

# INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE

## English B

### EXTENDED ESSAY

*Examining Change in Personality when Growing Up*

Word Count: 3990

**RQ:** How does Harper Lee express change in Jean Louise's personality as she grows up in

“Go Set a Watchman”?

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## **Introduction**

Change is something no human can run away from. Whether it is because our setting changes or we grow up, people always find a way to change. This might be voluntarily or involuntarily, but nobody stays the same person they are as a child. The little changes we go through as we grow up pile up and eventually make us a different version of ourselves; however this does not mean that change is a negative thing. Being a different version of ourselves usually ends up with us being a better us.

The author of the book, Harper Lee lived from April 28, 1926, to February 19, 2016, and she released her last book “Go Set a Watchman” in July 2015. She used her own life as inspiration when writing “To Kill a Mockingbird” and the sequel, “Go Set a Watchman”. She used her father A.C. Lee as an inspiration while writing Atticus in both her books. A.C. Lee was a man who believed the racial segregation in America was natural but still defended two black men who were charged with murder just like Atticus in “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “Go Set a Watchman”. She created the character Dill in “To Kill a Mockingbird” with her childhood friend and neighbour Truman Capote in mind (Fine) who was also a writer. With the model of Atticus being the father of Harper Lee and the model of Dill being her childhood friend, it is safe to say that Harper Lee used herself as the model of the main character Jean Louise Finch in both novels.

“Go Set a Watchman” was released in 2015 as a sequel to the all-time classic “To Kill a Mockingbird”. It takes place 20 years after the events of “Mockingbird”, and this brings lots of changes to the characters we know and love. Jean Louise has moved out of Maycomb and lives in New York now. Jem Finch had died from a heart attack prior to “Watchman” s events. Atticus is old now and he cannot take care of himself. On hindsight, these seem like the only changes we know. However, “Go Set a Watchman” deals with the change of perspective and

the new insight people might gain with the process of growing up. Many people in the media have criticized this book because it takes away the perfect father figure that Atticus is, that this book portrays a national hero as a racist character, and I could not disagree more.

In the beginning of the book, Jean Louise Finch travels from New York City to Maycomb, Alabama to visit her father because he has been suffering from arthritis. She connects with Jem's childhood friend and now her partner for several years, Henry Clinton. He works with Atticus in his law office and was mainly raised by him. After church, when Atticus and Henry leave for work, Jean Louise finds a racist pamphlet called "The Black Plague" among Atticus' files when she is cleaning them, and this horrifies her. She finds it impossible to believe that her father can be racist, so she follows Atticus and Henry to work. She finds them in a meeting of the Maycomb County Citizen's Council. This council is the place where the white supremacists and the people who support segregation meet at. Jean Louise cannot believe that the same man who defended a black man in the same exact building that he is in right now is supporting racist means. She goes crazy, and she prepares to go back to New York immediately. She confronts Henry about this, and Henry tries to explain the situation to her, but she is in no state to listen. After the altercation between the two, she realises that Atticus was listening to everything they have said, and Jean Louise finally confronts Atticus about his actions. Atticus patiently listens to everything Jean Louise says and explains to her that he does not do what he does because he supports the council, but Jean Louise refuses to listen to him. She goes home in a blind rage, and just as she is about to get in the car, Uncle Jack talks to her about her actions and that she needs to see Atticus as another person and not a God. Jean Louise thinks about this the whole night and apologises to Atticus for lashing out to him like she did, and Atticus tells Jean Louise that he is proud of her because she has finally broken her blind bond that she had with him.

After further exploration, I came up with the research question, “How does Harper Lee express change in Jean Louise’s personality as she grows up in *Go Set a Watchman*?”. In this question, the difference of personality as Jean Louise grows up throughout the years will be examined in the aspects of the most important events in her life and how her understanding of everything around her will switch as she grows up within the novel. This will be made possible by examining Jean Louise throughout the book and seeing the contrasting ideas of her on the same events. Alongside this, how Harper Lee expresses this change with her word choices and literary techniques will also be examined.

## **Development**

### **What Has Not Changed?**

As the main topic of discussion is the change of Jean Louise’s personality throughout the book, it might feel bizarre to start off with something that has not changed in her personality, but everything is connected to her not changing this feature in her life yet changing everything else. As it is seen in “*Go Set a Watchman*”, Jean Louise thought that Atticus was perfect, flawless throughout all the stages in her life. This makes her not think rationally when she sees him doing something everyone else would too. As Uncle Jack says which is the title of the book, “Every man’s island, Jean Louise, every man’s watchman, is his conscience.” (Lee, 278) In this quotation, “watchman” refers to “For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth.” - Isaiah 21:6 (Garrison) A watchman is a person who can maintain a strong mindset and leadership even at times of huge disarray. They are the ones who are always reliable and are “perfect”. In the eyes of Jean Louise, Atticus is her watchman and when her watchman acts in a way an ideal watchman would not, she feels as if she is in a void and tries to escape from that feeling of emptiness.

She thinks with her childish mind, and she cannot comprehend the idea of change in society and her father, or rather her watchman.

On the surface, it might seem like Jean Louise has not changed at all and she is the same person as who she was before. This is mainly true, however as the years pass, everything around her changes, and as one grows up, their perspectives tend to change without realisation. As a child, she did not really think about many things, and went along with the philosophy of what her father told her was right. These core messages shaped the way she has thought her entire life, and although it is not in the entirety of “Go Set a Watchman”, it is possible to see the change in Jean Louise’s mentality in the ending of the book.

A big reason why this “change” in her personality is not as obvious is because Harper Lee tells the story through Jean Louise’s eyes. Jean Louise has moved out of Maycomb very prior to the beginning of “Go Set a Watchman”, therefore she is some sort of an outsider to the town as she was not affiliated with the town for almost 5 years other than her annual visits to her ageing father, Atticus Finch as mentioned in the lines “(...) on her fifth annual trip home.”. (Lee, 3) However, as much of an outsider she is to Maycomb, she also has the perspective of a child when it comes to her hometown. She has various memories of everywhere in Maycomb – as it is a small town – and that part of her, that part of her whole being is not accepting of all the changes the town went through. As grown up as she had become over the decades, she cannot accept that her town that she associated with racial equality is turning into a normal town of the time, where racism is still an important problem and is not fully destroyed.

### **The Beginning of the Change**

The event that makes Jean Louise realise the change in her life is her sighting of Atticus in the Maycomb County Citizen's Council in which she hears her idol Atticus and her lover Henry in a racial segregation meeting. "The one human being she had ever fully and wholeheartedly trusted had failed her; the only man she had ever known to whom she could point and say with expert knowledge, 'He is a gentleman, in his heart he is a gentleman,' had betrayed her, publicly, grossly, and shamelessly." (Lee, 113) The shock that she is in is unbearable, and the three adverbs used by Harper Lee, "publicly, grossly, and shamelessly" emphasises her feeling of disgust that the person whom she had looked up all her life has gone against his teachings to her. Lee gives the contrast in Jean Louise's emotions from before and after she is faced with this event by using clearly positive and negative words. Before she saw Atticus in the meeting, her feelings towards him were "a wholeheartedly trust, a gentleman", whereas after this event occurs, her feelings transform into "failure, betrayal, shameless". The usage of such strong and distinct adjectives gives the reader the true feeling of good and bad, and makes the reader understand the exact feeling of broken heartedness Jean Louise is going through.

It is also at this point in the book that Jean Louise realises the change in the town she grew up as a whole. Just moments after this incident, Jean Louise speaks with an ice-cream man from her past. In what seems to be an unimportant conversation for Jean Louise, the reader is informed with her subconscious thoughts about Maycomb: "'Been livin' in New York, haven'tcha?' / 'Yes.' / 'Maycomb's changed, ain't it?' / 'Yes.'" (Lee, 112) In what seems to be a normal conversation between a salesman and a customer, Harper Lee disguises the beginning of a new chapter in Jean Louise's life. Jean Louise realises how it is not only the people close to her that changed, but rather the whole town. Harper Lee uses foreshadowing in the subtlest way with this interaction that seems unimportant, in a way that

Maycomb County is the very essence of who Jean Louise is, and the fact that it is changing means that the essence of who Jean Louise is will also change within the book.

### **The Confrontation**

As someone who does not want to believe this change in the attitude of the two people she most cares in the world, Jean Louise feels as if she needs to have a talk with both Henry and Atticus. In her confrontation with Atticus, Harper Lee changes the perspective of the story for the reader to understand Jean Louise's feelings better. While the whole novel is written in a way in which the storyteller follows her, the story is now told as if Jean Louise is the one telling it. Before the confrontation begins, Lee has used the words "She had not intended to say it, but she could not stop herself.", whereas after it begins, the word usage turns to "Hurts, doesn't it? You're damn right it hurts. You know how it feels now." (Lee, 228) This change in perspective is made so that the feelings and thoughts of Jean Louise are conveyed to the reader in the rawest form possible. This is made possible through the use of short sentence structures. When a person is made to look enraged, they go straight to the point of their emotions rather than explaining themselves logically, and Harper Lee used this to her advantage as the shorter sentence form gives the reader the impression that she is in an outrage at this moment.

This confrontation between Jean Louise and Henry takes her anger to a whole new level, and just as it is about to come to an end, Atticus shows up – which makes Jean Louise completely forget about Henry. In the confrontation with Atticus, the first-person point-of-view of Jean Louise still continues, but the content of this confrontation is more important towards Jean Louise's understanding of growth than anything. The conversation starts respectfully, where Atticus tries to understand and evaluate the situation for himself, and Jean

Louise following this lead. Jean Louise thinks that Atticus' attitude has changed drastically in the lines "You've cheated me in a way that's inexpressible, but don't let it worry you, because the joke is entirely on me. You're the only person I think I've ever fully trusted and now I'm done for." (Lee, 252) Throughout the whole altercation between her and Atticus, she is always the aggressor and the one talking the most, as well as most furiously. Jean Louise is heartbroken and when speaking to Atticus, she stops being Jean Louise and turns into Scout. The ungrown child in her hates Atticus for what he did but a glimpse of a grown Jean Louise can be seen from the line "You're a nice, sweet, old gentleman, and I'll never believe a word you say to me again." (Lee, 252-253) Harper Lee used these contrasting adjectives to show that while Jean Louise is furious about what happened, she is broken that her idol is someone she cannot recognise anymore.

The confrontational side of this situation is the climax of the book, and Lee expresses each character's feelings so that the reader understands the standpoint of everyone and can make their own judgement of the situation. Not rushing into situations and evaluating the conditions is what Atticus has been trying to teach Jean Louise her whole life, and it is also what Harper Lee is trying to get across to the reader.

### **The Observable Growth**

As children, people tend not to use their reasoning but rather their emotions to guide them in a kerfuffle. When time passes and they grow up, while emotion is still among the biggest of the factors when making a decision, the element of logic shares that decision with emotion. After Jean Louise has the biggest outbreak in her life, she quickly turns to the child in her as mentioned before and lashes out to her lifetime idol, Atticus. After this altercation is completed, she needs to remain calm therefore she needs someone to talk to and perhaps explain to her why Atticus did what he did. In the argument with Atticus, he mentions that

him and Uncle Jack have spoken about Jean Louise: “Called a while ago and said – among other things – that if you weren’t already on the warpath you’d soon be.” (Lee, 237-238) Knowing the fact that she is indeed in a warpath, the feeling of her uncle knowing her – possibly better than herself – makes her feel safer to go to him for answers. Harper Lee provides the reader with this fact and lets it slip by the fierce discussion between the two characters, but when Jean Louise goes to Uncle Jack for guidance in the following chapters, it becomes apparent that this information was given deliberately in order for the reader to understand how much Uncle Jack really knows.

The respectful and revelation talk Jean Louise has with Uncle Jack is a second climax in the book, when the reader is finding out things about Atticus alongside Jean Louise. Throughout the whole book, Uncle Jack is only mentioned to be a doctor and is shown as a generally drunk, head in the cloud character who does not take anything seriously, as can be seen in the first true interaction of him and Jean Louise in the book. “ ‘What’s been happening, Uncle Jack? What *is* the matter with Atticus? (...)’ He put his hands on the table to steady himself, his incisive features melted, his eyebrows shot up, he laughed loudly.” (Lee, 187) In contrast to this attitude from him, after the altercation between Scout and Atticus, he is almost always mentioned to be Dr. Finch. A doctor is a reputable person in a community, and this sudden change of addressing a man shows the change of tone in a conversation. Uncle Jack mentions to Jean Louise, “It’s bearable, Jean Louise, because you are your own person now. (...) now you, Miss, born with your own conscience, somewhere along the line fastened it like a barnacle onto your father’s.” (Lee, 264-265) This is Harper Lee’s way of telling the reader that the conversation Jean Louise had with Atticus is the change she needed her entire life. Before they talked, she was never taken seriously and was always seen as the little girl who was brought up in Maycomb. Even after she had moved to New York and started a life there, people only saw her as Atticus Finch’s baby girl. Them

falling in different sides to an important issue shows that Jean Louise has completed Atticus' teachings and can make her own judgement to a topic rather than blindly following everything an idol says.

### **Why a watchman?**

It is also in this part of the book where the title is given in the lines "Every man's island, Jean Louise, every man's watchman, is his conscience. There is no such thing as a collective conscious." (Lee, 265) A watchman, in this context, refers to a morally strong individual who is able to make their own decisions no matter the consequences. In this context, Jean Louise is told to be a watchman of her own and not a collective watchman with Atticus. Jean Louise mentions that "This was news, coming from him. But let him talk, he would find his way to the nineteenth century somehow." (Lee, 265) Harper Lee using a figure from the Bible – Watchman – shows the intellectual side of Dr. Finch's personality. As someone who had been described as a drunken person so far, hearing him give valuable advice is an enlightening experience for Jean Louise. This realisation of the sudden change in Uncle Jack's personality emphasises Jean Louise's growth to a new level. The character of Uncle Jack was created to be a safe spot for Scout, as a person who she was close to since her childhood other than Atticus. When this safe spot for Jean Louise begins to give valuable advice and life lessons to her just like Atticus did in his earlier days, this makes Jean Louise realise that she is being taken seriously and she realises that she has grown up.

### **The Realisation**

With the realisation of the change in her understanding of what is right and what is wrong, Jean Louise tries to look back at the falling-out her and Atticus had in order to try to understand his side to the argument. Beforehand, she completely brushed off everything that

had anything to do with Atticus as can be seen in Jean Louise's argument with Henry, "'Did you know Mr. Finch joined?' 'I wouldn't be surprised at anything Mr. Finch ever joined in his life.' (...)' 'The Wizard happened to be the Methodist preacher – "'That's the kind of company Atticus likes.'"' (Lee, 229) Perhaps the clearest change in Jean Louise's personality is given through this contrast of thought. After she has undergone this change, she is ready to take in new thoughts and be open for any kind of ideas. She still does not acknowledge the person she is speaking to to be Uncle Jack, but she gives in to the concept of listening in the lines "'You were an emotional cripple, leaning on him, getting the answers from him, assuming that your answers would always be his answers.' She listened to the figure on the sofa." (Lee, 265) Harper Lee purposefully chose this difference in thought of Jean Louise straight before and after a certain event happened in order to show the reader that the argument changed who she was as a person. This can be understood from the tone of the writing in both situations. It is clearly seen that Jean Louise cut off anyone who talked about Atticus before, but she is willing to listen to what Uncle Jack has to say afterwards, as this is emphasized and given its own sentence "She listened to the figure on the sofa." (Lee, 265)

Jean Louise sees Atticus as a changed person, someone who has switched their ideals as the years passed by. However, as she grows up herself and starts to realise the truths of life to herself, she understands that it is not Atticus who changed, but rather herself. Atticus has always been the person to try to understand the other side's ideas before giving them a piece of his mind. This can be seen throughout the book, such as him saying "'Would you care to prove that statement?'" (Lee, 23), "'How so?' (...)' 'You seem to be constitutionally sound so far. Proceed.'" (Lee, 239) Harper Lee has shown this side of Atticus time and time again in the book, but Jean Louise being surprised by the portrayal of this side of Atticus shows the change in her personality. Throughout her life, she always brushed over Atticus trying to make her create her own truths, but when this fact is told straight to her, it hits her like a slap

to the face, such as in the lines “‘He was letting you break your icons one by one. He was letting you reduce him to the status of a human being.’ (...) she would have had a spirited argument only, an exchange of ideas, a clash of hard and different points of view with a friend, with him she had tried to destroy.” (Lee, 266) from *Uncle Jack*. This realisation of her very own self makes her understand that she has finally completed her growth as a person and has successfully transformed from Scout to Jean Louise.

## **Conclusion**

Growth is a very vital part of every being's existence. It makes them realise their previous mistakes and learn from them, it makes them understand the things they were not able to understand, and most importantly, it makes them who they are as a person. In Harper Lee's "*Go Set a Watchman*", the element of growth is given by the story of Jean Louise. Her interactions with everyone in her life and herself truly brings out every side of her personality. Her story of the destruction of an idol and breaking apart from the biggest part of her life is a growth story which is not easy to portray, but Harper Lee made it possible by using her literary genius. Her usage of foreshadowing put ideas to the reader's mind about the climax of the book, her usage of word choice as given through the contrast of positive and negative adjectives brought out the ideas in each character's head possible to observe and to top it all, her creation of every aspect of the book made it feel realistic so that the reader could understand and evaluate the situation for themselves. This made it possible for the reader to grow at the same time as reading about Jean Louise's growth in the story, and thus making the reader feel a part of the novel. The growth of Jean Louise was examined in this research, however many other subjects such as the way Harper Lee's own life has been portrayed in the novel and how the feeling of a big family is given in the story can also be examined for future academic papers.

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