

**Rising and Falling the Father Persona as Moral Compass for both
His Daughter and His Society in Harber Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*
and *Go Set a Watchman***

Assist lect. Jameel Ibrahim Hasan

Open Educational College/ Qurna

Ministry of Education

Keywords: Finch, fatherhood, race, To Kill a Mockingbird, Go Set a Watchman

Summary:

The development of Atticus Finch as a moral parent figure in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) is examined in this paper. While *Go Set a Watchman* reveals Atticus's ideological contradictions by depicting him as a segregationist upholding the racial status quo of the mid-twentieth-century South, *To Kill a Mockingbird* established Atticus as an enduring symbol of integrity and justice — an honorable father who anchors both Scout's moral development and the American literary imagination. This paper makes the case that Harper Lee's contradictory depictions show not just the limits of Atticus's moral authority but also the deep disillusionment required for Jean Louise Finch to mature, based on rigorous textual analysis bolstered by historical and cultural critique. This essay illustrates how *Go Set a Watchman* subverts the notion of the incorruptible parent by placing Atticus within the historical context of southern liberalism and white paternalism, forcing readers to consider the brittleness of inherited moral certainties. The study concludes that Lee's two novels, when read in dialogue, invite a more mature ethical reckoning with the complexities of race, conscience, and the fallibility of even our most cherished heroes. According to the study's findings, reading Lee's two books aloud encourages a more responsible ethical examination of the intricacies of race, conscience, and the frailty of even our most beloved heroes.

Introduction

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) protagonist, Atticus Finch, is one of the most influential characters in American literature. As a parent whose steadfast sense of right and wrong formed not just his daughter Scout's moral compass but also the moral compass of innumerable pupils and citizens who faced him in courtrooms and classrooms alike, Atticus has stood as the epitome of justice and integrity. For decades, Atticus has served as a cultural icon and father figure, and he has long been hailed as a moral role model and advocate for racial fairness (Kendrick, 2016). This picture is drastically complicated by the posthumous release of *Go Set a Watchman* (Lee, 2015), which portrays an older Atticus who opposes the growing Civil Rights Movement and defends segregationist views (Mills, 2015). A critical reexamination of how literary personalities may be influenced by and implicated in the social ideas of their day is encouraged by this startling discrepancy, which challenges readers' long-held beliefs (Johnson, 2016).

Surprisingly, Jean Louise Finch's return to Maycomb in *Go Set a Watchman* turns into a story of disillusionment as she faces the disturbing reality that her father, who was previously portrayed as the moral compass of her childhood, actually represents the inconsistencies of a white southern moderate in the 1950s (Flynt, 2017). But for many, this literary icon was destroyed by the unexpected release of *Go Set a Watchman* in 2015, which showed a very flawed and human Atticus who supports segregationist ideas and opposes the forces of social progress.

In order to question the timeless idea of the uncorruptible southern hero and reveal the brittle underpinnings of inherited moral certainties, this paper contends that Lee's *Watchman* purposefully rewrites Atticus Finch as a flawed father figure through Scout's personal crises. This essay makes the case that Harper Lee purposefully rewrites Atticus Finch in *Go Set a Watchman* in order to highlight the inconsistencies and complexity of the American South and force us to face the

unsettling realities that underlie the myths we create about morality, family, and history.

2. Methodology

This research examines the divergent depictions of Atticus Finch in *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) using a qualitative literary analysis technique. The goal is to examine how Harper Lee, within the historical, cultural, and ideological contexts of the American South in the middle of the 20th century, creates and destroys the character of the noble parent.

The study is predicated on a careful reading of both main texts, with an emphasis on a few important sections that highlight Atticus Finch's moral values, his shortcomings, and the development of Scout's father-perception. Quotations are used to show how Atticus's mythological and flawed aspects are influenced by conversation, narrative voice, and symbolic events. To illustrate this thematic change, pertinent passages are found and examined, such as crucial trial scenes, Jean Louise's confrontations, and Atticus's self-justifications.

Harper Lee's portrayal of race, parenthood, southern liberalism, and cultural reception is examined in this research through attentive reading, as well as secondary materials including peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and critical essays. The inclusion of works by critics including Johnson (2016), Batchelor (2015), Kendrick (2016), and Thomas (2017) places the texts in the context of discussions about southern myth-making, liberal whiteness, and the evolution of Atticus's legacy.

Historical-contextual criticism informs the analysis, placing the books in their different publishing contexts: *Go Set a Watchman*, while being published later, is set in the cultural conflicts of the 1950s, while *To Kill a Mockingbird* is set during the Civil Rights Movement. This method makes it clearer how the fictitious father and readers' reactions are shaped by changing historical facts. Lastly, using an

intertextual comparison perspective, this essay analyzes how *Go Set a Watchman* questions the moral presumptions made in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. By demonstrating how Jean Louise's loss of confidence in her father reflects the reader's own reevaluation of the legendary Atticus Finch, this comparison approach draws attention to the thematic cycle of disillusionment.

3. Historical and Cultural Background of the Contexts

The historical currents of the American South in the middle of the 20th century are strongly reflected in Harper Lee's portrayal of Atticus Finch. The broader cultural mythology of the "Southern gentleman" and the parental figure as a pillar of Southern identity must be considered in the context of Harper Lee's creation of Atticus Finch. The country was struggling with long-standing racial segregation and the struggle for integration in public life when *To Kill a Mockingbird* was released in 1960, coinciding with the growing Civil Rights Movement (Flynt, 2017). As a moderate white liberal during the Civil Rights era, Atticus stands up for an innocent Black man against institutional prejudice in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) (Larson, 2016). According to Thomas (2017), this portrayal made it possible for white readers in the 1960s to balance a reassuring, patriarchal ideal with an anti-segregationist position without completely upending the social order.

According to historical study, Atticus's fictional character was influenced by Lee's background in Alabama and her father, Amasa Coleman Lee, a lawyer who once represented two Black men who were charged with murder (Shields, 2006). So she portrays Atticus figure as a copy of her father. Within a culture influenced by Jim Crow laws and the heritage of Reconstruction, Atticus Finch established himself as a countercultural moral hero by defending Tom Robinson, a Black man wrongfully convicted of raping a white lady.

Nonetheless, *Go Set a Watchman* presents a less consoling and more historically accurate picture of the southern moderate. However, the tension of the 1950s Deep

South immediately following the Supreme Court's momentous ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which required school desegregation, is reflected in *Go Set a Watchman*, which shows a distinct historical dimension (Beidler, 2015). Atticus's membership in the Maycomb Citizens' Council in Watchman is reminiscent of actual segregationist groups that were founded in opposition to federal integration decrees (Harris, 2017).

Atticus becomes a more historically realistic character as a result of this historical turn from a mythic ideal. Watchman challenges the father figure with the intricacies of race, class, and generational strife, implying that moral absolutes are brittle when viewed through the prism of historical change, as Batchelor (2015) points out. Lee challenges the South's self-image, which is frequently sanitized in postwar American memory, by using Jean Louise's disillusionment as a narrative device (Romine, 2017). Lee highlights the inconsistencies of a father figure who both promotes justice and defends racial supremacy when social systems are in danger by situating Atticus inside this actual sociopolitical setting.

Lee challenges readers to consider the boundaries of liberal paternalism in the face of systemic racism by drawing a comparison between the segregationist father of Watchman and the honorable father of *Mockingbird* (Chura, 2016). In Southern literature, paternity, authority, and whiteness intertwine to both uphold and challenge prevailing power systems, as this dual image illustrates (Thomas, 2017). The nuanced roles of authority and parenthood in southern tales are reflected in this conflict.

4.1 The Rising of Father Figure in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

From the beginning of the novel till its end Atticus stands clearly against racism. He refuse the discrimination in all its forms whether it is by actions or by speaking. Atticus sternly corrects Scout when she makes a racist slur, "Don't say 'nigger,' Scout. That's common." (Lee, 1960, p. 83). He sets a good example for his children by

discouraging the use of disparaging words. Calpurnia, the Black housekeeper for the Finch family, is respected and treated as an authoritative figure by Atticus. That's why she plays a major role in raising his children. He treats her with all respect and esteem considering her one of the family, "She's a faithful member of this family and you'll simply have to accept things the way they are." (Lee, 1960, p. 137). He upholds Calpurnia's position, demonstrating that he respects her opinion despite racial conventions.

Atticus believes in moral quality and tries to pass this over into his daughter Scout, "But there is one way in this country in which all men are created equal" (Lee, 1960, p. 233). Scout learns from Atticus that race has no bearing on morality. This is from his defense of Tom Robinson in court, when he emphasized equal treatment under the law.

Moreover, Atticus Finch is portrayed in *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a model of moral rectitude and virtue who embodies a timeless ideal of justice that surpasses the prejudice of his town. He exhibits a strong commitment to principle above popularity by insisting on protecting Tom Robinson in the face of societal censure. As Scout is informed by Atticus, "The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience" (Lee, 1960, p. 105). Atticus is positioned as an almost legendary father figure—a moral compass in a culture characterized by racial prejudice—by asserting his own integrity in the face of societal injustice. Atticus is regarded as an ethical figure because of his steadfast faith in the rule of law. He explains his choice to stand up for Tom Robinson by saying, "Simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try to win" (Lee, 1960, p. 87).

Readers, scholars, and critics have all hailed Atticus Finch as the greatest literary parent and moral leader throughout the years. According to Madden (2016), Scout's father "has come to symbolize the ideal of moral courage in American letters" (p. 4).

Scout, the young narrator, gives her father's insight a prophetic quality by characterizing him as someone who "can do no wrong" according to her opinion (Lee, 1960, p. 112). At first, Scout thinks highly of Atticus, seeing him as a man of unflinching morals and brilliance. She thinks that he is perfect and cannot make errors.

The story is filled with instances of her father being idolized. In the following quote Jem says, "Atticus ain't ever whipped me since I can remember. I wanta keep it that way," (Lee, 1960, p. 115) . Here we see that Atticus never hit his children because he doesn't like violence.

As the story goes on, especially during Tom Robinson's trial, Scout starts to realize that, in spite of his best efforts, Atticus cannot go against the society's prejudice because the sentence is against Tom Robinson's and he is ultimately killed. Scout realizes the terrible reality that even her father's competence and kindness cannot overcome Maycomb's deep-rooted bigotry as the all-white jury finds Tom Robinson guilty despite Atticus's outstanding defense, "Atticus had used every tool available to free men to save Tom Robison, but in the secret courts of men's hearts Atticus had no case." (Lee, 1960, p. 245). This phrase demonstrates the disconnect between Atticus's ideals and the unchangeable reality; it is Scout's first indication that her father's moral authority is twisted when it comes to addressing societal prejudice.

We can also find another quote where Atticus explains the repressing of the people in power. Following the trial, Jem finds it difficult to comprehend the unfairness, and Atticus demonstrates his worn-out reality by outlining the system's shortcomings, *"They've done it before and they did it tonight and they'll do it again and when they do it — seems that. Only children weep"* (Lee, 1960, p. 243). This passage demonstrates Atticus's resignation. He understands that even with his best efforts,

he cannot completely combat the adults in Maycomb who are involved in racial injustice.

Anyway, it seems that Harper lee is preparing us to meet another father who is entirely different and affected by the racism and discrimination of the society. The father who speaks in the language of society which is full of segregation. This father ,we will see in the *Go Set a Watchman*, will surprises Scout and leaves her with inner conflict not believing that he is the same father of her childhood.

4.2 The Falling of Father Figure in *Go Set a Watchman*

Go Set a Watchman takes place in the middle of the 1950s, twenty years after the events in *Mockingbird*. A 26-year-old Scout ("Jean Louise") travels back to Maycomb from her life in New York to visit her father ,Atticus, who is now in his seventies and suffering from a medical condition.

Harper Lee destroys the legendary father figure she established in *To Kill a Mockingbird* in *Go Set a Watchman*, portraying Atticus Finch as a moderate segregationist who upholds the Southern status quo rather than as the steadfast defender of racial justice. Jean Louise is forced to face her father's moral failings and the unsettling truth that her hero is, in fact, seriously damaged when this knowledge shatters her childlike wonder. Actually Jean Louise falls apart when she discovers that her father is racist.

The great shock that Jean Louise gets is at the close of Chapter 8, following Jean Louise's encounter with Atticus during the Maycomb County Citizens' Council meeting, "*The one human being she had ever fully and wholeheartedly trusted had failed her,... had betrayed her, publicly, grossly, and shamelessly*"(Lee, 2015, p. 113). The meeting holds exactly at the same place where her father was standing to defend black man accused of rape. This scene shatters " Scout " simply because the man who filled her with pride publicly and shamelessly, now is letting her down by

attending a discrimination meeting. She loses the confidence she had in him as a child because of this shock.

When Jean Louise discovers her father is no longer her moral guardian, this statement captures the unadulterated emotional destruction she experiences. Only a few years later, Jean Louise believes that all Atticus taught her has been totally undermined by his behavior.

Atticus explains his position to Jean Louise by asking her, *"Do you want Negroes by the carload in our schools and churches and theaters? Do you want them in our world?"* (Lee, 2015, p. 246). In this conversation Atticus tries to rationalize why he is siding by white people and asking to take black people away from the society in order not to be in the sectors of the society such as schools, churches, theaters and so on.

This quotation also highlights a concealed bias and disillusionment from the viewpoint of his daughter, Jean Louise, and represents a dramatic change in Atticus's opinions about racial relations. It captures the nuanced and frequently incongruous character of racism in the American South. The well-liked character from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus, is shown as being racist and going to Ku Klux Klan gatherings. As a defender of racial justice in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus represents a black man named Tom Robinson in court. In contrast, *Go Set a Watchman* portrays him as a man who has long-standing biases against Black people, especially when it comes to integration. It compels readers to face the unsettling truth that racist opinions may exist in people who are respected for their moral character

Additionally, these three places are important in educating people, they are tutorial places. He wants them to still ignorant. Consequently, ignorant people may commit crimes and be criminals, this is entirely opposites his situation in *To kill a Mockingbird* when he stands to defend Tom Robison. *Mockingbird's* Atticus does his best to make an innocent person now oppositely *Watchman's* Atticus is trying to

make criminal people. As Schram & Tibbetts (2021) show that one of the societal reasons causing crime is a lack of knowledge and education, "When individuals lack adequate education, they are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed, which increases the likelihood of involvement in crime." (p. 155)

As the discussion progresses, Atticus accuses his daughter that she is a "color blind" and she can't see people clearly:

"You're color blind, Jean Louise," he said. "You always have been, you always will be. The only differences you see between one human and another are differences in looks and intelligence and character and the like." (Lee, 2015, pp. 245–246)

Of course this lets her down and leaves her in a heavy puzzle because all what she got is from him. She continues to be Atticus's favorite, and she gladly abides by all the rules her father taught her. She thinks he always acts honorably and doesn't question his integrity. Here, Atticus's tone is nearly contemptuous rather than laudatory. He believes that Jean Louise is naive about the reality of segregation, white supremacy, and what he refers to as "Negro backwardness" because she is unable to see race as a social limit.

Jean Louise is so shocked that she is about to have nervous breakdown. Uncle Jack explains why Atticus is so erratic to lessen the impact of her shock, "Every man's island, Jean Louise, every man's watchman, is his conscience. There is no such thing as a collective conscience." (Lee, 2015, p.265). In this line her uncle is trying to tell her to leave her father with his own point of view whether it is racism or antiracism. Though we expect something positively from someone, we receive entirely something negatively. Jack's remarks emphasize the title of the book, *Go Set a Watchman*, which suggests that Jean Louise has to develop her own moral compass rather than mindlessly deferring to her father's authority.

Finally, Jean Louise is forced to acknowledge her father's shortcomings at the book's conclusion, "As she welcomed him to the human race, the stab of discovery made

her tremble a little." (Lee, 2015, p. 278). The quotation recounts Jean Louise's (Scout) epiphany that her father, Atticus Finch, is not the perfect person she had assumed him to be, and that he had shortcomings. She is experiencing a shift in how she views her father. This statement is crucial: Jean Louise is forced into maturity by Atticus's frailty. To protect her values, she needs to become her own "watchman." Consequently, Jean Louise decides to leave Macomb and she shall never come back to it. Jean Louise lashes out at the end of her encounter with Uncle Jack and Atticus, *"I never want to see Maycomb again. I never want to see you again. I want to get out of this terrible place and never come back."* (Lee, 2015, p. 254–255). It demonstrates how Jean Louise's disenchantment with her father and Maycomb reaches a breaking point when she recognizes that she must leave her hometown, which stands in for the traditional South that she now despises. She is no longer the submissive "Scout" who was molded by her father's power or Maycomb's customs.

4.3 Analyzing

5. Conclusion

This research has looked at how Harper Lee simultaneously creates and destroys the character of Atticus Finch as a flawed product of his period and as a legendary representation of moral purity. Atticus is an exemplary father in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), whose unshakable sense of justice and empathy affects Scout's moral compass making him an enduring emblem of integrity. He is firmly established in the canon of American literature as an example of a morally upright parent because of his support of Tom Robinson, his quiet bravery in the face of public disdain, and his capacity to inculcate a clear moral code in his children.

However, *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) exposes Atticus's frailty, drastically upending this myth. The protagonist of *Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch, is firmly ensnared by the racist systems of his era, as these scenes reveal. Lee forces readers to face the unsettling truth that even the most revered individuals are fashioned by the

constraints of their historical period through Jean Louise's agonizing revelation of her father's segregationist views. Jean Louise's scathing rejection of Maycomb, Atticus's paternalistic justifications, and the Citizens' Council sequences all show a very human parent whose moral authority is neither absolute nor simple.

A more sophisticated interpretation of both works is encouraged by this contradiction, which calls into question oversimplified hero worship and highlights the complexity of liberal whiteness in the American South in the middle of the 20th century. Lee's two books emphasize that moral integrity is dynamic and has to be continuously analyzed, questioned, and reinterpreted by every generation by contrasting the honorable father with the imperfect father.

Jean Louise's disappointment acts as a narrative trigger for moral and personal development. She takes charge of her own conscience by "welcoming [Atticus] to the human race" and turns into her own "watchman." By doing this, Lee serves as a reminder to readers that having a truly moral vision necessitates having the guts to acknowledge even our heroes' complete human frailties rather than blindly admiring them.

Finally speaking, the loss of her father as an unquestionable moral compass represents this betrayal to Jean Louise. So disillusionment is essential to growing up. In contrast, Scout falls asleep in Atticus's arms, completely trusting him, toward the conclusion of *Mockingbird*, in *Watchman* she is distancing herself from the paternalistic society of the South. Accordingly the biblical title of *Go Set a Watchman*, she goes away and sets her own guardian.

References:

- Batchelor, B. (2015). Harper Lee's *Go Set a Watchman* and the limits of liberal paternalism. *Southern Literary Journal*, 47(2), 123–137. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/604578>
- Beidler, P. G. (2015). Atticus Finch and the Citizens' Council: Reading *Go Set a Watchman* in historical context. *Southern Studies*, 22(1), 45–58.

- Chura, P. (2016). Atticus reconsidered: Race, class, and the American father figure. *Studies in American Fiction*, 43(1), 21–40. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/617751>
- Flynt, W. (2017). *Mockingbird songs: My friendship with Harper Lee*. HarperCollins.
- Harris, T. (2017). Racial politics in *Go Set a Watchman*. *The Southern Quarterly*, 54(3), 78–94.
- Johnson, C. D. (2016). Atticus Finch and the mad dog: Harper Lee's discourse on the southern moderate. *Southern Cultures*, 22(1), 5–25. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/611316>
- Kendrick, A. (2016). Harper Lee and the illusion of moral certainty. *The Southern Literary Journal*, 48(2), 44–59. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/622301>
- Larson, E. J. (2016). Mockingbird politics: Atticus Finch and the southern moderate. *American Studies*, 55(4), 21–36.
- Lee, H. (1960). *To kill a mockingbird*. J. B. Lippincott & Co.
- Lee, H. (2015). *Go set a watchman*. HarperCollins.
- Madden, D. (2016). Revisiting the mythic Atticus Finch. *Studies in American Fiction*, 43(1), 1–18. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/617751>
- Mills, C. (2015). The watchman awakens: Atticus Finch in an age of disillusionment. *Journal of American Studies*, 49(4), 799–812. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-american-studies/article/abs/watchman-awakens-atticus-finch-in-an-age-of-disillusionment/>
- Romine, S. (2017). Harper Lee and the southern self. *Mississippi Quarterly*, 70(3), 419–437.
- Schram, P. J., & Tibbetts, S. G. (2021). *Introduction to criminology: Why do they do it?* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Shields, C. J. (2006). *Mockingbird: A portrait of Harper Lee*. Henry Holt and Company.
- Thomas, K. (2017). Reconsidering the mythic South: Atticus Finch and the boundaries of white liberalism. *Southern Cultures*, 23(1), 60–82. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/650648>

نشوء وسقوط شخصية الاب كبوصلة اخلاقية لكلا ابنه ومجتمعه في روايتي ان تقتل طائرا بريئا واذهب وضع لك رقيقا للكاتبة هاربر لي

م.م. جميل ابراهيم حسن

الكلية التربوية المفتوحة/ فرع القرنة

وزارة التربية



Janjon.jj37@gmail.com

الكلمات المفتاحية: هاربر لي ، اكس فينش ، الابوة ، العنصرية، ان تقتل طائرا بريئا ، اذهب
واقم رقيقا

الملخص:

يتناول هذا البحث تطوّر شخصية أتيكوس فينش كأب أخلاقي في روايتي هاربر لي لقتل طائر محاكي (1960) واذهب وأقم رقيقاً (2015). تكشف اذهب وأقم رقيقاً عن التناقضات الأيديولوجية لدى أتيكوس من خلال تصويره شخصاً عنصرياً يقف بجانب التفرقة العنصرية جنوب الولايات المتحدة منتصف القرن العشرين، حيث رسّخت رواية لقتل طائر محاكي صورة أتيكوس كرمز دائم للنزاهة والعدالة — أب نبيل يُشكّل الأساس الأخلاقي لتربية سكاوت وفي خيال الأدب الأمريكي. ويجادل هذا البحث بأن التناقضات في تصوير هاربر لي لأتيكوس تكشف ليس فقط حدود سلطته الأخلاقية، بل أيضاً خيبة الأمل العميقة والتي لعبت دوراً في عملية نضوج جين لويز فينش، وذلك بالاعتماد على تحليل نصي صارم مدعوم بسياق تاريخي ونقد ثقافي. ويوضح هذا البحث كيف تقوّض رواية اذهب وأقم رقيقاً فكرة الأب الذي لا يخطئ، عبر وضع أتيكوس في سياق الليبرالية الجنوبية والأبوة البيضاء، مما يجبر القراء على التفكير في هشاشة فكرة الأخلاقية الموروثة. ويخلص البحث إلى أن قراءة روايتي لي معاً تفتح الباب أمام مراجعة أخلاقية أعمق لمسائل العرق والضمير وقابلية السقوط حتى لأعز أبطالنا. ووفقاً لنتائج الدراسة، فإن قراءة روايتي لي معاً تحفّز على فحص أخلاقي مسؤول يتناول تعقيدات العرق والضمير وهشاشة الرموز البطولية الأكثر رسوخاً في وجداننا.