

Harper Lee's book *Go Set a Watchman* around which there is a furore involving: capitalist exploitation by opportunist publishers; an eighty-nine year old author who apparently does not know what she is doing; publication sixty years after the book was written; the book as the first draft of *To Kill a Mockingbird*; a clever editor who helped to shape it into the more conventional novel that became a hit and was made into a movie; confusion about the book as a prequel not a sequel; and most of all, Atticus Finch, the noble Hero of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, shown as an idol with clay feet. Readers want:

heroes

not anti-heroes

romance

not reality

nobility

to dazzle the eyes

and consistency,

consistency,

cause and effect

we need the lies

Jekylls not Hydes

the art of fiction

the fiction of art

The general consensus is that *Go Set a Watchman* is inferior to *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It does not follow conventional expectations; it does not have the logic of cause and effect that turns a story into a work of art, unlike *To Kill a Mockingbird* with its wonderful hero who in the Deep South stands up against racism and espouses the cause of a black man's human rights.

Some reviewers criticise *Go Set a Watchman* on the grounds that it does not conform to the standardised formula for a novel. For me, the novel is like the character in it of Dr Jack Finch, Atticus's brother, who does not present his arguments in terms of abstract principles of logic. He creates his own logic which is made up of personal references --Â to which we may or may not have access --Â that are strung together requiring us to make connections and find personal meanings. Unlike *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which fulfills standard expectations of good versus evil, *Go Set a Watchman* presents good and evil in a human mixture that applies to us all.

It plainly requires us to work out for ourselves where we stand. We are not, like Scout, to follow blindly where Atticus leads. Atticus, himself, has worked through what he believes and his understanding of the situation is not idealistic; it is based on what he has observed. We may or may not agree with his estimation of the situation and that is what makes him human. His daughter in seeing him as a model of integrity reduced him to something unreal, a Platonic

ideal. When she becomes aware that she can no longer agree with him, it is the moment of her liberation, a liberation that encompasses both her father and herself. She need no longer be dependent on him for what she believes and does and he can be a human being who makes mistakes.

There is no such thing as perfection in the human condition; human beings are limited by their perspectives. When we become aware of our limitations, we become capable of change. Atticus's understanding that people without experience of governing, cannot make good governors, is logical. When such a perception becomes conflated with race and leads to continued exclusion on the grounds of race, it requires more consideration than Jean Louise's condemnation of it as racist. It requires a whole new perspective. It is true that black people have been discriminated against and cruelly treated but their suffering does not automatically endow them with the ability to govern; suffering is not the basis for such a responsibility. Jean Louise's arguments are based on emotion not on reason; not on what is practicable.

And so are Atticus's arguments; he has always responded to unfair treatment of black people and has been compassionate at a basic level of interaction. But when blacks want to be in government, he finds them not ready. Instead of devoting his efforts to making them ready, he becomes involved in keeping them subservient. Deep down he is responding to his conditioning in a racist society. He is what we, in South Africa during apartheid, referred to as a white liberal.

What is needed is a situation which changes the kind of governance that has been in effect. The new insights that black people bring to governance requires such change. Government, however, being such a complex form of administration cannot easily be changed and ways have to be found to incorporate the new with the old. That is very difficult as we in South Africa have been learning for the past twenty-one years. Affirmative action which simply means being inducted into existing forms is not the answer. Both Atticus and Jean Louise are thinking in terms of affirmative action – one for, the other against.

For me, *Go Set a Watchman* is a modern novel, deep, intriguing, challenging and satisfying. It is different in style from *To Kill A Mocking Bird*, which is romantic. *Go set a Watchman* is realistic.