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The Intersection of Personal Experience and Literary Creation of Harper Lee's Novels

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Abstract: This study explores the intersection between personal experience and literary creation in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) using a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in Lucien Goldmann's Genetic Structuralism. Through close textual analysis supported by biographical and historical interpretation, the research examines how Lee's lived experience and socio-historical context shape narrative structure, character construction, and ideological expression. The findings indicate that Lee's childhood in the racially segregated American South, her family background, and her social observations strongly influence the depiction of Maycomb, the development of Jean Louise Finch, and the thematic focus on racial injustice and moral responsibility. The study also reveals that editorial intervention played a crucial role in transforming *Go Set a Watchman* into *To Kill a Mockingbird*, resulting in a more coherent narrative structure and a redefined portrayal of Atticus Finch. Overall, the study demonstrates that Harper Lee's enduring literary significance lies in her ability to transform personal memory and historical reality into fiction that offers profound insight into the social and moral complexities of Southern American society.

Keywords: Harper Lee; Personal Experience; Genetic Structuralism; Southern American Society.

I. INTRODUCTION

Harper Lee occupies a distinctive position in American literary history, not only for her engagement with race, morality, and justice but also for the way her personal experiences intersect with her literary imagination. Raised in the American South during a period marked by rigid racial hierarchies and social transformation, Lee drew extensively on her observations of Southern life, familial influence, and historical circumstance in shaping her fictional worlds. Although her published literary output consists of only two novels, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *Go Set a Watchman* (2015), these works collectively reveal how personal memory, social environment, and ethical reflection inform her creative process. Examining the relationship between Lee's lived experience and her narrative constructions provides a critical lens through which her novels may be more fully understood.

The publication of *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) generated intense anticipation but ultimately provoked polarized critical responses, largely due to its controversial portrayal of Atticus Finch. Unlike the morally upright and heroic figure presented in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), Atticus in *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) is depicted as holding segregationist and racially prejudiced views. This disjunction prompted readers and critics to reconsider not only Finch's symbolic status but also the extent to which Lee's characters reflect the complexities of her personal and historical context. Kakutani (2015) expressed disappointment, characterizing *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) as more of a historical artifact than a polished novel, particularly troubled by its destabilization of a character long regarded as a moral ideal.

Other scholars and critics, however, interpret this unsettling portrayal as a deliberate and meaningful extension of Lee's thematic concerns. Murphy (2015) argues that *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) forces readers to confront the entrenched racial ideologies of the American South and the

contradictions embedded within its social fabric. From this perspective, the novel complicates the idealized moral framework of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), suggesting that Atticus Finch's earlier representation may have reflected a selective moral vision shaped by narrative perspective rather than an absolute ethical truth. Such a reading underscores the role of authorial positioning and evolving consciousness in literary creation.

Nocera (2015) further suggests that the discomfort surrounding *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) can be mitigated by viewing the novel as an integral part of Harper Lee's broader literary exploration of race, justice, and moral ambiguity. Rather than diminishing the legacy of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), the later publication offers insight into Lee's developing reflections on these issues, shaped by her personal experiences and the changing social realities of her time. When read together, the two novels function as complementary texts that illuminate the dynamic relationship between lived experience and literary representation.

These interpretive debates are inseparable from the broader historical context that informed Lee's life and writing. World War II (1939–1945) accelerated social change in the United States, intensifying African American migration and demands for racial equality (Sitkoff, 2010; Asha et al., 2022; Indasari et al., 2020). The Double V Campaign linked the fight against fascism abroad to struggles against racism at home, while President Truman's desegregation of the military in 1948 marked an important federal shift toward civil rights. These developments formed the socio-historical backdrop against which Lee's moral and political consciousness emerged.

The 1950s further shaped this landscape through pivotal events such as *Brown v. Board of Education* that occured in 1954, which challenged legalized segregation (Klarman, 2004), and the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–1956), which popularized nonviolent resistance and elevated Martin Luther King Jr. as a national leader (Brinkley, 2000). At the same time, strong resistance to desegregation—evident in the Southern Manifesto and the Little Rock crisis in 1957 had exposed the persistence of racial ideology in Southern society (Jacoway, 2007; Abbas et al., 2023). These tensions are deeply embedded in the moral conflicts depicted in Lee's fiction.

Published within this charged historical environment, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) was widely praised for its portrayal of racial injustice and moral courage. Narrated through the perspective of Scout Finch, the novel achieved canonical status as an "instant classic" (Gibbons, 2009), valued for its ethical clarity and emotional resonance. Johnson (1994) emphasizes its educational significance, particularly its capacity to challenge dominant social norms and cultivate empathy. By contrast, *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) unsettles this moral certainty by revealing ideological contradictions within its central character, thereby inviting readers to reconsider how personal experience, memory, and historical positioning shape literary creation.

Taken together, the divergent receptions of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) highlight the importance of examining Harper Lee's novels through the intersection of personal experience and literary construction. By situating her works within their biographical and historical contexts, this study seeks to illuminate how Lee's fiction reflects both individual perspective and collective social reality, contributing to ongoing discussions of race, justice, and moral complexity in American literature.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Engaging with previous studies is essential for situating the present study within existing academic discourse on Harper Lee's novels. Numerous studies have examined racial ideology, character development, and social criticism in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *Go Set a Watchman* (2015), particularly through the figures of Atticus Finch and Jean Louise Finch. However, these analyses vary in the extent to which they address the role of Harper Lee's personal experience in shaping her literary creation.

Youssef (2018) examines the ideological transformation of Atticus Finch from a morally

idealistic figure in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) to a pragmatic and racially conservative character in *Go Set a Watchman* (2015). The study highlights reader dissonance and critical controversy resulting from this contrast, interpreting the shift as a movement from moral idealism to pragmatism. While Youssef offers a valuable comparative reading of character portrayal, the analysis remains largely text-centered and does not sufficiently explore how Harper Lee's personal background and historical positioning inform this ideological transformation.

Sanmartín Cao (2018) similarly focuses on the contrasting representations of Atticus Finch, framing him either as a symbol of tolerance or as an embodiment of ingrained racial prejudice. By emphasizing factors such as social class, education, and racial identity, the study contributes to discussions of American heroism and supremacist ideology. Nevertheless, its reliance on binary character interpretation limits deeper engagement with the complexities of literary creation shaped by evolving social consciousness and the author's lived experience.

Nugraha et al. (2020) present two studies centered on Jean Louise Finch. The first investigates her emotional, cognitive, moral, and religious development across both novels using Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic framework, while the second examines the moral values reflected in her character, highlighting the influence of family, social norms, and moral education. Although these studies effectively demonstrate the interaction between individual development and social environment, they prioritize psychological and ethical dimensions rather than the intersection of authorial experience and narrative construction.

Asha (2020) analyzes representations of anti-racism in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) through a qualitative descriptive approach informed by Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism. The study identifies prejudice, discrimination, and eviction as dominant forms of racism influenced by the socio-historical conditions of the Great Depression, emphasizing Atticus Finch's role in resisting racial injustice. Despite its contribution to understanding social criticism in the novel, the research does not address the continuity or transformation of ideological representation across Harper Lee's broader literary output, nor does it examine how personal experience informs literary creation.

Asha (2025) extends this line of inquiry by employing genetic structuralism and comparative analysis to trace Atticus Finch's ideological development across *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *Go Set a Watchman* (2015). This study situates Atticus's transformation within the social changes of the mid-twentieth-century American South and explores how social pressure and personal struggle shape racial attitudes. It also highlights Jean Louise Finch's disenchantment with her father's shifting views as a manifestation of generational and moral conflict. While this research provides substantial insight into the relationship between social change and literary representation, it primarily foregrounds collective social dynamics rather than Harper Lee's personal experience as a formative influence on narrative design and character construction.

Despite extensive scholarly attention to racial ideology, character transformation, and sociopolitical context in Harper Lee's novels, limited research has explicitly examined how Harper Lee's personal experiences intersect with her literary creation. Consequently, the dynamic relationship between Harper Lee's personal background, historical consciousness, and creative decisions remains insufficiently explored. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) through the lens of the intersection between personal experience and literary creation, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how individual perspective and social reality converge in Harper Lee's fiction.

III. METHODS

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in Lucien Goldmann's Genetic Structuralism to examine the intersection between Harper Lee's personal experience and her literary creation. The analysis centers on close textual reading supported by contextual interpretation, emphasizing extrinsic elements such as Lee's biography, historical positioning, and the critical

reception of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *Go Set a Watchman* (2015). These external factors are examined to reveal how the author's lived experience and socio-historical environment shape narrative structure, character construction, and ideological expression.

The primary data consist of Harper Lee's two novels, biographical materials, and critical responses to her works, while secondary data are drawn from relevant academic books, journal articles, and authoritative online sources. Data were collected through systematic textual analysis, biographical examination, and historical-sociological review of mid-twentieth-century Southern America. Analysis was conducted thematically by correlating literary elements with social structures and authorial experience, enabling a comprehensive interpretation of how personal history and collective consciousness intersect in Harper Lee's fiction.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Harper Lee's works, the relationship between her personal experience and her literary creation is particularly evident, even though the narratives do not directly replicate events from her own life. The characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) reveal clear traces of Lee's background, social environment, and personal observations. While the novels remain works of fiction, aspects of Lee's childhood, community life, and interpersonal relationships enrich the portrayal of her characters. Jean Louise Finch, for instance, reflects elements of Lee's personality and embodies a worldview shaped by growing up in the racially stratified society of the American South. Through this fusion of lived experience and imaginative reconstruction, Lee creates characters that possess emotional authenticity and resonate with complex social realities.

Further illustrating this connection, Harper Lee and her fictional counterpart Jean Louise (Scout) share notable similarities that underscore the influence of Lee's personal history on her writing. Both grew up during the 1930s in small rural towns in southern Alabama, environments deeply marked by racial segregation and social inequality. These shared conditions form a critical backdrop for Lee's novels, shaping the narrative perspective and thematic concerns while highlighting how personal experience intersects with literary creation.

Harper Lee's portrayal of the fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama, a setting that powerfully conveys both the atmosphere and social conditions that shape the novel.

Data 1

> *"Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. In rainy weather the streets turned to red slop; grass grew on the sidewalks, the courthouse sagged in the square. Somehow, it was hotter then: a black dog suffered on a summer's day; bony mules hitched to Hoover carts flicked flies in the sweltering shade of the live oaks on the square."* (Lee, 1960: 4)

This depiction reflects the broader influence of Lee's personal experiences and the historical context of her upbringing on her representation of Southern life. Maycomb functions as a symbolic representation of small, insular communities in the Deep South during the 1930s—a period characterized by economic hardship, rigid racial segregation, and deeply rooted social conventions. Descriptions of the town as "tired" and deteriorating, with muddy streets and a dilapidated courthouse, evoke not only physical decline but also moral and social stagnation, reinforcing the novel's critical perspective on resistance to change within Southern society, as can be seen below:

Data 2

> *"Men's stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three-o'clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum."* (Lee, 1960: 4)

The persistent heat, emphasized through images such as men's collars wilting early in the

morning and women bathing before noon, intensifies the sense of discomfort that permeates Maycomb. This oppressive climate mirrors the suffocating social environment in which strict class divisions and racial prejudice dominate everyday interactions. Lee's comparison of Southern women to "soft teacakes" glazed with sweat and talcum subtly critiques the performative nature of Southern gentility, exposing the tension between outward decorum and underlying moral decay. These details draw heavily on Lee's childhood experiences in Monroeville, Alabama—a small Southern town where racial tension and rigid social hierarchies were an everyday reality. Lee's familiarity with this environment enables her to construct a setting that not only grounds the narrative but also reinforces its central themes of racial injustice, moral complexity, and social resistance.

Parallels between Harper Lee's personal life and her fiction extend beyond setting to character construction. Lee's father, Amasa Lee, was a lawyer and a member of the Alabama state legislature, a background that closely parallels the character of Atticus Finch in both *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *Go Set a Watchman* (2015). Beyond professional similarity, both figures are depicted as moral authorities whose values significantly influence their daughters' understanding of justice, ethics, and social responsibility.

Further connections emerge in the depiction of childhood relationships. Harper Lee and her fictional counterpart Jean Louise both grew up with a close bond to an older brother and a young neighbor, relationships that are reflected in the characters of Jem and Dill. Lee's brother and her childhood friend Truman Capote are widely understood as inspirations for these figures, and their presence plays a formative role in shaping Jean Louise's worldview, just as similar relationships influenced Lee's own development.

Additionally, both Harper Lee and Jean Louise are portrayed as passionate readers from an early age. Lee was known for her deep love of literature, while Jean Louise is depicted as learning to read before formal schooling, exemplified by her habit of reading. This shared trait further underscores how Lee's personal experiences inform her literary creation, blending lived reality with fictional representation to produce narratives that resonate with authenticity and emotional depth.

Data 3

> *"... as I read the alphabet a faint line appeared between her eyebrows, and after making me read most of My First Reader and the stock-market quotations from The Mobile Register aloud, she discovered that I was literate and looked at me with more than faint distaste."* (Lee, 1960: 15).

Early exposure to literature played a crucial role in shaping both intellectual growth and critical awareness, enabling individuals to engage thoughtfully with their surrounding world. This idea is illustrated in the scene where Scout demonstrates her reading ability to her teacher, Miss Caroline, on her first day of school. Miss Caroline's response, marked by a sense of "faint distaste," is significant when examined in relation to Harper Lee's critique of formal education, social hierarchy, and individuality. The episode highlights Scout's advanced literacy and the informal learning environment fostered at home, which stands in contrast to the rigid and standardized educational system represented by her teacher. Scout's ability to read at an early age is largely attributed to Atticus Finch, whose emphasis on knowledge, reasoning, and independent thought reflects a household that nurtures curiosity and intellectual freedom.

This moment also reflects a recurring theme in Lee's work: the difficulty faced by those who diverge from established social norms. Scout's intellectual maturity distinguishes her from her peers, much as Atticus's moral conviction and willingness to defend a Black man set him apart from the broader community of Maycomb. This can be seen from Atticus' statement below:

Data 4

> *"Why reasonable people go stark raving mad when anything involving a Negro comes up, is something I don't pretend to understand... I just hope that Jem and*

Scout come to me for their answers instead of listening to the town. I hope they trust me enough...." (Lee, 1960: 81)

The Finch family's position outside the town's dominant values underscores Lee's critique of inflexible social structures and their constraints on moral and personal development.

A further point of convergence between Harper Lee's life and Jean Louise Finch's fictional experience lies in their early exposure to racially charged legal cases. Lee was six years old during the Scottsboro trials, which involved the false accusation of nine Black youths and later inspired the central conflict of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960). Similarly, Jean Louise is six years old during the trial of Tom Robinson, a Black man unjustly accused of raping a white woman. Atticus's statement:

Data 5

"I'm simply defending a Negro—his name's Tom Robinson. He lives in that little settlement beyond the town dump. He's a member of Calpurnia's church, and Cal knows his family well. She says they're clean-living folks." (Lee, 1960: 68)

The statement from Atticus above signals the moral gravity of the trial and introduces Jean Louise to the realities of racial injustice. These parallel experiences expose both Lee and her protagonist to systemic racism at an early age, shaping their ethical awareness and understanding of justice.

Harper Lee's literary imagination was also shaped by the broader political and social climate of the American South during her formative years. Growing up under the Jim Crow system, which institutionalized racial segregation and inequality, Lee witnessed firsthand the persistence of discrimination and injustice. These conditions are vividly reflected in her portrayal of Maycomb in both *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *Go Set a Watchman* (2015), where racial prejudice permeates social interactions and moral decision-making. The injustices Lee observed during her youth informed her nuanced depiction of race relations and the ethical dilemmas faced by her characters.

Education and early professional aspirations further influenced Lee's writing. She attended the University of Alabama to study law, following her father's path, though she did not complete her degree. Nevertheless, her exposure to legal studies is evident in her detailed and realistic depiction of courtroom procedures and legal argumentation. The trial of Tom Robinson, in particular, reflects Lee's understanding of legal processes and her engagement with questions of justice, fairness, and moral responsibility.

Lee's relocation to New York City in 1949 marked another formative experience that shaped her literary perspective. The contrast between the progressive, fast-paced environment of New York and the conservative social structure of her hometown in Alabama is mirrored in *Go Set a Watchman* (2015), where Jean Louise returns to Maycomb after living in New York. This geographical and cultural tension reflects Lee's own experience of navigating differing social values, highlighting the conflict between Northern ideals and Southern traditions.

The evolution of *Go Set a Watchman* into *To Kill a Mockingbird* further demonstrates Lee's developing literary perspective. *Watchman*, written earlier, presents a more direct and uncompromising critique of Southern racial ideology through an adult viewpoint. By reworking the narrative into *Mockingbird* and adopting a child's perspective, Lee was able to address complex moral issues with greater emotional clarity and accessibility. This shift illustrates her awareness of narrative voice as a powerful tool for shaping reader engagement and moral reflection.

The eventual publication of *Go Set a Watchman* in 2015 renewed debates regarding Lee's intentions and the development of her characters, particularly Atticus Finch. The contrasting portrayals of Atticus, as a moral hero in *Mockingbird* and a segregationist in *Watchman*—reflect the complexity of human belief systems and the influence of historical context on moral reasoning.

Data 6

"Well, your father's on the board of directors and Henry's one of the staunchest members." Alexandra sighed. "Not that we really need one. Nothing's happened here in Maycomb yet, but it's always wise to be prepared. That's where they are this minute." (Lee, 2015: 67)

This divergence invites readers to reconsider the stability of moral authority and highlights how societal change can challenge deeply held convictions.

The sign of Atticus' ideological shift also can be seen where scout's anxiety begins when she finds a racist pamphlet entitled "The Black Plague", which shocks Scout and indicates a departure from his previously portrayed values.

Data 7

"On its cover was a drawing of an anthropophagous Negro; above the drawing was printed The Black Plague. Its author was somebody with several academic degrees after his name." (Lee, 2015: 66)

As inferred from the scene above where Scout finds Atticus collection of racist pamphlets entitled The Black Plague, it represents a significant and troubling shift from his previously portrayed values in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960).

In addition, Harper Lee's novels are deeply shaped by her personal history, social environment, and the historical realities of her time. The parallels between Lee's life and the experiences of her characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) illustrate how personal memory and collective history converge in literary creation. Through Jean Louise Finch and other characters, Lee offers an authentic and emotionally resonant exploration of racial injustice and moral complexity in the American South, demonstrating how individual experience and societal context together inform enduring literary expression.

Futhermore, The findings indicate that *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) was initially introduced by its publisher and widely reported in the media as a sequel to *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960). However, textual and historical evidence reveals that *Go Set a Watchman* is in fact the original manuscript draft of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, completed in 1957 and later acquired by J.B. Lippincott Company. Harper Lee's editor, Tay Hohoff, identified the manuscript's literary potential, noting the presence of what she described as "the spark of the true writer" (Mahler, 2015). Despite this recognition, Hohoff assessed the manuscript as structurally underdeveloped, characterizing it as a collection of loosely connected episodes rather than a cohesive novel.

Further analysis shows that Hohoff identified the flashback sections involving Scout's childhood as the manuscript's strongest narrative component. Consequently, Lee was advised to expand these sections and reshape the narrative around Scout's formative years. Under Hohoff's editorial guidance, Lee revised the manuscript through several drafts over the following years. This process ultimately resulted in a restructured and thematically refined novel published as *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960).

Kakutani (2015) noted the differences between the two versions, observing that:

Data 8

"Some plot points that have become touchstones in Mockingbird are evident in the earlier Watchman. Scout's older brother, Jem, vividly alive as a boy in Mockingbird, is dead in Watchman; the trial of a black man accused of raping a young white woman ... is only a passing aside in Watchman. (The trial results in a guilty verdict for the accused man, Tom Robinson, in Mockingbird but leads to an acquittal in Watchman.)" (Kakutani, 2015)

Comparative textual analysis supports Kakutani's (2015) observation that while certain narrative elements appear in both texts, their execution and emphasis differ significantly. In *Go Set a Watchman*, Jem Finch is deceased, whereas in *To Kill a Mockingbird* he plays a central role in the narrative. Similarly, the trial of Tom Robinson—one of the defining events in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, where Robinson is wrongfully convicted—is only briefly mentioned in *Go Set a Watchman* and concludes with an acquittal. These differences demonstrate a substantial shift in narrative focus, character function, and thematic development between the draft and the final novel.

Data 9

> *"Students of writing will find Watchman fascinating for these reasons: How did a lumpy tale about a young woman's grief over her discovery of her father's bigoted views evolve into a classic coming-of-age story about two children and their devoted widower father?"* (Kakutani, 2015).

This emphasizes the ideological and tonal shift between the two novels. *Go Set a Watchman* is described as disturbing, openly depicting racist language and attitudes typical of the segregated South. Kakutani then contrasts this harsh realism with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which is framed as a morally redemptive text aligned with civil rights ideals. The quotation from Andrew Young underscores how the revised novel came to symbolize hope, ethical growth, and human dignity, despite originating from a darker and more confrontational narrative.

Data 10

> *"How did a distressing narrative filled with characters spouting hate speech (from the casually patronizing to the disgustingly grotesque—and presumably meant to capture the extreme prejudice that could exist in small towns in the Deep South in the 1950s) mutate into a redemptive novel associated with the civil rights movement, hailed, in the words of the former civil rights activist and congressman Andrew Young, for giving us 'a sense of emerging humanism and decency'?"* (Kakutani, 2015).

The findings further reveal that *Go Set a Watchman* centers on Jean Louise Finch as an adult confronting her emotional disillusionment upon discovering her father's racially prejudiced views. This narrative is episodic and introspective, emphasizing personal conflict rather than broader social critique. In contrast, *To Kill a Mockingbird* adopts a childhood perspective that allows for a more coherent coming-of-age narrative, focusing on moral education, empathy, and justice through Scout and Jem's experiences.

This transformation also significantly altered the portrayal of Atticus Finch. In *Go Set a Watchman*, Atticus is depicted as morally ambiguous and aligned with segregationist views, reflecting the entrenched racial attitudes of mid-20th-century Southern society. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, however, Atticus is reconstructed as a moral exemplar whose commitment to justice and racial equality forms the ethical core of the novel. This shift illustrates how editorial intervention and narrative restructuring influenced both character development and thematic direction.

The revision process also resulted in a more unified narrative structure. While *Go Set a Watchman* presents a fragmented sequence of events, *To Kill a Mockingbird* demonstrates a clear narrative arc with deliberate pacing and thematic cohesion. This structural refinement enabled the novel to more effectively address complex social issues, including racial injustice and moral responsibility.

The publication of *Go Set a Watchman* in 2015 generated considerable criticism, largely due to its presentation as a newly released novel rather than an early draft. Readers' expectations of a polished sequel contributed to disappointment, particularly regarding Atticus Finch's portrayal. The novel's raw narrative style, explicit depictions of prejudice, and limited thematic resolution were perceived as weaknesses when compared to the carefully developed narrative of *To Kill a*

Mockingbird.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the evolution from *Go Set a Watchman* to *To Kill a Mockingbird* reflects both Harper Lee's creative development and the influence of editorial guidance within a shifting socio-historical context. The transformation illustrates how narrative perspective, character reconstruction, and thematic refinement contributed to the emergence of *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a culturally significant and enduring literary work.

V. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Harper Lee's novels are shaped by a significant intersection between personal experience and literary creation. Although *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and *Go Set a Watchman* (2015) are fictional works, the findings reveal that Lee's childhood in the racially segregated American South, her family background, and her social observations strongly influence her narrative settings, characters, and thematic concerns. Through imaginative reconstruction, Lee transforms lived experience into fiction that conveys emotional authenticity and complex social realities.

The close parallels between Harper Lee and her protagonist Jean Louise Finch highlight how personal history informs literary representation. Shared experiences, such as growing up in small Southern towns, early exposure to racial injustice, strong familial influence, and a deep engagement with reading and education shape both character development and narrative perspective. The fictional town of Maycomb emerges as a symbolic reflection of Southern society, embodying social stagnation, racial prejudice, and moral tension rooted in Lee's lived environment.

The study also finds that editorial guidance was central to the transformation of *Go Set a Watchman* into *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The shift from an episodic adult narrative to a child-centered coming-of-age story enabled clearer thematic focus, structural coherence, and broader social resonance. This transformation significantly reshaped the portrayal of Atticus Finch, whose evolution from a morally ambiguous figure to a symbol of justice reflects changes in narrative strategy and thematic intent rather than inconsistency in characterization.

Overall, the evolution of Harper Lee's novels illustrates how personal memory, historical context, and creative revision interact in the literary process. The findings confirm that Lee's enduring literary impact lies in her ability to merge individual experience with broader social realities, producing narratives that offer profound insight into racial injustice, moral responsibility, and human complexity in the American South.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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