

GRADUALISM AND MARGINALISATION A READING OF GO SET A WATCHMAN BY HARPER LEE

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ABSTRACT

In *Go Set A Watchman* the reader becomes acquainted with an older Atticus who appears to be some kind of a racist liberal. This paper explores the characterization of Atticus and his attitude towards segregation, and the voting right of the black population. The 1950s, in the many acts of violence were perpetrated against the blacks. It was the same year when *Go Set A watchman* was published. In *To Kill A Mockingbird* the earlier novel written by Harper Lee, Atticus is pictured as human, idealistic a lover of justice and an extremely good father. In *Go Set A Watchman* the author explores a kind of hidden aspect of Atticus and by doing so she writes a more realistic novel than she had written earlier. She explores the falseness of the philosophy of Gradualism and mildly indicts the white population of attempting to regulate the freedom of the blacks.

Go Set A Watchman is a novel by Harper Lee published on July 14,2015 by Harper Collins, United States and William Heinemann, United Kindom. Although written before her first and only other published novel. the Pulitzer Prize – winning *To Kill A Mockingbird* and initially promoted by its publisher as a sequel – it is now accepted as being a first draft of the famous novel, with many passages being used again in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Harper Lee in the novel, *Go Set A Watchman* gives a realistic picture of Atticus but in the novel *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Atticus is a man of justice and is picturized in a sentimentalised, idealized way that does not give a true picture of the existing society of the South in which he lived. Atticus in *Go Set A Watchman* pleads the case for a very gradualist approach to ending white supremacy. The dynamics of this philosophy of Gradualism is explored in this article and it is pointed out that the philosophy of Gradualism was in fact can attempt at marginalizing the blacks.

When Jean Louise now grown up to be a 26 year old young woman comes home for her annual visit to her father and Maycomb, county. She gets a number of shocks. One of them has to do with her father Atticus who is a lawyer and former state legislator. Soon after she returns she follows Atticus to citizens Council meeting where she sees her father actively introduce a man who delivers a racist speech. This is not the

picture of Atticus that Scout had or even the readers of *To Kill A Mockingbird*. In the earlier novel Atticus was man of unimpeachable goodness and high morals. He represented resistance to black persecution. He had helped a black boy get acquitted on a false charge of rape. Scout is upset when she sees her father, an older man, now associating with the kind of white racists that Scouts disliked.

The Citizens Councils were a network of right wing organizations that had spread in the Southern part of the US. The first Council was formed in July 11,1954. They had their main spring from the US supreme court ruling that segregated public schools were unconstitutional. The main aim of this councils was to oppose racial integration of public schools, oppose voter registration in the South where the majority of the blacks had lost there voting rights. They opposed integration of public facilities. They used many kinds of tactics such as intimidation, firind black people from jobs, propaganda and threatening and comitting violence against civil rights activits. Thus they were a pernicious group of white people who opposed the civil liberties of the black people.

Jean Louise wonders why her father was in the meeting. Her uncle Jake explains to her that Atticus had not suddenly become racist, but he was trying to slow down federal government intervention into state politics. The resistance to federal laws was explained in terms of resistance to a political philosophy which was being forced on the people of the South.

Uncle Jack explains to Jean Louise, "Now at this very minute, a political philosophy foreign to it is being pressed on the South and the South's not ready for it". After the civil war when the South had been defeated many federal laws were passed to unify and administer the USA. Uncle Jack's statement summarises the continued resistance by the Southern part of America to federal law.

Atticus main argument with Scout is that the black's of the South are not ready for full civil rights.

"Honey, you do not seem to understand
that the Negroes down here are still
in their childhood as a people. You
should know it, you've seen it all
your life . They've made terrific
progress in ada[ting themselves to
white ways, but they're far from
it yet".

A little earlier he had asked her, “Do you want your children going to a school that’s been dragged down to accommodate Negro children”. He is not in favour of giving the blacks the full civil right because he feels that they are not fit to vote or Govern at least immediately, not. He feels that they should be allowed to develop slowly and that is the reason why he feels that the citizens councils are the only defence.

Scout argues against her father by saying that even though blacks are backwards, are illiterate and they are dirty, comical, shiftless and no good but does not mean that they are Subhuman. When Atticus questions her she says that, when any one is denied hope as the black people had been then it brings them to a subhuman level.

The NAACP question the attitude of people like Atticus, Martin Luther as quoted by Ako – Adjei observed in his letter from Birmingham Jail to such a white moderate who had written to him. He questions how a white man “paternalistically believes that he can set the time table for another man’s freedom ; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a ‘more convenient season’”.

The NAACP or the National Association for the advancement of colored people was a Civil rights organization formed in the United States in 1909. National NAACP initiatives included political lobbying, publicity efforts and litigation strategies developed by its legal team.

In the novel *Go Set A Watchman*, Atticus decides to take up the case of Calpurnia’s son only so that they would not approach the NAACP. Calpurnia’s son was accused of killing a white man by driving rashly and running him over. He needs to be tried to decide whether to convict him of murder or manslaughter. The story suggests that the white man was a habitual drunk and may have caused the accident by suddenly coming out on the road. If this could be proved the black man could go free. The NAACP often came forward to help such black people and to represent them in the court. When Atticus takes the case, Scout feels that justice will be done but the black people know that Atticus can only lighten the sentence he cannot acquit him. This black organization was fighting against the Gradualist approach favoured by many educated white people of the South. It is quite clear that those who believed in the philosophy of Gradualism would never admit to a time to say that the blacks were fit to govern.

The novel also mentions about the Ku Klux Klan the attitude and her uncle Jack towards this white organization in rather mild “people don’t agree with the klan, but they certainly don’t try to prevent them from putting on sheets and making fools of themselves in public”. The Ku Klux Klan was a notorious organization a white supremacist hate group which targeted black population. They used terrorism, both physical assault and murder, and they upheld the purity of Anglo – Saxon blood. People who believed in gradualism like Atticus did not take the Ku Klux Klan seriously but tried to pretend that this organization merely posed a mild threat. Scout’s uncle Jack says that “Klan can parade around call it wants, but when it starts bombing and beating people, don’t you know who die the first to try and stop it??? This response is

rather mild in contrast to threate of violence which the ku klux klan were committing with flightening regularity.

Go set a watchman was published in 2015 and in that year nine black worshippers in mother Immanuval church were killed by a young racrcist who had draped himself in the flag of Robert .E.Lees. army.Before the charlestom shootings there had been a year long wave of killings of unarmed African .Americans by white police .It is significant that during this time of upheavel .*Go set a watchmen* was published exposing the deep seatedmess of racial prejudice in the US society .”In some of its best passages ,watchman preserves the poisonous rants of the male citizens councils and their female parlor counter parts with searing accuracy .Enveloped by reverberations from Charleston and Ferguson ,ite painful but essential to remembers what lies behind the protest”..

Go set AWatchman is a nesonating look.the time of its publication helps to bring a sharp reminder that the themes in southern culture do not easily fade marginalization of the black has not ended legal issues entangling blacks are not over

According to Henry. I Watson *Go Set A Watchman* provides “an invaluable historical window” on the feelings of “white segregationists and disenters” . it was one thing to do the right thing for one helpless black defendent but when a whole people demanded justice the masks of the moderates and gradualists dropped . The novel is not as formed to restart the progress of the blacks artistically brilliant as the novel *to kill A Mockingbird* but it strength is its truthfulness. the portrait of Atticus in *go set a watchman* is fittingly pictured , correctly in context of the time in which he lived. The novel written in the 1950s and published in 2015 is eminently and shockingly a documentary of the complicity of educated whites in supporting racist organizations and marginalising the blacks in the name of political freedom and preservation of life styles . Complicity on the part of white police officers in marginalising blacks and involing them in crime profiles similar to the case mirriored in *go set a watchman* is still an going phenomenon. Thus the 1950s and the 2015s resonate on each other suggesting that marginalization the blacks has not ended and the struggle against marginalisation has to go on.

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