve práce představí další jižanské autory druhé poloviny 20. století (William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers) a nabídne literárněvědné analýzy povídek těchto autorů. Jádro práce se zaměří na samotný román *To Kill a Mockingbird*. S pomocí rozborů povídek zmíněných autorů práce vytyčí společná témata, jako je například téma morálky a rasové a sociální nerovnosti a diskriminace v kontextu společenských vztahů maloměsta amerického Jihu.

Abstract

The bachelor thesis deals with the literature of American South, specifically with the writer Harper Lee and her novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The aim of the text is to outline the major themes and motifs and find features characteristic of the period and literary tradition. Firstly, the thesis presents Southern gothic authors, such as William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers, who worked in the second half of the 20th century and provides the literary analysis of their short stories. The core of the work focuses only on Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The analysis works with the outcomes of preceding chapters in order to define themes, such as morality, racial and social inequality and discrimination in the context of social relationships in a small town in the American South.

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INTRODUCTION

This bachelor thesis focuses on literary work of American Southern writer Harper Lee, specifically on her novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The novel was published in 1960 and became both an instant bestseller and critical success. The unforgettable novel won several awards, such as The Pulitzer Prize for fiction and was later adapted into an Academy Award-winning film. Pointing out burning issues of US South and concerning on powerful and universal themes, the novel is regarded as a masterpiece of American classic literature.

The aim of this thesis is to define the major themes and motifs of the novel. The literary analyses of short stories by other Southern authors of the period (William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers) will help to specify the features characteristic of the literature of the American South in the second half of the 20th century. In the first chapter, the thesis introduces American Southern literature and its key features that often occur in the work of Southern authors. In the second and third chapter, the text focuses on the genre of gothic, specifically on the tradition of Southern gothic. These theoretical chapters will provide crucial facts and help with further literary analyses.

Following chapters deal with significant Southern authors, such as William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers. It also focuses on their brief biography and their style of writing within the gothic tradition. The major themes and motifs are illustrated in the analyses of their short stories (*A Rose for Emily*, *Dry September*, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*). Chapter six concentrates on Harper Lee, her personal and her work life. The author protected her private life and the sources for her debut *To Kill a Mockingbird*, therefore there is only little known about her.

Finally, the thesis outlines the plot of the novel and analyses characteristic features of the tradition of Southern literature. The chapter is divided into several sections, each analysing the novel. Themes as racial and social injustice, the importance of morality, or Southern small-town life are examined. The outcomes of the chapters above are incorporated and compared with the main text under discussion.

1 AMERICAN SOUTHERN LITERATURE

The term 'Southern Literature' refers to works written both about and in the South of the USA. As Ulmanová and Roraback say: "...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 works the so-called Southern temper."¹

For many years, American South was defined as a wasteland, where poverty characterized much of a region. According to literary critic H. L. Mencken, the American South was a cultural desert in the 1910s.² However, the South experienced a significant change and the crisis point developed into the literary renaissance. The Southern Renaissance was represented by colossal writers, such as William Faulkner (1897-1962), Thomas Wolfe (1900-1938), Allen Tate (1899-1979), Katherine Anne Porter (1890-1980) and others.³ The second wave of the Southern Renaissance, which has been recognized as the generation "in search of love", arose in 1940s and 1950s.

In the early 1920s, a group of teachers and students, including Allen Tate, created a new literary tradition that was purposely Southern. In 1930, their manifesto *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, by Twelve Southerners appeared and reflected their political and philosophical views. Their reaction to the Great Depression period contains for instance a criticism of the false sophistication, commercialism or the absence of nature and people. The program of Twelve Southerners did not directly resonate with the fiction; however, it influenced the intellectual atmosphere of its time.⁴

¹ PROCHÁZKA, M., J. QUINN, H. ULMANOVÁ a E. S. RORABACK. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2002. ISBN 80-246-0358-6., p. 225

² PROCHÁZKA, M., J. QUINN, H. ULMANOVÁ a E. S. RORABACK. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2002. ISBN 80-246-0358-6., p. 225

³ PROCHÁZKA, M., J. QUINN, H. ULMANOVÁ a E. S. RORABACK. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2002. ISBN 80-246-0358-6., p. 225

⁴ PROCHÁZKA, M., J. QUINN, H. ULMANOVÁ a E. S. RORABACK. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2002. ISBN 80-246-0358-6., p. 227

1.1 KEY FEATURES OF SOUTHERN LITERATURE

Throughout the history, the U.S. South has been seen different and separated from the rest of the country. The style of writing provides numerous aspects which demonstrate its own cultural identity. The most crucial feature seems to be the historical consciousness which is undoubtedly connected to an awareness of place. According to Jennifer Rae Greeson, development of Southern literature during the 19th century affected the perception of the region as both foreign and interior.⁵ There is no doubt that the most influential factor was that people of South had fought in their Civil War and had been crushingly defeated. This is the moment when Southern people were not classified as typical Americans anymore and became anomalous. Their experience created more pessimistic and, in a way, European view of history.

Hand in hand with history is a place. That place has been the South, especially the small town and the countryside. While focusing on US South, writers tend to stress individuals and their tight relationships as a community.⁶ Furthermore, Southern authors celebrate characters, who would be the different from protagonists in the classical American tradition. Therefore, those “...*who do not leave the community but integrate themselves into it, while still maintaining their individuality and dignity...*”⁷ are usually heroes in Southern literature. In addition, characters often face to the fact that they cannot escape their origins.

Since the black community is an integral part of Southern life, one of the key features is the tense relationship between blacks and whites.⁸ Even though slavery was abolished a long time ago, it remains a burning issue. The fact, that some people used to own other human beings, persists as historical guilt and an abstract historical curse. Therefore, characters are closely tied to history and have to deal with its consequences. What was, perhaps, the key

⁵ HINRICHSEN, L., M. PITTS, M., Nineteenth-Century Southern Literature. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* [online]. last revision 2017, [cit.2019-11-12] from <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-298>

⁶ BRINKMEYER, R. H., *Remapping Southern Literature: Contemporary Southern Writers and the West*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000.

⁷ BRINKMEYER, R. H., *Remapping Southern Literature: Contemporary Southern Writers and the West*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000., p. 4

⁸ BUCKNER A., J., Southern Literature and the Civil Rights Era. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* [online]. last revision 2018 [cit.2019-11-12] from <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-650>

reason for the Civil War became one of the essential factors for many writers. Great example is the work of William Faulkner.

Black characters are still portrayed as servants or slaves and they have to face racism, which reminds to reader that the issue of racial injustice is still present and cannot be ignored. The element of black characters brings along a feature of black speech. Writers usually indicate this attribute in order to support the characters stereotypes and reader's sense of place. However, the existence of numerous dialects and different pronunciation is not as evident as in spoken language.

Another important element of Southern style of writing is an oral storytelling tradition. Nevertheless, the story is usually told for its own pleasure and the storyline matters the most. There is a large absence of social context, therefore there is no didactic element or social message. Including legends and fairy-tales, tradition of storytelling represents a significant part in the structure of many literary works. What is more, the retelling the events extends the reader's sense of character's inner life.

Furthermore, the list of the most distinctive features contains views of family, religion or community. Even though Southerners are deeply religious and respect the Bible, the concept of God is slightly modified. The family does not function well, usually there are unconventional, incomplete or disintegrated relationships and the traditional responsibility to family is rare. On the contrary, authors indicate that characters rather feel responsibility to their communities. Procházka says: *"In a typical Southern community, everybody knows everybody, and nobody is excluded."*⁹ However, responsibility to the region is not that clear. Even though literary heroes still respect their region, they no longer know how to protect it.

⁹ PROCHÁZKA, M., J. QUINN, H. ULMANOVÁ a E. S. RORABACK. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2002. ISBN 80-246-0358-6., p. 236

2 THE GENRE OF GOTHIC

While the classic gothic novel was established in Britain in 1764-1820 or thereabouts, in the United States, the genre of Gothic finds its foundation in the early 19th century.¹⁰ Traditionally, the gothic novel includes features of magic, mystery and supernatural circumstances and the gothic sense is often supported by horrific settings and strange atmosphere. Allan Lloyd Smith listed four features in order to define the genre and point out differences from the European version: “*the frontier, the Puritan legacy, race and political utopianism.*”¹¹

Many of America’s greatest writers have worked within the tradition of Gothic and to the present, some of the best literary works have been Gothic. One of the U.S. authors that must be mentioned when speaking about Gothic is Edgar Allan Poe. It was Poe who, in a very literal sense, gave a face to American Gothic and influenced many authors. Even present-day Gothic master Joyce Carol Oates confirms Poe’s great influence by defining it as: “*incalculable*” and asks a rhetorical question: “*Who has not been influenced by Poe?*”¹² His accomplishment is enormous in many areas: in detective fiction, in the theory of short fiction, and in creating an uncanny dreamscape, which is sometimes called the *Poescape* or *Poeland*.¹³ His unreliable or mad narrators, haunted houses and souls returning from the dead are instantly recognizable.

The American Gothic, which is basically the imaginative expression of the fears and desires of Americans, helps us to understand the American literature and, of course, the American mind-set. Nevertheless, the Gothic is no longer strictly connected to the certain characteristics, such as ruined castles usually situated in foreign lands. As the genre has become more inclusive during the last few decades, many taboo topics were brought to the

¹⁰ FLORA, J., L. HARDWICK MACKETHAN, eds. *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movement, and Motifs*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002

¹¹ BJERRE, T., Southern Gothic Literature. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* [online]. last revision 2017, [cit.2019-11-14] from <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-304>

¹² CROW, CH. L. *History of the Gothic: American Gothic*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-7083-2044-0., p. 39

¹³ CROW, CH. L. *History of the Gothic: American Gothic*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-7083-2044-0., p. 38

spotlight and pointed out the burning issues of American society. It usually presents disturbing and frightening techniques, and sceptical view of human nature and history.¹⁴

3 THE DEFINITION OF SOUTHERN GOTHIC

There is no place in the United States where is the Gothic more present than in the South. According to Charles L. Crow, the American South became the principal region of American Gothic in literature.¹⁵ A genre of Southern Gothic grew out of an American gothic tradition which finds its foundation in the early 19th century.¹⁶ Even though the Southern Gothic evolved from the American, which again evolved from the English Gothic, the style of writing in the South remains unique. It is defined by the presence of irrational and horrific thoughts, desires and impulses; strong sense of alienation and explorations of abnormal psychological states. The all-penetrating feature which likewise shapes the Southern Gothic, is a presence of the grotesque.

Furthermore, it brings to light the historical realities of US South that has been unsaid in the official version of southern history, such as aspects of racism, slavery and its legacy. However, it is important to mention that race is not the only concern of Southern Gothic. For instance, it highlights the issue of gender, patriarchy, religion, addiction or physical deformities.¹⁷ Many gothic authors make use of myths of southern society in their tales, for example they work with theme of plantation aristocracy and, on the contrary, lower social class living in isolation in closed communities, who faces to educational ignorance, racial intolerance, perverted sexuality, etc. According to Flora, the characters from lower class often promote their limitations as their best characteristics.¹⁸

¹⁴ CROW, CH. L. *History of the Gothic: American Gothic*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-7083-2044-0., p. 2

¹⁵ BJERRE, T., Southern Gothic Literature. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* [online]. last revision 2017, [cit.2019-11-14] from <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-304>

¹⁶ BJERRE, T., Southern Gothic Literature. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* [online]. last revision 2017, [cit.2019-11-14] from <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-304>

¹⁷ WEINSTOCK, J. A. *The Cambridge Companion to American Gothic*. Cambridge University Press, 2017. ISBN 9781316337998.

¹⁸ FLORA, J., L. HARDWICK MACKETHAN, eds. *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movement, and Motifs*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002

According to Charles L. Crow, “*the South’s Gothic remains, however, a reliable, if distorted, mirror of the cultural anxieties that shape our national conversation.*”¹⁹ Even though Southern Gothic did not have a great novelist at its literary beginnings, the historical and cultural conditions produced Gothic literature of the next century. While Edgar Allan Poe’s (1809-1849) poems and short stories did not take place in a southern setting, he managed to display all the characteristic features of Southern Gothic and he is a foundational figure in Southern Gothic. Nevertheless, the major author of Southern Gothic is arguably William Faulkner (1897-1962). A great deal of Faulkner’s work belongs in the Southern Gothic category, e.g. *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *A Rose for Emily* (1930), or his most sensational and scandalous novel *Sanctuary* (1931) that deals with an issue of rape.²⁰

3.1 THE SENSE OF GROTESQUE

Certainly, the all-penetrating feature of Southern literature and, of course, Southern Gothic, is a sense of grotesque. However, the term is hard to pin down, especially outside of a specific context. Nevertheless, literary grotesque is applied to anything that deviates from a standard, challenges what is considered normal and stable and seems abnormal, ugly, bizarre or unnatural.²¹ It is displayed in many forms, yet characters with physical deformities, so-called freaks, are the most evident. Deformed figures appearing with cross-eyes, wooden legs or crippled limbs invoke everything from horror to sadness or humour.²²

In defining the grotesque, the absurd and the conflict between two opposite elements are crucial. Being at one and the same time horrific and hilarious often leads to the point of comic absurdity that feels totally inappropriate. According to C. Hugh Holman, the grotesque mode is used as the most typical method of the writers of humour in the South. Holman points out that they incorporated it into their fictions in order to demonstrate the realistic attributes

¹⁹ WEINSTOCK, J. A. *The Cambridge Companion to American Gothic*. Cambridge University Press, 2017. ISBN 9781316337998., p. 154

²⁰ BJERRE, T., Southern Gothic Literature. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* [online]. last revision 2017, [cit.2019-11-14] from <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-304>

²¹ FLORA, J., L. HARDWICK MACKETHAN, eds. *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movement, and Motifs*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002

²² BJERRE, T., Southern Gothic Literature. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* [online]. last revision 2017, [cit.2019-11-14] from <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-304>

of characters that might overwhelm readers.²³ In addition, many Southern authors of the 20th century included features of literary grotesque, however the most outstanding novelist utilizing the grotesque humour is Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964).²⁴

4 WILLIAM FAULKNER

Regardless of E. A. Poe, who is known as a foundational figure of Southern Gothic, William Cuthbert Faulkner is widely considered the most important and influential writer of Southern Gothic. He was born in Mississippi, near Oxford, where his parents moved when he was five. There is no doubt that William Faulkner had been deeply influenced by his family. His father, a reclusive man who loved to hunt and drink, probably inspired him to create the characters of weak or absent fathers in his works. On the contrary, his ambitious and sensitive mother succeeded to be a more profound influence. Furthermore, his great-grandfather had many interests and became a local legend. As an illustration, he was a colonel in the Civil War, railroad builder, lawyer, politician or a writer. The connection to Faulkner's great-grandfather can be found in his novel *Sartoris* (1929) and *The Unvanquished* (1938).²⁵

The fact that he spent most of his life in Oxford is reflected in most of his stories which are set in the make-believe Mississippi county of Yoknapatawpha. He invented not only the entire mythical region but also its history from the time of the earliest white settlement to the 1950s. The novelist managed to portray home to Civil War defeat and its events in a broad historical perspective, its geography, economy as well as social and moral issues. The characters of Chickasaw and poor white and black families mixed with the landscape defined by swamps, deep woods and ruined plantations work as deeply Gothic.²⁶

During the period of modernism, the innovation of narrative techniques was joined to experiments with chronology. William Faulkner provides great instances of this innovation as he deals with time in a special way. For example, in his Gothic novel *Sanctuary* (1931), he

²³ FLORA, J., L. HARDWICK MACKETHAN, eds. *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movement, and Motifs*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002

²⁴ PROCHÁZKA, M., J. QUINN, H. ULMANOVÁ a E. S. RORABACK. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2002. ISBN 80-246-0358-6., p. 236

²⁵ BAYM, N., R. S. LEVINE. *The Norton anthology of American literature*. 8th ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, c2012. ISBN 978-0-393-93479-3., p. 695

²⁶ CROW, CH. L. *History of the Gothic: American Gothic*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-7083-2044-0.

destroys linear development of a story and lets his heroes to experience their own sense of time. Furthermore, he breaks with traditional chronological structure as his characters are past-oriented.²⁷ His novels combine multiple points of view with fragmented chronology in order to indicate that past, present and future events are mixed into one frame. Therefore, the reader is asked to recreate complicated family histories that often illustrate the Southern history and difficult relationship of black and white Southerners. The gothic sense of alienation and uncertainty is stressed by Faulkner's complex, labyrinthine language, the technique of interior monologue and the stream of consciousness.²⁸

4.1 A ROSE FOR EMILY

Much of Faulkner's novels and short stories belongs in the Southern Gothic category. *A Rose for Emily* (1930), the often-anthologized short story, is perhaps the clearest example of Faulkner's style of writing. The story, narrated from a plural point of view by the townspeople, opens with the death of Miss Emily Grierson, the last of her line. The reader follows Emily's long and lonely passage into old age and learns about details of her life. Faulkner describes Emily's complicated relationship with her father, her refusal to accept father's death, her courtship by the northern carpetbagger Homer Barron and his disappearance and finally, her difficulties with the town elders.

A Rose for Emily shows Faulkner's ability to fuse Southern Gothic themes and modernist narrative techniques. The story seems to have a casual and conversational narrative however it releases key pieces of information that come together at the conclusion. At the end of the story, after Emily's funeral, the townspeople break open the door to an upstairs bedroom of the Grierson house and discover a man's corpse lying on the bed. The horror image is followed by another shock – next to the corpse is a pillow with “*a long strand of iron-gray hair.*”²⁹ The very last scene, which is probably the most Gothic scene in the story, is a manifestation of Emily's extreme attempt to stop the time.

²⁷ PROCHÁZKA, M., J. QUINN, H. ULMANOVÁ a E. S. RORABACK. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2002. ISBN 80-246-0358-6., p. 228

²⁸ CROW, CH. L. *History of the Gothic: American Gothic*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-7083-2044-0., p. 124-125

²⁹ FAULKNER, W. *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*. New York: Random House, 1996. ISBN 0-679-76403-8., p. 130

Her stubborn refusal to accept change, time or loss is present throughout the entire short-story and shows that, just like many Southerners, Miss Emily Grierson clings to memories of the past. Emily's denial is also linked to her social class. She is unable to admit the fact that her social class had lost wealth and land with the defeat of the Confederacy. One could say that Emily is a monument to the past. Just like her house, she stays the same over the decades even though the world around her is embracing a modern future.³⁰

4.2 DRY SEPTEMBER

Considering its history of slavery, racial injustice, segregation and lynching, the US South is defined by violence and aggression, both on personal and community level. The painful experience persists as a historical guilt and frustration which can be found in the Southern literature. In 1931, William Faulkner published the short story called *Dry September*, which deals with one of the most painful realities of US – racial violence.³¹ Despite the fact that the violent scenes are mostly rumoured, implied or described with minimalist precision, the short story is full of it. The story is set in Mississippi, the region where racism, segregation and poverty were hard to uproot. The violence is not only linked to the race, but also to class and gender. Faulkner illustrates how the white community deals with an accusation that a black man raped a white woman and points out the issues of white supremacy.

The female character, Miss Minnie, corresponds to Miss Emily of *A Rose of Emily*. Both women are shown in retrospective stories and the author emphasizes their family background, social life, sexual experience and position in the town. The third-person narrator shifts between the stories of Minnie's life and the conversation between the men in the barbershop where the rumour is discussed. By using this technique, the events seem more urgent and the tension is built. When the identity of the black man is revealed, we learn that the barber named Hawkshaw knows the man and claims that he is a good person. However, when a former war hero, McLendon, arrives to the barbershop, the group turns into a lynching mob. McLendon is determined to take action against the black man named Will and convinces others that it does not really matter if the crime happened or not: "*Happen? What the hell*

³⁰ CROW, CH. L. *History of the Gothic: American Gothic*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-7083-2044-0., p. 124-125

³¹ SKEI, H. H. *Reading Faulkner's Best Short Stories*. 1st ed. University of South Carolina Press, 1999. ISBN 978-1570032868., p. 83

*difference does it make? Are you going to let the black sons get away with it until one really does it?"*³²

The development of the story is so deliberate that it seems almost natural and inevitable. Furthermore, the allusions, metaphors and Gothic symbolism that Faulkner used, leave no doubt about Will's unfortunate fate. Clear example of Faulkner's foreshadowing can be found in the first lines of the short story: "*the bloody September twilight, aftermath of sixty-two rainless days,*"³³ and is followed by the rumour that a black man raped a white woman. This is only one of many examples of a symbolic connection between the weather and the events in the story. The final picture of the short story gives additional view on the character of McLendon, who comes home after he and the group of men murder Will and he brutally beats his wife. Faulkner criticizes the male aggression, brutality and stupidity on one hand and the passivity and fear of women on the other hand.³⁴

³² FAULKNER, W. *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*. New York: Random House, 1996. ISBN 0-679-76403-8., p. 171-172

³³ FAULKNER, W. *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*. New York: Random House, 1996. ISBN 0-679-76403-8., p. 169

³⁴ SKEI, H. H. *Reading Faulkner's Best Short Stories*. 1st ed. University of South Carolina Press, 1999. ISBN 978-1570032868., p. 95

5 THE GENERATION “IN SEARCH OF LOVE”

A great deal of American fiction of the post-war period dealt with outcasts in poor areas. In the 1940s and 1950s, the South saw a marked revival of Gothic and increase in women’s writing. Many writers followed the tradition established by William Faulkner and focused on odd characters. However, the generation called “in search of love” was not as concerned about history as Faulkner and rather focused on intimate themes. Some of the most remarkable works was written by women, such as Flannery O’Connor (1925-1964), Carson McCullers (1917-1967) and Eudora Welty (1909-2001) even though the last mentioned rejected being labelled as a Gothic writer.³⁵

The writers of the generation “in search of love” combined a formal experimentalism with a dark vision of evil. Stories are mostly set in the rural world, among children, neglected women or the disabled or physically deformed.³⁶ The families illustrated in the works do not function very well, often they are incomplete or highly unconventional. This fiction includes a strong sense of grotesque and deals with the exploration of human loneliness, failed love and broken communication.

5.1 FLANNERY O’CONNOR

Marry Flannery O’Connor, who was born in 1925 in Savannah, Georgia, is perhaps the best-known author using Southern grotesque. Her own experience of being an outsider in a way, strongly influenced her style of writing. Not only was she physically handicapped, but also a Roman Catholic in the mostly Protestant South.³⁷ Her themes and style of writing have had an impact on many writers of her own time and later. Of course, the most significant number of writers who have followed her techniques are those from American South. She undoubtedly influenced other authors in three areas: her use of grotesque connected with terror and violence, her religious thoughts often introduced through allegory and last but not

³⁵ BJERRE, T., Southern Gothic Literature. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* [online]. last revision 2017, [cit. 2019-12-03] from <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-304>

³⁶ BRADBURY, M. *The modern American novel*. New ed. New York: Penguin Books, 1994. ISBN 0-14-017044-8.

³⁷ PROCHÁZKA, M., J. QUINN, H. ULMANOVÁ a E. S. RORABACK. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2002. ISBN 80-246-0358-6., p. 235

least, her sense of humour, irony and satire portrayed through the dialogue of ordinary “folks”.³⁸

A plethora of O’Connor’s stories are filled with sublime Gothic motifs and characters, summarized by Chad Rohman as: “...monstrous misfits, devils and demonic figures, perpetrators and victims, doubles and doppelgängers, freaks and the deformed, madness and mad acts, ghosts and kindly spirits, and physical and spiritual isolation.”³⁹ O’Connor writes of awful actions and events fearlessly and intentionally. To shock the reader, she writes, for example, of mutilation, premature burial, drowning, death by goring, rape, suicide or murder. Examples of both Gothic and grotesque elements are easily found in her short story *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1955), which brings along a mixture of the humorous and the horrible. A story takes a shocking, violent ending, when the characters on a family road trip come upon “The Misfit”.

Usually, O’Connor’s characters have in common their misunderstanding in their selves, and their worlds. She wants her characters to become aware of their spiritual disease, their mistaken trust in their security in a material world and their need for grace.⁴⁰ These demands are closely connected with religion, which stands in the centre of her works, therefore all of her works offer the possibility of some religious explanation. Nevertheless, her theological point of view is compensated by her sense of humour and irony. In terms of South’s race problems, Flannery O’Connor dealt with this issue during civil-rights period, in stories *The Artificial Nigger* (1955), *Everything That Rises Must Converge* (1965) and *The Judgement Day* (1965). In these stories, she treated the black characters almost as symbols.⁴¹

³⁸ FLORA, J., L. HARDWICK MACKETHAN, eds. *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movement, and Motifs*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002

³⁹ BJERRE, T., Southern Gothic Literature. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* [online]. last revision 2017, [cit. 2019-12-13] from <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-304>

⁴⁰ FLORA, J., L. HARDWICK MACKETHAN, eds. *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movement, and Motifs*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002

⁴¹ PROCHÁZKA, M., J. QUINN, H. ULMANOVÁ a E. S. RORABACK. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2002. ISBN 80-246-0358-6., p. 233

5.1.1 A Good Man Is Hard to Find

As most of O'Connor's work, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* is set in the US South. In the beginning of the short story, the self-centred Grandmother insists of going to the East Tennessee instead of Florida and to persuade the family, she mentions an article about an escaped convict heading toward Florida. Ironically, she foreshadows the end of the story at the very beginning. In the first lines of the short story, the reader learns that disrespect characterizes family's relationships with one another. Nobody pays attention to the Grandmother – her son named Bailey, and his wife, an innocent-looking woman, ignore her, and her grandchildren, John Wesley and June Star, mock her.

To refer to the title of the short story, the definition of "good" is elusive. The Grandmother uses the label "good" several times in the story. However, her definition of "good" does not imply "moral" or "kind". She believes that she is the right person to judge others and that people are "good", when they keep to the same moral code as she does. Flannery O'Connor said: "*The grandmother didn't want to go to Florida. She wanted to visit some of her connections in east Tennessee and she was seizing at every chance to change Bailey's mind.*"⁴² Even though, the Grandmother is probably considered a good person by the community, she proves that she is also mean. By forcing her family to obey her and change the direction, she caused them to meet the escaped convict, the Misfit, and sealed their death. Finally, the label "good" loses its meaning completely, when her assumption of the Misfit being "good" proves false. After the Misfit murders the self-centred Grandmother, he observes that: "*She would of been a good woman... if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life.*"⁴³

According to O'Connor, the irony lies in the fact that all people are in love with themselves. In terms of narcissism, there is no difference between the Grandmother and the Misfit.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the Grandmother is so self-centred that she manipulates her son Bailey to obey all her whims. This theme is evident in many O'Connor's stories. She often presents monstrous families, in which parents usually impose their strength on their children and give

⁴² MALIN, I., H. T. MOORE. *New American Gothic*. 1st ed. Southern Illinois University Press, 1962. ISBN 978-0809300716., p. 36

⁴³ O'CONNOR, Flannery. *Collected works*. New York, N.Y.: Library of America, 1988. The Library of America. ISBN 0-940450-37-2., p. 153

⁴⁴ MALIN, I., H. T. MOORE. *New American Gothic*. 1st ed. Southern Illinois University Press, 1962. ISBN 978-0809300716., p. 36

them false love.⁴⁵ As in any other story of Flannery O'Connor, there is a strong connection to her Christian beliefs. At the end of the short story, the Grandmother has a strange insight, which the author designed to be a moment of grace. Before she is murdered by the Misfit, she says: "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my children!"⁴⁶ She experiences a moment of grace, when she realizes that they are both human beings. Even though the ending is terrifying, it suggests that there is the possibility of redemption.⁴⁷

5.2 CARSON McCULLERS

Carson McCullers, who represents Southern Gothic as well, was born in 1917 as Lula Carson Smith.⁴⁸ Even though she decided not to stay in the South and lived at different places in the USA, just like her friend Tennessee Williams or Truman Capote, her style of writing remained distinctly Southern in more than one aspect. Her stories and novels are steeped in grotesque and are set in the American South, typically in small towns. The writer is known for creating a strange fictional world filled with lonely and physically deformed characters, who feel unloved and disappointed.

In her unfinished autobiography *Illumination and Night Glare* (2000), she confessed that her own experience of melancholy and painful isolation had been an inspiration to her tales. "Everything that happens in my fiction has happened to me," she said.⁴⁹ The lives of her characters are full of "illumination", "night glare", depression and frustration, just like her life was.⁵⁰ The group of people she wrote about, usually members of marginal groups, may seem odd or even freakish, possibly, because of their aberrant behaviour, anomalous desires and

⁴⁵ MALIN, I., H. T. MOORE. *New American Gothic*. 1st ed. Southern Illinois University Press, 1962. ISBN 978-0809300716., p. 65

⁴⁶ O'CONNOR, Flannery. *Collected works*. New York, N.Y.: Library of America, 1988. The Library of America. ISBN 0-940450-37-2., p. 152

⁴⁷ CROW, CH. L. *History of the Gothic: American Gothic*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-7083-2044-0., p. 131

⁴⁸BJERRE, T., Southern Gothic Literature. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* [online]. last revision 2017, [cit. 2019-12-17] from <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-304>

⁴⁹ GRAY, Richard J. *A history of American literature*. 2nd ed. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. ISBN 978-1-4051-9228-6., p. 593

⁵⁰ GRAY, Richard J. *A history of American literature*. 2nd ed. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. ISBN 978-1-4051-9228-6., p. 593

grotesque appearance. What is more, McCullers's interest in adolescents, who learn the meaning of loneliness, also supports the sense of strangeness.⁵¹

Frequently, Southern grotesque characters are labelled as "misfits" and McCullers's protagonists became one of the most obvious examples. They are usually described as people who do not fit in society, do not have any fixed place within community, and usually fail to find one. However, the fact that Carson McCullers presented a group of lonely individuals trying to find human understanding, friendship and social justice, brought to the surface what McCullers sometimes called our "lonesomeness", a kind of weirdness that all people share.⁵² Through the grotesque characters, she reminds us that every each of us lives and dies alone, unaccompanied by anyone else.

Carson McCullers published four novels in her short life. Perhaps, the most successful piece of work is McCullers's debut, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, published in 1940. In her other novels, she kept writing about the horrors of life with coolness and without emotion, which stresses the tragedy of lonely lives. McCullers's second novel *The Member of the Wedding*, which was also dramatized, was published in 1946 and tells a story of 12-years old girl experiencing the pains of growing up. Furthermore, the story of extremely strange love-triangle relationships in her third novel, *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1951), meets the requirement of Southern Gothic literature in terms of a strong tradition of storytelling, as the oral folklore plays an important role in the structure. Finally, her last novel *Clock without Hands* (1961) includes another important feature of Southern Gothic, since the author openly dealt with the issue of racism.⁵³

⁵¹ PECK, A. M., E. PECK. *Americká literatura*. Dubicko: INFOA, 2002. ISBN 80-7240-299-4.

⁵² GRAY, Richard J. *A history of American literature*. 2nd ed. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. ISBN 978-1-4051-9228-6., p. 593

⁵³ PROCHÁZKA, M., J. QUINN, H. ULMANOVÁ a E. S. RORABACK. *Lectures on American Literature*. Praha: Karolinum, 2002. ISBN 80-246-0358-6., p. 231

5.2.1 The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter is probably the most successful novel that Carson McCullers published. The novel tells a story of four people, joined by their mutual friendship with deaf-mute engraver John Singer. The youngest character, adolescent tomboy named Mick Kelley, lives as outsider in the small, isolated Georgia town. She has a great passion for music and dreams of better life. Arguably, her character is autobiographical to Carson McCullers herself. In addition to Mick, there are Biff Brannon, who is the owner of the New York Café, Jake Blount, a violent alcoholic who wholeheartedly believes in Marxism, and Dr Benedict Copeland, an African American physician.

All the characters are lonely and live in isolation, even though they are surrounded by others all the time. According to Oliver Evans, they suffer from “spiritual isolation” and narcissism. He believes that: “*Every individual is imprisoned in the cell of his own being, and any practical attempt at communication, such as speech, is doomed to failure.*”⁵⁴ A clear example is the character of John Singer, who is isolated from others because of being deaf mute, or Mick who cannot communicate with her family and feels herself only when being isolated. McCullers uses speech as a binding symbol. For example, there is an obvious irony of John Singer’s last name. Furthermore, Doctor Copeland often moans, Jake Blount screams, and Mick dreams of some place where she could go to hum out loud.

Carson McCullers accepts narcissism as a fundamental part of “the human condition”, therefore all the major characters, apart from John, are narcissistic.⁵⁵ However, they do not realize it. Ironically, they reflect one another, but they cannot see the similarities they have. All of them project their narcissism onto Singer, they see him as they wish him to be. In fact, he becomes a pseudo-religious figure for them, and each character creates a different kind of god in him. This theme points out McCullers’s belief that all people need to create some guiding principle or god. At the same time, Singer cannot prove their view false and he as a person becomes forgotten.

⁵⁴ MALIN, I., H. T. MOORE. *New American Gothic*. 1st ed. Southern Illinois University Press, 1962. ISBN 978-0809300716., p. 19

⁵⁵ MALIN, I., H. T. MOORE. *New American Gothic*. 1st ed. Southern Illinois University Press, 1962. ISBN 978-0809300716., p. 20

As John is loved by them and he loves Antonapoulos, his deaf-mute friend who was taken away to an insane asylum, he represents one of the main themes – the human struggle to be loved and express oneself. Nevertheless, John is not a true lover to the four people who desperately need him. Finally, he destroys their love by committing a suicide.⁵⁶ The author also deals with the theme of family and family tensions. Almost every family in the story is broken. For example, Mick's story indicates that her parents neglect her problems and do not understand her. Mick is aware of the gap between them and finds a surrogate-parent in John Singer.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ MALIN, I., H. T. MOORE. *New American Gothic*. 1st ed. Southern Illinois University Press, 1962. ISBN 978-0809300716., p. 23

⁵⁷ MALIN, I., H. T. MOORE. *New American Gothic*. 1st ed. Southern Illinois University Press, 1962. ISBN 978-0809300716., p. 54

6 LIFE AND WORK OF HARPER LEE

It is an undeniable fact that Nelle Harper Lee wrote one of the most widely read and best-selling novels in American literature. She was born on April 28, 1926 to Amasa Coleman Lee, a lawyer, and his wife Frances Finch Cunningham Lee. She grew up as the youngest of four children in Monroeville, a rural southern Alabama town, where she also graduated from high school. As a child, she had been a close friend to a boy living next door, Truman Capote, who would also become a well-known novelist.⁵⁸ For a year, she attended Huntingdon College in Montgomery and later she transferred to the University of Alabama. Nelle Harper Lee, who had started using a penname 'Harper Lee' on her articles she wrote for the university newspaper, followed an example of her father and enrolled in the university's law school. Nevertheless, she discontinued her studies six months before she would have graduated and received her degree and she moved to New York City in order to accomplish her dream of a writing career.⁵⁹

While working in New York City, Lee wrote several essays and shorts stories but none of them was published. Being financially supported by her friends, she was able to work on her debut *To Kill a Mockingbird* which was finally published in 1960 and became an instant success. The novel won several awards, such as The Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1961 and Lee was offered to write a script for a movie adaptation. However, she declined and collaborated only as a consultant. The novel was adapted into a motion picture in 1962, starring Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch.⁶⁰ The movie only added to her fame and caused expectations for her next novel, but for more than half a century a second book failed to turn up. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was translated into some 40 languages and sold more than 30 million copies within the world.⁶¹

For many years, *To Kill a Mockingbird* remained the only book of Harper Lee and the chance of realising another one seemed very small. However, Lee's long-awaited novel called

⁵⁸ BLOOM, H. *Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird*. New ed. Infobase Publishing, 2010. ISBN 978-1604138115., p. 10

⁵⁹ SHIELDS, Ch. J. *Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee: From Scout to Go Set a Watchman*. 1st ed. Henry Holt and Co., 2016. ISBN 978-1250115836.

⁶⁰ SAGE, L., G. GREER and E. SHOWALTER. *The Cambridge guide to women's writing in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. ISBN 0-521-66813-1.

⁶¹ FINE L., A. FOCCA. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. *Encyclopædia Britannica* [online]. last revision 2020 [cit. 2019-12-12] from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird>

Go Set a Watchman, a sequel to her debut, was published in 2015 and became a bestseller in the USA the same year.⁶² The story, set in 1950s, reflects a grown-up Scout's point of view. Apart from the two novels, she published only a few essays during her lifetime, such as *When Children Discover America* (1965) or *Romance and High Adventure* (1985). Furthermore, she gave appreciable assistance to a friend from her childhood Truman Capote with his *In Cold Blood* (1964), which he dedicated to her a year later.⁶³

In one of her last interviews, with a Chicago radio show in 1964, she described her literary ambition and mentioned her fascination by "rich social pattern" in Southern small towns. She continued: "*I would simply like to put down all I know about this because I believe that there is something universal in this little world, something decent to be said for it, and something to lament in its passing. In other words, all I want to be is the Jane Austen of South Alabama.*"⁶⁴ Later, she returned to Monroeville and lived relatively normal life with her sister Alice. She was well-known for keeping an intense privacy and protecting her family life. Since she was not excited about the publicity and did not give interviews in more than 40 years, there is very little known about her personal life. Her desire for privacy is also illustrated by her quote: "*My needs are simple: paper, pen and privacy.*"⁶⁵

Harper Lee was awarded several honours and degrees not only for her contribution to literature, but also for her progressive understanding of racial and social justice. In June 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed Lee to the National Council of The Arts, in 2007, she received the Presidential Medal of freedom and in 2010, the National Medal of Arts. Sporadically, there were some events Harper Lee attended. In 2001, she started to visit an annual award ceremony at the University of Alabama in order to meet the winners of a contest for the best essay on *To Kill a Mockingbird*, held by a local high school. She also attended the Local Methodist Church and spent some time in Manhattan, where she had a small apartment.

⁶² DEAHL, R. 'Go Set A Watchman' Tops Print Book Sales in 2015. *Publisher Weekly* [online]. last revision 2016 [cit. 2019-12-13] from <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/69052-watchman-tops-print-sales-in-2015.html>

⁶³ SAGE, L., G. GREER and E. SHOWALTER. *The Cambridge guide to women's writing in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. ISBN 0-521-66813-1.

⁶⁴ GRIMMES, W. Harper Lee, Author of 'To Kill a Mockingbird,' Dies at 89. *The New York Times* [online]. last revision 2016 [cit. 2019-12-13] from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/20/arts/harper-lee-dies.html>

⁶⁵ BURLING, A. *Harper Lee: Pulitzer Prize-winning Author*. Abdo Publishing, 2015., p. 10

After a stroke she suffered in 2007, she lived quietly in Alabama. She died on February 19, 2016 at the age of 89.⁶⁶

7 TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

This part of the thesis focuses on the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* and its major themes and motifs. The aim of this chapter is to outline the plot of the novel and analyse its characteristic features. In addition, it is going to be compared with the work of selected American Southern authors, who worked mostly in the second half of the 20th century and whose works are discussed in the chapters above.

Enormously popular novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* is set in the early 1930s during the Great Depression in the fictional Southern town of Maycomb, Alabama. The main protagonist and narrator at the same time, is a six years old Jean Louise Finch, who ages to almost nine years old during the course of the story. Jean is a typical tomboy and is best known by her nickname Scout. Not only is she unconventional and rejects fixed gender roles, but she is also above average in intelligence. She lives with her older brother Jeremy, mostly called Jem, their widowed lawyer father Atticus, and a black cook Calpurnia. Later, another female element occurs in their house as Aunt Alexandra moves in to help Atticus.

When Tom Robinson, a black resident of the town of Maycomb, is accused of raping a young white woman, Mayella Ewell, Scout's father decides to defend him even though he knows that the chance of winning the case is very little. The reader sees the trial from Scout's, thus childish, point of view. The falsely accused and convicted man is later killed while trying to escape. Meanwhile, the siblings spend their summer with their friend Dill, who comes from Mississippi and they play out their own drama of prejudice and superstition. During the novel, Scout, Jem and Dill are fascinated by the local rumours about a reclusive man named Boo Radley. Never leaving his house, Boo is basically a source of childhood superstition. However, as they get closer to him and develop into more sympathetic individuals, Boo Radley becomes more real for them.

⁶⁶ GRIMMES, W. Harper Lee, Author of 'To Kill a Mockingbird,' Dies at 89. *The New York Times* [online]. last revision 2016 [cit. 2019-12-13] from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/20/arts/harper-lee-dies.html>

At the end of the story, Mayella's father, Bob Ewell wants to take revenge on the Finch children for being humiliated in the courtroom by their father. On a Halloween night, Bob Ewell attacks Scout and Jem, breaking Jem's arm. However, Boo Radley rescues Scout and Jem by killing Mr. Ewell. and becomes fully human to them. In a sense, the character of Bob Ewell reminds us some of the characters of Carson McCullers that have been described in chapter five. In her novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, she focuses on people who are isolated from others and do not belong to the outside world. At least, they realize their own love, they become more and more narcissistic and the isolation is complete.⁶⁷ Just like McCullers' characters, Mr. Ewell is, in a way, driven by his narcissism.

Harper Lee included some typical features of the Southern literature in the novel. For example, Southern writers tend to emphasize a strong historical consciousness connected to the place. At the beginning of the story, the reader learns a brief history of Scout's family which outlines the history of the South. There are also certain characters that are grotesque and represent the Old South and the glorification of the past. Even though it outlines some historical facts that are inseparable from the place of the story, Harper Lee managed to create a novel that is free of ideologies and the need to revise history.⁶⁸

There is a plethora of autobiographical features in the story, for that reason it is almost impossible to separate the novel from Harper Lee and her life. For instance, there is a parallel between the character of Atticus and Lee's father, Amasa Colman Lee, who was a dedicated lawyer as well. Furthermore, the character of Charles Baker Harris, who was called by a nickname "Dill", was inspired by Lee's childhood friend and Southern author Truman Capote. Many biographers agree that Lee gave a suitable description of Capote as a boy. According to Harold Bloom: "*Dill/Capote is a boy of almost psychotic imagination; a prophetic liar who is constantly inventing stories, many of them to explain his absent mother or father.*"⁶⁹ In addition, Lee's next-door neighbour in Monroeville, Truman Capote, remembers her as a

⁶⁷ MALIN, I., H. T. MOORE. *New American Gothic*. 1st ed. Southern Illinois University Press, 1962. ISBN 978-0809300716., p. 15

⁶⁸ BLOOM, H. *Harper Lee's to Kill a Mockingbird*. New ed. Infobase Publishing, 2010. ISBN 978-1604138115., p. 8

⁶⁹ BLOOM, H. *Harper Lee's to Kill a Mockingbird*. New ed. Infobase Publishing, 2010. ISBN 978-1604138115., p. 13

stubborn girl, who bullied boys and was always determined to find her own way, just like her the tomboy protagonist of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.⁷⁰

7.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To Kill a Mockingbird is structured around a false accusation that a black man, raped a white woman. In the novel's case, there are several parallels to the actual trial of the Scottsboro Boys. In 1931, a group of nine black youths was arrested in Jackson County, Alabama. The boys, ranging in age from 13 to 19, were accused by two white women (Ruby Bates and Victoria Price) of raping them on a train. The young boys were transported to Scottsboro, Alabama, where they were waiting for the trial. For that reason, the group of nine teenagers is often called the Scottsboro Boys. Only few days later, all-white and all-men jury immediately convicted the teenagers, and eight of them were sentenced to death. Eventually, the lives of the nine Scottsboro were saved, though they were not saved from the prison.⁷¹

The case of the Scottsboro Boys helped fuel the rise of the civil rights movement later in the 20th century, and significantly influenced nation's legal and cultural way of thinking. However, it is also important to mention that *To Kill a Mockingbird* was not written in Alabama in the 1930s. Harper Lee published her novel in the mid-20th century in New York, at a time of the civil right movements. For instance, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery only few years before the publication. Among other things, the instant success of the novel might be attributed to the timing of the publication.⁷²

⁷⁰ BLOOM, H. *Harper Lee's to Kill a Mockingbird*. New ed. Infobase Publishing, 2010. ISBN 978-1604138115., p. 13

⁷¹ HISTORY.COM EDITORS. Scottsboro Boys. *History.com* [online]. last revision 2020 [cit. 2020-11-21] from <https://www.history.com/topics/great-depression/scottsboro-boys>

⁷² BLOOM, H. *Harper Lee's to Kill a Mockingbird*. New ed. Infobase Publishing, 2010. ISBN 978-1604138115., p. 15

7.2 PREJUDICE AND RACISM

The fictional County of Maycomb is, as many Southern places, defined by its history of racism and racial violence. Dealing with the theme of prejudice and racial injustice is one of the key features of the Southern literature.

Racism and racial injustice are undeniably one of the most evident themes of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It is necessary to mention, that the storyline of *To Kill a Mockingbird* contains plenty of similarities with the short story *Dry September* that has been analysed in chapter four. Even though Harper Lee did not publish as radical and claustrophobic piece of work as William Faulkner did, there are some crucial parallels that must be discussed. The most obvious one is the theme of racism and a common temporal background, as both texts are situated in the Southern states during the period of economic Depression. Furthermore, both Lee and Faulkner refer to the peak of lynching in the South. They structured their stories around the lynching scene caused by a false accusation of a rape, the victim being a white woman, and the alleged criminal, a black man. Both stories are told from a limited perspective and focuses mainly on the reaction of white community. Only in Lee's novel, there is a stress on flaws of the then jurisdiction.

In the story of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, protagonist's father, Atticus Finch, is one of the few characters who is not willing to accept the town's racial prejudice. He agrees to defend Tom Robinson, a black man who was accused of raping Mayella Ewell. Even though Atticus has always been respected by everyone in Maycomb, he and his family become an object of scorn and threats after his decision. In fact, their resistance to racial prejudice has positioned them against the town's people at large. Anyone who stands up for a black resident is accused of being a "nigger-lover"⁷³ which, in a simplified way, means committing a treason, likewise in the *Dry September*. At one point, Atticus is forced to deal with a mob intent on lynching his client Tom which is finally unwittingly diffused by Scout. Most of the second part of the novel takes place in a courtroom where the reader witnesses the trial. Atticus presents a defence of Tom Robinson and gives a more plausible explanation of the evidence. After interrogating Bob Ewell and his daughter Mayella, he points out that Tom is not capable of committing such a

⁷³ LEE, H. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960, p. 144

crime because of his injury. Although it is more than clear that Tom is innocent, and Bob Ewell is most likely the one who hurt his own daughter, the all-white jury decides that Tom is guilty.

Tom has a chance to tell what happened in his point of view, however almost no one consider a relevance of his words. During the trial, Tom is asked if he is accusing Mayella of lying. Harper Lee showed that not everyone is allowed to tell a lie. Tom is completely sure that she is not telling the truth, however he is fully aware that his word carries less weight than Mayella's lie. In general, the black characters in the novel are rarely given a voice when speaking about racism and when they do, they do not express anger or frustration towards the white community. They rather avoid conflicts and respond to racism passively. For example, Helen Robinson, Tom's wife, walks through the woods in order to avoid the Ewell house.

To Kill a Mockingbird and *Dry September* remind to the reader that lying can destroy innocent people. The false accusations of the rape are only rumoured, but the town's people treat the gossips as facts. They do not need any evidence to be sure that the black characters are guilty. Furthermore, the alleged rape in both cases is only a pretext for the white residents to confirm their supremacy and power. They demand justice for the alleged victims, but they only hide their racist intentions under a fake pretence of honour. Lee's Mayella and Faulkner's Minnie are not a priority for anyone in the community. Both are ostracized and targets of the prejudice just like the black characters. Therefore, the issue of prejudice is not connected only to the racial conflict. The authors stress social and gender injustice in their works as well. For instance, Tom cannot accuse Mayella of lying, though she can be accused by Atticus since he has a higher social status than her.

Both Lee and Faulkner provided a deeper introspection into culture and mentality of Southerners, as they pictured the regions where segregation, poverty and prejudice persisted many decades after the abolishment of slavery. However, Harper Lee treats the theme of racism differently than William Faulkner. She focuses on characters who promote tolerance and open-mindedness and who are not interested in lynching. Faulkner, on the other hand, highlights the mob violence and the mob power to influence any individual attempt to stop it.

7.3 GOOD VS. EVIL AND MORAL EDUCATION

Arguably, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is widely read and praised for its powerful and universal themes. Harper Lee managed to write a piece of work that gives us the point of view of an innocent child and is easy to follow. On the other hand, she managed to fill the novel up with hidden symbols, references and allusions and the reader gradually learns valuable life lessons.

Throughout the course of the novel, Scout and her brother Jem are confronted with prejudice and ignorance. They learn the most significant life lessons through the unfortunate fate of the main outsiders of the novel, Tom Robinson and Boo Radley. Harper Lee makes it obvious that Tom and Boo are similar characters, not only because of being the outsiders. They are both quiet and reserved, both got into trouble with the local legal system and both represent innocent victims of prejudice. In another words, they are the “mockingbirds” of the story, since they represent the innocence destroyed by evil.

As the story develops, the siblings are forced to change their childish mind-set and gain ability to consider another person’s perspective sympathetically. In the beginning of the story, Atticus famously says: “*You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.*”⁷⁴ As the novel ends, Scout’s development is more than clear: “*Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough.*”⁷⁵ Part of Scout’s maturing process is her own experience being an outsider. As an intelligent tomboy and a daughter of a man who publicly defends a black man, she becomes a freak among her classmates. Due to this fact, Scout realizes her connection to the Maycomb outsiders.

As children, Scout and Jem have very black and white views regarding what is good and what is evil. For instance, they believe that most of the people in Maycomb are good. They also believe that the Radley family, and especially Arthur Boo Radley, is evil even though there is little real evidence that Boo is a bad person. His position in Maycomb society and the gossips about him, made him inhuman in the children’s eyes. There is a certain parallel with novel *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* written by Flannery O’Connor that has been described in chapter

⁷⁴ LEE, H. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960, p. 39

⁷⁵ LEE, H. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960, p. 374

five, especially when the characters refer to terms “good” and “bad”. Just like one of the characters of O’Connor’s novel, the Grandma, Scout and Jem apply the labels inaccurately. However, they do so because of the lack of experience with the evil. The Grandma, on the other hand, is more like the citizens of Maycomb who follow their own rules and codes, regardless of the morality.

Nevertheless, Atticus encourages his children to see the world as a more complex place where people are not strictly divided into good or bad categories. In a way, Atticus himself has experienced evil, however he managed to keep his faith in people and not to become cynical. During Tom’s trial, Scout and Jem have many opportunities to question their belief that people are only good or only bad. After the trial and the realization that evil and injustice are present in the Maycomb community, Jem is disappointed and his belief in the goodness of people is badly damaged. Scout is shocked as well; on the other hand, she is able to maintain her faith in the goodness of human nature. This makes, in a sense, a “mockingbird” from Jem.

Since Atticus embodies the moral backbone of the story, the theme of the importance of morality is obviously most explored through the relationship between him and his children. Atticus’ intention to instil a sense of morality in his children is clear when Jem gets into a conflict with their racist neighbour Mrs. Dubose who insults every member of the Finch family, including Jem and Scout. As a punishment for destroying her camelias, Jem must visit her and read aloud to her every day for a month. After her death, Atticus shares that Mrs. Dubose was a morphine addict, who broke herself of her addiction in the weeks before her death in order to die with a dignity. He adds: “*She was the bravest person I ever knew,*”⁷⁶ to suggest that every person has their own sense of dignity and everyone should be treated with respect.

The moral education provided by Atticus contrasts with the scenes at school where Scout is frequently confronted with teachers and their moral hypocrisy. Scout starts her first year at school in the beginning of the novel. Shortly, the reader can witness the first conflict between institutionalized and home education, as Scout is punished for being ahead her classmates. It is not the only case, when Scout feels frustrated and is concerned about her education. Atticus understands the flaws of the school system; however, he is sure that his children need to go through this system in order to be a part of society.

⁷⁶ LEE, H. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960, p. 149

Another clear example of Scout's conflict with school is by the end of the novel when learning about Holocaust at school. Her teacher explains the difference between America and Germany and why Hitler is a bad person: "*Over here we don't believe in persecuting anybody. Persecution comes from people who are prejudiced. Prejudice... There are no better people in the world than the Jews, and why Hitler doesn't think so is a mystery to me.*"⁷⁷ However, Scout remembers Tom's trial and finds her speech inconsistent: "*I heard her say it's time somebody taught 'em a lesson, they were gettin' way above themselves, an' the next thing they think can do is marry us. Jem, how can you hate Hitler so bad an' then turn around and be ugly about folks right at home...*"⁷⁸ Her maturity and her way of thinking unburdened by prejudice allow her to relate the teacher's explanation to Tom's trial and notice the hypocrisy. In conclusion, Scout understands that Atticus and life experiences have taught her more than school ever will and that the most valuable lessons are those of understanding and humanity.

7.4 THE LAW AND THE SOCIAL CODES

The laws and codes play an important role which is implied at the start of the novel in the epigraph from Charles Lamb: "*Lawyers, I suppose, were children once.*"⁷⁹ The laws and codes of the town of Maycomb are present throughout the whole story, starting with the fact that the main adult character is a lawyer. What is more, his children, and even his black cook, are familiar with some legal terms. The novel is built on social codes which are both law-abiding and law-breaking. Take, for example, the long-ago arrest of Arthur Boo Radley by his father, the accusation of Tom Robinson and the following threat of lynching, Ewell's absence at school, or the intruding of the children on the Radley property.

Most of the second part of the novel is centred around Tom's trial and seems to be a criticism of the legal system, at least the one that exists in Maycomb. Even though the conversation in the courtroom is mostly about legal matters, it serves as a great opportunity for public entertainment. With the accusation and the trial, the town is suddenly woken up from its slow and sleepy mode. Finally, Atticus loses the case. Tom Robinson being found

⁷⁷ LEE, H. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960, p. 329

⁷⁸ LEE, H. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960, p. 331

⁷⁹ LEE, H. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960, p. 1

guilty, emphasizes the limitations of the law and the fact that laws cannot protect those who need it the most. Lee's "mockingbirds" are not protected from the evil injustice mainly because of hidden social codes which differ from the legal or religious principles.

Atticus understands the flaws of the system; however, he still believes in the legal process. On the other hand, he knows that the law must be bent in some situations. By the end of the book, it is not the law that protects Scout and Jem from Bob Ewell and his murder attempt, it is one of the "mockingbirds", their reclusive neighbour Arthur Boo Radley. The law would require Boo to go through a trial, however Atticus and Heck Tate, the local sheriff, know that Boo should not experience it and rather should be protected. There are two crucial lies connected to crime and violence that have, ironically, opposite consequences. The first one destroys an innocent man whose position is disadvantaged because of his race. The second lie is said to protect the destruction of an innocent man whose position is disadvantaged because of his reclusiveness. In conclusion, Harper Lee implies that lying affects the most vulnerable members of society and can be used either to harm or to protect.

7.5 FAMILY AND CLASS

Harper Lee deals with the theme of family through many relationships and the most explored is, of course, the relationship between Atticus and his children. He treats Scout and Jem with respect and as equals. Even though he is a widower, and the family is incomplete, it is not dysfunctional. When Scout needs a female role model, Calpurnia, who is seen as very much one of the family, is there for her. Nevertheless, the author meets the demands of Southern Gothic when showing other families in the novel. Take, for example the Ewells or the Radleys. It is typical for Southern Gothic to picture unstable, incomplete and dysfunctional families. Similarly, Carson McCullers incorporates a picture of dysfunctional family into her *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. Typically, almost every family tie is broken. The best example might be the character of Mick and her family situation, since she does not feel close to her parents and desperately looks for surrogate-parents.

In contrast to Jem and Scout, Charles Baker Harris, who is better known by his nickname "Dill", comes from a broken family. Even though Dill is a storyteller, the reader senses that he tells the truth when speaking about his family, especially when he explains why he ran away from home: "...they just wasn't interested in me... they stayed gone all the time, and when they

were home, even, they'd get off in a room by themselves."⁸⁰ The author contrasts Dill's family situation with Scout's and shows a type of dysfunctional and unstable family. Unlike Mayella Ewell, Dill does not live in a violent and poor family, yet he is unhappy and frustrated since he lacks attention and time of his parents: "*The thing is, what I'm tryin' to say is – they do get on a lot better without me, I can't help them any. They ain't mean. They buy me everything I want, but it's now-you've-got-it-go-play-with-it. You've got a roomful of things. I-got-you-that-book-so-go-read-it.*"⁸¹

There are several families pictured in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and all of them are different. Harper Lee managed to show how important were social classes and family groups in a small town in the Southern part of the USA. The class stratification has a great impact on the events in the novel and it is evident that race and class prejudice is deeply rooted in the Maycomb community. This is demonstrated by Jem and his explanation of the social stratification: "*There's four kinds of folks in the world. There's the ordinary kind like us and the neighbors, there's the kind like the Cunninghams out in the woods, the kind like the Ewells down at the dump, and the Negroes... The thing about it is, our kind of folks don't like the Cunninghams, the Cunninghams don't like the Ewells, and the Ewells hate and despise the colored folks.*"⁸²

The Finch family is a part of the highest social class in the Maycomb County, labelled as the "ordinary". These are the white families of middle or upper economic backgrounds. It is typical that they have deep roots and respected positions in their region, and they are fixated on it. In the cultural context of the South, the social status serves as a reflexion of people's character, and vice versa. Many Southern authors deal with obsession with family history, the best example might be William Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*.⁸³ Emily is basically a symbol of fixation on the past. Like Emily, there are certain characters in Lee's novel, who represent the obsession with the position of their family in the community and the related traditions. Probably the most obvious one is Aunt Alexandra, Atticus's sister.

Aunt Alexandra represents an archetype of a perfect Southern Lady who is devoted to her family and highly values propriety, traditions and family heritage. When she moves to her

⁸⁰ LEE, H. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960, p. 190

⁸¹ LEE, H. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960, p. 191

⁸² LEE, H. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960, p. 302-303

⁸³ *A Rose for Emily* by William Faulkner has been analysed in chapter 4.2

brother's house, she is determined to teach Scout and Jem to behave like a proper lady and gentleman, however it often leads her to clash with Scout. She wants Scout to behave more ladylike, but Scout is a playful tomboy who refuses to accept given gender roles. In chapter 9, Scout demonstrates how society, including her aunt, expects feminine behaviour from girls right from a young age: "*Aunt Alexandra was fanatical on the subject of my attire. I could not possibly hope to be a lady if I wore breeches; when I said I could do nothing in a dress, she said I wasn't supposed to be doing things that required pants.*"⁸⁴ Alexandra's belief in patriarchy is another feature that demonstrates the old Southern traditions connected with a high aristocracy.

The social hierarchy in Maycomb follows with the Cunninghams and the Ewells. Both categories are represented by poor white Americans, nevertheless there are some significant differences between them. For example, the Cunninghams are honest and hardworking. They also pay back their debts and do not take advantages of black people. The Ewells, on the other hand, interact differently in the society and that is why they are in the lowest category, apart from the blacks. Families like the Ewells are regarded as "white trash". The representative of "white trash" in the story is Bob Ewell who is not able to keep a job, spends his money on alcohol, beats his children and leaves them starving. His dark personality is confirmed when the reader learns about his attack on Scout and Jem.

The fourth and the lowest social class is represented by black people. Having their own sections of town, they are separated from the whites. Their category might be described as a "caste" since it is not possible to escape from it and the members are treated like they are not human beings. There are many classes within black community, for instance Calpurnia has perfect Southern manners and she is in good relations with the Finch family. Nevertheless, she will always be in the lowest class because of the colour of her skin. The profound impact of the class stratification is especially evident in the accusation and trial of Tom Robinson.

⁸⁴ LEE, H. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960, p. 108

7.6 DEFINITION OF SOUTHERN SMALL TOWNS

Harper Lee situated her novel in a small town with all the stereotypical aspects of small-town life which helps to highlight the important social relationships of the novel. Scout sees her hometown as an old, lethargic, warm place. According to her, the town is tired and slow: “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.”⁸⁵ Being a sleepy Southern town, Maycomb is a place where everyone is involved in everyone else’s business. The fact that rumours run through the town almost every day, makes the community close-knit and intimate.

Not only is gossiping a great part of every-day reality in Maycomb, but it is also an important tool that Harper Lee used to structure her novel. In fact, the rumours and gossips that go around in the town are what makes the story and what makes some characters. For example, the Finch kids learn about Boo Radley mainly through the rumours from Miss Stephanie Crawford, the neighbourhood gossip: “So Jem received most of his information from Miss Stephanie Crawford, a neighborhood scold, who said she knew the whole thing.”⁸⁶ This feature is typical for many writers who work with Southern small-town setting in their works. Like in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, in William Faulkner’s *A Rose for Emily*, and even more noticeably in his *Dry September*, the rumours drive the story and provide an image of the local people and of the way they think.

Related to gossips, another feature typical for a Southern small town is putting emphasis on reputation and class stratification. As the town of Maycomb is close-knit, each family is known for its specific traits that define them. The established characteristics and rules which support the stereotypical and collective thinking are handed down from generation to generation. Even Scout is aware of the system in Maycomb, for that reason she knows what to expect from people in the neighbourhood and around town and feels safe when playing there. She explains the system this way: “Thus the dicta No Crawford Minds His Own Business, Every Third Merriweather Is Morbid, The Truth Is Not in the Delafields, All the Bufords Walk Like That, were simply guides to daily living: never take a check from a Delafield without a discreet call to the bank; Miss Maudie Atkinson’s shoulder stoops because she was a Buford; if

⁸⁵ LEE, H. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960, p. 6

⁸⁶ LEE, H. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960, p. 13

*Mrs. Grace Merriweather sips gin out of Lydia E. Pinkham bottles it's nothing unusual – her mother did the same.*⁸⁷ Scout and her father and brother do not fit into this world of Maycomb, nevertheless Aunt Alexandra fits into it perfectly.

The social codes in Maycomb are much more abundant and do not relate only to Scout's description. It is typical for this type of setting, that anyone who deviates from an accepted norm or standard, is consider odd. Therefore, prejudice is a burning issue when speaking about Southern small towns, not only in Lee's work. For instance, Scout, like many people in the town, thinks that the Radley family is odd because of not attending the church and socializing with others. Another example is the way that town's people treat the black residents. In the beginning, Scout does not find anything negative about the way Maycomb and its codes and traditions work. However, her point of view is gradually changed, especially after Atticus's decision to defend Tom Robinson.

⁸⁷ LEE, H. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1960, p. 175

8 CONCLUSION

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to analyse Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* and given short stories written by William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers. The thesis provides a comparison of given works and points out parallels and similarities within the Southern Gothic tradition.

Even though *To Kill a Mockingbird* does not have as dark tone as, for example, Faulkner's or O'Connor's works, it still belongs to the Southern Gothic category. Harper Lee put the story into quiet and peaceful atmosphere, however there are certain Gothic elements that disturb it. Whether it is the mad dog that Atticus must shoot, the fire that destroys Miss Maudie's house, Bob Ewell's attack on Halloween night, or, probably the most Gothic motif, the character of mysterious Boo Radley, these details create tension and meet the Southern Gothic demands.

Harper Lee meets the demands of the Southern style of writing in more aspects. The most obvious one is situating her novel into the US South as the story takes place in a fictional small town in Alabama, called Maycomb. Although Lee is not as interested in history as Faulkner, her characters show a historical consciousness that is connected to an awareness of place. Focusing on small community of Maycomb, Lee managed to picture typical Southern relationships and its issues.

The theme of racial conflict is, without a doubt, characteristic of the Southern setting. Just like Harper Lee, all the mentioned writers included the theme into their works to remind the readers the issue of racism that persists in the Southern states of the USA. Black characters are mostly portrayed as servants, they usually face racism and segregation and do not have much opportunities to speak and defend themselves. The best parallel might be found in Faulkner's *Dry September*, since the conflict between blacks and whites plays an important role in both cases. Both writers deal with a false accusation that an innocent black man raped a white woman. Both black men eventually die because of the accusation, however William Faulkner pictured more radical story, since his character was not put on trial and was murdered by the lynching mob.

Another element used in the Southern style of writing is an oral story-telling tradition. *To Kill a Mockingbird* proves that this feature is present in the South, as the rumours run through the town daily and are an integral part of the local culture and mentality. In addition, it corresponds with the picture of small towns presented by other authors. In Faulkner's *Dry September* and *A Rose for Emily*, the plot and the characters are based on rumours and gossips as well.

One of the most crucial elements that shapes the Southern Gothic, is the sense of grotesque. It is applied to anything that deviates from a standard and challenges what is seen as normal. The Southern authors use many forms of the grotesque in order to highlight something abnormal. For example, typical use of grotesque is displaying outsiders. More specifically, they often describe mentally sick people, people with physical deformities, blacks or criminals. There are plenty of characters not only in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but also in Faulkner's, O'Connor's and McCullers's works that meet this demand.

Furthermore, all authors agree in picturing unstable, unconventional and dysfunctional families. Even though Harper Lee put the main protagonist into an incomplete family, it does not represent a dysfunctional unit. Nevertheless, she put supporting characters into these types of families. The rest of the authors explored this issue from a closer perspective, as their protagonists usually come from broken and dysfunctional families. Hand in hand with family is a family history and class stratification. The characters often cannot escape their origins and experience social injustice based on their class. In conclusion, all texts under discussion belong to the Southern Gothic tradition, as they highlight its key features and correspond with each other, especially in terms of the major themes.

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