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从女性叙事学解读《百舌鸟之死》

A Feminist Narratological Reading of

To Kill a Mockingbird

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Abstract

Harper Lee is a modern southern female writer with a unique style in the history of American literature in the 20th century. She came to the literary scene in the 1960s and achieved great success by publishing her sole novel – *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The success of the novel was so immediate that the novel's release was described as a “summer storm”. *To Kill a Mockingbird* continued the best traditions of the American authors who wrote about America's South – Mark Twain, William Faulkner and many others – will forever belong to the treasure of American literature.

Critics at home and abroad have made collective efforts to thoroughly explore various themes in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, such as racism, morality, humanity, and Bildung education, etc. In spite of the prosperity and richness of Harper Lee's study, there is still much room for new approaches and perspectives. Therefore, this thesis, taking the perspective of feminist narratology, tries to explore how Harper Lee adopts narrative focalization and narrative voice to achieve female authority in the patriarchal society in the novel.

This thesis is divided into five parts including an introduction and a conclusion. In the introduction part, a general presentation about Harper Lee and *To Kill a Mockingbird* as well as an overview of Harper Lee's criticism are done to bring forward the theme and significance of this study.

The first chapter traces the origin, the shaping process and the development of feminist narratology theory. Feminist narratology is one of the most influential schools of post-classical narratology, which rose in the 1980s. It assimilates the standpoints of feminist literary criticism, and overcomes the limitation of narratology which advocates that the form is alienated from the text. Its main task is to explore narrative discourse, structural features of works and narrative strategies and then to do research on gender politics in historical, social and cultural contexts.

The second chapter conducts an analysis of the narrative focalization in the novel and explores the authority of the female gazer. First in order to get a better

understanding of the background, the social historical context of American South, particularly southern traditions and southern lady, is provided here. Then concepts of narrative focalization are introduced. Then by following the eyes of the heroine Scout, we gaze into the male world and female world in the novel. Instead of being an object to be watched by the male gazers, females become the bearer of the gaze, deconstructing the male gendered hierarchical relations.

The third chapter probes into the narrative voice in the novel to establish females' own voices. First based on the theory of narrative voice, we discuss Harper Lee's deliberation of using the "narrating-self" and "experiencing-self" alternately to achieve female narrative authority. Then the utility of feminist narrative features are explored, such as chronological narrative order, children's language and symbolic images. After that, the growth of the protagonist from an innocent girl to a sensible teenager is examined. And Miss Lee expresses her own attitude toward women in the transitional period in America South. New southern females should be confident, independent, and courageous to find their own places in society.

The thesis comes to the conclusion that as a female writer in American South, Harper Lee pays particular attention to southern women's living conditions and their social status. Through the novel, she advocates that females should, especially new southern females, first establish their own voices, and then live as speakers of their own experiences to realize their freedom and rights, and finally achieve their equal status in the male-dominated world. Thus, Harper Lee deserves to be a great female writer in American literary history.

Key Words: Harper Lee; feminist narratology; narrative focalization; narrative voice

摘要

哈帕·李是 20 世纪美国文学史上一位风格独特的南方女作家。1960 年，她凭借其唯一一部作品——《百舌鸟之死》成功挺进文坛。小说一经发表取得了巨大的成功，当时被称为一场“夏日的暴风雨”。《百舌鸟之死》沿袭了马克·吐温、威廉·福克纳等美国南方作家的优良传统，将永远被视为美国文学的瑰宝。

国内外的批评家已对《百舌鸟之死》一书的主题做了较为透彻的研究，例如种族主题，道德主题，人性主题以及成长主题等。尽管文学上对哈帕·李的研究已比较丰富和全面，但我们仍然可以用新的方法和新的视角去解读文本。本文以苏珊·兰瑟的理论为基础，从女性叙事学的角度出发，旨在分析哈帕·李如何在小说中通过运用叙述视角和叙述声音在父权社会取得女性的权威。

全文分为五部分，引言部分介绍了作者哈帕·李及其作品《百舌鸟之死》，回顾了相关的文学评论并加以分类，进而引出该研究的主题和意义。

第一章追溯了女性叙事学理论的起源、形成和发展。女性叙事学起源于上个世纪 80 年代，是后经典叙事学中最有影响力的流派之一。该理论吸收了女性主义文学批评的观点，同时克服了经典叙事学中主张形式与文本分离的局限性，并以探讨叙事话语，叙事技巧以及文本结构为对象，在社会、历史、以及文化语境中研究性别政治。

第二章深入分析了文本中的叙事视角以及女性视角的权威。首先，为了更好的理解文本，本章介绍了美国南方的社会历史背景（特别是南方传统和南方淑女的背景知识）；接着介绍了叙事视角的相关理论概念；随后，透过女主人公小海鸥的眼睛，我们进入到文本中的男性世界和女性世界。女性在摆脱被注视者的身份，成为注视者的同时，解构了以男性为主导的社会关系。

第三章则探讨了文本中的叙事声音以及女性如何确立自己的声音。以叙事声音理论为基础，先讨论了哈帕·李巧妙地将“叙事自我”和“经历自我”相结合去取得女性叙事的权威；然后探讨了文本中的女性叙事特点，如叙事时间顺序、孩童语言以及象征性意象；最后分析了小主人公从一个无知小女孩成长为一个懂事青年的历程。同时，哈帕·李也表达了她对美国南方社会转型时期女性发展的观点，即女性要自信、独立、勇敢地找到自己的社会地位。

结论部分对全文做出总结。作为一位美国南方的女作家，哈帕·李特别关注南方女性的生活状况和社会地位。通过《百舌鸟之死》，她主张女性，特别是南方女性，应该首先使自己的声音得到承认，然后为她们的自由和权利而发声，最后在以男性为主的社会中争取自己的平等地位。因而，哈帕·李无疑是美国文学史上一位杰出的女性作家。

关键词：哈帕·李 女性叙事 叙事视角 叙事声音

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Introduction

American South is a fertile land nurturing a lot of world-wide famous writers. Mississippi had William Faulkner and Eudora Welty; Georgia had Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers; Louisiana had Kate Chopin and Tennessee Williams. And Alabama inspired a special female writer and her first and only work, that is, Harper Lee and her *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In the foreword to the illustrated English edition of *To Kill a Mockingbird* in 1977, Nadiya Matuzova gives her comments, "Her only, remarkable novel which continued the best traditions of the American authors who wrote about America's South – Mark Twain, William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell and many others – will forever belong to the treasure of American literature".¹

Nelle Harper Lee was born in Monroeville, Alabama, the youngest of four children of Amasa Coleman Lee and Frances Cunningham Finch. Her father was a former newspaper editor and proprietor, who had served as a state senator and practiced as a lawyer in Monroeville. As a child, Harper Lee was a tomboy and a precocious reader, and became the best friend of her schoolmate and neighbor, the young Truman Capote.

In 1944, Lee graduated from Monroe County High School in Monroeville, and enrolled at the all-female Huntingdon College in Montgomery for one year, and pursued a law degree at the University of Alabama from 1945 to 1949, pledging the Chi Omega sorority. Lee wrote for several student publications and spent a year as editor of the campus humor magazine, *Rammer Jammer*. Though she did not complete the law degree, she studied for a summer in Oxford, England, before moving to New York City in 1950, where she worked as a reservation clerk with Eastern Air Lines and British Overseas Airways Company.

Harper Lee continued as a reservation clerk until 1958, when she received a Christmas gift from her friends who would like to support her life for a whole year for

¹ --A writer's story: The mockingbird mystery [EB/OL].(4 June 2006) [6 April, 2011].<<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/a-writers-story-the-mockingbird-mystery-480965.html>>

her to write whatever she pleased. Then Harper Lee devoted herself to writing. And she finished her first novel – *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the summer of 1959. Since its publication in 1960, the book has had eighty weeks on the best-seller list, sold 30,000,000 copies, and has been translated into more than forty languages. It won the Pulitzer Prize in 1961, and was adapted by Horton Foote into an Academy Award-winning film in 1962. Harper Lee has also been the recipient of numerous honorary degrees, but has always declined to make a speech. In one of her rare interviews with Roy Newquist in New York in March 1964, she explained:

I never expected any sort of success with *Mockingbird*. I was hoping for a quick and merciful death at the hands of the reviewers but, at the same time, I sort of hoped someone would like it enough to give me encouragement. Public encouragement. I hoped for a little, as I said, but I got rather a whole lot, and in some ways this was just about as frightening as the quick, merciful death I'd expected.²

There has not been much published on the doings of Miss Lee since 1966. She kept herself far away from the spotlights. Harper Lee refused to have anything to do with commercial spin-offs from *To Kill a Mockingbird* and seemed unmoved by all the accolades bestowed on her novel. Instead, she settled into a routine that took her to favorite coffee shops, followed up on her lifelong involvement with the First United Methodist Church, but mostly left at home where she could indulge her lifelong passion for reading. Harper Lee once wrote a letter to Oprah Winfrey, and talked about her love of books as a child. “Now, 75 years later in an abundant society where people have laptops, cell phones, iPods and minds like empty rooms, I still plod along with books” (Lee, 2006:14).

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee draws upon her childhood experiences as the daughter of a southern lawyer to portray the moral awakenings of two children in Maycomb, Alabama, during the 1930s. Recalling her experiences as a six-year-old girl from an adult perspective, Jean Louise Finch, nicknamed Scout, describes the

² --A writer's story: The mockingbird mystery [EB/OL].(4 June 2006) [6 April, 2011].<<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/a-writers-story-the-mockingbird-mystery-480965.html>>

circumstances that involve her widowed father Atticus, and his legal defense of Tom Robinson, a black man mistakenly accused of raping a white woman.

The success of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is so immediate that the novel's release is described as a "summer storm". Critics praise Harper Lee for capturing the setting of a small southern town with its complex social fabric of blacks and whites of all classes, from aristocratic to hard-working middle class to white trash. Other reviewers comment on its narrative technique, characterization, balance of humor and tragedy, use of symbolism, and careful interweaving of numerous themes, such as childhood innocence and adult perceptions, justice and injustice, racial tolerance and intolerance, cowardice and courage, be it the physical courage of facing a lynch mob and shooting a rabid dog or the courage of standing up for one's beliefs in the face of public condemnation.

In general, most reviewers have extremely high praise for Harper Lee's writing. As for the content of the novel, R. A. Dave contends, "The novel's small world assumes a macrocosmic dimension and expands into immensity, holding an epic canvas against which is enacted a movingly human drama of the jostling worlds—of children and adults, of innocence and experience, of kindness and cruelty, of love and hatred, of humor and pathos, and above all of appearance and reality—all taking the reader to the root of human behavior" (Matuz. ed, 1999:245). As for the narrative features of the novel, Patrick Chura attempts to separate the historical present of the moment of the text's production in the mid 1950s from the historical present of the novel in the mid 1930s, and analyzes the prolepsis and anachronism in the novel (Chura, 2000: 15). Keith Waterhouse notices the importance of the children's games and contends that the games are treated forcefully in Harper Lee's novel and "pretty soon we are in the adult game based on the same fear and fascination of the dark" (Matuz. ed, 1999:247). James B. McMillan also notices that the Gothic elements in the game are pure realism. Besides the above reviews, some critics comment on the fusion of the two parts of the book and find that "the first section of the book fully prepares one for the second section". As for the social setting of the novel, Claudia Durst Johnson praises Harper Lee for her "insight into Southern mores" and her

portrait of a “Southern liberal” (Johnson, 1994:22).

Meanwhile, critics’ attention is more often than not directed to the topics of racism and legal issues. Edgar H. Shuster asserts, “The achievement of Harper Lee is not that she has written another novel about race prejudice, but rather that she has placed race prejudice in a perspective which allows us to see it as an aspect of a larger thing; as something that arises from phantom contacts, from fear and lack of knowledge; and finally as something that disappears with the kind of knowledge or ‘education’ that one gains through learning what people are really like when you ‘finally see them’” (Matuz. ed, 1999:249). After analyzing the African American theme of the novel, Charles E. Wilson Jr. concludes that “the primacy of overt racism is still well established” in the South (Wilson, 2005: xv). Many attorneys assert that Atticus Finch has been a hero and a model for them on a very personal plain. Their arguments confirm the immortality and mythic stature of Atticus and recognize the importance of *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the individual and national consciousness.

While Harper Lee invokes heated discussion abroad, domestic scholars also react to this significant female writer with rising interest. Beyond all doubt, Professor Liu Guozhi plays a leading role in the research on *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Her studies center on the bi-circular structure of the story, the Southern Belle Complex, the theme of southern racial relations, and the writing style of Harper Lee. In “On the Bi-Circular Structure in *To Kill a Mockingbird*”, Professor Liu maintains that there are two circular structures in the novel. With a comparative and contrastive analysis, she claims that “the relationship between Arthur’s and Tom’s stories is that of supplementing and being supplemented, containing and being contained.” And this subtle narrative structure shows Harper Lee’s “insight into the meaning in routine life and truth in contradictions” (Liu Guozhi, 2006:130). In “Southern Belle Complex and *To Kill a Mockingbird*”, Professor Liu concludes that *To Kill a Mockingbird* reveals the social prejudice against the black under the special cultural background. She holds that *To Kill a Mockingbird* acts as an apocalypse the Old South left to the modern Southern people (Liu Guozhi, 1999:95). In “Harper Lee and Southern Literary Tradition”, Professor Liu interprets Harper Lee’s “combination of humor with the

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