THE ROMANTICISM OF HARPER LEE'S
TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

THESIS

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By

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The thesis examines the influence of the Romantic elements of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* upon the novel's characterizations, structure, tone, and themes. Chapter One contains a critical survey of criticism about the novel and a list of Romantic elements. Chapters Two, Three, and Four present the three most important of those elements. Chapter Two is the exploration of the novel's Gothic traits. Chapter Three explores the Romantic treatment of childhood's innocence and perspicacious vision as it pertains to Dill, Jem, and, in particular, Scout. Chapter Four is a detailed study of Atticus Finch, the novel's Romantic hero, who expresses or incorporates many of the most important elements of Romanticism in the novel.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Not much has been written about Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize winning novel, To Kill a Mockingbird, despite the fact that the novel has continued to be respected for the nearly twenty years since it was first published. Some of the critics deal mainly with the story of Tom Robinson and the theme which calls for an end of racial bigotry. Others write about Scout, the six-year-old narrator and persona. A few deal with Atticus and his influences upon the lives of Scout, Jem, and Tom Robinson.

Opinions about To Kill a Mockingbird are generally favorable. The Library Journal, after a long plot summary, concludes that the novel is "a compassionate, deeply moving novel and a most persuasive plea for racial justice."\(^1\) On the other hand, William Stuckey in his book about the Pulitzer Prize winning novels\(^2\) takes a jaundiced view of the novel. Stuckey claims that Lee's treatment of Tom Robinson is superficial, and he claims that Lee's "real

\(^1\)Library Journal, LXXXV (May 15, 1960), 1937.

\(^2\)Stuckey evaluates the novels on the premise that, if a novel is popular with the public, it cannot be of any literary merit.
point" is that Robinson is a likeable character because Robinson is a hardworking "boy" who "knows his place and keeps it." 3 Stuckey also writes about Calpurnia: "[She] both mothers and bullies her young charge in the tradition of the lovable 'mammy.'" 4

Stuckey's interpretations are suspect. Nick Ford's opinions expressed in his article in Phylon, a journal devoted to racial equality in law and the arts, seems to be a more balanced view. Ford arrives at an opposite interpretation of To Kill a Mockingbird's black characters. He writes: "Instead of stereotyped Negroes, this novel presents living, convincing characters—neither saints nor devils, neither completely ignorant or foolish, nor completely wise or wholly courageous. . . ." 5 Ford describes Calpurnia as possessing "quiet dignity and wisdom" as she deals with Scout, Jem and the black and white adults of Maycomb. 6

Edwin Bruell's article deals mainly with Atticus's efforts to save Tom Robinson from conviction, and he interprets the novel as being a political and social commentary

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6Ibid., p. 123.
on racial injustice. Bruell feels that, although Atticus fails, the novel contains the hope that the "dawn" of freedom from racial ills will occur.7

Fred Erisman also emphasizes the political and social ideas of the novel. Erisman feels the book is meant to teach the South, as a region, a great lesson: the South must "escape the stifling provincialism that has characterized its past."8 He uses Atticus as his example for the South to follow. Erisman states: "He is presented as a Southern version of the Emersonian man, the individual who vibrates to his own string. . . . Through him, and through Jem and Scout . . . Miss Lee presents her view of the New South."9 I agree with Bruell and Erisman that the novel's theme calling for racial justice is important. This theme is, as I will note later, an element of Romanticism. But I do not think this theme is necessarily the most important theme in the novel.

Scout attracts the attention of a considerable number of the critics. Phoebe Adams does not like the novel's use of Scout as the narrator. Adams states: "It [the novel] is frankly and completely impossible, being told in the


9Ibid., pp. 128-129.
first person by a six-year-old girl with the prose style of a well-educated adult."\textsuperscript{10} Stuckey also complains that the point of view switches from Scout as an adult looking backward to a "naive child" who does not comprehend the world about her.\textsuperscript{11} He continues to state the "reason for this inconsistency" is that, when Lee "gets into difficulties with one point of view, she switches to the other."\textsuperscript{12}

The point of view of the novel does change, but Adams and Stuckey have failed to note two points about the changes in point of view. First, strict consistency would only serve to damage the dramatic effects of the novel; information vital to the novel would be omitted. When these minor changes in point of view occur, they are usually prefaced with such a statement like "as Jem and I discussed later" or "it wasn't until years later that I learned. . . ." The transitions are smoothly done and they are necessary. Second, it is clear, in spite of Stuckey's contention, that Scout usually does understand, as Stuckey states, "the implications of her actions,"\textsuperscript{13} as I will later demonstrate. Neither Adams nor Stuckey realizes that the novel has the


\textsuperscript{11}Stuckey, p. 194.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid.
Romantic tendency, as Jacques Barzun implies, to put emphasis upon theme and ideas rather than upon consistency.14

An anonymous reviewer in The New Yorker supports the opinion that Lee handles her writing well by stating that Lee is "a skilled, unpretentious writer" who alternates moods and techniques well.15 In his article, Leo Ward simply summarizes the plot for the most part. He does, however, admire the writing skills that Lee employs: "Both the style and story seem simple, but no doubt it is quite an achievement to bring them to that condition."16

Although Frank Lyll generally approves of the novel as a whole, he writes in his review that he feels that the "expository style has a processed, homogenized, impersonal flatness quite out of keeping with the narrator's gay, impulsive approach to life in youth."17 For the most part, the writing is vigorous and lively. Lee's writing style is, however, a bit dry during the Christmas celebration in chapter nine.

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15"Book Reviews," The New Yorker, XXXVI (September, 1960), 203.


A number of critics respond to Scout's personality. *Time* states: "Scout Finch is fiction's most appealing child since Carson McCullers's Frankie..."\(^{18}\) Ford states that the presentation of Scout and her world is the best "ever presented by an American novelist, with the possible exception of Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*.\(^{19}\) Bruell writes: "[Lee] paints Scout in warm tones and we like the child."\(^{20}\)

Harding Lemay, who concentrates on plot summary, expresses concern that the novel appears to be divided into two stories, one about Boo Radley, the other about Tom Robinson. Lemay writes: "The two worlds remain solitary in spite of Miss Lee's grace of writing and honorable decency of intent."\(^{21}\) In fact, the two plots are intricately interwoven. The novel begins with Scout and Jem interested in Boo Radley, but soon Tom Robinson's plight is brought to their attention. Boo Radley remains in the minds of the children as the story of Tom Robinson unfolds. In chapter fourteen, Dill thinks he understands why Boo does not run away. He tells Scout: "'Maybe he doesn't have anywhere to

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\(^{19}\)Ford, p. 122.

\(^{20}\)Bruell, p. 659.

"Dill is implying that Robinson's situation is similar to Boo's. Robinson is trapped with no place to go. After Robinson's conviction, Jem is depressed by the injustice he witnesses, and he informs Scout: "'I think I'm beginning to understand why Boo Radley stayed shut up in the house all the time . . . it's because he wants to stay inside.'" The two plots are directly joined as Boo saves the lives of Scout and Jem at the end of the novel when Bob Ewell tries to kill them. The two plots are never truly removed from each other.

Almost all the criticism displays a lack of understanding of *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s deeply Romantic nature, giving way to numerous misconceptions about the novel's characters, themes, and structure. I believe that the proper method of interpreting the novel requires an examination of the elements upon which its Romanticism is built. A close examination of *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s Romantic elements clarifies and explains most of the novel's important aspects.

Following is a list of Romantic elements or traits. The elements are not listed in any particular order of importance:

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23Ibid., p. 208.
Belief that the universe is an organic whole, on the "analogue of man" rather than a random series of chemical and physical reactions, and is sustained by "justice and love;" the universe is moral

Belief that reality is spiritual as well as physical

Faith that human beings are basically good, not evil

Quest or long search

Sense of sensitivity and feeling

Gothicism

Sentimentality

"Zeal" for the historical past; especially the Middle Ages, that was seen as "an age of faith, chivalry, and poetry."


31 Ibid., p. 46.


33 Bernbaum, Guide, p. 35.
Affection and, at times, hatred for nature and the feelings nature arouses.

Emphasis on the individual

Belief in the corrupting influence of civilization

"Interest in the state-of-nature . . . which expressed a preference of the simple life of earlier ages. . . ." such as the life style of the Noble Savage

Rebellion against society and its evils

Struggle for "humanitarian movements and reforms . . . the rights and dignity of man. . . ." democracy, and the political and social freedoms of the individual

Belief in the innocence of the child and in the "clarity of the childhood vision"

"Elegiac interest: in death, mutability, mourning, melancholy"

"Use of local dialects and color"

"Translation or imitation" of old Celtic, Scandinavian, and Oriental literature

Emphasis of the "imaginative, emotional, intuitive" over the "rational and formal" in literature

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35 Railo, p. vi.

36 Battenhouse, p. 18.

37 Hugo, pp. 34-35.


39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.


43 Erisman, p. 131.


45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.
Use of analogy to express themes and ideas\textsuperscript{48}

Regard for and kindness to animals\textsuperscript{49}

Use of heroes who "epitomize many of the most important aspects of Romanticism"\textsuperscript{50}

Obviously, \textit{To Kill a Mockingbird} does not contain all of these Romantic elements. There is no emphasis on kindness towards animals and no elegiac interest. Nature is not emphasized, and it plays only a background role. The wonders and the curative powers of nature, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson describes in \textit{Nature}, are not factors in the novel's Romanticism. Finally, \textit{To Kill a Mockingbird} is not written in imitation of ancient Celtic, Scandinavian, or Oriental literature.

Some Romantic elements are only touched upon in the novel. Erisman establishes the "regional" aspect of the novel;\textsuperscript{51} the setting is a small Alabama town. But Lee seldom uses the regional dialect. Local color is restricted mainly to attitudes of the society, characterized by representative individuals—such as Atticus's sister Alexandra and the Finch's Negress cook Calpurnia. Alexandra is a


\textsuperscript{49}Bernbaum, \textit{Guide}, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{50}Peter L. Thorslev, \textit{The Byronic Hero} (Minneapolis, 1962), p. 4.

\textsuperscript{51}Erisman, pp. 122-123.
fanatic about "family" and what it means to be a Finch family member. Calpurnia is concerned with following proper manners and social norms. The society, as a whole, holds fast to a rigid code of conduct defined by economic class and race.

There is no real zest for the ancient past in To Kill a Mockingbird. The novel is set in the immediate past during the early 1930s. The past is not worshipped as a chivalrous and poetic era. In chapter one, Lee sets the tone about the past:

Somehow it was hotter then: a black dog suffered on a summer's day . . . Men's stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon . . . and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frosting of sweat and talcum.

People moved slowly then. . . . A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go. . . .

Clearly, such a setting in time does not have the sense of chivalry and poetry as do the time-settings of James Fenimore Cooper's The Deerslayer and Sir Walter Scott's Ivanhoe.

Three Romantic elements dominate the novel, and through them the Romanticism of To Kill a Mockingbird is made apparent. These elements are Gothicism, the innocence and perspicacious vision of childhood, and the Romantic hero.

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52Lee, p. 30.
One of the major Romantic elements in To Kill a Mockingbird is Gothicism. According to Jane Lundblad, typical Gothic traits are a castle, a manuscript, a crime of some sort, religion, Italians, deformity, ghosts or demonic figures, magic, natural phenomena such as wind and lightning, armored knights, works of art, blood, and, as Peter Thorslev suggests, a Gothic villain. From this list, Lee makes use of the castle, a crime, religion, and ghosts by connecting them to the Radley family, especially Boo Radley, and their home. Lee uses darkness and stillness as phenomena of nature to great effect in two scenes. Important events, according to Lundblad, are often accompanied by darkness to serve the Gothic purpose of arousing feelings of dread. Lee does not make use of Italians, deformity, blood, or armored knights. There is a Gothic villain, in the person of Bob Ewell.

Childhood itself and the perspicacity of the childhood vision are important Romantic elements in the novel. Emerson feels that only the heart and eye of a child see and know nature. William Wordsworth, according to Charles

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54 Thorslev, p. 6.

55 Lundblad, p. 21.

56 Thompson, p. 3.

Babentroth, also associates the child with all that is noble and beautiful in life and the world; the child lives closest in time to nature and God.\textsuperscript{58} Living close to this "natural state" enables the creative powers of seeing reality to be fully developed. Innocence is also retained and renewed.\textsuperscript{59} Flannery O'Connor, in a letter to a friend, disparagingly refers to \textit{To Kill a Mockingbird} as a "child's book."\textsuperscript{60} In a sense, however, the novel is a child's book, for the narrator is a child and receives special treatment from the author.

Scout, the six-year-old narrator and persona, clearly observes the injustice of Tom Robinson's conviction and his subsequent death. The evil revealed during the trial nearly destroys the "child" in her twelve-year-old brother Jem, but it does not injure her innocence.

Scout's vision cuts through the bigotry and myths of her community and denies the inferiority of the black folks, such as Calpurnia and Tom Robinson, and the poor and uneducated people, such as the Cunningham family. She sees that all people are worthy of respect and justice.

Her vision often expresses itself by means of imagery. The use of symbolic imagery is also a Romantic trait.

\textsuperscript{58}Babentroth, p. 344. \textsuperscript{59}Ibid., p. 313. \textsuperscript{60}Flannery O'Connor, \textit{The Habit of Being}, edited by Sally Fitzgerald (New York, 1979), p. 411.
Albert Gerard, in his discussion of Romanticism, stresses that "image--metaphor, simile, personification, or mere descriptive epithet--is the best instrument . . . for transmitting the intuition . . . because it is based on analogy."  

Scout has the tendency to match people's personalities with, in her view, animals that symbolize specific characteristics of the people.

The third and most important Romantic element of the novel is the Romantic hero himself. The Romantic hero of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is Atticus Finch. Bruell, however, feels that Atticus is "no heroic type but any graceful, restrained simple person like one from Attica." Erisman agrees with Bruell's statement. But Atticus is a hero, and a Romantic hero. Atticus fits Thorslev's description, listed above, of the Romantic hero; Atticus does, to use Thorslev's word, "epitomize" many important Romantic traits.

For example, Atticus possesses an "awareness of the clarity of the childhood vision." Atticus knows how accurately children see the world and its doings. He tells his brother that one must always answer a child's question

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61 Gerard, p. 235.  
62 Bruell, p. 660.  
63 Erisman, p. 129.  
64 Thorslev, p. 4.  
65 Erisman, p. 131.
truthfully: "Children are children, but they can spot an evasion quicker than adults..." 66

By his words and deeds, Atticus also demonstrates the Romantic beliefs that the universe is moral and reality is spiritual as well as physical. He is empathetic; his sensitivity to the lot of all people, such as Tom Robinson and even Bob Ewell, shows his great respect for life and the rights of individuals. Atticus often reminds Scout, as Erisman points out, that each person is unique and worthy of respect. 67 He is polite to everyone--white or black, rich or poor, demonstrating his high regard for humanity. In his defense of Tom Robinson, Atticus's struggle for the rights and liberties of the individual and his rebellion against society's ills become apparent. Atticus's quest is his mission for justice on Tom Robinson's behalf. Erisman points out that Atticus embodies some of the Romantic elements as found in Emerson's *Nature* and "Self-Reliance." 68 Atticus also follows several of the ideas found in the writings of Emerson's colleague Henry David Thoreau.

A thorough examination of the three dominant Romantic elements of *To Kill a Mockingbird*—Gothicism, childhood's innocence and clear vision, and the Romantic hero—clear up misconceptions about the novel's characters and themes.

66 Lee, p. 83. 67 Erisman, p. 128. 68 Ibid.
CHAPTER II

GOTHICISM

The purpose of Gothicism, also known as "horror-romanticism," is to create "an air of suspense [sic] and terror." Added to this atmosphere is a pronounced feeling of dread, which can be a physical fear of the body or a spiritual fear of the mind and soul. Gothic traits are meant to provide the not unpleasurable thrills of mystery and dread.

Harper Lee uses Gothicism in To Kill a Mockingbird effectively. She uses seven Gothic traits: a castle, crime, religion, a ghostly or demonic figure, magic, the phenomena of nature, and a Gothic villain. These traits work together to create the Gothic element in the novel.

The Castle

The setting is the key to Gothicism, for it provides the proper air of mystery and it is the backdrop for other

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2Ibid., p. 319.
4Railo, p. 58.
scenes of "innumerable horrors." The mainstay of the setting is the "haunted castle." The haunted castle does not need to be a castle. An old run-down or ruined house can serve equally well. The actual building is unimportant as long as it provides the proper Gothic atmosphere. Such an old house is the setting of Nathaniel Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables. Similarly, in Edgar Allen Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher," the ancestral Usher home takes the place of a medieval castle.

The Radley Place is the "haunted castle" of To Kill a Mockingbird. Located three lots down from the Finch home, the Radley house stirs the darker emotions in Scout and Jem Finch. Scout describes the Radley Place as it looks from the street:

The house was low, once white with a deep front porch and green shutters, but had long ago darkened to the color of the slate gray around it. Rain-rotted shingles drooped over the eaves of the veranda; oak trees kept the sun away. The remains of a picket drunkenly guarded the front yard—a "swept" yard that was never swept—where johnson grass and rabbit-tobacco grew in abundance.

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5Ibid., pp. 7-8.  
6Ibid., p. 7.  
7Ibid., p. 8.  
The house is always tightly locked. The windows remain shuttered constantly, and the blinds drawn. The screenless doors are closed throughout the week as well as on Sundays.

The rear of the Radley Place enhances its "haunted" quality. One night, Scout, Jem, and their new friend Dill Harris creep through the backyard, hoping they can peek inside the house. Scout becomes timorous as they approach the house and she gets her first good look at it:

The back of the Radley house was less inviting than the front: a ramshackle porch ran the width of the house; there were two doors and two dark windows between the doors. . . . An old Franklin stove sat in a corner of the porch; above it a hat-rack mirror caught the moon and shone eerily. 10

Scout and Jem never see the house's interior.

Anything connected to the Radley Place is considered evil and malignant. The backyard fence separates the Radley's property from the school's playground. Pecan trees in the Radley yard drop nuts on the other side of the fence. Few people knowingly eat the pecans because they fear the nuts are deadly poison. One child claims he nearly died from eating the "pizened" nuts.

The Ghostly Figure

Living inside the Radley house is someone who frightens Jem and Scout more than the house. According to Scout, "the

10Ibid., p. 52
mere description of whom was enough to make us behave for days... The person is Arthur (Boo) Radley.

Boo is the ghostly or demonic figure prevalent in Gothicism. An aura of mystery and fear surrounds his very name; no one ever sees him. Many people of Maycomb, adults as well as children, think of him as the town's madman, ghost, or ghoul. Scout describes the local attitudes about Boo:

Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom... People said he went out at night when the moon was down, and peeped in windows. When people's azaleas froze... it was because he breathed on them. Any stealthy crimes committed in Maycomb were his work. Once... people's chickens and household pets were found mutilated; although the culprit was Crazie Addie... [people were] unwilling to discard their suspicions.

Few people have seen Boo for over fifteen years, but a popular ghoulish conception of him is passed by word of mouth. Jem relates this picture to Dill:

Boo was six-and-a-half feet tall, judging from his tracks; he dined on raw squirrels and any cats he could catch, that's why his hands were bloodstained—if you ate an animal raw, you could never wash the blood off. There was a long jagged scar that ran across his face; what teeth he had were yellow and rotten; his eyes popped, and he drooled most of the time.

Boo mysteriously comes and goes in the night, and Jem and Scout never see him. But he knows them. He leaves them small gifts in a hole of an oak tree that sits in the

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11Ibid., p. 12.  
12Lundblad, p. 19.  
14Ibid., pp. 17-18.
Radley front yard. The items he leaves are such things as a spelling medal, a broken watch, two soap dolls made to resemble Scout and Jem, and a case knife. One cold winter's night he gives Scout a blanket. Maudie Atkinson's house burns down, and they are forced from their house in case the fire spreads. As the night wears on, Scout dozes and Boo covers her sleepy and cold body with a blanket.

The Finch children have a strong desire to see Boo. They concoct schemes to make him come out, but they fail. Scout finally gets her wish at the end of the novel. His true looks, while not like the gory image the town envisions, does enhance his ghostly visage. Scout describes him as he stands in Jem's room:

He pressed the palms of his hands against the wall. They were white hands, sickly white hands that had never seen the sun, so white they stood out garishly against the dull cream wall in the dim light . . . .

His face was as white as his hands, but for a shadow on his jutting chin. His cheeks were thin to hollowness; his mouth was wide; there were shallow, almost delicate indentations at his temples and his gray eyes were so colorless I thought he was blind. His hair was dead and thin, almost feathery on top of his head.15

Like a ghost, Boo cannot stand exposure to bright lights. He gets Scout to lead him to the dimly lit porch rather than the livingroom with its bright lights. He needs the darkness. Boo is the ghostly figure in the Gothic tradition.

15Ibid., p. 245.
The Mysterious Crime

A mysterious crime or a guilty sense of wrong doing is another trait of Gothicism. Boo is a tormented creature who is "anguished by an indefinable guilt for some crime it cannot remember having committed." The crime may be spiritual, like the sin of adultery committed by Arthur Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne. It may be criminal like the murder of old Pyncheon in The House of the Seven Gables.

The only crime Boo commits is a one-night drinking spree during which he and a few teenage friends harass Maycomb's old town marshal. For punishment, Boo's father locks the boy inside the Radley house. A year or two later his mother accuses him of stabbing his father with scissors. Nobody but Boo and Mr. Radley know what has actually happened, but the sheriff incarcerates Boo in the courthouse basement, which serves as the Gothic device of a dungeon. He nearly dies from the damp. Boo is soon entrusted to his father's custody and returned to the house. No one ever sees him again in the daytime.

The townspeople do wonder what has become of him. At one point Jem speculates that he has died and his body stuffed up the chimney. Scout disbelieves Jem and wonders how he is forced to remain inside the house:

\[16\text{Lundblad, pp. 19-20.}\]
\[17\text{Thompson, p. 3.}\]
\[18\text{Lundblad, p. 56.}\]
\[19\text{Ibid., p. 62.}\]
Nobody knew what form of intimidation Mr. Radley employed to keep Boo out of sight, but Jem figured that Mr. Radley kept him chained to the bed most of the time. Atticus said no . . . there were other ways of making people into ghosts.20

The unknown nature of Boo's crime, the severe and bizarre punishment, and the pervading silence that overhangs the entire situation heightens the novel's air of mystery and feelings of dread.

Religion

Abbeys, cloistered monks, and strange religious practices are standard Gothic fare.21 Two characters who prominently typify this Gothic trait are Ann Radcliff's Schedoni of The Italian and Matthew Lewis's Ambrosia of The Monk. In this tradition of Schedoni and Ambrosia are Mr. Radley and his oldest son, Nathan.

Father and son resemble each other physically and temperamentally. They share physical characteristics with Radcliff's Schedoni. Schedoni is "extremely thin" in figure. His countenance is serious; his skin is pale and bleached.22 Mr. Radley's eyes are "so colorless they did not reflect light."23 His demeanor is grave and unsmiling, and his posture is "ramrod straight."24 He, too, is thin.

Lewis's monk, Ambrosio, is an amorous, licentious man whose lustful dealings with women are cruel and merciless.

20Lee, p. 16.  
21Lundblad, p. 18.  
22Railo, p. 178.  
23Lee, p. 16.  
24Ibid.  
25Railo, p. 176.
Unlike Ambrosio, the Radley's passion is religion, not sexual lust; but they are as ruthless as Ambrosia in satisfying their desires.

The use of the Gothic trait of religion thickens the aura of mystery and horror surrounding the Radleys and increases the suspense and feelings of dread by adding a satanic feeling to the Gothic atmosphere.

The Radleys belong to a Protestant sect that is fundamentalist to an extreme degree. They "cloister" themselves away from all who are not of their faith. They have little contact with the rest of Maycomb's community. Maudie Atkinson, a friendly neighbor of the Finch's, explains to Scout that the Radleys are "foot-washing" Baptists who are more "hard-shell" than she herself is. The foot-washers believe anything pleasurable is a deadly sin. For example, they loudly condemn Maudie because she spends more time growing pretty flowers than reading her Bible. The Bible is taken so literally that, according to Maudie, "'foot-washers think women are sin by definition.'" Their devotion is as hypocritical as the piety of the young Ambrosia whose religious zeal is, in reality, "spiritual conceit and pride."28

Schedoni and Ambrosio commit murders. The Radleys do not actually kill anyone, but they nearly destroy Boo's

26Lee, p. 45.  
27Ibid.  
28Railo, p. 324.
soul. For his "crime" Boo must be punished, and Mr. Radley--followed by Nathan after the old man's death--strives to insure that Boo's punishment is eternal. They go about the task with the religious fervor of fanatics. When Nathan discovers that Boo has been leaving gifts for Scout and Jem in the oak tree, he seals up the tree-hole, depriving Boo of even the simple human pleasure of sharing.

Magic

Spells, supernatural events, enchanted objects, magic amulets and potions are fairly common in Gothicism.²⁹ Railo says that the manifestations of magic in their presentations by writers can be either rationally explained, ignored as illusions or insanity, or accepted simply as supernatural or magical.³⁰

Many adults and children in To Kill a Mockingbird believe in supernatural phenomena. Spells and incantations provide protection from evil spirits, or "haints," which stalk Maycomb. To protect themselves as they walk past the Radley Place, the Negroes whistle to frighten away the malignant evil of the house. The blacks also believe in the phenomena known as "hot steams." Jem gives instructions on the nature of "hot steam:"

"Haven't you ever walked along a lonesome road at night and passed by a hot place?" Jem asked Dill.

²⁹Lundblad, p. 20. ³⁰Railo, p. 324.
"A Hot Steam's somebody who can't get to heaven, just wallows around on lonesome roads an' if you walk through him you'll be one, too, and you'll go around at night suckin' people's breath--"

"How can you keep from passing through one?"
"You can't," said Jem. "Sometimes they stretch all the way across the road, but if you hafta go through one say, 'Angel-bright, life-in-death, get off the road, don't suck my breath.' That keeps 'em from wrapping around you--"31

Scout and Jem laugh at the idea that hot steams might be real, but they accept as reality other forms of magic. When Jem returns to fetch his trousers which he lost the night they sneaked into the Radley's backyard, he finds the pants neatly folded over the fence and repaired. He tells Scout that he feels the pants were left there, as if someone knew he would return for them. Jem says: "Like somebody was reading my mind ... like somebody could tell what I was gonna do."32 For a long time afterwards, Jem fears his every thought is known. They eventually discover that Boo has been watching them from his window for years, and he simply knows them very well.

One element of magic foreshadows Boo's rescue of Scout and Jem. One of Boo's gifts is a pair of Indian-head pennies. Jem gravely considers the pennies as magic amulets. He tells Scout the Indian-heads are powerful magic:

"Well, Indian-heads--well, they come from the Indians. They're real strong magic, they make you have good luck. Not like fried chicken when

31Lee, pp. 39-40
32Ibid., p. 58.
you're looking for it, but things like long life 'n' good health . . . these are real valuable to somebody."³³

The pennies are indeed good fortune for Scout and Jem. Boo saves them from death, allowing them to escape from early deaths.

The Phenomena of Nature

Moonlight, blowing wind, lightning, and other such natural phenomena effectively lend themselves to the development of the Gothic atmosphere, particularly deep darkness which "often attends the crucial events."³⁴ In two of the novel's crucial scenes, Lee envelopes the settings in darkness. The first critical event marks Jem's first step into manhood. The second incident is the climax when Bob Ewell attacks Jem and Scout.

The first happens on a moon-drenched night. Scout, Jem, and Dill creep under the Radley's back fence in an attempt to peek through the shutters at Boo. The moon disappears, and the dark swallows the world. Barely able to see, they bump into objects and each other. Scout observes: "That we would be obliged to dodge the unseen from all directions was confirmed when Dill ahead of us spelled G-o-d in a whisper."³⁵

The moon reappears as Jem climbs onto the porch. As Scout watches with terror, a shadow materializes over Jem:

It was the shadow of a man with a hat on. At first I thought it was a tree, but there was no wind blowing, and tree-trunks never walked. The back porch was bathed in moonlight, and the shadows, crisp as toast, moved across the porch... The shadow stopped about a foot beyond Jem. Its arm came out from its side, dropped and was still. Then it walked along the porch and off the side of the house, returning as it had come.36

The children bolt, never knowing to whom the shadow belongs. A shotgun blast cuts through the silence and darkness. As they flee, Jem entangles his trousers in the fence, abandons them, and runs off in his undershorts. Later, he decides he must retrieve them, even though he believes he risks his life.

As Scout waits on her back porch for Jem to return, she listens to the sounds of night. Railo points out that at night, sounds which are ordinary in the daytime, become mysterious and are capable of inspiring fear and dread.37 Scout trembles with fear at almost every noise:

Every night-sound I heard from my cot on the back porch was magnified three-fold; every scratch of feet on gravel was Boo Radley seeking revenge, every passing Negro laughing in the night was Boo Radley loose and after us; insects splashing against the screen were Boo Radley's insane fingers picking the wire to pieces. . . .38

The night-crawlers had retired, but ripe china-berries drummed on the roof when the wind stirred,

36ibid., p. 53. 37Railo, p. 60.
38Lee, p. 55.
and the darkness was desolate with the barking of dogs.\textsuperscript{39}

Jem returns with his trousers, and he is changed. He is filled with a fear of something unknown, but he regards Boo no longer with horror but with a compassionate curiosity. For the first time, he senses Boo's humanity and takes his first steps into manhood. From this time onward, Scout watches a distance grow larger between them.

The next crucial scene is Bob Ewell's attack upon Scout and Jem as they are walking home from a Halloween party at the school. Scout is stuck inside her "ham" costume. Lee heavily emphasizes the night's bleakness, for she mentions the intense darkness five times in two pages. Scout and Jem approach the climactic scene: the huge oak tree near the corner of the schoolyard and the Radley Place. Jem thinks he hears a strange sound. Scout hears nothing but becomes uneasy:

The night was still. I could hear his [Jem's] breath coming easily beside me. Occasionally there was a sudden breeze that hit my bare legs, but it was all that remains of a promised windy night. This was the stillness before the storm.\textsuperscript{40}

They move on in the night. As they approach the oak tree, she hears the noise which he mentioned:

Maybe it was the wind rustling the trees. But there wasn't any wind and there weren't any trees except the big oak.

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., p. 57. \hspace{2cm} \textsuperscript{40}Ibid., p. 236.
Our company shuffled and dragged his feet, as if wearing heavy shoes. Whoever it was wore thick cotton pants; what I thought were trees rustling was the soft swish of cotton on cotton, wheek, wheek, with every step.

I felt the sand go cold under my feet. . . .

Bob Ewell charges out of the darkness to kill them. He breaks Jem's arm, knocking the boy unconscious. Attacking Scout, he tries to knife her, but he is thwarted by her costume. He is attempting to crush her when he suddenly releases her.

Scout cannot see, but she can hear the noise of two people's struggling. The fighting ceases with the sound of someone's death rattle. The terror of the entire scene is intensified by Scout's being able only to hear. She stumbles over a corpse and panics. Finally extricating herself from her costume, she sees under a streetlight a man carrying Jem to her house. She races home to find her brother safe and Boo Radley her friend and rescuer. Boo has saved them by killing Bob Ewell.

The Gothic purpose of arousing emotions of fear, dread, and excitement are helped to fruition by Lee's use of natural phenomena. Darkness, lack of wind, and aural impressions attend most of the critical events of the novel, amplifying the Gothic tension.

41Ibid., pp. 237-238.
The Gothic Villain

The Gothic villain is never a "sympathetic" character, for "he and his crimes are made to appear even more monstrous by the addition of gratuitous acts of cruelty or sadism." Another reason he is despicable is that he "acknowledges the moral codes of society and his own wickedness by violating these codes. . . ." The Gothic villain pursues his evil to his certain death. Bob Ewell fits the description of the Gothic villain.

Ewell, a minor character, is the typical Gothic villain. He takes sinister pride in his cruelty and never feels remorse or pity. The one trait that seems to intensify Ewell's repugnance is his cowardice. Ewell savagely beats his oldest daughter because, isolated from human contact and affection by her father, she tries to seduce a young Negro man. Ewell brings a false charge of rape against the man, Tom Robinson, to cover his brutal attack upon his own daughter, and he lies on the witness stand to secure a conviction. He hypocritically proclaims he seeks justice and the protection of Southern womanhood. After Robinson's death, he torments Robinson's widow with implied threats of either assault or rape. He stops only when her

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43 Ibid., p. 53.
44 Ibid., p. 54.
employer confronts him man-to-man with a promise of legal action.

Ewell is too cowardly to perform his cruel deeds openly. He harasses Helen Robinson only when she is alone, just as he beats his children when no one is near. When Atticus, who is Robinson's lawyer, and Judge Taylor reveal him to be the liar and hypocrite he is, he seeks revenge. Afraid to deal with them personally, he employs underhanded methods: he tries to burglarize Judge Taylor's house and, as I have noted, he tries to kill Scout and Jem.

Ewell flouts many codes and customs of his society. He gets drunk in public rather than in private (which is tolerated). His drinking causes hardships for his children. He is violent when drunk and he spends his welfare money on green bootleg whiskey. The innocent suffer for his conduct. Refusing a W. P. A. job, he is the first in line to get his relief check, and he lets everyone know he buys liquor with the money. He enjoys outraging the townspeople.

He goes to great lengths to violate even small customs and codes. He curses violently in front of women and children, conduct not condoned in Maycomb, and laughs at the discomfort he causes. Ignoring the Wesleyan principle of personal cleanliness and hygiene, he houses his family next to the town dump and keeps his body filthy. Scout notices at Tom Robinson's trial that for the very first time she is seeing Ewell clean.
Ewell takes pride in his cruelty and violations of social mores. His breaking these codes is a tacit acknowledgment of their validity and his personal wickedness. In the manner of the Gothic villain, he pursues without remorse his evil course of action until he dies a deserved and violent death.

The use of a Gothic villain and other traits of Gothicism do not make *To Kill a Mockingbird* a simple *roman noir*, a "novel of terror and wonder."45 The novel contains other elements of Romanticism. But the Gothic traits play a significant role in the overall Romanticism of the novel.

45Lundblad, p. 9.
CHAPTER III

THE VISION OF THE CHILD

The Romantic vision of the child is expressed, according to Charles Babentroth, by beliefs in the innocence of the child\(^1\) and in the perspicacious observation of reality and truth by the child.\(^2\) The three children in *To Kill a Mockingbird*—Jem, Dill, and, in particular, Scout—take on the Romantic qualities of the child, innocence and his clear perception of reality.

**Innocence**

Scout lacks any sense of original sin or evil existing within herself. She lives in harmony with nature's ways and sees most occurrences as being simple and natural. Right and wrong are decided by feeling; religious dogmas and concepts confuse her. Maudie Atkinson tries to explain to Scout some religious differences between Baptist and "foot-washing" Baptist. When informed that the "foot-washing" Baptists believe Maudie to be eternally condemned because she loves to raise flowers, Scout grows incredulous:


\(^{2}\) Ibid., p. 357.
"My confidence in pulpit Gospel lessened at the vision of Miss Maudie stewing forever in various Protestant hells. . . . How so reasonable a creature could live in peril of everlasting torment was incomprehensible."³ Scout simply judges: "'that ain't right.'"⁴ After Maudie attempts to explain divergent biblical interpretations, Scout comes to this conclusion about institutional religion: "'It don't make sense. . . . God's loving folks like you love yourself. . . .'"⁵

Scout is free from many conventional ideas about what actions are sinful or "dirty." In chapter six, Scout, with Jem and Dill, watches late one night their neighbor, Mr. Avery, urinate under a streetlight. Scout does not feel a hint of guilt or a sense of wrongdoing on Mr. Avery's part or her observation. In fact, she rather admires his ability with a glint of jealousy. She finds nothing evil or "dirty" in a normal, natural bodily process.

In chapter seven, Mr. Avery blames a rare winter snowfall upon the sins of children. Scout, who is delighted with the snow, reflects: "If this is our reward, there is something to say for sin."⁶

As can be seen, Scout's concept of sin is not tied to religion or social conventions. A sin to Scout, a child of

⁴Ibid. ⁵Ibid., p. 46. ⁶Ibid., p. 64.
nature, is a violation of nature's ways by harming something or someone needlessly. For example, Scout understands the idea that it is a sin to kill a mockingbird, because mockingbirds do not harm and their singing brings people pleasure. To harm such a creature is a sin against nature. At the end of the novel, Scout readily understands Sheriff Tate's reason for not disclosing that Boo Radley saved her life and Jem's: Boo's shy sensitive nature could not withstand the popularity of his being a hero. She tells her father: "'It'd be sort of like shootin' a mockingbird... . . .'" Scout relies upon her instinctive feeling, which, according to Babentroth, is derived directly from the child's close existence in time to God, to tell her which are the right courses to follow.

Scout's innocence is also reflected by her open, honest heart. Rarely does she choose her words or conduct herself in order to please people. She usually reacts to situations with instinctive honesty. For example, in chapter three, she beats up Walter Cunningham, Jr. because he is an indirect cause of her being disciplined by their teacher. She punches her cousin Francis in the mouth, in chapter nine, for calling Atticus a foul name. Cecil Jacobs, a schoolmate, commits the same mistake and feels her wrath.

\[7\text{Ibid., p. 251.}\] \[8\text{Babentroth, p. 344.}\]
Scout's innocence allows her to understand and respect Jem's occasional desire to be alone. She states: "Sometimes in the middle of a game he would . . . go off and play by himself behind the carhouse. When he was like that, I knew better than to bother him." 9

When Jem becomes moody after the abortive attempt to get a peek at Boo in chapter eight, Scout feels she must not ask him any questions: "I left Jem alone and tried not to bother him." 10 She feels that he will talk to her when he wants. Scout respects Jem's desire for privacy as he reaches early adolescence. She does not understand the changes through which he is going, but she defers to her intuition and gives him his solitude.

Her instinctive behavior is also honest, and her honesty occasionally gets her into trouble with adults. On her first day at school, Scout tries to explain to her teacher that the poor but proud Walter Cunningham will not accept lunch money: "'You're shamin' him, Miss Caroline. Walter hasn't got a quarter to bring you, and you can't use any stovewood.'" 11

Early in chapter three, Scout's instinctive honesty gets her into conflicts with adults once more. Watching Walter pour syrup over all his food, she comments: "He would probably have poured it into his milk glass had I not

asked what the sam hill he was doing. . . ."12 Scout does not understand that she has broken a custom that states one does not embarrass a house guest. She only knows she asked Walter a simple question.

Scout's frank questions and statements do not always anger adults. Calpurnia, who knows Scout is devoid of malice, usually understands Scout's innocence. After attending Sunday service with Calpurnia at the Negro church, Scout notices that Calpurnia speaks differently to blacks than she does to whites. Curious, Scout bluntly asks: "'Why do you talk nigger-talk to the--to your folks when you know it's not right?'"13 Scout means no offense; all she wants is information.

When Scout discovers that Dolphus Raymond, a white man who prefers to live with blacks rather than whites, drinks only Coca Cola and not whiskey, she blurts out: "'Then you just pretend you're half. . . .''14 She cuts off her statement because he laughs. Raymond appreciates her frankness. Encouraged, Scout points out: "'That ain't honest, Mr. Raymond, making yourself out badder'n you are already.'"15 Scout's statements and questions seem blunt and rude, but her words normally lack a vicious bite. Because Scout is innocent, her words lack the power of insult.

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12Ibid., p. 27.  
13Ibid., p. 118.  
14Ibid., p. 184.  
15Ibid.
Scout's honesty does not always gratify or anger adults; she sometimes shames them. She disperses the lynch mob by attempting to chat with Walter Cunningham, Sr., about his son and legal entailment. Cunningham is shocked into leaving by her innocence. Atticus observes: "'So it took an eight-year-old child to bring 'em to their senses... you children made Walter Cunningham stand in my shoes for a minute.'" As Fred Erisman suggests, the truly good people admire and wish to imitate Scout's innocence and innate honesty.17

Like all children, Scout cries. But Scout, as the child of nature, cries only when nature's ways are violated. She barely stifles her tears in chapter seven when Nathan Radley cements in the knot-hole, because she intuitively feels that Nathan Radley's purpose, as mentioned previously, is to hurt Boo.

Scout is vexed as Atticus, in a strange fit of weakness, gives in to Alexandra and tries to convince Jem and Scout to "live up" to their Finch family name. Scout relates her reaction: "For no reason I began to cry, but I could not stop. This was not my father. My father never thought these thoughts."18 She is saddened by the realization that

16Ibid., p. 146.
18Lee, p. 125.
her father is going against his beliefs and is violating his own nature.

That the child weeps when nature's ways are broken is reinforced by actions of Dill and Jem. During the trial Dill becomes nauseated by the prosecutor's use of racial slurs. Dill explains himself to Scout: "'It ain't right, somehow it ain't right to do 'em that way. Hasn't anybody got any business talkin' like that--it just makes me sick.'"19 Dolphus Raymond elaborates on Dill's instinctive reaction to bigotry: "'Things haven't caught with that one's instinct yet..."20 Raymond further explains the things about which to cry: "'Cry about the simple hell people give other people--without even thinking. Cry about the hell white people give colored folks, without even stopping to think that they're people, too.'"21

Jem, too, cries when confronted by injustice and unnatural hatred. After Robinson is convicted, Scout relates: "It was Jem's turn to cry. His face was streaked with angry tears as we made our way through the cheerful crowd. 'It ain't right,' he muttered..."22 Jem, Dill, and Scout reflect their innocence by their reactions to the things that they regard as violations of nature's ways.

19Ibid., p. 183.  
20Ibid., p. 185.  
21Ibid.  
22Ibid., p. 194.
Scout's innocence is also demonstrated by her lack of a sense of time. The ability to feel time's passage is missing. I think that preoccupation with time is one of those "complications of life" that Rousseau feels, according to Jacques Barzun, is a result of civilization's corrupting force. Scout is free of this tainting influence. Much to Alexandra's dismay, Scout has not the slightest interest in family history or the history of the South. Scout is concerned only with the present. When she displays no concern about future Jem tells Scout in frustration: "That's because you can't hold something in your mind but a little while. . . ." Jem's statement is meant to be insulting, but it is actually accurate.

One evening after Tom Robinson's death, Scout thinks back over the events of the last two years and remembers the raid in the Radley's backyard. But she cannot place it in time: "And it had happened years ago. No, only last summer--no, summer before last, when . . . time was playing tricks on me." Unable to resolve the problem, she merely decides: "I must remember to ask Jem." Then, she drops the matter completely, for time holds no real interest for her.

24 Lee, p. 128.
25 Ibid., p. 221.  
26 Ibid.
Scout innocently accepts magic and other supernatural phenomena as a normal part of everyday reality. She believes without question, for a long time, that Boo Radley is a malevolent phantom, and she finds Jem's description of Boo, quoted earlier, to be reasonable. While she publicly scoffs at the existence of hot steams, she takes Jem's word that the Indian-head pennies are valuable good luck charms. Her intuitive acceptance of the supernatural marks that Scout is the innocent child of nature who knows that reality, according to C. M. Bowra, exists spiritually and mystically as well as physically. Scout's belief in the supernatural also demonstrates that she is the Romantic child of innocence.

Perspicacity of the Childhood Vision

The innocent child, as Babentroth implies, is endowed at birth with the ability to see truth and reality with remarkable accuracy. Scout possesses this ability, and she sees through the hypocrisy of Maycomb's racial and social bigotry, which she finds confusing and unnatural. Her vision cuts through myth, traditions and customs, and moral blindness. Being close to nature, Scout also tends to

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28 Babentroth, p. 376.
express her interpretations of life in images derived from nature, particularly in the forms of animals.

Scout recognizes the humanity of all people. She rejects the evaluation of individuals because of race, economic status, or ancestry. In chapter twelve, Scout worships in Calpurnia's church and finds the service similar to that of her own church. Pleased with her discoveries about her black friend, Scout asks Calpurnia if she can be a guest one day in Calpurnia's home: "I was curious, interested; I wanted to be her 'company,' to see how she lived, who her friends were."  

Alexandra forbids Scout to visit Calpurnia's home for the same reason that she refuses Scout and Jem permission to invite Walter Cunningham, Jr. over for supper. Alexandra tells Scout her reason: "'You can scrub Walter Cunningham till he shines, you can put him in shoes and a new suit, but he'll never be like Jem.... Because-he-is-trash, that's why you can't play with him.'"  

According to Alexandra, the Cunningham family and Calpurnia, by implication, are "'not our kind of folks.'"  

Scout observes the fact: "There was indeed a caste system in Maycomb." According to Alexandra, background is a deciding force in determining a person's worth. Scout and

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29Lee, p. 205.  
30Ibid.  
31Ibid., p. 204.  
32Ibid., p. 123.
Jem ponder the meaning of background, but they never arrive at a suitable definition. She punches holes in every one of Jem's attempts to explain. For example, trying to demonstrate that the Finches are in some fashion different from the Cunninghams, Jem states that their family has been reading and writing longer. Scout's vision shows her that Jem's argument is wrong, for the only reason young Walter cannot read well is that he helps his father farm and misses school. Scout offers her feelings: "I think there's just one kind of folks. Folks."\(^{33}\)

Scout's innate vision permits her to penetrate the hypocrisy and unreasoning prejudices of Maycomb's people. In chapter twenty-six, her class at school discusses Nazi Germany's persecution of Jews. Her teacher, Miss Gates, becomes red-faced as she preaches against the Nazi programs against Jews. But Scout grows angrily confused at Miss Gates' hypocrisy. On the previous night, Scout had overheard Miss Gates as she spoke against Negroes. Scout angrily tells Jem: "How can you hate Hitler so bad an' turn around and be ugly about folks right at home--"\(^{34}\)

Scout's vision causes her to be repelled by the adult's civilized world. Scout prefers the honest, simple world of nature as do, according to Babentroth, Wordsworth's children

\(^{33}\)Ibid., p. 207.
\(^{34}\)Ibid., p. 207.
in *The Prelude*, or of other children. The evening Dill returns to Maycomb as a runaway, Scout sadly perceives that Jem has entered the world of adults. She and Dill, as Edwin Bruell states, are "oppressed by grown-up injustice" which they find all about them and seek each other for comfort. They sleep in the same bed "in pristine innocence," and Dill says with simple purity: "'Let's get a baby.'" The two children cling to each other, knowing they share a common understanding of the world.

Scout rejects school because she sees it is a threat to her vision. Maycomb's school system operates on a procedure designed to force children to learn to see life as the state wants. Scout notices her father and uncle have done well despite the fact they have no formal schooling except college. She feels that school is not serving her interests: "I could not help receiving the impression that I was being cheated out of something. Out of what I knew not, yet I did not believe that twelve years of unrelieved boredom was exactly what the state had in mind for me." She intuitively feels the suppression of her individuality, and tries a variety of schemes to convince Atticus to keep her at home.

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35Babentroth, pp. 334-335.
37Ibid. 38Lee, p. 133. 39Ibid., p. 35.
She uses cuss-words she learns at school, attempts to catch ringworm and threatens to run away.

The nearly subliminal back-biting and the insulting insinuations delivered at Alexandra's Missionary Circle tea are easy for Scout to see. For example, Scout understands Mrs. Merriweather's veiled gossiping about "good but misguided" Atticus. As the tea winds down, Scout receives a depressing vision about the world of women: "There was no doubt about it, I must soon enter this world, where on its surface fragrant ladies rocked slowly, fanned gently, and drank cool water." Although this realization does not please Scout, she accepts the truth of her vision.

Scout also distrusts the world of science in the manner, as Babentroth points out, of Wordsworth's child subjects. Scout's vision can be observed by her attitudes towards her uncle, a physician: "He was one of the few men of science who never terrified me, probably because he never behaved like a doctor." Scout likes her uncle because he is truthful about medical details such as how much removing a splinter will hurt. He does not lie. He also retains his humanity with, as Scout notes in chapter nine, a rather broad sense of humor. According to Scout's vision, these

40Ibid., p. 213.
41Babentroth, pp. 340-341.
42Lee, p. 75.
characteristics seem to be lacking in other men of science, and for this reason she fears them.

Scout is also repelled by people who work in government. She describes the offices of county officials as dark, dusty "hutches" that smell of decaying paper and damp urine-stained concrete. She pictures the officials as follows: "The inhabitants of these offices were creatures of their environments: little gray-faced men, they seemed untouched by wind or sun." The comparison implies, I think, that Scout believes them weak and cowardly. Scout, the child of nature, feels a repugnance for the image of people who shut sunlight out of their lives.

As Bob Ewell testifies against Tom Robinson, Scout is reminded of the town dump and "the varmints that feasted on Maycomb's refuse." His receding forehead and seemingly nonexistent chin are connected by the base of a long, thin pointed nose, which gives him the mean appearance of a rat.

Scout receives a different image from Ewell's daughter Mayella as she testifies. Scout sees Mayella as a "steady-eyed cat with a twitchy tail." This simile indicates that Scout's first impression is that Mayella is a liar.

A mental picture recurs to Scout by which she explains her understanding of evil and injustice. The image is of
Atticus's stepping out into an empty street on a cold winter's day, pushing back his glasses, and shooting the rabid dog. It is through the recollection of this event that she interprets two affairs.

The first time she recalls this image is on the night the lynch mob tries to hang Tom Robinson. The nature of the mob's intention is lost on Scout until she returns home: "I . . . was drifting into sleep when the memory of Atticus calmly folding his newspaper and pushing back his hat [as the mob approached the jail] became Atticus standing in the middle of an empty waiting street, pushing up his glasses. The full meaning of it hit me. . . ." Scout compares the hatred and blind, violent bigotry of a mob which has lost its reason to an equally ill rabid dog. She also sees that her father faces the danger alone.

Scout recalls the picture a second time as the jury returns with Tom Robinson's guilty verdict:

The feeling grew until the atmosphere in the courtroom was exactly the same as cold February morning. . . . A deserted, waiting empty street and courtroom was packed with people. . . . I expected Mr. Tate to say any minute, "Take him, Mr. Finch. . . ." As Atticus and Robinson face the jury to receive the verdict, the image completes its sequence in Scout's mind: "It was like watching Atticus walk into the street, raise a rifle to

46Ibid., p. 145.
his shoulder and pull the trigger, but watching all the time knowing that the gun was empty."\textsuperscript{48} Scout sees the blind, insane action by the jury as the same as a diseased, mad beast. But this time she knows that Atticus's efforts are fruitless. His work to save Robinson are as in vain as trying to kill with an empty gun. Scout knows that Robinson is a dead man.

Scout, as the innocent child of nature, does not comprehend the prejudice, evil, injustice, and hypocrisy in verbal terms. She is incapable of expressing herself in that manner. Instead, she instinctively equates the evil that she is witnessing to a mad dog, a diseased creature that is out of balance with nature's ways. She metaphorically sees that her father is attempting to fight the evil by shooting the mad dog.

Scout is able to feel truth if not actually able to see it; her childhood vision extends to the heart. Dolphus Raymond is aware of Scout's ability. When she asks him why he is willing to entrust his secret to Dill and herself that he is not a drunk, he replies: "'Because you're children and you can understand it.'"\textsuperscript{49} Scout comprehends that Raymond simply wants to give Maycomb a reason it can understand for his living with Negroes. She appreciates his courtesy.

\textsuperscript{48}\textit{Ibid.} \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{49}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 184.
Possessing natural innocence and a clear vision of reality, Scout assumes that her father is the norm for most adults. This misconception causes her some confusion and discomfort as she discovers that most adults are not at all like Atticus. Scout does not recognize that her father is not ordinary. Dolphus Raymond tells her: "'Miss Jean Louise, you don't know that your pa's not a run-of-the-mill man, it'll take a few years for that to sink in.'" Scout does not realize that Atticus, as we shall see in Chapter IV, is of a heroic mold and lives in harmony with nature. Her intuitive vision and her innocence inform her that he is the type of person that everyone ought to be.

Scout, along with Jem and Dill, possesses a childhood innocence and a perspicacity of vision. These Romantic traits clarify Scout's role in the overall Romanticism of To Kill a Mockingbird by explaining her precocious behavior and her judgements on the novel's events.

Ibid., p. 185.
CHAPTER IV

THE ROMANTIC HERO

Atticus Finch is the Romantic hero of To Kill a Mockingbird. Peter Thorslev defines the Romantic hero as one who "epitomizes many of the important aspects of Romanticism."¹ Atticus fits the definition. Atticus either represents or incorporates into his character the following Romantic elements: a recognition of the perspicacity of the childhood vision, sensitivity, a belief in the basic goodness of mankind, a zeal for freedom and rights of the individual, obedience of conscience, a regard for nature, and a faith in a moral universe. He also shares traits with other Romantic heroes. These traits are a noble background, courtesy, isolation, and involvement in a quest. Atticus does not, however, share in, as C. M. Bowra states, the Romantic "cult of love."²

Fred Erisman also points out that Atticus has a strong tendency to follow Emerson's teachings,³ especially the

essays "Self-Reliance" and "Nature." In matters of obedience to one's conscience and principles, Atticus is particularly Emersonian. Atticus also follows Henry David Thoreau's ideas found in Walden and "Civil Disobedience." This trait gives Atticus moral strength of decision that, as Thorslev points out, many Romantic heroes lack.\(^4\)

The Romantic hero often has a noble background, like Lord Byron's Don Juan.\(^5\) Atticus's origin is in this tradition. His family is an old, respected plantation family which passes for aristocracy in Alabama during the 1930s. Erisman feels that Atticus rejects any idea of his family's "nobility" or "gentle breeding."\(^6\) Generally, that is true. For example, in chapter three, Atticus informs Scout that she is the everyday sort of child who must obey the truancy laws and attend school. At times, however he has a definite aristocratic air about him. He tells his children that they are special and must not behave like their peers. He demands, for example, that Scout must not use the word "nigger" because such speech is "common."\(^7\) Atticus's word choice does suggest, at least, slightly aristocratic behavior.

\(^4\)Thorslev, pp. 142-143. \(^5\)Ibid., p. 151.
\(^6\)Erisman, p. 129.
Howard Hugo points out that the Romantic hero often abandons traditional family occupations and seeks his own career. As a young man, Atticus leaves the plantation life of his fathers and becomes a lawyer.

Atticus lives a quiet, simple life. Scout says her father was different from her schoolmates' fathers: "He never went hunting, he did not play poker or fish or drink or smoke. He sat in the livingroom and read." He lives his life according to the dictum of Emerson's student Henry David Thoreau: "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!" His office reflects his unaffected lifestyle; it contains "little more than a hat rack, a spittoon, a checkerboard, and an unsullied Code of Alabama."

The Romantic hero, according to Fred Erisman, has the ability to see with the clarity of a child, and Erisman feels that Atticus's vision of truth extends to the perception of reality and verities normally seen only by children. Erisman's opinion is fairly accurate, but Atticus's vision is not as nearly complete as that of a

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9Lee, p. 85.


11Lee, p. 10.

12Erisman, p. 131.

13Ibid.
child's. For example, he is unable to comprehend fully that Bob Ewell is totally evil. Scout, as we have seen, instinctively realizes Ewell's wickedness when she sees him for the very first time. In chapter seventeen, she equates him with the vermin that scavenge in the junkyard next to his home.

In spite of his blind spot, Atticus does recognize and understand many things that children do. Erisman writes that Atticus does so two times: "The first of these appears...[as] an attempted lynching is thwarted by the sudden appearance of the Finch children, leading Atticus to observe, 'so it took an eight-year-old child to bring 'em to their senses...'."\(^1\) Erisman also quotes Atticus telling Jem that if he and eleven other boys his age were on the jury Robinson would be a free man.\(^2\) Atticus does, then, see the truth by, as Emerson says, retaining "the spirit of infancy into the era of manhood."\(^3\)

There are other instances in which Atticus is aware of the childhood vision and sees truth as a child sees it. The first is his understanding of Scout's fighting other children. The second instance occurs as the Finch family walks home from the trail. Jem weeps in sorrow and pain and asks

\(^1\)Erisman, p. 131. \(^2\)Ibid. \(^3\)Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, edited by William H. Gilman (New York, 1965), p. 189.
Atticus to explain how the jury could convict an obviously innocent man. He replies: "'I don't know, but they did it... [and] when they do it--it seems only children weep.'"17 The final instance happens at the novel's conclusion as Scout explains to him that to reveal that Boo saved her life to the public would in itself be a crime and sin: "'It'd be sort of like shootin' a mockingbird... .'"18 He sees the validity in her statement. Rather than harm the shy Boo Radley by exposing him to the public view, he agrees to "hush up" Boo's part in Bob Ewell's death. Atticus does perceive the truth as a child.

A major trait of Romantic heroes is, according to Hugo, an "acute emotional sensibility, which raises them above their less sensitive peers."19 This trait is in line with the Romantic belief that, according to Ernest Bernbaum, feeling is a higher form of thought than rationality.20 Atticus has an incredible capacity for comprehending the conditions of others. He explains to Scout his method of understanding people: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."21


21Lee, p. 31.
He also uses his patient understanding as he deals with Scout's fighting other children. He explains to his brother how he manages to discipline her with only commands and threats: "Jack, she minds me as well as she can. Doesn't come up to scratch half of the time but she tries... She knows I know she tries. That's what makes the difference."\textsuperscript{22} He appreciates Scout's condition: she reacts instinctively—albeit violently—when her pride or sense of honor is at stake. And he knows that works to control her temper.

He uses his empathetic understanding during his involvement in the Tom Robinson case. By comprehending Robinson's motives for his actions, Atticus is better able to defend his client. He is fully aware of Robinson's situation: his only defense is his word, a black man's word against the word of two white people, in a society that places no value upon a black man's testimony or his life. Atticus explains to Scout the particular problem Robinson faces as Mayella Ewell tries forcefully to seduce him: "He would not have dared to strike a white woman under any circumstances and expect to live long, so he took the first opportunity to run—a sure sign of guilt."\textsuperscript{23}

Atticus is able to feel some pity for Mayella Ewell, even though she puts Tom Robinson's life into jeopardy.

\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 84. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 179.
He appreciates her situation. At the trial, he informs the jury that he holds no ill feelings toward her: "I have nothing in my heart but pity for the chief witness for the state. . . . She is the victim of cruel poverty and ignorance. . . ." He paints a sad portrait of her as a lonely, love-starved young woman.

His insight, however, into Mayella's situation does not render him passive or slow his energetic defense. He proceeds to use his knowledge of her motive for accusing Robinson of rape. Mayella, he tells the jury, is putting Robinson's life in danger in order to get rid of her own guilt:

"She has committed no crime, she merely broke a time-honored code of our society. . . . She struck out at her victim--of necessity she must put him away from her--he must be removed from her presence, from the world. . . . the evidence of her offense? Tom Robinson, a human being."  

When he learns Robinson is shot to death in an attempted escape, he thinks he knows why Robinson flees, even though he assures him the case has a chance on appeal. He concludes: "I guess Tom was tired of white men's chances and preferred to take his own."  

Atticus's empathy extends even to Bob Ewell. Soon after the trial, Ewell spits in his face and threatens to

24 Ibid., pp. 186-187.
26 Lee, p. 215.
get even. His children worry for his safety as they wonder why Ewell hates their father. When he discovers their fear, he assures them that Ewell's words are empty and that he will do nothing: "See if you can stand in Bob Ewell's shoes a minute. I destroyed his last shred of credibility at that trial. . . . The man had to have some kind of comeback, his kind always does. . . . You understand?" 27 Although he clearly errs in his conclusion, he does place himself in Ewell's shoes and sees things from Ewell's position.

Awareness, as Hugo suggests, does not always bring happiness. 28 Atticus's sensitivity causes him to feel Robinson's fear, Mayella's loneliness, and his children's sadness and confusion as the town heaps abuse upon their heads, and he stoically endures the stress. Although he attempts to hide his emotions, his sister Alexandra notices how personally he takes the feelings of others: "I just want to know when this will ever end. . . . It tears him to pieces." 29

The Romantic hero's ability, as Bernbaum states, "to imagine himself outside his own ego" 30 allows him to look into the hearts of his fellows and see them "in their true light, their essential character and their genuine worth." 31

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27 Lee, pp. 199-200.
28 Hugo, p. 31.
30 Bernbaum, p. xxvii.
31 Ibid.
This talent sets him off from other people and, unfortunately, isolates him from his society.\textsuperscript{32} Atticus is indeed isolated from his society. His simple life-style, mentioned earlier, indicates his separation from many social contacts, and it is his sensitivity which tends to remove him from close contact.

He keeps relationships rather distant even with his children. In chapter one, Scout gives this clue: "I found our father satisfactory: he played with us, read to us, and treated us with a courteous detachment."\textsuperscript{33} I believe a part of his detachment is due to the untimely death of his wife. Scout mentions in chapter one that he does not talk about her and evades the topic when her mother is brought up in conversation.

The isolation of the Romantic hero is not, however, complete or total. As Thorslev states, the hero remains too much an organic part of the universe and society "for him to remain an alienated outsider."\textsuperscript{34} Atticus is not the Romantic isolato but is a functioning member of his community, as the following passage proves: "He liked Maycomb, he was Maycomb County born and bred; he knew his people, they knew him, and because of Simon Finch's industry, Atticus was related by blood and marriage to nearly every family in

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{32}Ibid. \quad \textsuperscript{33}Lee, p. 11. \quad \textsuperscript{34}Thorslev, p. 19.}
Clearly a hyperbole, the last line indicates Atticus occupies a definite place in Maycomb County's community. Thorslev admits that this paradox exists: the Romantic hero is both removed and a functioning part of society at the same time. Atticus is both an outcast and a welcome friend in his hometown.

Besides isolating the Romantic hero, his sensibility also manifests itself in the form of good manners and courtesy—especially toward women. Atticus is considerate of everyone, black or white, rich or poor. One striking trait of his gentility is his habit of addressing people formally in everyday speech. When he refers to someone in conversation, most of the time he uses the full name—Tom Robinson, Bob Ewell—or formal titles—Miss Maudie, Sheriff Tate. He reserves familiar names only to children and to blacks in his presence, which followed the codes of propriety. He is never rude or patronizing as he talks to blacks. Whenever he issues instructions to his black cook, Calpurnia, he says "please" and "thank you." His manners contrast sharply to Alexandra's lady friends who, during a missionary circle tea, give curt commands to Calpurnia and crassly ignore her as they gossip about the "darkies" who work for them.

35Lee, p. 11. 36Thorslev, p. 19.
37Ibid., p. 8.
During Tom Robinson's trial, Atticus treats Mayella with gracious formality. Not accustomed to good manners, she complains to Judge Taylor that Atticus is being sarcastic. Judge Taylor replies: "'Mr. Finch is always courteous to everyone. He's not trying to mock you, he's trying to be polite. That's just his way.'"\(^{38}\)

Atticus's courtesy is more than verbal. His deeds are also indicative of his consideration of others. As Maudie Atkinson's house burns down one night, Atticus and the neighbors carry out furniture. He does not grab the first chair in sight, as Scout relates: "I saw Atticus carrying Miss Maudie's heavy oak rocking chair, and thought it sensible of him to save what she valued most."\(^{39}\) His consideration extends to children. Dill tells Scout how Atticus treats the youngest Robinson child on a visit to Mrs. Robinson: "She was too small to navigate the steps... Atticus went to her, took off his hat, and offered her his finger. She grabbed it and he eased her down the steps."\(^{40}\) To Atticus, good manners are a means of treating people decently.

A reason that he treats people decently is that he shares the Romantic belief that, according to Bernbaum, mankind is basically good.\(^{41}\) Erisman, on the other hand, feels

\(^{38}\)Lee, p. 168. \(^{39}\)Ibid., p. 67. \(^{40}\)Ibid., p. 219. \\
that Atticus shares the "Puritan assumption" of man's totally flawed constitution. But Erisman contradicts that view when he states that Atticus is Emersonian. Also, Atticus himself says that people are basically good. An example of his faith in mankind's inborn goodness is displayed after the lynch mob tries to take Tom Robinson, whom he is guarding. Jem wonders how a decent man like Walter Cunningham can threaten murder and nearly hurt his friend. Atticus explains:

Mr. Cunningham is basically a good man . . . he just has his blind spots along with the rest of us. . . . A mob's always made up of people no matter what. Mr. Cunningham was a part of a mob last night, but he was still a man.  

At the novel's end, Scout tells him that a bandit-hero in a book is actually a good person; he replies: "Most people are, Scout, when you finally see them."  

This faith in man's innate goodness is part of the strength of Atticus, but it is also a weakness. He cannot comprehend evil. He sees the results of evil in various forms: racism, mob violence, brutality, and cowardice, but he never truly understands it. In chapter nine, he tells his brother "Why reasonable people go stark raving mad whenever anything involving a Negro comes up, is something I

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42 Erisman, p. 132.
43 Lee, p. 146.
44 Ibid., p. 255.
don't pretend to understand." He feels that racism is a disease.

He tells Jem that the jury convicts Tom Robinson because "something came between them and reason," and in chapter twenty-three he explains to Scout he does not know how decent people can convict an innocent man simply because his skin is black. In chapter twenty-eight when he learns that his children have been attacked, he is stunned with shock and confusion. He murmurs to Sheriff Tate: "I can't conceive of anyone low-down enough to do a thing like this." Informed in the next chapter the assailant was Bob Ewell, the only explanation of Ewell's attack at which he can arrive is that Ewell was out of his mind.

I do not mean to imply that Atticus believes in the absolute goodness of mankind. In his final argument to the jury, he shows his awareness of individual human frailty and imperfection: "There is not a person in this courtroom who has never told a lie, who has never done an immoral thing, and there is no man living who has never looked upon a woman without desire." It is the wholly corrupt, like Bob Ewell, whose mind he cannot comprehend.

One factor behind Atticus's zealous defense of Tom Robinson is his sensibility. A second reason is the Romantic

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45 Ibid., p. 84.  
46 Ibid., p. 201  
48 Bernbaum, Guide, p. 35.
hero's concern for political and social rights of the individual, for which he is ready to fight. The third factor, as Erisman briefly states, is Atticus's "strong regard for personal principle." He is the Romantic hero who, as Thorslev writes, "accepts the burden of his conscience willingly... [and] he does not attempt to evade his moral responsibility."

After Scout gets into a fight at school, she explains to Atticus that many people think he should make only a token effort in Robinson's behalf. He replies that he cannot do so for several reasons:

"The main one is, if I didn't I couldn't hold up my head in town, I couldn't represent this county in the legislature, I couldn't tell you or Jem not to do something again... I could never ask you to mind me again. Every lawyer gets at least one case in his lifetime that affects him personally. This one's mine, I guess." Erisman accurately finds that his statement is reflected in Emerson's "Self-Reliance:" "no careful ear is needed to hear echoes of Emerson's 'Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.'" By obeying his principles, "Atticus is singularly Emersonian."

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49 Bernbaum, Guide, p. 35.  
50 Erisman, p. 130.  
51 Thorslev, p. 163.  
52 Lee, p. 73.  
53 Erisman, p. 131.  
54 Ibid.
Atticus's principles run deep into his conscience, which he cannot violate. Scout again pressures him to explain his distinctly nonconformist actions, and he replies:

"This case, Tom Robinson's case, is something that goes to the essence of a man's conscience—Scout, I couldn't go to church and worship God if I didn't try to help that man."  

She relates that most people say he is wrong to help Tom Robinson. He continues:

"They're certainly entitled to think that... but before I can live with other folks I've got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience."  

Atticus has no choice but to do what he thinks is right. That he must obey his conscience over the public mind calls to memory Thoreau's statement: "Public opinion is a weak tyrant compared with our own private opinion."  

He takes the case partly, as we have seen, because his conscience will not allow him to do otherwise, and because he shares the Romantic hero's trait, which Bernbaum points out, of involving himself in the struggle for freedom, justice, and individual rights.  

Atticus does not accept the case with joy. In chapter nine, he confides to his brother that he would rather have turned down the case, as he has the legal prerogative to do.

56Ibid.  
57Thoreau, p. 10.  
58Bernbaum, Guide, p. 35.
But he desires to "jar the jury a bit" and prove something to Maycomb and, especially, to his children.\textsuperscript{59} He knows he will find himself, as Erisman suggests, like Emerson's non-conformist who is frequently castigated by the world's displeasure.\textsuperscript{60}

He has the strength and bravery, which Emerson feels, are required to fight and struggle for virtue and justice.\textsuperscript{61} In chapter fifteen, alone and unarmed while guarding Robinson at the jail, he calmly faces the armed lynch mob. He has the courage to carry on as abuse is heaped upon him and his family. When Bob Ewell spits in his face and threatens his life, he is able to quip: "I wish Bob Ewell wouldn't chew tobacco."\textsuperscript{62}

Despite his seemingly casual attitude, Atticus's passion runs deep. He reveals the depth of his convictions in a conversation with Scout:

"As you grow older, you'll see white men cheat black men every day of your life, but let me tell you something and don't you forget it--whenever a white man does that to a black man, no matter who he is, how rich he is, or how fine a family he comes from, that man is trash. . . . . . . . . . . . . ." I looked up, and his face was vehement.\textsuperscript{63}

His feelings are very pronounced, for this is one of only three occasions when he nearly loses his composure.

\textsuperscript{59}Lee, p. 84. \hspace{2cm} \textsuperscript{60}Erisman, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{61}Ralph Waldo Emerson, \textit{Representative Men} (Boston, 1903), p. 290.
\textsuperscript{62}Lee, p. 198. \hspace{2cm} \textsuperscript{63}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 202.
He puts his convictions into effect at Robinson's trial. He proves Emerson's statement that words are a form of action.\textsuperscript{64} It is not necessary for the Romantic hero to perform adventurous and dangerous exploits, like Walter Scott's Ivanhoe, in order to redress wrongs and obtain justice. Atticus's main weapon to free Robinson is his words. His battleground is the courtroom.

But Atticus knows that logic and truth are not enough to save his client; he must reach the inner core of civility that he believes to reside in each juror's heart. His final plea is meant to shake the jury, but it also reveals the strength of his convictions:

"Thomas Jefferson once said that all men are created equal. . . . [but] we know all men are not created equal in the sense some people would have us believe. . . . "But there is one way in this country which all men are created equal--there is one human institution . . . that institution is a court. It can be the Supreme Court of the United States or the humblest J. P. court in the land. . . . But in this country our courts are the great levelers, and in our courts all men are created equal. "I am no idealist to believe firmly in the integrity of our courts and the jury--that's no ideal to me, it is a living, working reality."\textsuperscript{65}

Concluding his final argument, he reaches out to touch each juror's emotions instead of his mind by appealing to his sense of honor:

\textsuperscript{64}Emerson, "The Poet," \textit{Writings}, p. 309.

\textsuperscript{65}Lee, p. 188.
"Gentlemen, a court is no better than each man of you sitting before me on the jury. A court is only as sound as its jury, and a jury is only as sound as the men who make it up. I am confident that you gentlemen will... come to a decision, and restore this man to his family. In the name of God, do your duty."66

Atticus is not "acting"; the emotions he displays are genuine. His words and mannerisms may be calculated for effect, but I doubt it. I think his speech is spontaneous, and it reflects his convictions that all men have rights as individuals and are deserving of justice before the law. Scout, who is familiar with her father's normal courtroom behavior, notices his deviation from his normally dry conduct. She is surprised by other things that happen. She sees him perspire, which he seldom does. She remembers that his face was dry as he faced the lynch mob the night before. She is curious when he removes his watch because it was "something he didn't ordinarily do."67 But when he removes his coat and vest and then loosens his tie, she is horrified for he never "loosened a scrap of clothing until he undressed for bed... and it was the equivalent of him standing before us stark naked."68

I interpret his removal of his watch, coat, and vest in two ways. It clearly demonstrates the extreme emotions under which he is working. He is hot with, as Montague

66Ibid., pp. 188-189.  
67Ibid., p. 186.  
68Ibid.
Summers termed, the Romantic "eagerness" to do battle with injustice and to aid the transgressed. These actions are also symbolic. He removes items that I feel are representative of the encumbrance of civilization, and these hindrances, according to Jacques Barzun, disturb the free, natural self. Atticus liberates himself from artificial restraints and allows natural truth of the individual's rights to freedom and justice to come forth more freely. At the same time, using Scout's image of his standing naked, he is exposing his honest, open self to the jury.

To Kill a Mockingbird also contains the Romantic element of a quest. The quest need not be a picaresque one, in the manner of medieval knights searching for the Holy Grail or an endless search for knowledge like Goethe's in Faust. As Thorslev points out, the Romantic hero, like Byron's Manfred, also seeks truth. Atticus's defense of Tom Robinson is his quest, in which he fights for truth and justice.

Atticus is like the Romantic knight-errant who champions the cause of the weak and downtrodden. He fights for the civil rights of a black man against a society that


71 Thorslev, pp. 180-181.
denies his client the most basic human dignity: the right to be called a man. The knight-errant fights oppression and evil by a trial by combat which is conducted according to the rules of chivalry. Atticus battles injustice, as noted earlier, in a court of law guided by the code of Alabama.

Maudie explains to Scout and Jem that men like their father are "born to do our unpleasant jobs for us." She also states that when a people are called upon to be just, they have a person like Atticus to fight for them. Obviously she is comparing Atticus to a champion.

A number of other people also view Atticus as their champion. They admire his bravery and regard him with honor and respect. In chapter twenty-one, all the Negroes stand in respect as Atticus leaves the courtroom. The next morning he finds his kitchen filled with food given by the Negro community who, Calpurnia tells him, appreciates what he has done. White people, too, are grateful for his fighting for justice. According to Maudie, these are "'the handful of people . . . who say fair play is not marked White Only . . . who say a fair trial is for everyone. . . .'" She goes on to say that people honor Atticus because they "'trust him to do right.'"

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72 Lee, p. 197.  
73 Ibid., p. 216.  
74 Ibid.
Atticus accepts the quest, knowing he will fail to prevent Robinson's conviction. Twice he is asked if he will secure an acquittal, and each time he answers a simple "no." But the Romantic hero, as Barzun suggests, continues his efforts to persevere in his quest despite the knowledge that he is most likely doomed to failure from the start.\textsuperscript{75}

Atticus has some faith in eventual victory in getting Robinson acquitted. He continuously reminds Robinson that they have a chance to win on appeal. I do not believe, however, that he places too much hope in the higher courts. He says there is a chance on appeal. He does not, however, stress the likelihood of a reversal. Robinson's death depresses him, but he does not seem very surprised. He implies that Robinson's chances of escaping prison were about the same as winning the appeal. Scout describes the futility of her father's efforts: "Atticus had used every tool available to free men to save Tom Robinson, but in the secret courts of men's hearts Atticus had no case. Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed."\textsuperscript{76}

The quest continues in spite of ultimate failure, and, in this regard I think Atticus's defense of Tom Robinson parallels Mrs. Dubose's struggle to free herself from morphine.

\textsuperscript{75}Barzun, p. 101. \textsuperscript{76}Lee, p. 220.
addiction. The old woman is dying, and death appears to remove any purpose to her suffering the agony of withdrawal. But she wishes to be free of the drug and, as Atticus tells Jem, "'beholden to nothing and nobody.'"77 She knows death will either prevent her victory or erase it should she succeed, but she regardlessly fights it out to a conclusion. He explains the meaning of her quest to Jem:

"It's when you're licked before you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do. Mrs. Dubose won. . . . According to her views, she died beholden to nothing and nobody. She was the bravest person I ever knew."78 Although she dies, the lesson of her bravery passes on to Jem, and he will not forget. Her quest is not a complete failure.

Atticus's attempt to obtain justice for Tom Robinson fails; all his striving seems to be in vain. But a gleam of light shines through the defeat's gloom. Some change is effected. He speaks truth and demands justice for those whose voices are silenced, and a barely perceptible alteration takes place in Maycomb County. Waiting for the jury to return, Maudie senses the slight shift in Maycomb's attitudes:

"Atticus Finch won't win, he can't win, but he's the only man in these parts who can keep a jury out so long in a case like that. And I thought

77 Ibid., p. 104. 78 Ibid.
to myself, well, we're making a step--it's just a baby-step, but it's a step." 79

Atticus's quest does not totally fail, for one juror held out as long as he could for Robinson's acquittal. The truth changes at least one person. As Edwin Bruell suggests, Atticus knows that the dawn of freedom from "racial ills" will come 80 and he has helped to clear the way.

The Romantic hero is often, according to Bernbaum, a man of nature. 81 Erisman claims that Atticus is a "lover of nature" because he retains the childhood vision. 82 But he also argues that, as noted previously, Atticus maintains his childhood vision by being a lover of nature. 83 This argument seems weak. Atticus is not the man of nature who, as Emerson writes, takes "the greatest delight which the fields and woods minister. . . ." 84 Atticus left a life close to nature, farming, to live among people in a town. But Atticus is, I think, in the Emersonian sense, the virtuous man who lives "in unison with her [nature's] works." 85 Atticus is a man of nature because he shares

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79 Ibid., p. 197.
81 Bernbaum, Guide, p. 35. 82 Erisman, pp. 130-132.
83 Ibid., p. 131.
84 Emerson, "Nature," Writings, p. 189.
85 Ibid., p. 195.
Emerson's idea that in the "variety of nature" is found "unity," in "diversity," harmony. He knows that all of nature's creatures, as Emerson suggests, are different from one another and that each is perfect and harmonious to nature's whole. During the trial, he expresses this view:

"Some people are smarter than others, some people have more opportunity because they're born with it, some men make more money than others, some ladies make better cakes than others--some people are born beyond the normal scope of most men."

His acceptance of nonconformity is best expressed by a line from Emerson's poem "Fable:" "Talents differ; all is well and wisely put. . . ." He recognizes that the diversity of talents and life-styles is normal and natural.

The key to understanding Atticus as a man of nature, however, is to examine the reason he refuses to hunt or shoot. Scout and Jem never see him shoot until the day he guns down the rabid dog with a single shot from about fifty yards. They learn that, as a young man, he was known as "Ol One-Shot." Maudie explains why their father does not hunt any longer:

"If your father's anything, he's civilized in his heart. Marksmanship's a gift of God, a talent--oh, you have to practice to make it perfect. . . . I

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86Ibid., p. 189.  
87Ibid.  
89Emerson, "Fable," The United States in Literature, edited by James E. Miller and others (Glenview, 1976), p. 129.
think maybe he put his gun down when he realized that God had given him an unfair advantage over most living things."90

Atticus shares the Romantic hero's trait, as Thorslev points out, of accepting the responsibility of his talents as well as his weakness.91 He feels he must live in harmony with nature by not hunting rather than live in discord with nature by using his overwhelming marksmanship for his own profit. He realizes, however, that a rabid dog is not in harmony with nature. He shoots it to protect natural harmony. Maudie explains to Scout: "I guess he decided he wouldn't shoot till he had to, and he had to today."92

He takes no pride in his gift; he is humble. Scout thinks his humility is a bit unusual, and Maudie replies: "'People in their right minds never take pride in their talents.'"93 Atticus, like James Fenimore Cooper's sharp-shooting Leather-stocking, never boasts nor squanders his ability in wasteful and harmful ways. He seeks harmony with nature to find it in himself.

Atticus's deep convictions about his shooting ability, his determination to pursue a doomed quest, his faith in the basic goodness of mankind, his energetic and passionate defense of Tom Robinson, and his humility and courtesy, as we have seen, are based upon the Romantic assumption that, as

90Lee, p. 93.  
91Thorslev, p. 163.  
92Lee, p. 93.  
93Ibid.
René Welleck states, the physical side of reality and truth is not "divorced" from spiritual reality.94 Reality, justice, and truth are real and are not empty words; the universe is moral.

The clearest example of his faith in a whole, moral universe is expressed by the novel's greatest theme: it is a sin to kill a mockingbird. The concept of sin in itself requires a belief in right and wrong. As he gives Scout and Jem air rifles, he issues these instructions: "I'd rather you shot at tin cans in the backyard, but I know you'll go after birds. Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."95 Scout notes this is the only time he ever tells her that to do something is a sin. Maudie clarifies this statement:

"Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."96

Atticus is flexible in his moral applications, for he believes that, while right and wrong are real, they are not absolutes which govern all situations in the same way. He

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95 Lee, pp. 85-86.

96 Ibid., p. 86.
follows, as Todd Lieber writes, the Romantic trait of being "unable to accept any fixed version as final or any truth as absolute." He explains to Scout that Bob Ewell's children do not go to school although the law clearly demands they attend. He explains: "Sometimes it's better to bend the law a little in special cases." He further explains that Bob Ewell is allowed to hunt and fish out of season and drink whiskey during prohibition because his children are the ones who would suffer if the law stops him. He asks Scout: "Are you going to take out your disapproval on his children?"

The most prominent instance of his moral flexibility is his agreement with Sheriff Tate. Atticus consents, as noted earlier, to lie about the manner of Bob Ewell's death. He is clearly breaking the law; he condones perjury and suppression of evidence. Earlier, he condemns Mayella and Bob Ewell's perjury on the witness stand, and now he commits the same offense. But the situations are not the same. Mayella and Bob Ewell's lies cause a man's death; Atticus's false testimony saves a life. His value

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98 Lee, p. 33.
99 Ibid.
system calls to mind Emerson's direction that a person "must not be hindered by the name of goodness but must explore if it be goodness."\textsuperscript{100} Atticus explores the situation and finds, in this case, that the law is not good. This sentiment echoes Thoreau's statement about law: "And if it is of such nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then I say, break the law."\textsuperscript{101}

Atticus chooses to remain silent and tacitly adheres to Sheriff Tate's report that Bob Ewell fell on his own knife. Atticus knows that if he acts in the name of goodness and speaks the truth, an innocent man will suffer. He is in full agreement with Tate's statement:

"To my way of thinking, Mr. Finch, taking the one man who's done you and this town a great service an' draggen' him with his shy ways into the limelight--to me it's a sin and I'm not about to have it on my head. If it was any other man it'd be different. But not this man, Mr. Finch."\textsuperscript{102}

Atticus recognizes he must remain forever flexible and not accept any form of truth or reality as absolute.

Atticus's role as the Romantic hero of \textit{To Kill a Mockingbird} is an important part of the novel's Romanticism because he not only shares similarities with other Romantic heroes but also he espouses, explains, or personally takes on a large number of Romantic elements.

\textsuperscript{100}Emerson, "Self-Reliance," \textit{Writings}, p. 260.

\textsuperscript{101}Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," \textit{Walden}, p. 229.

\textsuperscript{102}Lee, pp. 250-251.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The foregoing examination of the Romantic elements of
Gothicism, the innocence and perspicacious vision of child-
hood, and the Romantic hero explains and clarifies the
Romanticism of To Kill a Mockingbird. The numerous mis-
conceptions about the novel's characters, themes, and
structure, as noted through this work, are clarified by
understanding the novel's Romantic nature.

The Gothic traits in the novel provide the proper
setting for an air of terror and suspense.¹ The seven
Gothic traits--a castle, a crime, religion, a ghostly or
demonic figure, magic, the phenomena of nature, and the
Gothic villain--work together to create the Gothicism in
the novel. The novel's Gothicism does provide the thrills
of mystery and dread at which, as Eino Railo points out,
Gothicism aims.²

The Romantic element of the vision of the child
expresses the beliefs, according to Charles Babentroth, in

¹Eino Railo, The Haunted Castle: A Study of the Ele-
²Ibid., p. 58.
the innocence of the child\textsuperscript{3} and in the perspicacity of the childhood vision.\textsuperscript{4} The three children in the novel—Dill, Jem, and especially Scout, the narrator and persona—are presented in the light of these Romantic views of childhood.

The third and most important element in To Kill a Mockingbird is the Romantic hero. Atticus fits Peter Thorslev's definition of the Romantic hero as one who "epitomizes many of the important aspects of Romanticism."\textsuperscript{5} Atticus represents or incorporates the following Romantic elements: recognition of the innocence and the perspicacious vision of childhood, sensitivity, a belief in the basic goodness of mankind, a zeal for freedom and rights of the individual, obedience of conscience, a regard for nature, and a faith in a moral universe. Atticus also shares the following traits with other Romantic heroes: a noble background, courtesy, isolation, and involvement in a quest. Atticus embodies some of these Romantic elements, as Fred Erisman demonstrates, as they are expounded in Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Nature" and "Self-Reliance" and in, as I have shown, Henry David Thoreau's Walden and "Civil Disobedience."


\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., p. 357.

\textsuperscript{5}Peter Thorslev, The Byronic Hero (Minneapolis, 1962), p. 4.
These three Romantic elements express the majority of the Romantic traits noted in Chapter I, and they are the foundation upon which the Romanticism of To Kill a Mockingbird is built and made clear.
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