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WHERE IS FINCH'S LANDING? REREADING *TO KILL A  
MOCKINGBIRD* AS MORAL PEDAGOGY

**Abstract.** What does the impossible location of Finch's Landing tell us about the moral pedagogy of *To Kill a Mockingbird*? Rejecting the claim that the novel calls for us to place ourselves in another's shoes, I argue that it actually exposes the weakness of this mechanism as a resource for moral action. Instead, the novel seeks to demonstrate that such action requires a kind of engaged critical reflection, one called for by a text that makes far more significant demands on the reader than many have recognized. The location of Finch's Landing is the key to understanding the whole text. Seriously.

FOR MORE THAN FIFTY years, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* was widely regarded—by white Americans at least—as a heuristic not only for understanding America's troubled racial politics but also as a moral pedagogy for addressing the same.<sup>1</sup> Long before Martha Nussbaum suggested that literature could be a way of modeling Adam Smith's "fellow feeling," and thus of cultivating a more humane and tolerant liberal polity, Atticus Finch's advice to his daughter—"if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. 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"—sought to cultivate the same sort of insight for the same purpose.<sup>2</sup>

In June 2015, however, the *To Kill a Mockingbird*—moral pedagogy complex was struck a serious blow with the publication of *Go Set a Watchman*, a second novel by Harper Lee written before *To Kill a Mockingbird*, featuring versions of some of the same characters and some similar

scenarios. Most shocking—for some<sup>3</sup>—was the depiction of Atticus Finch as an unreconstructed bigot: a member of the town's White Citizens' Council, a onetime Klansman, and a consumer of racist literature. The moral lesson of the first-written but later-published novel seemed to be diametrically opposed to the pedagogical demands of its more famous companion. *Go Set a Watchman* takes its title from Isaiah 21:6, which declares: "For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth." Serving as a leitmotif to highlight the moral and political development of Jean Louise (the adult Scout), the first-written novel culminates in this Scout's recognition that she must become her own watchman: that her uncritical reliance upon her father's example has left her morally and emotionally stunted.

One of the many puzzles posed by the transition from *Watchman* to *Mockingbird* is the disappearance of *Watchman's* demand that the chief protagonist stand on her own two feet. In *Mockingbird*, Scout, and by extension the reader, is asked to stand in another's skin or shoes: the moral focus turns from work on the self to imagining the other. The protagonist and reader of *Mockingbird* appear, furthermore, to be encouraged to model themselves on Atticus rather than to cultivate independent thought: following the lawyer hero's aphorisms, maxims, and moral example. Nevertheless, although seeking to imagine oneself in the position of another might promote some degree of critical self-reflection, such exercises in imagination can all too easily become a projection of the existing self onto another, leading to the confirmation of preexisting biases. Imagining oneself in the position of another is not only far harder than it might seem, it is also very easy to delude oneself into believing one has been successful.<sup>4</sup> In the transition from *Watchman* to *Mockingbird*, Lee's moral pedagogy would appear to have become a lot less demanding; indeed, it might be argued that the very simplicity of the latter's moral demands helped to make it so popular.

Here, however, I offer what I believe to be an entirely new reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, one that suggests the existence of two different moral pedagogies at work in the same text: the first, the standard reading of the novel as an exercise in moral imagination as a route to tolerance; the second, a subterranean set of demands on the reader that most have chosen to ignore but which, if engaged, reveal much about the reader and his or her desire to choose the simple over the complex, the easy over the hard, and the superficially rewarding over the intellectually challenging. Paying attention to this second moral pedagogy restores to *Mockingbird* *Watchman's* demand that both its readers and protagonists challenge their own self-understandings as a path to moral insight.

Harper Lee gave her last interview in 1964; thereafter she was famously silent about her first published novel. Multiple theories have been offered to explain this silence, none of which can be said to more plausible than any other: even in the wake of her death little information has emerged that would answer this question with any degree of certainty.<sup>5</sup> To these theories I suggest another, albeit as an addition rather than a substitute. Initially overwhelmed by the success of *Mockingbird*, Lee did all she could to promote it. “I was a first-time writer, so I did as I was told,” she observed in 2015. Nevertheless, when it became clear that the die was cast and the simple moral pedagogy had crushed its more complicated subtext, Lee may have become frustrated with her readership and chosen to withdraw. Her decision, shortly before her death, to publish *Go Set a Watchman* may have been a last attempt to draw attention to the subterranean complexities at work in *Mockingbird*: indeed, it is notable that the popular response of dismay and outrage prompted by the new/old Atticus Finch was directly akin to Jean Louise’s discovery of the selfsame Atticus in *Watchman*. Lee recreated for the reader of both texts the experience of disappointment, disillusionment, and anger of her main protagonist in the first-written one. She demanded that her readers stand on their own two feet and stop expecting Atticus Finch and *To Kill a Mockingbird* to save them from their own prejudices and moral failings. To kill a mockingbird, that which simply imitates without cognition, it is, Lee suggests, necessary to go set a watchman.

Literary readings predicated upon claims to subterranean textual meaning inevitably suffer from the weaknesses of their paranoid cousin, the conspiracy theory. Not least among these weaknesses is that such theories are nonfalsifiable: any evidence against the conspiracy can also be understood as evidence for it. I am acutely aware of this problem and recognize no good way out of it. All I can do, therefore, is acknowledge this danger while presenting my arguments in good faith. Søren Kierkegaard is said to have observed that if G. W. F. Hegel had prefaced his work with the statement that it “was merely an experiment in thought,” he would have been the greatest thinker who ever lived.<sup>6</sup> While certainly no Hegel, I would, nevertheless, like to preface my arguments with the same disclaimer.

The aim here is not simply to dismiss a longstanding reading of a popular novel but rather to suggest an alternative/complementary reading that might offer some broader suggestions about the role and function of literature and literary readings as resources for moral pedagogy. Paying close attention to the details of the text might tell us just as

much, if not more, as the text appears to say on the surface, and more about our own capacity for critical reflection. In keeping with this commitment to close attention to the text, much of what follows turns upon the ostensibly innocuous issue of the shifting and ultimately impossible location of the Finch family homestead, Finch's Landing.

## I

The extent to which factual errors might be thought to mar a literary work is an open question. While some have suggested that, as a purely aesthetic matter, literature is freed from the demands of factual accuracy, others, most notably the literary critic Christopher Ricks, have argued that literature's artistic freedom is itself reliant upon the facticity of those aspects of the text from which imagination permits divergence. "You can't," he observed, "get mileage from the matter of fact and then refuse to pay the fare."<sup>7</sup> Bracketing this broader debate, I employ the question identified by M. W. Rowe: is the author "making a mistake or a point?"<sup>8</sup> Considerable debate exists about the possible significance of the former;<sup>9</sup> here, however, my focus is on the significance of the latter. I raise Rowe's question with regard to one of the most obscure, but potentially most significant, possible errors of fact Lee appears to make in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the location of Finch's Landing.

The geographically impossible location of Finch's Landing has been identified on only one previous occasion, by Alabama writer William T. Going in 1975. In *Mockingbird*, we are told that Simon Finch, the family patriarch, "worked his way across the Atlantic to Philadelphia, thence to Jamaica, thence to Mobile, and up the Saint Stephens," and later, "established a homestead on the banks of the Alabama River some *forty* miles above St. Stephens" (*TKAM*, p. 4). As Going notes, "(Miss Lee somewhat obscures intentionally or unintentionally [the Landing's] exact location by mentioning a Saint Stephens river—'the Saint Stephens'—and implying that old Saint Stephens, the territorial capital of Alabama, was on the Alabama River, when it actually stood on the Tombigbee)."<sup>10</sup> St. Stephens, then, is not a river, and the Landing could not be both forty miles above St. Stephens *and* on the Alabama River.<sup>11</sup>

As his use of parenthesis suggests, Going mentions these anomalies only in passing and makes nothing more of them. In the context of this discussion it may, nevertheless, be worth asking whether Lee and/or her narrator are making a mistake or making a point. Evidence for the latter is, perhaps, suggested by the second account of the location

of the Landing offered by the narrator in *Mockingbird*: “Maycomb, some twenty miles east of Finch’s Landing, was the county seat of Maycomb County” (*TKAM*, p. 5). Interestingly, perhaps, were the Landing said to have been forty miles *east* of St. Stephens, not forty miles *above*, then it would, indeed, have been on the Alabama River. Moreover, its position on the Alabama would have been such that twenty miles further east of that, where Maycomb is said to be located, would be exactly where Monroeville, Lee’s hometown and the ostensible model for her fictional town, is situated.

Considerable similarities between Maycomb and Monroeville include, but are not limited to, its courthouse, town square, and other aspects of its layout.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Lee appeared to deny what seems obvious to the many who have conflated the written-world town of Maycomb with the unwritten world of Monroeville.<sup>13</sup> In a letter of September 13, 1960, responding to a “Mrs. Hudson,” Lee observes: “You ask me where Maycomb County is, where the Landing is—the only answer I can give you is that Maycomb County is in my heart and the Landing is in my imagination.”<sup>14</sup> At the bottom of the letter is a sketched outline of the state of Alabama, with the words “Maycomb County” filling the interior. The question of whether Maycomb is Monroeville in literary drag is, nevertheless, quite different from the question of whether Finch’s Landing could be said to be *both* forty miles above Saint Stephens *and* on the Alabama River. The first can never be answered definitively, the second is a simple matter of fact. As Christopher Ricks’s work suggests, by situating her story in Alabama in the United States with its incumbent history of racial tensions, Lee is drawing on a certain facticity that makes her imaginative tale possible.

Multiple sources confirm that Harper Lee was a keen student of Alabama history and cartography; as such, it seems unlikely that she would made not one but two such obvious mistakes in her description of her local geography.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Lee is known to have shared a copy of the finished or almost-finished manuscript with Gladys Watson, her former English teacher and lifelong Alabama resident who might also have been expected to have caught the possible mistakes before publication, as might her husband to whom she is said to have read it (Shields, p. 131). Likewise, in a 1959 letter to his aunt, Truman Capote talks about having read much of the book, and he, too, might have been expected to catch the mistakes if that is what they were.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the location of Finch’s Landing shifts from *Go Set a Watchman* to *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In *Watchman*, we are informed that “Atticus Finch’s

great-great-grandfather, an English Methodist, settled by the river near Claiborne.”<sup>17</sup> Approximately forty miles east of St. Stephens, and twenty miles west of Monroeville/Maycomb, Claiborne’s position on the Alabama River would appear to make it the geographical location of the fictional Landing as described in *Mockingbird*. This, then, raises the question of why Lee chose to alter this geographically possible location of the Landing in *Go Set a Watchman* to its geographically impossible location in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Conceivably she simply made a mistake, but much suggests otherwise.

Further evidence for the claim that the mislocation of Finch’s Landing was the author making a point rather than making a mistake is to be found in Lee’s otherwise meticulous attention to detail. To be sure, errors of fact can be found in the novel. Patrick Chura identifies two textual anachronisms. Noting that “the novel’s 1930s history is exposed as at times quite flawed in its presentation of facts,” he observes that the Works Progress Administration (WPA) “did not exist until 1935, but it is mentioned in the novel’s fourth chapter, which is set in 1933.” Likewise, he continues, “Eleanor Roosevelt did not violate segregation law by sitting with black audience members at the Southern Conference for Human Welfare in Birmingham until 1938, but the event is mentioned by Mrs. Merriweather during the fall of 1935.”<sup>18</sup> Although Chura constructs an elaborate theory of prolepsis to explain these errors, it is, perhaps, more plausible to suggest, with Christopher Mole, that some mistakes simply do not matter: nothing appears to turn on these minor chronological concerns, and they do not appear to add up to a coherent theory of the text.<sup>19</sup>

In the case of Tom Robinson’s appeal of his rape conviction in *Mockingbird*, by contrast, Lee demonstrates a detailed and precise knowledge of American legal history. She does so with reference the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling on April 1, 1935, in the case of *Norris v. State of Alabama*, overturning the convictions of two of the Scottsboro Boys because of the systematic exclusion of African Americans from their jury. Lee’s eye for detail and her reliance upon historical context is suggested by the changing degrees of confidence with which Atticus expresses his belief in the possible success of an appeal. In December 1934, when the petition of writ for certiorari asking the Supreme Court to consider the case has just been issued, Atticus tells his brother, “I think we’ll have a *reasonable* chance on appeal though” (*TKAM*, p. 100; emphasis added); whereas, in late September or October 1935, following the favorable April decision, he tells Scout, “We’ve got a *good* chance”

(p. 250; emphasis added).<sup>20</sup> Lee exhibits a similar degree of precision with regard to her understanding of the townspeople's knowledge of Adolf Hitler's activities in the early 1930s. Some critics, drawing on Deborah Lipstadt's work on American newspapers and the Holocaust, have suggested that Lee's depiction of Maycomb's knowledge of Hitler was implausible. But Dan Puckett's work on Southern newspapers and the Holocaust shows otherwise and that, once again, *To Kill a Mockingbird's* facts are strongly supported in the unwritten world beyond the text. This raises the question of what Lee's commitment to factual verisimilitude might suggest about her novel and its moral pedagogy.<sup>21</sup>

## II

A commonplace of *To Kill a Mockingbird* criticism—academic, popular, and legal—is that Atticus Finch is a moral compass, not only for the other characters in the text but also for its readers. “In *Mockingbird*,” writes Michiko Kakutani, “Atticus was a role model for his children, Scout and Jem—their North Star, their hero, the most potent moral force in their lives.” Stephen W. Thrasher likewise observes that Finch “has long operated in the American imagination as a kind of moral compass against racism,” while Denis Slattery declares him “a courtroom moral compass.” The examples of this trope are legion.<sup>22</sup> For some readers, however, the trope's persistence might raise the possibility that the supposed moral compass may be, like the novel's geographical compass, miscalibrated. If the novel's moral compass is similarly unreliable, then the supposed moral lessons of the novel might be considered less obviously didactic than has hitherto been suggested, with the text demanding more of its readers than simple mimetic fidelity to Atticus Finch's example.

In such circumstances, reading would seem to require more than a passive scanning of one's eyes over the text—rather, as befits a story soaked in the legal, the sort of ongoing critical evaluation appropriate to a jury. This approach suggests that, rather than gorging ourselves on the feel-good moral confectionary of the standard reading of the novel—that which permits us to identify ourselves with an unambiguously good individual fighting a clear injustice—we might instead be forced to consider the extent to which the story we are reading is more complex than the manner in which it is depicted. Indeed, that the geographical compass is off by ninety degrees—the Landing is described as *north* rather than *east* of Saint Stephens—rather than one hundred and eighty makes the text especially demanding. While the latter would simply call



on us to do the opposite of Atticus's example, the former tasks us with engaging in complex moral reasoning to assess for ourselves what is at stake and how we might act in similar circumstances. In this demand, perhaps, Lee, like Henry James, seeks to "make the reader," cultivating the reader's critical skills rather than simply telling him or her what to think. There are multiple such moments in the text.

Atticus's oddly blithe statement, "Way back about nineteen-twenty there was a Klan, but it was a political organization more than anything," is just such a moment (*TKAM*, p. 196). For, as Glenn Feldman's work suggests, Atticus grossly misrepresents the importance of the group—both as a political and a terrorist organization—in the 1920s, and, indeed, its persistence thereafter. Moreover, Atticus's supporting anecdote about Sam Levy, the Jewish merchant who showed himself unfazed by the Klan, ignores the murderous violence carried out against African American citizens of Alabama and the valid fear that the Maycomb Klan, even if they were as Atticus describes, would no doubt have engendered in Maycomb's black population.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, Atticus's seeming endorsement of the views of Henry W. Grady—one of the most eloquent voices of the "New South" in the late nineteenth century—might call upon us to reconsider Atticus's motivations for defending Robinson.<sup>24</sup> While maintaining his belief in the inferiority of African Americans, Grady argued for the protection of their legal and political rights because this was the only way of ensuring they would not rise up against whites.<sup>25</sup> Atticus's expression of a similar fear—"Don't fool yourselves—it's all adding up and one of these days we're going to pay the bill for it" (p. 296)—suggests that his defense of Robinson, while admirable, might have been motivated by less-than-admirable reasons. Here the book might, for example, be asking whether doing the right thing for the wrong reasons is morally laudable; just as the book ends with a consideration of whether it is appropriate to do the legally wrong thing for the right reasons.

For many, perhaps, the impossible location of Finch's Landing might seem a rather thin reed upon which to place so much hermeneutic weight. Nevertheless, the "simple mistake" explanation appears implausible given Lee's knowledge of Alabama geography and commitment to factual precision elsewhere in the text. Moreover, other elements of the text are hiding in plain sight that seem to back up this rejection of Atticus's supposed status as a moral exemplar for others to follow. In 1935, shortly before the trial, Scout recalls that she, Atticus, and Jem were reading the sports pages of the newspaper. "Alabama might



go to the Rose Bowl again this year,” she concludes, “judging from its prospects, not one of whose names we could pronounce” (*TKAM*, p. 126). The question of why the Finches cannot pronounce the names of these prospects does not appear to have been broached until 2019, and the answer—anti-immigrant bigotry—suggests that Atticus’s moral compass fails, once again, to point due North.<sup>26</sup>

Not all such indications of Atticus’s faulty moral compass require such hermeneutic effort. Another for which he is widely lauded in the literature—his familial embrace of Calpurnia—is similarly problematic. In response to his sister’s suggestion that the family dispense with Calpurnia’s services, he responds:

Alexandra, Calpurnia’s not leaving this house until she wants to. You may think otherwise, but I couldn’t have got along without her all these years. She’s a faithful member of this family and you’ll simply have to accept things the way they are. Besides, sister, I don’t want you working your head off for us—you’ve no reason to do that. We still need Cal as much as we ever did. (*TKAM*, p. 156)

It is, however, a comment that undoes itself. While championing Calpurnia as a family member, Atticus makes clear that her status in the family is predicated upon her willingness to work her “head off” in a way that is untrue of genuine family members. Furthermore, considerable evidence suggests that the family’s relationship with Calpurnia is far more exploitative and sordid than has generally been suggested: we might ask, for example, why the book presents conflicting accounts of Calpurnia’s move to Maycomb (*TKAM*, pp. 7, 167), and what exactly is being suggested about the nature of her relationship with the Finches during her visit to the church (p. 134). The novel pays repeated attention to just such moments in a way that calls into serious question the supposed decency and moral rectitude of Atticus Finch, and the moral system by which he claims to live.<sup>27</sup>

Closer attention to Atticus as a moral agent further indicates the peculiarity of regarding him as a moral exemplar. He is, to put it mildly, just plain weird. Evidence for this comes in his admonishment to his children: “Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit ’em, but remember it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird” (*TKAM*, p. 103). Bluejays and mockingbirds are both aggressive pests known to attack humans. Atticus’s preference for one over the other seems arbitrary at best, and he gives no further explanation for his position. Indeed, it is telling that he is prepared to bolster this seemingly arbitrary preference

with the language of sin, making him all the more peculiar, not least because Scout observes: "That was the only time I ever heard Atticus say it was a sin to do something" (p. 103).<sup>28</sup> Atticus refuses to hate Hitler, fails to condemn racism—only certain expressions of it—and engages in blatantly sexist characterizations of the townswomen in front of his daughter, but draws the line at killing one avian pest over another. It is, perhaps, not too strong to suggest that his famous aphorism—that which gives the book its title—is rather more vacuous than gnomic.

### III

Some debate in *To Kill a Mockingbird* criticism centers on whether the narrator is unreliable.<sup>29</sup> Certain aspects of the text seem to support such a claim. The narrator gives and then takes away: Calpurnia is a member of the family, but one whose duties mark out her difference; Atticus seems to be an advocate for racial justice, but one whose embrace of Grady suggests his position is predicated upon self-interested pragmatism rather than moral principle; and he expresses impatience with Hitler, but shares the German's eugenic beliefs about the dangers of immigration by inferiors. Here, however, I wish to suggest that we might think about the "unreliable reader." The unreliable reader is one who simply fails to do the work required to grasp the complexity of the text. *To Kill a Mockingbird* has long been regarded as a simple tale well-told, one in which the good stands out from the bad at all levels. And, to be sure, much in the text supports such a reading.

Nevertheless, multiple indicators also show that the presented narrative is not the whole story. Paying attention to the details of the text—such as the location of Finch's Landing or why the Finches cannot pronounce the names of the prospects for the 1935 Crimson Tide—should force the reader to become the Jean Louise of *Go Set a Watchman*, who is capable of seeing what is in front of her and coping with it rather than immersing herself in the illusions of childhood. Confronting her father, Jean Louise learns that she must make her own choices and not simply mimic his: she kills the mockingbird that the Atticus of that novel would protect. The pedagogical value of this reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird*—as opposed to the simple demand to imagine oneself as other—is that it suggests that by doing the hard work required of this approach, the reader can come to understand what she has ignored or that to which she has been blind, an experience that not only vividly illustrates the limitations on the moral imagination approach but also demonstrates

what genuine, as opposed to ersatz, moral reasoning requires. To achieve this, the text must offer a pedagogy of indirection: simply being told “think for yourself and make your own choices” is unlikely to produce the outcome in the same way that being told to imagine oneself as another offers a simple but often misleading maxim to follow. Rather, the text must lead the reader to her own discoveries.

Presiding over Robinson’s trial, Judge Taylor observes, “People generally see what they look for, and hear what they listen for” (*TKAM*, pp. 198–99). Here, perhaps, Lee alerts us to the problem of reading as moral pedagogy: people have a tendency to read into a text and hear back what they put in. This is, of course, an accusation that could be leveled at my own argument, which might, to some, seem to construct a grand edifice on a very shaky foundation. Taylor’s comment could, however, be applied to any reading: certainly, once the dominant reading of the text as offering a moral pedagogy for a better America took off, nothing could stop it; nevertheless, it could have gone another way. Perhaps significantly, Lee puts these words in the mouth of a judge, somebody whose job cannot be done by simply employing maxims and aphorisms. Being a judge requires judgment in a way that being a watchman does and, because of the previously identified limitations of the exercise, imagining that one is somebody else often does not.

In book 10 of Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates recounts the Myth of Er. It tells a story about the afterlife, indicating that one is rewarded for good deeds on earth and punished for bad. It is a story that seems to run counter to the whole tenor of a text in which Socrates has been asked to show that justice is a good in itself, not just because of its consequences. John Seery argues that the Myth of Er has two possible effects on the reader. For those who have read the text and derived little from it, the Myth of Er offers a second-order conception of justice. For Socrates, justice requires that we know why we are being just, and the Myth of Er seems to advocate that acting justly might be an acceptable alternative: incomplete, to be sure, but better than pursuing injustice.<sup>30</sup>

For those who have read the text and experienced its dialectical effects—for those who have had their souls turned toward the light—the Myth of Er might serve to remind them that they are, at every moment, choosing their future and who they will become because of their actions. It is, perhaps, a little preposterous—but only a little—to say that something similar might be going on with *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Disputing this claim would, however, require a better explanation for the multiple moments where Lee poses challenges—of varying degrees

of obscurity—to the reader. Foremost among these is, I believe, the puzzlingly out-of-place Finch's Landing. The answer to the question of whether she is making a mistake or making a point appears to be the latter.

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1. See, for example, Claudia Durst Johnson, "The Secret Courts of Men's Hearts: Code and Law in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*," *Studies in American Fiction* 19, no. 2 (Autumn 1991): 129–39; Thomas L. Shaffer, "Growing Up Good in Maycomb," *Alabama Law Review* 531 (1993–94): 531–61; and the multitude of testaments to the personal moral experiences of readers including Oprah Winfrey, Tom Brokaw, Rick Bragg, and Scott Turow in Mary McDonough Murphy, *Scout, Atticus, and Boo: A Celebration of Fifty Years of "To Kill a Mockingbird"* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010).
2. Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), p. 33, hereafter abbreviated *TKAM*; Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and the Public Life* (New York: Random House, 1997). For an extended critique, see Simon Stow, *Republic of Readers? The Literary Turn in Political Thought and Analysis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).
3. The "Atticus Finch as moral exemplar" reading of the novel has very much been a white phenomenon. See Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016), p. 368.
4. See Simon Stow, "American Skin: Bruce Springsteen, Danielle Allen, and the Politics of Interracial Friendship," *American Political Thought* 6 (2017): 294–316.
5. The best account of Lee's post-*Mockingbird* struggles is to be found in Casey Cep, *Furious Hours: Murder, Fraud, and the Last Trial of Harper Lee* (New York: Random House, 2019).
6. *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), p. 87.
7. Christopher Ricks, "Literature and the Matter of Fact," in *Essays in Appreciation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 299.
8. M. W. Rowe, "Lamarque and Olsen on Literature and Truth," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 47, no. 188 (1997): 322–41.
9. See Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Richard Eldridge, "The Question of Truth in Literature: *Die Poetische Auffassung der Welt*" in *Fictional Characters, Real Problems: The Search for Ethical Content in Literature*, ed. Garry L. Hagberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 119–38; Christopher Mole, "The Matter of Fact in Literature," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 4 (2009): 483–502.

10. William T. Going, *Essays on Alabama Literature* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1975), p. 9.

11. It is possible that “above,” which is here understood to mean “north of,” has some other regional meaning specific to Alabama. Nevertheless, a thorough search of dictionaries of slang and/or regional English, including *Dictionary of the Alabama Language*, reveals no such alternative meaning in Lee’s home state or elsewhere. See, for example, Cora Sylestine, Heather K. Hardy, and Timothy Montler, *The Dictionary of the Alabama Language* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993); *Dictionary of American Regional English*, vols. 1–6 (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1985–2013); John S. Farmer and W. E. Henley, *Dictionary of slang & its analogues, past & present* [ . . . ], rev. ed. (New Hyde Park: University Books, 1966); Albert Barrère and Charles G. Leland, *A dictionary of slang, jargon & cant embracing English, American, and Anglo-Indian slang* [ . . . ] (London: G. Bell, 1897). It is telling that Going, an Alabama writer, writing on Alabama literature, in a book published by the University of Alabama Press, offers no such possibility.

12. See Monroe County Heritage Museums, *Monroeville: The Search for Harper Lee’s Maycomb* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 1999).

13. The distinction between the written and unwritten worlds is taken from Philip Goodman via Philip Roth. See Simon Stow, “Written and Unwritten America: Philip Roth on Reading, Politics, and Theory,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 23 (2004): 77–87.

14. Harper Lee, letter to Mrs. Hudson, September 13, 1960, [http://4.bp.blogspot.com/\\_CGQxpRoInM/VNLGyPeWX-I/AAAAAABT4E/ULKiO9t0GtE/s1600/hl3.jpg](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_CGQxpRoInM/VNLGyPeWX-I/AAAAAABT4E/ULKiO9t0GtE/s1600/hl3.jpg).

15. See Charles J. Shields, *Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006); and Marja Mills, *The Mockingbird Next Door: Life with Harper Lee* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

16. Melissa Block, “Letter Puts End to Persistent *Mockingbird* Rumor,” NPR.com, March 3, 2006.

17. Harper Lee, *Go Set a Watchman* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), p. 72.

18. Patrick Chura, “Prolepsis and Anachronism: Emmet Till and the Historicity of *To Kill a Mockingbird*,” *The Southern Literary Journal* 32, no. 2 (2000): 1.

19. Christopher Mole, “The Matter of Fact in Literature,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 4: 483–502.

20. This section draws on Simon Stow, “The Other Finch Family: Atticus, Calpurnia, Zeebo, and Black Women’s Agency in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Go Set a Watchman*,” *Post-45*, January 11, 2018, n.p.

21. This section draws on Simon Stow, “*To Kill a Mockingbird*: What Maycomb Knew about Hitler (and Why It Matters),” *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews*, forthcoming. Published online August 8, 2019.

22. Michiko Kakutani, “Review: Harper Lee’s *Go Set a Watchman* Gives Atticus Finch a Dark Side,” *New York Times*, July 10, 2015, [nytimes.com/2015/07/11/books/review-harper-lees-go-set-a-watchman-gives-atticus-finch-a-dark-side.html](http://nytimes.com/2015/07/11/books/review-harper-lees-go-set-a-watchman-gives-atticus-finch-a-dark-side.html); Steven W. Thrasher, “Whiteness Still Front and Center: *Go Set a Watchman*,” *The Guardian*, July 15, 2015; Denis Slattery, “Atticus Finch, Revered Lawyer in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Is Racist in *Go*

*Set a Watchman*, Harper Lee's Upcoming Novel: Report," *New York Daily News*, July 10, 2015. Many other writers employ the term "moral compass"; others simply imply it. See, for example, Joshua Barajas, "How Newspapers Reviewed *To Kill a Mockingbird* in 1960," PBS.org, July 13, 2015; Daniel D'Addario, "Go Set a Watchman Review: Atticus Finch's Racism Makes Scout, and Us, Grow Up," *Time*, July 11, 2015; Johnson, "The Secret Courts of Men's Hearts"; William Kilpatrick, Gregory Wolfe, and Suzanne M. Wolfe, *Books That Build Character: A Guide to Teaching Your Child Moral Values through Stories* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); Renee Newman Knake, "Beyond Atticus Finch: Lessons on Ethics and Morality from Lawyers and Judges in Postcolonial Literature," Michigan State University College of Law Legal Studies Research Paper Series, Research Paper No. 07-18 (2008): 37-66; The Editors of *LIFE*, *LIFE: The Enduring Legacy of Harper Lee and "To Kill a Mockingbird"* (New York: Time Books Inc., 2016); John B. Owens, "Grisham's Legal Tales: A Moral Compass for the Young Lawyer," *UCLA Law Review* 48 (2000-01): 1431-42; Mike Papantonio, *In Search of Atticus Finch: A Motivational Books for Lawyers* (Pensacola: Seville Publishing, 1995); Zachary Raasch, "Go Set a Watchman (Review)," *The Hopkins Review* 1 (2016): 141-43; Gregory J. Sullivan, "Children into Men: Lawyers and the Law in Three Novels," *Catholic Lawyer* 1 (1996-97): 29, 43; Richard A. Zitrin and Carol M. Langford, *The Moral Compass of the American Lawyer: Truth, Justice, Power, and Greed* (New York: Random House, 2011).

23. Glenn Feldman, *Politics, Society, and the Klan in Alabama 1915-1949* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999).

24. Having bested Jem in an argument, Atticus makes his son read Grady's speeches. Not only does it seem unlikely that he would have Jem read a book with whose political views he disagreed, the many similarities between Grady's views and his own suggest Atticus's affinity for Grady's work (*TKAM*, p. 166). See Simon Stow, "Atticus Finch as Namesake: Roman Notable or Methodist Bishop?" *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Reviews*, forthcoming. Published online May 24, 2019.

25. See, for example, Henry W. Grady, *The New South: The Writings and Speeches of Henry W. Grady* (Savannah: The Beehive Press, 1971), p. 25.

26. Simon Stow, "To Kill a Mockingbird: Why Can't the Finch Family Pronounce the Names of the Prospects for the 1935 Crimson Tide?" *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes, and Review* 33, no. 44 (2020): 347-48.

27. Stow, "The Other Finch Family."

28. See Simon Stow, "Scout's Visions of Sin; Or, Why It's Probably Okay to Kill a Mockingbird After All," *The Explicator* 78, no. 1 (2020): 17-20.

29. "No one can classify the point of view as ironic in the traditional sense, as one finds irony in Twain and Salinger . . . with its first-person narration. For, though the tone is childlike, the reader is prone to trust the judgments and values of the narrator" (Claudia Durst Johnson, "*To Kill a Mockingbird*": *Threatening Boundaries* [New York: Twain Publishers, 1994], p. 33). (I must admit I do not know what Johnson means by "ironic in the traditional sense.") Likewise, in a response to Steven Lubet's attempt to reconsider the heroism of Atticus Finch, Atkinson declares, "Unreliable narrators and inconsistent perspectives are, of course, standard features of sophisticated fiction and film. But Lee gives us no hint of Scout's being anything other than right about Tom

Robinson's innocence and Atticus's wisdom. *To Kill a Mockingbird* . . . is no *Rashomon*" (Rob Atkinson, "Comment on Steven Lubet: Reconstructing Atticus Finch," *Michigan Law Review* 97: 1339, 1998–99, 1370). Others have, however, pointed out that narration by a child, or by an adult recalling her childhood, poses particular problems for claims to narratorial reliability. As McAdams notes, "We receive the story from an unreliable narrator, the eight-year-old Scout, whose limitations place extra interpretive demands on the reader" (Richard H. McAdams, "Empathy and Masculinity in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*," in *American Guy: Masculinity in American Law and Literature*, ed. Saul Levmore and Martha Nussbaum [New York: Oxford University Press], p. 253). Zwick, on the other hand, seeks to split the difference. "While a classically unreliable narrator Scout is not," he writes, "is it possible that her loving account so moves a reader that it captivates his judgment, as well? Unquestionably, young children easily fail to see glaring flaws in their parents' characters, and slightly more discerning older children may willingly overlook the same out of devotion" (Peter Zwick, "Rethinking Atticus Finch," *Case Western Law Review* 60, no. 4 [2010]: 1352).

30. John Seery, *Political Returns: Irony in Politics and Theory from Plato to the Antinuclear Movement* (New York: Westview Press, 1990).