

Mockingbirds in the Land of Hadedahs:

The South African Response to Harper Lee

To Kill a Mockingbird is a novel of and about memory. Claudia Durst Johnson concludes her study of the novel with a lyrical meditation on what sustains its power: we are “enthralled, not by the horror of racial mixing or the Dracularian Boo, but by the reminders of a lost innocence, of a time past. . . .” She argues persuasively that we “encounter the ghosts of ourselves, the children we once were, the simplicity of our lives in an earlier world. . . . Reality and illusion about the past is blurred. Within the novel’s Gothicism and Romanticism, we as readers are enthralled with the past, and, like the responses elicited by the Gothic, we react with pain and pleasure to an involvement with our past world and our past selves” (Johnson, *Threatening* 112).

This enthrallment with the past through memory has been a common response of those to whom I have spoken regarding either their teaching or their learning experience of Harper Lee’s novel. Given the traumatizing history of South Africa, the mix of pain and pleasure takes on especially weighted meaning, but the nature of that weight depends on the reader’s specific context. In South Africa, the variety of experience is not only very wide indeed, but the grounds of experience were rigorously isolated from each other for more than half a century, and the effects of that separation will be felt for a very long time to come. Notwithstanding this history of separateness, of apartheid, *To Kill a Mockingbird* has clearly spoken to South Africans in ways that suggest its capacity to sound the depths of a common humanity.

In researching this chapter, I found that a systematic account of the reception of the novel in South Africa was rendered impossible by the lack of material: reviews from the 1960s appear to be nonexistent. Assiduous trawling through databases proved futile. Editions that were prescribed for schools were published overseas and thus came with prefaces written by non–South African scholars. Student guides published overseas proliferate, but I was able to find two locally designed resource books. These will be considered below.

This lack of critical material, it seems, is not unique to South Africa. As recently as 2000, Terry O’Neill commented on the lack of academic attention paid to *Mockingbird* even in the United States, “[d]espite the book’s popularity,” and suggests some reasons for this: Lee’s reticence and the novel’s perceived status as “popular fiction” (O’Neill 11–12). Legal scholars appear to have shown a great deal more interest in the novel than literary scholars.

Despite the limited academic interest in Lee’s novel, it has been widely taught in schools from the 1960s onward, not only in the United States but also in South Africa. Many South African schools have “book rooms” which stock set texts from previous years. Any book that has been taught may be taught again. This means that *Mockingbird* can be recycled indefinitely, although it may not necessarily have special privilege over anything else that happens to be in the book room. Much authority over these decisions rests with the head of the English department in each school. In preparing this chapter, I conducted a mailing to 450 high schools in the Western Cape asking whether the book was being taught at present or had been taught recently and, if so, whether the teachers concerned would be willing to be interviewed. This project produced only one response—from a private school saying that they did not teach it. (This may mean that teachers are simply too busy to be bothered. I do have anecdotal evidence that some teachers of junior grades are teaching the book at present.)

The body of this chapter rests, then, on my own recollections and on the accounts and memories of teachers based in the Western Cape whom I knew or who were introduced to me once word-of-mouth did what other research methods could not. Many of these teachers started teaching the book thirty years ago or more. The novel’s place in high school curricula reached a high point in 1979, when it was prescribed as the exit-level text in the “modern novel” category. After that, it continued to be taught at the more junior levels.¹

My first experience of the novel was, I think, fairly typical. The account that follows maps some of the context in which white South African schoolchildren may have encountered it.

My copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is an award dating from 1969 when I was a pupil at Germiston High School, a whites-only school in a mining town on the East Rand—that is, the eastern end of the Witwatersrand, in the northern part of the country, where gold had been mined since the turn of the century. The

town is known for its mine dumps—high mounds of gray residue upturned by the burrowing for gold. We were forbidden to climb mine dumps: children could get buried and die in them. So they stay in my memory as rather mysterious and ominous signs of gray ravagement. If you did climb them, you might see far away to the “locations”—the settlements for black South Africans.²

I remember the main street of Germiston, President Street, as a mix of department stores targeting lower-income families and clothing stores that supplied school uniforms, run by Indian men whose habit of chewing betel nut gave them red, scary mouths. Their womenfolk dressed in beautiful, brightly colored, gold-edged saris and had red spots painted in the middle of their foreheads. I did not know where they lived or where their children went to school.

Germiston High School catered to a mix of social classes: upper-middle-class children who had swimming pools and studied ballet and music, and middle- to lower-middle-class children who lived where I did, in a cosmopolitan suburb of Afrikaans- and English-speaking families as well as Portuguese, Greek, and Italian immigrant families. I do not remember seeing many black South Africans in the neighborhood, except for the servants and “nannies” who worked for white families. Some of these servants lived on the premises of their employers in tiny rooms in the backyard, where their beds were often raised above the ground on bricks. I was told—I think by my grandmother—that this was to prevent attacks by the “tokolosh,” a fearful figure from African folklore. The overt and daily antagonism for children from this community existed not between black and white but between Afrikaans- and English-speaking. They went to separate-language schools and had fights in the veld after classes were over.

My experience of *To Kill a Mockingbird* was thus informed by an identification with the “tired old town” (11) of Maycomb, the point of view of the children, and especially the gothic otherness of Boo. Coming back to the novel many years later, I had only the vaguest recollection of the race theme. In a deeply segregated society, the geography, the politics and the severe media control of apartheid made it very easy, especially for a child, not to know very much about anything outside one’s immediate ambit.

While I read the novel independently, a younger interviewee studied it formally ten years later. His family lived in a white Cape Town suburb across the railway line from a “colored” suburb. Two bus rides got the children home from school: the first departed from the elite high school they attended and dropped them at a terminus in a working-class area. They then got on a mixed-race bus, a very unusual circumstance for the time. The bus stop closest to home was the last of the white stops before the bus headed into the unknown and reputedly dangerous “colored” townships, dangerous because of both gangs and political activism.

In 1979, the political environment was much more volatile, yet my interviewee, studying the novel as a prescribed text at senior high school level, was

as able as I had been to respond to the evocative power of Maycomb and its perceived commonality with the area where the family lived. To an uncharitable mind, there was even a version of the Ewells within spitting distance, and the link could be made: *they* had the vote, but the “garden boy” did not. The local church ladies had regular pious meetings to raise funds and discuss the many virtues of a certain reverend who ministered to the blighted out in the wilds.

By this stage, a nagging sense of the political parallels between South Africa and the world of *To Kill a Mockingbird* infused the classroom. There was nothing overt, no foregrounding of the race issue, but rather a sense that teachers had to be cautious about “talking politics” in class. In 1976 the black schools had revolted against having Afrikaans imposed on them as a medium of instruction. Terrible violence had erupted in the suppression of the revolts, and pandemonium seemed to hover over the land. An increasing sense of turmoil pervaded even the most protected of environments.

Nevertheless—and this is a point made by several interviewees—it was always possible to distance the events in Maycomb, even to use that foreign location to exculpatory ends. Maycomb’s otherness was what one retired teacher calls a “safety barrier.” Whites never saw apartheid firsthand unless they made the effort. So, too, in responding to *Mockingbird*, it was quite possible to feel sympathy for black Americans without registering the same sympathy for the blacks across the veld in the “locations”: after all, the book was in your hand, while your black neighbors were separated from you by a vast divide. Total segregation applied not only to living areas but to buses, trains, cinemas, theaters, restaurants, hotels, restrooms, beaches—except where the services of blacks were needed.

Tom Robinson’s trial was something that happened “over there” and reactionary voices were able to add that fact to the frequent complaint that Americans had no right to tell “us” what to do, when their own history was as—if not more—shameful: Look at what they did to the Indians, look at slavery, look at racial oppression to this day! One well-known story from the Eastern Cape in the 1970s recounts how the headmistress of a posh girls’ school firmly forbade linking Lee’s story with anything that was happening in South Africa at that time. Teachers had to keep the story and their classes in the Deep South of the 1930s.

The distance between the novel and South African contemporary history was often exacerbated by the strangeness of the Deep South in the imaginations of the children. Teachers point out that the America exposed most regularly (these days, even relentlessly) to South African children is the glamorous North or the West Coast. (There is considerable irony in this pervasive ignorance, given the many levels at which comparisons function between South Africa and, specifically, the Deep South.)

This is not the full story, though. So much of the way that high school readers experienced Lee’s novel depended on who they were, where they were, what their

backgrounds were, and who was teaching them. At the simplest level, teachers continue to enjoy reading the book aloud in class—increasingly necessary as a postliterate generation of pupils have become either less enamored of reading or can scarcely read. At a more complex level, the resonances with South Africa's troubled time could be heard and the volume raised in a variety of ways.

As is well known, *To Kill a Mockingbird* was conceived in the mid-1950s, published in 1960, and grew to fame and massive popularity in the United States through the 1960s, '70s, and '80s. Throughout that period, it faced a fair share of controversy on the score of language, values, and stereotyping. Those three decades were among the most tumultuous in U.S. history, but perhaps even more so in South African history.

The early 1950s saw the growth of black protest against an increasingly repressive and intransigent white Afrikaner-dominated South African government. This protest movement resulted in the establishment of the "Congress Alliance" between the African National Congress (ANC), representatives of "colored" and Asian constituencies, and the Communist Party. The movement also led to the adoption, in 1955, of the Freedom Charter, calling for a nonracial democracy. In 1960, the massacre at Sharpeville of peaceful protesters against the pass laws was followed by the state's mass banning of opposition groups, forcing them into exile.³

The 1960s saw the development of a "Homeland" policy that sought to relocate all black South Africans to designated autonomous areas and divest them of South African citizenship. The festering sore of migrant labor grew apace, with the unforeseen outcome that black workers from different ethnic backgrounds began to meet in polyglot urban environments.

In 1969, Steve Biko founded the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), calling on all those subject to apartheid to join. As mentioned above, the state's attempt to impose Afrikaans school instruction on black children in 1976 led to massive opposition, which was violently repressed. The BCM was banned. Within the country, President P. W. Botha played an ambivalent game of tightening control even while engendering some reform. The proposed "Tricameral Parliament," for example, was meant to allow "colored" and Asian representation and so bolster resistance to black activism.

In 1983, however, one of the most effective resistance movements was formed: the United Democratic Front (UDF). It was more all-embracing than the BCM and marked a recommitment to the ANC dream of nonracialism. Mass mobilization and destabilization within the country marked the 1980s in the wake of the formation of the UDF. In addition, there was increasing pressure from abroad through economic sanctions. The collapse of communism helped to allay white fears that majority rule would invite Soviet domination.⁴

There was also increasing bitterness about the loss of young lives in the border wars with Namibia and Angola, originally fed by the paranoid theory of a "total

onslaught” from communist-backed neighboring African countries. All young white South African males were subject to the draft and served an initial period of two years. Thereafter, they could expect to be called up to three-month camps until the age of fifty-five. As rebellion grew in the black and “colored” townships, camp duty might be either “on the border” or in the townships. Effectively, there was a civil war.

All this pressure fed into the volte face of the Nationalist government in 1990, when the then-president, F. W. de Klerk, made his historic announcement of the unbanning of the ANC, among other banned organizations. Then in 1991, Nelson Mandela was released after twenty-seven years in prison. The way was paved for the negotiation of a new South Africa, a miracle scarcely conceived in the dark days of the 1970s and ’80s, when the word “bloodbath” was on most minds.

Against the backdrop of these oppressive decades, those artists who suffered most and at firsthand were South African protest writers, artists, and theater makers, including disenchanting Afrikaners such as the “sestigers” (notably Breyten Breytenbach and André Brink, whose works were routinely banned). Books that were prescribed for high school children tended to be the classics such as Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and modern novels such as F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, George Orwell’s *1984*, or Graham Greene’s *The Power and the Glory*. It was in the latter category that *To Kill a Mockingbird* fell.

Although education departments were segregated along race lines, there was some uniformity regarding prescribed texts. This uniformity may have had to do, as one teacher proposes, with the ways in which books build up momentum. Once a text has proved successful as a “teaching text” and study guides start becoming available, it will more than likely reappear across the system.

In a nation having two official languages (English and Afrikaans) and many more unofficial languages spoken by the majority of the population, lists were frequently determined according to the level at which the official languages were taught (first language/higher grade or second language/lower grade). Although there were variations in the process, usually prescribed book committees appointed by the Department of Education proposed lists of texts to their constituencies through educational gazettes and bulletins. (The committees comprised departmental officials, schools inspectors, principals, and teachers).

Criteria for recommending books as set texts included cost; teachability and artistic value (rather subjective criteria dependent to some degree on who happened to be sitting on the prescribed book committees); absence of bad language; cautious treatment of sexuality; and durability—that is, the likelihood of the book’s being taught over again for several years. Teachers and high school principals had time to respond to the provisional list; then the final list would be published. Teachers then chose from the approved list. Variations in the system

had much to do with racial boundaries. The white system was a more democratic structure, with the English and Afrikaans teachers' unions having a great deal of input and control over the process.

To Kill a Mockingbird appears to have reached a wide range of schoolchildren from all population groups and met with no opposition. What did meet with opposition, to the point of being banned from schools, was Athol Fugard's play *Boesman and Lena* (1969), a searing study of a nomadic "colored" couple in the Eastern Cape, and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). In both cases, though, the objections had to do not with race but with sexual references and obscenity.⁵ Copies of *Boesman and Lena* already acquired by schools had to be rounded up and sent off for storage. There was an uproar among outraged teachers both for and against the play. *Mockingbird*, by contrast, is largely remembered as a wonderful and eminently teachable book, well suited to the classroom.

I was able to interview teachers who had taught the novel at elite single-sex schools, upper-class co-ed schools, cosmopolitan schools, "colored" schools, and schools attended by children of various races. The role of the teacher in framing the focus of attention could be as important as what the children themselves might or might not see in the novel.

One of the most flourishing boys' high schools in the mid-1970s hosted children from a wide mix of social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. The student body included liberal, informed, well-read Jewish boys as well as the children of immigrants from Southern Europe and those from conservative, right-wing families. There were the extremely wealthy and the extremely poor. My interviewee stresses that while he saw *To Kill a Mockingbird* as "a South African novel right from the beginning," he was determined to see to what extent the boys would discover its political relevance for themselves.

The crisis moment arrived when the meaning of the title was being explored. There was general agreement that Boo was a mockingbird, but when prodded by the teacher to think of Tom as a mockingbird, chaos broke loose. Half the class thought "yes," half the class thought "no," and the debate turned instantly to South Africa's discriminatory systems: the whiteness of its judges and magistrates and the rampant inequality meted out to blacks before the law. (Of course, there is a key difference between the American justice system and the South African one that existed at the time. Where it is possible for Atticus to stress equality before the courts and for Lee to ironize the differences between the official law and the law in men's hearts, in South Africa there was no such equality. The official law was itself heinous, discriminatory, defined by prejudice. "Black South African" constituted a contradiction in terms, given the establishment of the "homelands" mentioned above and the consequent denial of South African citizenship.)

The drama being played out in the classroom took its most violent turn when two lads from a very conservative Afrikaans background sprang up, whipped

round to the rest of the class, and declared that the book had nothing to do with South Africa, where the blacks were patently not as good as the whites and where, in any case, the law courts were fair. The teacher allowed the debate to rage until the next day, when he recovered control of the discussion, leading the class into an appreciation of the real nature of education the novel had facilitated: to be disturbed, to be forced into rethinking one's position, to listen to what others have to say, to empathize.

Read in allegorical mode, the teacher suggests, it is possible to see Boo as an image of apartheid: "as long as we lock him away, we can't see him." The ambience of the class was, on the whole, frightened and their written work on the novel revealed anxiety tied, the teacher believes, to their sense that apartheid was on a downward slope, that South Africa had to move toward a democratic society, but that, in the 1970s, it did not seem possible that this could happen without terrible upheaval.

The possibilities opened up in class for this kind of discussion were deftly closed down in the exam. In 1979, *Mockingbird* was the prescribed modern novel for exit-level high school students. The exam questions were innocuous, generalized. They pertained to Scout's rite of passage and the theme of courage, but with no lead into contemporary South African relevance. Indeed, teachers taught this relevance at some risk. One teacher tells of how surveillance tactics caused immense caution: comprehension tests set by individual teachers that might suggest a politicization of the classroom could end up in that teacher's confidential file, housed in the Department of Education.

The cultural and political diversity of a school no doubt contributed considerably to the enabling of debate. Where there was more homogeneity, there was less likely to be conflict of opinion. There are in South Africa several old, well-established schools attended by generations of fathers and sons. Environments are invariably leafy, elegant, and well heeled. One finds them in the traditionally English-speaking suburbs of Cape Town, in the Kwa-Zulu Natal sugar-farming districts, and in the more affluent parts of Johannesburg.

Atticus was often the main focus for many of these boys, representing as he does the liberal, generous view of humankind as mostly nice "when you finally see them" (296). Atticus is also courageous, and whatever immediate relevance the book held for these boys might well have been connected to that courage. These were teenage readers who, in the next year, would be drafted into the armed forces to face combat in the bush of Namibia and Angola. They were the Vietnam generation of South Africa. For many of these boys, the book was accessible, engaging, memorable in different ways, but not especially life-transforming.

There are equivalent girls' schools across the country, surrounded by high protective walls, where girls are taught to be accomplished young ladies and where every effort was made in the 1980s to shield them from the uproar taking

place right outside those walls. In one case, a friend told me over dinner, a progressively minded teacher brought *Mockingbird* into the classroom and taught it provocatively (and at some risk to her career in the school), actively engaging the dormant political awareness of the girls, many of whose perceptions were radically altered as a result. Her own recollections of the impact of both teacher and novel are very vivid.

At another end of the racial spectrum, there are “historically colored” high schools with high reputations for academic excellence and political engagement. A teacher at one of these schools told me how pupils were especially intrigued by the history of the civil rights movement and took as one of their heroes the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. A context of debate around communism and socialism informed discussions, and issues of social class were of concern to the students. A much higher level of sociopolitical awareness thus led to a sharper focus on the political dimensions of the novel. Atticus’s capacity for unbiased judgments opened debate on the possibility of ordinary friendships between black and white: Could such things happen? Was it possible for a white to look at a person as a person and not as a black person? Boo’s story also generated debate on the nature of insanity, while students identified with Scout and Jem especially in terms of fear and what causes fear in children.

At another church-run school, attended by “colored” and then by “colored” and black schoolgirls, Atticus was, once again, seen as a heroic model. According to their teacher, the fact that he is white made no difference to the girls. Their need was for images of heroism. Tom, on the other hand, especially in recent years, is seen as a victim and generates impatience with the students. They do not want to be reminded of stories of black victimhood and victimization.

In recent years at the same school, Boo interests the students because of the theme of child abuse. As one of the growing scandals in South Africa, this approach to Boo is a powerful one. These girls also devour a magazine called *You*, which specializes in grotesque family tragedies, and they see Boo’s story as a recapitulation of such sensational and disturbing accounts. At a more intense, firsthand level, their teacher organizes social-work projects for them at a home for the mentally disabled, where the girls demonstrate deep sympathy and compassion for these marginalized folk. On the whole, the students manifest strong responses to those characters on the peripheries in the novel (although sympathy for Mayella Ewell appears to have to be taught—the girls’ tendency to see in stark moral terms defines Mayella as evil in the first instance).

The problems of broken families, single-parent families, abuse, and rape are rampant in the country, and it comes as no surprise that, in the new South Africa, these are the areas in the book that need to be treated with extreme delicacy. At one school, a young girl who had been the victim of a rape responded with extreme distress to Mayella’s story, such that the class had to be assured that Tom

had not in fact committed rape. In another, Dill's plight as the child of negligent parents had particular poignancy, while Scout and Jem's single-parent family was also a source for discussion. In yet another, the assault by Bob Ewell on Scout and Jem became a moment of illumination in the classroom, when black children expressed no especial alarm at the scene: "It happens all the time," they said, shattering the complacency of their white peers.

While the accounts above take a very positive view of the effects of the novel, there are dissenting voices, one of which mirrors the criticism leveled by Elizabeth Lee Haselden in her 1961 review. She argues: "The book offers no character with whom the reader can identify himself, depicts on the part of no one involved in the trial any inner struggle for an ethical answer to injustice, and is lacking in real compassion for people" (Haselden 655). She stresses the great divide between the idealization of Atticus and his family and the typecasting of the eccentrics who surround them and with whom we are at no time encouraged to identify. Haselden's final shaft effectively pierces some of the problems registered by teachers recalling the effect of the novel in South African classrooms: "... the reader can witness his concern about injustice-in-general, in some removed place, at a distant time, without feeling any personal sense of guilt or involvement in the extensions of injustice into our own time and place. 'We' are not in the book, and the finger does not point at 'us'" (Haselden 655). This squares with the suggestions, recorded above, that the geographical and historical distance of the story—set not only in "America" but in a region unfamiliar to South African children, and several decades earlier—enabled a comfortable experience of the novel. One could commiserate with Tom, be fascinated by Boo, admire Atticus, enjoy the grotesqueries of Mrs. Dubose and the Ewells, and then frame the whole experience in some exotic "other where." This was particularly the case for children at schools that were themselves at a comfortable distance from the heat of struggle and oppression. Even the debate between conservatives and liberals described above was tempered by the teacher's sense that, finally, the boys' sympathy was for Tom as human, not as black. Many boys had difficulty understanding racial prejudice if they did not come from an informed and enlightened, politicized background. It was indeed possible to end up feeling more compassion for black Americans than for black South Africans. (Ironically, the prescribed text that had more impact on some students in 1979 was an Afrikaans novel by F. A. Venter, *Swart Pelgrim*, about a black miner wrenched from his family to work in Johannesburg under the iniquitous system of migrant labor.)

One of the teachers to whom I spoke stressed these issues forcefully, proposing Haselden's argument in slightly different terms. He speaks of the text's stance of "gatkruipery" (arse-licking) toward the reader, "inviting," "enlisting" the reader to join the author "on the side of the angels." For him there is a failure of the book "to see the god in both the heroes and the villains." The representation of Atticus

as liberal hero exacerbates this failure in that we are invited to applaud what Haselden calls the exemplary lawyer's "Olympian wisdom and calm" (Haselden 655) and be part of the narrative of racial enlightenment that he represents—effectively exonerating us from guilt.

Collusion between author, Atticus, and reader mimics a scenario in South Africa among liberals where they could, as my interviewee put it, "pat themselves on the back when they realized how bad apartheid was and that they were not guilty in any way." The narrative and moral sacrifice in this collusion is Tom. In his critique of the novel, W. J. Stuckey comments that the "main plot line is inserted in the middle of the Boo Radley incident" (Stuckey 193, qtd. in O'Neill 26). That is, Tom Robinson's story is embedded in the larger narrative. His story may address the "larger social issue" of racial prejudice, but the very fact of that embedding calls into question the centrality of his story and makes it easy for South African exam papers to focus rather on the growing-up story, in which Tom's predicament (rather than Tom as a character) is merely a catalyst. The dissenting teacher points out, too, that Tom dies offstage six chapters before the end, thus enabling the return to the "Boo Radley incident"—really the crucial framing narrative—thereby effecting closure in the moving elegy of the last chapters.

Against this reading are the attempts to bring Lee's novel back home, seen to a greater or lesser degree in resource books that were devised for teachers. I had access to two: the *Mockingbird* edition of the MACRAT series and the manuscript published by the Teaching and Learning Resource Centre at the University of Cape Town's School of Education. The former is largely concerned with picking out the content and themes of the novel in meticulous detail, and includes lists of questions on each chapter.

The single attempt to *push* the South African connection appears in one of the suggestions for a class project: "Recast the story in a South African context (using, for example, a character by the name of Mayella Swanepoel and setting it in some Northern Transvaal CP town) and write or dramatise an extract from the story" (unpaginated).⁶ It could be argued that this exercise encourages precisely the stereotyping of which Lee has been accused, especially with regard to poor whites. Here the proposal is to see the equivalent of Mayella as a poor white Afrikaner. At one level, given the many similarities between poor-white Afrikaner history and poor-white southern history, especially during the Depression years, this is an interesting and potentially fertile exercise but would depend on a full historicizing of the plight of these groups of people, something which Lee does not offer apropos of the Ewells and to which (especially English-speaking) South African children would generally not have had access.

The University of Cape Town's resource book is much more determined in its South African focus. It makes a very conscious attempt to forge links between themes in the novel and South African experience. The book was developed by

the 1988 Method of English class and Penny Dichmont, who taught at St. Mark's College, an independent, nonracial, Anglican school in Lebowa.⁷ It is aimed at Standards 8 or 9 (English first language) or Standard 9 (English second language—see note 2 for an explanation of the grade structure in South African schools at the time). The first page contains the following invitation to teachers:

If teachers are able to select setwork books, this novel is highly recommended because of its powerful story and themes which are relevant to a South African audience.

The description of childhood and the theme of prejudice, particularly racial prejudice can be used as a springboard for discussion and creative writing. (unpaginated)

A photocopied image of a child in silhouette walking along railway tracks introduces part 1. The child is recognizably black, thus immediately framing the connections to be made. Children are encouraged to draw parallels between Maycomb and South African towns as well as to write about their own homes or neighborhoods. Poets' accounts of Cape Town and Soweto stress the pain of racial and class divisions.

Similar links are encouraged with regard to themes of childhood, guns and hunting, and the meanings of courage. Part 2 explores racism in the United States with quotations from Alice Walker, Alice Gibson, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Margaret Walker, and Coretta Scott King. A transcript of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech is included, with the note that the recording of this speech was banned in South Africa.

The problem of prejudice is broadened to include sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and antagonism against people of different ideological persuasions, as well as those marginalized in other ways: the insane, alcoholics, ex-convicts. Exercises encourage pupils to think about the stereotyping of Americans, Afrikaners, police and teachers, et al. While the questions posed to the children invite them to analyze the prejudices of characters such as Mayella and Mrs. Dubose, they do not ask about the prejudice of *the novel* against its characters. A section on politics and religion serves to point up the different ways religion can help or obstruct the cause of a nonracial society and includes quotations from Martin Luther King, Trevor Huddleston, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.⁸

The book ends with exercises asking pupils to write about what they have learned about society and people while reading Lee's novel and, perhaps most interesting, asks them to look at a selection of photos, choose one, and write some lines on what they imagine the people to be thinking. (The photos are of an elderly man, a group of black children, a poor child who has just received a pair

of shoes, a Vietnamese child, an old Polish woman.) The final entry is the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. As a project, pupils are asked to collect formal and creative documents about human rights.

This resource book is, then, an attempt to engage students in as varied and complete a way as possible with the political resonance of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and its relevance to South Africa in the late 1980s. It was a time of great uncertainty in the country as incipient and radical changes became more and more evident, while the means of effecting those changes were as nebulous as ever. Would there be terrible violence or would there be a peaceful transition? And what did peace mean in a country where bloody struggle was rampant?

At the present moment, after the birth of a “new South Africa” in 1994 with the first democratic elections, there is broad consensus that the shift in political climate has made students of the novel less interested in the political parallels with the old South Africa. These parallels are part of a history that many young people seek to put behind them. One teacher makes the point that “teaching liberal books during the struggle was much more interesting than teaching them after the struggle was over.” Now, in many schools, there is what he terms a “less volatile atmosphere in the classroom.” There is more tolerance, openness, and understanding, and the book is less charged.

Indeed, getting children to read at all in South Africa is a growing problem, as mall culture and television take over. Attention spans are shortening and there is more agitation in the classroom. At one school, where children’s parents would more than likely have been engaged in the struggle, pupils “shuffle in their seats” when political issues are raised. At another, there is a perceived increase in apathy and insensitivity to the past. Students have become more introspective, turned in on their own individual needs and desires. At the university level, too, teachers comment constantly on a pervasive amnesia among students.

These observations do, however, deserve some modification. One teacher, for example, involves her girls in field trips, including one to the ruins of District Six apropos of studying Richard Rive’s elegiac “*Buckingham Palace*” *District Six*. The bitterness of forced removals that have led to the girls’ now living in unsafe areas with heavy transport costs and uprooted families is very strong. The victims of these removals were very largely those classified as “colored,” a community who bequeathed to District Six its now legendary status and who have been actively engaged for years in complex explorations of the meanings of the classification applied to them under apartheid.⁹ One might speculate that the minor thread of Dolphus Raymond and his mixed-race relationship would offer an interesting point of departure for readers, especially in the Western Cape, where the “colored” community is a defining factor of the region’s complex identity.

One’s overall sense, however, is that *To Kill a Mockingbird* peaked in popularity in South Africa during the height of the struggle years—ironically perhaps

both because of and despite the caution necessary in the teaching of a story so terrifyingly germane.

Notes

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The hadedah (pronounced “hah-dee-dah”) is a grayish green ibis found mostly in the northern part of South Africa. The bird’s name derives from the sound it makes.

1. The South African school system before 1994 comprised seven years of primary school education (Grades 1 and 2, followed by Standards 1 through 5), followed by five years of high school. The exit year was Standard 10 or, commonly, “Matric,” when students were normally seventeen or eighteen years old. At this point, all students wrote centrally set exams on texts that had been taught across the systems. Systems themselves were differentiated among race groups, language groups (English and Afrikaans), and regions. A detailed account of these systems would be extraordinarily tedious and space-consuming. Suffice to say that the slow, painful, and gargantuan process of school reform continues.

2. “Locations” refers to settlements of black South Africans. Cut off from the white suburbs by varying distances, locations were identifiable as treeless, comfortless places. “Natives” was the polite term for their inhabitants, much as “Negro” or “colored” became the polite term for black Americans. The racial category “Asian” referred to people of Indian descent. The status of those descended from Chinese, Japanese, and so on, changed according to patterns of government and relations with those countries. At one point, the Chinese were “honorary whites.” “Black” refers to people of specifically African descent. In South Africa, “colored” referred conventionally, under apartheid, to people of mixed race, Khoi-San, and Malay descent. The term has been exposed to lively and increasingly complex debate over many years, including the spelling of the term. Spelled with a capital C, it implies acquiescence in apartheid classifications. Placed in quotation marks (and often prefaced by “so-called”), it alerts one to the unnatural, constructed nature of the classification. Spelled without quotation marks but lowercase, it becomes available to a play of meaning of the kind sociologist Zimitri Erasmus calls for in her notable contribution to the debate, the volume of essays entitled *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001). The book offers a wide range of perspectives on how the term is utilized. Erasmus makes a plea in her introduction for “re-imagining coloured identities in post-*Apartheid* South Africa”: “In re-imagining coloured identities we need to move beyond the notion that coloured identities are ‘mixed race’ identities. Rather, we need to see them as cultural identities comprising detailed bodies of knowledge, specific cultural practices, memories, rituals and modes of being” (21).

3. All black Africans were required to carry passes with them wherever they went, indicating their right to be in a particular area. Failure to produce a valid pass could mean imprisonment, or worse.

4. See Anthony Marx's interesting account (1998) in a book that draws provocative parallels between segregated societies in the American South and Brazil.

5. The schools' edition of *Boesman and Lena* included a glossary in which Afrikaans expletives were translated into English obscenities. It was widely understood that if the glossary had not been included, there would have been no objection to the play's being taught.

6. "CP" refers to the Conservative Party, a far-right-wing party formed in 1982 when it became apparent that the Nationalist Party, in power since 1948, was "softening" its stance on reform.

7. Lebowa is in the far north of South Africa. "Method of English" refers to discipline-specific teacher training, in this case English literature. The Method course was one of the subjects that formed part of the Higher Diploma in Education.

8. Trevor Huddleston was the legendary prior of the Church of Christ the King in Sophiatown, a mixed-race area of Johannesburg that has acquired almost mythic status as the home of many of the most creative black talents of the 1950s. From 1955, some 57,000 Africans were forcibly removed, under the Group Areas Act, to make way for a working-class Afrikaans population. The African inhabitants were sent to Meadowlands and Diepkloof, more than fifteen kilometers southwest of Johannesburg (the area now known as "Soweto"—a name derived from "Southwestern Townships").

9. District Six was a multiracial area on the immediate outskirts of Cape Town city center, on the slopes of Table Mountain. It was a thriving community producing major political activists and artists. There were also problems of crime and slum conditions, however, giving the apartheid government the excuse to have it brutally demolished in the 1960s. The policy of segregation led to the forced relocation of the "colored" population from District Six to the so-called Cape Flats, a desolate, windswept area created out of reclaimed swamplands. Families and community life were fractured, and many of the townships that developed on the Flats are now notorious for violence and gangsterism—problems that appear to be on the increase.

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