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Understanding Atticus Finch

From To Kill a Mockingbird to Go Set a Watchman

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1. Introduction

Early in 2015, Harper Lee made news with the announcement of her second novel, *Go Set a Watchman* (Alter). The HarperCollins publishing house billed it as a sequel to *Mockingbird*, because *Watchman* is narrated by the same character, Jean Louise “Scout” Finch, is set in the same fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama, and involves many of the same characters (Nielsen). Harper Lee’s agent went further and stated that it was the last installment of what was to become a trilogy of which the Pulitzer Prize winning novel was the first part (*Flood*). However, evidence shows that *Watchman* was one of the early drafts of the author’s magnum opus (Shields 68), first handed in to publisher J. B. Lippincott & Co. in 1957 (Nielsen).

Though the publication of *Watchman* was highly anticipated, it was to an even greater extent controversial. A lot of speculation centered on the question as to why Harper Lee waited more than 55 years to publish it (Alter). Many in her hometown were of the opinion that she must have been pressured or manipulated to release her second novel, while those closest to her contested that the author was able to make up her own mind and was happy with her decision (Alter, Howard & Kovalski). Furthermore, despite being the fastest selling book in the history of the HarperCollins publishing house (Nocera), *Watchman* has many readers upset, specifically because it depicts Atticus Finch, a character who has been a moral hero for many in the past half century, as being, after all, “a bigot” (Mahler). In the new book, the “racist” Atticus supports segregation and wants to withhold voting rights from blacks (Kakutani). A bookstore in Michigan was even reported to be refunding readers who wanted to return *Watchman*, though still selling it after having seriously warned buyers of its contents (Konstantinidis). This suggests that Atticus underwent radical transformation from *Watchman*, since it was the earlier draft, to *Mockingbird*: from racist to moral hero. Nocera went as far as to say that it is “[s]illy to view the

Atticus Finch of *Go Set a Watchman* as the same person as the Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.” This thesis, however, argues that Atticus is congruous throughout both novels, because his attitude toward blacks and segregation is an implicit aspect of his character in *Mockingbird* that is made explicit in *Watchman* due to its distinct context, and he maintains virtually all character traits from the former in the latter. This thesis statement will be proven by elaborating, in the second chapter, on how Harper Lee, in writing her own real life experiences and relatives into her fiction, based Atticus Finch on her own father, who was in favor of segregation when she first conceptualized the character. In the third chapter, analyses of Atticus Finch in *Mockingbird* will be presented establishing Atticus’ core characteristics and proving that through his acts and statements, Atticus’ opinions of blacks and segregation are inferable. In the fourth chapter, a similar approach will be used to analyze Atticus in *Watchman*, proving that though Atticus’ views on blacks and segregation becomes explicit in the new novel, he nevertheless maintains most of the character traits that he already has in *Mockingbird*. Therefore, the illusion that Atticus has undergone fundamental change from one novel to the next is in reality an effect created by the different contexts Atticus Finch is placed in.

2. The Origin of Atticus Finch

The origin of Atticus Finch has to be traced back to the conception of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, because it is the book in which readers first meet him. As made evident by Nielsen, the Pulitzer Prize winning novel was the product of the rewriting of *Go Set a Watchman*. An intermediate title the novel had was *Atticus*, which was suggested by Maurice Crain, who formed part of the husband-and-wife agents who played an important role in Harper Lee's career as a writer; they had given the author enough money as a Christmas present in 1956 to take a year off from work so she could dedicate herself to writing (Mallon 79). Harper Lee moved to New York to focus on writing fiction after she had dropped out of the law program at the University of Alabama in 1948 (Shields 60). During the early to mid-1950s, before the generous offer of her friends, she worked during the day as a ticket agent for the British Overseas Air Corporation and wrote at night (Shields 62). At first, she wrote short stories, but Maurice Crain and his wife, Annie Laurie Williams, suggested she weave the stories into a novel (Murray 76).

Most of what Harper Lee wrote is autobiographical, e.g. similar to Scout in *Mockingbird*, Harper Lee exhibited tomboy behavior as a child when she would fight boys and “[t]alk mean like [one]” (Shields 6). Truman Capote, a friend of Harper Lee's since childhood, captured this propensity when he put her into his fiction in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* as Idabel Tompkins: “I want so much to be a boy” (Shields 30). In turn, Harper Lee based Charles “Dill” Baker Harris on Capote (Shields 96). The passages of the children putting on plays in *Mockingbird* and *Watchman* are reminiscent of the time the authors would act out plays they wrote as children using a typewriter Harper Lee had received as a gift from her father one Christmas (Shields 26), whom incidentally she called by his first name, in the same way Scout addresses Atticus (Shields 6). Truman Capote himself stated that the passages about Scout, Dill, and Jem are “[q]uite literal

and true” (cited in Shields 73). Furthermore, similar to the Jean Louise of *Watchman*, the author, also a smoker, would try to make at least annual visits to Monroeville from New York (Shields 62); and the death of Jem in *Watchman* coincides with the passing of Harper Lee’s brother, Edwin (Shields 63).

With so many parallels between Harper Lee’s own life and her fiction, it is no surprise that she modelled Atticus Finch on her own father, Mr. A. C. Lee, a lawyer in Monroeville who served on the state legislature (Shields 35). Growing up with a lawyering father, then a lawyering older sister, Alice, and finally attending law school herself, Harper Lee had exceptional insight into the legal profession and good knowledge of court trials to draw from for her novel (Shields 56). There are a few court cases cited as being the inspiration behind *Mockingbird*, e.g. Chura, when arguing for historical prolepsis in the 1960 novel, states that the Emmett Till trial of 1955, in which two white men who had lynched a black teenager by the same name for whistling at a white woman were acquitted, “[s]eems unquestionably to have provided a workable model for [...] the Tom Robinson trial” (1, 4), while Shields states that “[m]any readers, teachers, and scholars have assumed that [Harper Lee] chose to tell [...] a version of the infamous Scottsboro Boys trials in 1931-1937,” in which nine black teenagers were accused of raping two white women in 1931 (70, 120). However, in the late 1990s, Harper Lee acknowledged to biographer Richard Wright that she based the case of Tom Robinson on the trial of Walter Lett, a black man “[w]hose arrest for raping a white woman was reported in the Monroe Journal on November 9, 1933” (Mallon 80). In his biography of the author, Shields writes that “[Harper Lee] knew the details of [the Walter Lett case] well [...] in her imagination, she could see the hero, the attorney in charge of a fictionalized version of Walter’s defense [...] it was her father, Mr. Lee” (72). This had not come out of nowhere. In November 1919, early on in his career, Mr. Lee took on a

criminal case; he was appointed to defend two blacks that had been charged with murder: “he did his utmost, but lost [...] and he] never took another criminal case” (Shields 73). This aversion to criminal law was later to be transferred to Atticus, whose first two clients readers are told he watched be hanged: “[a]n occasion that was probably the beginning of my father’s profound distaste for the practice of criminal law” (Lee, “Mockingbird” 5).

If Atticus is based on Mr. Lee, what was his views on blacks and segregation? Mr. Lee believed in segregation and was not shy about scolding the pastor at the First United Methodist Church whenever he would preach about “[r]acial prejudice and unfair labor conditions;” in 1952 he is reported to have ordered the Reverend Ray Whatley to “Get off the ‘social justice’ and get back on the Gospel” (Mallon 80). However, in the mid-1950s he is reported to have changed his views on segregation and gradually became “[a]n advocate for the rights of blacks” (Shields 120). Shields argues that the case of Emmett Till and Autherine Lucy, a black student whose attempted enrollment at the University of Alabama caused racist violence on campus, probably had an influence on Mr. Lee’s change of heart, along with his daughter Alice, who had a more progressive outlook in race matters (121).

Nevertheless, it is clear that Mr. Lee and Atticus share similar experiences as lawyers: they both try their utmost defending black men in court, despite their opinions on blacks and segregation. In addition, relating to the case of Walter Lett, Shields argues that Mr. Lee must have been among the individuals in Monroe who petitioned to obtain clemency for Walter Lett, because Mr. Lee, as “[t]he publisher and editor of the *Monroe Journal*, a director of the Monroe County Bank, an attorney, and an elected representative from Monroeville,” would have exerted a tremendous amount of influence on the decision (71). This illustrates that Mr. Lee had, similar to Atticus, a complex attitude toward blacks and segregation before his change of heart. There

was room in his perception of blacks to allow for the possibility that they could be wrongly charged, which stirred him to help them. In *Mockingbird*, Atticus goes through a similar realization regarding the Tom Robinson case, the injustice of which also stimulates him to exert himself in proving the defendants innocence.

It might be suggested that the Atticus in *Watchman* embodies the attitude Mr. Lee had regarding segregation before he changed his mind, while the Atticus in *Mockingbird* resembles the Mr. Lee of after the mid-1950s who was an advocate for the rights of blacks. However, there are two problems with such an interpretation: it is probable that Harper Lee's conception of Atticus had already been cemented before Mr. Lee expressed his newly adopted views publicly, and most importantly, in the following chapter it will be proved that at no point in *Mockingbird* does Atticus express such views. Instead, through his behavior it becomes clear that he is indifferent regarding the unequal social position blacks have in the South, as Mr. Lee himself was in the mid-1930s.

3. Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which is set in the fictitious American Southern town of Maycomb, Alabama, in the mid-1930s, readers encounter the “nearly fifty year old” Atticus Finch and learn about him through the lens of the first person adult narrator, Jean Louise “Scout” Finch, who recounts experiences from her childhood and at times embellishes them by narrating passages with the limited understanding she herself would have had as a child (Murray 78, 80). Before the publication of *Go Set a Watchman*, which makes explicit Atticus’ attitude toward blacks and segregation, there were already diametrically opposed views on the character from *Mockingbird*, e.g. Claudia Carver views Atticus as a role model for lawyers, while Monroe Freedman states that he is “hardly admirable,” because as a state legislator and community leader, he lives “[h]is own life as a passive participant in that pervasive injustice” (cited in Dare 127). This thesis is in agreement with Freedman, because though the manner in which Atticus handles the Tom Robinson case is commendable, there are many facts surrounding Atticus and the trial that are overlooked by critics and readers, to judge from the reaction to Atticus in *Watchman* presented in the introduction. Atticus’ perception as a role model sympathetic to the unequal social position blacks had in the South during the 1930s might be due to the film adaptation released two years after the publication of the novel, which focuses for more than 30% of the running time on the courtroom case (Shackelford 103), making Atticus rather than Scout the focal point and hero of the film (Watson 419). That coupled with the Oscar Gregory Peck won for his portrayal of Atticus Finch (Shields 127), and there remained a highly romanticized perception of the character in popular culture, which since has been reinforced by teachers who assign *Mockingbird* in their classes “year after year” and regard Atticus “[a]s an emblem of American racial heroism” (Crespino cited in Jimison et al 2).

However, this is not to say that there is nothing good about Atticus; on the contrary, he possesses what Johnson states is “[a] code that rises above hate” (134), which makes him a role model for his children and, indeed, many readers as illustrated above. Interestingly, in achieving this code Atticus does not emulate certain aspects of the Southern culture of his time. He is different to most other white males we meet in Maycomb, even in the way he spends his leisure time. Scout tells the reader that Atticus is older than the parents of her and Jem’s school friends, and does not “hunt, play poker, fish, drink or smoke;” instead, he enjoys reading (Lee, “Mockingbird” 118). Furthermore, upon being spat in the face in public by Bob Ewell, he resists the Southern code of honor, which would have dictated that he at least fight him, but instead he passively prevents the situation from escalating into a duel (Seidel 2633). Moreover, Atticus even goes in opposition to ideas of the old South that Aunt Alexandra embodies, e.g. “[t]hat the longer a family had been squatting on one patch of land the finer it was” (Lee, “Mockingbird” 170; Osheim 202). In resisting these aspects of Southern culture, Atticus provides Scout with a role model she can look up to when facing her own struggles in Maycomb and teaches her to use her head rather than her fists (Lee, “Mockingbird” 101), because as Shackelford makes clear, more than just being a novel about racism, *Mockingbird* is “[v]ery much about the experience of growing up as a female in the South” (102). This is evident when Aunt Alexandra, acutely aware of women’s roles in Maycomb, tries to convince Scout to wear a dress instead of her overalls, arguing that she should be a “[r]ay of sunshine in [her] father’s lonely life;” but Atticus, upon hearing this from Scout, tells her that “there are already enough sunbeams in the family” and for her to go on being herself, because he does not mind the way she is (Lee, “Mockingbird” 108). In promoting the independence of his own daughter in a South that had restrictive roles for

women, Atticus exhibits an aspect of his character that has indubitably contributed to his “[s]uitability as a role model” (Dare 127).

Furthermore, Osheim has noted that Atticus conscientiously promotes the moral development of Scout and Jem by showing concern for them both before and after the trial, and by teaching them to be tolerant of the people that have different opinions to them (201). This can be exemplified when Atticus knows that Mrs. Dubose insulted him, but he only says that “she had her own views about things, a lot different from mine;” and then he does not antagonize her, but instead uses her battle against morphine addiction as an example to teach his children what “real” courage is (Lee, “Mockingbird” 149). This ability to empathize is made evident when he tells Scout that “you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view” (Lee, “Mockingbird” 39). Atticus also teaches Scout to transform empathy into kindness when he tells her why he does not charge Walter Cunningham for the legal services he provides him (Lee, “Mockingbird” 27-28). But the most important moral lesson that Scout learns through Atticus is one that he never states explicitly, because it is one that *Watchman* makes clear he does not even believe in. This moral lesson is expressed by Scout as a rebuttal to Jem’s theory of there being “four kinds of folks in the world,” to which she says “there’s just one kind of folks. Folks” (Lee, “Mockingbird” 304). Perhaps this is the conclusion Scout reaches after she asks Atticus if it is true that he is a “nigger-lover” and he says “I certainly am. I do my best to love everybody” (Lee, “Mockingbird” 144).

However, Atticus’ lack of involvement with the black population of Maycomb and the higher esteem in which he holds clearly prejudiced white people, reveals him as a character that has a lower opinion of blacks than he does of whites and as a character in favor of segregation. If he truly empathized with the blacks of Maycomb, he would have visited Helen, who is Tom

Robinson's wife, more than on one occasion which was to tell her about Tom's death, for which he enlists the aid of Calpurnia, and which betrays his unfamiliarity in visiting the blacks in Maycomb (Lee, "Mockingbird" 315). Atticus also says that if a white man cheats a black man he is "trash," because he realizes the position blacks have in the community is an unfair one, but which, as Freedman points out, as a state legislator and a community leader he does nothing to help improve (cited in Dare 127; Lee, "Mockingbird" 295). In contrast to his lack of involvement with the black population in Maycomb, it is important to notice that Atticus always gives his attackers, who are all whites, the benefit of the doubt and intrinsically believes in their good nature. As is the case with Mrs. Dubose, he calls the racists in Maycomb "[o]therwise reasonable people;" he excuses Mr. Cunningham though he was part of the mob that wanted to lynch Tom Robinson while in jail; and most importantly, he neglects Bob Ewell's threat even though the whole town considers him to be a dishonorable man which almost gets his children killed (Lee, "Mockingbird" 117, 210, 292). Atticus also exposes white privilege in Maycomb through his "inconsistent [...] relationship to the law," e.g. he tells Scout that white Maycomb ignores the fact that Bob Ewell illegally hunts and traps out of season, because they know he has children to feed (Lee, "Mockingbird" 41; Osheim 202). A misdemeanor that would certainly be unpardonable if committed by a black person. Therefore, even though Atticus claims to love everyone, his behavior reveals him to be biased toward whites and content with the status quo.

Furthermore, Atticus realizes that Tom Robinson is convicted of a crime he did not commit purely because a white person has said that he committed it, regardless of the insurmountable evidence to the contrary (Lee, "Mockingbird" 116-17). Despite this, Atticus tells Scout and Jem that such cases as the one of Tom Robinson are adding up and that one day whites will have to pay the bill for it; he hopes that "[i]t's not in you [sic] children's time" (Lee,

“Mockingbird” 296). It is safe to conclude that if Atticus was against segregation and truly had the best interests of Maycomb’s black population at heart, he would not hope for the delay of social justice for blacks in order to preserve the privileges white people enjoyed in the South.

Nevertheless, what really is the cause of the conflict between Atticus and the majority of white Maycomb is not that he is defending Tom Robinson, but that he is “aiming to defend” him (Lee, “Mockingbird” 218). In other words, he does not automatically side with the white plaintiff and does not take the case as the defendant of Tom Robinson in order to fulfil a meaningless role for the sake of appearances, but actually does his best to defend him. However, as Osheim has points out, Atticus is not an idealist or a civil rights crusader: he is given the Tom Robinson case, which he reluctantly accepts despite knowing that the accused black man is innocent (203). In fact, Atticus tells his brother Jack that he “[had] hoped to get through life without a case of this kind,” by which he means a case in which he has to defend a black man against a white man (Lee, “Mockingbird” 117). However, when Scout asks him why he is defending Tom Robinson, Atticus says that otherwise he “[c]ouldn’t hold up [his] head in town” (Lee, “Mockingbird” 100). Further on, he says that he “[c]ouldn’t go to church and worship God if [he] didn’t try to help that man” and that the “one thing that doesn’t abide by majority rule is a person’s conscience” (Lee, “Mockingbird” 139). This is the case of a white man’s conscience gnawing at him. Tom Robinson is clearly innocent, as Atticus demonstrates in court, and the plaintiff, Bob Ewell, is known by everyone in Maycomb to be dishonorable (Lee, “Mockingbird” 229). The case is made so completely obvious in order to evoke the inner conflict experienced by Atticus and which he explicitly states. Yet if it was up to him, he would have rather not been appointed the case. As Freedman summarized it, he would rather be a “[p]assive participant in that pervasive injustice” (cited in Dare 127).

Mockingbird does not narrate the story of a social justice revolution: Atticus is clearly not an advocate for the rights of blacks. Atticus, similar to Mr. Lee, simply tries hard to defend a man who is clearly innocent from unfair punishment. As shown in the case of Mr. Lee, this does not mean Atticus's defense of Tom Robinson is incongruous in a character that in *Watchman* reveals his seemingly contradictory views of blacks and segregation. Atticus' perception in popular culture as a social justice hero is erroneous, if this was not the case, critics and readers alike would not have been shocked when his views on blacks and segregation are clearly stated in *Watchman*; an attitude which is implicit in *Mockingbird*, as evidenced by his view of whites as inherently good people despite their obvious faults, his lack of involvement with blacks in general, and his reluctance to defend Tom Robinson.

4. Atticus Finch in *Go Set a Watchman*

Go Set a Watchman is set in the same fictitious town of Maycomb, Alabama, as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but twenty years in the future preceding the start of the Civil Rights Movement in 1955. Even though Harper Lee's second novel was written before *Mockingbird*, it acts as a sequel to it. Therefore, it is crucial for Atticus' personal history to be at least coherent from *Mockingbird* to *Watchman* in order to prove that he is congruous throughout both novels. *Watchman* is reported to have been "only lightly copy-edited," though by whom exactly is not reported (Mahler). Nevertheless, this statement is supported by one conspicuous discrepancy in the narrative that connects *Mockingbird* and *Watchman*. In the latter, Jean Louise says that Atticus had "[w]on an acquittal for a black boy on a rape charge" and that the girl was "white and 14" (Lee, "Watchman" 109), whereas in the former, Myella is 19 and Tom Robinson, who is a man married with children, is convicted on the rape charge (Lee, "Mockingbird" 240, 282). However, this inconsistency does not distort the coherence of the narrative from *Mockingbird* to *Watchman*, nor does it distort the coherence of Atticus as a character. What is important for Atticus' story is that he defends an innocent black man in court; the outcome of the trial is not relevant. It is interesting to note that, in contrast to the discrepancy mentioned, there are also certain details that do not change, e.g. that the boy and Tom Robinson have only one arm (Lee, "Watchman" 109; Lee "Mockingbird" 248-49). In fact, there are quite a few descriptive passages that are exactly the same in both novels, which Collins & Sonnad catalogue in their article: they relate to how Maycomb obtained its name and descriptions of the town, Aunt Alexandra's confidence and her corsets, and the origin of the different spellings of the Coninghams and the Cunninghams.

In *Watchman*, Atticus retains almost all of the aspects of his character that he has in *Mockingbird*, but, of course, the twenty-year gap in the storyline is cause of changes and developments concerning the central characters from the 1960 book. *Watchman* starts at the moment the twenty six year old Jean Louise is about to arrive in Maycomb. She, who in part narrates the story along with an omniscient third person narrator, visits from New York for two weeks each year. It is revealed that Jem “[d]ropped dead in his track one day” years preceding the start of *Watchman* (Lee, “Watchman” 29). Calpurnia retires immediately after his death and Aunt Alexandra moves in to help Atticus with the household chores. Though he is 72 years old and physically ailing with arthritis, Atticus is still active practicing law, but has an apprentice in the new character Henry “Hank” Clinton, who is also the suitor of Jean Louise. Even though Atticus does not explicitly teach Jean Louise any moral lessons in the manner he does in *Mockingbird*, the reader can nevertheless perceive that he is still a kind man, e.g. he secretly provides for Hank after his mother passes away, gives him a job and regards him as a son (Lee, “Watchman” 12). Furthermore, he still opposes the same classist ideas embodied by Aunt Alexandra, particularly when he undermines “[her] lectures on the innate superiority of any given Finch” by pointing out the ways in which the Finch family is similar to other white families in Maycomb (Lee, “Watchman” 6). However, as in *Mockingbird*, Atticus excuses faults in all whites, e.g. when he says that “Willoughby’s a crook [...] but do you know of any Negro who knows as much as Willoughby?” (Lee, “Watchman” 246). Yet Atticus encourages Jean Louise to be independent and to pursue her own interests, which is made explicit when the third person narrator tells the reader of Atticus’ feelings towards Aunt Alexandra: “[she] was an impossible woman, but a sight better than Jean Louise permanently home and miserable” (Harper Lee, “Watchman” 18). Atticus does not want his daughter to sacrifice her ambitions in

order to conform to the prescribed gender roles in Maycomb, which would have dictated she leave New York and return to Maycomb in order to help her father at home. Instead, Atticus encourages Jean Louise to be independent-minded, maintaining yet another aspect of his character from *Mockingbird* that contributed to his reception as a role model.

These obvious similarities in Atticus' character in *Mockingbird* and *Watchman* aside, what has many readers upset regarding the new novel is how Atticus has a seemingly polar opposite view of blacks. The revelation starts with Jean Louise finding a pamphlet titled "The Black Plague," which among other things states that "[N]egroes can't help being inferior to whites" (Lee, "Watchman" 101-02). The author of the pamphlet is a man named O'Hanlon, "[a] god-fearing man who quit his job to devote his full time to the preservation of segregation;" in short, he is a man who wants to "uphold the Southern way of life" (Lee, "Watchman" 108). Though Atticus does not wholly agree with him, he nevertheless asks Jean Louise if she does not "realize that [the black population of Maycomb] is backward" (Lee, "Watchman" 242). It is worth emphasizing that the Tom Robinson case has not been erased from Atticus' backstory, leading Jean Louise to say: "I remember that race case you defended, but I missed the point. His cause interfered with your orderly mind, and you had to work order out of disorder" (Lee, "Watchman" 248). Jean Louise, similar to the readers and critics presented in the introduction of this thesis, is completely surprised at the fact that her father, who defends a black man in *Mockingbird*, supports segregation. It is worth restating the nuance in understanding Atticus' behavior in relation to the Tom Robinson trial in *Mockingbird*: he does not accept to defend Tom Robinson, which to reemphasize, he reluctantly does, because Tom Robinson is a black man; Atticus puts all of his effort into the case, because above all, he knows that Tom Robinson is "innocent of the charge" (Lee, "Watchman" 109). Atticus definitely would not have been in such

moral turmoil if the Tom Robinson case was more ambiguous and the plaintiff a more respectable white man than Bob Ewell.

However, Atticus' view of blacks and segregation, similar to Mr. Lee, does not stem from blind and angry racism. If it did, both Atticus and Mr. Lee would not be stirred to act in favor of blacks who are wrongly charged with crimes. Atticus' opinions of blacks and segregation stems from fear. What he is really concerned about is that "[the black population will] vote in blocs;" he is terrified of a potential reversal of the status quo: "if the Negro vote edged out the white you'd have Negroes in every county office" (Lee, "Watchman" 243). In addition to this fear, Atticus feels powerlessness in his own state, which in *Watchman* is typified by the Supreme Court decision in 1954 regarding the *Brown v. Board of Education* trial which ended segregation in public schools in the South. He refers to the case in the heated discussion he has with Jean Louise when she confronts him about his views on blacks and segregation (Lee, "Watchman" 238). Of course, Atticus, a lawyer well versed in the United States Constitution, knows, as Jean Louise points out, that the Supreme Court overruled the tenth amendment in making its decision (Lee, "Watchman" 239), which states that: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people" (US Constitution). Atticus says that "[t]he South [resents] being told what to do" by the Supreme Court and the NAACP regarding the people in their own state, especially due to the violation of the tenth amendment (Lee, "Watchman" 247). For Atticus and other Southern whites, the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was experienced as a stab to their identity and their ability to govern themselves, as Uncle Jack points out: "apparently our brethren in the Northland are not content with the supreme court's activities. Now they want to change our hymns on us;" this he says right after learning that a music instructor from New Jersey told the

music director of the Methodist church the Finches attend that the way in which Southern people sing their hymns is wrong (Lee, "Watchman" 97). Moreover, Atticus fears losing government control to blacks in his own state, because he does not think they have the education to fulfil their responsibilities as citizens with voting rights and as potential government officials (Lee, "Watchman" 244, 246). He states that though blacks have made considerable progress in adapting to "white ways," they are still "far from it" (Lee, "Watchman" 246-47). In holding this view, Atticus completely ignores the fact that the black population had been taken advantage of and mistreated for the previous centuries, and were still in a position of social-economic inequality in regards to whites in what had also become their states in their South, since, as he himself points out, whites had the majority vote and practically held all positions in government (Lee, "Watchman" 243).

In contrast to Atticus, Jean Louise realizes, as he also does, that her way of thinking had progressed passed that of the Southern culture at the time, especially as evidenced by her progressive views on not only women's role in society, but also racial justice. Her forward thinking prompts her to imagine that the old buildings in Maycomb are telling her to leave (Lee, "Watchman" 111), partly because she feels she cannot live in a place where blacks are treated as inferior to whites: "if life's an endless flow of the kind of talk I've heard this morning, I don't think I'd exactly fit in" (Lee, "Watchman" 272). Jean Louise's thoughts and statements suggest that the South is incorrigible and that enlightened people such as herself cannot live there. However, Uncle Jack tells her that "Maycomb needs more of [her, because] the time [her] friends need [her] is when they're wrong [and not] when they are right" (Harper Lee, "Watchman" 272-73).

Despite Atticus' views on blacks, he keeps his composure in the climactic discussion he has with Jean Louise, even as she curses at him (Lee, "Watchman" 253). His calm reaction can be equated to the passage in *Mockingbird* where Bob Ewell spits in Atticus' face and threatens to kill him (Lee, "Mockingbird" 291). In both situations, he reacts passively, because doing so is just part of his character, but also because he understands the way Bob Ewell and Jean Louise feel. When it comes to the former, he says that he "[d]estroyed [Bob Ewell's] last shred of credibility" at the Tom Robinson trial and that Bob Ewell "[h]ad to have some kind of comeback" (Lee, "Mockingbird" 292); whereas concerning the latter, Atticus knows that Jean Louise views him as her hero, but knows that their discussion on their different views on blacks has to serve to present him to her "[a]s a man with a man's heart, and a man's failings" (Lee, "Watchman" 265). In other words, Atticus lets Jean Louise "[r]educ[e] him to the status of a human being" (Lee, "Watchman" 266), because essentially he is the same loving father from *Mockingbird*. Atticus does not fundamentally change as a character from *Mockingbird* to *Watchman*. In fact, in the former, he virtually maintains all the character traits he has in the latter: his ability to empathize, his kindness, his opposition to classist ideas as embodied by Aunt Alexandra, his excusing faults in all whites and his promotion of Jean Louise's independence as a woman. Atticus is congruous throughout *Mockingbird* and *Watchman*. What is different from the former to the latter is the context in which he is placed, which emphasizes other aspects of his character, creating the illusion of a fundamental change in Atticus.

5. Conclusion

The reactions to *Go Set a Watchman* from readers and critics presented in the introduction suggest a fundamental change in Atticus Finch from *To Kill a Mockingbird* to *Go Set a Watchman*: from moral hero to racist. This is an illusion created by the different contexts of the two books that emphasize different aspects of his character. Atticus is in fact congruous throughout both novels.

The investigation on the origin of Atticus helped broaden the perception of the character: it was shown that Atticus was molded after Harper Lee's father, Mr. A. C. Lee, who was still in favor of segregation when the author's concept of the character was cemented. How Mr. Lee was stirred to act in favor of wrongly accused black men despite his beliefs also reveals the same complexity in Atticus' view of blacks and segregation, on the one hand, and his sense of justice, on the other. The reason Atticus exerts himself to defend Tom Robinson is because he knows the defendant is innocent and not because he is a black rights activist.

Furthermore, analyses of *Mockingbird* was presented delineating Atticus' major characteristics, such as his ability to empathize, as evidenced in his explanation of why Bob Ewell threatens and spits in his face after the Tom Robinson trial. Atticus' ability to empathize is transformed into kindness when he refuses to charge Walter Cunningham for legal services provided to him. Atticus was also shown to oppose the classist ideas Aunt Alexandra embodies and to promote Scout's independence as a girl in a Maycomb that wants to bend her behavior to fit that of the model Southern girl. Furthermore, though Atticus' opinion of blacks and segregation are not clearly expressed in *Mockingbird*, they are still discernable upon close reading: he repeatedly excuses faults in all the white people that threaten and verbally attack

him; he does not involve himself with the black population of Maycomb; and he reluctantly accepts the case of Tom Robinson, despite knowing him to be innocent.

Analyses of Atticus in *Watchman* established the same personality traits found in *Mockingbird*. Atticus shows kindness when he provides for Henry “Hank” Clinton and gives him a job after his mother passes away. Atticus also opposes the classist ideas Aunt Alexandra expresses, he excuses faults in all whites and he encourages Jean Louise to be independent in a South which has restrictive roles for females. Furthermore, despite his views on blacks and segregation, Atticus’ ability to empathize enables him to remain calm in the climactic discussion he has with Jean Louise, because essentially he is the same loving father from *Mockingbird*.

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