

SOUTH AFRICAN SHORT FICTION  
IN ENGLISH AND AFRIKAANS SINCE 1948

by Martin Trump

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## ABSTRACT

Prevailing critical practice tends to view South African literature as comprising a number of writing communities in the country whose works and concerns have little to do with each other. Hence literary works in English and in Afrikaans, by black and by white South African writers are rarely considered in relation to one another. Literary criticism in South Africa has, in other words, proceeded along much the same lines as the political determinations of the country, dividing the literature into distinct racial and linguistic camps. While I have chosen to consider South African short fiction with reference to different major writing communities in the country, an underlying principle of this study is the essential unity of South African literature. Works in different languages and by writers of different social groups are seen as comprising a single national literature. Consequently I have followed the practice throughout of frequently drawing comparisons between stories by writers in English and in Afrikaans, by black and by white writers. One sees as the study develops how works by writers in all of the communities are closely related to one another. Black and white South African writers share a host of common concerns in their works.

The short story has been chosen as the genre for consideration in this work because it is a predominant literary form in all of the major South African communities. It has been at the cutting edge of developments in South African prose fiction since the 1940's. The short story sharply illustrates not only historical and social changes in the country but also changing patterns within the writing communities. The historical context of this study is that of the short period of ascendancy of Afrikaner nationalism during the 1950's and 1960's and the indications of this movement's gradual disintegration and collapse during the 1970's and 1980's. This is seen against the emergence of African nationalism as the most forceful adversary of white racism in South Africa.

The section on the white short fiction in English takes as one of its key points of examination the notable range and diversity in its works; this is directly linked with the fact that this community is at a remove from the central historical clash between Afrikaner and African nationalisms. The short fiction of Afrikaners is considered in two phases, that of the 1950's and 1960's, and then from the 1970's on. In the first phase the writers were striving to modernize their prose tradition and to a great extent abandoned pressing local issues for an involvement in the fashionable trends and concerns of contemporary European and American writers. By the 1970's, however, Afrikaans writing returns to share the concerns of English South African writers about the ravages of apartheid in the region.

Black short fiction of this era is viewed as dealing with a central tension in the black community: namely, the threat of violence against traditional values of communalism. The study concludes with an appraisal of the literature of apartheid assessing its place within African and international literary traditions.

The principal writers discussed in this study are: Hennie Aucamp, Chris Barnard, H.C. Bosman, M.C. Botha, Breyten Breytenbach, Jack Cope, Achmat Dangor, Abraham De Vries, Ahmed Essop, Nadine Gordimer, Henriette Grové, P.J. Haasbroek, Bessie Head, Christopher Hope, Dan Jacobson, Elsa Joubert, Alex La Guma, E.M. Macphail, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, James Matthews, John Miles, Casey Motsisi, Es'kia Mphahlele, Mbulelo Mzamane, Njabulo Ndebele, Welma Odendaal, Alan Paton, Jan Rabie, Richard Rive, Sheila Roberts, Barney Simon, Can Themba, and Peter Wilhelm.

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## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
SECTION ONE	
WHITE SHORT FICTION IN ENGLISH SINCE 1948	
A - PROLOGUE - The Short Fiction of Herman Charles Bosman	
I. Introduction	13
II. Bosman's Short Fiction, the Marico, and Literary Influences on His Work	17
III. Bosman on South African Literature and points of Contact with Later Writers	28
IV. Bosman's Ideas on Writing as Revealed within his Short Fiction	31
V. The Marico and Critical Responses to Bosman's Use of It in his Short Fiction	34
VI. Bosman's Satire of the Mania about Race in South Africa	41
VII. The Voorkamer Stories as Political Fables	55
VIII. Bosman's Fiction and South African History	64
IX. Bosman's Work and Rural Afrikaner Short Fiction	66
X. Bosman's Place in Contemporary Literature and his Links with Black South African Culture	69
XI. Conclusion	72
B - White Short Fiction in English since 1948	
I. Introduction	83
II. Apartheid and the Contacts between Black and White People	86
III. Stories of Warning and Prediction	100
IV. Responses to the Society	
a) Sorrow and Rage	107
b) Humour	118

V.	The Predicament of White South Africans	131
VI.	Black Characters	141
VII.	Diversity in the Short Fiction	144
VIII.	Conclusion	153

C - The Short Fiction of Nadine Gordimer

I.	Introduction	165
II.	The Categories of Gordimer's Fiction	167
III.	The Central Place of Women in Gordimer's Major Stories about Apartheid.	170
IV.	Gordimer's Short Fiction of the 1970's and 1980's	192
V.	Conclusion	201

SECTION TWO

AFRIKAANS SHORT FICTION SINCE 1948

I.	Introduction	209
II.	The Works of the 1950's and 1960's	
a)	Major Concerns	220
b)	Formal Features	236
c)	Treatments of the Farm and Countryside	246
d)	Apartheid and the Contacts between Black and White People	257
III.	The Works of the 1970's and 1980's	
a)	Major Concerns - A Literature About Violence	287
b)	Journalistic Writing and John Miles's <u>Liefs Nie Op Straat Nie</u>	291
c)	A Literature about Violence - A Society at War and in Prison	300
d)	Satire	318
e)	The Presence of Black Characters	332

f)	The Writer's Concern about his Craft and Developments within the Rural Short Fiction	335
IV.	Conclusion	342
SECTION THREE		
BLACK SHORT FICTION IN ENGLISH SINCE 1948		
I.	Introduction	364
II.	Communal Storytelling and The Value of Communalism	369
III.	A Language of Distinction - The Black Writers' Use of English	394
IV.	Humour	412
V.	A Literature About Violence	
a)	Racial Violence	433
b)	Violence within the Black Communities	459
VI.	Key Stories	464
VII.	Conclusion	488
	CONCLUSION	503
	APPENDIX - BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES	511
	SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	547

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For my late father and for my mother,  
with love and thanks.

The identity of a people or civilization is always reflected and concentrated in what has been created by the mind - in what is known as 'culture'. If this identity is threatened with extinction, cultural life grows correspondingly more intense, more important, until culture itself becomes the living value around which all people rally.

Milan Kundera

'A Kidnapped West or Culture Bows Out',  
(from Granta, No. 11, 1984, p. 97.)

INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

Politics, one learns swiftly in South Africa, not so much pervades but invades every aspect of life. Politics in South Africa dictates the place where one lives, the salary one earns, the kind of job one performs, indeed often whether one has a job or not, one's freedom of movement in the country, the kind of statements one is allowed to make in public (and often in private), the people whom one has as friends, and (until recently) the person with whom one is allowed to have sexual relations and marry.<sup>1</sup> Much South African literature reflects and records this political invasion of personal lives. This is to be expected. But what is surprising is the way South African literary critics have treated the literature along much the same lines as the political determinations of the country. That is, South African literature is seen as consisting of several traditions or communities of writing which have little relationship with one another. For instance, Afrikaans literature has virtually never been considered in comparison with or in relation to South African English writing. The same is true of the relationship between writing by black and white people in English. Not only are black and white South Africans legally forced apart from one another, but their creative writing as well is viewed as comprising distinct, hermetic traditions. As one looks back over South African literary criticism since the 1920's one discovers the selfsame racial and social divisions dominating the way critics considered (and still consider) the country's writing. In short, critics have hardly ever stepped

beyond apartheid in the ways in which they have treated the literature. It seems to me that there are two fundamental problems with this kind of criticism; one practical, the other ideological.

On a practical level, South African writing whether in English, Afrikaans, or in vernacular languages shares a hoard of common themes and subjects. For instance, South African writers in all of its communities have variously dealt in stories, novels, plays, poems, and autobiographies with the overwhelmingly high levels of violence in the country. Afrikaans writers of the 1970's and 1980's have concerned themselves particularly with the brutalities of the bush wars, while writers in English have treated aspects of the violence meted out to black people in South Africa. There is an obvious correlation between these two broad fields of concern. Therefore, Afrikaans stories about the violence of white soldiers cry out for comparison, or at least need to be considered along, with stories about racial harassment of black people. Similarly, one finds a number of South African literary works dealing with the subject of white masters and black servants, and it needs to be emphasized that this has not been the special preserve of any particular community of South African writers but has concerned a wide range of writers, black and white, English and Afrikaans. One needs to compare the ways in which writers in the different communities have treated this topic. The congruent concern about subjects and themes reflects the realities of the society where people

of different communities are thrown together and interact with one another, although most of the time on unequal terms.

The second problem that besets literary criticism in that it divides the South African writing communities from one another, offering no correlation between the works of black and white writers (or even between white Afrikaner and white English writers), is an ideological one. Despite efforts of successive white minority governments during this century to break apart the lives, histories, and cultures of black and white South Africans, the two major communities of the country are intimately linked with each other. They share a common historical destiny. And this is the case in spite of the divisions and barriers between them. It is impossible in my view to consider seriously any aspect of South African history or culture without relating features of the black and white communities to one another. Yet this, I would suggest, is precisely where most South African literary critics have failed. They have chosen to see the country's literary history as following precisely the same pattern as that favoured by Afrikaner nationalists. Put bluntly, with apartheid as the ruling ideology in South Africa, its literature is viewed in exactly those terms: separate development. Indeed, if one were to support the ideological tenets of apartheid it makes perfectly good sense to see black South African and white South African writing as distinct and wholly unrelated literary traditions.

This kind of error, it seems to me, attaches as much to black as

to white literary critics: both commit the same practical and ideological mistakes, albeit often from positions which are apparently radically different. Where one would expect a form of criticism from a reactionary white Afrikaner critic wholly in keeping with apartheid, it is bewildering to find the same approach being practised both by a liberal white or radical black critic.

This study aims to fly in the teeth of these prevailing practices. Instead of paying exclusive attention to the works of one or other of the major writing communities in South Africa I have chosen to view works from all of these alongside one another. The social and linguistic barriers between black and white, English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking people in the country, however, cannot be ignored and simply glossed over. They are of enormous significance in South Africa and offer justification for an examination of the writing in these different communities in separate sections, at least. This is what I have done. The short fiction of white writers in English, white writers in Afrikaans, and black writers in English are considered in distinct sections. In the case of two writers, Herman Bosman and Nadine Gordimer, I have considered the substantial body of their short fiction in individual sections. The size and quality of their individual short-fiction oeuvres alone in my view justify this special attention to their work.

Throughout each of the chapters there are cross-references to writers in other communities and to common themes and subjects

among these writers. Throughout I attempt to convey the sense of writers wrestling under adverse circumstances with issues affecting not only themselves and their immediate community but in many cases all of their countrymen. Naturally the pressures and sense of history acting on a liberal white English-speaking writer are different from those acting on an Afrikaner writer or on a black writer. Indeed, these writers may conceive of their roles and work in markedly different ways from one another. These issues are considered and measured against one another in this study.

The historical context of this work is that of the short era of ascendancy of Afrikaner nationalism from the late 1940's until the end of the 1960's and this movement's gradual collapse and disintegration during the 1970's and 1980's. Reference is also made to the political marginalization of the white English-speaking community during this period and the slow but sure emergence of African nationalism as the major antagonist of white racism in the country. At the time of writing, South Africa has effectively moved into a phase which Nadine Gordimer suggestively has called interregnum.<sup>2</sup>

South African literature since the 1940's is especially interesting because of the way in which the major political issues of the country are given a central place in the writing. By the 1970's even Afrikaner writers who had formerly tended to steer relatively clear of political involvement in their works began increasingly to reflect political concerns. It is fair to

say that the mainstream of major South African literature in recent decades is highly political in content. There is a continual interplay between private and political domains in the writing. In this respect the South African literary tradition is noticeably different from those of the England, the United States of America, and to a lesser degree, from many Western European Countries. I would argue that in these countries writing which is intimately engaged in their political issues is not so much within the mainstream but at the fringes of their literary traditions. Yet this is emphatically not the case in South Africa where it is virtually impossible to consider seriously the literary tradition of this country in terms other than the political concerns of the works and their writers.

Flowing from this, I think that it is entirely justified to claim, and this is in accord with the views of major African literary critics, that South African literature needs to be assessed in the first place on its own terms as an African literature and not to be solely measured against works from Europe and America, since these comprise literary traditions which are strikingly different from that of South Africa.<sup>3</sup> I would argue further that it is specious to regard works from Europe and America as necessarily defining standards of excellence and attainment for writers operating not only in an entirely different social context but also within a literary tradition so markedly different from those of these continents. These ideas are central to my own critical practice in this

study where European and American literary works and traditions are frequently referred to, often in a comparative way, but are not necessarily assumed to be the touchstones for South African writers and for an assessment of their works.

There is a blend of personal and pragmatic reasons for choosing short fiction as the genre for consideration in this study and not, say, the novel or poetry. I have always found the short story an attractive literary form. Sadly, most critical studies of the story have either been limited to formal discussions of what particular qualities distinguish the story from other and longer forms of prose writing or have offered intense analyses of the contents of individual stories. While both of these areas are interesting and valuable (and find their place in this study) I have found a distinct lack of attention to the social context of story writing.<sup>4</sup>

Where the short story is often a rather peripheral form in the literary traditions of most countries, this is emphatically not the case in South Africa. South African short fiction since 1948 is especially interesting because of its diversity in form and content, and the sheer energy of the writing. Moreover short fiction has in many respects been at the cutting edge of developments in South African prose fiction. For example, stories in Afrikaans of the 1970's about the bush wars and English stories from the late 1960's on, about the breakdown of social order in the country anticipate novels on these same subjects often by several years.<sup>5</sup> Further, poetry and short

fiction are the only two literary genres to have been extensively chosen and used by writers in all of South Africa's communities. The novel, the biography, the autobiography, and drama have been less evenly spread among writers of the major communities. The novel, for example, has been scantily used by black writers over this period.

The reasons for the story's predominance in the prose tradition of South African writing seems to me to be linked to a number of social circumstances. In the first place, since the 1950's the short story has been the most sought after literary form as a result of the rise of popular tabloids and small literary magazines. Their emergence partly filled the gap created by the dearth of local publishing houses in South Africa with strong interests in literature during that period. In this way, from the 1950's at least, short story-writing was stimulated by journals and magazines for writers in all of the communities. This proved especially fortunate for black writers. The short story in South Africa must also I think be considered in relation to the overwhelming social pressures of the country. It is a form especially well-suited to social conditions of duress; its brevity can contain many of the brief, harsh encounters of South African life. Moreover, it has been plausibly argued that for black writers the pressure of their lives simply does not easily allow them the leisure-time needed for longer prose works.<sup>6</sup> Circumstances in South Africa have lent themselves to the rise and development of the story and it is arguably the country's most important literary form.

It has become fashionable nowadays to make a great deal of the theoretical models underlying one's critical practice. Literary critics have begun in increasing measures to quote slabs of their favourite theorists at various points in their critical studies. I do not follow this practice in this study. I should, however, like to express some acknowledgement of theoretical sources in this work. I have been influenced in this study by the critical work carried out by historical materialists of this century such as Georg Lukacs, Lucien Goldmann, and Raymond Williams. Moreover, I have been influenced by their fellow scholars in the field of history and especially by recent South African historians such as Stanley Trapido, Martin Legassick, Shula Marks, Bernard Magubane, and Sam Nolutshungu. To a certain degree the force of influence of these historical materialist writers has been a negative one in that I have seriously questioned their views of history, culture, and literature. Yet time and time again I have returned to their works and found their theoretical positions a powerful stimulus to the way I conceive of literature and how I should model my own critical practice.

It is one of those intriguing and often bewildering features of life, touched upon so eloquently by Milan Kundera in the epigraph to this study that, as people face pressures which threaten their very existence, culture becomes 'the living value' around which they gather. In South Africa, people in all of its communities are facing this kind of pressure and the literary output of the country has grown both in quantity and

quality in the past few decades. What one sees in South African writing since the 1940's is precisely the response of people living under pressure. Yet there is remarkable variation among works which essentially are responding to a single threat against the health of the nation. It is the aim of this work to show how the forbidding conditions of South Africa have become a creative base for the writers, a foundation from which a literature, often of very high quality, has flowed.

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#### NOTES

1. In April 1985 the South African government announced its decision to repeal the Immorality Act and the Mixed Marriages Act. These had been in force, proscribing sexual relations and marriage between white and black South Africans, since the early 1950's.
  2. Gordimer, Nadine: 'Living in the Interregnum' (in the New York Review of Books, January 20th 1983, pp. 21-29).
  3. This type of argument about the need to view African literature on its own terms and not those necessarily derived from European and American literatures is most cogently stated in Toward the Decolonization of African Literature by Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Thechukwu Madubuike (Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980).
  4. Dan Jacobson makes precisely this point in his article 'Ars Brevis, Vita Longa', a review of The Oxford Book of Short Stories (chosen by V.S. Pritchett) and Walter Allen's The Short Story in English (in the London Review of Books, Vol.3, No. 13, 16th July 1981, p. 14).
  5. Long stories or novellas are included in this study as I regard them as having closer affinities with short fiction than with the novel. Although one could argue plausibly that long stories or novellas form a sub-genre of their own, I have chosen to bring them within the same frame of discussion as the short story. There is no doubt a point for formal debate here, but one which I would suggest is rather minor.
  6. This is a point argued by Ezekiel Mphahlele in his critical work The African Image (London, Faber, 1962; see pp. 34 and 38 in particular).
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SECTION ONE

WHITE SHORT FICTION IN ENGLISH SINCE 1948

A - Prologue - The Short Fiction of Herman Charles Bosman

- I. Introduction
- II. Bosman's Short Fiction, the Marico, and Literary Influences on his Work
- III. Bosman on South African Literature and Points of Contact with Later Writers
- IV. Bosman's Ideas on Writing as revealed within his Short Fiction
- V. The Marico and Critical Responses to Bosman's Use of it in his Short Fiction
- VI. Bosman's Satire of the Mania about Race in South Africa
- VII. The Voorkamer Stories as Political Fables
- VIII. Bosman's Fiction and South African History
- IX. Bosman's Work and Rural Afrikaner Short Fiction
- X. Bosman's Place in Contemporary Literature and his links with Black South African Culture
- XI. Conclusion

B - White Short Fiction in English since 1948

- I. Introduction
- II. Apartheid and the Contact between Black and White People
- III. Stories of Warning and Prediction
- IV. Responses to the Society
  - a) Sorrow and Rage
  - b) Humour
- V. The predicament of White South Africans
- VI. Black Characters
- VII. Diversity in the Short Fiction
- VIII. Conclusion

C - The Short Fiction of Nadine Gordimer

- I. Introduction
  - II. The Categories of Gordimer's Short Fiction
  - III. The Central Place of Women in Gordimer's Major Stories about Apartheid
  - IV. Gordimer's Short Fiction of the 1970's and 1980's
  - V. Conclusion
-

## A Prologue - The Short Fiction of Herman Charles Bosman

The trouble with me is that I never know what is going on in the world. I do not keep abreast of the latest developments in the field of politics, commerce and industry, culture and finance and philosophy.' Herman Bosman.<sup>1</sup>

'"The great will not condescend to take anything seriously," Emerson says in his essay on "Heroism". We would do well to ponder the truth of this statement, in its relation both to life and art.' Herman Bosman.<sup>2</sup>

'Language of any description fascinates me...Doing with sentences the things you can't do in actual life: or that you can do only rarely.' Herman Bosman.<sup>3</sup>

Lionel Abrahams holds that one of the precepts in Bosman's life and view of art was to distrust the obvious.<sup>4</sup>

### I Introduction

I should like to begin this section dealing with the short fiction of white South African writers in English by considering the works of Herman Bosman. As I hope to show, Bosman's short fiction anticipates a great deal of what has happened in the country's writing since his death in 1951. Moreover, his works offer the particularly interesting case (and one symptomatic of many later writers) of a South African influenced by a wide range of international literary works and traditions yet which, in the final analysis, remain notable and distinctive in their deep kinship with South Africa and its traditions. For these reasons Herman Bosman's works are the ideal starting point to this study.

Herman Charles Bosman was born near Cape Town in 1905 of Afrikaner parents. Both his parents were descended of old Cape Afrikaner families, and, although Bosman grew up with English as his first language (he went to English-medium schools and

university) Afrikaans as a language and Afrikaner history were never far from his consciousness.<sup>5</sup> This is particularly important not only because Bosman used the Afrikaans language and history to such telling effect in his stories and novels, but also in terms of how Bosman viewed the Afrikaner and his language's 'rootedness' in Africa and the continent's history.

There are a number of instances both in his fiction and in his essays in which he compares the different levels of involvement and even of commitment of the Afrikaner on the one hand, and the English-speaking South African on the other, to their country, its history, and their cognizance of themselves either as Africans or transplanted Europeans. For instance, in his essay 'Aspects of South African Literature' of September, 1948, Bosman emphatically makes the initial point that Afrikaans is not Dutch, nor Low German: 'The resemblance that exists between Afrikaans and the languages of the Low Countries is something fortuitous and meaningless, something to do with the mechanical side of linguistics.'<sup>6</sup> (Bosman's statement is, as so many of his pronouncements are, both contentious and appealing in its call to common sense.) He then continues to pose the question why it is that South African English literature, with its origins in the early nineteenth century, and thus preceding the birth of Afrikaans literature by several decades, had at that time taken second place in his estimation, to Afrikaans literature:

I think I have found the answer, all right. The Afrikaner accepts himself as part of Africa. Out of his own traditions and history and background, out of the stones and the soil and the red guts of Africa, he is fashioning a

literature that has not reached a very high inspirational level - let us make no mistake about that - but that has struck an authentic note, somehow, and that you can feel has got a power in it that must become an enduring part of the Afrikaner's national heritage.

In Bosman's novel Willemsdorp, one of the characters, an Afrikaner politician, makes a similar point to a mixed audience of Afrikaans and English-speaking people, about the notable differences in the way in which Afrikaans and English-speaking South Africans conceive of themselves and their relation to their country:

"We Afrikaners have got everything," Dap van Zyl was saying. "We've got a feeling for the country that's part of our blood. I can pick up a clod of earth, red Transvaal earth, between my fingers and crumble it. Where's your intellect and economics then? What I feel about that handful of soil is the guts of nationhood. What English-speaking South African has got that? It's only we Boers that have got it. We've got to win. Show me where the Englishman with his God Save the King is in Africa next to that."<sup>8</sup>

There are a number of biographical records of Bosman's life, several of which tell more about the biographer than of the work's subject. Yet through reading accounts of Bosman's life by friends of his such as Lionel Abrahams, Jean Blignaut, and Bernard Sachs, as well as biographical notes and studies by Stephen Gray and Valerie Rosenberg, one gains a composite and comprehensive view of the man, Herman Bosman.<sup>9</sup> Certain crucial phases and incidents of Bosman's life are recounted here which have a direct bearing on his writing career. It must be indicated at the outset that Bosman lived a short life - forty-six years - which was filled with many incidents, a great deal of which must have caused him considerable personal pain, even anguish. It remains one of the wonders about Bosman that in

the midst of a life which had more than its fill of troubles, he remained a genial, irrepressibly humorous man who produced a corpus of fiction and essays which is characterised precisely by its benign spirit and humour.<sup>10</sup>

In his twenty-first year, after qualifying as a school-teacher, Bosman was sent by the Transvaal Education Department to a remote part of the northern Transvaal called the Marico for his first teaching post. Bosman spent only six months in the Marico and on his return to Johannesburg during the July-winter vacation he brought on himself one of the most fearful tragedies of his life. In circumstances which to the present remain shrouded in mystery, Bosman fired the rifle which killed his step-brother. Bosman was sentenced to death which was later commuted to a ten-year prison term; he ended up by serving some four years hard labour in Pretoria Central Prison. Out of the prison experience was to emerge his much later autobiographical work, Cold Stone Jug (1948 - 1949) which he described as "an unimpassioned chronicle of my somewhat lengthy sojourn in prison."

If the experiences of the death-cell and the years in prison were to produce a notable single prose work, then the preceding six-month period Bosman spent as a teacher in the backveld (South African backwoods) was to serve as one of the most profound influences on his oeuvre of essays, novels and particularly, short fiction. After his release from prison in 1930 the Marico was to become the emblem, the distinguishing locale of the greater portion of his prose work. Since this is the case, it

goes without saying that a full and proper understanding of what the Marico was and came to represent in Bosman's works is essential to any kind of serious appreciation of his oeuvre.

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## II Bosman's Short Fiction, the Marico, and Literary Influences on his Work

Bosman's short fiction can be divided into three, or perhaps more properly, four categories or types. There are the Oom Schalk Lourens stories in which Bosman uses a backveld narrator, Lourens. His narrative presence is indicated by a phrase such as, 'Oom Schalk Lourens said', placed very early in the story. For instance, 'The Home-Coming' starts like this: 'Laughter (Oom Schalk Lourens said). Well, there's a queer thing for you, now, and something not easy to understand...'<sup>11</sup> And, in similar fashion, Schalk Lourens takes his place as the narrator in a large number of Bosman's stories, ostensibly directing and manipulating the flow of a story which really, of course, is one of Bosman's own invention. From 1930 till about the time Bosman began contributing his weekly pieces to the Johannesburg journal/newspaper The Forum in April, 1950, just about eighteen months before his untimely death, Bosman produced well over forty Schalk Lourens stories. Among these are many pieces which in the succeeding decades have come to be regarded as classic South African stories. Most of these pieces appeared in weekly or monthly journals. Some of these journals such as the South African Opinion and Trek were news and commentary papers, in which the short story was just one of the regular features.

The second type of Bosman's short fiction was the Voorkamer (literally, front-room or living-room) piece. These were written at the end of Bosman's life, on a weekly basis for The Forum. Eighty of these pieces appeared before Bosman's death in October, 1951. As the Lourens stories were invariably set in, or at least related directly to the Marico, so the Voorkamer pieces, which consisted of conversations and topical debates, were set in the voorkamer (front-room/living-room) of one of the Marico farmers - Jurie Steyn. The voorkamer of Jurie Steyn doubled as district post office and communal meeting place, and the Afrikaners of the area grouped there for mail-collection, coffee, and for talk.

The third type of short prose work written by Bosman was the story of the city. The setting was almost always Johannesburg, and the narrators in virtually all of these pieces are urbane figures who display large measures of sophisticated wit. (Consider, 'Rita's marriage' 'Underworld', and 'Heloise's teeth', for example). What is particularly significant about these stories is firstly that there are so few of them - there are merely eight of these pieces altogether in The Collected Works and the Almost Forgotten Stories volumes. Secondly, although there are among them some very fine works, they do not form a distinctive strain in Bosman's short-story oeuvre.

Finally, there are a number of stories set in the Marico bushveld or in the South African countryside which do not have the intrusion of Schalk Lourens as narrator. However, there are a

large proportion of these that are extremely close in theme and treatment to the Lourens stories. (For example, 'The Traitor's Wife', 'The Clay-Pit', 'The Question', and 'Great Uncle Joris'). The mere inclusion in these pieces of the formulaic phrase, 'Oom Schalk Lourens said', would make these almost indistinguishable from the Lourens stories.

What stands out most strikingly in the majority of the one hundred and sixty or so pieces of short fiction written by Bosman is the use of a uniform locale, which, if it is not the Marico itself, is an equivalent South African backveld setting. According to available records of Bosman's life there were only two or three occasions on which he actually lived in or visited the Marico. There was his six month stay in 1926, prior to the later disasters of that year; and there is a record by Bosman, in an essay called 'Marico Revisited', of a short visit there during 1944.<sup>12</sup> There may have been other visits to the Marico but these were certainly not extended stays. In addition to his brief periods in the Marico, it must be pointed out that Bosman did spend a large part of 1943 in the northern Transvaal town of Pietersburg as editor of the small town newspaper for the United Party, the Zoutpansberg Review and Mining Journal. The period in Pietersberg certainly offered Bosman a fund of information and acted as a direct stimulus to his two novels, Jacaranda in the Night (1947) and Willemsdorp (written during 1950 and 1951, first published in 1977).

What is clear about Bosman's connection with the Marico and the northern Transvaal and the brevity of his contact with this region, is that his use of this locale in the major part of his short fiction suggests something far more than simply a writer's recall either of experiences he may have had or even a retelling of stories he may have been told there. This is not of course to deny that there is a large element both of nostalgic recall and a retelling of traditional bushveld stories in Bosman's oeuvre. In addition, the fact that the Marico (I use the term Marico to designate both the Marico itself and the countryside locale in general) was a constant feature in Bosman's writing for over twenty years, the entire extent of his mature writing life, and that Bosman - essentially a city man - was repeatedly to use the two structural forms of Lourens story and Voorkamer piece; to re-use details of plots, the themes of betrayal, love lost, for example; to use character stereotypes - the Hensopper (Boer traitor), the demure but sly young woman - to the point of self-irony; and perhaps more importantly, to use the Marico consciously as a base for social criticism and satire, calls for an analysis of Bosman's Marico in terms far beyond a writer's use of a locale simply for the sake of an intense regionalism.

Bosman's attraction to the Marico and his use of it in so much of his work was spurred on not simply by his few brief visits to that region, but by a number of significant literary impulses and factors. Bosman was an extremely well-read man with broad reading interests. Even the most cursory of readings of the

essays collected in the volumes A Cask of Jerepigo and Uncollected Essays would indicate the breadth of his reading and the depth of his cultural awareness. Bosman's favourite reading was Shakespeare and then the developing tradition of American prose writers, from Poe onward to writers of the early decades of the twentieth century,<sup>13</sup>

There were two major features in the writings of the early American writers which struck Bosman forcibly and drew his admiration: firstly, how these writers were using experiences of the everyday world - common experiences - and relating them in the language of the everyday to create literature of the highest quality. His comments on Shakespeare could be applied equally to his regard of Poe, Twain, Melville, and the other Americans: 'Now there is nobody in literature that can do just this - out of everyday emotions, out of the common-places of life, the old and worn truths of existence and the most familiar of human experiences to create the deathless spirit of romance, the dark and sudden loveliness of poesy's enchantments.'<sup>14</sup> Bosman particularly admired the humour in the works of these early American writers. Secondly, Bosman saw in these writers a struggle to create a literature and a language which was closely bound to their nation. They were pioneers in their national culture. Bosman was to draw from these, his favourite writers, a similar direction for his own prose writing.

It is worth spending a little time considering the influence of these writers on Bosman in greater detail, and those features of

their works which were later incorporated into Bosman's own prose oeuvre. One of the most apparent features of the prose writings of the early Americans is the central place given in them to dialogue, local accents, and even dialects. Out of this concern there flows an involvement in the storytelling faculty of man. In his assessment of Bosman's short fiction Geoffrey Hutchings draws the parallel between Bosman and the American writers in this way. He indicates that through Bosman's use of the backveld- Marico setting and the narrative device of Schalk Lourens and the Voorkamer raconteurs he is:

...able to reach a tradition almost as old as literature itself - that of the simple yarn. In a class-conscious literature like that of England this tradition has been largely suppressed. In American literature however, with its more democratic impulses, the yarn, having flourished as a great oral tradition, penetrated written literature too, through such minor writers as Artemus Ward and Josh Billings, to writers of greater stature like Mark Twain, Herman Melville, Bret Harte, Ambrose Bierce and O. Henry, all of whom were known to Bosman. And in the great cultural cauldron of the United States, the tradition was no doubt strengthened through contact with such literatures as Russian, Yiddish and Celtic.

Yarn-spinning is a frontier activity,<sup>15</sup> and a Bushveld tradition which persists down to this day.

In the prose works of the American writers Bosman was brought into contact with the use of the fireside tale - a bit of backwoods storytelling which from a highly localized setting and told through the brusque language of the district often pointed to certain truths about human nature. More importantly, however, it often touched upon topics of current social debate in that district or in the broader national community. Bosman used the fireside tale to such an extent in his short fiction, both in the

stories and anecdotes of Schalk Lourens and in the conversations of the characters in Jurie Steyn's voorkamer, that his use of the form appears to consist largely of an assemblage of tales, incidents, and conversations between and about backwoods characters. Yet as in the case of the fireside tale in the prose works of the American writers there are resonances in the localized narrative that move far beyond the confines of this or that particularized region or district, and indeed beyond the period, most often in the past, in which these stories have taken place.

Bosman discovered the use of the fireside tale and the regional narrative not only in his reading of the works of non-Southern African writers, but also in the works of fellow South African authors; they had made rich use of this story-telling tradition. Bosman had read or knew personally all of these writers who had either used the fireside tale in their works or had described and used in some detail one or other rural Southern African setting: Douglas Blackburn, Perceval Gibbon, Stephen Black, W.C. Scully, Pauline Smith, C.R. Prance, William Plomer, Frank Brownlee and Sanni Metelerkamp. In fact, Bosman actually mentions Scully by name in one of his works, 'Old Transvaal Story' (from Unto Dust), and finds the prototype for his Schalk Lourens in Scully's Oom Schalk of Between Sun and Sand: A Tale of an African Dersert, which appeared in 1898. There are other forerunners to Bosman's Oom Schalk Lourens in works by some of these writers: there were the two sage women, Gibbon's Vrouw Grobbelaar and Prance's Tante

Rebella; Sanni Metelerkamp had Outa Karel, and Brownlee had Corporal Wanzi a black storyteller - all of whom had either appeared before the first Oom Schalk Lourens stories of 1930 and 1931 or were contemporary creations with Bosman's Boer narrator.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps the most potent source of influence for the use of a backwoods narrator and for the use of a regional, rural setting in Bosman's short fiction came from his reading of the stories of his close friend, Aegidius Jean Blignaut. From his discussions with his friend about these stories there evolved a form of story that became distinctively Bosman's. Blignaut and Bosman had met during the early 1920's, prior to Bosman's visit to the Marico and his period in prison, and the two young men (Blignaut was several years older than Bosman) formed a close and enduring friendship. On Bosman's release from prison, Blignaut and he took up their friendship of earlier years, and within weeks of their meeting, Blignaut showed Bosman, in early 1930, several stories of his which took place in the South African platteland (countryside) and were narrated by a wily black man called Hottentot Ruiters. The Ruiters stories were published by Blignaut and Bosman soon after in a very small edition which has now been lost.<sup>17</sup>

Bosman wrote an immensely enthusiastic preface to this collection and much of what he says of Blignaut's work is not only just but very astute. Bosman's response to reading the Ruiters stories were the series of his Schalk Lourens and Marico stories, the

first of which - 'Makapan's Caves - appeared in the first issue of the literary journal, The Touleier, edited by Blignaut and himself, in December 1930. Blignaut wrote a wonderfully witty riposte to Bosman using the device of a rural narrator, modelled in part on his Hottentot Ruiter, in the story 'Campfires'.<sup>18</sup>

In the conclusion of his preface to the Blignaut story collection of 1931, Bosman offers a penetrating and moving tribute to his friend's storytelling art which, in fact, could equally well apply to the vast number of his Marico stories. Bosman wrote of Blignaut's The Hottentot's God:

When we have finished this book and the stories lose their clarity of outline and grow blurred, as with the days they must, we find that in our memories there is an echo. It is a sound that seems blended from all the sounds we have heard reverberating through the stories; and yet in some way it is also different: it is of more profound significance and reaches deeper into our hearts, for we feel that it is pregnant with a stark and passionate meaning.

It is a low tone that, remaining unheeded amongst the noise of life and the clamour of action, is nevertheless heard in its plaintive insistence when all that turmoil dies. That note is still there, vibrant in our memories, when the jolting of Schalk Lourens's wagon has faded away on the Kalahari, when the smoke has cleared from the battlefield and on Magersfontein the cattle browse again.

It is a brooding rhythm: a sombre cadence that is composed of half-notes. It is the voice of Africa.

Bosman and Blignaut were young men of kindred spirit, and together they edited, during the early 1930's, not only the literary journal The Touleier, a successor to Roy Campbell's, William Plomer's and Lourens van der Post's The Voorslag, but also a number of scandal sheets and pamphlets.<sup>20</sup> The journalistic offerings of these two talented and precocious young men had much

in common with the British paper The Private Eye or the French Le Canard Enchaîné. Bosman was to have much to do with journalism during the rest of his life. When he left South Africa in 1934, for a five year stay in Britain and Europe, he worked with John Webb on the Sunday Critic and Empire Magazine, and founded a shortlived publishing venture called the Arden Godbold Press in London. On his return to South Africa he worked as a literary editor, as well as an assistant or an involved contributor to a number of journals such as Trek, South Africa Opinion, On Parade, The Forum and Spotlight. In the final and, arguably, the most productive years of his literary life, he deliberately chose to work as a proofreader on the Johannesburg Sunday Express, while during the nights he dedicated himself to the creative writing of the Voorkamer pieces and his novel Willemsdorp.

Bosman's involment in journalism seems to suggest that he was never far from contact with people and projects which were directly related to news and the current debates of the day. This is of particular importance for the consideration of his short fiction, which may appear on first reading to have little to do with topical events in South Africa and the wider world, but which on a deeper and more informed reading are very directly engaged in debates of the time.

The second major area in which Bosman found a kinship between his writing (and his ideas on writing) and that of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century American writers was that they were forging a new national literature. They were using the

language and locale of their country in a way which would forever bring distinctiveness and distinction to American literature. Many of the American writers - Twain, Melville, Billings, Poe - were in a real sense frontier writers, both describing the American frontier, as well as establishing the frontier, an ethos for American literature. No major American writer after them could be considered without some reference back to the literary achievement and 'world' of these earlier writers; nor without a conscious recognition of that frame of reference established by them during the nineteenth century. As we shall see, Bosman, although perhaps to a slightly lesser extent than these American writers, his work appearing a little later in the course of South African literary history than theirs did in American literature, brought a distinctive local quality and what Lewis Nkosi called a 'committed South Africanness' to South African writing.<sup>21</sup> There is much to defend Jean Blignaut's claim that 'Herman Charles Bosman gave South African literature its ethos.'<sup>22</sup>

In his essay on Edgar Allan Poe, of February 1948, Bosman was to point the parallel between the situation of Poe and his contemporary American writers and the position in which the South African writer found himself at the end of the 1940's.

Bosman wrote:

Where I feel that Edgar Allan Poe has more than ordinary significance for us writing in South Africa is in regard to the struggle he put up to get American literature on the map. He was fated to arrive on the scene at the beginning of the creation of an authentically American literature, just as we in this generation find ourselves at the same literary crossroads in respect of South African literature. Writing English in this country, are we going to write English or are we going to write South African?

Actually, the decision has already been taken out of our hands - as it had also been taken out of the hands of Edgar Allan Poe and his contemporary writers, even though they were not at all aware of it.

Bosman astutely drew these parallels between the formative great prose writers of America and the state of their literature at the time of their writing, and the current situation in South African literature, and went on from this point in his analysis to indicate that as the Americans had utilized regional settings, forms of language and references to a localized American history, so the South African writer had to do the same, but in a South African context.

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### III Bosman on South African Literature and points of contact with later writers

Bosman was emphatic about the fact that an indigenous South African literature of worth would have to throw off the derivative mantle of Europe and America. In Bosman's statements about South Africa culture and letters one of the most striking features of what he is saying and indeed, the way in which he is saying it, is how similar his views and modes of expression are to the later South African writers - white and black - whose works emerged during the 1950's and 1960's. It is worth quoting, at this point in the study, several of these statements which indicate not only Bosman's sharp perception of the literary state of affairs in South Africa at the time, but emphatically align his work with literary works not so much of the 1930's and 1940's, as of the following two decades.

In the Poe essay he writes:

The time has gone by when a South African writer, rebelling against the hegemony of contemporary English letters, which would doom him to the inferior status of a 'colonial' writer, starts abusing South Africa, in order to make it appear that he is not a 'colonial' writer, after all. That kind of strategy is played out today...

In the development of our own young culture, England and America, with their great literary traditions, can be a source of tremendous inspiration to us. On the other hand, readily make monkeys of those of us who get our values mixed. <sup>24</sup>  
Capital - 180000 SYMBOLS EXERCISING A PREDOMINANT INFLUENCE on a certain type of mind) - England and America can just as readily, <sup>24</sup> make monkeys of those of us who get our values mixed. <sup>24</sup>

In the October 1947 issue of Trek, Bosman wrote:

We have nothing in the way of a living school of contemporary English South African writing, such as creates the mould of a people's thinking and acts as the strongest simple inspiration in the unfolding of people's spiritual consciousness. In other words, we have a handful of individual literary figures, mostly novelists, writing in and about this country in English; we haven't got an English South African literature in terms of South African culture...

South Africa, her cities and her dorps and her veld, her polyglot and polychromatic population, her hard beauty and her sullen contrasts, offers the writer a literary raw material rifted with dazzling ore. And I believe that English South African literature needs only a small measure of encouragement to enable it <sup>25</sup> to enter upon a period of great creative efflorescence. <sup>25</sup>

In the South African Opinion he wrote in a similar vein:

The essential soul of a culture is that it must be indigenous ... Afterwards it can be enriched with the opulent splendours of other cultures...

The place for South African literature to take root is here. Here in Johannesburg. Here in South Africa. It must grow up from the granite of our pavements. From the sun-stricken soul of our veld. From either or both: it doesn't matter which. It must be created here. It must be born here out of the minds and the blood of our writers. And it must be transformed into the magic of the printed word. And it is here that our writers must find appreciation and understanding. Here must be our audience, our market and

our temple.<sup>26</sup> The era of the synthetic quasi-European culture has ended.

Bosman was eager to promote the South African book trade, and saw the huge vacuum which existed locally for the English South African writer. In his series of articles on Afrikaans literature for the South African Opinion, he wrote in January, 1946: 'The writer in this country who uses English as his medium is just about in a hopeless position. Publishing facilities are nil. What sort of a position would, say, Mexican literature be in if Mexican writers had to send their books to Madrid to try to get them published.'<sup>27</sup> And again, in July of the same year, he wrote in an article on a South African novel competition: 'I regard [the] local development in the book publishing trade as an essential preliminary to the creation of an authentic South African [English] literature.'<sup>28</sup>

It is perhaps not without significance that the works of Bosman issued in book form during his life time - Jacaranda in the Night (1946), and Gold Stone Jug (1949) as well as the early verse collections - were all published in Johannesburg. As Stephen Gray points out, Bosman's contemporaries of the late 1940's, who were to form a nucleus of leading Southern African writers of the next three decades, Nadine Gordimer, Alan Paton, and Doris Lessing, all took their works either to British or American publishers.<sup>29</sup> Bosman's audience has always remained predominantly South African and his works are virtually unavailable to the English and American reader.<sup>30</sup>

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IV Bosman's ideas on Writing as revealed within his Short Fiction

The best witness to Bosman's concern for an indigenous form of South African writing is, of course, the body of his own fiction; and within this corpus of works, his short fiction is a perfect illustration of how a writer used local historical concerns, settings, language and themes to create literary texts which embody many of the demands Bosman himself postulated for an autonomous, indigenous literature with a life and value of its own. It is precisely the use of a distinctively South African kind of language, humour and references in Bosman's stories which have offered the chief appeal to a large proportion of his readers and critics. (Among these critics I number Geoffrey Hutchings, David Wright, William Plomer, and Lewis Nkosi).

In several of Bosman's stories there are references to his concern about indigenous writing, and his related view that what brings quality to this kind of writing is not a prosaic attention to realistic detail - scene description, records of local customs, etc. - but a sensitivity to the spirit of the people and their district, and what loosely could be termed the technical genius of the author. In the Schalk Lourens story 'Splendours from Ramoutsa', for example, one of the young men of the district arrives on the old Boer's stoep and starts telling Oom Schalk about the splendid tale he has been told by the Indian storekeeper at Ramoutsa. This tale - and others that have come from the storekeeper - are filled with exotic details

of beautiful Indian princesses, palaces, processions of elephants, and so on. Several farmers of the district suggest to their Boer storyteller that he will have to follow the Indian's example and start including some of these exotic features in his own tales. The story continues from here in this way:

I [Schalk Lourens] said they were talking very foolishly. I pointed out that there was no sense in my trying to tell people about kings and princes and trained elephants, and so on, when I didn't know anything about them or what they were supposed to do even.

"They don't need to do anything," Frik Snyman explained, "you can just mention that there was a procession like that nearby when whatever you are talking about happened. You can just mention them quickly, Oom Schalk, and you needn't say anything about them until you are in the middle of your story. You can explain that the people in the procession had nothing to do with the story, because they were only passing through to some other place."

Of course, I said that that was nonsense. I saw that if I had to keep on using that same procession over and over again, the people in it would be very travel-stained after they had passed through a number of stories. It would be a ragged and dust-laden procession...<sup>31</sup>

Through passages such as this Bosman is humorously and cunningly revealing several of his own trade secrets and and some of his aversions as a storyteller. (See similar examples of this form of humorous self-reflexive commentary or critique of his writing in stories like 'Mafeking Road', 'Old Transvaal Story', and 'The Selons-Rose'.)

In the Voorkamer piece, 'Local Colour', which appeared in The Forum on May 20th 1950, Bosman offers a piercing satire of a man who arrives in the Marico setting out to capture its local colour and atmosphere for his new South African novel. Gabriel

Penzhorn (his name is significant) is portrayed as the stereotypical English colonial writer. He was 'wearing a white helmet above his spectacles and with a notebook and a fountain-pen below his spectacles'.<sup>32</sup> The Marico farmers take (or seem to take) the writer's request up in earnest, and tell him that if he is after atmosphere then the best place in the region for this is a nearby gorge from which gases emerge. As for local colour they recommend he take samples - as he should of the gas - of a brightly coloured local bush called bloubos (blue bush). This is a good example of the literal, earthy type of humour which runs through many of Bosman's stories, where one is never entirely certain the Marico farmers are quite as obtuse as their utterances seem to suggest they might be. In the way in which the writer and the local people misconstrue each other's meanings, Bosman is posing yet another reflection upon writing, and upon writing in South Africa in particular. As is made clear in this piece, Bosman had a great scorn for superficial forms of realist writing, and particularly that kind of realism that brashly set out to capture the spirit of a district and its people. Penzhorn is an exemplar of this school. Bosman was castigating in particular a form of naturalism which in chronicling data posed as realism; his realism was of a much more complex nature, in which the local specificities served as only one of the levels, although an important one, on which his stories functioned.

As 'Local Colour' wittily illustrates Penzhorn is not particularly interested in what the Marico people say and in

their ideas: what he is seeking is some kind of local data and folklore which will fit into his preconceived notions of what should be happening in that part of the country. This kind of monstrous arrogance is gently satirized in this piece.

Bosman is, by implication, also making the point in this Voorkamer work that his own writing about the Marico is of a completely different kind from that of Penzhorn. Unlike his colonial writer-character, Bosman is not mining the Marico for local colour and atmosphere; he is not the arrogant exploitative writer. His concern with that part of South Africa, and his use of it as a writer, is for quite different purposes.

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V The Marico and Critical Responses to Bosman's use of it in his Short Fiction

It is worth considering briefly at this point the nature of the Marico, since it is such a crucial feature of Bosman's work. The Marico district is a region of South Africa which, remote though it is from the urban complex of the Rand, has a fascinating historical past of its own which makes it an ideal kind of setting for Bosman to use in his fiction for the type of complex view he is wishing to evolve of South African history and social relations. Prior to white settlement in the middle and late nineteenth century the Marico had, for centuries, been the home of the Barolong, the San, and various Tswana peoples. Black farmers and hunters had traversed the plains and mountains of this corner of the Transvaal for many hundreds of years. During the early 1830's the warriors of Mzilikazi passed through

this region clashing with the indigenous black people, and, for a short time, the Barolong and the northward-moving Boers formed an effective war-alliance to thrust the Amandebele (Matabele) north of the Limpopo to Bulawayo. The Barolong-Boer alliance soon broke down, and the Barolong never truly regained their former land, as the Boers swept into the northern Cape and northern Transvaal.

The Marico borders on the Cape as well as on the southern boundary of Botswana. In 1885, after continued struggles with the Boers, the British established the protectorate of Bechuanaland. The Marico thus is, in a literal sense, a frontier region in South Africa. To the south it had the growing mining and industrial conurbation of the Witwatersrand, and to the north the black agrarian-based country of the Tswana people. Across the Malopo River lay the enormous sand stretches of the Kalahari where the San people lived. After the rinderpest blight of 1896 and the South African War of 1899 - 1902, the Marico was virtually a depopulated zone until Afrikaner farmers trekked back there during the second decade of this century. In 1926, Bosman was to discover there an agrarian community of Afrikaners many of whom had either fought in the South African War (or even the earlier war of 1881) and who had a long memory for history. Also, these farmers had an enormous amount to do with the black people of the region, of neighbouring Bechuanaland, and the Kalahari.<sup>33</sup> The black people who were variously servants, farm labourers, witchdoctors,

weather prophets, or the Bechuana people with whom the Afrikaners bartered and exchanged cattle, played a large part in the lives of these Marico-Afrikaner farmers. There was a settled order of black and white interaction in the Marico, and although much of it was predicated by notions of white superiority and 'baaskap' this did not significantly alter the fact that there was a shared pattern of agrarian existence between white and black, where the Afrikaners at times felt more of a kinship with the black people of the surrounding area than with representatives of the urban culture to the south - white and black.

Apart from Bosman's use of the Marico in his fiction, there were two notable instances of very eminent South African writers using the Marico, during Bosman's lifetime, in their novels, and their treatment of the region has notable similarities to that of Bosman. Sol Plaatje's historical novel Mhudi was written in 1917 and published in 1930. Plaatje casts back in the novel to the events of the 1830's when the Amandebele were moving through the Transvaal and clashing with the Barolong and then with the Boer-Barolong alliance. The novel embodies a carefully constructed political prophecy, based closely on the events of the time, which bears directly upon the later conditions of the 1910's when the South African black people saw their rights and particularly their rights to land ownership, stripped away from them by white rule. Mzilikazi points out to his people in the novel that the Barolong (Bechuana) - Boer alliance will soon

break down and the black people will then be subjected to the ferocity of the militarily stronger Boers. History, as Tim Couzens points out in his introduction to Plaatje's novel, becomes a moral fable for Plaatje.<sup>34</sup>

Peter Abrahams's novel Wild Conquest (1950), like Mhudi, deals with the troubled times of the 1830's for black and white South Africans. The setting again is the passage of the Amandebele through the Transvaal, and Abrahams is at pains in the novel to indicate the political resonances and lessons to be learnt from that historical phase. Interestingly, Abraham's novel was enthusiastically received in a review in The Forum in June 1951, and, in August of that year - two months before Bosman's death - Abrahams had written a letter to The Forum explaining his feelings about Wild Conquest and about his role as an exiled black South African writer.<sup>35</sup>

Bosman's critics have described his treatment of the Marico in two distinguishably different ways, and upon this difference the nature of the broad appreciation of his entire fictional oeuvre really rests. For the larger group of critics - Wright, Nkosi, Hutchings, Plomer, Edward Davis, L.M.D. Stopforth, and Clive Millar - Bosman's stories and prose pieces of the Marico are very fine evocations of a certain corner of South Africa. Bosman is treated primarily as a regional realist, an author who had a fine eye for local colour, the district humour, and a very good ear for the tales of that district which he retold in his own stories. Nkosi sums up this response to Bosman's short

fiction of the Marico most eloquently: '...Bosman to my mind remains largely a folk humorist, deft, amusing, satirical - sometimes pungently so - but in the end lamentably fails to evoke a country larger than a locality'.<sup>36</sup>

David Wright and William Plomer carry Nkosi's analysis one step further by arguing that Bosman's stories present a world which although local and remote is also universal. For instance, Plomer writes:

It is perhaps Bosman's chief feat in these stories to have presented local and remote involvements of passion, love, hate, fidelity, infidelity, history and death in such a way that they are made universally human, and to have maintained while doing so his light and entertaining touch.<sup>37</sup>

A second and much smaller group of critics (Stephen Gray, Lionel Abrahams, and Leon Hugo) see Bosman's use of the Marico and consequently the function of his fiction in a rather different light. For a start, they take Bosman's aversion to a superficial pseudo-realism seriously, and conclude that Bosman's use of the Marico is far more than a simple realistic portrait of a remote district. In short, the Marico is a real South African locale which Bosman has used entirely for this own literary purposes, one of which is that the backveld setting stands for a wider South African reference. What is taking place in Bosman's Marico is actually a reflection of much wider South African social and historical issues. Gray writes along these lines: 'He [Bosman] meant the Marico to symbolize all of South Africa. Its history, at one time or another, has been every South African's history, and its worrying and questions,

its drama and laughs, concern all of us, too. For "Marico" interpret "South Africa", and the allegory is complete.<sup>38</sup> Hugo writes similarly: 'Embedded for the most part in the soil of the Marico, they [Bosman's stories] are of course far more than regional studies. Satirical, wryly humorous, passionate and tender in turn, these little masterpieces hold up the mirror to the entire family of peoples in South Africa, perhaps everywhere'.<sup>39</sup>

This line of criticism accepts both Bosman's genius in local portrait-painting and humour, and the fact that his works of short fiction may offer views of humanity which hold a universal kind of appeal and an evocation of widely experienced situations; yet it insists that Bosman was doing something far more complex and valuable than this, and paradoxically enough, far more closely linked to indigenous South African experiences. Bosman's stories, in fact, can be seen to be functioning on a dual level. Firstly, as bits of local, backveld storytelling - and this is the most basic level, and as such often easily misinterpreted. And secondly, as works of short fiction which are offering a fable-like treatment of South African events and situations.<sup>40</sup>

A reading of Bosman's short fiction which regards his use of the Marico simply as some form of realistic transposition of local material and language can lead to major misrepresentations.

I should like to quote two instances where critics and readers of Bosman's work, who hold diametrically opposed ideological

views, have managed to misrepresent his fictional achievements precisely because they failed to perceive in Bosman's writing these further levels of topical and fabular reference. On the one hand there is Lewis Nkosi who is a supporter of black rights in South Africa. Nkosi's acceptance of Bosman's use of the Marico on a purely realistic plane leads him to make the understandably aggrieved commentary:

The blacks of course are rarely more than shadows in Bosman's work. Flat, mechanical, sub-human clowns invariably referred to as 'kaffirs' by his narrator, they are foils for playing off his Boer characters for whom he claimed the real stage. Also Bosman succeeded to a great extent in hiding so well behind the attitudes of his characters, and that of his narrator, Oom Schalk Lourens, that we are obliged to blame them for the indifference or failure to perceive the full humanity of the blacks. My own conviction is that the blacks did not fully engage Bosman's interest; he had a folklorist attitude towards Africans which combined bad anthropology and vulgar sentimentality: a sort of 'save-the-Bushman-art' campaign without any deeper psychological engagement with the people who created that art. There are anthropological clichés like 'telephone drumming' in a part of Africa where it does not in fact exist [see Bosman's complex use of African drum communication as a symbol in the story 'The Kafir Drum']; or in 'Graven Image' Radipolong is forbidden by tradition to carve other Africans because this would be witchcraft; only Africans in the South don't use this form of witchcraft. These things may not matter to white readers but they <sup>41</sup>do for Africans; they are significant distortions.

If, in fact, Bosman was simply functioning as a realist writer in his short fiction and as nothing more, then Nkosi's complaints would indeed carry a great deal of weight.

The second misrepresentative response to Bosman's work has come from reactionary white South African press reviewers and through a large number of South African readers who see in the Marico

stories a superb evocation of a rural scene where white farmers are continually booting the black people of the district about. Bosman's Marico is, in their eyes, a racist paradise. In fact, Bosman's fiction, by means of this line of interpretation, is co-opted into the corpus of works which vindicate apartheid. As is the case in Nkosi's response to the Marico stories, if these are taken as works of rural realism, purely and simply, and if one were to leave out of reckoning the small number of fairly direct satires of racist folly in South Africa in Bosman's short-fiction oeuvre, then this reactionary response to his shortfiction would have much justification.

I should like to argue strongly against such an appreciation of Bosman's short fiction. It is necessary at this point to consider, with careful attention to the works themselves, how Bosman in fact using the Marico-framework as a literary device; and to look at how, by this means, he creates a kind of fabular account of the South African society, in which both events of the historical past and current social debates can be treated. In this way it will be shown that an interpretation of Bosman's work either as seen by Nkosi, or as reactionary critics have treated it, is completely untenable.

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#### VI Bosman's Satire of the Mania about race in South Africa

A significantly large number of Bosman's short prose works either take as their central concern, or make passing reference to, South African race relations. The Marico, which I am now referring to as a specifically Bosmanesque construct standing

for the broader society, is the locale Bosman uses to explore a large number of permutations of social interaction between white and black people in South Africa. His first story set in the Marico, the Schalk Lourens piece, 'Makapan's Caves', presents a kind of microcosmic model of a large number of the themes and concerns which were to characterize his short prose fiction of the next two decades. The story opens with a literary tour de force, the kind of story-beginning characteristic of many of Bosman's finest works:

Kafirs? (said Oom Schalk Lourens). Yes, I know them. And they're all the same. I fear the Almighty, and I respect His works, but I could never understand why He made the Kafir and the rinderpest. The Hottentot is a little better. The Hottentot will only steal the biltong hanging out on the line to dry. He won't steal the line as well. That is where the kafir is different.

Still, sometimes you come across a good kafir, who is faithful and upright and a true Christian and doesn't let the wild dogs catch the sheep. I always think that it isn't right to kill that kind of kafir.<sup>42</sup>

The first point to note about this opening - and, indeed, for a great deal of the prose in the Marico works - is the particular kind of English Bosman is using. In many instances his prose is offering a very literal form of translation from Afrikaans into English. The Afrikaans of the first two sentences of 'Makapan's caves' would read: 'Kafirs? (sê Oom Schalk Lourens). Ja, ek ken hulle.' Bosman's 'Yes, I know them' is an instance of this literal transposition from language to language. If the quality of a great deal of the Marico prose is suffused with elements of the Afrikaans language - syntax, vocabulary, style - then so too is the nature of the world being described almost entirely drawn

from the framework of the mainstream, traditionalist Afrikaner culture.

The attitudes, for example, towards the black and mixed race people and the vocabulary ('kafir' and 'Hottentot') being used here and in other Bosman stories reflect accurately the way in which many Afrikaners did (and do still) view these people. This particular traditionalist Afrikaner Weltanschauung is accurately and sensitively portrayed in Bosman's prose works, conveying, as this opening does, a ruthlessness so often wedded with a certain Calvinist-Christian outlook on the world.

Consider how this is similarly conveyed a little later in this story. The narrator's father is giving his sons advice as to how they should behave in the punitive mission against a black tribe:

"Don't forget to read your Bible, my sons," he called out as we rode away. "Pray the Lord to help you, and when you shoot always aim for the stomach." These remarks were typical of my father's deeply religious nature and he also knew that it was easier to hit a man in the stomach than in the head: and it is just as good, because no man can live long after his intestines have been shot away.<sup>45</sup>

One cannot fail to discern in Bosman's prose - here and in virtually all of his short fiction - the strong current of satire running throughout. In this instance, Bosman is skilfully suggesting how the Afrikaner's sense of religion can be bound, indeed, be concomitant with a brutal attitude to black people -- "Don't forget to read your Bible, my sons ... Pray the Lord to help you, and when you shoot always aim for the stomach." The force in Bosman's piece is how religion -

ideally so intimately associated with notions of peace and goodwill between men - is here linked to acts of brutal militarism.

In 'Makapan's Caves' the satire is particularly vitriolic. This quality of a poker-faced, bleak satire is an important component of this story. This, for example, is how Bosman's narrator describes the background of the mission against the tribe of Makapan:

It was just after my twenty-first birthday that we got the news that Hermanus Potgieter and his whole family had been killed by a kafir tribe under Makapan. They also said that after killing him, the kafirs stripped off old Potgieter's skin and made wallets of it in which to carry their dagga [marijuana]. It was very wicked of the kafirs to have done that, especially as dagga makes you mad and it is a sin to smoke it. A commando was called up from our district to go and attack the tribe and teach them to have respect for the white man's skin.<sup>44</sup>

Here, and in a large number of his stories, Bosman takes the manic South African concern about skin colour as a butt for his satire, often using, as he does in the passage above, a kind of reductio ad absurdum. Although Bosman's satire is rarely quite as savage as in these instances, it must not be assumed, as many critics and readers have done, that there is barely a serious, even tragic dimension to his fiction. Consider, for example, an extract from his much later story of the 1940's, 'Sold Down the River', where he is similarly ridiculing the race-difference -mania in South Africa, yet in a much gentler way. The narrator Schalks Lourens is describing the visit of a touring acting -company to the Marico. The company are performing a version of the American classic, Uncle Tom's Cabin, and have, through local

pressures, modified and altered the play in ways to suit the Afrikaner audiences. For instance, the director 'had so far adapted the play to South African conditions as to make Uncle Tom threaten to hit Topsy with a brandy bottle'.<sup>45</sup> The old Negro is also portrayed, in this version, as a chicken thief. During the performance of the play, in a hall adjoining a disused mill, the company face the difficulty of having to act scenes in the midst of a continuous shower of flour which has seeped through from the ceiling of the neighbouring mill.

Bosman's narrator comments:

Naturally, all this confused the audience a good deal. For, with the flour sifting down on to the faces of the actors, it became difficult, after a little while, to tell which were the white people in the play and which the negroes. Towards the end of the first act Uncle Tom, with a layer of flour covering his make-up, looked just as white as Simon Legree.<sup>46</sup>

Certainly, Gordon Vorster, Bosman's close friend and literary associate (they were working together as editors for an extensive anthology of South African English verse at the time of Bosman's death) saw in Bosman's life a sombre and even sad dimension behind all the jokes and laughter. Vorster's comment could very well apply to his friend's fiction. He wrote of Bosman:

Did he really laugh all those uncontrolled laughs or - and the thought gives me cold shivers - was he crying?... If this is Bosman, then the whole accepted character of Bosman built up on a series of authentic but non-sequitur anecdotes falls apart in the face of what was probably the most authentic thing about him - this laughter-that-might-have-been-crying.<sup>47</sup>

Returning to 'Makapan's Caves', the historical event of the punitive expedition against Makapan's people is the backdrop for

a personal saga which contains within it the sorrow and complexity of Bosman's vision of South African social relations. The story tells of how Schalk comes accidentally to shoot and kill a young black man who had been adopted by his family many years before.

Nongaas had been an orphan and had attached himself - and had been accepted - by the Lourens family as one of their entourage of black servants. Young Nongaas had been particularly fond of Schalk's older brother, Hendrik, and it is through his devotion to the white youth that Nongaas eventually comes to lose his life - at Schalk's unwitting hands. Within the narrative framework of 'Makapan's Caves', set as it is against the extermination of a black tribe, Bosman places this tale, of the devotion of a black man for a white, which ends tragically. Nongaas does not survive. Through a work such as this - and there are many other examples such as 'The Rooinek', 'In the Withaak's Shade', 'Marico Scandal', 'Funeral Earth', 'Graven Image', 'Day of Wrath', and 'Birth Certificate' - Bosman offers a sombre view of the society.

Towards the end of his writing career Bosman began phasing out the Schalk Lourens narrative in his works and to develop narrative forms which could incorporate a multiple viewing of the society. He achieved this through shifting the narrative focus in the novel Willemsdorp, and by means of the group of Afrikaner narrators of the Voorkamer conversation-stories. The topics for conversation in Jurie Steyn's voorkamer had a great

deal to do with topical events taking place during the period 1950 and 1951 in which Bosman was composing these works. The most obvious evidence of this is how, in many pieces, one of the characters, At Naudé, would start a conversation by mentioning a piece of news he had either read about in the newspaper or heard on the radio. However, as Stephen Gray points out in his paper on the Voorkamer pieces, there is a great deal of evidence in addition to this that the subject matter of the majority of these works was suggested by the events of the day, most of which were being reported and discussed in the pages of the very journal, The Forum, in which the Voorkamer pieces appeared.<sup>48</sup>

The final two years of Bosman's life saw the National Party government of South Africa putting into effect the kind of legislation which would, for the years to come, break virtually all of the bonds of goodwill which had until then existed between black and white South Africans. The kind of kinship which tenuously existed between Bosman's Marico Afrikaners and the black people of the area was to be broken down completely. Schalk Lourens's admiration of Mosigo, the African drum-man in 'The Kafir Drum', the community's respect for Mosiko the black prophet as revealed in 'The Prophet', and Oupa Bekker having driven with the Bapedi Chief Umsumfu in the black man's motor car as described in the Voorkamer piece 'Failing Sight', were to become events of a past which, in recollection, was far more palatable than the grim present of overtly instituted racial distrust.

Taking the place of these notable instances in Bosman's short fiction where black and white people could coexist reasonably harmoniously together, there emerges more and more strongly a grim brooding portrait of the society where all certainty seems to have disappeared. This mood is captured most graphically in one of the last of Bosman's stories cast in the Schalk Lourens mould, 'Unto Dust', first published (in Afrikaans originally) at the end of 1948. Here, the irrespressible high spirits of the Boer narrator have disappeared to be replaced by a mood of disquiet. The central concern of the story is death and the laughter at the follies of racial discrimination has become more harsh. <sup>49</sup> The central incident in this story is how a group of Boers had to bury one of their white colleagues who had been killed alongside a black man in one of the skirmishes with a black tribe. They cannot distinguish between the bones of the white and the black man. This is an extract from the story which illustrates the bitterness which is increasingly becoming part of Bosman's fiction:

"I remember one of our party saying that that was the worst of these kafir wars" Stoffel Oosthuizen continued. "If it had been a war against the English, and part of a dead Englishman had got lifted into the coffin by mistake, it wouldn't have mattered so much," he said..."Naturally, we burghers felt very bitter about this whole affair...and our resentment was something that we couldn't explain, quite. Afterwards, several other men who were there that day told me that they had the same feelings of suppressed anger that I did. They wanted somebody - just once - to make a remark such as 'in death they were not divided'. Then you would have seen an outburst all right..."<sup>50</sup>

In August 1950 Bosman's Voorkamer piece, 'Birth Certificate', appeared in The Forum. It presents his ironic and moving

response to the legislation (the Population Registration Act of 1950) which was to classify South Africans as either being white, coloured or black. This is how the piece begins:

It was when At Naude<sup>51</sup> told us what he had read in the newspaper about a man who had thought all his life he was white, and had then discovered that he was Coloured, that the story of Flippus Biljon was called to mind. I mean, we all knew the story of Flippus Biljon. But because it was still early afternoon we did not immediately make mention of Flippus. Instead, we discussed, at considerable length, other instances that were within our knowledge of people who had grown up as one sort of person and had discovered in later life that they were in fact quite a different sort of person.<sup>51</sup>

Bosman's language is filled with irony, barely concealing his scorn of a situation where a man could live his whole life thinking that he was white and then 'discover' that he was coloured. Can one 'discover' one's race? Also, there is much irony in the way the narrator describes the situation of an individual 'who had grown up as one sort of person and discovered in later life that they were in actual fact quite a different sort of person'. This Jekyll and Hyde situation can only arise, the narrator is implying, through some traumatic incident taking place in the lives of the individuals which happens here to be the monstrous imposition of a system of race classification upon the South African people. A further veiled irony and prediction is how this brutal system would, in fact, create Jekyll and Hyde situations both for individuals, groups of individuals, and for families.<sup>52</sup>

It is also worth noting the studied avoidance by the Marico characters of reference to one such cruel instance where race

classification has caused chaos - namely, the case of Flippus Biljon: 'But because it was still early afternoon we did not immediately make mention of Flippus'. These painful and unnecessary intrusions upon personal lives are best left for later discussion, or best not discussed at all. When, finally, at the end of the afternoon, the story of Flippus Biljon is raised again for discussion, there is a feeling of regret among the voorkamer characters: 'Consequently, we were disappointed when At Naudé started making further mention of that piece of news he had read in the daily paper. So there was nothing else for it but that we had to talk about Flippus Biljon...'<sup>53</sup>

It is instructive to compare Bosman's response to the Population Registration Act in this piece with Ezekiel Mphahlele's in the story 'A Point of Indentity' written by him more than a decade after Bosman's work.<sup>54</sup> Mphahlele's story offers a sombre account of how the jocular Karel Almeida - the son of a Portuguese man and a black woman - is broken and destroyed by his having to be classified Coloured, in accord with the new legislation. Bosman's 'Birth Certificate' shares with Mphahlele's piece an anger and a polemic against the brutal system, but where the two works differ is that in Bosman's story the illustrative instances of the folly of the new legislation are initially comical. It is behind the laughter and the farcical nature of the events narrated that Bosman builds his anger.

After they have avoided earlier discussion of Flippus Biljon's case - and after a few brief comical exchanges where the white

characters display their extreme sensitivity to their racial origins - Oupa Bekker tells the tale of young Heilart Nortje. The infant Nortjé had been stolen from his cradle by a troop of baboons. The child is nurtured and brought up by the baboons, and finally captured by his father and re-introduced into the world of humans with results which are both amusing and sad. Bosman's description of how the boy's parents view young Heilart's behaviour among the baboons is surely one of the great moments in South African fiction, where comedy, tragedy, and pathos converge:

And once, through his field-glasses, Heilart had been able to observe his son for quite a few moments. His son was then engaged in picking up a stone and laying hold of a scorpion that was underneath it. The speed with which his son pulled off the scorpion's sting and proceeded to eat up the rest of the scorpion whole filled the father's heart of Heilart Nortjé with a deep sense of pride.

I remember how Heilart talked about it. "Real intelligence," Heilart announced with his chest stuck out. "A real baboon couldn't have done it quicker or better. I called my wife, but she was a bit too late. All she could see was him looking pleased as anything and scratching himself. And my wife and I held hands and we smiled at each other, and we asked each other, where does he get it all from?"<sup>55</sup>

It is perhaps appropriate to interrupt the discussion here to point out that one of the finest satirical strains in Bosman's writing is built up around the evolutionist model of civilisation which sees man as the apex of creation, having evolved through a variety of stages, one of which is the 'ape-stage'. The debate about this particularly crude evolutionary model was very much a current talking point in South Africa, spurred both by Raymond Dart's paleontological finds in Botswana of the so-called *Australopithecus Africanus*

during the 1920's (as well as later finds) and by the Afrikaner racist ideologists who then took up the theme by arguing that the black man was on a lower evolutionary rung to the white man and somewhere on the ladder of evolution slightly above the apes. It is worth quoting several instances of Bosman's treatment of this debate which are illustrative of his brilliant humour and his utter scorn of the racial denigration of black people.

One of the characters in the Voorkamer piece, 'Dying Race' (September 1951), considers the lot of San (Bushman) in this way: "That's the only way the Bushman will ever get it right," Jurie Steyn said, "through sitting down and using his brain a bit - thinking out quietly about why he's such a bane to mankind. It's only in that way that he'll be able to change his ways a little and not get the human race such a bad name wherever he goes just through his belonging to the human race."<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, in his piece 'Jim Fish', Bosman describes the farcical situation when black employees of a Johannesburg bakery are forced to tread the dough during electricity failures. He writes:

On these occasions that particular bakery's proud boast that its products were, from start to finish, untouched by human hands, was only literally correct, in the sense that it excluded human feet. Strict adherents of the school of thought that places the coloured races outside of the pale of humanity as such would in this situation find themselves in something of a dilemma. For it would not be human hands or feet, but just the feet of niggers that kneaded the dough, in long wooden troughs, at <sup>57</sup>those times when the electric power at the bakery failed.

This line of humour is not only found in Bosman's stories but also in his novel, Willemsdorp, and in his essays. In Willemsdorp there is this scene of fine comic humour where an Afrikaner policeman is boasting to his superior officer of his abilities as a detective.:

"Of the white men, yes, sir, I would say that in South-West [Africa] I was the best," Brits said. "But there was a Bushman there what hadn't any clothes on but a copper ring in his nose that could follow a trail that was without a lie three months old. And we also had a trained baboon there that had just no clothes on at all, and that was also better than me. Not much better, I won't say, mind you. I think he had a better eye for a trail than me. But I could smell a trail better than that baboon could. Still, I don't think as that trained baboon was much of a credit to the Force, if you understand what I mean, sir. I think that that Bushman with a ring in his nose was more of a credit to the force. The baboon never seemed really as he wanted to make use of his great gifts. He would steal brandy out of the canteen and go on the booze for a week, even if we was right in the middle of a big diamond smuggling case. That would makes just no difference to that baboon. And then in the end he goes and steals brandy for himself and that Bushman with the ring in his nose. And then it would be just too disgraceful, sir, with the two of them on the drunk together. I remember the time - "

"Yes, you should write an article about it for the News some day, Brits." the commandant interrupted him.<sup>58</sup>

Finally, in two of his essays, Bosman carries his satire to the point where he creates an intentionally farcical allegory of humans (white people) on the one hand, and baboons (black people) on the other, where Bosman casts his lot with the baboons.

He writes in 'A visit to the Zoo':

I looked at the baboons in the Zoo - looking away at long intervals, also in order not to embarrass them - and the feelings of which I was most strongly conscious were that the baboons were a people who were kindly and highly

intelligent and very unpractical, and who were poor but had kingly qualities, and who, of all the people in this country, seemed most nearly to conform to a type of person whom I would be proud to claim as a fellow South African.

In the essay, 'Simian Civilization', he continues this consciously farcical debate in this way:

I have come to the conclusion, regrettably enough, that I have a great deal in common with the more inferior class of monkey, the kind of monkey who, through an unhappy degeneracy of spirit, is not able to approach the more solemn things of life with a proper sense of gravity ... And I have noticed that I get moved to mirth by just about the same things that stimulate a monkey's risibilities. Only, the monkey has got a more subtle sense of humour than I have, and sort of more refined...<sup>60</sup>

Although I think that Bosman's zany satire of the racist categories and cast-typing in South Africa is defensible, it is worth pointing out that his equation of black people and apes (for obviously satirical purposes) and his taking the side of the underdog in South Africa would almost certainly offend many black South Africans. In his defiantly humorous way Bosman is here stepping into one of the most sensitive areas in the country and, by doing so, inevitably taking risks.

Returning to 'Birth Certificate', the final episode of the piece is, in fact, the tale of Flippus Biljon, and here as in the case of young Heilart Nortjé, Bosman couches his critique of apartheid policy in terms of sly irony and through comic observation:

Because he had been adopted by a Coloured family, Flippus Biljon had always regarded himself as a Coloured man. And then one day, quite by accident, Flippus Biljon saw his birth certificate. And from that birth certificate it was clear that Flippus Biljon was as White as you or I. You can imagine how Flippus must have felt about it.

Especially after he had gone to see the magistrate at Bekkersdal, and the magistrate, after studying the birth certificate, confirmed the fact that Flippys Biljon was a White man.

"Thank you, Baas," Flippus Biljon said. "Thank you very much, my basie."<sup>61</sup>

The address, 'Baas' (Boss), is one of the most common forms of address of a black person to a white in South Africa, in which the inferiority and subjection of the black person is affirmed. Bosman's wry and controversial observation is that even on hearing that he is white Flippus continues to use his customary form of address, 'Baas', to a white man; this suggests that the racial patterns in South African society are deeply ingrained in the minds of the people and that sudden turn-about in social relations - here the crude imposition of compulsory race classification - will inevitably cause disruptions in personal lives and in the social fabric.

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#### VII The Voorkamer stories as political fables

I should like to conclude these discussions of individual works of short fiction by Bosman by considering three of the Voorkamer pieces which bear witness to the use of the form of these local discussions as the basis for a kind of political fable.

Written in July 1951, some three months before his death, 'Feat of Memory' takes as its central theme and point for topical discussion instances of people displaying great abilities to call up incidents and facts out of the past; and, conversely, occasions when people's memory of past happenings has forsaken

them. The discussion is given a specific direction when At Naudé remarks:

"Anyway, it said over the wireless the other night...that some of the greatest men in history have also had some of the worst memories. And it wasn't only learned men, like professors (that we all know have got very bad memories) that were like that. But also men without any kind of learning at all - men like great politicians, for instance, it said over the wireless."<sup>62</sup>

Shortly afterwards, one of the other Voorkamer characters continues the discussion in this way:

Thereupon Gysbert van Tonder made mention of a number of great politicians that he had known in his time who suffered from extraordinary lapses of memory. There was one politician in particular, Gysbert van Tonder said, who, when he came round to the Marico before an election, knew every farmer by his first name and knew the ages of each of the farmer's children and knew where each child came in class at the end of the term. And yet, because of that high kind of official responsibility that Jurie Steyn had mentioned, the politician's memory just went completely, immediately after he had been elected.<sup>63</sup>

Having brought the discussion into a South African context Bosman then introduces, as he so often does in these works, a tale by the elderly raconteur of the group, Oupa Bekker, which, partly because it recalls events of the long-distant past and partly because of its diffuse and rambling (often interrupted) narration, seems to have little to say or add to the earlier discussion: yet as one considers it more carefully, the old man's tale is, as in this case, a pertinent addition and support to what has gone before it. Oupa Bekker tells of a man called Sarel Meintjies, nicknamed 'Rooi' Sarel, who had the most extraordinary memory in the entire region. Oupa Bekker gives instances of his phenomenal memory and traces the course of his life. At one point in his narration, one of the younger men

interrupts him, and comments:

"And a man like 'Rooi' Sarel, with those great gifts for remembering things - well, I feel he must have been very proud to have been able to make use of his gifts to help people. I mean, not only the Marico district, but the whole coutry - all the nation, that is - would be benefited through having in its midst somebody with such fine powers of memory as 'Rooi' Sarel's, put to their proper use..."<sup>64</sup>

Oupa Bekker tells of how 'Rooi' Sarel lost his job in the Marico after he had capsized the post-cart at a drift in the Malopo River. He was helped through that difficult time by a man, Japie Krige, who himself had suffered several misfortunes of his own. Krige helped 'Rooi' Sarel find work in Pretoria, and it was in this job that Sarel could use his powers of memory for State service: through his evidence to the authorities several Marico farmers were arrested for misrepresenting their cattle losses on their claim forms - one of whom was Japie Krige. Oupa Bekker concludes the piece with this comment:

"But there were some farmers in these parts who said that, with remarkable memory and all, there was one thing that 'Rooi' Sarel forgot. It was a pity they said, that with so many things that he was able to remember, he should have forgotten where his loyalty lay..."<sup>65</sup>

History in South Africa was in turmoil at the time at which this piece was written. The National Party government had just tabled the Separate Registration of Voters Bill which would disenfranchise the mixed race (Coloured) people. The Torch Commando consisting largely of ex-servicemen were recalling, in protest meetings and marches, the loyalties which black servicemen had shown during the Second World War to the South African and Allied cause. In The Forum of June 1951, Senator Edgar Brookes wrote: 'It is probable that South Africa has never

been so divided in all the forty one years of Union.'<sup>66</sup>

It is at this point that Bosman writes 'Feat of Memory' with its message about forgotten loyalties, about how political or economic expediencies are absolutely no grounds for forgetting the concerns of the wider public. Bosman's piece is making the point - through the seemingly innocuous and insignificant talk of his backwoods characters - that by overlooking moral considerations such as shared loyalties between people and the need to preserve these, the government of South Africa is creating a climate for the brutal betrayal of common interests. Bosman's Voorkamer characters, here and in many other of these works, act as a kind of chorus of the common people.

Written a week earlier in July 1951, 'Man to Man' describes the events in the Voorkamer when a new young police recruit arrives unexpectedly. The Voorkamer-set are a little taken aback and feign a brittle nonchalance until one of the members breaks the tension by cleverly telling the new policeman what everyone in the Marico knew, that Gysbert van Tonder (one of the present company) is the greatest cattle-smuggler in the district. Bosman continues the narrative, indicating the lawless and independent temperament of the Marico folk as well as the kind of kinship that existed between them and the Bechuana people across the national border:

Well, that gave us a good laugh, of course. We all knew that Gysbert van Tonder smuggled more cattle across the Konventie border than any other man in the Marico. What was more, we knew that Gysbert van Tonder's father had been regularly bringing in cattle over the line from Ramoutsa

before there had ever been a proper barbed-wire fence there, even. And we also knew that, in the long years of the future, when we were all dead and gone, Gysbert van Tonder's sons would still be doing the same thing. What was more, nothing would ever stop them, either. And not even if every policeman from Cape Town to the Limpopo knew about it. For the Bechuanas from whom he traded cattle felt friendly towards Gysbert van Tonder. And that was a sentiment they did not have for a border policeman, unreasonable though such an attitude might seem. Moreover, this was an outlook on life, that to a not inconsiderable degree, Gysbert van Tonder shared with the Bechuanas.<sup>67</sup>

By means of innuendos and gentle cajolery the Voorkamer members make it clear to the young policeman that respectable men like themselves want nothing to do with the police. At a later point in this exchange Oupa Bekker starts to tell a tale of the distant past about a young police recruit who had similarly been appointed to serve in the Marico. In those days this man's title was that of a veldkornet (sergeant). Oupa Bekker comments that the greatest trial which faced the new veldkornet in his job was that, friendship-loving person that he was, he was compelled to act as an informer on his neighbours, thus losing the possibility of his having friends in the district. As Oupa Bekker is on the point of continuing to the end of this tale, the communal narrator breaks in to indicate how reluctant the men in the Voorkamer were, as in the case of Flippus Biljon's story, to hear this account:

"In the end-" Oupa Bekker said.

But we had rather that Oupa Bekker had not continued to the end, which was at once stark and inexorable, pitiless and yet compelling.<sup>68</sup>

The story which does finally get taken to its sombre conclusion is that, in the end, the only true friend the veldkornet had left in the district was not one of his neighbours, but the

greatest scoundrel in the Marico - one Sass Koggel. The Voorkamer characters listen to Oupa Bekker's story 'with fluctuating degrees of attention'.<sup>69</sup> Bosman then brings the piece to an end in this way:

But Constable Bothma [the new police recruit] and Gysbert van Tonder did not listen to Oupa Bekker at all. They were too engrossed in what each had to say to the other. And while talking to Gysbert van Tonder, the cattle smuggler, it was only once necessary for the policeman, Constable Bothma, to open his notebook.

Constable Bothma opened his notebook at the back, somewhere, and extracted a photograph which he passed over to Gysbert van Tonder. Gysbert studied the likeness for some moments. "Takes after you, does he?" Gysbert van Tonder asked.

In his voice there was only sincerity.<sup>70</sup>

As in 'Feat of Memory' it is not at all difficult to see in the pattern of events and discussions taking place in Jurie Steyn's voorkamer a veiled admonition and reference to the State authorities and to the wider society. Through the Voorkamer context Bosman is posing a model where, through the authorities imposing themselves on a settled way of life (as the National Party government were doing in their drive to bring race discrimination into legal practice) and, in this piece exemplified by the age-old and continual cattle-smuggling between the white and black people, they are isolating themselves from the communities they govern - seen in this piece by the veldkornet's (and the new recruit's) alienation from his neighbours; finally, the ruling powers form an alliance with the criminal elements of the society and become tainted by this association - the veldkornet's and Constable Bothma's friendship with the two great criminals of the Marico. Bosman's piece is

a cleverly wrought political fable in which the nature of its prediction and prophecy make it, like Oupa Bekker's tale within it, 'at once stark and inexorable, pitiless and yet compelling'.

'Day of Wrath', written in January 1951, takes as its starting point At Naudé's account of a news item about a group of Protestant Christians in an overseas country who sold up their farms and joined a woman who had prophesied the end of the world to them: they had gathered together in a barn. The Voorkamer characters muse about the notion of selling up one's farm-property and moving away. Amidst the quarrels which arise between several of the Afrikaner farmers during this discussion, there emerges the fact that a number of them are considering leaving the Marico (South Africa) and trekking to what they hope will be better prospects in Rhodesia. Even the veteran of the group, Oupa Bekker, is considering a move out of the country. At Naudé then explains to them the further implications of this religious group's abandonment of their homes on hearing the woman's prophecy. Jurie Steyn, after some thought, comments:

"I wonder why they were so quick to listen to their prophet woman, the people in that foreign part...I mean, there must have been a reason, why they heeded her words and sold up so quick. After all, there was nothing that she could prophesy to them that could be half as bad as what you can read for yourself in the last few pages of the Good Book. Things like the passing of the first world in pools of fire. I have read it more than once, for myself, in a time of drought. And it has brought me a good deal of comfort, too, in a time of drought."

The group agree with Jurie Steyn that reading the final chapters of Revelation, of the Day of Wrath, has brought them a measure of comfort during drought periods. They begin to have an

inkling of what may have compelled the religious devotees overseas to have left their homes to join the prophetic woman.

At Naudé then adds:

"I think I see what you're getting at, Jurie...You get a bellyful of it, sometimes, don't you. After all, even if there isn't a drought, you do suddenly find when you take a look over your farm, including the improvements you've made on it - you do get the feeling...Revelations or no Revelations - that you've just got a bellyful".<sup>72</sup>

Bosman then brings the piece to an end in this way:

"It's funny, now, about Policansky," Gysbert van Tonder remarked. "But the last time I saw David Policansky, he told me he was looking for a buyer for his store. He wanted to trek out somewhere, right away from Bekkersdal, he said. And you know what - from the way that David Policansky spoke, it sounded almost as though he had also been reading the New Testament, for drawing comfort. He wasn't talking much different from what we're<sup>73</sup> talking now. He would sell out quite cheap, he said, too."

This is a sombre, brooding piece of short fiction, replete with veiled suggestions and innuendos. Throughout there is an uneasy atmosphere: the characters quarrel; there is talk of leaving South Africa. Bosman skillfully weaves the bit of news - about the religious group overseas - into the fabric of the voorkamer discussion, and this brings an almost apocalyptic quality to the piece. The characters' dissatisfaction with their current lot and the intention of many of them to 'up and leave' the country poses a depressing kind of prophecy of what may lie ahead for many South Africans in the troubled times which are bound to arise in their country.

Bosman's use of this prophetic, fabulous type of narrative points ahead to works by later writers, such as Barney Simon, Nadine Gordimer, Peter Wilhelm, Christopher Hope and J.M.

Coezee who have come to use settings in their prose fiction which suggest the imminent (or past) breakdown of the South African State as it is presently constituted.<sup>74</sup> Bosman's works, in fact offer a bridge between the prose writers of the earlier era, such as Olive Schreiner, W.C. Scully, Perceval Gibbon, and Pauline Smith, and these newer authors. Like many of the earlier writers mentioned Bosman used a rural South African setting in his fiction; but, unlike most of them, this locale was used as a base from which he could direct a wide-ranging critique of the society. In his short fiction there are elements of the older writers - their rusticity, for example - as well as the energy and polemical qualities found in the works of the writers of the 1950's through to those of the 1980's. Bosman's fiction stands as an index to a number of the literary possibilities which have been taken up by later English South African writers.

He was the first major South African writer in English to tackle in a sustained way - that is, throughout his prose oeuvre - the greatest social issue in South Africa, that of the relationship between the white and black peoples. Bosman's short fiction squared up to the fact that racial inequality and the gradual increase in legislation detrimental to the interests of the black people was becoming part of the country's tragic historical load, and it was unavoidably part of the South African writer's position to deal with this. Bosman's stories also indicate methods by which a writer could deal with an inescapably brutal social system. One of his main fictional

stratagems, as has been illustrated, was to treat the harsh realities in a fabular way, displacing a simple realistic response to the heated social conditions by a complex account of that world in terms of fable-like stories. In this respect, Bosman's short fiction was to act as a pointer ahead for a younger generation of writers who found themselves having to treat the unpleasant conditions of their country and being forced to seek fictional techniques which could embrace both the social issues and also give scope to the creative imaginations of the individual authors. Bosman's short fiction gave evidence of the fact that there were immensely fruitful channels open to the talented writer by which he could broach the problems of the society and continue to maintain a verve and individuality, often preserving a sense of humour, in his works. Dorothy Driver is therefore surely mistaken when she writes: 'Pauline Smith (1882 - 1959) is the most significant South African writer of the era after Olive Schreiner and before Nadine Gordimer.'<sup>75</sup> In her attempt to establish a continuum of high quality South African English writers, with a questionable exclusiveness given to women, she has left out Herman Bosman, a writer whose work certainly offers greater claims to significance than the undeniably fine, yet rather dated and subdued, fiction of Pauline Smith.

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#### VIII Bosman's Fiction and South African History

Bosman held the view that in the evolution of a nation's history

and culture the accounts of its past which would come to characterize that society would not be those of the historian or the sociologist, but rather those of the creative writer. The records of the poets would long outlive the aridities of the historian's chronicle:

...Fiction is different from history. At least, I suppose that is what an historian would maintain, ignoring, for the moment, the immortality that is in good fiction. Because, when all is said and done, it is not the dull fact, recorded in terms of historical truth, that is going to survive. If you wait long enough you will see in the end that historical fact, carefully checked up and audited by the historian, cedes place to the poet's embroidered lie.<sup>76</sup>

It is interesting in the light of these views to consider Bosman's fictional contribution to South African culture, and to recognize how many of his works bear penetrating witness to social and historical phenomena in South Africa. It is also worthwhile remarking, that within many of his short prose works his glancing references to historical incidents and phases offer some of the most perspicacious and moving records of those particular events.

Consider, for instance, the following two accounts of the South African War of 1899 - 1902. In 'The Rooinek' Schalk Lourens tells of his return home after the fighting, and the Boer defeat:

I was in the veld until they made peace. Then we laid down our rifles and went home. What I knew my farm by, was the hole under the koppie where I quarried slate stones for the threshing-floor. That was about all that remained as I left it. Everything else was gone. My home was burnt down. My lands were laid waste. My cattle and sheep slaughtered. Even the stones I had piled for the kraals were pulled down. My wife had gone to the concentration

camp and we went together to look at our old farm. My wife had gone into the concentration camp with our two children, but she came out alone. And when I saw her again and noticed the way she had changed, I knew that I, who <sup>had</sup> been all through the fighting, had not seen the Boer War.

In 'Mafeking Road', there is a similar power in his description of the Boer retreat from Mafeking. Schalk Lourens is recalling this Afrikaner defeat:

Long afterwards I spoke to an Englishman about this. He said it gave him a queer feeling to hear about the other side of the story of Mafeking. He said that there had been very great rejoicings in England when Mafeking was relieved, and it was strange to think of the other aspect of it - of a defeated country and of broken columns blundering through the dark.

I remember many things that happened on the way back from Mafeking. There was no moon. And the stars shone down fitfully on the road that was full of guns and frightened horses and desperate men. The veld throbbed with the hoofbeats of baffled commandos. The stars looked down on scenes that told sombrely of a nation's ruin; they looked on the muzzles<sup>78</sup> of Mausers that had failed the Transvaal for the first time.

It is arguable that accounts such as these, in Bosman's fiction, do, in fact, convey much of the historical essence of these events, and certainly present an evocation of historical situations which outlive any prosaic account of them by historian or social scientist.

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#### IX Bosman's Work and Rural Afrikaner Short Fiction

Bosman's use of a localized rural setting in the greater part of his short prose fiction as the basis for a searching social analysis is worth considering in relation to the use of different rural parts of South Africa in the short fiction of three later, eminent Afrikaner story writers: Abraham H. de

Vries, Hennie Aucamp, and Henriette Grové. These three writers all base many of their best, and often most characteristic works, in specific South African small-town or farm settings. As is the case in Bosman's short fiction there are discernible elements of nostalgia in the works of all of these writers, which is often counter-balanced either by satire (De Vries), self-reflexive irony (Aucamp), or a remorseless portrait of the weakness, hypocrisy or loneliness of the small-world characters (Grové).

As with Bosman, their best pieces of rural short fiction rise above the level of localized description and there are wider bounds than the particular setting being evoked in these pieces, although the ways in which each of these writers suggests the wider frame of reference differ. Certain of their works share with Bosman's a critical response to the society. De Vries's short stories have in common with Bosman's a strong strain of humour, an eye for the absurd, and a large measure of narrative playfulness - a sheer delight in the art of storytelling.

Aucamp's rural works - in particular, 'Vir Vier Stemme' ('For Four Voices') - give a sense of the grotesque which lies close to the surface of the seemingly placid lifestyle and environment. Bosman himself had referred to the 'undercurrents' in small-town or countryside life. In his essay, 'The Dorps of South Africa' (July 1945) he wrote:

And there is this other characteristic of life in a dorp [small country town]. As I have said, if you know one dorp you know them all. That quiet, that other-world peace and

tranquility, is a very deceptive thing. All that restfulness is only on the surface. Underneath, there is ferment. When something happens by which you are drawn into those strong undercurrents that constitute the real life of the dorp, and that make a macabre mockery of its superficial air of repose, then you come to a stark realization - possibly for the first time - of what tangled and gaudy and tempestuous material this substance consists that people call life.<sup>79</sup>

Aucamp pays direct tribute to Bosman's skill as a storyteller in an essay, 'Herman Charles Bosman: Teorie en Praktyk' (1972) and, obliquely, in pieces such as 'Twee Stories oor Sensuur' ('Two Stories about Censure') and 'Vir Vier Stemme' by using a backwoods narrator called Lourens.<sup>80</sup>

Grové draws from Bosman and has parallels to his short fiction in her unremitting eye for the foibles of her small-world characters. She, perhaps, more so than De Vries and Aucamp, has removed the rustic-gilt from her portraits of the rural world and, in this regard, shares Bosman's penetration of the areas of pretence, hypocrisy, and lack of vision in the society she describes.<sup>81</sup>

What is significant about Bosman's short fiction which takes the Marico-locale as its basis is precisely the fact that Bosman's works were appearing some ten to thirty years before the stories of these Afrikaner writers, and before the emergence of a critical tradition in Afrikaans short-prose fiction. Part of the explanation as to why this is so must lie both in the fact that Bosman was an English-speaking South African having immediate contacts with the views of liberal English-speakers, (he published in their journals, for instance), and because of his

own highly intelligent and astute nature.

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X Bosman's Place in Contemporary Literature and his links with Black South African Culture

Bosman's stories have close affinities with the traditions of both South African English and Afrikaans literature. In the case of the English tradition, as I have pointed out, Bosman's works have acted as a kind of bridge between the literature of an older group and a new generation of writers. As regards Afrikaans literature, his fiction rather serves as the starting point to a self-critical approach to Afrikaner history and society; here Bosman was pointing the way ahead to young Afrikaner writers who would come to question through their fiction the orthodox traditions and values which Afrikanerdom had passed down to them.

The perceptiveness in Bosman's writings carries them beyond the years in which they were written. Both within his essays and his short fiction there is an energetic quality, a kind of exploration of area which would begin to concern writers of the next three decades in South Africa. In his short fiction Bosman shares a great deal with emergent European and American story writers of that time. There is a concern with the craft of writing, which is often treated in the subject-matter of the stories: 'Splendours from Ramoutsa', 'Mafeking Road', 'Local Colour', 'The Selons-Rose', and 'Old Transvaal Story' are examples of this. There is the projection of the narrator as a

devious, playful individual, who is constantly playing with the reader's credulity: one is never quite sure when Bosman or his narrators are being serious. In short, there is a multiple layering within the fictional text which suggests the complex response to the social reality being described. If one were to think of a contemporary of Bosman's who was displaying these qualities in his fiction, then the Irish writer, Flann O'Brien, is a good example.

In his essays Bosman's statements about the need for the creation of an African consciousness and for a commitment of South Africans to the continent sound strikingly similar to utterances of black political leaders and to the writings of cultural figures such as Ezekiel Mphahlele. Consider these two examples, which could very easily be construed to be the statements of a South African black person committed to a shared community involvement in the country and continent. In an essay entitled 'Rock Paintings of the Bushman', written in 1942, Bosman turns to the notion of patriotism:

As there is a war on today, it is perhaps not inappropriate to utter a few well-chosen remarks on patriotism. When we speak of South Africa we seem to forget that we really are dealing with some part of the actual continent of Africa. Our patriotism, at its strongest, is an emotional attachment to some section or other of the inhabitants of a certain expanse of terra firma. But it is a patriotism that is little disturbed by an African consciousness. Our patriotism is hardly more native of the soil than is our culture: they are both exclusive and the part they exclude is Africa.

For this reason nearly all South African art and literature is, culturally, thin. To describe or depict Africa is not to convey her message. Similarly, our patriotism would be greatly strengthened if it were to undergo a genuinely

African orientation; if we grew to accept the fact that Africa is different, and that we are part of her wonders.<sup>82</sup>

In his essay, 'London', Bosman wrote: 'As is well known, I don't believe that there is anything that Europe can teach us. Rather do I believe that Africa has a vast amount of knowledge to impart to a cocksure, because decaying, Europe.'<sup>83</sup>

In Bosman's life and in his works there is often a fascinating kinship between this white English-speaking South African who regularly chose an Afrikaner milieu for his works and black South African culture. His essays indicate how very close Bosman's thoughts on South African society and culture are to the statements and views of black South Africans committed to an open, democratic society. I have noted the interesting parallels, perhaps purely coincidental, but nevertheless not to be ignored, between Bosman's use of the Marico and his treatment of history as a kind of moral fable with the works of two black novelists, Sol Plaatje and Peter Abrahams. It is important to consider as well how the central thrust and the content of his short fiction is towards an egalitarian society. The butt of his satire is more often than not the short-sightedness either of certain of his Afrikaner characters or of their government; and, this myopia is often intimately bound up with a failure to relate on equal and decent terms with their black countrymen. Bosman's short fiction points to the roots of the breakdown in social relations between black and white in South Africa, and in so doing suggests a way out of the terrible impasse which had been reached during the final years of his life.<sup>84</sup>

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## XI Conclusion

In the case of Herman Bosman, there was a close, if not inseparable, link between his life on the one hand, and his essays, novels, and his short fiction on the other. In this study of his short fiction there has been a deliberate blending of all of these elements. Bosman's reputation as one of South Africa's best writers is correctly made to rest, by most critical observers of his work, largely upon his short fiction. Most critical assessments of his short fiction conclude with glowing terms of praise for a masterly writer, who maintained a deftness of touch and a fine sense of humour throughout his short-prose oeuvre. This conclusion is no different. Bosman certainly is an author of the highest quality. His stories are among the very best produced in South Africa. Where this conclusion departs from the established norm is that I feel Bosman's short fiction must not simply be seen as humorous, well-wrought, and inventive products of a skilful writer, but also must be regarded as some of the finest, pioneering analyses of South African society in fictional form. Bosman's particular use of a rural setting, local forms of language, backwoods narrators, and traditional tales have worked together to create a distinctive - one is tempted to say, unique - kind of South African short fiction which has a significance and a life far beyond the years in which the stories were written. One has to recall that along with the literary excellence of Bosman's short fiction there is an underlying commitment to the country and

indeed, to the continent. His short fiction displays a concern with the overriding national issues of South Africa; issues which themselves are of major significance to the wider African society.

Herman Bosman is a particularly interesting figure in the course of South Africa literary history. He straddles the English and Afrikaans literary traditions both in his use of a particular kind of English which has close affinities with Afrikaans and with the involvement his short fiction has with the world of the Afrikaners. He also occupies a fascinating position in relation to the black South African culture. This becomes apparent not only in his statements about South African society which have marked similarities with those of black political and cultural figures, but also how he built, within his fiction, a critique of the cruel and unnecessary barriers which exist between white and black people in the country. Finally, it is worth recalling his view of South African history and how he depicted that view in his short fiction, as a kind of moral fable; and how this has affinity with the way in which certain black South African writers treat the past, both as a record of instances of humiliations and of proud resistance, as well as a means of directing one's present efforts for the creation of a better future.

The form of Bosman's short-prose works poses an interesting kind of bridge between more than one frame of reference. His use of story-forms which are so closely related to rural realism and an

evocation of the past which often appears distanced from the cut and thrust of contemporary events is beguiling. Bosman's short fiction uses traditional storytelling modes and locales - the fireside tale, for example - to make a transition from the past to the present, and often, in his most brilliant works such as 'Feat of Memory', 'Man to Man', and 'Day of Wrath', to the future.

Bosman conceived of himself neither as an author writing exclusively for English-speaking South Africans or for Afrikaners, for whites or for blacks<sup>alone</sup>; his works incorporated and were directed at the broad South African audience. During his lifetime this kind of optimistic outlook on South African society was still a viable possibility, yet in the years which have followed his death (in 1951), the notion of a unified South Africa with a homogenous South African literary audience has become more a dream than a reality. The following chapter deals with the main body of short fiction in English by white South Africans which has been written in the new troubled era already dawning towards the end of Bosman's life. I shall begin with the background of this fiction because, although elements of it existed before this period, its full import has become increasingly apparent since 1948.

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NOTES

1. Bosman, Herman C.: 'The Standard Theatre' an essay in A Cask of Jerepigo which is part of The Collected Works of Herman Charles Bosman (2 volumes), compiled by Lionel Abrahams, (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1981, Vol.2, p.440).
2. Bosman, H.C.: 'A visit to the Zoo' an essay in A Cask of Jerepigo, Collected works, Vol.2, p.439.
3. Bosman, H.C.: 'Simian Civilization' an essay in A Cask of Jerepigo, Collected Works, Vol.2, p.550.
4. Abrahams, Lionel: Foreword to the Collected Works entitled, 'Bosman's genius - the roles and the riddles', pp. 14 & 17, Vol.1. In his essay, 'The Poetry of Elizabeth Eybers' (Trek, March 1949, pp. 26 - 27), Bosman remarks: '...I can't stand anything as dull as the declaration of an obvious truth: I very much prefer a lie, even.'
5. In an essay, 'A View from Within. An Afrikaner looks at Herman Bosman', W.A. De Klerk traces how the Afrikaans language and Afrikaner history impinged on Bosman's thinking and writing. (See pp. 166 - 172.) At one point De Klerk remarks: 'What was more natural than that this man, who carried in his "collective unconscious" - the special dispositions inherited from one's ancestors - the memory of centuries of revolt, should now experience something of its pain and smart'. This essay appears in Bernard Sachs's memoir, Herman Charles Bosman As I Knew Him, (Johannesburg, Dial Press, 1974, pp. 157 - 174).
6. Bosman, H.C.: 'Aspects of South African Literature' in Herman Charles Bosman - Uncollected Essays, compiled by Valerie Rosenberg, (Cape Town, Timmins Publishers, 1981, p.99). This essay first appeared in the journal Trek, September 1948.
7. Ibid., p. 101.
8. Bosman, H.C.: Willemsdorp in The Collected Works, Vol.1, p. 552. The image of men taking up the Transvaal earth and crumbling it in their hands is poignantly used by Bosman in his story, 'Funeral Earth' (from the Unto Dust collection), where this action similarly evokes the bonds of men to the country. It is a significant point that the men who carry out this action in 'Funeral Earth' are both Boers and black tribesmen. Bosman points to what he feels is the fated kinship between Boer and black in this story; and this theme is repeated in many other stories, as I am about to demonstrate.
9. Biographical accounts of Bosman are given in: Abrahams, Lionel: Foreword to the The Collected Works, op. cit., pp.1 - 19.; Blignaut, Aegidius Jean: My Friend Herman Charles Bosman, (Johannesburg, Perskor, 1980); Sachs, Bernard: Herman Charles Bosman As I Knew Him, (Johannesburg, Dial Press, 1974); Gray, Stephen: Biographical note on H.C. Bosman in Southern African Literature: an introduction, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1979); Rosenberg, Valerie: Sunflower to the Sun, (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1976).
10. Bosman's geniality is attested to in every biographical record of his life. There are no accounts I have read which dispute this feature of the man.

11. Bosman, H.C.: 'The Home-Coming' (in the Unto Dust collection (1963) in The Collected Works, Vol.1, p. 188).
12. The essay 'Marico Revisited' appeared in South African Opinion, November 1944. It appears in A Cask of Jerepigo (The Collected Works, Vol.2, pp. 524 - 527).
13. See the following essays, in particular, which indicate Bosman's partiality to Shakespeare and the early American prose writers: 'Innocents Abroad', 'Humour and Wit', and 'Stephen Leacock' (in A Cask of Jerepigo in The Collected Works, Vol.2, pp. 520 - 523, 589 - 592, 593 - 594, respectively), 'The Genius of Shakespeare' and 'Edgar Allan Poe' (in the Uncollected Essays volume, op. cit.)
14. Bosman, H.C.: 'The Genius of Shakespeare' (from South African Opinion, September 1945, in Uncollected Essays, p.86).
15. Hutchings, Geoffrey: 'Herman Charles Bosman: short stories' (in Perspectives on South African Fiction, Sarah Christie, Geoffrey Hutchings, and Don MacLennan (Johannesburg, Ad Donker, 1980, p. 85). Also, see Hutchings's article: 'A Master of Gossip. A note on Herman Bosman' (in the London Magazine Vol.10, No.9, December 1970, pp. 44 - 51).  
In this quotation from Hutchings's essay on Bosman his notions of 'literature preceding the act of yarn-telling is suspect, as is his cavalier statement about 'a class-conscious literature like that of England' suppressing the yarn-tradition. Nevertheless, there is much of value in the parallels he draws between Bosman's use of the yarn and that in the early American prose tradition. His description of 'the great cultural cauldron of the United States' comprised of different national groups parallels, though demographically on a smaller scale, the mélange of different ethnic communities and cultures in South Africa.
16. I am indebted to Stephen Gray's Introduction to his Selected Stories edition of Bosman's work, (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1980), for much of the information discussed in the last page. See, Gray's Introduction, pp. 9 - 10.
17. In 1980, Ad. Donker, Johannesburg, published a selection of many of the earlier and a few more recent Ruiter stories under the title, Dead End Road.
18. Blignaut's 'Campfires' is reprinted in the Dead End Road collection of 1980.
19. Bosman, H.C.: Preface to the collection The Hottentot's God by Blignaut (1931); reprinted in Dead End Road(1980), pp. 105 - 106.
20. It is interesting that these five young men - Plomer, Campbell, Van der Post, Bosman, and Blignaut - chose Afrikaans titles for their two literary journals suggesting the kinship they felt as English-speaking South Africans with Afrikaner-South Africa. See, the chapter 'The Custody of History - The Touleier' in My Friend Herman Charles Bosman by Blignaut, for a first-hand account of the life and times of these endeavours op. cit., pp. 22 - 32.

21. Nkosi, Lewis: 'Herman Charles Bosman: In Search of the True Afrikaners!' (South African Authors (No. 3), South Africa: Information and Analysis Paris, International Association of Cultural Freedom, September 1969, p. 1).

22. Blignaut, A. Jean: My Friend Herman Charles Bosman, op. cit., p. 41.

23. Bosman, H.C.: 'Edgar Allan Poe' (in the journal Trek, February 1948, and this essay appears in the Uncollected Essays, p. 97).

There is an interesting verbal parallel - and one rich in significance - between Bosman's question - 'Are we going to write English or are we going to write South African?' - and an expression of Richard Rive's, in the preface to his autobiography, Writing Black of 1981. Rive observes there: 'The title Writing Black is deliberately chosen in order to focus attention on my experiences as a South African who is still voteless because of the colour of my skin. I look forward to the day when it will not be necessary for writing in my country to be tied to ethnic labels, when the only criteria will be writing well and writing South African.' The difference between these two statements - which were made, one at the point of South Africa's overt commitment to apartheid policies and the other, thirty three years later in the grim history of that State policy, indicate precisely how social divisions have altered the entire cultural map of South Africa, and how South African culture must now be viewed in terms of this social breakdown.

24. Ibid., pp. 97 -98.

25. Bosman, H.C. 'Profile: Sarel Marais' (in Trek, October 1947, p. 17).

26. Bosman, H.C.: 'An Indigenous South African Culture is Unfolding' (in South African Opinion, April 1944, p. 17. This passage is also quoted in Valerie Rosenberg's Sunflower to the Sun, op. cit., p. 168).

27. Bosman, H.C.: 'The Old Afrikaans Writers I' (in South African Opinion, January 1946, Vol.2 No. 11, p. 18).

28. Bosman, H.C. 'S.A. Novel Competition' (in South African Opinion, July 1946, Vol.3 No. 5, p. 26).

Also, see Bosman's essay 'The South African Short Story Writer', (Trek, October 1948, pp. 24 - 25), in which he strongly makes the case for an annual publication of the best new South African stories; this, in order to encourage South African short story writers.

29. Gray, Stephen: 'Bosman's Marico Allegory: a study in topicality' (in English Studies in Africa, Vol. 20, No. 2 1977, p. 83). Doris Lessing, it must be indicated, was already in exile when her first published works appeared in Britain.

30. Although Anthony Blond of London published the Unto Dust collection in 1963, and this received favourable reviews, as for example David Wright's review in the London Magazine of July of that year, neither this collection nor any other has been issued since then in England.

31. Bosman, H.C.: 'Splendours from Ramoutsa' (from Mafeking Road (1947) in The Collected Works, Vol. 1, pp. 138 - 139).

32. Bosman, H.C.: 'Local Colour' (from Selected Stories (ed. Gray) in The Collected Works, Vol. 2, p. 379). 'Local Colour', a Voorkamer piece, appeared in The Forum in May 1950.

33. See Bosman's own carefully noted points about the Marico history in his two essays, 'Marico Revisited' and 'Reminiscences' (in A Cask of Jerepigo, The Collected Works, Vol. 2, pp. 524 - 532.).

34. Couzens, Tim: Introduction to Mhudi - An Epic of South African Native Life a Hundred Years Ago by Sol T. Plaatje, (Johannesburg, Quagga Press, 1975, p. 14).

See, Mzilikazi's prophetic fable in this novel, pp. 153 - 154.

It is perhaps not insignificant to note that both Plaatje and Bosman shared an enormous admiration for Shakespeare, and to remark that Shakespeare's own use of history in his dramas was often closely related to a moral purpose. Plaatje translated five of Shakespeare's plays into Sechuana.

35. See Gray's paper, 'Bosman's Marico Allegory', loc. cit., pp. 87 and 93.

36. Nkosi: op. cit., p. 2. In a similar vein, Geoffrey Hutchings writes of Bosman's Marico short fiction: 'It would be a mistake to see this as an attempt at a comprehensive portrait. It remains very closely bound to a small particular group in a particular place. The farmers of the Groot Marico are a part of Afrikanerdom. And Bosman has made a valuable contribution to our understanding of that part.' Hutchings goes on to refer to Bosman's 'intense regionalism'. (See his article in the London Magazine, loc.cit., p. 45).

37. Plomer, William: Foreword to Bosman's Unto Dust collection (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1963, p.xi).

Here is David Wright's commentary on Bosman's short fiction from his article, 'A South African Zoschenko' (London Magazine, July 1963, p. 80):

'It is in his Marico stories that Bosman, focusing upon a small pastoral community of farmers all but hermetically sealed off in their corner of the Transvaal backveld, succeeds in recording and creating an imaginatively valid world - local, remote, yet universal.'

38. Gray, Stephen: Introduction to the Selected Stories volume, loc. cit., p. 13.

39. Hugo, Leon: Foreword to Blignaut's My Friend Herman Charles Bosman, p. 12. On this crucial issue of Bosman's use of the Marico, Lionel Abrahams writes in his Foreword to The Collected Works, (Vol. 1, pp. 10 - 11):

It is fair to say that however convincingly Schalk Lourens' Groot Marico and the rest of his world looks and sounds and smells like the actual platteland, it is in fact substantially a geographical phantom, an aesthetic invention. The regionalism, the realism of these stories is only apparent, a cloak, a sort of ectoplasm to render visible a population of creatures whose native home is the author's imagination, whose real raw material is his entire

experience and perception both of the specific truths of South Africa and of what he liked to call "the eternal verities".

40. It is worth pointing out here that in my conversation in July 1983 with Jean Blignaut - Bosman's great friend and colleague - he (Blignaut) was in entire agreement that Bosman's use of the Marico was far more complex than a realistic description of the Transvaal backwaters. I shall quote several of our exchanges on this point:

Question: It seems to me that the world Bosman was portraying was not meant to be a carbon-copy of the Marico world he saw.

Blignaut's answer: Of course it wasn't. I have often said that...The Marico was a literary technique for Bosman whereby he could recreate a scene familiar to his readers in story after story. It was a literary device, nothing else.

Question: Do you think it could be argued that, in a sense, Bosman's Marico - if you like, even the Marico in Bosman's mind - was a fictional world in miniature which reflected far wider issues in South Africa?

Blignaut's answer: Yes, I think so. That's just about what it was.

Blignaut made the point that Bosman's stories were entirely his invention: 'Bosman had so many plots, he didn't know what to do with them all...As my Ruiter stories were entirely my invention, so were Bosman's stories his own invention.'

41. Nkosi: op. cit., p. 7

42. Bosman, H.C.: 'Makapan's Caves' (from Mafeking Road in The Collected Works, Vol. 1, p. 62).

43. Ibid., p. 64.

44. Ibid., p. 63.

45. Bosman, H.C.: 'Sold Down the River' (from Unto Dust in The Collected Works, Vol. 1, p. 247).

46. Ibid., p. 248.

47. Quoted from a letter by Gordon Vorster which appears in Rosenberg's Sunflower to the Sun, op. cit., p. 229.

48. See, Stephen Gray's seminal paper, 'Bosman's Marico Allegory: a study in topicality', loc. cit.

49. As in 'Makapan's Caves' much of the dark satire in 'Unto Dust' turns about the folly of people who see skin colour as a means for social discrimination.

50. Bosman, H.C.: 'Unto Dust' (from Unto Dust in The Collected Works, Vol. 1, p. 146).

51. Bosman, H.C.: 'Birth Certificate' (from A Bekkersdal Marathon in The Collected Works, Vol. 2, p. 168).

52. See, for instance, the subject of Mphahlele's story 'A Point of Identity' soon to be discussed in this chapter.

While I was drafting this chapter, during July 1983, there were reports both in South Africa and internationally of an incident in South Africa which illustrates the horrifying and brutal nature of the country's race classification system. An abandoned baby girl was found in a deserted lot in Pretoria: in order for

the infant to be able to be adopted or placed in an institution for child welfare the authorities felt it necessary to determine, at the outset, the baby's race - in South African terms, white, coloured, or black. A variety of 'race-determining test' such as hair examinations were carried out, and the girl was deemed to be coloured. See the Rand Daily Mail, The Star, The Guardian, and The Times for 25 - 27th July, 1983. Sadly, the observations and criticisms Bosman were making in 1950 have reference over three decades later.

53. 'Birth Certificate', op. cit., p. 171.

54. 'A Point of Identity' appears in Mphahlele's story collection In Corner D, (Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1967). This story is fully discussed in the chapter about black fiction on pp. 454 -459, of this study.

55. 'Birth Certificate', op. cit., p. 170.

56. Bosman, H.C.: 'Dying Race' (from A Bekkersdal Marathon in The Collected Works, Vol. 2, p. 247).

57. Bosman, H.C.: 'Jim Fish' (from Selected Stories in The Collected Works, Vol. 2, p. 406).

58. Bosman, H.C.: Willemsdorp (first published by Human & Rousseau in 1977. The Collected Works, Vol. 1, p. 490).

59. Bosman, H.C.: 'A Visit to the Zoo' (an essay in A Cask of Jerepigo, The Collected Works, Vol. 2, pp. 438 - 439).

60. Bosman, H.C.: 'Simian Civilization' (an essay in A Cask of Jerepigo, The Collected Works, Vol. 2, pp. 548 - 549).

61. 'Birth Certificate', op. cit., pp. 171 - 172.

62. Bosman, H.C.: 'Feat of Memory' (from A Bekkersdal Marathon in The Collected Works. Vol. 2, pp. 210 - 211).

63. Ibid., p. 211.

64. Ibid., p. 213.

65. Ibid., p. 214.

66. Brookes, Edgar: 'Diary of a Liberal' in The Forum, June 15th, 1951.

67. Bosman, H.C.: 'Man to Man' (from A Bekkersdal Marathon in The Collected Works, Vol. 2, p. 217).

68. Ibid., p. 219.

69. Ibid., p. 219.

70. Ibid., p. 220.

71. Bosman, 'Day of Wrath' (from Jurie Steyn's Post Office in The Collected Works, Vol. 2, p. 363).

72. Ibid., p. 363.

73. Ibid., p. 363.

74. See, for example, Barney Simon's two stories 'The Fourth Day of Christmas' and 'Our War' in Jo'burg Sis (1974); Gordimer's novel July's People (1981); Peter Wilhelm's story collections LM (1975) and at the End of the War (1981); Christopher Hope's 'Learning to Fly: an African Fairy Tale' in Private Parts (1981); J.M. Coetzee's prose works, Dusklands (1974), In the Heart of the Country (1976), Waiting for the Barbarians (1980), and Life and Times of Michael K. (1983).

For an interesting parallel to 'Day of Wrath' in Bosman's oeuvre, see the much earlier Schalk Lourens story of 1937, 'On to Freedom'. In this explicitly political piece where a young

Afrikaner espouses the rights of black people, Bosman uses the notion of trekking away from one's home or a given situation to very humorous effect in his commentary upon the Afrikaner characters and their social outlooks. This piece, 'On to Freedom', opens the volume entitled, Herman Charles Bosman - Almost Forgotten Stories, compiled by Valerie Rosenberg, (Cape Town, Howard Timmins Publishers, 1979).

75. Driver, Dorothy: 'Pauline Smith: a quiet voice' (in the Times Literary Supplement, September 16th 1983, p. 997).

76. Bosman, H.C.: 'Ghosts' (an essay from A Cask of Jerepigo, Collected Works, Vol. 2, p. 452).

77. Bosman, H.C.: 'The Rooinek' (from Mafeking Road in The Collected Works, Vol. 1, pp. 124 - 125).

78. Bosman, H.C.: 'Mafeking Road' (from Mafeking Road in The Collected Works, Vol. 1, p. 53).

79. Bosman, H.C.: 'The Dorps of South Africa' (an essay from South African Opinion, July, 1945, in Uncollected Essays, pp. 83 - 84).

80. Aucamp, Hennie: 'Herman Charles Bosman: teorie en praktyk' (in Contrast, October 1972). This essay reappears in a selection of Aucamp's essays entitled, Kort Voor Lank, (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1978, pp. 79 - 91).

Aucamp's two stories referred to here, 'Twee stories oor die sensuur' and 'Vir Vier Stemme' appear in his collection of 1981, Volmink, (Cape Town, Tafelberg).

81. For much fuller characterizations of the short prose of Aucamp, De Vries, and Grové, see the chapter on Afrikaans short fiction in this study.

82. Bosman, H.C.: 'Rock Paintings of the Bushman' appears in Uncollected Essays, loc. cit., pp. 38 - 39.

83. Bosman, H.C.: 'London' (an essay in A Cask of Jerepigo in The Collected Works, Vol. 2, p. 496).

84. It is perhaps worth noting several other incidents in Bosman's life which suggest the kind of kinship he felt for the black South African people, and which I am arguing is not an insignificant factor in the assessment of his oeuvre. Bosman and Blignaut published their first stories and poems of the 1930's under the masthead, African Publications. They changed the name of their literary journal, The Touleier to The African Magazine in an attempt to revive it. They established for a short time a cultural club for young black people in one of Johannesburg's slums, called The Blackchat Club. In his poem 'Africa', Bosman draws a kinship between himself and a leading figure of black resistance of the early nineteenth century, Makana. He writes: 'Of Makana, my brother, I sing/ Of Makana, my brother ...My eyes are darker since my brother died...' ['Africa' from Poems from Mara in The Collected Works, Vol. 1, p. 721.] [Makana was a Xhosa tribesman who early in the nineteenth century (1817 - 1820) offered spirited resistance to Boer and English encroachment on tribal lands. He was imprisoned by the British, as a political prisoner on Robben Island, and drowned while attempting to swim back to his country on the mainland. Makana has become an emblem

of black resistance. See, for example, Mtutuzeli Matshoba's story 'A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makkkana' in Call Me Not a Man, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1979.)

The nickname Bosman's mother gave to him was 'kaffertjie'.

[Many of the references made in this note are drawn from observations made by Blignaut in his memoir of Bosman, My Friend Herman Charles Bosman.]

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## B - White Short Fiction in English since 1948

### I Introduction

White English-speaking people in South Africa are a minority group within the white population of the country: they are therefore 'a minority within a minority'.<sup>1</sup> The period since the fall of the Smuts government in 1948 has seen the rapid political marginalization of the white English-speaking community. Caught between the growth and success of Afrikaner nationalism, on the one hand, and the emergent forces of African nationalism on the other, this community has found itself in a strange and unenviable position.<sup>2</sup> Because of linguistic and cultural differences between the Afrikaner and English-speaking people in South Africa, the latter have found it difficult to identify with Afrikaner nationalism, although a large proportion of them have eventually thrown in their lot with this movement.

By contrast, association and identification with African nationalism has been made increasingly difficult for white English-speaking South Africans during the past four decades. The reasons for this are twofold: the most immediate cause has been the legislation of the 1950's and 1960's proscribing any form of intimate social or political liaison between white and black people; and the inexorable process stemming from this has seen the African nationalist movement becoming ever more alienated from white people in the country. English-speaking white South Africans are legally and socially delimited from any form of serious political and social relationship with black

South Africans, as well as being distinct and largely cut off from the Afrikaner community. They find themselves in a relatively insignificant position vis-a-vis the forces directing historical change in South Africa. However, like their fellow whites, the Afrikaners, there is a distinct sense that this community experiences what one of Nadine Gordimer's characters called 'the loneliness of a powerful minority'.<sup>3</sup>

For white English writers being part of this displaced and in many ways marginal community has a number of consequences for their fiction. Because of the circumstances of their social group, occupying an externalized position to the historical clash between Afrikaner and African nationalism, these writers are perforce onlookers of their society not only in the conventional sense of the writer being a type of outsider in his own world, but doubly so as this is precisely the situation of his entire community. Thus, white English writers are in the "fortunate" position, which nevertheless on occasion is felt by them to be an encumbrance, of being so displaced from the cut and thrust of change in their country that they are left free to range widely in their choice of characters and situations from the larger communities around them. One could, however, argue that Afrikaner or black writers are in the same position; but, this is not precisely so. There is an important difference in the case of the leading white English writers, who are without exception of liberal persuasion, and have a kinship both to the Afrikaners and to the black people which is not so for their

counterparts in each of the other communities. The white English writers share the destiny of the Afrikaners simply because of their common race (white), and at the same time feel a powerful bond with the aspirations of their fellow black countrymen. In short, these white writers have shared sympathies with both camps while conversely, this cannot be said to be so for the Afrikaner or black writers. However, to be quite accurate, there are a small number of Afrikaner writers, especially younger writers of the 1970's and 1980's, who share with liberal white English writers a sympathy for black people in the country. Yet, for the Afrikaner writers, their central concern remains the fate of their own community; while, for the white English writers, affairs in the Afrikaner and black communities exercise a greater influence both over their lives and fiction than those in their own displaced group can possibly do. As a result of this, by far the greater number of works by white English writers deal variously with the interaction of black and white people, the follies of apartheid, or the lives of black people, instead of with the particular difficulties of white English people; although one could argue that this, in the narrowest sense, is their special preserve.

There is a wide range of characters and situations drawn from virtually all of the South African communities in the short fiction of these writers. Indeed, it is not at all uncommon to find a single writer describing black, white English-speaking and Afrikaner people in a broad diversity of settings in a

single collection of stories; a phenomenon admittedly not unique to the white English writers but, I would suggest, one which characterizes their fiction and distinguishes it from the generally more confined focus one finds in works by black and Afrikaner writers which essentially tend to deal with concerns specifically affecting their particular communities. Not being able to identify and associate closely either with Afrikaner or African nationalism has afforded the white English writers a rare and difficult freedom. This, in essence, is the central concern of this chapter.

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## II Apartheid and the Contacts between Black and White People.

It is not surprising to find that one of the major subjects in short stories by white English-speaking writers, and one which is shared in works by black and Afrikaner authors, is the nature of the contact between black and white people; and this taking place in a diverse number of ways, with a variety of implications and results for those involved. Further, many of these stories by white English writers bear witness to the liberal concerns of their authors in trying to show how the barriers which have been set between people of different colour both mask and betray their common humanity. There is a tension in these works between an ideal where people of different colour could possibly feel equal to one another and the crushing and inescapable awareness that the reality in South Africa stands squarely in the way of this taking place. It is from this

unresolved tension that much of the sadness in these stories arises.

Alan Paton's 'A Drink in the Passage' deals with this kind of sadness.<sup>4</sup> Here a black and white man are fleetingly brought together out of their mutual love of art and beauty. The Afrikaner Van Rensburg is admiring a sculpture by the black man Simelane, which is being displayed in a city shop-window. There these men meet and Van Rensburg expresses his admiration of the work and invites Simelane, who never reveals that he is the sculptor of the piece, to share a drink with him. Because of the prohibition against black and white people drinking together in public, Van Rensburg invites his companion to his flat. They drink together; yet Paton suggests the marginality of the contact between black and white people by describing how their drink is taken, not at leisure in the white man's flat, but hastily in the passage outside. This image of two sensitive men, one black and the other white, forced by social mores to share a drink in a cold passageway suggests the extent to which ordinary and decent relations between black and white people have been diminished.

'A Drink in the Passage' is one of those rare South African stories where black and white characters treat one another with respect, indeed, with admiration. Interestingly, in other works which describe similar incidents the chief characters are invariably on the margins of society; in Bartho Smit's story 'Ek vat my land' ('I seize my land'), as in Paton's story, the black

and white characters are art-lovers, a child and a servant in Athol Fugard's play Master Harold and the Boys, children in Peter Wilhelm's story 'Seth 'n Sam', radical students in Lewis Nkosi's play Rhythm of Violence, and the poor in Alex La Guma's 'A Matter of Taste'.<sup>5</sup> In each case the relationship between the characters of different colour is short-lived.

Paton often intrudes passages of moral sentiment within his fiction and 'A Drink in the Passage' is no exception. As in many of his stories about the black children at Diepkloof reformatory he reserves moral judgement until the concluding passages of the work.<sup>6</sup> In the reformatory stories this moral and social stock-taking is appropriately left to the works' narrator, the principal of the institution, who reflects upon the distressing nature of the incidents that have overtaken one or more of his young charges. Similarly, in 'A Drink in the Passage', it is late in the story when Simelane, who is relating the incident which took place between him and Van Rensburg, lapses into a moment of meditation which carries within it much of the author's own voice and views. Van Rensburg comments wistfully to Simlane, "You know about our land being beautiful?", and the black man then reflects:

Yes, I knew what he meant, and I knew for God's sake he wanted to touch me too and couldn't; for his eyes had been blinded by years in the dark. And I thought it was a pity, for if men never touch each other, they'll hurt each other one day. And it was a pity he was blind, and couldn't touch me, for black men don't touch white men any more; only by accident, when they make something like [the sculpture] 'Mother and Child'.

There is much that is accurate in Simelane's observation here. However, as the narrator sets out to judge the situation his diction becomes inflated and a note of ponderousness, even sententiousness is permitted to enter the story.<sup>8</sup> On two occasions in this passage Simelane stresses his feeling of pity for his white companion and when he continues to refer to this man as being blind, a patronizing tone which is out of tune with the rest of the story is allowed to intrude. However, the image of people not being able to touch one another is most successful, in that it stems directly from the dramatic context of the story where Simelane and Van Rensburg find themselves barred by circumstances and social custom from actually touching one another whether out of affection or fellow-feeling. One can compare this most usefully with similar moments in two stories by Dan Jacobson, 'The Box' and 'The Zulu and the Zeide'.<sup>9</sup> Here too, Jacobson is exploring some of the implications arising out of the tenuous contact between black and white people, and in 'The Zulu and the Zeide', most compellingly, between members of the same family as well.

The central incident in 'The Box' is the occasion when a young white boy pulls apart the handiwork which the family's black servant had painstakingly made for him; the black man's pigeon-box is quite useless for the young boy's purpose of breeding his birds. To the white boy's genuine surprise the black man, Jan, begins to cry after what appears to him to be his young charge's wilful and ungrateful act of destruction. At

this point, Jacobson allows his narrator, who is simply the young boy grown up, to reflect upon the black man's behaviour and how totally unexpected it was for him:

I couldn't understand his grief, it was beyond my understanding... I suppose my attitude could be verbalized into a wonder: I didn't know that they felt like that. And they were all the coloured and African people that I passed everyday and took for granted. They were a strange twilight people to me; I liked some and was afraid of others, but they were beyond an uncrossable barrier, even when we played with them or listened to them talking. And the barrier was simply that they didn't feel. They had emotions; I had seen them angry or laughing or subdued under a white man's curses. But somehow they weren't real emotions; my emotions; they were black emotions, different from my own. But now Jan [the black man] had crossed the barrier. He was crying as I might cry. There was no difference between us at all. He was human, and he was crying.

As in Simelane's reflection there is a great deal of social acuity in this passage from Jacobson's story. Again, like that moment in Paton's story there is an element of condescension in the way Jacobson's narrator treats members of the other coloured group. Yet I would suggest that this is more palatable in 'The Box' than in Paton's story simply because the dramatic context of the story, a man recounting his sensations and experiences as a child, permits the kind of condescension that a white child in such a situation might feel. In short, one has little sense in this passage in Jacobson's story, as one certainly might in 'A Drink in the Passage', of the author interposing his own views into the course of the work. And if one argues that these reflections are indeed none other than Jacobson's then these are at least entirely subsumed and contained within the dramatic context of the story and offer no break in its flow.

Immediately after this passage the narrator returns directly to the upsetting moments surrounding this incident: "Stop crying, Jan. You can make another box." But I could not touch him, I could not put my arm around him. He was still black'.<sup>11</sup> Jacobson observes here how this white child deflects blame for the black man's grief away from his own responsibility to the object itself, the box. Moreover, as in Paton's story, the two characters are unable to comfort one another and share their emotions by touching or embracing one another precisely because they are of a different colour. As the white child observes: 'He was still black'.

The issue of people being able to touch one another or not is also of central significance within the dramatic context of 'The Zulu and the Zeide'. In this story, however, Jacobson offers a startling variation on this theme. Here it is not a white and a black person who find themselves unable to touch one another, which as in 'A Drink in the Passage' and 'The Box' is of course a metaphor for people not being able to understand each other's feelings and thoughts, but two white men - a father and a son - who fail to establish this basic human contact. Where the black man Paulus and the old Jewish man, the zeide, succeed in drawing close to one another despite the racial taboos of the country, the old man's son Harry Grossman fails to achieve this in his relationship with his father. Indeed, it is precisely the issue of human contact that serves as the touchstone for the story's climax.

Harry Grossman finds the duty of controlling his father's eccentric and itinerant habits irksome. In an attempt to avoid the difficulties which arise out of this old Lithuanian man short-sightedly wandering the streets of the city alone, Harry engages a newly arrived Zulu migrant, Paulus, to take charge of his father. To Harry's surprise this arrangement works marvellously well and soon the old man who speaks only Yiddish and the young Zulu migrant have become inseparable. As in Paton's 'A Drink in the Passage' and the various other examples I cited earlier of white and black characters forming bonds between one another, the Zulu and the zeide are in obvious ways people on the fringes of South African society: the white man who has failed indeed, steadfastly refused to adjust to his new community and the black man who is striving to learn the ways of his new urban environs. Both men are outsiders in their world and it is perhaps because of this that the taboos barring white and black people from drawing close to one another fail to have an effect on them.

Unlike the course of events in 'A Drink in the Passage' and 'The Box', however, Jacobson does not check his story at this point but involves a third party in the relationship of the two characters: namely Harry Grossman. As the bond between the zeide and Paulus develops, Harry feels a compounded sense both of guilt about the way in which he has treated his father and of frustration at his growing exclusion from contact with him. The story's climax is reached when the old man repudiates Harry in

favour of the more gentle and patient black man. Jacobson poses a startling contrast between the scene where Paulus bathes the old man with tenderness and care, and the later episode where Harry's failure to repair the breach between himself and his father is described precisely in terms of their being unable to touch one another. The zeide weeps across the room from his son and a moment earlier when Harry calls out to him, Jacobson records: "'Please," Harry said. He threw out his arms towards his father, but the gesture was abrupt, almost as though he were thrusting his father from him.'<sup>12</sup>

'The Zulu and the Zeide' describes two worlds: that of the wealthy white people of the city and that of the poor black people who are compelled to serve white masters. This is a common subject in some of the country's best stories. The linked yet separate worlds of white masters and black servants, which in essence is of the very nature of South African society, also features prominently in Nadine Gordimer's stories 'Happy Event' and 'Something for the time being', Es'kia Mphahlele's novella 'Mrs. Plum', and Elsa Joubert's Afrikaans story 'Agterplaas' ('Back-yard').<sup>13</sup> Jacobson's story, however, goes somewhat further than these works in that there is an explicit parallel drawn between the place of white and black people in the city. Where, for instance, Gordimer's 'Happy Event' and Mphahlele's 'Mrs. Plum' contrast the way in which people behave when rich (the whites) and poor (the blacks), 'The Zulu and the Zeide' also indicates that both parties are not dissimilar from

one another in their being migrants to the city in search of the same goal - material success. Both the Grossman family's and Paulus's and his fellow black servants' story is one of 'rags to riches', although, of course, the level of their successes are on a vastly different scale from one another. Nevertheless, the parallel and the events of the story offer a solemn warning to the younger generation of black urban migrants. The journey to the city and the pursuit of gain, as in the case of the Grossman family, can prove disastrous in human terms. However, Jacobson is careful to indicate in the story that there is in the cities an existing system of kinship and support among the black serving classes, which itself is more fully the subject of Mphahlele's 'Mrs. Plum' and Joubert's 'Agterplaas'.

The implications of people not being able to draw close to one another, whether they are white or black, are spelled out most clearly in 'A Drink in the Passage' and 'The Zulu and the Zeide'. The outcome of such a situation, which of course typifies the relationship between black and white people in South Africa, is pain and sorrow for one or both of the parties involved. In 'A Drink in the Passage' we recall the phrase, 'for if men never touch each other, they'll hurt each other one day'; and in 'The Zulu and the Ziede', Harry Grossman, in losing virtually all contact with his father, also loses the comfort and satisfaction of such a relationship, and the old man's death is the sad and dramatic fulfillment of this lack. In this respect both of these stories form part of that strain of

admonishing and prophetic works which as we shall see later in this and in subsequent chapters are so common as to comprise a kind of sub-genre within South African fiction.

If these stories stress the fragility and tenuousness of contact between black and white people in South Africa and the hurt stemming from such an arrangement, then there are also works which explore the ways in which white people have become dependent upon the black people about them. Indeed, in 'The Zulu and the Zeide', an old white man comes to depend almost entirely on a black man-servant, the black man becoming his closest companion in life. So too, in E.M. Macphail's 'Modus Vivendi', the white woman Louisa, as she grows older, discovers that she is slowly but surely losing contact with children who marry and leave home, her husband who spends the greater part of his life away from her, and even with her white friends.<sup>14</sup> All the while she has formed a strong and close bond with her black servant, Charlie. As old-age, loneliness, and disability come upon Louisa the only stable relationship in her life is that with the black man. Yet, as in 'The Zulu and the Zeide', the fact that this man is only a servant and can never truly be a friend and equal contributes to the pathetic sadness of the white character's death. It is one of the central ironies of these two stories by Jacobson and Macphail that it is on the servant's afternoon off work that their white charges die, members of their own families being oblivious to the kind of care and attention needed by their own flesh-and-blood. The sad

outcome of events in these stories is shown to derive fairly directly from deficiencies within the way white people treat one another.<sup>15</sup>

In another of E.M. Macphail's stories, 'Pregnancy', she humorously traces the dependency of white people on black people by describing, through the conversations of a white woman and her black servant, the way in which a series of white households come to rely heavily on the black servants who do nothing less than keep these white homes from falling into wrack and ruin.<sup>16</sup> In this process the black serving class are swift to suit their own needs as well, albeit on a very modest scale. Mphahlele's 'Mrs. Plum', however, is the major South African story to develop these observations which are lightly touched on here in Macphail's work. With Mphahlele's work, 'Pregnancy' is one of the rare stories describing the curious kind of language white women (especially) use in their dealings with black servants. Where Mphahlele's central concern is the paternalism couched in his white character's speech, Macphail turns particularly to the way the white narrator adopts her servant's manner of speaking. Here, for instance, is the narrator's account of her servant's weekly work-rota and family which is made up almost entirely of the black woman's idiosyncratic coinages:

Josephina comes to me on Tuesdays. She works for My-Baas-Old-Wife-Dead, New Wife and son Klein Basie on Wednesday and Thursday. On Fridays she goes to Roland and Girlfriend-for-Roland and the only day she can spare Little-Missis-So-High and Child is Monday. Josephina has

five children. They are First Born, Jakob, Two Girls and Last Born.

'Pregnancy' is rare among South African stories in suggesting the way white people are drawn not only into the field of experience of their black servants (of which there are many examples), but also into the ways in which black people use language. In this case, however, the white narrator seems attuned to the ways in which her black servant's language contains some of her ironic views of her employers and how she uses this type of speech as a collaborative act of social satire. In 'Mrs. Plum', however, the rather more typical white characters are scarcely able to discern irony and veiled criticism in the language of their servants, mainly because they regard these semi-literate black people as having little in the way of intellect.

One of the most characteristic responses of white South Africans to their black countrymen is that of fear. Whatever else black people represent, and are compelled to do by way of maintaining high living standards for white people, they are, in the final analysis, feared by most white South Africans. The grounds for this fear are complex and lie within the historical consciousness of white settlers who have displaced and continue to displace people whose skins are darker than their own. It is a theme treated especially well in Jan Rabie's Afrikaans story 'Droogte'.<sup>18</sup>

Among the white writers in English, Barney Simon has a number of stories dealing with white characters of the

lower and lower-middle classes. Many of these stories take the form of dramatic monologues in which lower class white characters offer self-confessional accounts of one or other parts of their lives. Interestingly, the insecurity of the characters is a recurrent theme in these monologues which often figures in their fear of black people. In 'Miss South Africa (6)', for instance, the character's breakdown at the end of the piece is triggered by suggestions that she might be compelled, in her career as a beauty queen, to live with black people overseas on equal terms.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in 'Monologue for Vanessa', the speaker lives in fear in her city apartment in Johannesburg.<sup>20</sup> The presence of black people preys upon her continually: within her block of flats black women are raped, black women are having clandestine sexual liaisons with white men, and in the wider society black strikers are shot dead on the mines, and violence from Soweto is imminent. Her whole life is permeated by the violence of the society. Even her apartment becomes easy prey to the black man who services the block of flats. She says of him:

Phineas, whose life frightens me more than anybody I know, has a key to my flat. He uses my bath and my deodorant. Once I came home early and met him leaving my flat with a woman. He is not afraid to take what he wants. I am grateful that he does not choose to take too much and that he does not choose to harm me...<sup>21</sup>

This passage looks forward to two of Simon's most ambitious works 'The Fourth Day of Christmas' and 'Our War' in which order has broken down in South Africa and bands of looters roam the streets unchecked.<sup>22</sup> A theme in white South African writing which starts out simply as the racial fear of black people

becomes, in stories from the late 1960's onwards, the legitimate prediction of a society in which violence is rampant and in which the racial identity of the antagonists is immaterial in circumstances of widespread chaos.

The kind of violence which stems specifically from the truncation of contact between white and black people, however, is the central theme of Macphail's compact story 'Chasm'.<sup>23</sup> It deals with the rape of a young British woman, Elizabeth Ross, by a black man who is merely called Izak. The white woman, unfamiliar with accepted codes of South African behaviour in which white people treat black people with a healthy measure of contempt, offers assistance to Izak after he has injured his hand during building activities at her home. Soon after treating his injury, a process which continues for several days, Elizabeth is raped by Izak. When asked about the circumstances of the rape by the judge at his trial Izak replies simply: "It was the fault of the white woman. She encouraged me. She made overtures to me. She took my hand in her hand. She played with my fingers. She wanted me."<sup>24</sup>

The implications of this fairly bald story are straightforward. Like the encounter of the young white woman and the black man in Gordimer's story 'Is there nowhere else where we can meet?', Elizabeth Ross's contact with Izak ends violently.<sup>25</sup> The title of Macphail's piece suggestively refers to the gulf in understanding between the black and white characters, which has been enforced by the virtual exclusion of contact between the

lifestyles of these two people in South Africa, and which in turn has contributed in no small way to the violence of Elizabeth's rape. The shock of the story's conclusion, after all, is that in his own way Izak is right, although his violent behaviour, after Elizabeth has spurned his advances in her bedroom, is inexcusable. In his eyes the white woman's conduct appeared as an invitation for sexual relations, and with little other contact with white people before this, except for the derision served out to him by the bosses he has worked for, Elizabeth's tender and, for him, entirely uncharacteristic behaviour could understandably be construed in this way. Although there are, of course, moments in South African fiction when black and white people communicate clearly with one another and the outcome of their contact is profitable and kindly for both, Macphail's 'Chasm' reflects the more common if not necessarily as violent pattern of black and white encounters in the country.<sup>26</sup>

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### III Stories of Warning and Prediction

In a country where social injustice is so conspicuous it is not surprising to find a large body of fictional works warning of the damaging and disastrous consequences of the existing system. What is interesting, however, is the comparatively large number of works by white writers in English and Afrikaans that conjure up apocalyptic visions of South Africa after the breakdown of the current order; many of these works, Nadine Gordimer's July's

People, J.M. Coetzee's Life and Times of Michael K, Peter Wilhelm's 'At the end of a War' and Karel Schoeman's Na die Geliefde Land, for example, are actually set in times of war and civil disorder.<sup>27</sup> This kind of fiction is not nearly as common among black writers for whom the inevitability of conflict in South Africa is so readily a part of their past and present condition that there is little compulsion on them to project the chaos they experience daily into some indefinite future: events of the past and the present are sufficient for them and the future, it seems, will follow naturally from these. Indeed, among the most successful works of prediction and warning by white writers are those set either in the country's past or in its present. Jack Cope's 'Heart-of-the-Daybreak', for instance, is set in the past and describes the way a Khoisan woman finds her liberation from the Afrikaner farm where she has spent most of her life in a form of cruel bondage.<sup>28</sup> The final image is of this woman set free within the vast Karoo landscape and one that looks forward, inevitably, to the future emancipation of her entire community.

Most of the stories of this type, however, are not so optimistic. Another of Cope's works, 'A Pound of Flesh', describes the way an Afrikaner farmer is left free to govern the lives of his black servants without any checks being placed on him.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, his tyrannical power is ably supported by the local police and authorities. Similarly, in the black writer Achmat Dangor's story, 'Jobman', the future liberation of the black people is

overshadowed by the seemingly impregnable power of white farmers.<sup>30</sup>

Dan Jacobson's 'Beggar my Neighbour' and 'Another Day' are similar to one another not only in theme but also in the way which they use a technique common in this writer's short fiction of looking at South Africa through the eyes of children.<sup>31</sup> Both stories gain much of their strength by describing plausible, almost commonplace events, as much a part of the South African past as they are of its present. In short, 'Beggar my Neighbour' and 'Another Day' describe meetings between white children and black people which suggest 'the ineluctibility of what's coming' in the country.<sup>32</sup>

'Beggar my Neighbour' traces the changing relationship of a white boy, Michael, to two black children of similar age to himself and whose names he never learns, who have become frequent claimants for food and alms at his house. There are a series of shifts in the white child's paternalistic behaviour towards these children in which each phase of Michael's conduct reflects common ways white people treat their black countrymen. The boy finds himself moving from benevolence to impatience and irritation in his dealings with the two black children; and these feelings swiftly give way to anger, hatred, and finally to fear. The story reaches its climax in the dreams Michael has of the black children while he is ill with a fever. After abusing his companions his dreams take an unexpected turn and Michael welcomes the children into his house. Shortly before this,

however, he comes to the startling recognition that the hatred he has felt for these children is a mutual one: '...Michael understood what he should have understood long before: that they came to him not in hope or appeal or even in reproach, but in hatred. What he felt towards them, they felt towards him: what he had done to them in his dreams, they did to him in theirs.'<sup>33</sup>

He breaks down and embraces both girl and boy tenderly. Michael's gesture recalls moments in 'A Drink in the Passage' and 'The Zulu and the Zeide', but the white boy has gone further than Van Rensburg and Simelane in Paton's story: black and white characters touch one another. The story draws to an end with Michael's realization that this has all been a dream. And he is deeply grieved by this. The reconciliation he has achieved in his dream is beyond his reach in the real world. On recovery, he finds that the black children have vanished from his world: 'He never saw them again, though he looked for them in the streets and lanes of the town. He saw a hundred, a thousand, like them; but not the two he hoped to find.'<sup>34</sup>

The wistfulness of this conclusion stems largely from the fact that the white child has lost two potential friends. Significantly, Michael is described as a lonely child without brothers and sisters, with few friends at school. During the day his parents work and this solitary boy begins to form the basis of a relationship with the black children. However, 'Beggar my Neighbour' turns out to be a story of wasted opportunities. The work's implication that the gap between

black and white people has grown too large for reconciliation is a theme common in works by white writers and Paton's Cry. the Beloved Country offers what is perhaps the most widely known exploration of it.

It is interesting to compare this story with a later piece by the black writer Mango Tshabangu entitled 'Thoughts in a Train' where two black children similarly walk the streets of a 'white' suburb.<sup>35</sup> Jacobson's story never really describes the sensations of the two black children other than recording their furtiveness and the persistence of their visits. Tshabangu, however, notes that the overwhelming experience of his two young protagonists in such an area is one of fear; not so much a self-induced fear, but a response to the fear that surrounds them in these wealthy avenues.<sup>36</sup>

'Another Day' operates in a similar way to 'Beggar my Neighbour'. The story successfully functions both realistically and in a fabular way. It describes how a young white boy follows the abject funeral procession of a black child through the streets of his town. The central encounter of the piece is that of the white boy and the young black man who pushes the barrow carrying the small coffin. This man, who is both undertaker and gravedigger, becomes a threatening figure in the boy's mind, suggesting that his fears of death and of black people are linked. At one point, for instance, we read:

"Don't run away," he [the black man] said. His hands grasped me gently. I was sure he would never let me go. Death itself stood over me, determined to punish my curiosity by satisfying it utterly. What had happened to

that other child was going to happen to me. I was going to learn all that he had learned.<sup>37</sup>

Nothing so dramatic happens, however; but, after the burial, the black man calls out to the white boy in 'a deep, mocking voice': "Another time... Another day".<sup>38</sup> All the way home the boy hears the rumbling of the black man's barrow behind him. The black man's threat of some unspecified form of cataclysmic action is deferred to the future.

Peter Wilhelm's story 'Seth'n Sam' similarly figures the clash between black and white people in terms of the relationship between two young people.<sup>39</sup> In this case, Seth and Sam are black and white boys who have grown up together on the same farm. Although inseparable during their early years it is, as in many stories of colonial societies, when the white lad goes away for secondary schooling that the boys' lives diverge and they grow apart from one another. It is a pattern observed, for instance, in Cope's 'Witch White' and Hennie Aucamp's Afrikaans Wimpie and Tatties stories.<sup>40</sup> Wilhelm compresses the bildungs aspect of this story, swiftly bringing his two protagonists to early adulthood in a way similar to that of M.C. Botha's Afrikaans story 'Die Kort lewe van 'n gemiddelde man' ('The short life of an average man'), a work which is strikingly like 'Seth 'n Sam' both in tone and subject.<sup>41</sup> The young men meet while Sam (the white fellow) is on military service in the South African army. By now, Seth has joined a force of black guerillas and their final encounter is a fatal one as Seth shoots his white friend of earlier years.

On a less sombre note than these stories is Christopher Hope's humorous parable of race relations in the country, 'The Problem with Staff'.<sup>42</sup> Instead of following the conventional pattern of prophetic stories about South Africa which variously end violently or with the black and white characters sundered from one another, Hope's work teasingly plays with the possibilities of what might happen if black and white South Africans cooperated with one another. The setting for this experiment in race relations is a hotel run by a white proprietor who employs three black waiters, each drawn significantly from one of the castes enshrined in the country's laws - black, Coloured, and Indian. As events turn out, Mr. Whitney ends up housing his black waiters and their families in the hotel, cheek-by-jowl with white guests and the result is a startling volte face for those who hold that such endeavours are doomed. Business booms, service improves, and the white hotelier gains more in the way of leisure than he had ever previously experienced when his black staff lived miles away from the hotel in dismal segregated slums. This story, however, is rare among works of prophecy and prediction about South Africa where by far the greatest number of works of this kind do not stress the benevolent possibilities arising out of racial harmony and do not deal with the situation humorously but consider in a sombre fashion the cruel consequences of people divided on the basis of differences in their skin colour.<sup>43</sup>

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IV Responses to the Society (a) Sorrow and Rage

South African writers have dealt with the distressing conditions of their country either by weeping about them or by laughing at them. There are, however, works which collapse these two responses into one another by weeping and laughing at the same time.<sup>44</sup> Although a crude kind of dichotomy, one can clearly discern two streams within South African fiction following one or other of these courses. In fiction by white writers in English the response of weeping at social conditions has been dominant, with the majority of works by leading writers such as Alan Paton, Jack Cope, Dan Jacobson, Nadine Gordimer, and J.M. Coetzee falling into this category. The humorous approach has been less copiously used with Herman Bosman's fiction remaining the high point of achievement in this regard. Bosman, indeed, often maintains a delicate balance between the two poles in works which seem to both laugh and weep at the social conditions.<sup>45</sup> As we shall see, writers of the 1970's and 1980's such as Sheila Roberts, Peter Wilhelm, and especially Christopher Hope have found humour and humorous satire a particularly effective way of dealing with the cruel circumstances of their country. There is no doubt an incongruity where writers use forms of literary comedy to deal with aspects of social tragedy. Yet this need not imply a weakness in terms of this writing, nor suggest that the writer's use of humour is a way <sup>of</sup> avoiding unpleasant social circumstances. The sense of disjunction and disturbance one gets on reading works which describe social hardships in a humorous way is an important vindication of the writer's use of this

literary mode. In the case of South African writers their use of forms of comedy can I think be understood on two levels. In the first place the absurdities and anomalies of apartheid offer a diversity of targets for a literary response of laughter; and this is often derisive. Secondly, by the 1970's so many of the obvious tragedies and horrors of apartheid had been treated with sober concern in the literature that there was a sense of exhaustion of the subject. Humour and humorous satire proved ways in which writers could maintain concern about apartheid and yet bring diversity to this well-used subject.

One must also observe that within both these streams of writing, whether weeping or laughing, there is very often a common factor - that of anger. Behind the tears and behind the laughter writers often conspire to give vent to their anger and it is this aspect as much as the shared subject-matter which links the two streams in South African writing; it is a key element in works by black and white authors alike. The writers' protest can reside equally well in works of mirth as in those of sorrow.

I shall begin by considering the dominant approach of white writers in English. Circumstances in South Africa have lent themselves to a host of fictional works which dramatize the misery brought about by apartheid, where victims are most commonly black, but are occasionally white. Moreover, writers are often concerned to show how black and white people alike are affected by the system. We have noted the sense of sadness and loss in Paton's 'A Drink in the Passage' and Jacobson's 'Beggar

my Neighbour'. This is also well treated in Jacobson's 'A Day in the Country' which describes an altercation between two white families over the way one family has abused a black child.<sup>46</sup> A group of Afrikaners seize a black child who has ventured dangerously in front of their car and set about teaching the child a painful and humiliating lesson. A family of Jewish South Africans witness this incident and, after an angry exchange in their moving cars, square up to the Afrikaners expecting an almighty quarrel. Jacobson suggests in this encounter how both parties are especially sensitive about their racial identities and about the kind of slurs familiarly attached to each of their communities. This bracketing together of the racial consciousness of Jews and Afrikaners is virtually unique in South African fiction; and in choosing to focus on the clash of Jewish and Afrikaner people about the abuse of a black person, Jacobson adroitly achieves a composite view of the tensions and, ultimately, the failures which attend discrimination on the grounds of race. The Jewish family reprove the Afrikaners about their behaviour and easily take the upper hand in the dispute. However, the encounter and the incident with the black child brings little satisfaction to either side. The Jewish boy who is the story's narrator remarks at the conclusion of the meeting with the Afrikaner family: 'No one shook hands with anyone, there had been no reconciliation to warrant that'.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, in the final lines of the story, there is an overwhelming sense of loss and defeat at what has just taken place:

It was a quiet journey home. Everyone was feeling depressed and beaten, though as I have explained, the victory was ours. But we had all lost, so much, somewhere, farther back along that dusty road.<sup>48</sup>

More common than stories of this type however, are those which describe the misery inflicted on black people. In such stories the writer's sympathy rests squarely with the victims of white oppression. Alan Paton is the most adept white South African writer of this kind of fiction. Aside from his novels, his stories about black children at Diepkloof reformatory, his story 'Life for a Life' about black rural workers, and his story 'Debbie go home' about a family of mixed race, all strongly engage the reader's sympathies for people who have been forced onto hard times. In 'Life for a Life', for instance, there is the following sentence, representative of much of his work, which chronicles the cumulative load of injustice and indignity forced upon a black farm worker:

Because one was a shepherd, because one had no certitude of home or work or life or favour, because one's back had to be bent though one's soul would be upright, because one had to bear as a brand this dark sun-warmed colour of the skin, as good surely as any other, because of these things, this mad policeman could strike down, and hold by the neck, and call a creeping yellow Hottentot bastard, a man who had never hurt another in his long gentle life, a man who like the great Christ was a lover of sheep and of little children, and had been a good husband and father except for those occasional outbursts that any sensible woman will pass over, outbursts of the imprisoned manhood that has got tired of the chains that keep it down on its knees.<sup>49</sup>

This long sentence whirls from the multitude of conditions and circumstances which damn a black man in South Africa, through qualities of his merit, to his rage and exhaustion at this debasing way of life. The repetition of the word 'because' at

the start of the opening phrases strikes dramatically like hammerblows. 'Life for a Life' describes how a white community exacts vengeance on the black workers of a farm, after a white farmer has been murdered. A black man is chosen, the head shepherd on the farm, and killed. There is no question about his innocence; yet a victim is needed and vengeance is taken.<sup>50</sup> The story's central concern is the ways in which white and black people express the hatred they feel for one another. After the white farmer's murder, for instance, the narrator describes the sensations of the black shepherd and his wife in this way:

Guilt lay heavily upon them both, because they had hated Big Baas Flip [the murdered man], not with clenched fists and bared teeth, but, as befitted people in their station, with salutes and deference.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, after Enoch Maarman, the black shepherd, is killed, his brother-in-law Solomon Koopman responds to the news that the authorities are not going to investigate his death nor permit his body to be buried on the farm where he had served for nearly fifty years, in the following way: 'Solomon Koopman would have gone away, with a smile on his lips, and cold hate in his heart'.<sup>52</sup> The white people, however, are under no compulsion to hide their contempt for the black people. The character who looms largest among the whites is the detective Robbertse and we are told of him: 'he hated to see any coloured man holding his head up, he hated to see any coloured man anywhere but on his knees or his stomach.'<sup>53</sup> And he and his fellow whites are swift to prove this. Maarman is killed and his widow is given three days to clear off the farm, since the house she had

occupied with her husband will soon be needed for her husband's replacement. Paton, like many black writers, shows the resilience of the black people in face of suffering. On hearing of her husband's death, for instance, Sara Maarman is shown to be well-schooled in suffering: 'But she wept only a little, like one who is used to such events, and must not grieve but must prepare for the next.'<sup>54</sup> She leaves the farm at the end of the story strengthened in her resolve to make a new life for herself with her son in the Cape.

Jack Cope's 'A Pound of Flesh' similarly describes the dignity of black rural workers in circumstances of enormous hardship. Schalk Dawel, the white farmer, rules a small farm-kingdom in the South African heartland with a tyrannical hold. Black people of the area are tied to his service in a form of debt bondage. One such person is Abram, an ancient shepherd who has herded the flocks of this man and his father before him, for decades. Abram seek\_\_ permission to return to the farm-yard and pass his last days there in the company of his people. Dawel refuses, thrusting before the old man a list of fictitious debts which bind the shepherd to his service. Abram is forced to return to his lonely sheep station and there settles down to die. In the final scene of the story Dawel, the district surgeon, and the local policeman inspect the old man's corpse and Dawel appropriates all the money Abram had saved in order to defray the costs of a number of debts he has invented. The image which remains as strong as this picture of a cruel man is that of Abram accepting his fate with a dignified kind of

stoicism, knowing all the while that justice lies with him and that one day things will change. As he remarks to Long-Piet, the black man who is sent to accompany him back to the sheep station, "...one day he [the white man] also will stand at the slaughter pole".<sup>55</sup>

Along with works of this kind by Paton and Cope, there are a number of stories by black writers on this theme, many of which similarly evoke the dignity of these people under difficult circumstances: among them are James Matthews's 'Crucifixion' and 'The Awakening', Mtutuzeli Matshoba's 'A Glimpse of Slavery', and Alex La Guma's 'The Lemon Orchard'.<sup>56</sup> As in 'A Pound of Flesh', La Guma's novel Time of the Butcherbird also suggests the approaching nemesis for white people largely in relation to black people living in the countryside. Interestingly, stories of this kind about black rural workers are rare in Afrikaans literature, with writers only during the 1970's and 1980's beginning to consider the plight of these people. Before this, however, the countryside in by far the greater number of their works was either the site of the Afrikaner's heroic past or of the authors' colourful childhoods. For white English-speaking writers, who generally have had only passing contact with the countryside, there were few myths and illusions about this world.

Anger at conditions in South Africa lies close to the surface in many stories by Jack Cope. 'The Bastards', for example, describes the way a conglomerate consisting of wealthy Afrikaner politicians, farmers, and businessmen expropriate land owned by

black people in order to open a diamond mine there.<sup>57</sup> Compensation is meagre and the black people can do little to stop their land being snatched from them. Cope sets the nobility and refinement of these black people, called Bastards (Bastards) because of miscegenation among their ancestors, in striking contrast to the behaviour of the 'New Afrikaners' who dispossess them of their land. There is little doubt, however, as to whom the title of the story most properly refers. As in Jan Rabie's Afrikaans stories 'Drie Kaalkoppe eet tesame' ('Three bald heads eat together') and 'Dies Irae' and, indeed, in similar fashion to the celebrated conclusion of Orwell's Animal Farm, Cope's central image of human acquisitiveness is that of a mammoth feast, where the greed of an exploitative group is literally figured in their gorging themselves beyond satiety.<sup>58</sup> Evoking a grim irony in the situation, Cope's Afrikaners organize their eating in a triumphal banquet set in the middle of the Kalahari desert on the site of their newly acquired land. The former owners of this land, the Bastards, are left to look on this fantastic invasion from a polite and measured distance.

Anger also erupts in Cope's stories by way of the fiery outbursts his aggrieved characters utter. However, in certain of these moments, Cope allows his work to lapse into melodrama. For instance, Henrik van Lill, the disenchanted Afrikaner in 'The Bastards' offers the following cri de coeur: "I ask myself what's become of us, of our Afrikaner virtues, of our simplicity, our truth, our courage against adversity. Look at

us now!"<sup>59</sup> Van Lill has more than just cause for complaint against his people; yet, when Cope frames this in such a naive and hyperbolic way, the critical and dramatic possibilities of such a moment are wasted. He is more successful in this regard in an earlier story 'The Little Missionary'.<sup>60</sup> Here, Benjamin Segode, a militant young black man confronts a young Afrikaner girl who is giving a group of black children a class in Bible instruction. Segode is angry, yet his rage is measured. Unlike Van Lill, he never falls to hysterical-sounding phrases, although his charges are left open for us to dispute. He addresses the white girl in this way:

"Juffrou du Preez, we people know this book [the Bible] - do you understand? We have had it for more than a hundred years, two hundred. It is full of good, it is written in a way that the heart of a man understands. But I say we should put it away for a time. I mean that we do not accept it from you. Do you hear? We do not believe you, we do not trust you - you, little girl, and your Dominies and your rich men and your soldiers and policemen. When we are equal and free we will take up the Bible again. Then we will be happy with it..."<sup>61</sup>

Uys Krige once said: 'South Africa is a million square mile prison without a roof'.<sup>62</sup> This image of the country as a gaol recurs in much of its writing. At the end of Paton's story 'Sunlight in Trebizond Street', for instance, the newly released political detainee considers the world outside the prison he has just left and comments: 'There is an illusion of freedom in the air'.<sup>63</sup> The freedom people perceive in the society is illusory. Indeed, we read in Alex La Guma's novel The Stone Country how the central character, George Adams, a political prisoner, 'cursed the guard, cursed the jail, cursed the whole

country that was like a big stone prison anyway'.<sup>64</sup>

Conditions in South Africa have spawned an entire class of prison literature in virtually every genre: from novels, poems, stories and plays, to autobiographies. Writers in all of its communities have described its prisons and one could assemble a sizeable and forbidding anthology of works on this subject, largely written in English but also in Afrikaans. The goals of the country, incarceration, and the more general experience of restricted freedom are frequent subjects in South African stories. In subsequent chapters I shall consider stories of this kind by Afrikaner and black writers. Among white writers in English most of the leading writers have one or more stories about the prisons and many more which suggest the gaol-like circumstances of the country. In common with Alex La Guma many of these writers see South Africa as a kind of stone prison. Sara Maarman in Paton's 'Life for a Life', for instance, speaks of 'this land of stone' and the black priest in Peter Wilhelm's 'All the days of my death' comes to think of his country early on during his detention in this way:

Torture nothing but torture, down here in the bedrock of the country.<sup>65</sup> (My underlining).

He then continues:

And I never truly believed it; it was concealed so well. Of course my friends warned me what would happen when I went in, if the system got me. Somehow I didn't believe it. It was too remote, even when people I knew whispered about it, the little filthy secret. I assumed it was part of the mythology of being 'in'. That it should be so direct a thing, just shut in by walls, was beyond me. They were describing sight to a blind man...<sup>66</sup>

The way the black narrator compares his incredulity about circumstances in the prisons to that of a blind man having sight described to him has an ironic significance not only in his present condition but also in relation to the later events of his story. This man, after all, is a prisoner who is 'unjustly accused, unjustly incarcerated, unjustly locked away in stone': that is, he is totally deprived of freedom.<sup>67</sup> The central theme of this story, however, becomes this man's renewed vision of himself and of his world. At the end of the story, this most political sensitive and sensible of men has learnt the extent of his earlier naiveté about the country precisely through the harsh and bitter experiences of his detention and has made the necessary adjustments within himself. Finally, he resolves to accept the role his white gaolers have forced upon him: 'So let me become a "terrorist". Let them be confirmed in their perceptions of me. There is no way out; this is not a way out... I become the very thing they wish me to be'.<sup>68</sup> Conditions in prison have brought the black priest logically and ineluctably towards this emancipatory moment.

The terrible experience of solitary confinement and the mental torture it entails are described by the prisoner in Paton's 'Sunlight in Trebizond Street'. Here, for instance, is his account of one of the many traumatic moments of his detention:

After 105 [days of solitary confinement] I nearly went to pieces. The next morning I couldn't remember if it were 106 or 107. After that you can't remember any more. You lose your certitude. You're like a blind man who falls over a stool in the well-known house. There's no birthday, no trip to town, no letter from abroad, by which to

remember. If you try going back, it's like going back to look for something you dropped yesterday in the desert, or in the forest, or in the water of the lake. Something is gone from you that you'll never find.<sup>69</sup>

This passage conveys the irreparable damage and irredeemable loss of such an experience. The images are purposely common-place: forgetting the day, yet not having any familiar everyday aides de memoire at one's service. It is in moments like this where writers create a contrast between conditions of crisis and a certain quietness in their style that they are most successful in dealing with the experience of people in prison and in hardship.<sup>70</sup> An important part of the function of contemplative and sober passages such as these is to bring us to think again about what lies behind the misery inflicted on the characters about whom we are reading. Yet, as I hope to show, there is another way of achieving this; and this is by means of a complete reversal of mood; in short, the use of humour.

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(b) Humour

The conjunction of the terrible and the amusing is a central feature of much South African writing where writers often treat distressing circumstances in their country in a humorous way. This linking of essentially contrary modes is profoundly disturbing. As a result, one finds oneself laughing at events which should ordinarily cause one to weep. Indeed one finds, as Christopher Hope puts it, that writers' use of humour might on their part be 'a necessary device to distance themselves from what is really unspeakable'.<sup>71</sup> More than this, however, this

approach, as I have suggested earlier, shares a common effect with writing which simply deals soberly with the misery of people: we are brought to reconsider the grievous circumstances with which the work in question is dealing. This is the case in many works by Herman Bosman, South Africa's greatest humorous writer. For example, a punitive mission against a black tribe and the death of a black and white man on the same spot in two of his most celebrated stories, 'Makapan's Caves' and 'Unto Dust', offer the grounds for much mirth and at the same time forcefully suggest the folly and pathos surrounding the way white people treat their black compatriots in South Africa.<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, in Jack Cope's 'The Name of Patrick Henry' the essentially pitiful circumstances of a black man forced to prove his identity and place of birth to the white authorities in order to be able to live in the place of his choice without the continual threat of imprisonment by them, form the basis of a work finely balanced between sorrow and humour.<sup>73</sup> Much of the humour of this story arises from the ironies of this man's position. For instance, one of Patrick Henry's greatest difficulties is that of his name: not African and not easy to transform into one of the regular 'Jim' or 'John' names which whites love to call black men. On his journey with two white men, a lawyer and an 'inspector from the control office' to find his childhood home, Patrick Henry is told by one of them:

"...Your name is no laughing matter, it's a handicap. I can't do anything for a boy with a handle like that. It's absurd, nobody can take it. Why don't you get rid of it as soon as you can and call yourself something plain like Tom Mabom?"<sup>74</sup>

There is much irony in all of this, as it is these white men who are pressing him for evidence in support of his claim to being Patrick Henry. As he continues to point out to them, with some indignation:

"No, sir, I stick to my name. Honestly, I can't eat it or buy bread with it, and I can't smoke it in my pipe. But it's all I have got left. No, sir, any other name but Patrick Henry is dishonest."<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, there are a further set of ironies arising from these latter comments, one of which the white man is quick to seize on: "'That's rich coming from him...'", he observes.<sup>76</sup> Patrick Henry has earned small amounts in the past by being a forger: he has helped fellow blacks with false documents. Yet, in another of the ironies surrounding his life, he has always been unable to create fake documents good enough for himself.

There is a strong sense of the absurd about this story and especially in many of the dialogues there is a Beckettian quality strongly reminiscent of exchanges between Vladimir and Estragon in Waiting for Godot or Hamm and Klov in Endgame where one or other of the characters digs away at the follies and hypocrisies of their world. Consider, for example, this passage later in the story, where after failing to find his childhood home Patrick Henry is told by the lawyer to find evidence of his origins swiftly and not to try to abscond in the interim. The black man responds indignantly:

"Where would I decamp to?... I have nowhere to go. I'm not here, I'm not there, I'm not anywhere or anyone. How would you like to be that, sir?"

"Don't be damn crazy. There's no comparison. I know who I am."

"Do you?"

"What do you mean?"

"I'm only asking, sir. And him - is he [the inspector] God or something? - does he decide who I am, does he know who he is himself?"

"Look here, Archy. Better take my advice and get moving."<sup>77</sup>

Yet the entire context of Cope's story is not at all unfamiliar or exceptional. On the contrary, Patrick Henry's case is that of many thousands in South Africa and the absurdity of his position is really that of the society that treats him and his kind in the way it does. Cope develops his satire in one further way. Patrick Henry, although often angry and upset at his position, is never defeated, and not only survives the vicissitudes of his life but actually looks on circumstances with a great deal of humour. In this respect, Cope's story has much in common with the portrayal of black characters in works such as Fugard's Kani's and Ntshona's Sizwe Bansi is Dead (with which its plot has striking similarities) and The Island together with those in stories by black writers such as Mphahlele's 'Grieg on a Stolen Piano' and 'In Corner B', the humorous sketches of Casey Motsisi, and Mbulelo Mzamane's 'Jola' stories from his collection Mzala.<sup>78</sup> Towards the end of this story, for instance, Patrick Henry is left to wander the rubbish lot which now occupies the site of his former home and meets a cheerful black man who lives on the tip. They strike up conversation:

"Who are you, brother?"

"I am nobody," Patrick Henry said. "I used to be someone, but now - "...

"I understand," the man said ... "I am also a nobody." They rocked with amusement and they felt they had been old friends.<sup>79</sup>

In turn, it is precisely this good humour and camaraderie between black people which becomes a major cause for celebration in a large number of works by black writers.

In an earlier section of this chapter I considered stories such as Alan Paton's 'Sunlight in Trebizond Street' and Peter Wilhelm's 'All the days of my death' which deal in anger and sorrow with the harsh experiences of people in South African prisons. Christopher Hope's 'Learning to Fly', which he suggestively subtitled 'An African Fairy Tale', shares much the same subject as these works, yet is entirely different in tone: in Hope's story, outrage gives way to satirical laughter.<sup>80</sup> 'Learning to Fly' is a prophetic story about South Africa, different in its prophecy, however, from most other works of this type. Here, the narrator looks back at current events in South Africa from the future and we are given a disturbing vision that under black rule nothing much changed in the country. The story observes caustically that what changes in society are not its institutions but only the people who fill positions in them; even after a social revolution where those people currently holding the posts might have political views as different from their former occupants as those of an Afrikaner nationalist and a black revolutionary. The differences between political systems might be less significant, Hope's work is daringly suggesting, than their similarities are usually reckoned to be.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, early in the story Hope swiftly establishes a series of parallels between his two representative

antagonists, the black political prisoner Mphahlele and his chief interrogator the white Afrikaner, Du Preez. For example, these are Du Preez's first impressions on meeting his victim:

Clearly Mphahlele belonged to the old school of whom there were fewer each year... Du Preez couldn't help warming to this just a little. After all, he was one of the old school himself in the new age of trimmers and ameliorists. Mphahlele was tall,<sup>82</sup> as tall as Du Preez and, he reckoned, about the same age...

Soon after this meeting Du Preez reflects further that 'Mphahlele had treated him as if they were truly equals'.<sup>83</sup> Hope's story humorously describes a series of events 'in the final days of the old regime' where the black political detainee, Mphahlele, outwits his white interrogator, Du Preez, to appear later as an interrogator 'in the early days of the new regime'.<sup>84</sup>

Throughout 'Learning to Fly' Hope plays the humorous and terrible against one another and one of the most successful ways in which he does this is by using parody. Indeed, in a country with so many people holding extreme, often idiosyncratic beliefs and in which circumstances themselves are often so bizarre it is surprising to find how little parody has been used by its writers. However, in 'Learning to Fly', parody abounds, and here is part of a passage in which Du Preez is outlining his theory about the way members of different race-groups choose to kill themselves while in detention:

"Considering your average white man," Du Preez is supposed to have said, "my experience is that he prefers hanging - whether by pyjama cord, belt, strips of blanket; providing he finds the handy protuberance, the cell bars, say, or up-ended bedsteads he needs, you'll barely have turned your

back and he'll be up there swinging from the light cord or other chosen noose. Your white man in his last throes has a wonderful sense of rhythm - believe me, whatever you have heard to the contrary - I've seen several whites about to cough it and all of them have been wonderful dancers... When it comes to Africans I have found that they, perverse as always, choose another way out. They are given to window jumping. This phenomenon has been very widespread in the past few years. Personally, I suspect its roots go back a long way, back to their superstitions - i.e. to their regard for black magic and witchcraft. Everyone knows that in extreme instances your average blackie will believe anything: that his witchdoctors will turn the white man's bullets to water: or, if he jumps out of a window thirteen stories above terra firma he will miraculously find himself able to fly..."<sup>85</sup>

Much of the force of this passage derives not simply from the fact that many of the events described here actually take place in South Africa, that black and white detainees do die in custody in these ways, but from the cruelly humorous way Hope is parodying the manner in which an Afrikaner state official such as Du Preez speaks. There is, for instance, the characteristic love of taxonomy and lists in Du Preez's speech as well as the distinctive preference for inflated terms such as 'protuberance' and 'terra firma'. However, the most striking feature of the parody is how Hope apes the chatty, casual way in which such an official talks; and this is in complete disharmony with his grisly subject matter. For example, amidst detailed accounts of hangings and deaths by leaping from a building there are the following familiar, indeed convivial, turns of phrase: 'considering your average white man', 'believe me, whatever you may have heard to the contrary', and 'when it comes to Africans'. Hope's character is doing nothing less than inviting us to share his views. The kind of disjunction this creates is profoundly disturbing while at the same time very amusing.

Hope's stories and novels take a wide range of South African characters as their satirical targets. It is not, as in most works of South African satire, simply white Afrikaners, state officials and a motley crowd of racialsists who face castigation and ridicule in his works. We find black nationalists and revolutionaries, radical white students, black homeland chiefs, and black guerillas (such as Mphahlele in this story 'Learning to Fly') as well as the more usual targets for criticism scorched by his satirical grilling. In a review of the story collection Private Parts, Geoffrey Hughes remarks that Hope 'criticizes in an even-handed fashion'.<sup>86</sup> This is absolutely correct, but one needs to ask whether such an 'even-handed' approach is appropriate in circumstances such as those of South Africa. A more conventional position of attacking the obvious villains is certainly a safer approach and one which, <sup>it</sup> might <sup>be</sup> argued, is the only legitimate way of dealing with a system such as that in South Africa, which so blatantly descriminates against a single group. Hope's wide-ranging and apparently non-partisan form of satire is undoubtedly treading on dangerous ground and taking innumerable risks. Yet I feel, as in the case of Bosman and of many satirists before him, that his kind of potentially offensive satire is justified not simply because the kind of follies he observes are indeed widespread and deserve criticism but also because Hope steers carefully clear of becoming morally high-handed; this he achieves by not having an authorial presence in his works which looks sneeringly at all he sees. Moreover, by leaping in where angels fear to tread, Hope,

following the satirical direction of Bosman, has released new springs of energy and brought vitality to our viewing of the situation; and this is much needed in a literary tradition dominated (although understandably enough) by works of sobriety, sorrow and rage.<sup>87</sup>

Although the leading exponent of this kind of satire, it is not unique to Christopher Hope among white English-speaking writers. In his story 'Black', for instance, Peter Wilhelm finds much to laugh at in the cant of white and black political extremists alike.<sup>88</sup> As in 'Learning to Fly' and a number of works mentioned earlier, 'Black' is set in a future South Africa. It is the story of the white Minister of Culture's disturbing discovery that he is slowly but surely becoming black. Wilhelm wittily calls this ailment 'progressive negrosis' and puckishly describes it as a 'benign malignancy affecting only the White blood corpuscles. There is no danger of secondary or tertiary carcinomic accretions. There is merely an alteration of pigmentation: the White corpuscles turn Black.'<sup>89</sup>

As Hope parodies the speech of a state official in 'Learning to Fly', so too does Wilhelm in this story. In this case, the Minister of Culture recalls one of his parliamentary speeches:

"It is the policy of my Government," he had enunciated in that cool, rational, immovable tone for which he was famous, "that the different national groups in our country participate in and share their own separate cultural heritage. Just as I would feel out of place at an initiation ceremony in the Congo, and would inevitably fail to appreciate the nuances of drumming and ululation which might form part of the ritual, it would be improbable if

any member of a grouping not defined as White could appreciate the Western flavour and import of such White artists as Beethoven and Shakespeare... Nevertheless, I can categorically state that any member of a non-white group is free to learn a White language and participate without fear of discrimination in the reading of books in that language..."<sup>90</sup>

There is nothing 'cool' and 'rational' about this speech and as in good examples of parody, the parodist keeps extremely close to the form of language used by his original model, only shifting meaning slightly, but decisively, towards the comical. There is the irony, however, in this case, that Wilhelm's original model is in itself so absurd that there has been little need for him to create this kind of parodic displacement; it is only clearly discernible in the concluding observation about black people being given free rein in their choice of language and reading matter.

One of the comic developments of this story is the white Minister's transformation: he actually becomes black.<sup>91</sup> His retribution is even more dire than that meted out to other similar white heroes in Afrikaans stories by Jan Rabie and M.C. Botha.<sup>92</sup> In the final episode of this story, the white-black man abandons his former attitudes of white supremacy and undergoes a reversal, just as dramatic as the change of his skin-colour: he espouses the ideals of black supremacy. This turnabout in allegiance affords Wilhelm the opportunity for another piece of parody which ironically complements the white Minister's earlier parliamentary speech. This time, however, it takes the form of a ghastly poem, immediately recognizable as a

parody of the host of similar works which have been spawned especially since the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. Here is part of this poem which appears later in a literary journal predictably called BLACK, which Wilhelm wryly informs us was later banned:

You have come in the Black night  
like a lover whose kiss is darkness...  
Now take me into the Black dawn  
which has begun in Dar-es-Salaam,  
and Accra,  
and Lusaka,  
and here too where I bellow my visions of Blackness.<sup>93</sup>

As in the parliamentary speech, there is little need for comic hyperbole or alteration of Wilhelm's original models here, as these come so close to self-parody themselves.

One point, finally, about this kind of satire is that it is precisely and to some extent predictably the white English-speaking writers who of all the South African writers have used it most extensively. It is they, after all, who are closest to being spectators of the clash between black and Afrikaner people in the country and are, arguably, best placed to see the follies in the camps of either of these adversaries. Put differently, satire of this kind seems suited and to flow most often from those afforded the opportunity of holding liberal and often non-partisan positions in society.<sup>94</sup> Partisanship, as I hope to show in the chapters about Afrikaans and black English writing, places different sets of demands on writers and consequently calls forth from them often distinctly different, yet equally valuable works of literature.

The inconsistencies and incongruities of apartheid offer much in the way of humorous material for writers. Bosman was swift to seize upon this in a large number of his Marico stories and later Christopher Hope likewise found much that is ridiculous and absurd flowing from this system of racial discrimination. In particular, Hope often sets out to pour scorn on racist attitudes by conjuring up episodes which throw conventional responses into disarray. 'The Kugel', for instance, closes with a most unusual infringement of the Immorality Act: here, the two lovers turn out to be a white and a black man and the surprise at this event is emphasized through the bewildered reaction of a white onlooker.<sup>95</sup> Further, this outraged spectator is none other than a radical student, most liberal in views one would expect. However, Hope casts an ironic look at the attitudes of even this apparently most tolerant of individuals. As the black and white lovers are led away by the police the narrative point-of-view shifts to the young female student:

Belinda through her pain and fury recognized something absurdly dignified in the progress of this strange couple, the tall, striding figure of Wolferman and beside him the richly swathed, plump figure of his unlikely queen...<sup>96</sup>

Similarly, in the story 'On the Frontier' Hope throws up another series of comic ironies by means of a farcical episode in which a black man who is an albino is pressed into demonstrating the effectiveness of a sun-tanning lotion on his pallid skin.<sup>97</sup> Hence, we are given the image of a white-black man earning some money from a white pharmacist by allowing his skin to become gradually darker.

Jack Cope treats some of the humorous paradoxes of black and white contact in South African in his story about 'the wisely moderate editor of an officially approved Zulu newspaper and the moderately wise principal of a liberal black college', 'The Tame Ox'.<sup>98</sup> The central episode of the story is the award ceremony at which Dr. Luke Njilo, the tame ox of the story's title, is to be granted an honorary doctorate by white representatives of one of South Africa's 'white' universities. However, at this most dignified of moments Njilo, swathed in his scarlet academic gown, succeeds in giving the lie to his damaging sobriquet by rising up in front of the Zulu audience in a fiery performance of a Zulu warrior dance. The onlookers are enraptured by this and Njilo's doubtful status, in the lap of the white gods so to speak, is vindicated for them. Indeed, despite the awkward ambivalence of his position Njilo achieves a rare dignity in this story, converting a potentially difficult and embarrassing moment for him in front of his people into a triumph, both in their eyes and in those of the white officials. At the end of his dance, for instance, we read how he leaps easily back on to the podium with the admiring white Chancellor's assistance and comments, not without some good-humoured irony, to this man: "'I am afraid, sir, the trappings of civilization were somewhat in the way".'<sup>99</sup> Njilo, the 'New African', is indicating rather more than the academic garments of white culture; yet his actions imply that such larger issues are no more a nuisance than a suit of unaccommodating clothing ('trappings') easily doffed or donned according to need.<sup>100</sup>

As in stories by black writers, and here I am thinking especially of works by Mphahlele, Essop, Mzamane, and Matshoba, the good-humoured flexibility and resourcefulness of a black character receives the markedly affectionate and approving attentions of the writer who sees in them qualities also representative of that character's entire community.

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#### V The Predicament of White South Africans

The difficult position of white liberal-minded English-speaking people in South Africa is the concern of a small, but important number of stories. Among these, Alan Paton's 'The Hero of Curie Road' is rare in dealing humorously with this subject.<sup>101</sup> Paton's hero is the quintessential South African liberal. 'Mr. Thomson', we are told in the story's first sentence, 'was a gentle little man who belonged to the All-Races Party, which believed in equal opportunities for all people'.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, he is courteous to everyone around him and a lover of nature. For all this, the likeable 'little man' has his problems and this is how Paton describes his predicament: 'Mr. Thomson was much liked by many people, but was disliked by many also, some because they thought he was plotting a revolution, some because they thought he would be useless at it anyway.'<sup>103</sup> This is a blunt and humourous appraisal of the dilemma of white South African liberals facing the taunts and accusations of both Afrikaner and black nationalists.

A great test arises for Mr. Thomson when he is given the

opportunity to address the annual meeting of the black South African Congress; like the All-Races Party, Paton's barely concealed fictional name for the Liberal Party, the South African Congress is his name here for the African National Congress. The occasion proves a traumatic one for Mr. Thomson as his moderate views are derided by militant sections of the black audience. He leaves feeling useless and excluded from any productive role in the country: 'He looked in at a shop window and suddenly saw himself as an ineffectual old man, wearing an overcoat, member of a fragmentary Party...writer of lightweight letters that no one read...'.<sup>104</sup> His melioristic views of South Africa are dashed and he comes even to regard the aims of the All-Races Party as 'crass stupidity'.<sup>105</sup>

Paton, however, is not content to leave his hero desolate and entirely excluded from any part in the South African political arena. Comfort in the form of a visit from a Mr. Chetty, a black man, soon comes Mr. Thomson's way. The South African Congress has not rejected him entirely, Chetty tells him: '"They know you, Mr. Thomson...They know you are a friend of ours"'.<sup>106</sup> With this as consolation and Chetty's further assurance that God may take a part in the chaotic events of the country, Mr. Thomson's confidence is somewhat restored and he faces the future with a measure of purpose. Whether Paton intends us to read this conclusion ironically or not, there is little doubt that Mr. Thomson's place in the hurly-burly of South African politics remains an exceptionally marginal one. It is fitting

that the last glimpse we are given of Mr. Thomson is of him bashing animatedly away at the keys of his typewriter in the process of producing yet another of his indignant letters for the local newspapers about the state of the nation.

Peter Wilhelm's long story 'LM' is the dramatic account of a similar kind of South African.<sup>107</sup> In this case, however, the hero's sense of his displacement in the society leads to his voluntary exile. Wilhelm's narrator, who interestingly is given the same first name as the author, decides to leave South Africa in revulsion as much at his class as at events in the country. Peter sets out on a similar path to that of Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man; he too is a writer. Yet Peter's narrative is not only as in Joyce's novel, an account of the world he has left behind, but also of the new one in which he seeks some form of regeneration.

Unlike most liberal white South Africans who decide to leave he moves not to the settled democracies of Europe, America or Australia, but chooses to remain in Africa. He settles in Mozambique shortly before its liberation. Peter's images of the country he has left are among the most scathing in South African literature. He is appalled at its excesses. Here, for instance, is one of his reflections on it:

A barbaric, feudal society, South Africa has this high level of unreality: and always there are stunning moments of self-recognition when it crystallizes, when you find yourself quite blank in the face of the improbable, as if in the gothic interstices of Johannesburg's tower blocks you heard suddenly a hunting horn sound out and saw red-coated men on horses pursuing a black man.<sup>108</sup>

The 'improbable' image of Peter conjures up of South African society is, in fact, grimly appropriate and qualifies his description of it as 'barbaric' and 'feudal'. The hunt after all is commonly practiced by the European nobility and upper classes and this startling image suggests accurately not only the kind of division (between black and white) one finds in the country, but also the nature of the relationship between the two antagonistic groups. In a later passage, Peter links the misery in the country even more explicitly to the affluent class of white South Africans. He recalls how:

We had parties and adulteries. We had panics when some bloated company collapsed and the stink spread through the city.

Johannesburg is a deeply unhappy city. Cripples litter the streets under impressive towers in which men make money. And though the men are secretly demented at their relationship to the dreadful artifices of their society, they hide it in excess and betrayal. And their women - the glossy things in the innumerable supermarkets on Saturday morning - keep them at it.

Advance. Consume. Advance. Consume.<sup>109</sup>

The financial endeavours of the wealthy, far from bringing benefits to the society, pollute it. Indeed, on occasions when such ventures fail, the effects are compared to that of an obese corpse or drunkard with its stench spreading out from it into the world around it. These ideas crystallize in the Popeian paradox: 'Cripples litter the streets under impressive towers in which men make money.'<sup>110</sup> Here the focus becomes panoramic: the earlier image of a black man being hunted by affluent men beneath the tower blocks of the city is inevitably recalled by this sentence.

The latter part of this passage deals with an aspect of life for liberal white English-speaking people in South Africa so common as to have become a cliché in itself: that of their anguish about their role and place in the society. Indeed, Peter chooses to describe this in melodramatic and hackneyed terms. We read, for example, of men who are 'secretly demented at their relationship to the dreadful artifices of their society' and who hide these feelings 'in excess and betrayal'. Shortly before this passage Peter had ridiculed his class by recording how 'we owned the same accent and the same opinions' and spoke continually of 'our liberal torment at conditions in the country'.<sup>111</sup> It is interesting to notice how frequently these people are described in relation to their mercantile activities: they 'own' accents and opinions and the women of this class, 'the glossy things in the innumerable supermarkets', become not only appendages ('things') to their husbands' business activities but also the evil geni who drive them ever on to greater wealth and by implication to further misery.

A common theme in works by white English-speaking writers and one which is a feature of 'The Hero of Currie Road' and 'LM' is the shame and guilt people of liberal disposition feel about the condition of black South Africans. Most often this feeling is compounded both by the realization that they are powerless to effect any significant improvements in the lives of their black countrymen and by the knowledge that the acts of goodwill which they do perform have limited results: what they have to offer

is of little avail. This syndrome, if it could be so called, is the subject of satirical and ironic scrutiny in Paton's and Wilhelm's stories and is the butt of Mphahlele's satire and scorn in his novella 'Mrs. Plum'. There are, however, less corrosive treatments of it. Dan Jacobson's 'The Box', for instance, deals with the predicament of white South Africans as much in sorrow as in reproach. Here, for example, is the story's conclusion which describes the visits of a retired servant to her former employers: 'She [the black woman] still comes, though she has long left our service; she has grown almost blind from the cataracts that are covering her eyes, and we buy off pity and guilt with five shillings every visit, and perhaps a blanket, a blouse of my sister's, a pound of sugar'.<sup>112</sup> The incompleteness of the white family's charitable gesture is suggested by the inconclusiveness and inadequacy of their list of gifts: moreover, what is left unsaid here is how the black woman responds to these donations. What is observed however, is the effect of this gesture on the white family: for them, at least, it 'buys off pity and guilt' and is recognized as doing only that.<sup>113</sup>

There is a similar moment in Jacobson's story 'A Day in the Country'. After the Jewish family have watched in silent disapproval the end of the episode in which the Afrikaners have been tormenting the black child, the narrator observes:

We hoped that it was our condemnation that had broken it [the episode] up. Yet there was the taste of guilt in each of our mouths that we have just looked our condemnation and not said anything to them, not made a protest in the name

of humanity. But we were used to that sort of scene and that sort of guilt. Together they almost make up a way of life.<sup>114</sup>

Indeed, as one reads works about white people in South Africa it is precisely these kinds of episode of racial tension where the liberal inclinations of the characters are of little use and value and feelings of guilt arise which constitute their world and, in Jacobson's resonant phrase, 'make up a way of life'.

A sense of futility even attends those white characters who commit themselves to political action. This is Nadine Gordimer's especial concern in stories such as 'Open House' and 'Africa Emergent' and in a wide range of her novels.<sup>115</sup>

Similarly, in Alan Paton's 'Sunlight in Trebizond Street' the white political prisoner thinks ruefully about his position in gaol and what he considers to be the ultimate futility of his actions and commitment: 'If I talk [to the gaolers], then what was the use of these 100 days? Some will go to prison, some may die. If I don't tell...then they will suffer just the same. And the shame will be just as terrible.'<sup>116</sup>

In this man's case, it is not simply a question of a lack of nerve on his part; after all his refusal to inform on his compatriots for an extensive period while in solitary confinement is eloquent testimony of his resolve and dignity. Yet, even so, he is overcome by feelings of shame and of having failed in some way.

In Peter Wilhelm's 'LM', the narrator sees political commitment as a way of bringing to an end the purposelessness of his former way of life. He observes pithily: 'When Frelimo comes they will

create a socialist state. Good. Let them put me to work in a collective, let them teach me to be a true African and not a walking absurdity, a contradiction.'<sup>117</sup> For Peter has observed that his white compatriots in Mozambique are little different from those he has left behind in South Africa: they too are devoted to luxury. The imminence of the revolutionary change in government has done little to alter their way of thinking and they respond either by seeking the easiest ways out of the country (by which they can ferry out as much of their wealth as possible) or by acts of violence. Wilhelm's view of the white society in Lourenco Marques in 1974 could, in interesting ways, simply become that of South Africa carried somewhat forward in the historical scale to a period of similar social breakdown and change.

Peter realizes, however, that his commitment to the cause of Frelimo, the political antithesis of all that he has experienced in white South African society, will not be without enormous difficulties for him. He reflects on this later in his narrative: 'The Africa I searched for has driven me away, and a new Africa has found me out. The men with kalashnikovs and grenades will be merciless in their assessment of my worthlessness...'<sup>118</sup> By the end of his story, after which the revolt of the white citizens of the city has collapsed, Peter has seen some of the violence which has been meted out to white people who chose to fight their way out of the country. Yet his resolution holds strong despite this violence. Torn by feelings

of anguish at the death of white friends whom he had warned against fleeing and an intense loneliness, he still remains in Mozambique. 'LM' offers a view of what destiny might have in store for those white South African liberals who see out the changes in their own country. The costs, as indicated in this story, are high and the personal sacrifices are many; yet the courage of this action will certainly restore, as it does to Peter, a sense of self-esteem and purpose to a group of people who have seen so much of their dignity stripped away from them.<sup>119</sup>

When these writers turn to white South Africans it is most often the wealthy who are the subjects of their stories. Lower-and lower-middle class white people appear less often in their works. However, when they do it is interesting to discover that they face similar kinds of problems as their more well-to-do fellow white citizens. Where characters of the white lower classes seldom suffer the same pangs of guilt which the more wealthy tend to feel, they do share a sense of displacement in the society. This is often increased by a fear of black people who are reasonably close to them in the class and financial structure of the country and as a result often perceived to be a threat to them. These people face difficulties on two broad levels: firstly, they remain a minority like the rest of the whites in the country, with all of the problems this entails; and secondly, because of their relatively poor financial situation they face the usual difficulties of a fairly indigent group.

Barney Simon, as we have seen earlier, has a number of stories, many in the form of dramatic monologues, which deal precisely with these kinds of themes. Similarly, many of Sheila Roberts's stories are set within the world of lower-class white South Africans and deal with the difficulties confronting this group of people. Most of Simon's and Robert's works are 'slice-of-life' stories, interesting and valuable because of the vivacity with which the lives of the characters are described. The characters are most often seen as victims who only manage to lift themselves out of their difficulties by means of their resilience and good humour. This, for instance, is the case of the leading characters in Sheila Roberts's stories 'Granny Kersting', 'This Time of Year', and 'The Works'.<sup>120</sup> Less common, however, are those stories which deal with the plight of these characters in relation to wider social patterns in South Africa.<sup>121</sup> This is the case, as I observed earlier, of Barney Simon's works 'Miss South Africa (6)', 'Monologue for Vanessa', 'The Fourth Day of Christmas', and 'Our War'. Sheila Roberts also has a small number of stories of this kind.<sup>122</sup>

'Cleft Stick', for example, describes a sordid series of events among a group of poor people in which all the characters, regardless of their race, are victims of a kind.<sup>123</sup> The story is told from the three perspectives: that of a lower-class white policeman, a poor white woman, and her husband, who is a miner. The miner seeks out the companionship of a young black maid-servant; the girl cries out at the man's advances; a

neighbour reports this to the police and the black girl is arrested; finally, the miner's wife tries to slash her wrists.

In each of the three descriptions of this dramatic series of events one gets a strong sense of how the various characters are trapped by their restrictive milieu. The policeman finds that his job is often degrading, especially in cases such as this one where he has to investigate a purported sexual liaison between a white man and a black woman. The wife has to endure not only circumstances of poverty but also has a husband who is addicted to drink and has taken to making passes at her black servant.

The miner himself is a man of few prospects, in an unhappy marriage, who finally lands himself in circumstances far more shaming than would ordinarily be the case in a society without the racial taboos of South Africa. Needless to say, it is the women in the story who suffer the most. The white woman is driven to the point of taking her life and the innocent black girl is carted off to prison.<sup>124</sup> As in some of Nadine Gordimer's best stories, Roberts has perceived in this work a common aspect in the victimisation of the female sex and of black people in South Africa. However, more than this, 'Cleft Stick', based as it is on a common kind of incident in South Africa, gives a trenchant account of the widespread misery caused by the bars and taboos set between people of different colour.

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## VI Black Characters

Black characters, as we have seen, feature in a large number of

stories by white writers in English. In most of these there is a high degree of congruence between their portraits of black people and those in works by black writers. White and black writers alike have dealt with the same areas of concern and difficulty for black South Africans. Moreover, white writers have contributed to the range of views of the black community: this is not to say, however, that they have defined the black ethos in their literature, but have certainly added most valuably to the works of black writers who understandably lead the way in this endeavour. Indeed, if one takes Alan Paton's story 'Debbie Go Home', for example, one finds that it has a great deal in common not only with stories by black writers but also with works by other white writers on the same subject.<sup>125</sup> Its central theme is essentially that of a great deal of writing about the black community: namely, the way in which black people struggle to maintain bonds between one another in the face of the high levels of violence around them. As in works by Alex La Guma, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Can Themba, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Mbulelo Mzamane, Elsa Joubert, and Nadine Gordimer, Paton sets his story within a black family circle and considers the way individual characters within this closed group respond to the harsh circumstances about them. Along with stories such as Mphahlele's 'In Corner B', Matshoba's 'My Friend, the Outcast' and 'A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana', Mzamane's 'Jola' stories, Joubert's 'Agterplaas' ('Back-yard'), and Gordimer's 'A Chip of Glass Ruby' and 'Some Monday for Sure', Paton's story celebrates the way the love and affection the characters feel for one another triumphs over their

adverse circumstances.<sup>126</sup> This is in contrast with stories where violence simply places too great a strain on the harmonious bonds between black people: one thinks here, for instance, of La Guma's 'Slipper Satin' (which balances, however, the strains and affections within a single black family), Themba's 'Kwashiorkor', and Gordimer's 'A City of the Dead, A City of the Living'.<sup>127</sup>

Further, it is interesting to consider how this theme is similarly taken up in Jan Rabie's story 'Die Groot Vrot' ('The Huge Rot') which has an Afrikaner and not a black family as its focus.<sup>128</sup> One finds that not only have black and white writers contributed to the views of one another's communities, but that there are sets of thematic concerns such as this one of the way a family behaves in circumstances of hardship which are common in works by these writers.

It must be indicated, however, that white writers have not been unequivocally successful in their treatments of black characters. Black people occasionally become sentimentalized victims in their works, although interestingly this has been less common in short stories than in novels; perhaps simply because of the story's narrower scope and in certain respects its tighter technical demands. In 'Ndbele's People', Christopher Hope sets out to dismantle some of the less fortunate stereotypes of black people.<sup>129</sup> In particular, his satirical target here is the not uncommon view of the black man as helpless victim: a man hurt and with little mind of his own. The black people in this story, who it must be said are subjected to Hope's characteristic brand of

wide-ranging and unremitting satire, are a far-cry from these hapless pawns of history. Gabriel Shushwe, the Bantustan chief, for example, is described as 'a greedy, grasping, jumped-up little black turd' who bluntly tells a young black priest soon to join a white parish in the city to 'go out and crucify the bastards'.<sup>130</sup> The priest Ndbele, a more sympathetic character, sets out to do nothing less than convert the white members of the church to an enlightened view of Africa. There have been few constraints in the way white writers have treated their black characters, although Hope's satirical approach, it must be admitted, is rare among works in which sympathy for black people is usually the dominant mode.

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#### VII Diversity in the Short Fiction

If one were to seek a characteristic quality in the writing by white South Africans in English which distinguishes their works from those of the Afrikaner and black writers, I think this would be its diversity; not only in subject-matter but also in fictional technique. This is not to say that Afrikaner and black writers have not treated a range of South African (and non-South African) characters and situations in a variety of ways in their works, but that this is far less common than in the case of the white English writers. As illustration, a collection of short stories by almost any English writer is likely as not to contain stories not only about white English-speaking South Africans, but even more probably about black people and Afrikaners, not to mention pieces about non-South African characters with these not

necessarily set in South Africa.<sup>131</sup>

This certainly is the case among the writers whose works we are considering. Moreover, within these story collections there is almost without exception a range of fictional approaches from realism and naturalism to fantasy and the fable. These are not characteristic features of short-story collections by Afrikaner or black writers.

Why this is the case is not so easy to explain. Part of the reason for it must lie in the place the white English-speaking community occupies in South African society; and it is a topic which has recurred throughout this chapter. What I have not dealt with, however, is the white English South African writer's common inheritance with other English writers around the world, which is also shared by black South African writers in English. The literary tradition in English is a diverse one embracing writing from the Commonwealth and America; value within it often attaches to works which bring fresh perspectives to bear on what might otherwise be seen as a somewhat stolid literary culture. There is a need or even demand for diversity in this tradition. This, in brief, I would suggest, along with the social place of these writers, acts as a powerful spur to the range and variety one finds in their works. Because of their different situation in South Africa, black writers have faced a greater compulsion to localize their works within their own community than their white counterparts who find their group cast somewhat adrift from the central forces directing historical change in the country.

Afrikaner writers are in an analogous position to the black writers, concerned mainly about the destiny and troubles of their community, with most of their works set squarely in it. However, because of the influence of American and European literatures and cultures on them and also because of a rising disaffection for the restraints of Afrikaner society, many Afrikaner writers have moved further towards the kind of diversity one finds in white English-South African writing.

Earlier sections of this chapter dealt in detail with the range of subjects and characters in white South African short fiction in English. Let us, however, consider further the diversity of techniques used in this short fiction. From the stories cited earlier one can gain a good idea of the range of fictional approaches being used by these writers. Certainly, realism and to a lesser extent naturalism are the most common modes. Nevertheless, even among works by writers such as Alan Paton, Dan Jacobson, and Jack Cope, whom one would characterize in the first instance as realist story writers, one finds realism giving way in certain of their works to a form of fabular writing. In this respect, one need only recall stories such as 'A Drink in the Passage', 'The Hero of Currie Road', 'Beggar my neighbour', 'Another Day', and 'Heart-of-the-Daybreak'.

Among works by writers such as Peter Wilhelm, Barney Simon, and Christopher Hope, this tendency is more common and there is a noticeable penchant for stories which take on qualities of the parable. 'Seth 'n Sam', 'The Problem with Staff', and 'Learning

to Fly' are stories of this kind. Mention was also made earlier of Barney Simon's two tales 'The Fourth Day of Christmas' and 'Our War'. It is worth considering these in greater detail. Both are inventive and ambitious works set in an imaginary future in South Africa. As in Christopher Hope's 'Learning to Fly' and Jack Cope's 'The Name of Patrick Henry', Simon brings the humorous and distressing together in both of these stories.

In 'The Fourth Day of Christmas', the voluble Cookie and his equally garrulous grandmother look on in wonder and amusement at the antics of a group of looters who break into their house late one night. The horror of the event is displaced by the way Cookie and his grandmother see in it endless causes for mirth. They look on with increasing amusement as the men blunder about the house in a bizarre hunt for stowed away treasures, these men trying to simulate all the while the efficiency of a military manoeuvre. One of the high-points of the story's comedy is the inventory of stolen goods called out by the gang's leader including such unlikely items as half a paw-paw and six threadbare adult sheets. 'Our War' offers a similar, yet more forbidding view of disaster. As in 'The Fourth Day of Christmas' Simon celebrates the good humour and resilience of his characters in circumstances of hardship.

Here, for instance, are the young narrator's opening words:

Well, this is about our war. Whenever I complained about it, the noise and the dirt and the stinking and the dying, Mama used to say, "Listen, Leiba, be grateful for what you've got. That you're not in London or Moscow or New York or somewhere. Be grateful you're here where things always happen easier."

When I got upset about Lily Fine losing her leg, she said,

"So, but she's still got her head"...<sup>132</sup>

This kind of earthy and distinctly Jewish stoicism prevails throughout the story. Simon's characters are poor Jews, of a kind more familiar in the times of his childhood than in later decades. As a result, there is a curiously satisfying fusion of two disparate moments in this work: one in an imaginary future in Johannesburg and the other drawn from a recognizable phase in its past. It is almost like reading a story about, say, George Orwell walking the streets of a war-torn London in 2020.<sup>133</sup> The high degree of inventiveness in this story is a quality not uncommon in other works by white English-speaking writers.<sup>134</sup>

In this regard, it is worth commenting on Peter Wilhelm's consciously experimental stories. 'Pyro Protram' assumes the form of a science-fiction story: the last man-on-earth is beset by monstrous creatures and fearful hallucinations from his past.<sup>135</sup> In the last lines of the work, however, Wilhelm offers a notable change in emphasis. The foregoing events we learn from the conversation of two psychiatrists took place within the deranged mind of a mental patient shortly before his death. This man, the creator of the terrible visions, was none other than a person whom people had called in earlier times 'a great South African': he had been a Springbok rugby player and was set for parliamentary office. In more recent times, however, things had gone wrong for him: he had killed his wife and his mental breakdown followed soon after. By means of this twist-in-the-tail ending, Wilhelm's story lifts from being a rather unexceptional piece of science-fiction to become a notable

work of satire.

'Lion' is a disturbing account of an episode not unknown in South African life: a lion from the wild enters the suburbs of a city wreaking havoc as it passes and throwing the white people into panic.<sup>136</sup> It is an occurrence taken up in a similar way in Nadine Gordimer's later novella 'Something out There'.<sup>137</sup> Wilhelm's story suggests something more than a mere record of a series of sensational events. Although he never draws the explicit parallel, as Gordimer does in her strikingly similar works 'Lion on the Freeway' and 'Something Out There', there is the suggestion that the lion's invasion of the white suburbs is like that of another far more common experience for white South Africans; namely, the fear of black people and the fear of an invasion from this source.<sup>138</sup> It is not entirely coincidental that Wilhelm's predator, like the black people of the country, is an indigenous and centuries-old part of its landscape. 'Lion' ends on a more sombre note than Gordimer's 'Lion on the Freeway'. Wilhelm's animal is finally cornered on one of the city's highways and shot. Gordimer's narrator on the other hand imagines the lion of that story, whom she hears every night in its cage in the nearby zoo, breaking free of its cage one night, 'turning his head at last to claim what he's never seen, the country where he's king'.<sup>139</sup>

What we find then in fiction by white South Africans in English is that although realism is a dominant form there are also a number of works which either shift from realism to the fabular

without noticeably moving beyond their plausible frames of reference, or those which consciously displace realistically described events, most often into an imaginary future.<sup>140</sup> This is not of course to mention the various forms of satire which appear in a number of works by these writers. It might also be added that in a small but important number of her works of the 1970's and 1980's such as 'A Soldier's Embrace', 'Oral History', 'Town and Country Lovers One and Two', and 'Something Out There', Nadine Gordimer has entered a field popularly known as New Journalism in which the subjects of her stories (here the bush-wars, urban terrorism, and infringements of the Immorality Act) are more usually those one finds in works of journalism.<sup>141</sup> In this area as we shall see, Afrikaner writers of the 1970's and 1980's have been especially active.

Sheila Roberts has said that 'the very ambience of South Africa causes people who begin challenging the overall unfairness and injustice to start examining other situations where similar injustices exist. I think it must be impossible to be critical of the situation and not allow that criticism to ripple out in other areas of one's life.'<sup>142</sup> One of the areas into which women writers such as Sheila Roberts, Nadine Gordimer, and Bessie Head have allowed 'criticism to ripple out' is that of the difficulties facing women in Southern Africa.<sup>143</sup> All three of these writers have described in a range of works how it is women who often find themselves at the bottom of the pile in the society. Further, as I indicated in the discussion of Roberts's story 'Cleft Stick', both she and Gordimer have perceived common

factors in the oppression of women and black people in South Africa. However, in stories such as 'All That Jazz' and 'The Works' Roberts also indicates that the situation is often somewhat more complex than this and that one need not see the abuse of women in South Africa stemming solely from the conduct of white men, but that black men are ready to mix hatred of whites with sexual slurs on women as well.<sup>144</sup> The white woman narrator of 'The Works', for example, describes her encounter with a group of black men in this way:

There are four of them. Coloured men. Not men she would normally glance at, sideways perhaps, ready to nod or smile in politeness. Coloured men. Workers in shabby shapeless clothes.

Then one jumps at her. She jumps, like a lopsided jack-in-the-box, not touching her, but saying something like Yah. Or Baby. Or Dolly. Or Hoertjie. Or just Hello. She doesn't remember. She just knows that one jumps out at her and the others laugh and she is brought up short, stumbles off the pavement, and is then completely disorientated...They amble on, laughing, but she doesn't laugh, nor does she know for the moment where she is...<sup>145</sup>

This episode, it might be added, forms one of a series of similar incidents of that afternoon in which men have in various ways demeaned the narrator. Indeed, the most common perspective one is given of the relationship between the sexes in works by these writers is how women are abused by men from all communities in the country.

In 'Knobs and Nikes: a tale of Revenge', Sheila Roberts does something unique in South African fiction: she draws a connection between the brutishness of a man's treatment of his wife and his adherence to Afrikaner nationalism. In short, Roberts suggests a

link between the man's political preferences and his sense of himself as master in bed. This is achieved most ingeniously. Ruff is not a very caring lover. For instance, after having taken care of his sexual needs, his wife, who is the story's narrator, tells us how remiss Ruff is in fulfilling his part of the bargain: 'I don't mind doing this for him after I have been taken care of, so to speak. But more and more these days he geysers first and then his whole body begins to exude a sweat of self-righteous doing-my-duty labour. He can't rise up like a helium-balloon twice...'<sup>146</sup> Moreover, on the occasions he does turn to her he is prone to laughter as she is reaching orgasm: consequently, his wife is left shamed and unsatisfied. It is one of the story's fine comic ironies that the only time the narrator gains sexual fulfilment from her husband is after his return from the fortnightly meetings he attends of a mens-only Afrikaner nationalist group. Ruff returns filled with patriotic ardour and summons his wife to act the way a submissive wife is claimed to have responded in earlier times to the sexual demands of her Voortrekker husband. As a result of these elaborate charades our narrator is at least granted an orgasm by her husband. At the end of the story, however, the narrator turns the tables on Ruff, leaving him so as to join her welcoming Tant Sannie.

Works such as these about the sexual harassment and the difficulties faced by women and indeed their ingenuity under these conditions have added a valuable dimension to South African fiction and one which has become increasingly popular among

contemporary feminist writers. Writers such as Roberts, Gordimer, and Head are exploring these pressing social issues and, moreover, often drawing connections between them and the other broader national concerns of racial violence and exploitation. In the concluding chapter of this section about the works of white English-speaking writers I shall consider Nadine Gordimer's short fiction particularly with regard to these issues and show the way in which they have formed a distinctive and valuable component in her writing.

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#### VIII Conclusion

In his College Lecture at the University of Natal, entitled 'The Political Novelist in South Africa', Christopher Hope made two provocative observations about recent South African writing.<sup>147</sup>

In the first place, there is a kind of predictable repetitiveness about much South African writing in which the circumstances of apartheid have been dealt with so often that there is a kind of exhaustion of the subject: the 'narrow field has been crossed and recrossed so many times that there really is very little left to say about the awfulness of life under apartheid'.<sup>148</sup> Further, as the nature of the State changes, while passing through an era of violent disorder prior to the realignment of political positions in South Africa, the white English-speaking writers are going to find the certainties of their world violently thrown about. No longer will it simply be a case of condemning white racialists and racism and sympathizing with black victims in their works,

but these writers will find themselves ever more concerned with their community's threatened place in the country. I think Hope's points are shrewdly made, although I tend to regard the works of writers about apartheid as revealing a greater flexibility and inventiveness than he perhaps admits in this essay.<sup>149</sup>

White English-speaking writers in South Africa are certainly going to find themselves and their community under even greater threats than they have faced until the early 1980's, and their fiction will surely move along with the changes. I hope that their works will continue to reveal the diversity in subjects, characters and approaches which we have observed to be of such importance. Hope may, however, be right in predicting that fiction about their own community will increase.

However, what is of significance about this community's writing since 1948 is precisely its range and diversity in treating aspects of apartheid and South African society. As I have argued throughout this chapter, I feel that this is due in no small measure to the place of the white English-speaking community, being somewhat distanced from the central historical clash between African and Afrikaner nationalists. But this has not meant that an enfeebled literature has stemmed from its writers. On the contrary, white English-speaking South African writers have pitched themselves into a concern about the pressing issues of the day and their works reflect in every possible way this commitment. Their detachment from the major communities of the

country (black and Afrikaner) has moreover afforded them a freedom not as easily available to their fellow black and Afrikaner writers: namely, a freedom to range widely among subjects and characters from all of the South African communities. It is this freedom and their use of it which has produced much of the value in their works.

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NOTES

1. The phrase 'a minority within a minority' is used by Nadine Gordimer to describe the white English-speaking South African community in her essay 'Living in the Interregnum' (in The New York Review of Books, January 29th 1983, p. 24).
  2. For an analysis of the twin nationalist movements - Afrikaner and African and the place of the white English-speaking community in relation to these, see Edwin Munger's Afrikaner and African Nationalism (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1967, in particular pp. xvii - xviii).
  3. Gordimer, Nadine: A World of Strangers (London, Gollancz, 1958, p. 75).
  4. 'A Drink in the Passage' appears in Alan Paton's collection of stories Debbie Go Home (London, Jonathan Cape, 1961; all page references here are to the Penguin edition of this collection - Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1965; the story appears on pp. 87 - 95 of that edition).
  5. Bartho Smit's story 'Ek vat my land' appears in the anthology Bolder ed Hennie Aucamp (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1973, pp. 32 - 42). 'Seth 'n Sam' appears in Peter Wilhelm's story collection At the End of a War (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1981, pp. 10 - 15).
  6. For example, see the stories 'Ha'penny', 'The Divided House', 'Death of a Tsotsi', and 'Sponono' from the collection Debbie Go Home, op. cit.
  7. Paton, Alan: 'A Drink in the Passage' from Debbie Go Home, op. cit., p. 95.
  8. These are qualities which also attach to other passages of social and moral judgement in Paton's fiction. Consider, for instance, the conclusion of the story 'Sponono' where the narrator (the white reformatory principal) uses a metaphor drawn from chess which he condescendingly calls 'a game not known to you' in his address to the black youth of the title: 'Sponono, we have reached, you and I, what is called, in a game not known to you, a stalemate. You move and I move, but neither of us will ever capture the other...' (p.117, Debbie Go Home).
  9. 'The Box' and 'The Zulu and the Zeide' first appeared in Jacobson's collection A Long Way from London (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1959). All page references here are taken from Jacobson's selected story volume Inklings (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973).
  10. Jacobson, Dan: 'The Box' from Inklings, op. cit., p. 6.
  11. Ibid., pp 6 - 7.
  12. Jacobson, Dan: 'The Zulu and the Zeide' from Inklings, op. cit., p. 30.
  13. Nadine Gordimer's story 'Happy Event' appears in her collection Six Feet of the Country (London, Gollancz, 1956, pp. 31 - 46) and 'Something for the Time Being' appears in her next collection Friday's Footprints (London, Gollancz, 1960). Es'kia Mphahlele's novella 'Mrs. Plum' appears in his collection In Corner B (East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1967, pp. 164 - 208).
- Elsa Joubert's story 'Agterplaas' appears in her collection Melk (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1980, pp. 59 - 69).

14. 'Modus Vivendi' by E.M. Macphail appears in her collection Falling Upstairs (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1982, pp. 79 - 85).
15. On the theme of white dependancy on black people see Gordimer's story 'Good Climate, Friendly Inhabitants' from her collection Not For Publication (London, Gollancz, 1965) and my discussion of this story on pp. 181-2 of my chapter on her short fiction.
16. 'Pregmancy' appears in the collection Falling Upstairs, op. cit., pp. 123 - 127.
17. Ibid., p. 123.
18. 'Droogte' first appeared in Jan Rabie's collection 21 (1956) and later in his volume of collected stories, Jan Rabie Versamelerhale (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1980, pp. 33 - 35). This story is discussed on pp. 263 - 265 of my Afrikaans chapter.
19. 'Miss South Africa (6)' appears in Barney Simon's collection Joburg, Sis! (Johannesburg, Bateleur Press, 1974, pp. 113 - 125).
20. 'Monologue for Vanessa' appears in Joburg, Sis! op. cit., pp. 139 - 141.
21. Ibid., p. 141.
22. 'The Fourth Day of Christmas' and 'Our War' appear in Joburg, Sis!, op. cit., pp. 153 - 161 and 165 - 180, respectively.
23. 'Chasm' appears in Macphail's collection Falling Upstairs, op. cit., pp. 47 - 51.
24. Ibid., p. 51.
25. 'Is there nowhere else where we can meet?' appears in Nadine Gordimer's first story collection The Soft Voice of the Serpent (London, Gollancz, 1953). This story is discussed on pp. 170 - 173 of this study.
26. This observation is supported not only by evidence of a sociological kind but by the much larger proportion of novels and stories which describe areas of conflict and discord between white and black characters than of those describing cooperation between them. A rare example of black and white people acting charitably towards one another occurs in Jack Cope's story 'The Flight' from his first collection The Tame Ox (London, Heinemann, 1960, pp. 193 - 202.), in which Cope includes the irony of having the black characters being told off in dismally predictable fashion by their employer after having acted in a kindly way to a white woman who had lost her way at night.
27. 'At the end of a war' is the title story of Peter Wilhelm's collection of 1981. It appears on pp. 136 - 160 of that collection, op. cit.
28. 'Heart -of-the-Daybreak' by Jack Cope appears in his second volume of stories The Man Who Doubted (London, Heinemann, 1967, pp. 233 - 247).
29. 'A Pound of Flesh' appears in The Man Who Doubted, op. cit., pp. 125 - 140.
30. 'Jobman' appears in Achmat Dangor's collection Waiting for Leila (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1981, pp. 82 - 104). It is referred to on p. 140 of this study.
31. 'Beggar my neighbour' is the title story of Jacobson's second

story collection Beggar my Neighbour (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964). It appears with 'Another Day' in his selected story volume, Inklings, op. cit., pp. 58 - 69; and 'Another Day' is on pp. 140 - 144 of that collection.

32. The phrase 'the ineluctability of what's coming' was used by Dan Jacobson in his description of these stories during our discussion of his work. Interview with Dan Jacobson, University College, London, 1st March 1984.

33. Jacobson, Dan: 'Beggar my Neighbour' from Inklings, op. cit., p. 68.

34. Ibid., p. 69.

35. Mango Tshabangu's story 'Thoughts in a Train' appears in the anthology Forced Landing Africa South Contemporary Writings ed. Mthobi Mutloatse (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1980, pp. 156 - 158).

36. 'Thoughts in a Train' is discussed further on pp.392 - 393 of this study.

37. Jacobson, Dan: 'Another Day' from Inklings, op. cit., p. 143.

38. Ibid., p. 144.

39. 'Seth 'n Sam' by Peter Wilhelm appears in his collection At the End of a War, op. cit., pp. 10 - 15.

40. 'Witch White' by Jack Cope appears in his collection Alley Cat (London, Heinemann, 1973, pp. 17 - 30). Hennie Aucamp's Wimpie and Tatties stories appear in his first volume of stories Een Somermiddag (Cape Town & Pretoria, HAUM, 1963). The latter stories are discussed on pp.281 -282 of this study.

41. 'Die kort lewe van 'n gemiddelde man' by M.C. Botha appears in his collection Skertse 1976 - 1979 (Johannesburg, Taurus, 1981, pp. 5 - 9). It is discussed on pp.322 - 323 of this study.

42. 'The Problem with Staff' appears in Christopher Hope's collection Private Parts and other Tales (Johannesburg, Bateleur Press, 1981, pp. 17 - 31).

43. For discussion of the predictive and admonishing tales of Herman Bosman see pp. 55 - 64 of the chapter on his work.

44. I am grateful to Christopher Hope with whom I discussed many of the issues in this section. Indeed, he was most eloquent in elucidating ideas which, at that stage, were somewhat hazily defined in my thinking. Interview with Christopher Hope, Highgate, London, 8th March 1984. It is also worth mentioning a distinction the Afrikaner writer Abraham De Vries made in an interview with Chris Barnard, between what he called 'wise and sensible' writers and 'playful' writers ('wyse en spelende skrywers'); however, De Vries did little in applying this classification to South African literature. 'Abraham H. De Vries in gesprek met Chris Barnard' in Gesprekke met Skywers 3 (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1973, p. 121).

45. See p. 45 of the chapter on Herman Bosman for discussion of this point.

46. 'A Day in the Country' by Dan Jacobson first appeared in A Long Way from London, op. cit., and is reprinted in Inklings, op. cit., pp. 9 - 17.

47. Ibid., p. 16.
48. Ibid., p. 17.
49. Paton, Alan: 'Life for a Life' from the collection Debbie Go Home, op. cit., p. 52.
50. The events around which this story is based took place in South Africa and Paton developed his work from newspaper reports of the incident. Interview with Alan Paton, Botha's Hill, Natal, 20th April, 1983. One might add that many of the stories dealing with the misery inflicted on black people are based on actual incidents; this was borne out in my interviews with writers such as Alan Paton, Jack Cope, and Dan Jacobson, In this case, reality supercedes any need to fictionalize the events. The literary quality lies entirely in the telling.
51. Paton, Alan: 'Life for a Life' from Debbie Go Home, op. cit., p. 44.
52. Ibid., p. 54.
53. Ibid., p. 47.
54. Ibid., p. 53.
55. Cope, Jack: 'A Pound of Flesh' from the collection The Man Who Doubted, op. cit., p. 133.
56. James Matthew's 'Crucifixion' and 'The Awakening' appear in the volume of his collected stories The Park (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983, pp. 117 - 130 and pp. 131 - 141). 'A Glimpse of Slavery' by Mtutuzeli Matshoba appears in his collection Call Me Not a Man (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1979, pp. 27 - 64). Alex La Guma's 'The Lemon Orchard' appears in A Walk in the Night, op. cit., pp. 131 - 136.
57. 'The Bastards' by Jack Cope appears in Alley Cat, op. cit., pp. 123 - 140.
58. Jan Rabie's 'Drie kaalkoppe eet tesame' first appeared in 21 (1956) and along with 'Dies irae' is reprinted in his Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 9 - 10 and pp. 222 - 240, respectively. These two stories are discussed on pp. 225 -226 and pp.327 - 328 of this study.  
Images of people who exploit others in terms of their boundless appetites are age-old. For an interesting discussion of literary prototypes of this kind of imagery see Claude Rawson's 'Eating People', a review of Cannibalism and the Common Law: The Story of the Tragic last voyage of the 'Mignonette' by A.W. Brian Simpson (in London Review Books, Vol. 7, No. 1, 24th January 1985, pp. 20 - 21).
59. Cope, Jack 'The Bastards' from Alley Cat, op. cit., p. 128.
60. 'The Little Missionary' by Jack Cope appears in his collection The Tame Ox, op. cit., pp. 84 - 97.
61. Ibid., p. 92.
62. Jack Cope passed this remark of Uys Krige's on to me during our interview. Interview with Jack Cope, Hitchin, 26th February 1984.
63. Paton, Alan: 'Sunlight in Trebizond Street' from Knocking on the Door: Shorter Writings selected and edited by Colin Gardner (Cape Town, David Philip, 1975, p. 193).

64. La Guma, Alex: The Stone Country (Berlin, Seven Seas, 1967 and London, Heinemann, 1978, p. 58 - U.K. edition).
65. Paton, Alan: 'Life for a Life' from Debbie Go Home, op. cit., p. 57 and Wilhelm, Peter: 'All the days of my death' from At the end of a war, op. cit., p. 95.
66. Ibid., p. 95
67. Ibid., p. 134. It is worth remarking that Malatsi (the black man) again uses the image of stone to describe his condition: 'unjustly locked away in stone'.
68. Ibid., p. 134.
69. Paton, Alan: 'Sunlight in Trebizond Street' from Knocking on the Door, op. cit. pp. 187 - 188.
70. This feature occurs not only in 'Sunlight in Trebizond Street' and 'All the days of my death', but also in Alex La Guma's prison stories 'Out of Darkness' and 'Tattoo Marks and Nails'. These stories are discussed on pp.442 - 5 and pp. 459 - 60 of this study.
71. Interview with Christopher Hope, Highgate, London, 8th March 1984.
72. 'Makapan's Caves' was Bosman's first Schalk Lourens story and was written in 1931. It later appeared in his collection Mafeking Road (Johannesburg, Central News Agency, 1947, pp. 46 - 54). 'Unto Dust', written in 1947, appeared as the title story of Bosman's posthumous collection Unto Dust (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1963). These two stories are discussed on pp. 42 - 46 and p. 48 of this study.
73. 'The name of Patrick Henry' appears in Jack Cope's collection The Man who Doubted, op. cit., pp. 89 - 106.
74. Ibid., p. 94.
75. Ibid., p. 94.
76. Ibid., p. 94.
77. Ibid., p. 101.
78. Es'kia Mphahlele's stories 'Grieg on a Stolen Piano' and 'In Corner B' appear in his collection In Corner B, op. cit. A number of Casey Motsisi's humorous sketches appear in the volume Casey & Co. Selected Writings of Casey 'Kid' Motsisi ed. Mothobi Mutloatse (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1978). Mbulelo Mzamane's 'Jola' stories appear in his collection Mzala - The Stories of Mbulelo Mzamane (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1980). All of these stories are discussed in the chapter on the black short fiction.
79. Cope, Jack: 'The Name of Patrick Henry' from The Man Who Doubted, op. cit., pp. 103 - 104.
80. 'Learning to Fly - An African Fairy Tale' appears in both the South African and British editions of Private Parts, op. cit. The British edition is published by Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1982. Interestingly, Hope dropped the story's subtitle in the British edition.
81. This, however, is more properly the satirical subject of Hope's novel Kruger's Alp (1984).
82. Hope, Christopher: 'Learning to Fly' from Private Parts, op. cit., p. 10. (SA ed.) and pp. 57 - 58 (U.K. edn).

83. Ibid., p. 13 S.An edn. and p. 60 U.K.edn.
84. Ibid., pp. 7 and 15, (SA. edn) and pp. 54 and 63 (U.K. edn.)
85. Ibid., pp. 8 - 9 (S.A. edn) and pp. 55 - 56 (U.K. edn).
86. Hughes, Geoffrey: 'The Bronzed Albino - Surrealist Fantasies'. Review of Private Parts (in Contrast, July 1983, Vol. 14 No 3, p. 91).
87. I think that Hope's satirical approach can usefully be compared with that of Swift, especially in his celebrated 'A Modest Proposal', where he sets out to shock and offend the sensibilities of the complacent.
88. 'Black' by Peter Wilhelm appears in his collection LM (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1975, pp. 87 - 91).
89. Ibid., p. 89.
90. ibid., p. 90.
91. cf. the similar use of this kind of device in Christopher Hope's novel A Separate Development (1980).
92. See Jan Rabie's stories 'n Koekie Seep' and 'Wit op Swart' which appear in his Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 120 - 124 and pp. 177 - 182. M.C. Botha's 'Frans Malan' appears in his collection Die einde van 'n kluisenaar se lewe (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1982, pp. 27 - 36). These stories are discussed on pp. 272 -274 and 319 - 322 of the Afrikaans chapter.
93. Wilhelm, Peter: 'Black' from the collection LM, op. cit., p.91.
94. I think that if one were to examine the satirical traditions of writing in countries other than South Africa the same conclusion would hold true.
95. 'The Kugel' by Christopher Hope appears in the British edition of Private Parts, op. cit., pp. 119 - 133.
96. Ibid., p. 133.
97. 'On the Frontier' by Christopher Hope appears in the British edition of Private Parts, op. cit., pp. 134 - 150.
98. 'The Tame Ox' is the title story of Jack Cope's volume The Tame Ox, op. cit. The quotation is from p. 12 of this volume.
99. Ibid., p.22.
100. This story, Jack Cope told me, was based on an incident of the 1930's which took place at the ceremony at which Revd. John Dube, principal of Ohlange Institute, a Methodist Mission school and college, was awarded an honorary degree. Interview with Jack Cope, Hitchin, 26th February, 1984. Dube, along with people like Sol Plaatje and Herbert Dhlomo were representative of a new order of black South Africans, later called 'New Africans', See Sol T. Plaatje by Brian Willan (London, Heinemann, 1984) and The New African - H.I.E. Dhlomo by Tim Couzens (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985).
101. 'The Hero of Currie Road' by Alan Paton appears in Knocking on the Door, op. cit., pp. 167 - 174.
102. Ibid., p. 167.
103. Ibid., p. 167.
104. Ibid., p. 171.
105. Ibid., p. 173.

106. Ibid., p. 173.
107. 'LM' by Peter Wilhelm is the title story of his collection LM, op. cit., pp. 9 - 42.
108. Ibid., p. 29.
109. Ibid., p. 31.
110. cf. this line in Wilhelm's story with the famous line in Canto III of Pope's 'The Rape of the Lock': The hungry judges soon the sentence sign, and wretches hang that jurymen may dine.
11. 21 - 22. See The Works of Alexandra Pope ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 96).
111. Wilhelm, Peter: 'LM' from the collection of that name, op. cit., p. 30.
112. Jacobson, Dan: 'The Box' from Inklings, op. cit., pp. 7 - 8.
113. cf. the similar conclusion of Nadine Gordimer's story 'Ah, woe is me' from her collection The Soft Voice of the Serpent. This story is reprinted in the volume of her Selected Stories (London, Jonathan Cape, 1975, pp. 24 - 30).
114. Jacobson, Dan: 'A Day in the Country' from Inklings, op. cit., p.11.
115. 'Open House' and 'Africa Emergent' by Nadine Gordimer appear in her collection Livingstone's Companions (London, Jonathan Cape, 1972). These stories are discussed on pp. 192 - 195 and of this study.
116. Paton, Alan: 'Sunlight in Trebizond Steet' from Knocking on the Door, op. cit., p. 191.
117. Wilhelm, Peter: 'LM' from the collection of that name, op. cit., p. 14.
118. Ibid., p. 21.
119. It is worth indicating that other South African writers have set stories of theirs in one or other of South Africa's neighbouring states which have recently become independent after long struggles against white oppression. Like 'LM', events in Mozambique form the backdrop to Welma Odendaal's Afrikaans stories 'LM' and 'Baker' ('Dry-nurse'): these stories appear in her collection Keerkring (Johannesburg, Perskor, 1977) and are discussed on pp.312 - 315 of my Afrikaans chapter. Consider as well Nadine Gordimer's 'A Soldier's Embrace' and 'At the Rendezvous of Victory' which appear in her collections A Soldier's Embrace (London, Jonathan Cape, 1980) and Something Out There (London, Jonathan Cape, 1984). All of these works hold important implications for South Africans soon to experience similar historical changes in their country.
120. 'Granny Kersting' by Sheila Roberts appears in her first collection of stories Outside Life's Feast (Johannesburg, Ad. Donker, 1975, pp. 93 - 105); 'This Time of Year' and 'The Works' appear in her next collection This Time of Year (Johannesburg, Ad Donker, 1983, pp. 7 - 15 and pp. 54 - 60, respectively).
121. Alan Paton's 'The Hero of Currie Road' and Peter Wilhelm's 'LM' are stories which deal with the plight of their characters in relation to the wider social upheavals of the society.

However, the heroes of these two works are of a higher social class than most of the characters in the stories by Sheila Roberts and Barney Simon.

122. Examples of these kind of stories are 'All that Jazz' from Outside Life's Feast, op. cit., pp. 41 - 51; and 'A Spell at Witwilger', 'Mbiti herself', 'The Works', 'The English Department and Martimus', and 'Knobs and Nikes' from her collection This Time of Year, op. cit., pp. 33 - 44, 45 - 53, 54 - 60, 71 - 80, and pp. 108 - 114, respectively.

123. 'Cleft Stick' by Sheila Roberts appears in Outside Life's Feast, op. cit., pp. 85 - 92.

124. cf. the black women who are the victims in Nadine Gordimer's stories 'Town and Country Lovers One and Two' from A Soldier's Embrace, op. cit., pp. 73 - 84.

125. 'Debbie Go Home' is the title story of Alan Paton's collection Debbie Go Home, op. cit., 9 - 22.

126. 'In Corner B' is the title story of Es'kia Mphahlele's collection of 1967, op. cit., 'My friend, the Outcast' and 'A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana' appear in Mtutuzeli Matshoba's collection Call Me Not a Man, op. cit. Mzamane's 'Jola' stories appear in his collection Mzala, op. cit., Elsa Joubert's 'Agterplaas' appears in her collection, Melk, op. cit. 'A Chip of Glass Ruby' and 'Some Monday for Sure' appear in Gordimer's collection Not for Publication, op. cit. All of these stories are discussed in various sections of this study.

127. Alex La Guma's story 'Slipper Satin' appears in the selection Quartet ed. Richard Rive (London, Heinemann, 1965, pp. 67 - 73). Can Themba's 'Kwashiorkor' appears in his collection The Will to Die (London, Heinemann, 1973, pp. 14 - 26).

Nadine Gordimer's 'A City of the Dead, a City of the Living' appears in her collection Something out There, op. cit., pp. 10 - 26.

128. 'Die Groot Vrot' by Jan Rabie first appeared in his collection Die Roos aan die Pels and was later collected in his Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 190 - 198.

This story is discussed on pp. 265 - 269 of the Afrikaans chapter.

129. 'Ndbele's People' by Christopher Hope appears in the British edition of Private Parts, op. cit., pp. 12 - 40.

130. Ibid., pp. 14 and 15.

131. The same holds true for works in other genres by these writers. Consider, for example, the novels of Nadine Gordimer, Dan Jacobson, and Alan Paton.

132. Simon, Barney: 'Our War' from the collection Joburg, Sis!, op. cit., p. 165.

133. In my discussion of this story with Barney Simon he made the following interesting remark: 'The situation in 'Our War' and 'The Fourth Day of Christmas' as well might be pessimistic, but the human spirit is not. There is an optimism in so far as the humanity of the people prevails'.

Interview with Barney Simon, Riverside Studio, London, July 14th 1983.

134. For stories of comparable technical inventiveness in Afrikaans see Jan Rabie's 'Die Groot Vrot' from his Versamelerhale, op. cit. Abraham De Vries's 'Terug na die Natuur' from his collection Twee Maal om die Son (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1969) and M.C. Botha's stories 'Die prys wat jy moet betaal' and Frans Malan's from his collections Die prys wat jy moet betaal (Johannesburg, Perskor, 1982) and Die Einde van 'n Kluisenaar se Lewe, op. cit. These stories are discussed in the Afrikaans chapter.

135. 'Pyro Protram' by Peter Wilhelm appears in his collection LM, op. cit., pp. 55 - 63.

136. 'Lion' by Peter Wilhelm appears in his collection LM, op. cit., pp. 101 - 108.

137. 'Something out There' is the title piece in Gordimer's collection Something Out There, op. cit., pp. 118 - 203. Gordimer's predator is not a lion, however, but an ape of sorts which maraudes the white suburbs.

138. 'Lion on the Freeway' by Nadine Gordimer appears in her collection A Soldier's Embrace, op. cit., pp. 24 - 27.

139. Ibid., p. 27.

140. Examples of the former are Jacobson's 'Beggar my Neighbour', Cope's 'Heart-of-the-Daybreak', and Wilhelm's 'Lion'; while examples of the latter kind of story-writing are Hope's 'Learning to Fly' and Simon's 'The Fourth Day of Christmas' and 'Our War'.

141. 'A Soldier's Embrace', 'Oral History', and 'Town and Country Lovers One and Two' appear in Nadine Gordimer's collection A Soldier's Embrace and 'Something Out There' is the title piece of her story collection of 1984.

142. Interview with Sheila Roberts, East Lansing, Michigan, 2nd March 1984.

143. See discussion of this topic in the sections of this study dealing with the short fiction of Nadine Gordimer and Bessie Head.

144. 'All that Jazz' appears in Outside Life's Feast and 'The Works' appears in This Time of Year.

145. Roberts, Sheila: 'The Works' from This Time of Year, op. cit., p. 54.

146. Roberts, Sheila: 'Knobs and Nikes: a tale of revenge' from This Time of Year, op. cit., p. 108.

147. Hope, Christopher: 'The Political Novelist in South Africa' being the College Lecture at the University of Natal, Durban. The lecture was delivered on 18th October 1984. The text of this lecture will be appearing in 1986 in Christopher Hope's Doing the Books - Reviews, Letters and other Writings. The manuscript of this lecture was kindly passed on to me by Christopher Hope and page references here are to this manuscript.

148. Ibid., p. 5.

149. An assessment of the flexibility and inventiveness of the South African writers will be given in the conclusion of this study on pp. 505 - 506.

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## C - The Short Fiction of Nadine Gordimer

### I INTRODUCTION

Nadine Gordimer's prose fiction offers one of the most sensitive barometers of social change in South Africa since the 1940's. Her novels and stories have traced changes in social mood from the period of passive resistance to apartheid in the 1950's, to the present era of armed opposition and struggle, beginning in the 1960's. She has located the difficulties that these times of oppression and resistance have created in the lives of her characters. One therefore gains what Stephen Clingman suggestively calls a view of history 'from the inside' by reading through her oeuvre.<sup>1</sup> The course of South African history has had its effect upon Gordimer's own thinking about her society; her changing consciousness is reflected most clearly in her fiction by a developing concern with the struggle of black nationalists for the liberation of South Africa from the tyranny of apartheid and by an acute recording of these historical trends.

Gordimer is, however, literally caught in a 'split historical position'.<sup>2</sup> She has come to identify herself with the causes of her black countrymen and yet is legally and socially cut off from any form of expression of this commitment other than through her writing.<sup>3</sup> As a result of the social division her writing has to bear the burden of her dislocated contact with the majority of her countrymen. In a certain sense Gordimer is writing both towards the black community from whom she is severed and also

towards the future which this community is in the process of realizing. The ideals embodied in her work are very similar to those of black South Africans hoping and striving for a better and a just future in South Africa. Nevertheless, there is a central paradox in Gordimer's case (the split historical position); and this is discernible in the style and form of her writing as well as in the nature of the readership of her work.

It is only on the level of the ideals and aspirations contained in her writing that her works can be regarded as populist; that is, appealing to mass sentiments in the black South African society. When one considers, however, the nature of her prose, it is apparent that Gordimer is addressing a literate, highly sophisticated, and therefore privileged readership. This is borne out by the <sup>appearance of</sup> individual stories, essays, and <sup>critical</sup> writings of hers in a wide range of highbrow international periodicals, such as The New Yorker, Encounter, The New Statesman, The New York Review of Books, Harper's, New Society, and others. Gordimer's readership consists largely of an elite; and, an overseas elite at that.<sup>4</sup>

Further, there is a noticeable difference in prose style between Gordimer's stories and those of fellow white English South African writers such as Herman Bosman, Sheila Roberts, and Barney Simon, where the prose of the latter is unmistakably imbued with a South African quality both through the regionality of reference and by the selection of vocabulary which is close to the colloquial and the dialectal. Stories such as 'Some Monday for

'Sure' in which Gordimer uses a black narrator whose speech is filled with local nuance and inflection, and 'Good Climate, Friendly Inhabitants' which has a white woman narrator of a fairly low position in the white social structure and whose language reflects her status, are rare in her short-fiction oeuvre.<sup>5</sup> Most often, the stories are told by affluent and eloquent white narrators or by an equally urbane and polished third person narrative voice, where there is little to distinguish the style in these works from those of cultured British prose writers.

In this regard it is worth mentioning a distinction which has been made by the black writer Achmat Dangor between a 'privileged' style of writing and 'ghetto' writing in South Africa. Gordimer, Ahmed Essop, and Alan Paton are examples of the former, whereas Dangor, Mbulelo Mzamane, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, and Njabalo Ndebele are ghetto writers. Dangor's distinction, made on grounds of style and not of content, seems to me to be apposite.<sup>6</sup> Gordimer's writing can be seen as evidence of her paradoxical social position: a white person living in privilege in South Africa, feted by an international readership and yet espousing the causes of the deprived black South African masses. The ideological implications of her works are populist and yet their form and mode of expression are élitist.

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## II The Categories of Gordimer's Short fiction

It is useful, in considering Gordimer's short fiction, to

delineate several distinguishable areas of concern and treatment among her stories. There are firstly a significant number of works which cast back to her experiences as a child and young woman growing up in a mining town on the East Rand. These stories create a kind of youthful world in Gordimer's fiction which she uses to test the sensations of a young person - most often a woman - moving from childhood to adulthood. Among these there are several moving accounts of the relationships between children and parents touching upon the bonds of affection as well as distance and rejection which arise between members of the older and younger generations. The stories 'The Umbilical Cord', 'Charmed Lives', 'The Prisoner', 'The Defeated', and 'The Termitary' are examples of this kind of fictional concern.<sup>7</sup> The mining town near Johannesburg, as it features in her work, has in it something similar to the way in which the Stormberg and Lyndhurst (Kimberley) function in the stories of Hennie Aucamp and Dan Jacobson. This locale in Gordimer's stories is also the canvas upon which she portrays idiosyncratic types such as Van As in 'The Last Kiss', Uncle Chookie in 'Clowns in Clover', or the deaf watchmaker Simon Datnow and the drunken Dr. Connor in 'Charmed Lives'.<sup>8</sup> In this respect these works are also similar to Abraham De Vries's stories of Ladismith and the Klein Karoo which are peopled with eccentrics and larger-than-life character-types.

Many of Gordimer's stories describe the life-style of affluent white people, most of whom are South Africans, South Africans abroad, or foreign visitors to South

Africa. In these Gordimer has a ready and easy target for her satirical and ironic observation.<sup>9</sup> In stories such as 'Enemies', 'Face from Atlantis', 'Out of Season', 'The Path of the Moon's Dark Fortnight', 'Native Country', 'Otherwise Birds Fly In', 'Time Did', 'A Mad One', and 'You Name It', she wittily probes the social pretensions of her well-to-do characters.<sup>10</sup> Gordimer often chooses an exotic African locale from which to explore the behaviour and foibles of the affluent characters and in which to play out the comedy of these stories. There are the colonial-style hotels in central Africa of 'Friday's Footprint' and 'Livingstone's Companions'; there is crocodile hunting in 'The Gentle Art', the safari in 'A Hunting Accident', and torrid lovemaking in the torrential rain of the Belgium Congo in 'Rain-Queen'.<sup>11</sup>

Although there are a substantial number of this kind of story in all of her collections I feel they are not the best of Gordimer's work and that they have fairly limited significance within her oeuvre. It seems to me that these accounts of the social pretensions, adulteries and duplicitous behaviour of affluent people, although offering a modulating tone to her best pieces, which explore these and other issues within the explicit context of people living in the apartheid state, do not fully engage the private and public worlds of the characters. The African settings in the pieces are more often than not irrelevant to the central psychological action of the stories. In fairness I must add that these stories do point to the spiritual impoverishment of the affluent characters and Gordimer has laid

bare the shallow and empty lives most of these people pursue. By doing this, Gordimer is hinting at how this truncated life-style has some kind of correlation with the characters' lack of contact with the experiences of the African people around them. In many of these works the white characters are portrayed as an aimless class of people on the African continent.<sup>12</sup>

The third and most important type of story in her oeuvre are those which deal with the lives and actions of characters placed in situations of physical or moral difficulty in South Africa. In these stories there is a direct involvement with the exigencies facing people who are either living through or who are closely tied to the political realities in this country. Within these works Gordimer often turns to the particular difficulties facing women in South Africa. It is worth indicating in this regard that Gordimer has been resistant to critics describing her as a feminist writer.<sup>13</sup> Notwithstanding, some of her best works deal with areas of women's experience and her descriptions of the 'female subculture' bring a valuable dimension to her oeuvre.<sup>14</sup>

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### III The Central Place of Women in Gordimer's Major Stories about Apartheid.

The story 'Is there nowhere else where we can meet?' is one of Gordimer's earliest works. It appeared in a journal called Common Sense in September 1947 when she was twenty-three years old. Years later, during the mid-1970's, when choosing stories for two representative selections of her work, Gordimer significantly placed this story at the beginning of both

collections.<sup>15</sup> 'Is there nowhere else where we can meet?' describes the violent contact between a young white woman and a poor black man. In many respects it offers a kind of record and depiction of the conflict which has increasingly become the historical pattern of social relations between white and black South Africans. The story also describes the psychological effects of the violent encounter on the young woman and her responses to the world around her.

The central incident of this very short piece is how a black man suddenly turns upon the white woman and, after a brief tussle, steals her handbag and a parcel. The young woman's calmness being shattered is reflected in Gordimer's descriptions of the veld and how it is experienced by the character prior to and after the encounter. The story opens with a description of natural harmony: 'It was a cool grey morning and the air was like smoke. In that reversal of the elements that sometimes takes place, the grey, soft, muffled sky moved like the sea on a silent day.'<sup>16</sup> There is a fine Lawrentian quality of natural description, establishing an intimacy between the mental state of the character and her surrounding world.<sup>17</sup> Gordimer skilfully builds into the descriptions a strong sense of the sensual and physical. For example, early in the piece, we read:

She had pulled a little sheath of pine needles, three in a twist of brown tissue, and as she walked she ran them against her thumb. Down; smooth and stiff. Up; catching in gentle<sub>g</sub> resistance as the minute serrations snagged at the skin.

Part of this landscape is also made up of a black man ahead of

the young woman on the path. Gordimer's description of the man shows that this is the perception of the young woman; it is likewise one of fine observation with a significant sensual component:

He was standing with his back towards her, looking along the way he had come; she pricked the ball of her thumb with the needle-ends. His one trouser leg was torn off above the knee, and the back of the naked leg and half-turned heel showed the peculiarly dead, powdery black of cold... The eyes were red, as if he had not slept for a long time, and the stong smell of old sweat burned at her nostrils.

After the attack, which follows this description, the nature around the woman, rather than being described as the calm and familiar world, becomes a cruel antagonist for the young woman:

She ran and ran, stumbling wildly off through the stalks of dead grass, turning over her heels against hard winter tussocks, blundering through trees and bushes. The young mimosas closed in, lowering a thicket of twigs right to the ground, but she tore herself through, feeling the dust in her eyes and the scaly twigs hooking at her hair. There was a ditch knee-high in blackjacks; like pins responding to a magnet they fastened along her legs, but on the other side there was a fence and then the road... She clawed at the fence - her hands were capable of nothing - and tried to drag herself between the wires, but her coat got caught on a barb, and she was imprisoned there, bent in half, while the waves of terror swept over her in heat and trembling. At last the wire tore through its hold<sup>20</sup> on the cloth; wobbling, frantic, she climbed over the fence.

After reaching the suburban streets Gordimer rather surprisingly describes the young woman's chief sensations not as those of relief but rather of loneliness and a profound sense of uncertainty. In addition, Gordimer conveys in the final lines of the story how the attack has, in a way, maimed or crippled the young woman. Here is the conclusion of the piece:

There was the gate of the first house, before her. She thought of the woman coming to the door, of the explanations, of the woman's face, and the police, Why did I

fight, she thought suddenly. What did I fight for? Why didn't I give him the money and let him go? His red eyes, and the smell and those cracks in his feet, fissures, erosion. She shuddered. The cold of the morning flowed into her.

She turned away from the gate and went down the road slowly, like an invalid, beginning to pick the blackjacks from her stockings.<sup>21</sup>

Gordimer skilfully suggests through the story's title - 'Is there nowhere else where we can meet?' - and the nature of the woman's perceptions that there is an element of attraction between the character and the black man. Gordimer has said about this story: '...The incident didn't happen. But, that kind of strange attraction/repulsion, fear... fear of contact and desire for contact must have been there subconsciously. And if you were a writer these things find their story.'<sup>22</sup>

Beyond the interesting and provocative implications this story has for the encounter between black and white South Africans in sexual, psychological, political, and historical terms, I should also like to suggest that the story establishes a fascinating identification between white women and black people.<sup>23</sup> In an important and fairly obvious way both the poor black man and the young woman are victims in this story. Gordimer is therefore offering an intriguing perception which arises out of the nature of the encounter of the two characters and of their status at the time of the conflict: namely, that the black man and the woman are together victims of the society in which they live. I should like to consider how a view of this identification is further elaborated in other of her stories.

'The Train from Rhodesia' is another of Gordimer's earliest works and was first published in the same month, September 1947, as 'Is there nowhere else where we can meet?'; it appeared in the journal Trek which incidentally was also printing stories by Herman Bosman at that time. The central encounter of this story takes place between a young white couple and a poor black craftsman. They meet at a country station during a brief train-stop; the two white travellers examine from their window the wooden carvings of the black craftsman. The young woman likes a lion-carving but, on being told its price by the black craftsman, gives up the idea of buying it as the price seems too high. As the train moves off her male companion manages to buy the lion - by now a kind of love-token - for a substantially lower price from the black man; triumphantly he offers the lion to the woman, but she spurns his actions:

"But how could you," she said. He was shocked by the dismay of her face.

"Good Lord, he said, "What's the matter?"

"If you wanted the thing," she said, her voice rising and breaking with the shrill impotence of anger, "Why didn't you take it decently, when he offered it? Why did you have to wait for him to run after the train with it, and give him one-and-six? One-and-six!"<sup>24</sup>

Shortly afterwards, while considering the skill that must have gone into the carving of the lion, she experiences sensations of acute shame, emptiness and incompleteness:

The heat of shame mounted through her legs and body and sounded in her ears like the sound of sand pouring. Pouring, pouring. She sat there, sick. A weariness, a tastelessness, the discovery of a void made her hands slacken their grip,<sup>25</sup> atrophy emptily, as if the hour was not worth their grasp...

The central concern of the story is the exploitation of the black

carver and how the black man is forced to accept this condition in order to survive. However, it is interesting that Gordimer expresses disgust at this situation through the responses of the young white woman: firstly, by her rejection of her male companion's act of exploitation and secondly by her sense of shame and personal misery at what has happened. As in 'Is there nowhere else where we can meet?' there is a fascinating link established between a white woman and a black man in which both share some form of victimisation or unfair treatment.<sup>26</sup>

'Six Feet of the Country', the title story of Gordimer's collection of 1956, is another fine example of how she has perceived a common element in the degrading way in which black people and women are treated in her society.<sup>27</sup> The story's narrator is a prosperous white Johannesburg businessman. By illustrating his indifference both to the black people around him and to his wife, Gordimer offers a piercing indictment of the kind of patriarchal attitudes which maintain or at least lend support to the iniquities of the apartheid society. Throughout his narrative there are numerous examples of the scant esteem he has both for his black farmhands and his wife. Consider, for instance, the complacency and smugness with which he treats his wife and their marriage in his opening descriptions of their situation:

My wife and I are not real farmers - not even Lerice, really. We bought our place, ten miles out of Johannesburg on one of the main roads, to change something in ourselves, I suppose; you seem to rattle about so much within a marriage like ours. You long to hear nothing but a deep, satisfying silence when you sound a marriage. The farm

hasn't managed that for us, of course, but it has done other things, unexpected, illogical. Lerice, who I thought would retire there in Chekhovian sadness for a month or two, and then leave the place to the servants while she tried yet again to get a part that she wanted and become the actress she would like to be, has sunk into the business of running the farm with all serious intensity with which she once imbued the shadows in a playwright's mind...<sup>28</sup>

Throughout this passage there are turns of phrase and expressions which demean the woman Lerice. The narrator hints at her inadequacy as a farmer, suggests that they have an unsuccessful marriage without the slightest hint that the reason for this may in part be due to his failings, and finally mocks her efforts at being both a farmer and an actress. There is an unfair kind of irony in the way he uses expressions such as 'Chekhovian sadness' and the 'serious intensity with which she once imbued the shadows in a playwright's mind', to project his views of his wife. Soon after this we get further evidence of the inflated form of male self-regard with which he considers himself and his relationship to his wife: 'I, of course, am there only in the evenings and at weekends. I am a partner in a luxury-travel agency, which is flourishing - needs to be, as I tell Lerice, in order to carry on the farm.'<sup>29</sup> The narrator establishes his dominant role in their lifestyle by means of his economic superiority. This kind of relationship is similar, it may be indicated, to his place and conception of himself in terms of his black servants.

A little while after this the narrator tells us:

But even in our saner moments, when I find Lerice's earthy enthusiasms just as irritating as I once found her histrionical ones, and she finds what she calls my "jealousy" of her capacity for enthusiasm as big a proof of my inadequacy for her as a mate as it ever was, we do believe that we have at last honestly escaped those tensions peculiar to the city about which our visitors speak.<sup>30</sup>

By now, Gordimer has deftly established the nature of this couple's marriage and has indicated by means of the man's continual disparagement of his wife how this must bear upon the failure of their relationship. From this point in the story Gordimer shifts the focus to the other central thematic concern of the work; namely, the relationship between the white and black people in the society. Immediately after the passage quoted above the narrator reflects on the particular 'tensions' of the city he has just mentioned:

When Johannesburg people speak of "tension" they don't mean hurrying people in crowded streets, the struggle for money, or the general competitive character of city life. They mean the guns under the white man's pillow and the burglar bars on the white man's windows. They mean those strange moments on city pavements when a black man won't stand aside for a white man.<sup>31</sup>

This piece gives a good example of a technique Gordimer frequently uses in her stories: namely, inserting into the narrative a flash of insight into the social context of the characters. When skilfully handled, as in this case, the observation truly has the effect of an illuminating moment.

The narrator in 'Six Feet of the Country' then pauses to consider the different kind of relationship which he perceives to exist between the black and the white people living outside of the city: 'Out in the country, even ten miles out, life is better than that. In the country, there is a lingering remnant of the pre-transitional stage: our relationship with the blacks is almost feudal. Wrong, I suppose, obsolete, but more comfortable all round.'<sup>32</sup> The events which follow shortly after this declaration explode the narrator's view of a benevolent condition

existing for rural black people and that these people are in some way protected from the horrors of the apartheid system. What follows is a frightening sequence of events: a black Rhodesian man - an illegal immigrant to South Africa - is found dead in one of the black servant's rooms: his brother asks the narrator if the dead man's body can be returned from Johannesburg, where it had been taken for a postmortem, to the farm for burial; the narrator sets about doing this, but during the funeral it is discovered that the body they have been given by the authorities is not that of the Rhodesian brother. The story ends with a sense of waste - how the black people on the farm have been brutally treated by the white authorities; all the money which they collected to ensure the return of the dead man has been wasted. One of the great strengths of this story is how it penetrates the workings of the apartheid state, by describing the awful machinery which, in blocking and deceiving the black people, ultimately humiliates and oppresses them. This process is witnessed and felt both by the white narrator and his wife as well as by the black servants on the farm.

Throughout the series of events which led up to the grim revelation at the funeral that the authorities had sent them the wrong body, the narrator had been coaxed and prodded along both by his wife and the black man Petrus - the dead man's brother - to get the man returned for burial. After the funeral, the narrator, for the first time during the course of these events, independently sets about haranguing the authorities and trying to get the right body returned to the farm. Every evening, on his

return from work, he tells Lerice and Petrus in the kitchen that his efforts have been fruitless. Gordimer then offers the following identification of the white woman and the black servant:

She and Petrus both kept their eyes on me as I spoke, and oddly, for those moments they looked exactly alike, though it sounds impossible: my wife, with her high white forehead and her attenuated Englishwoman's body, and the poultry boy, with his horny bare feet below khaki trousers tied at the knee with string and the peculiar rankness of his nervous sweat coming from his skin.<sup>33</sup>

It is worth pointing out that the descriptions of the white woman and black man here are almost verbatim those of the young woman and black man in 'Is there nowhere else where we can meet?'. As in that story the white woman and the black man are drawn together by their awareness of being wronged: she, through her estrangement from a husband who demeans her and her revulsion at the events of the burial-fiasco, and he at being a victim of social forces beyond his control.

After this linking of Lerice and Petrus, Gordimer establishes a further identification: in this case both of them spurn the white narrator and, by implication, all that he has come to represent at this stage in the story:

"What makes you so indignant, so determined about this now?" said Lerice suddenly.

I stared at her. "It's matter of principle. Why should they get away with a swindle? It's time these officials had a jolt from someone who'll bother to take the trouble."

She said, "Oh." And Petrus slowly opened the kitchen door to leave, sensing that the talk had gone beyond him, she turned away, too.<sup>34</sup>

It is therefore appropriate at the end of the story that it is

Lerice who makes a small, almost futile gesture of kindness towards the black people. The dead man's father had walked all the way from Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) to see his son buried. Lerice gives the old man, rather fittingly, an old suit which had belonged to her father.

I should like to cite two other stories by Gordimer which point a similar identification of white women and black people. The story 'The Smell of Death and Flowers' which closes the Six Feet of the Country collection describes the psychological changes which take place within the young white woman Joyce McCoy as she comes to identify herself more and more closely with the struggle for equal rights of the black South African people. The story gives an account of the period in Joyce's life from the time she makes a decision to join a movement which is defying the apartheid laws, up to her act of resistance itself. The compression of the time-scale and also perhaps the brevity of the story-form tend to make the record of the young woman's changing position a little unconvincing. Nevertheless, what is significant is that by the end of the story we have seen a marked change and developing sense of commitment in the young woman. There is a notable difference between 'a girl...silent, pink and cold as a porcelain figurine' at the beginning of the story and the person with a sense of social and political direction at the end.<sup>35</sup> In the final paragraph of the story, Gordimer conveys the young woman's sense of involvement in the world around her and also her sense of kinship with the black onlookers and the repressive conditions under which they live:

But as the policeman came to her and she spelled out her name for him, she looked up and saw the faces of the African onlookers who stood nearest her. Two men, a small boy and a woman, dressed in ill-matching cast-offs of European clothing which hung upon them without meaning, like coats spread on bushes, were looking at her. When she looked back, they met her gaze. And she felt suddenly, not nothing, but what they were feeling at the sight of her, a white girl, taken - incomprehensibly, as they themselves were used to be taken - under the force of white men's wills, which dispensed and withdrew life, imprisoned and set free, fed or starved, like God himself.<sup>38</sup>

Different in many ways to the stories which have just been discussed is the piece 'Good Climate, Friendly Inhabitants' which appeared in Gordimer's collection Not For Publication (1965). The story is the account given by a middle-aged white woman of the period in her life in which she had a short-lived relationship with a younger man. She is an office-worker at a city garage, and it is there that the young white man meets and then dates her. She fairly soon discovers that her young lover is little better than a vagrant and is using her both for an easy sexual relationship and for the use he can make of her money and flat. Throughout this period the only person to whom she mentions her liaison with the man is one of the black petrol-pump attendants, Jack Mpanza. However, because she has come to accept the inferiority of black people she does not speak directly to Jack about her difficult relationship and avoids explicit mention of the nature of her personal relationship with the man. For all that, Jack swiftly grasps the way in which she is being exploited by the white man and becomes a valuable confidant and source of advice to her. In fact, at the end of the story, it is he who steers the white man away from the narrator by telling him that

she has left the country. In this story Gordimer is indicating the bond which develops between the lonely and exploited white woman and the black man, although the woman never openly acknowledges the role Jack is playing in her life. What Gordimer also manages to achieve in the story is the contrast between the world-views of the white woman and black man. The narrator is a lonely divorcee living alone, hundreds of miles away from her married daughter. She is prey to the wiles of the white man she meets and has no-one in her community to whom she can turn for assistance and advice. Jack and the other black garage workers are described by Gordimer as forming a cheerful community; Jack himself has a developed sense of kinship with the black people around him. Towards the end of the story Jack advises the white woman in this way: 'He said, "When my children grow up they must work for me. Why don't you live there in Rhodesia with your daughter? The child must look after the mother. Why must you stay here alone in this town?"'<sup>37</sup>

Gordimer creates a link between the black man and the white woman both through the communication they share with each other and also through the marginal social positions they occupy. Yet she goes further than this in revealing that the black man has a fund of cultural knowledge and experience rooted in the African social structure - "When my children grow up they must work for me... The child must look after the mother" - which is not available to the white woman. She clings to a creed of independent living which is not resilient and is unable to help her deal with the difficulties and dangers of her society.

Feminist critics have indicated that one of the areas in relationships between men and women most illustrative of male dominance is in the way in which the partners communicate with one another, where often the most agreeable situation for a man who wishes to maintain his rule and way is through the silence or partial silence of his female companion. The man maintains his dominance by wholly or partly silencing the views and suggestions of the female partner.<sup>39</sup> I should like to consider Gordimer's story 'Something for the Time Being' from Friday's Footprint in the light of these observations. Before turning to the story however, it is worth recalling how the narrator in 'Six Feet of the Country' felt that the quality which defined a good marriage was precisely that of silence: '...you seem to rattle about so much within a marriage like ours. You long to hear nothing but a deep, satisfying silence when you sound a marriage.'<sup>40</sup> (My underlining). The silence which he achieves in his marriage, however, is not by having a silent, non-responding wife, but rather an estranged wife who turns away from him.

'Something for the Time Being' focuses attention closely upon two marriages: one of a white South African couple, and the other of a black couple living in one of the urban townships. In the opening section of the story Gordimer describes the relationship between the black couple, Daniel and Ella Mngoma. From the very beginning of this account, Gordimer emphasizes the silence which exists between Daniel and Ella and how this is an unsatisfactory condition:

He thought of it as discussing things with her, but the truth was that she did not help him out at all. She said nothing, while she ran her hand up the ridge of bone behind the rim of her child-sized yellow-brown ear... Yet her listening was very demanding; when he stopped at the end of a supposition or a suggestion, her silence made the stop inconclusive. He had to take up again what he said, carry it - where?<sup>41</sup>

Ella's failure to respond to Daniel is linked to his indecision. As one soon comes to see in the section which follows Daniel is a great talker and, while Ella barely responds verbally to his talk, there is the suggestion that Daniel is giving her little opportunity to do so. He is telling her how he has been dismissed from his job because of his political activities: these had led to his arrest. Although Ella does not speak throughout Daniel's description of his dismissal and his plan to get new employment, Gordimer conveys her thoughts by weaving in third person accounts of her growing concern about the fact that her husband is now jobless and that poverty now inevitably faces them. By the end of this section Gordimer has built up a strong impression of a wife cowed by her husband. This is achieved not simply by the description of Ella repeatedly stroking her head as in a nervous gesture, but also by the fact of her prolonged silence. It is only at the end of this two page section that Ella dares to say anything and this is a brief question expressing her concern about Daniel's ability to hold down a job.

In the middle section of the story Gordimer describes the marital relationship of a white couple, William and Madge Chadders. William has become Daniel Mngoma's new employer and from the

black man's first day of work in William's company there is a dispute about Daniel's political beliefs: Daniel is wearing an African National Congress Button. [The story takes place during the mid - or late 1950's]. William asks him not to wear the A.N.C. badge to work.

If there is a singular lack of communication between Daniel and Ella then there is a volubility in the relationship between William and Madge. Madge is swift to ask her husband about how the politically- involved Daniel has fared at work and takes up a spirited attack against the way in which her husband had asked the man not to wear the Congress button. Madge quickly gets William to state the paradoxical, if not hypocritical position he is in: "I can give the man a job because I feel sympathetic towards the struggle he's in, but I can't put him in the workshop as a Congress man".<sup>42</sup>

Early in the account of William and Madge, Gordimer had distinguished the temperaments of the two people. William was the quiet thinker, Madge the doer. Of William we had been told: 'William Chadders had not had any black friends or mixed with coloured people on any but master-servant terms until he married Madge, but his views on the immorality and absurdity of the colour bar were sound; sounder, she often felt, than her own, for they were backed by the impersonal authority of a familiarity with the views of great thinkers, saints, and philosophers, with history, political economy, sociology and anthropology.'<sup>43</sup> Madge, on the other hand 'knew only what she felt. And she always did

something, at once, to express what she felt. She never measured the smallness of her personal protest against the establishment she opposed.<sup>44</sup> Madge's challenge to William about the issue of Daniel wearing the A.N.C. badge to work substantially weaken the force of the 'impersonal authority' of his education and puts his position strongly in question: he is shown to be a man trying to weld together liberal political views while occupying a place in the establishment which itself is intolerant of any form of libertarian gesture. Madge has touched upon a fundamental inconsistency in his life, and one, it may be said, which applies to many similarly placed white South Africans.

By the end of this section their dispute about this issue is shown to have created a substantial rift between the couple:

They stood in uncomfortable proximity to each other, in the smallness of the bathroom. They were at once aware of each other as people who live in intimacy are only when hostility returns each to the confines of himself. He felt himself naked before her, where he had stepped out on to the towelling mat, and he took a towel and slowly covered himself, pushing the free end in round his waist. She felt herself an intrusion and, in silence, went out.<sup>45</sup> (My underlining)

The political difference of opinion as well as Madge's challenge to her husband about an inconsistency in his position has forced a division and a silence between them. This section closes with Madge's words to William: "I'm not angry. I'm beginning to get to know you".<sup>46</sup>

In the short final section of the story Gordimer describes the scene between Daniel and Ella after his first day at his new job.

Daniel tells her of his employer's request that he not wear the A.N.C. badge and implies that he is not going to be able to stay long in the post.

Obviously deeply concerned about his position and cherishing the hope that he can retain his job Ella goes through the agony of trying to express this to her husband. This is the way Gordimer describes this process:

She kept on looking at him. Her eyes widened and her mouth tightened; she was trying to prime herself to speak, or was trying not to cry. The idea of tears exasperated him and he held her with a firm almost belligerently inquiring gaze. Her hand went up round the back of her neck under her collar, anxiously exploratory. "Don't do that!" he said. "You're like a monkey catching lice."

She took her hand down swiftly and broke into trembling, like a sweat. She began to breathe hysterically. "You c<sup>wildly</sup>, grimacing at the bitterness of the malice towards <sup>him.</sup><sub>47</sub> ~~him.~~ <sup>him.</sup><sub>47</sub>

Daniel bursts out angrily against her and silences his wife yet again: 'He jumped from the table. "Christ! I knew you would say it! I've been waiting for you to say it. You've been wanting to say it for five years. Well, now it's out. Out with it. Spit it out!"'<sup>48</sup> Gordimer describes Daniel's verbal attack on his wife almost as if it were a physical assault upon her. 'She began to scream softly as if he were hitting her.'<sup>49</sup> Daniel calms down slightly but continues to disparage his wife. In the final lines of the story there is a sad irony: 'He went over to her and said, in a kindly voice, kneading her shoulder with spread fingers, "Don't cry. Don't cry. You're just like any other woman."<sup>50</sup> If Ella is 'just like any other woman' then it is both in her genuine concern for her husband and also in the callous way in which she

is treated for this love.

The central concern of the story is how the issue of political commitment can become a dividing force between husbands and wives. Gordimer has said of this story. 'It is set during the fifties, the period of political action before the big liberation movements were banned, where one saw so often these tensions arriving in families between husband and wife over political commitment.'<sup>51</sup> The force of the story lies not so much in the nature of the political debate but precisely in the illustration of how such disputes can bring division between people. By locating the political issues within the context of two difference marriages Gordimer creates a situation within which she can examine not simply ideas about political commitment, but but can focus upon the forces which hold people together and break them from one another in the most intimate of personal relationships. 'Something for the Time Being' is one of the most subtle explorations in South Africa short fiction of areas of contact between the overtly political and the purely personal.

The story 'Some Monday for Sure' similarly places an examination of political issues - in this case acts of armed resistance in South Africa and political exile - within the context of a marriage.<sup>52</sup> And Gordimer's observations in this work are not very different to those in 'Something for the Time Being'. The optimistic spirit within the story which is suggested by its title, the partially successful hold-up of a truck carrying dynamite, and by the buoyant good spirits of Josias and his

brother-in-law Willie, is set against the hardships and disappointments which face Josias's wife Emma during the process of their political involvement. When Emma hears of her husband's plan to aid in the hold-up of the dynamite truck for the underground resistance movement she naturally feels anxious: 'Emma was like somebody slipping into cold dark water; with every word that was said she went deeper.'<sup>53</sup> Yet she offers no resistance to Josias's involvement, and later, after her husband and brother have left the country for exile in Tanzania (then Tanganyika) she voluntarily flies to join them in Dar es Salaam, which means effective permanent exile for herself. Some months later Josias leaves the country for military training and Emma continues to stay in Dar es Salaam with her brother. Willie lives in the hope that he can soon leave to continue the armed struggle in South Africa. On the other hand, Gordimer describes the misery of Emma. She is parted form her husband and her family in South Africa. Unlike Wille she finds little pleasure living in the foreign city and cannot speak the language of the people about her. At one point she says: '"You and he go off, you come back or perhaps you don't come back, you know what you must do. But for a woman? What shall I do there in my life? What shall I do here? What time is this for a woman?'"<sup>54</sup>

Here, as in other of her works of fiction, Gordimer has the insight and the compassion to realize that the struggle for South African liberation will not be without enormous pain to individuals.<sup>55</sup> She tempers the inherent optimism of this story

by observations of the characters - and particularly of the woman - which suggest the trials which people are being enforced to undergo in their love for one another and in their hopes and efforts for a better South Africa.<sup>56</sup>

In stories such as 'Six Feet of the Country' and 'Something for the Time Being' Gordimer pointed to the divisions between husbands and wives and explored the reasons behind these ruptures. In the story 'A Chip of Glass Ruby' Gordimer describes the rapprochement which is achieved by a husband and wife.<sup>57</sup> As we shall see the grounds for the accord which is reached between the Indian couple, Mr. and Mrs. Bamjee, are in the openness of their relationship. Mrs. Bamjee is a political activist for black rights and although she senses her husband's antipathy about her activities, she openly discusses her work with him:

She had always treated Bamjee as if it were only a mannerism that made him appear uninterested in politics, the way some women will persist in interpreting her husband's bad temper as an endearing gruffness hiding boundless goodwill, and she talked to him of these things [i.e. her political activities] just as she passed on to him neighbours' or family gossip.<sup>58</sup>

The central event of the story is Mrs. Bamjee's arrest by the Special Branch because of her political activities; but the key relationship which Gordimer explores is that of the husband and wife. Gordimer traces with a great deal of tenderness Mr. Bamjee's changing responses to his wife's arrest and his exploration of why he loves her. Although upset and angered at his wife's arrest, he is shown to move through a process in which he comes to realize his wife's value as a person, not only to himself and the family, but also to the wider community. It is

through this realization that Gordimer skilfully builds the story's affirmation of what Mrs. Bamjee stands for. It is worth quoting one of the final exchanges in the story to see how Gordimer offers a tribute to the woman and so, by obvious implication, to the causes she supports.

Mrs. Bamjee has joined a hunger strike among the political prisoners. During the second week of the strike her daughter, Girlie, visits her. On the following day she visits her step-father, Bamjee, in order to wish him many happy returns for his birthday. Girlie tells Bamjee how his wife had made a special point on the previous day at the prison of reminding her about Bamjee's birthday. Bamjee considers his wife's action:

He shrugged it over. "It means a lot to children. But that's how she is. Whether it's one of the old cousins or the neighbour's grandmother, she always knows when the birthday is. What importance is my birthday, while she's sitting there in prison? I don't understand how she can do the things she does when her mind is always full of woman's nonsense at the same time - that's what I don't understand with her".

Girlie then responds to her step-father's musing:

"Oh, but don't you see?...It's because she doesn't want anybody to be left out. It's because she always remembers; remembers everything - people without somewhere to live, hungry kids, boys who can't get educated - remembers all the time. That's how Ma is."<sup>59</sup>

Girlie's observation about her mother is one of the warmest personal tributes in Gordimer's entire fictional oeuvre. It is significant in terms of the reading of Gordimer's work which I have been developing that this is uttered by a woman about another woman and that the force of the utterance arises out of a recognition that it is precisely Mrs. Bamjee's qualities as a

woman - her thoughtfulness for others which Bamjee calls 'woman's nonsense' - which feed her political commitment and are completely synonymous with it. This is a special moment in South African short fiction where the humanism of a political commitment is completely vindicated by the nature of the individual character engaged in that cause.

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#### IV Gordimer's Short Fiction of the 1970's and 1980's

Gordimer's best short fiction of the 1970's and early 1980's dealing with conditions in South Africa has a single thematic preoccupation and that is with the uncertainties of the era: the armed struggles in Southern Africa were revealing the vulnerabilities of the apartheid regime and consequently placing a variety of stresses on the black and white peoples in the country. Significantly, Gordimer quotes Gramsci's account of the conditions which occur in a state of interregnum as the epigraph to her novel of 1981, July's People: 'The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms.'<sup>60</sup> It is to this state of radical uncertainty that her best stories of this time address themselves. As in earlier works, Gordimer often uses the predicaments facing women in these stories as the central focus from which to explore the social malaise.

In 'Open House' the white activist for black rights, Frances Taver, is on the 'secret circuit for people who wanted to find out the truth about South Africa'.<sup>61</sup> These people are variously

visiting journalists, politicians, or churchmen. She is approached by an American political columnist and rather reluctantly arranges a lunch-meeting for him with three black men of the town. This situation of being a hostess to visitors wanting to penetrate 'the truth' about the country, places Frances in a particularly good position from which to reflect upon the changes in the social and political climate of South Africa. Gordimer's story about her - set in the late nineteen sixties or early seventies - is especially revealing about the nature of these changes and the climate of uncertainty that has arisen. For instance, Frances reflects about the situation in earlier years:

A few years ago it had been fun and easy to make these visitors an excuse for a gathering that quite likely would turn into a party. The visitor would have a high old time learning to dance the kwela with black girls; he would sit fascinated, trying to keep sober enough to take it all in, listening to the fluent and fervent harangue of African, white, and Indian politicals, drinking and arguing together in a paradox of personal freedom that, curiously, he couldn't remember finding where there were no laws against the mixing of races...<sup>62</sup>

A little later in the story she talks about the current state of affairs: "People don't want to talk any more. If they're doing anything, it's not something that can be talked about. Those that are left. Black and white. The ones you ought to see are shut away."<sup>63</sup>

The three black men Frances Taver invites to lunch are all comfortably placed in the black society and have little or no commitment to political issues. Gordimer describes the lunch scene with wit and irony, and at the end of the story shows

Frances trying to explain as much to herself as to the American journalist the phony quality of the lives these black men are pursuing and that they do not represent the progressive forces at work in the black community at all: "You must understand. Because the corruption's real. Even they've become what they are because things are the way they are. Being phony is being corrupted by the situation ...and that's real enough. We're made out of that."<sup>64</sup>

The sense of corruption and uncertainty prevalent in the society which Gordimer describes through the experiences of Frances Taver is mirrored in a story of the same period entitled 'Africa Emergent'.<sup>65</sup> This is one of Gordimer's rare stories about the apartheid state which does not have as its underlying theme a concern with women or at least a female narrator. 'Africa Emergent' is told by a white man and it describes his friendship with two black men. One commits suicide in America, and the other ends up in political detention in South Africa.<sup>66</sup> Early in the story the narrator says of friendships between black and white people: 'We hardly know by now what we can do and what we can't do; it's difficult to say, goaded in on oneself by laws and doubts and rebellion and caution and - not least - self-disgust, what is or is not friendship.'<sup>67</sup> This could very well be a restatement in personal terms of Gramsci's reflections (quoted earlier) about the nature of an interregnum. A little later in the story Gordimer describes the state of distrust in the society through the narrator's observation:

...during the last year or two we have reached the stage

where if a man is black, literate, has 'political' friends and white friends, and a passport, he must be considered a political spy. I was sick with myself...but I believed it, too. There's only one way for a man like that to prove himself, so far as we're concerned: he must be in prison.<sup>68</sup>

The narrator's friend eventually does 'prove' himself by being jailed for an unspecified 'political offence'. Gordimer concludes the story with the narrator's words: 'And so we white friends can purge ourselves of the shame of rumours. We can be pure again. We are satisfied at last. He's in prison. He's proved himself, hasn't he?'<sup>69</sup> There is a considerable amount of bitter irony, self-disgust and self-reproach being directed at the white community in these sentences. Through stories such as 'Open House' and 'Africa Emergent' Gordimer develops a vision and picture of a fractured society.

In Gordimer's collection A Soldier's Embrace (1980), which brought together her stories of the mid and late 1970's, there is a marked tendency in her pieces describing the hardships experienced by people in Southern Africa towards a form of fictional writing which has a great deal in common with the New Journalism of the period. In this respect, and also in that Gordimer sets two of these pieces - 'A Soldier's Embrace' and 'Oral History' -in the war-ravaged countries surrounding South Africa, her works parallel those of Peter Wilhelm ('LM') and the Afrikaner writers P.J. Haasbroek ('Die Aardrykskundeles', 'Die anatomieles', and others), and Welma Odendaal ('LM', 'Vryheidsvegter'). Even more noticeably than before, these stories by Gordimer take historical facts and events as their

primary impulses. In an important sense, it is the historical events and the social context in 'A Soldier's Embrace', 'A Lion on the Freeway', 'Town and Country Lovers, One and Two', and 'Oral History', which impel the narrative action. Both the leading and minor characters in these stories are shown to be trapped within their historical place. It might be added that the uncertainty in the Southern African social and political climate which characterized earlier works such as 'Open House' and 'Africa Emergent' similarly becomes the underlying thematic concern in these later stories. In 'A Soldier's Embrace', for example, the lawyer and his wife live in perpetual state of uncertainty after the liberation of their African country by black revolutionaries.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, in 'Oral History', the black chief lives continually unsure of what the historical events taking place around him will mean to his village. On the one hand, young tribesmen are joining the black guerilla movement, and on the other, the white-controlled army pursue these men and their village-supporters across his terrain. His act of informing the army about there being strangers and guerillas in his village leads to its extermination and so to his suicide.

In the stories 'A Soldier's Embrace', 'A Lion on the Freeway', 'Town and Country Lovers, One and Two', and 'Oral History', Gordimer's attention, as in earlier works, is on the woman's place in the society. The situation of women being the victims in society is confirmed in all of these works. Rather than devoting further space to illustrating how this is described in

each of these pieces I should like to quote one of the opening images in the collection's title story, 'A Soldier's Embrace', which most fittingly encapsulates the place of women in these stories. The lawyer's wife is returning home from the post office on the day the black forces enter the liberated city. She is caught in the jubilant crowd of citizens, white colonial soldiers, and black guerrilla fighters who are happily thronging the streets:

There were two soldiers in front of her, blocking her off by their clumsy embrace (how do you do it, how do you do what you've never done before) and the embrace opened like a door and took her in - a pink hand with bitten nails grasping her right arm, a black hand with a big-dialled watch and thong bracelet pulling at her left elbow. Their three heads collided gaily, musk of sweat and tang of strong sweet soap clapped a mask to her nose and mouth. They all gasped with delicious shock. They were saying things to each other. She put up an arm round each neck, the rough pile of an army haircut on one side, the soft negro hair on the the other, and kissed them both on the cheek. The embrace broke...

Here we have, as in the other stories mentioned, a woman caught symbolically in the flow of history between the two opposing male representatives of the society. For a short moment - as in both parts of 'Town and Country Lovers' and 'Oral History' - there is a tenuous accord between these forces (and the woman caught between them), and then the embrace breaks. The lawyer's wife leaves the country soon after the revolution with her husband; the two black women in the two parts of 'Town and Country Lovers' are ripped away from their white lovers by the laws of South Africa; in 'Oral History', the quiet of the village is shattered by the vicious act of reprisal by the white army and the women slowly return to reconstruct their homes after the attack. In

the case of all of these characters, history will continue after the broken embrace; yet the future, Gordimer is suggesting through these stories, is unclear.

In her most recently published collection of stories, Something Out There, Gordimer continues to explore the instability of contemporary South Africa. Indeed, as the social and political climate of the country has moved closer to boiling point and toward confrontation between black aspirations and white entrenchment, so Gordimer in her fiction has measured the fears and uncertainties in the society with a greater sense of urgency and compulsion. For instance, in this period of radical political uncertainty in South Africa, acts of betrayal have sadly become more common and in at least two of the stories such acts are the central feature of the plot. In 'Crimes of Conscience' it is the young white woman Alison Ross who is betrayed. Her seemingly liberal lover, Derek Felterman, turns out to be a Special Branch agent. Gordimer links the betrayal with the most intimate of human relationships; the political masquerade betrays Alison even as she takes Derek as her lover.

In 'A City of the Dead, A City of the Living' Gordimer sets the story in a black urban township. For reasons which are difficult to understand - in the end Nanike says "I don't know why I did it" - the black woman Nanike Moreke informs the police that her husband has been giving shelter to a black guerrilla in their house.<sup>72</sup> In this work Gordimer evokes the township world of squalor. The Moreke's house is shared by three groups of

people and is over-crowded. There is a gradual build-up of the effects of the tension which the harbouring of the black guerrilla has upon Nanike and there is an implication that the woman's act of betrayal, for which she is vilified by members of the community, may have stemmed from the sheer mental and physical exhaustion of having to conceal the man in such trying living conditions. The horror which Gordimer conveys in this story is linked to the act of betrayal itself which betrays both husband and community, as well as pointing to the nature of the frighteningly oppressive milieu in which it takes place. As in certain of her earlier stories Gordimer focuses attention on the plight of the women in 'Crimes of Conscience' and 'A City of the Dead, A City of the Living'. She frames the social issues within the context of a most basic relationship between men and women - as lovers and spouses.

The notion of betrayal is also a feature of several of the other stories in this collection. 'At the Rendezvous of Victory' describes the process whereby a former black guerrilla leader is gradually moved out of the front rank of the triumphant new black nationalist political party. In the piece 'Letter from his Father', Gordimer wittily invents the reply Hermann Kafka might have made to his son Franz Kafka's unsent 'Letter to his Father'. The father's letter is full of reproaches to his brilliant son whom he feels has betrayed and falsified the nature of their relationship to a world of readers. So too, in the pieces 'Terminal', 'Sins of the Third Age' and 'A Correspondence

Course', Gordimer describes acts of personal betrayal. In the story 'Blinder' which describes the misfortunes which beset the black domestic servant Rose, her lover and his family, Gordimer shifts the critical focus from an act of personal betrayal to a concern with a situation of social betrayal. Rose and her fellow blacks are shown by Gordimer in this work to have been betrayed by an oppressive society. Among other social curbs it is the imposition of influx control on black people in South Africa which lies behind the miserable existence which Rose is forced to accept.

The novella 'Something Out There', which gives the collection its title, is among Gordimer's finest individual works. She builds the novella around two central incidents which cannily reveal the social atmosphere of South Africa during the 1980's. In the one, a mysterious predator, an ape of sorts, has been pillaging the white suburbs of Johannesburg; in the other, two black men and a white woman set about establishing an arsenal of weapons which will be used by them for an act of sabotage. Both episodes evince the fear and threat which is preying upon white South African society. One of the particular strengths of this work is precisely how Gordimer carefully portrays the uncertainties which face white South Africans today and how they are helpless in the face of these. Though the State has a fine mesh of security controls and techniques of surveillance and the white suburbs are armed to repulse attacks, the act of sabotage succeeds as well as the attacks on white people and property by the unknown predator.

The conclusion of the novella is a literary tour de force in which Gordimer moves from giving a chronicle of the uncertainties which surround the act of sabotage and the suburban attacks to an affirmation of one enormous certainty. She records that the presence of the young black saboteurs in a disused mine which had been worked in ages past for its metals by black men and which has now been used by them as a place to hide a cache of weapons is testimony of the black man's enduring presence in South Africa. As Gordimer puts it, the presence of the young black men in this place has closed a circle. The implication is that their act has confirmed their rights to this country.

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#### V CONCLUSION

Among the large body of Nadine Gordimer's stories her finest pieces are those which depict the situation of the lives of the characters in relation to the social climate of apartheid and the related upheavals in Southern Africa. These are stories in which the characters face challenges from the society in which they live. A high proportion of these explore the particular difficulties that women living in South Africa face. In stories such as 'Is there nowhere else where we can meet?', 'The Train from Rhodesia', 'Six Feet of the Country', and 'Good Climate, Friendly Inhabitants' Gordimer achieves a fascinating identification between the white women and the black people who feature in them; she perceives and describes connections and common factors in their victimization. This portrait of women as

victims has been continued in her stories of the 1970's and 1980's where the historical events themselves - revolutions, urban terrorism, army reprisals, the prevalence of informers - are often described as antagonists facing the characters.

Gordimer has commented about her short fiction: 'Most of my stories are a kind of skein of interwoven things. It is very rare that there's just one story-line. That doesn't interest me very much.'<sup>73</sup> One of her most distinctive achievements as a story writer is how she has built into many stories which offer acute insights into the volatile and changing history of South Africa a correlation to the historical events based upon the experiences of the female characters in these works. Gordimer has revealed a courageous commitment in her short fiction to describe and expose the conditions that have been generated in the apartheid state, and it is often where she turned her attention in these works to the woman's place in this society that the 'skein of interwoven things' has become most engaging.

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NOTES

1. See: Clingman, Stephen 'The Consciousness of History in the Novels of Nadine Gordimer', (D. Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1983); Clingman, Stephen: 'History from the inside: the novels of Nadine Gordimer' (Unpublished paper submitted to the Conference on Literature and Society in Southern Africa, Sept. 8th - 11th 1981; University of York).
2. The term, 'split historical position', is taken from Clingman's D. Phil. study of Gordimer's work, loc. cit. I am indebted to Clingman's work on Gordimer which has established a significant basis for critical examination of her work.
3. For Gordimer's identification with the historical destiny of the black South African people and their cause, consider this statement: 'Few of the white people in my stories belong to that group of white South Africans who visualize and accept freedom for South Africa in terms of a black majority government elected by unqualified franchise. I do'. And later in this introduction to a selection of her stories she clarifies her choice of Some Monday for Sure as a title:... some perfectly ordinary day, for sure, black South Africans will free themselves and rule themselves.' Gordimer, N.: Introduction to the selection of stories, Some Monday for Sure, (London, Heinemann, African Writers Series, 1976). In this regard, also see, Gordimer's article 'Living in the Interregnum' (New York Review of Books, January 20th 1983, particularly p. 26).
4. It is clear in reading her work that Gordimer is, to a large degree, writing towards her privileged non-South African readership. In her short fiction there are many examples where narrators offer explanations which would be unnecessary for South African readers. Although this tendency has become less evident in recent collections one can still discern this in rare moments in a A Soldier's Embrace of 1980. For example, in the story 'Town and Country Lovers, One' we are told by the narrator: 'So he [the leading character] is much out in the field - which is the veld, here, - seeking new gold, copper...' and, that the coloured girl 'lived ... away to the west of the city, but this side of the black townships, in a township for people her tint.' (pp. 74 and 76). Almost every South African will know the locale, nature and name, both of the veld and of the distinction between housing areas for black and those for coloured people. 'Town and Country Lovers' first appeared in The New Yorker.
5. 'Some Monday for Sure' and 'Good Climate, Friendly Inhabitants' appear in Gordimer's collection, Not For Publication, (London, Gollancz, 1965).
6. Interview with Achmat Dangor, Johannesburg, 8th March 1983. The issue of a 'privileged' and 'ghetto' style of writing is discussed further on p. 409 of this study.
7. 'The Prisoner', 'The Defeated' and 'Umbilical Cord' appear in The Soft Voice of the Serpent, (London, Gollancz, 1953); 'Charmel Lives' appears in Six Feet of one Country, (London, Gollancz, 1956); 'The Termitary' appears in A Soldier's Embrace, (op. cit., 1980).

8. 'The Last Kiss' appears in Friday's Footprint, (London, Gollancz, 1960); 'Clowns in Clover' and 'Charmed Lives' appear in Six Feet of the Country, (op. cit., 1970).

9. Gordimer is particularly fond of the ironic mode. In her introduction to a selection of stories, Some Monday for Sure (1976), while commenting on two of the pieces 'The Bridegroom' and 'The African Magician', she writes: 'My approach in these stories, as in very many other, is that of irony. In fact, I would say that in general, in my stories, my approach as a short story writer is the ironical one, and that it represents the writer's unconscious selection of the approach best suited to his material.' (Introduction, p. 11).

In an interview with Susan Gardner, Gordimer said: 'My method so often has been irony, I find irony very attractive in other writers, and I find life full of irony, my own life and everybody else's; somehow one of the secret locks of the personality lies in what is ironic in us'. (From 'Nadine Gordimer - "A Story for this Place and Time": an interview with Nadine Gordimer about Burger's Daughter' by Susan Gardner, in Kunapipi, Vol. III, No 2, 1981; p. 110).

10. 'Enemies', 'Face from Atlantis', and 'Out of Season' appear in Six Feet of the Country; 'The Path of the Moon's Dark Fortnight' appears in Friday's Footprint; 'Native Country' appears in Now For Publication; 'An Intruder' and 'Otherwise Birds Fly In' appear in Livingstone's Companions, (London, Jonathan Cape, 1972); 'Time Did', 'A Mad One' and 'You Name It' appear in A Soldier's Embrace, (op. cit., 1980).

11. 'Friday's Footprint' and 'The Gentle Art' appear in Friday's Footprint; 'Livingstone's Companions' and 'Rain-Queen' appear in Livingstone's Companions; 'A Hunting Accident' appears in A Soldier's Embrace.

12. See, in particular, my discussion of Peter Wilhelm's 'LM' on pp. 133 - 135 and p. 138 of this study which deals with the issue of white South Africans as a rootless class of Africans with little commitment to the continent.

13. In Susan Gardner's interview with Gordimer in 1980, she asked her: 'Is there anything about the style of Burger's Daughter - or any of your other work, for that matter - that you regard for whatever social or genetic reasons as most likely to have been written by a woman? To which, Gordimer replied: 'No, I don't think so...' Shortly before this Gordimer had said: 'The ... feminist battle must come afterwards... I feel that if the real battle for human rights is won the kingdom of .. feminine liberation follows... I know this view is not shared by feminists.' (Susan Gardner's interview with Nadine Gordimer in Kunapipi, 1981, loc. cit., pp. 107 and 105).

In her introduction to her volume of Selected Stories (1975), Gordimer, while discussing the 'double solitude' of being an intellectual and a woman, writes: 'In any case, I question the existence of the specific solitude of woman-as-intellectual when that woman is a writer, because when it comes to their essential

faculty as writers, all writers are androgynous beings.' (Selected Stories, p. 11; my underlining).

14. The term 'female subculture' is drawn from Elaine Showalter's essay 'Towards a Feminist Poetics', which appears in Women Writing and Writing About Women, ed. Mary Jacobus (London, Croom Helm, 1979, p. 28).

After completing this chapter I read with interest Dorothy Driver's essay 'Nadine Gordimer: the Politicisation of Women' (in English in Africa, Vol. 10. No.2, October 1983, pp. 29 - 54). Her essay can very usefully be read alongside this chapter of mine; Driver's work makes a number of similar points about the place of women in Gordimer's fiction to those which are made in the following pages.

15. The two collections are Selected Stories (1975) and Some Monday for Sure (1976).

16. Gordimer, N.: 'Is There nowhere else where we can meet?' (from The Soft Voice of the Serpent, p. 92).

17. It is worth noting that D.H. Lawrence was a powerful early influence on Gordimer. See, Gordimer, N.: 'Notes of an Expropriator' (The Times Literary Supplement, 4th June 1964); and 'A Writer in South Africa - Nadine Gordimer' an interview with Alan Ross, (London Magazine, Vol 5, No.2, May 1965, p. 23).

18. Gordimer, N.: 'Is there nowhere else where we can meet?' (op. cit., p. 93).

19. Ibid., p. 93.

20. Ibid., p. 95.

21. Ibid., p. 96.

22. Interview with Nadine Gordimer, Johannesburg, 22nd April, 1983.

23. Clingman assesses the story in this way: "Is there nowhere else where we can meet?" is a remarkably concentrated anticipation of much that Gordimer's future work would explore. An allegory on numerous levels at once sexual, political and historical, it represents the inevitability of a future cataclysmic encounter between black and white in South Africa, as well as the ironies of its postponement.' (Clingman's D. Phil. study of Gordimer's work, loc.cit., pp. 36 - 37).

It is worth adding that the kind of relationship which Gordimer describes between the white woman Maureen Smales and the black man July in one of her most recent works July's people (London, Jonathan Cape, 1981), has a great deal in common with the interaction and its effects on the young woman in this story. See, in particular Maureen's final encounter with July in the novel (pp. 148 - 154).

24. Gordimer, N.: 'The Train from Rhodesia' (from The Soft Voice of the Serpent, pp. 53 - 54).

25. Ibid., pp. 53 - 54.

26. When I asked Gordimer about the background to the writing of 'The Train from Rhodesia' she told me about how she had travelled at the age of fifteen to Rhodesia. She then commented: 'And doubtless, it's then connected with some experience I must

have had through my relationships with men. Again, in South Africa, there's a problem that you meet somebody and are attracted to them and seem to get on well and then you get all sorts of unpleasant revelations about their attitude to other human beings who happen to be black.' (Interview with Nadine Gordimer, 22nd April, 1983).

27. 'Six Feet of the Country' first appeared in The Forum in February, 1953. It is the title story of Six Feet of the Country (1956).

28. Gordimer, N. 'Six Feet of the Country', p. 3.

29. Ibid., p. 0.

30. Ibid., p. 9.

31. Ibid., p. 9.

32. Ibid., pp. 9 - 10.

33. Ibid., p. 19.

34. Ibid., p. 19.

35. Gordimer, N.: 'The Smell of Death And Flowers' from Six Feet of the Country. (This story also appears in the Selected Stories volume and page references are from this edition, loc. cit., p. 106).

36. Ibid., pp. 123 - 124.

37. Gordimer, N.: 'Good Climate, Friendly Inhabitants' (from Not For Publication, p. 156).

38. After being advised by Jack to go and live with her daughter, the woman says to herself: 'Of course I wasn't going to explain to him that I like my independence.' (p. 156.) In the end her notion of independence is shown to be limited and inadequate: 'It just shows you, a woman on her own has always got to look out; it's not only that it's not safe to walk about alone at night because of the natives, this whole town is full of people you can't trust.' (p. 150.)

39. See, in particular, Tillie Olsen's work, fittingly titled Silences (London, Virago, 1980), which explores this feature of male dominance as well as how the accepted literary tradition has devalued and 'silenced' many works by women writers.

40. Gordimer, N.: 'Six Feet of the Country', p. 8.

41. Gordimer, N.: 'Something for the Time Being' from Friday's Footprint (this story also appears in the Selected Stories volume and page reference are from this edition, loc. cit., p. 185).

42. Ibid., pp. 190 - 191.

43. Ibid., p. 187.

44. Ibid., p. 187.

45. Ibid., pp. 192 - 193.

46. Ibid., p. 193.

47. Ibid., p. 194.

48. Ibid., p. 194.

49. Ibid., p. 194.

50. Ibid., p. 194.

51. Interview with Nadine Gordimer, 22nd April, 1983.

52. 'Some Monday for Sure' is the final story in the Not For Publication collection.

53. 'Some Monday for Sure' (from Not For Publication, p. 195).
  54. Ibid., p. 207.
  55. Compare the case of Rosa Burger in Burger's Daughter (London, Jonathan Cape, 1979), and that of the characters in July's People.
  56. Gordimer said of this story: "'Some Monday for Sure" was written after I had spent some time in Dar Es Salaam in the sixties, and had seen for myself what I think I called there the "rotting revolution" at that point in time, because it was then a kind of hiatus between the banning of all the big liberation movements and some sort of revival in some form. So, I hadn't realized until I saw people in these camps (or people living there) what a sad and terrible thing it is to be an exile. So it came out of that. And especially for some of the women who followed their men, like the character [Emma]. They missed the whole family thing; they even missed the squalor of some of the townships here.' (Interview with Nadine Gordimer, 22nd April, 1983).
  57. 'A Chip of Glass Ruby' appears in Not For Publication.
  58. Gordimer, N.: 'A Chip of Glass Ruby' (from Not For Publication, p. 106).
  59. Ibid., p. 113.
  60. Epigraph to July's people, loc. cit.
  61. 'Open House' appears in Livingstone's Companions, p. 135. (Page references are to the Penguin edition of this collection - Harmondsworth, 1975).
  62. Ibid., p. 136.
  63. Ibid., p. 138.
  64. Ibid., p. 146.
  65. 'Africa Emergent' appears in Livingstone's Companions, op. cit., pp. 222 - 237.
  66. Gordimer said of this story to me: "'Africa Emergent' is an intertwining of the result of a number of experiences to which I was close at the time - partly stemming from what happened to my very dear and close friend Nat Nakasa, who did commit suicide... and by the kind of atmosphere that came towards the end of the sixties and early seventies where anybody who wasn't in jail was "black" and anybody who got a passport was immediately suspected of being a spy.' (Interview with Nadine Gordimer, 22nd April, 1983).
  67. Gordimer, N.: 'Africa Emergent' (from Livingstone's Companions, op. cit., p. 222).
  68. Ibid., pp. 234 - 235.
  69. Ibid., p. 237.
  70. Although the country is not named in the story it is fairly unmistakable as being Mozambique. This was confirmed in my interview with Nadine Gordimer.
  71. Gordimer, N.: 'A Soldier's Embrace', loc. cit., p. o.
  72. Gordimer, N.: 'City of the Dead, City of the Living', (from Something Out There, London, Jonathan Cape, 1984, p. 26).
  73. Interview with Nadine Gordimer, 22nd April, 1983.
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## SECTION TWO

### AFRIKAANS SHORT FICTION SINCE 1948

#### I. Introduction

#### II. The Works of the 1950's and 1960's

- a) Major Concerns
- b) Formal Features
- c) Treatments of the Farm and Countryside
- d) Apartheid and the Contact between Black and White people

#### III. The Works of the 1970's and 1980's

- a) Major Concerns - A Literature about Violence
- b) Journalistic Writing and John Miles's Liefs nie op Straat Nie
- c) A Literature about Violence - A Society at War and in Prison
- d) Satire
- e) The Presence of Black Characters
- f) The Writer's Concern about His Craft and Developments within the Rural Short Fiction

#### IV. Conclusion

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## Afrikaans Short Fiction since 1948.<sup>1</sup>

### I INTRODUCTION

Afrikaner nationalism began to emerge in the nineteenth century and by the middle of the twentieth century it had become a potent force in South Africa. Since 1948 Afrikaner Nationalists have held governmental power in the country. Afrikaner writers have been noticeably slow to respond to the grievous features of this movement in their works. Only by the 1970's had a significant number of the writers begun to register criticism of the government and prevailing Afrikaner ideology in their writing. In this chapter I shall examine the changes in this writing community since 1948 by means of a critical consideration of its short fiction, a form whose tendencies and trends have much in common with other genres in Afrikaans writing. I shall also consider the reasons why it is that the Afrikaner writers have been so tardy and indeed, reluctant to challenge the central assumptions and practices of Afrikaner nationalism until such a late stage. In this context it is illuminating to note the development of Afrikaans as a distinctive language.

The Afrikaans language was formed largely out of the contact between Dutch settlers in the Cape and the black people of the region. There has always been a strong connection between Afrikaans and the Dutch and Flemish languages and literatures. Virtually all university students of Afrikaans study that language and its literature alongside Nederlands. Afrikaner writers have always felt a strong sense of kinship to Dutch and

Flemish literatures, in spite of the large areas of cultural difference between South Africa and these European countries.

By the early nineteenth century Afrikaans was widely spoken in the southern parts of South Africa, but there was little evidence of its use in creative writing or in written documents where either Dutch or English predominated. Interestingly, when Afrikaans appears in written works of the mid-nineteenth century it is often used to refer in jocular tones to the speech of the Khoisan ("Hottentot") people. Afrikaans was then seen by white writers as a kind of low, bastard language. By the end of the century, however, Afrikaans was given a more respectable status by early white Afrikaner nationalists who saw the language as a powerful cultural weapon in their struggle against British imperialism. Since that time the language has forcibly been brought under the aegis of Afrikaner nationalism, and the authorities in South Africa have been all too keen to forget the nature of the language's origins. Afrikaans became an official State language in 1925. It is now essentially the language most closely associated with Afrikaner nationalism and therefore with apartheid. It remains an irony that Afrikaans is also the language of a group of black people in South Africa who have brusquely been forced out of the Afrikaner camp by their fellow white Afrikaans-speakers.

Written literature in Afrikaans has almost exclusively been practised and promoted by white South Africans. Most black writers who have Afrikaans as a mother-tongue have chosen English

as the medium for their written works out of the same sense of protest which has motivated other black writers to use English as well.<sup>2</sup> When one talks then of Afrikaans literature (excluding oral traditions in Afrikaans) one is in essence referring to a body of writing by white writers. Afrikaans literary history therefore has a close connection with the pattern of white Afrikaner history.

Afrikaans short fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was unambitious in form and content. Afrikaans works of this era are obsessed with adventures, romantic love-triangles, animal sagas and somewhat later by ghost stories. Historical tales of the Great Trek and of other heroic moments from the Afrikaner past abound. Sangiro's Op Safari (On Safari) of 1925, for instance, was a prototype among works about the African bush and its game. African folklore and animal life fill the story collections of writers of the 1930's and 1940's such as P.J. Schoeman, G.H. Franz, and Minnie Postma. At about this time, a range of writers in Afrikaans, like Bosman in English, were drawn to ghost stories and to the mystery tale; many were influenced by the stories of Poe. C.J. Langenhoven, Eugène Marais, Reenen Jan Van Reenen, and Louis Leipoldt all had a number of stories of this kind. The most important short-fiction writers prior to the 1950's were Toon Van Den Heever, C.M. Van Den Heever, Jan Van Melle, and Uys Krige. Their significance was not so much on a thematic level, where they were concerned with many of the familiar Afrikaner subjects, but more

in terms of a formal refinement of Afrikaans prose. Further, there was a growing involvement in their works with social realism, especially in the case of Uys Krige and Jan Van Melle. Uys Krige's collection Sol y Sombra (1948) which brought together works about Spain of the mid-1930's was to form an early model for the kind of European-based stories which were to occupy many of the younger writers of the 1950's and 1960's.

The Afrikaner writers whose first works appeared in the 1950's and 1960's were a generation who had grown up during a period of crucial transitions for the Afrikaner people. Most of these writers had been born during the 1920's and 1930's and a very high proportion of them had been raised in rural or small-town environments; later, as young adults, they were to move to the cities. Such was the case of Jan Rabie, Abraham De Vries, Chris Barnard, Breyten Breytenbach, Hennie Aucamp, and Henriette Grové, who were among the most prominent writers of the 1950's and 1960's, and whose short fiction of this period will be the special concern of this chapter. They were born of a generation which had struggled to find economic and political certainty in a country which until then had been dominated by the white English-speaking community; a generation not far removed from the Afrikaners in the South African War at the turn of the century. These writers were to see the swift rise of a large part of their community from being the country's 'poor whites' during the early decades of the century to becoming the political and economic masters of South Africa. At the point when these writers began

to have their first works published, in the 1950's and early 1960's, the Afrikaners had moved into a position of political and increasing economic dominance. Their writing reflects, in most interesting ways, the rapid ascendancy of this minority group.

Afrikaner nationalism represented for a large proportion of white Afrikaans-speaking South Africans the unifying movement and ideology which had lifted them out of the social and financial inferiority which the South African War had brought upon their community. All aspects of Afrikaner life and culture were seized on and used by the nationalist movement in its attempt to bolster the pride of the white Afrikaans-speaking people: the Calvinist churches, history, politics, music, theatre, sports, and literature were all subsumed in the process of redressing the wrongs that had been done to the Afrikaners and of elevating their status in the country. For most white Afrikaans-speaking people, Afrikaner nationalism was synonymous with progress and this brought a resolute fidelity within the community to this movement and to its political and social leaders. This tendency had a profound effect on Afrikaans literature and it was only at an extremely late stage - the 1970's - that writers began consistently and outspokenly to challenge the movement and its values.

There had been a steady and increasing stream of Afrikaners into the cities during the first decades of the century and by the 1950's a large proportion of these new urban Afrikaners had found employment in areas of the economy which had been carefully

nurtured for the white urban classes by the Afrikaner government: the civil service, the railways, the post office, and education.<sup>3</sup> In short, the Afrikaner people had, in their terms, successfully weathered a period of economic and social insecurity and had made a rapid entry into the modern urban world: within several decades a largely agrarian society had been transformed into an urban industrialised one. Unlike their black countrymen, however, who had followed a parallel yet different process of rapid urbanization, the white Afrikaners held economic and political power in the country and had immediate access to means of support which ensured that the changes in lifestyle were as untroubled as possible; these, to a very large degree, they denied to the black people.

The emerging Afrikaner writers of <sup>the</sup> 1950's and 1960's measured these changes in their community by a conscious effort to create a modern, urbane literature which was wholly in keeping with the newly-achieved status of the increasing numbers of urbanized Afrikaners: most of these writers and their readers felt that their works were at that time a rebellion against traditional Afrikaner values and institutions. With hindsight we can see that the younger writers of the period were merely reflecting the transition of the Afrikaner community from its rural roots into a modern, technological world and were accordingly 'modernizing' its literature. The so-called revolution or renewal in the prose literature of the Sestigers (the name of the group of young writers of this period) was, to a very large degree, a misnomer;

the characterizing feature of their work, more accurately defined, was not so much their protest against past traditions or even a challenge to the community and its mores in their use of unorthodox or unconventional forms and language, as a shift in the direction of literary modes of expression largely based upon prevailing European and American models. Their novels, stories and plays were moving along with the changes in Afrikaner society and rather than challenging or criticising features of this community, the works were confirming trends which had already become historically established.

As one moves from the early part of the 1960's to the latter part of that decade, and particularly into the 1970's and 1980's, a more fundamental series of changes starts emerging in Afrikaans writing; and this is well-illustrated by reference to the short story. The writers now begin to challenge Afrikaner society and Afrikaner nationalism especially in their portraits of violence in the country and in the surrounding African states. Issues such as the bush wars, urban crime, and terrorism come to feature more and more strongly in their works. Significantly, satirical works which treat the South African state and Afrikaner society in a comical way and which set these institutions up for criticism become more plentiful and far more pointed than in the earlier decades. To a very large extent these changes in Afrikaans writing are signalled by the appearance of works by a younger generation of writers, many of whom were born in the 1940's and early 1950's.

This younger group of writers whose first works were published after the period of the Sestiger writing of the 1950's and early 1960's grew up in a markedly different social climate to that of their slightly more senior colleagues. John Miles, P.J. Haasbroek, Welma Odendaal, and M.C. Botha, who are the leading Afrikaner short-fiction writers emerging during the 1970's and 1980's, grew up in a period in which Afrikaner nationalism was in the ascendant and in which the spectre of poverty among Afrikaners had been virtually banished and had given way to a period of spectacular economic prosperity for this community. However, as the 1950's passed Afrikaners began to face the escalating claims and protests of the country's black population. The Nationalist Party has responded to these developments by an increasing repressive form of government and has progressively burdened the country with a series of restrictive laws. In order to stem the demands of the black people for participation within the political government of South Africa, the ruling Afrikaner party has effectively curtailed the freedom of all South Africans. This process was most sharply brought home to Afrikaner writers by the imposition of State censorship, applied most stringently from 1963 onward. Censorship came to affect Afrikaans writers most explicitly in the early 1970's when for the first time an Afrikaans literary work, Kennis Van die Aand, a novel by André Brink, was banned. The banning of this and other works unleashed a storm of protest among a large proportion of the writers, and individual writers who had previously had little to do with one another found themselves united with other

Afrikaner writers. In this way, the system of censorship, particularly when this began to involve the banning of Afrikaans literary works, ironically brought many of the Afrikaner writers together in opposition to measures being adopted by the Nationalist government. The issue of censorship became, for a number of the leading Afrikaner writers, a token of the repressiveness of their government and pointed the way for a developing critical consciousness amongst them to other far more central areas of State policy which were undermining peace and freedom in the country.

There were, of course, other areas of National Party policy which had previously angered certain Afrikaner writers. The disenfranchisement of the mixed-race (Coloured) people during the 1950's, for example, had earlier stirred Jan Rabie to a number of polemical essays and literary works which strongly criticized measures the government was taking in its drive to ensure the well-being of white South Africans. However, it is fair to say that it was the issue of censorship which was the first move of the National Party to affect a large number of the writers and to open their eyes to other areas of repression in the country.

By the end of the 1960's and in the early 1970's, therefore, Afrikaner writers were becoming aware of the fact that the form of unquestioning adherence to Afrikaner nationalism which most of them had earlier professed to a greater or lesser extent posed a number of moral pitfalls for them and in many respects was running counter to the freedoms they wished to enjoy, at least as

writers, open to choose and develop subjects in the ways they wished without the continual fear of curtailment and banning. I think it is fair to agree with Abraham De Vries that by the end of the 1960's the enormous political naiveté of the Sestiger writers had given way to a far broader and more critical viewing of South African society among the leading Afrikaner writers.<sup>4</sup>

The younger writers, and in particular the short-story writers, whose first published works began to appear from about this time onward, found themselves therefore in a very different position to the writers of a decade or so earlier. As I have pointed out, for the older writers - the Sestigers - the question of challenging Afrikaner nationalism in their works had scarcely arisen. Now, at the end of 1960's, the Afrikaans writing community had been repeatedly shocked by a series of incidents: these included the disenfranchisement of the mixed race people (effectively, brown Afrikaners); Sharpeville; the assassination of Verwoed; the rise of armed resistance; the trial and sentencing of Bram Fischer, an Afrikaner of high social standing, on grounds of treason; and finally the tightening of the censorship laws. These events tarnished the image of Afrikaner nationalism in the eyes of many white Afrikaans-speaking people. The young writers began producing works during a period in which there was a growing air of disaffection with the orthodoxies of Afrikaner society. This spirit was to increase as the 1970's passed while the Afrikaner government was continually being harassed by a succession of crises.<sup>5</sup> The Afrikaner writers found

themselves being pushed closer (and now this included the older writers as well), towards becoming a dissident faction within their community. The newly-formed Afrikaanse Skrywersgilde (Afrikaans Writers' Guild), for example, largely made up of white Afrikaner members (but also including white English and black writers), passed strongly worded motions critical of censorship and apartheid. The case of Breyten Breytenbach during the 1970's was symptomatic of the writers' disaffection with Afrikaner nationalism. It might be added that although not every Afrikaner writer was as strongly disappointed and aggrieved about affairs in the country as were the Sestigers and the new generation of younger writers, their response was not an isolated one and in fact can be seen as representative for the broad Afrikaner writing community. By the mid- and late- 1970's there were few apologists for apartheid among the ranks of the leading Afrikaans writers. Those who were satisfied with the status quo were a small and essentially unimportant band whose works were far from the forefront of writing in the community. As the mood of disillusionment was developing and gaining expression in Afrikaans literary works of the 1970's and 1980's, Afrikaans writing, for the first time in many decades, was beginning to share the concerns of South African English writing and the writers in these different communities began to adopt similar literary approaches with which to treat events within their country.

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## II The Works of the 1950's and 1960's

### a) Major Concerns

One of the leading figures in the Afrikaans literary world from the 1930's onwards was N.P. Van Wyk Louw. He described the Afrikaans prose tradition prior to the emergence of works by the Sestigers as chiefly characterized by a genial local realism ('gemoedelike lokale realisme').<sup>6</sup> Van Wyk Louw implied a prose tradition of little formal experimentation with an uncritical concern, most often a smug self - appraisal of the small - town and countryside world of the Afrikaners. The writing which arose during the 1950's and 1960's, by contrast, offered a break with this foregoing tendency and propelled Afrikaans literature by means of works which were often imitative of and derivative from European and American trends in fiction, into the main currents of modern twentieth-century literature. Afrikaans writers began to explore themes which were preoccupying their contemporaries in Europe and America and also turned towards fresh treatments of the rural life in South Africa. Many of the writers of this time spent periods either as students or as travellers in Europe during which their views of the world were greatly developed. Many were to find the European capitals - Paris, Amsterdam and Brussels, in particular - second and refreshingly new spiritual homes for their artistic natures and interests. During the 1930's Uys Krige had travelled in France and Spain and at the end of the 1940's the young Jan Rabie followed his older friend's example and set off for a seven-year sojourn in Europe, basing himself in Paris. Rabie was brought into contact with artists

and writers from a variety of countries and, in particular, met South Africans who had left their country in a spirit of disaffection with the growing repression being enforced there.

The product of these years was a collection of twenty-one short prose pieces, simply entitled 21. In using a very short form of story Rabie was taking up a tradition and practice which had engaged earlier Afrikaans short-fiction writers such as Pulvermacher, J.Lub, Eugène Marais, and Jan van Melle. In fact, beginning with Rabie's 21, I would argue that the most original contribution of the Afrikaans story writers since the 1950's to South African short fiction has been in this form of the very short prose work. Aside from the sketches by Casey Motsisi there is scarcely any instance of an English South African writer using this form; whereas in the Afrikaner community, as I hope to demonstrate, many of the best story writers have used it to outstanding effect.

One of the most striking features of 21, and one which is to recur in many of the short fiction collections by Afrikaner writers up to the 1970's, is that a large proportion of the stories are set within Europe or at least in a discernibly non-South African location. This certainly forms part of the trend, of which 21 was perhaps the major forerunner, of modernizing and bringing a cosmopolitan quality to Afrikaans literature. In a small number of cases, as we shall see, writers chose to locate their stories outside South Africa in order that they might comment critically on topical issues in the country

in a way which remained veiled and thereby not susceptible to censorship. This they would have learnt from other dissident writers. However, by far the largest number of stories set outside South Africa were responding to the writers' urge to broaden their literary focus and bring freshness into what they felt was a staid, provincial literature. By doing this, they certainly achieved their goal of widening the horizons of Afrikaans literature on the basic level of treating events within settings remote from South Africa which offered a certain exotic appeal to South African readers; but what they failed to do was to face up to the increasingly problematic aspects of South African society which were developing during the 1950's and early 1960's. Afrikaans literature of the period is singularly barren in this respect and we need to turn to the works of English writers to gain insights into this troubled and crucial period of recent South African history.

In Rabie's 21, however, the three pieces set in South Africa - 'Droogte' ('Drought') 'Plek vir een' ('Place for one more') and 'Stellenbosch, my vallei' ('Stellenbosch - my valley') - all deal explicitly with issues of racial tension and discrimination in the country. Indeed, I would argue that the themes of the other stories within this collection not set in South Africa, do have a bearing upon events within the country, albeit in an oblique way. In fact, a great deal of Afrikaans short fiction of this period responds to pressing realities within South Africa in an oblique way; and this approach in these writers' hands, as I have already

suggested, has most often tended to evade and mask issues within the country rather than squaring up to them. Despite this, it is noteworthy that forms of artistic guise or concealment have often been instrumental in making some of the best literary works about politically charged situations. In South Africa we need only think of Bosman's Marico stories which cunningly veil social criticism within the backwoods settings of these works; just as further afield, Hasek's stories about the supposedly moronic character, Schweik, and his seemingly perverse behaviour offer some of the most powerful satires of the rise of European fascism earlier in the century.<sup>7</sup>

There is a bewilderingly large range of subjects among the twenty-one pieces of Rabie's collection: one moves from a story about three bald men engaged in a grotesque Rabelaisian feast of self-consumption to pieces which describe equally disturbing incidents, many of them set within Europe in the midst of or recovering from the horrors of the Second World War. 'Lied oor Niemansland' ('Song over no-mansland') for example, describes the events which take place after the protagonist, Evert, returns from the war to discover his home town partitioned by barbed-wire fences and patrolled by vicious guards. In 'Die nuwe piramides' ('The new pyramids') there is a chilling account of the extermination of prisoners in the gas-chambers of the German concentration camps. As I indicated earlier, the three pieces set in South Africa describe different incidents of racial tension in the country. Finally, the collection closes with a

science-fiction type of story (an interest which Rabie, incidentally, later develops in a number of his novels) about a man who, like Frankenstein, is destroyed by the robot he has built with painstaking care. This diversity of subjects and treatment of characters in a wide range of settings and situations also characterizes a large number of the major Afrikaans story collections of the next decade or so. Short story volumes by Breytenbach, Barnard, De Vries, and Aucamp which appear in the 1960's are distinguished by precisely these features.

One of the common denominators in Rabie's collection is that virtually all of the pieces touch upon aspects of human perversity, whether it be the gluttony of the three bald men of the first piece, the racist obsessions of white characters in the South African stories, or the cruelty of the S.S. officers in the German camps. The essence of 21 is really Rabie's sombre view of the condition humaine in the middle of the twentieth century. What is of particular interest about 21 is both how Rabie consciously elected to publish these pieces in Afrikaans - a large number of the stories were first drafted in English - and in this way direct the volume specifically towards a small Afrikaans readership in South Africa; and secondly, how he established a link between South African forms of obsessive behaviour or perversity (the racism of certain of the white characters in the stories set in South Africa) with similar modes of conduct outside this context in Europe and elsewhere. It is

precisely because of this link between the mood and conduct of people in South Africa and those in other societies of the contemporary world that Rabie's volume is a far more significant work for South African literature than most of the Afrikaans short fiction collections of the next fifteen or so years. Although the precise nature of the connection between South African and European societies is kept sketchy and largely implicit in 21, Rabie has posed the suggestion that there are common elements in the social malaise of these different societies. Writers such as Breytenbach, Barnard, De Vries and Aucamp rarely developed links between stories of theirs set outside South Africa and those set within the country. What we see happening in their collections is rather a complex disjunction between their South African and European-based stories.

21 consists of compact and pithy pieces of short fiction in which Rabie's language is concise, yet incorporates extensive use of imagery. Consider, for instance, the description which opens the collection, at the beginning of the piece 'Drie Kaalkoppe Eet tesame' ('Three Bald Heads Dine Together'):

'n drie-eenheid kaalkoppe sit rondom die tafel. Die ligte van die restaurant gloei metaalagtig op die kaal gepoleerde krone. Dit laat dink aan eierdoppe, oopgerkraak tot monsteragtige misgeboortes van drillende wange en monde...

(A trinity of bald heads sit round the table. The lights of the restaurant glow metallically on the bald polished crowns. They resemble egg-shells, cracked open into monstrous misbirths of cheeks and mouths quivering with their loads of pinky flesh...)

One's attention is immediately arrested by the term 'n

drie-eenheid' ('trinity') which is being used to describe this most unholy threesome. Their huge heads are compared, with much force, to cracked egg-shells which give way to 'monsteragtige misgeboortes van wange en monde' ('monstrous misbirths of cheeks and mouths'). Throughout the collection Rabie uses piquant, evocative imagery, often visual which, as in this case, frequently creates a startling effect. In the piece 'n Vlermuis in die park' ('A bat in the park'), for example, the creature of the title comes to refer to an angry old woman who hauls her young charge briskly away from his playing friends.<sup>9</sup> In 'Skelle Modder' ('Glaring Mud') we read of how 'n ellendige voëlverskrikker van 'n man' ('a wretched scarecrow of a man') collapses face-first into the mud of a road and how: 'rondom sy hoof word die swart en oranje modder gevlek met bloed, tot dit die gespikkelde skoonheid van 'n ruiker blomme vertoon', ('about his head the black and orange mud becomes flecked with blood, until it displays the speckled beauty of a bouquet of flowers').<sup>10</sup>

There is much that is nightmarish in the stories of this collection and Rabie here owes an acknowledged debt to surrealism which is yet another feature of contemporary European literature which he has successfully blended into his work. Considering the brevity of these pieces it is hardly surprising to find that most of the stories take as their subject a single, often traumatic incident in the lives of the characters. In his critical analysis of 21, André Brink uses the phrase 'exploding moment'

('ontploffende oomblik'), drawn from the story 'La Promenade en chien', as a key to understanding one of the chief compositional elements of the diverse pieces; namely, the use of a concentrated episode at the heart of many of the stories. Brink suggestively compares Rabie's use of his 'exploding moment' in these stories to the epiphanic instances in James Joyce's prose.<sup>11</sup>

Although equal and occasionally surpassing Rabie's formal achievements in 21 none of the later Sestiger story collections was able to match his ability here to bring together, within a single volume, European stories and expressly European literary techniques with stories set in South Africa and offering fairly direct references to the racial situation in the country. Breyten Breytenbach's collection of short fiction, Katastrofes (1964), and his later stories of the 1960's and early 1970's, for instance, contain barely any reference to South Africa, while a very small number of his later stories are set in South Africa. What these works certainly do achieve is an intriguing blend of many of the avant-garde and artistically fashionable European tendencies of the period. Breytenbach succeeds in integrating these strains - Zen Buddhism, Hinduism, Existentialist thought, Surrealism, and even a form of Marxism- within highly individualistic pieces of fiction. Yet there is little sense, other than that the stories are written in Afrikaans, of how these pieces have any bearing on realities within South Africa. The same is true for the majority of Barnard's and De Vries works of the same period. For all the formal excellence of their

stories it is difficult to discern any connection between their subjects and events taking place in South Africa, except in the most general of terms. In essence, many of these pieces by Breytenbach, Barnard and De Vries are simply European stories written in Afrikaans, stemming, very largely, from their experiences while living abroad. Significantly, none of their collections from this period have appeared in English, although a substantial amount of Breytenbach's later more politically committed poetry and prose works have been translated not only into English, but also into a number of other languages.

It is interesting however, that these story collections have been received with almost universal and unqualified acclaim by Afrikaner critics who have viewed them as being among the key works in bringing Afrikaans literature into the fold of other modern literatures. This is certainly true; but what these critics have failed to observe is that in turning to Europe, these writers were moving away from pressing South African concerns and failing to link the two worlds. I am therefore suggesting that these Sestiger story collections are of limited significance, yet can be seen as a preparation for the works of the 1970's and 1980's. Later volumes of short stories bring together the formal achievements and experiments of the Sestiger works with an emphatic concern for affairs taking place in South Africa.

There are a number of common themes in the early story collections of Breytenbach, Barnard and De Vries, some of which

are shared with Rabie's 21. The governing idea in Breytenbach's collection is suggested in its epigraph (a quotation from an interview with Jean-Paul Satre) which gives the work its title: 'Ons is diere oorval deur katastrofes...' ('We are animals unexpectedly overtaken by catastrophes...').<sup>12</sup> Breytenbach's vision in this volume is of a random universe of misfortunes, relieved only temporarily by occasional moments of laughter. The tone of the collection is set in its first and best piece, 'Kersverhaal' ('Christmas Story'). An adolescent girl describes how, with terrible unexpectedness, a band of soldiers attack and massacre the people of her European village on Christmas Eve. The only relief to this bitter series of events is <sup>provided by</sup> the occasional wry comments of the young narrator which are at variance with the incidents taking place about her. There is a deep-rooted pessimism in Katastrofes and Breytenbach's vision is very much in accord with the existential anguish of many European writers of the time. Indeed, one comes to feel that his reflections often imitate attitudes which had previously been expressed in works by Beckett, Artaud, Sartre and Ionesco. For example, the narrator meditates in the concluding piece:

'Ek het tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat ons kwaadaardige gewasse is wat op die uiterste miskien die aarde sou kon bevrug, as die nie reeds dood was nie.' and:  
'Wat bly dan oor? Geloof? Hoop? Leifde? Rewolsie / Langsame selfmoord? Wel 'n grinnikende absurditeit'

('I have come to the conclusion that we are malignant growths who in the final extreme perhaps could have made the earth fruitful, if this had not already been dead'. and:  
'What, after all, is there left? Faith? Hope? Love? Revolution / Prolonged suicide? Well, a grinning absurdity').

Here there is a sense of Breytenbach, in the early 1960's, rehashing ideas in Afrikaans which had already become fashionable in Europe during the period shortly after the Second World War.<sup>13</sup>

Published in the same year as Katastrofes, Chris Barnard's collection Dwaal (Wandering ) is yet another account of existential crises facing modern man. It is worth reflecting that such a theme accords well and indeed was of special interest to the Afrikaner writer trying to be non-political in this period. As the title Dwaal suggests, Barnard explores the idea that man is trapped in a condition of eternal wandering, little knowing his destination and with little possibility of finding a purpose for his life. Characteristic of the entire collection is the first story 'Woestyn' ('Desert') which describes how two men, one old, the other young, lose all sense of direction and motivation in their journey across a desert:

Die loop het 'n proses geword, 'n lewenswyse. En alles het deel geword van die loop; alles het op een of ander tydstop saamgetrek tot die beweging van arms en bene. Bome gaan soos eeue verby en duine het geen verband meer met mekaar nie; elke duin is maar die een duin van alle tye.

(Walking has become a process, a way of life. And everything has become part of walking; at one point or another everything has been contracted into the movement of arms and legs. Trees pass by like centuries and there is no longer any connection between one dune and another; each dune is just the same dune for all time.)<sup>14</sup>

Barnard uses a different noun as the title for each of his stories ('Woestyn', 'Argipel', 'Vertrek', 'Geboorte'. and 'Meineed' ['Desert', 'Archipelago', 'Departure', 'Birth' and 'Perjury']); he traces in each of these the behaviour of

different protagonists, most of whom remain nameless, in distinct and extreme situations. The five stories are variously set in a desert, a prison, a mental asylum, during a state of war, and after the suspicious death of a prostitute. As in Breytenbach's collection, Dwaal offers a sombre vision of the world. The freedom fighter, Mentz, is killed at the end of the story 'Geboorte' ('Birth'), for example; the rebel movement he supports appears to have been crushed by the tyrannical government. Similarly, in 'Argipel' ('Archipelago'), the prisoner's attempts to maintain his sanity seem to have failed at the end of this story. The final lines of the collection offer a view of disaster and disorder in the world:

..Lippe roer nie meer nie. Branders breek nie meer die. En die aarde kantel om sy as.

(..Lips no longer move. Waves no longer break. And the earth topples from its axis.)<sup>15</sup>

One of the major weaknesses of Dwaal is that Barnard's exploration of the condition humaine lacks depth and definition: the characters and the situations in which they find themselves are described in a vague and generalized way. But in his next collection of stories, Duiwel-in-die-Bos (Devil-in-the-Bush) (1968), Barnard largely overcomes this defect. His concerns in this collection are as ambitious as in Dwaal, yet the stories are more pointed and well-defined than the rambling narratives of the earlier volume. Duiwel-in-die-Bos takes as its central theme the idea of evil and how this plays upon the lives of different characters. There is a close inter-play in these stories between notions of evil, sexual desire, and death. In 'Die Lang Kat'

('The Long Cat'), for example, a crippled man gives vent to his frustration at being sexually incapable by viciously attacking his wife's cat: the tom-cat represents the sexual freedom and ease of physical movement which the man's disabled condition denies him. In the more successful stories, 'Die swaar vrou' ('The heavy woman') and 'Die dood van Julika von Schwabe' ('The death of Julika von Schwabe') there are accounts of how children commit murders; these acts point towards a breakdown of the conventional tokens of good and evil.<sup>16</sup> In 'Die Dood van Julika von Schwabe', a brother and sister murder a nun who had been seen by their parents as their beloved teacher and companion. Julika von Schwabe is compared, at one point in the story, to love itself. In 'Die Swaar Vrou' Barnard similarly explores how children come to act with violence, breaking across social conventions. Here the boys murder their priest, a companion who has betrayed them, and a large woman who has been the subject of their sexual fantasies; the boys had previously been told that she was the incarnation of evil. Their violent act has a complex significance and in a poetic and deeply disturbing conclusion Barnard describes how the boys leave the scene of the fire singing hymns with renewed understanding of them and with great feeling:

Ons het die oggendlied gesing, maar dit was skielik 'n ander lied. Anders as gewoonlik soggens in die skemer kapel het ons hier buite tussen die bome verstaan wat ons sing. Ons het met oorgawe die oggendlied gesing.

En ek dink ons stemme was soet en helder so teen die ontsaglike opkomende son.

(We sang the morning hymn, but suddenly it was a different

song. Different from what was usual in the mornings in the dim chapel, here outside, between the trees, we understood what we were singing. We sang the morning hymn with surrender.

And I think our<sup>17</sup> voices were sweet and clear against the awful rising sun.)

The realm of fantasy and imagination figures prominently in a number of the stories. 'Skreeu' ('Scream') describes a strange nocturnal journey of the narrator which is both a fantasy and a reality for him. In the story which follows it, 'Bos' ('Bush'), the distinction between fantasy, an inner reality, and the external world is equally blurred. The narrator has been pursued for many years by a man called Kirst. It is difficult to discern whether Kirst is an actual person or some phantom of the narrator's mind, a kind of vengeful alter ego. The world Barnard is describing in these stories is a disturbing one; the most innocent and placid of individuals as well as the most protected of environments are vulnerable to sudden and disruptive forces, where order can be cruelly and sometimes ironically overturned. In this respect Barnard's vision in Duiwel-in-die-Bos is not very different to the changeable world of catastrophic possibilities presented in Breytenbach's earlier collection of stories.

Abraham De Vries's works are amongst the most elusive and varied of those by contemporary South African writers. His oeuvre is characterized not so much by elements of uniformity and constancy as by a wide range of subjects, settings and technical approaches. His first three story collections of the 1950's, however, offer largely unexceptional accounts of rural characters

and the strains which the urban economy is placing on many of these people and their lifestyle. A two year sojourn in Europe during the early 1960's proved to be a watershed in De Vries's career. Aside from the European setting of a high proportion of his stories in his next three collections, Dubbeldoor (1963) (Double-yoked egg), Vliegog (1965) (Fly's Eye), and Twee maal om die Son (1969) (Twice Around the Sun), these works reflect certain of the prevailing European literary vogues. Existentialism, surrealism, and the absurd feature prominently in these collections. De Vries's subjects range from the experiences of people living under Nazi occupation during the Second World War, to oblique satires of the racial obsessions of South Africans, to self-reflexive stories which view his own career as a writer with irony. As in Barnard's and Breytenbach's collections the central themes in De Vries's works of this period are ambitious; yet, unlike the collections of his fellow Afrikaner writers there is a wider range of ideas and a diversity of fictional techniques being explored in his works. There is no unified or reductive view of the world, nor a single thesis being developed in De Vries's collections as there are in Katastrofes, Dwaal, and Duiwel-in-di-Bos. De Vries's works offer instead a series of distinct glimpses of different facets of the contemporary world. Humour, pathos, tragedy, melodrama, or satire form central features of individual stories and variously combine within one's reading of an entire collection to offer a complex differentiated view of the world. This design informs the titles of two of De Vries's collections. The title, Dubbeldoor

(Double-yoked egg), suggest duality, which relates to two modes of perception within many of this collection's stories; namely, the real and the imaginary. Yet both coexist in human experience as do the double-yolks (of the title) within a single egg-shell. Vliegoog (Fly's Eye) refers to the way in which a fly's vision of the world is made up of a large number of distinct images. Similarly, the individual stories comprising De Vries's collection each have their autonomy, yet come together, for all their differences in tone and subject matter, to form the unity of the work - like the facets of a fly's eye.

The interrelatedness of the real and the imaginary is one of the few constant concerns in De Vries's short stories; and as in Barnard's pieces such as 'Skreeu', 'Bos', and 'Hoogsomernag' ('Mid-summer Night'), for example, it is often exceptionally difficult for the characters and indeed for the reader to disentangle these two realms. In the story 'Passenger in Transit', for instance, Walter hopes to celebrate a wage increase by throwing a party.<sup>18</sup> All his guests give reasons as to why they cannot come. Left on his own, Walter passes the night intended for his party drinking and fantasizing. The title of the story refers to Walter's imaginative journeys which become a reality for him. In the final scene of the story Walter's landlady recalls how one of his guests did in fact arrive on the night of the party; she had told this young woman that Walter was not there; he was away again on one of his journeys.<sup>19</sup> Even this down-to-earth landlady, De Vries's story implies, is unable to

distinguish between the real and fantastical life of her lodger. When Walter dreams he is, for this woman, literally not there.

There are a small number of De Vries's stories of the 1960's (aside from his collection of rural sketches and anecdotes about the Little Karoo) set explicitly in South Africa which explore the racial situation in the country.<sup>20</sup> In a rare piece, 'Die Muise' ('The Mice'), he deals with South African racism through incidents which take place in a European setting. In a subsequent section of this chapter I shall return to these stories; at this point, however, I would like to consider several formal features of these story collections of the late 1950's and 1960's. Features of their language and design as well as their subject matter and themes also formed an essential part of these writer's endeavours to modernize Afrikaans prose writing and bring their works into line with contemporary developments in American and European literature.

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b) Formal Features

Rabie's 21 and Breytenbach's Katastrofes consist of very short prose pieces (the short short-story) and these collections form part of the increasing interest in the contemporary literary world with this type of short story. Jorge Luis Borges of Argentina is perhaps the most notable practitioner of this very short story form in the present era and his volumes of short fiction had already become popular in Europe during the 1950's. But more significantly, Dino Buzzati in Italy had published a

collection of compact prose works under the title Catastrophe in 1949 and Breytenbach's collection of fifteen years later not only has its title in common with Buzatti's work, but offers a similar view of the world and uses an identical form of the story itself. One of the notable features of Afrikaans story collections of the 1950's and the 1960's is the high incidence of stories told by a first person narrator and it would seem reasonable to see this development again as taking place in close relationship to contemporary literary interests and practices in Europe and America. At this time the self-confessional poetry and prose of Wallace Stevens, Robert Lowell, and Sylvia Plath was in vogue: the exploration of the inner psyche was a popular subject in works of this period. Abraham De Vries and Hennie Aucamp, in particular, frequently use self-confessional narratives in their collections. De Vries's subjects are often the disturbed and the distraught, whereas Aucamp's narrators are most commonly lonely people facing problems of sexual and spiritual uncertainty which is often related to their approaching old age.

Closely allied to a narrator's act of confession or self-exploration in a story is the writer's own self-reflexive view of himself or his writing within his short fiction. Breytenbach for instance, uses his own name and that of his wife in the piece 'Troebel dobbelsteentjes' ('Turbid Dices') in which they appear as the leading characters.<sup>21</sup> In De Vries's story 'Terug na die Natuur ('Back to Nature') the main character is given the name of De Vries's nom de plume, Thys van der Vyver.<sup>22</sup>

This character is a friend of the author Abraham De Vries and is in the process of making films based on De Vries's stories. All references to De Vries's stories are faithfully recorded in footnotes and Van der Vyver even quotes assessments of De Vries's works by Afrikaner critics of the period. 'Terug na die Natuur' is, in this way, a kind of palimpsest of De Vries's oeuvre and is not unlike stories by Borges, ('Borges and I') Robbe-Grillet and B.S. Johnson, for example, which make wry and ironic references to the author and his way of writing. Similarly, Aucamp's story 'Armed Vision' describes how an author, who is closely identified with Aucamp, yet not named, visits an optician in order to have a set of contact lenses fitted.<sup>23</sup> The story's central theme is the ironic way in which this writer views the world: this man who admires the penetrating vision of other writers is shown blundering about the streets short-sightedly without his spectacles, newly fitted with a set of defective contact lenses. Aucamp mentions the contemporary authors Etienne Leroux and Saul Bellow in this piece and wittily plays with the reader's susceptibility in identifying the narrator with the author (Aucamp) himself. This self-consciousness of the author and the concern with the process of writing and the person behind the creative work have become common features in twentieth century prose fiction. They have a history extending beyond Borges and Robbe-Grillet: the Künstlerroman ('artist-novel') has risen to prominence through works such as Proust's Remembrance of Things Past, Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and Mann's Tonio Kröger and Dr. Faustus. The Afrikaner story-writers of the

1950's and the 1960's have likewise shown a strong interest in these modern literary experiments. In addition to the works of Breytenbach, De Vries, and Aucamp cited above, there are stories by Henriette Grové from this period which reveal her self-reflexive interest in the act of writing. For example, there is the following teasing passage, filled with self-irony, near the beginning of 'So vroeg-vroeg in die Môre ('So very early in the morning'). Here Grové is playing upon the author's mediating role between the real and the fictional:

Dit is 'n ware verhaal. Dit begin op 'n Dinsdagmiddag en eindig Vrydag saam met die lang somerskemer. Ek wil probeer om dit net te vertel. Gewoonlik skipper ek met die soontoe, hiernatoe en die heen en weer, maar hierdie keer is daar geen nodigheid voor nie. Ek hoef geen simbool te bou nie en geen vergelykings te tref nie. Daar is geen teëstellinge nie en baie min konflik. Dit is net 'n storie en dit gaan bo alles aan: dit loop, dit beweeg...

(It is a true story. It begins on a Tuesday afternoon and ends on the Friday with the long summer dusk. I shall try just to tell it. Usually I dally with the thither and the hither, the backwards and the forwards, but this time there is no need for that. I need not build any symbols and strike any comparisons. There are no contrasts and very little conflict. It is simply a story and it goes on, above everything else: it runs, it moves...) <sup>24</sup>

In a later story, 'Douw en Fransiena' ('Douw and Fransiena'), Grové describes how acts of writing and reading can bring comfort to people who find themselves in difficult circumstances. Fransiena has recently deserted her husband and in the uncertain days which follow she discovers a cache of letters which had been written years before, by a spinster school-teacher on her childhood farm. These letters were written to an imaginary lover and Fransiena comes to realize how the act of writing itself

offered this woman a means by which she could accommodate herself to a barren and lonely existence:

Week na week word werklikheid; 'n hele dag verander in 'n sin, en kommas punktueer noukeurig die feite van bestaan: kos en klere en die tyd wat verbygaan.

(Week after week becomes reality; a whole day changes in a sentence, and commas carefully punctuate the facts of existence: food and clothes and the time which passes by.)<sup>25</sup>

Fransiena then reads in one of the letters:

"..ek het jou lief, en al pos ek nooit die briewe nie, al weet jy niks daarvan af nie, sō het ek geskrywe."

("...I love you, and even though I do not post the letters, even though you know nothing of them, still I have written.")<sup>26</sup>

Through reading these letters Fransiena is moved to a re-assessment of her relationship with her husband and the need for love and companionship; she decides to return to him at the end of the story. Grové's work is as much about the possible functions of writing and reading as it is about love and loneliness.

One of the most innovative features of the major Afrikaans short-fiction collections of this period and indeed of the 1970's and 1980's, is the ingenious titles which the writers have given their collections; titles which often indicate the thematic or structural unities within these works as a whole. I have already referred to Barnard's use of the titles Dwaal (Wandering) and Duiwel-in-die-Bos (Devil-in-the-Bush), and to De Vries's collections Dubbedoor (Double-yolked Egg) and Vliegoog (Fly's Eye). Grové likewise uses the suggestive titles Jarringe (Annual-rings) and Winterreis (Winter Journey) for two of her

collections. In the former collection the title points towards the way in which the stories reveal chronological progression, as with tree rings, of Grové's craft as a story-writer from the early 1950's up to the mid-1960's. It also suggests how individual stories touch upon and express various layers of experiences from the past which have gone towards making up the leading characters in each work. The title Winterreis calls to mind Wilhelm Müller's Winterreise-cycle; Schubert's Lieder were themselves a response to Müller's works, and Grové by referring to a journey in winter time, rechoing the earlier cycle, suggests the sombre tone of the volume. During the 1970's, Welma Odendaal uses the title Getuie vir die Naaktes (Witness for the Naked) for a collection of stories about vulnerable and often lonely characters. P.J. Haasbroek's Heupvuur (Hip-fire) (literally, 'Fire from the hip') of the same period suggests the abrasive violence in most of its stories as well as the strength of the sexual drives which motivate many of the characters. This feature of a story collection's unity being suggested by means of its ingeniously conceived title has hardly been used by English South African writers who have most often taken the collection's title from one of its stories.<sup>27</sup>

There are, however, interesting parallels between the kind of language being used by certain of the Afrikaner story writers of this period such as Rabie, Breytenbach, and Barnard, and that being used by black South African writers. There is often a high density of images within the prose of these writers which is

strikingly similar to the language of the black writers. Needless to say the imagery and terms of reference being used by these 'Afrikaner' and black story writers are very different from one another, but it is interesting that the poetic elements of imagery and metaphor in the prose of these two groups of writers is a distinctive feature of their writing. In the following chapter I shall consider the nature of the imagery in black short fiction and the sources for its metaphoric references; however, Breytenbach, De Vries and Barnard were all strongly influenced by surrealism and the associative use of imagery in works by writers such as André Breton and Henri Michaux.<sup>28</sup> This kind of language usage was a distinct break from the tradition of realist prose writing which had dominated Afrikaans fiction until the mid-1950's. The use of surrealist elements within these writers' works was part of their gesture towards modernizing Afrikaans prose and showed their growing affinity with European literature. I have previously considered examples of Rabie's use of imagery in 21 and his particular penchant for visual images. I have also mentioned how the real and imaginary are often closely related to one another in stories by Barnard and De Vries. In Breytenbach's Katastrofes the language is often intensely poetic. The construction of sentences and paragraphs, replete with images, is not based so much upon logical connections, as upon an associative interlinking of ideas and images.<sup>29</sup> There are often sudden and unexpected leaps and changes within his use of images and a delight in verbal games. Consider, for example, the opening lines of the piece 'Bergen':

Bergen is 'n stad van seemeeue en wit. Dis 'n kolossale seedier wat eens op 'n lank lank gelede uitgespoel het en nou opgeblaas en dood stadig disintegreer die seevoëls is brommers wat geduring hoog bo die benerige lyf wiek deur die aaklige skêre van die snawels kla plons en veselslappies vleis oppik.

(Bergen is a city of seagulls and whiteness. It's a colossal sea animal which once upon a time long long ago was washed ashore and now is bloated and with deathly slowness is disintegrating the sea-birds are meat-flies which continually sail high over the bony body [and] through the dreadful shears of the beaks wail splash and peck at fibrous pieces of meat.)<sup>30</sup>

The description of Bergen as 'n stad van seemeeue en wit' ('a city of seagulls and whiteness') is followed early in the next sentence by a verbal echo of the work 'see' ('sea') in the image 'n kolossale seedier' ('a colossal sea animal'). Breytenbach continues to elaborate on this metaphor of the city as a sea animal and then takes up the reference to 'seevoëls' ('seabirds') and compares them to 'brommers' ('meat-flies'). This in turn, serves as the basis for a development of this image of the birds picking away at the body of the bloated sea-animal; and, we recall, in a moment of shock and also humour that Breytenbach had earlier in this long, unpunctuated sentence compared the city to a marine animal. Breytenbach's language here, and in other pieces in the collection, is, as I have indicated, built upon associative principles and sudden transitions. In a critical commentary on Katastrofes, Hennie Aucamp provocatively compares the construction of its pieces to the way in which images are used in films. He goes on to quote Antonioni on his film, Zabriski Point:

"It is not so much a question of reading between the lines, as of reading between the images." Precisely the same can

be said of Breytenbach's work: images are juxtaposed; the reader has to discover [literally,<sup>31</sup> read into] the connections between the images himself.

in the case of Barnard the language is strongly influenced by his preoccupation with dreams and reveries. His story 'Hoogsomernag' ('Mid-summer Night') opens in this way:

Ons droom almal soms dié soort drome. En seuns veral. Swaar en donker drome waaruit ons langzaam en teensinnig wakker word en wat 'n dag of drie daarna nog by ons bly soos 'n mooi en treurige herinnering.

(All of us, from time to time, dream these kind of dreams. And boys, above all. Dark and heavy dreams out of which we awaken slowly and reluctantly and which still remain with us for several days afterwards like a beautiful and sad memory.)<sup>32</sup>

Many of his stories evoke the mood of a dream and, as I suggested earlier, the real and the imaginary are often indistinguishable in these works. Flowing from these concerns it is not surprising that there is a rich poetic overlay in much of his prose. The story 'Bos', which Barnard himself has revealingly called a kind of poem, begins like this:

Daar is 'n soort stilte wat meer behels as die afwesigheid van geluid; 'n stilte sonder beweging; 'n stilte wat byna die dood self is. Die lug is stil, die blare en gras is stil, die voëls is ongelooflik stil. As die meide smiddae die mangopitte los en wegraak tussen die bome, dan kom dié stilte. Dis die uur sonder sonbesies-die dooie uur waarin 'n mens begin vermoed dat selfs die son iewers vasgesteek het. In so 'n uur kom Kirst.

(There is a kind of silence which comprises more than the absence of sound; a silence without movement; a silence which is almost death itself. The air is still, the leaves and grass are still, the birds are unbelievably still. In the afternoon when the maids leave the mango-pips and vanish between the trees, then this silence comes. It's the hour without cicadas - the dead hour in which a person begins to feel that even the sun has come to a stop somewhere. In such an hour, Kirst comes.)<sup>33</sup>

There is a sonorous quality in this passage largely achieved by

the measured repetition of the words 'stilte' ('silence') and 'stil' ('still') in the opening sentences. Further, there is the poetic comparison of silence with death, and the resonant phrase 'dis die uur sonder sonbesies' ('it's the hour without cicadas') with tonal repetition ('sonder sonbesies' - 'without cicadas') in adjacent words. Along with the suggestion of this being a time of death ('die dooie uur' - 'the dead hour'), there is the apocalyptic image of the sun having come to a stop. Finally, a link is established between these images of a deathly, silent time with the name Kirst. Kirst, as we are soon to learn, is the avenging figure who preys menacingly on the story's narrator.

The concern with surrealism in works by Rabie, Breytenbach, De Vries and Barnard seems to me to be interestingly symptomatic of this phase of Afrikaans writing. Realist approaches were being abandoned for the more experimental techniques of a prose which created the mood of a dream or a fantasy; or which at least was playing with the possibility that the real and the imagined were inextricably related to one another. The inner psyche of the person was of greater interest than an external reality; and in this process, social pressures in South Africa were, with the exception of a few stories, a remote concern in the works of these writers. Even were one to accept that a fictional concern for the troubled inner world of characters must in some way reflect back upon the problematic world in which these people are living, there is scarcely any evidence in these stories to support this kind of link with the distinctive type of crises

facing South Africa at this time; especially as a high proportion of the works are set in Europe with European characters in which the sole, tenuous connection with South Africa is the use of Afrikaans.<sup>34</sup> There is, however, one area in the short fiction of the Sestiger writers which has a strong regional link with South Africa; and this is their portrayal of the rural world. Nevertheless, even in this sphere, as we shall soon see, the writers scarcely touched on the overwhelming social issues of racial conflict within the countryside and the plight of impoverished landless black people. The Afrikaner writers of the 1950's and the 1960's were here solely concerned with the Afrikaner way of life in the countryside. We have to wait until the 1970's before a small number of stories start appearing which take as their major focus the nature of relationships between black and white people in the rural areas.

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c) Treatments of the Farm and Countryside

The South African countryside and, in particular, the farming life has occupied a central place in the cultural imagination of the Afrikaners. This is not difficult to understand when one considers the swiftness with which this group of people passed from an agrarian to an urban lifestyle. Substantial migrations of Afrikaners to the towns and cities began only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This shift in lifestyle, from farm to city, took some time, however, to make itself felt in Afrikaner literature. A consciously urbane Afrikaner literature only starts appearing from the 1930's on and it is really only

during the late 1950's that the prose tradition can in any way be seen as unmistakably that of the city. I would suggest that, with a small number of exceptions, this lag of the writers, behind the times so to speak, is one of the characteristics of Afrikaans literature up to the 1970's.

As I remarked earlier, all of the major Afrikaner writers of the 1950's and 1960's with whom I am dealing, were born and raised either on farms or in small country towns. Their writing abounds in recollections of the rural life they have left behind them. On the least interesting and least successful level are the stories which idealize the rural world and which rely heavily on a kind of nostalgia which summons up a rural Arcadia. In an essay significantly entitled 'Die vals noot in die herinnering' ('The False Note in Memory'), Hennie Aucamp, who uses the rural past to powerful effect in many of his finest stories, offers the following cautionary note about it:

Are there sharper memories than memories of youth?  
They are the basis for so many thoughts which still have to be thought. But I am pleading for greater discipline with these memories, a broader evocation of reality. Because nostalgia can so easily become sterile...<sup>35</sup>

For many of the Afrikaner writers of this period the world of their rural childhood became a ready fictional escape-route from the harsh, pressured life in the cities. For example, in De Vries's first collections of the late 1950's, the farm and countryside is the setting for an ordered way of existence far more benevolent than that of the towns. Although the characters face personal hardships on the farm and the pressures of the

urban world with its competitive spirit are beginning to prey upon them, the farm is always to be preferred to the corrupt world of the cities. For example, 'n Brief van Giepie, Meester' ('A Letter from Giepie, Master'), tells how a young man leaves his parent's farm for the city in search of a richer, more prosperous life.<sup>36</sup> Predictably, he comes to grief in the city. Chris Barnard's novella 'Naelstring' ('Umbilical Cord'), from this period of the late 1950's, describes the same process as a young Afrikaner girl from the countryside falls into evil ways in the city.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, the pattern of these stories is strikingly similar to the so-called 'Jim comes to Jo'burg' narratives of the same era which describe how a black youth who had travelled to the city, drawn by the attractions of this world, would suffer and possibly die there.<sup>38</sup>

Whether stories of a young Afrikaner's or black person's failed journey into the city, these narratives were on a most obvious level reflecting a parallel phase of rapid black and white urbanization in South African history. These accounts are generally predictable and offer a simplified dichotomy between an uncomplicated, wholesome life in the countryside and conversely, a corrupt, complex, and ultimately destructive life in the cities. Moreover, in the case of the 'Jim comes to Jo'burg' narratives these often imply highly questionable and politically controversial views about the place of the newly settled black rural migrant in the cities. The implication lying behind these narratives of the black man's unsuccessful journey to the city is

most often that black people are best advised to remain away from the cities and that their failure to make the adjustment to the new environment is indicative of their simple, even primitive natures. It is notable that this type of story is almost exclusively one told by a white author about black people; very few black writers describe this process.<sup>39</sup> However, in the stories by Afrikaner writers about the failure of members of their own community to adapt to the city we can see how these works offer an observation which is rather more than a mere idealization of the rural life at the expense of life in the cities; whether the writers were conscious of it or not these stories indicate a genuine failure within their own community. Indeed, the stories by De Vries and the novella by Barnard which I have quoted as examples refer back to a difficult era of transition for the Afrikaner community; one in which many Afrikaners were finding the move to the cities a difficult one. For these Afrikaner writers and their characters, the countryside which they have left behind them, while becoming the idealized site of a past life, at the same time serves as an indication of a failure in their present situation to adjust to the life of the cities.

Like De Vries and Barnard, the district in which Hennie Aucamp was raised forms an important element in a number of his stories.<sup>40</sup> However, unlike his two fellow writers, Aucamp avoids the trap of sentimentalizing the farm and countryside world although he does treat it as an ideal type of environment.

Aucamp's stories of this period about the countryside are of two types. The first of these are works of short fiction which come very close to being essays; the narrators, who are almost indistinguishable from the author, describe various aspects of the rural world of the Stormberg. (Aucamp grew up in the Stormberg region of the Eastern Cape). One of the most important features of these works is how the narrators describe this rural world as a vanished world or at least one which has lost a large proportion of its population in the move of its inhabitants to the cities. There is a desire in these works to preserve and, in some way, to render permanent in writing, a reality which is gradually disappearing in South Africa. In the opening of the piece 'Rust-mijn-ziel: 'n aandgesang' ('Rust-mijn-ziel: an evening hymn') the narrator describes his relationship to the farm of his childhood in the following way:

Ek staan op 'n rantjie en kyk oor die plaas en raak bedroef, want dis nie of ek na die plaas kyk nie, maar na 'n herinnering, 'n towerlandskap wat enige oomblik in die mis kan verdwyn. Oor 'n jaar of twee, drie, vier - wie kan se hoe lank? - gaan die plaas verdwyn; dan sal Rust-mijn-ziel 'n herinnering word, 'n Boplaas, "a landscape of the mind", 'n sprokie bevolk deur dodes.

(I stand on a small ridge and look over the farm and become sad, because it's not as if I am looking at the farm, but at a memory, a fairy landscape which can disappear in the mist at any moment. In a year or two, three, four - who can say how long? - the farm is going to disappear; then Rust-mijn-ziel will become a memory, a Farm Aboye, "a landscape of the mind", a tale peopled by the dead.)<sup>41</sup>

He continues to describe the way in which he, as a writer, can preserve in his work features of this disappearing world: "Wanhopig probeer ek red wat te red val: ek koester name en reuke; geluide, kleure, teksture..." ('Desperately I try to

rescue that which is able to be rescued: I cherish names and smells; sounds, colours, textures...')<sup>42</sup> In writing about the Stormberg, Aucamp manages not only to reclaim experiences of the past but succeeds in preserving them for present and future readers. As he comments at the end of an essay entitled 'Jamestown: 'n herinnering' (Jamestown: a reminiscence)': 'Sal dit help as ons die nostalgie lewend hou? Miskien; vir onself, vir latere geslages: dat ons nie vreemd word aan onself nie.' ('Will it help us if we keep nostalgia alive? Perhaps; for ourselves, for later generations: so that we do not become strangers to ourselves.')<sup>43</sup>

Aucamp has another type of short prose work about the countryside of his youth and this is one which consciously moves towards the fictional and away from the essay-like qualities of pieces such as 'Rust-mijn-ziel: 'n aandgesang' and 'Van die Plaas af' ('From the Farm').<sup>44</sup> Here again a narrator returns to the world of the Stormberg and passes through a series of experiences there which teach him as much about himself as about the rural world and its characters which he has left behind him. 'Portret van 'n Ouma' (Portrait of an Ouma') and 'n Bruidsbed vir Tant Nonnie' ('A Bride's Bed for Tant Nonnie'), for example, describe how slightly supercilious young men, who are the stories' narrators, return to their family farms and face confrontations there with elderly family members, many of whom have died by the time the story is narrated. 'Portret van 'n Ouma' opens in this way:

Toe ek nog sinnigheid had in romantiese mymeringe, het ek vakansies gaan sit in die huis waar my ouma se kinders

verwek en gebore is, en waar sy, baie jare later, op hoë ouderdom, en met die botheid van 'n dier, die pyn gedra het tot die dood uiteindelik gekom het. Noudat ek ouer is, 'n geëmansipeerde vrygesel, kom ek al hoe minder op die familieplaas, juis om aan die eise en verwyte van die verlede te ontsnap. Daarom vermy ek die ou huis. Tog moes ek nou die middag daar in, teen wil en dank, om skuiling te soek teen 'n bui reën.

(Whenever I had an inclination toward romantic reverie, I used to go during my holidays and sit in the house where my grandmother's children were conceived and born and where, years later, at a great age, she endured pain with the dumb patience of an animal until death finally came for her. Now that I am older, an emancipated bachelor, I come less and less frequently to the family farm, deliberately to escape the demands and reproaches of the past. For that reason I shun the old house. Nevertheless, the other afternoon I had to go in, against my will, to find shelter from a shower of rain.)<sup>45</sup>

Ironically, the narrator's chance visit to the ruined old home of his grandparents acts as the spur to his memories of the reproaches which his deceased grandmother used to level at him. The narrator recalls how the old lady used to continually chide him because of his lack of children. 'Vrugbaar, maar vrugteloos, en daarom sal jou plek jou nie meer ken nie' ('Fertile, yet fruitless, and therefore your place will no longer know you') was her reproach to this young man who had jauntily described himself as an 'emancipated bachelor' at the beginning of his narrative.<sup>46</sup> 'Portret van 'n Ouma' becomes the story of a young man's journey of self-discovery and re-appraisal.

If the countryside and the farm world is a fairly idealized realm in the hands of most of the Afrikaner writers of the 1950's and 1960's, there is one writer who has viewed it in a notably different way; and that is Henriette Grové. For Grové, life in the countryside and on the farm is as complex and as problematic

as life in the cities.<sup>47</sup> Many of her stories set within the countryside describe the foibles, the pain and loneliness of her rural characters. Rather than being liberated by their countryside milieu her characters are trapped both within the narrow confines of its rural mores and values and by their own short-sighted view of reality. Her stories thus have more in common with Pauline Smith's and Herman Bosman's portraits of rural Afrikaners than with the idealized views of this world and its characters being offered by her fellow Afrikaner writers. It is interesting to speculate why this should be the case and I would suggest that it might be that Grové's period of contact with the countryside world was somewhat longer than that of her fellow Afrikaner writers; she grew up in the Western Transvaal and completed her university education in the small town of Potchefstroom, in this area. Moreover, Grové has made the point that 'if one writes about the rural world with real knowledge gut knowledge... then one's portrait of it will be involved, unsentimental, and unrhetorical'.<sup>48</sup> Certainly, the rural world is seen by her as a complex sphere in its own right which is not merely a place of retreat for psychologically harassed city-dwellers.

Many of Grové's stories cast back to the period of her childhood during the 1920's and 1930's, in which rural Afrikaners were facing a series of disquietening changes. The modern world was impinging on the farm-world of these people and traditional patterns were being altered and often discarded. In particular,

the traditional patriarchal family structure within the rural communities was being broken down; in addition, for many of the people, there was a tension between the secular system of values being offered in the newly built cities and the religious values of the Calvinist Church. A theme which recurs in a number of her stories is that of adultery and how acts of infidelity place strains upon families and the characters involved.

In 'Die Betlehem Ster' ('The Bethlehem Star'), for example, Grové has a child narrator who comes to learn of her father's affair with another woman.<sup>49</sup> Grové frames the child's exposure to this by an episode within the girl's school in which a teacher has posed a challenge to the girl's class that they should strive to tell the truth for three months; the child who succeeds in this will win a golden star. In the end Lena feels compelled to lie to her mother about her father's mistress and this woman's house. The story manages to suggest the moral tensions which are being placed on this child as a result of the behaviour of the adults around her. Similarly, in 'Liesbeth Slaap uit' ('Liesbeth Sleeps Out'), the child Liesbeth's religious values and her outlook on the world are challenged when she is exposed to the fact that her friend's father is having an adulterous relationship with a young girl of the district.<sup>50</sup>

Grové's stories offer an unremitting view of the loneliness of many of the chief characters. Their loneliness is often related to changes in the social climate and to the sheer hardships

arising from the rural poverty which faces them. In 'Vakansie vir 'n hengelaar' ('Holiday for an angler'), there is the following portrait of an Afrikaner farmer, in which Grové presents an incisive view of some key aspects which make up the character of the traditional Afrikaner: his severe sense of religion and his deep love of the land which are being seriously challenged by changes in the society. Finally, this man, who is in many ways a representative of the Afrikaner patriarch, becomes a lonely outcast:

Haar pa was ook so, met een gedagte. Hy het sy plig geken en dit gedoen en sy pad in regskaapenheid, al was dit nie met blymoedigheid nie, bewandel. Sy kinders het hy in die vrese van die Woord grootgemaak, en sy daelikse gang was hulle tot stigting en voorbeeld. Maar toe sy oudste seun met sestien jaar uit die huis wegloop, het hy dit as 'n besoeking van Bo beskou. En toe die tweede in 'n volslae dronklap ontwikkel, was dit vir hom die staving van die tweede gebod. Dat sy grootmaak van hulle - 'n gebrek aan liefde en begrip - daar iets mee te doen kon hê, so iets sou hy met die rook van sy pyp in kringe voor hom uitblaas, want hy was 'n donker, inkennige mens wie se ganse gevoel ingedraad was tussen die vier bakens van sy grond en wat alleen geneentheid geopenbaar het met die heenkyk oor sy plaas. Dan het hy losgekom uit sy eenselwigheid. En toe hy later as gevolg van herhaalde misoeste verplig was om te verkoop, het hy hom selfs heeltemal teruggetrek van sy kerk. Hy kon God alleen dien deur sy grond.

(Her father was also like that, with only one idea. He knew his duty and did it, and walked in his path of uprightness, though it was not with joyfulness. He brought up his children in dread of the Word, and his daily way of life was a foundation and model for them. When his oldest son deserted the house at sixteen, he viewed it as a trial from Above. And, when the second turned into an absolute drunkard, it was proof for him of the Second Commandment. That his upbringing of them - a lack of love and understanding - could have had a part to play, such a suggestion he should have blown away in rings in front of him along with the smoke of his pipe, because he was a dark, reserved person whose entire sensibility was fenced in between the four markers of his land and who only revealed his inclinations while looking over his farm. Then he broke free of his solitariness. And, when later, as a result of

successive failed harvests he was forced to sell, he completely withdrew himself [literally, trekked away] from his church. He could only serve God through his land.)<sup>51</sup>

This breakdown of the religious certainty of the Church for rural Afrikaner characters features in many of her stories. We have noted the tensions which threaten the two children in 'Die Bethlehem Ster' and 'Liesbeth Slaap Uit'; and in 'Douw en Fransiena' ('Douw and Fransiena'), there is the following poetic description of how Fransiena, unlike her mother, has become cut off from the certainties and consolations which are offered by the Church:

Nes haar ma was Fransiena 'n vreemdeling op aarde en was die lewe ook vir haar 'n deurdrang tussen die engtes van geboorte en dood. Maar vir die ouer vrou was daar tog 'n uiteindelijke saligheid, ontelbare stemme wat sing, terwyl sy wat Fransiena was, wis dat die volk net na afloop van die begrafnis klippe op die hoop sou pak opdat die herfswinde dit nie oor die aarde strooi nie.

(Just like her mother, Fransiena was a stranger on earth and life was, for her also, a passage between the straits of birth and death. But for the older woman there was still an ultimate salvation, countless voices in song, while she, Fransiena, knew that just after the end of the funeral, the workers would pack stones on the mound lest the autumn winds scatter it over the earth.)<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, in stories such as 'Dood van 'n Maagd' ('Death of a Virgin') and 'Haar naam was Hanna' ('Her Name was Hanna') which end with calls to God and the possibility of Divine Salvation, the grim series of events which precede these conclusions suggest that the endings might be open to ironic or even satirical interpretation.<sup>53</sup>

Grové's stories of the 1950's and 1960's offer a critical view of the rural Afrikaner and his environment. Unlike her fellow

writers, she avoids idealizing the countryside; but, like them, there is scarcely any treatment in her works of the rural Afrikaner's relationship to the black people around him. Like most of the works of short fiction of this era there is a notable degree of insularity in these stories about Afrikaners in the countryside. One continually expects a broader frame of social reference, which is almost always omitted. However, during this period there was a small number of Afrikaans stories which did address themselves to the crucial social issue of the contact between white and black people in South Africa.

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d) Apartheid and the contact between Black and White People

In September 1951, the young Afrikaner writer, Bartho Smit, had a story entitled 'Ek vat my land' ('I seize my land') published in the conservative Afrikaner fortnightly tabloid 'Die Huisgenoot'.<sup>54</sup> This is one of Smit's only works of short fiction (he was later to become a leading Afrikaner playwright) and it was to remain uncollected until Hennie Aucamp included it in an anthology of previously uncollected Afrikaans stories in 1973.<sup>55</sup> 'Ek vat my land' differs to such an extent from the Afrikaans stories of the 1950's that it appears almost as a brash intrusion in the literary tradition of that time and seems to be a work more in keeping with the younger generation of Afrikaner writers of the 1970's and 1980's than that of an Afrikaner writer of the early 1950's. Indeed, it has more in common with protest-type of short fiction being produced by black writers of that earlier decade than with the rustic prose of the Afrikaner writers of that time.

Certainly, it has little similarity with the later prose experiments of the Sestigers and their efforts at modernizing their craft in line with developments in Europe and America. The only Afrikaans stories of the period with which it shares a direct concern about relationships between black and white South African characters are Rabie's three short pieces 'Droogte', 'Plek vir Een', and 'Stellenbosch my vallei' from 21, and Uys Krige's 'Dood van die Zoeloe' ('Death of a Zulu') in which an Afrikaner soldier comes to identify himself with the pain of a wounded Zulu soldier during the North African campaign of the Second World War.<sup>56</sup>

There is a clarity of vision and a degree of perception about race relations in South Africa in Smit's story which is missing from a very large proportion of Afrikaans writing; and, indeed, even in works which consciously set out to explore this topic. Right from the beginning of the story, Smit permits his white narrator the opportunity to scrutinize his relationship to the black people around him with honesty. The narrator is not simply an ingenuous sympathizer with black people and their culture, but a person who considers his relationship to these people with care. For example, shortly after meeting Silwane Nxumalo, the black artist, on the steps of the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the narrator ponders with some uncertainty the reasons why he feels drawn to black artists and lovers of art and takes the interest he does in them:

Miskien het my vaste geloof - wat terselfdertyd 'n

diepliggende vrees is - dat die Kulturele toekoms van hierdie land in die harte van die swart miljoene opgesluit lê en nie in ons nie, daar iets mee te doen; ek weet nie.

(Perhaps this has to do with my firm belief - which at the same time is a deeply ingrained fear - that the cultural future of this country lies locked within the hearts of the black millions and not in us; I don't know.)<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, the narrator comes, by slow degrees, to appreciate the nature of Nxumalo's paintings. After his initial rejection of their quality, which response he recognizes is informed by his own unfamiliarity with the black man's world and vision, he moves not only to an admiration of them but realizes how these works have come to affect his own view of reality:

En nadat ek die tweede keer daar was, het die natuur om my geleidelik die vreemde werklikheid van die doeke begin aanneem, en ek het die gevoel gekry dat ek nog altyd soos 'n vreemdeling, soos 'n toeris na hierdie land gekyk het.

(And after I had been there [Nxumalo's house] for a second time, the world around me gradually began to assume the unfamiliar reality of the canvases, and I got the feeling that I had [up till then] always looked at this country as a stranger and as a tourist.)<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, in the forceful conclusion of the work, Smit emphasizes again the narrator's recognition of his ephemeral contact with South Africa and his awareness of how his own exclusion and banishment from the wider black community is an ominous experience he shares with his white countrymen; ultimately it comes to signify the country's rejection of them. This kind of perceptiveness is rare among Afrikaner writers, although it does feature in Rabie's later story 'Die Groot Vrot' ('The Huge Rot') and in a much later story by Elsa Joubert entitled 'Agterplaas' ('Backyard').<sup>59</sup> Here however, is the conclusion of 'Ek vat my

land', where the narrator leaves Nxumalo's house and enters the shadowy world of the township at dusk:

Die hout hekkie het agter my gekraak en ek het in die smal kronkelende straatjie afgestap. Om my het Moroka met gedempte stemme geleef. Die smeulende vure het soos rooi oë deur die rooknewels na my gegluur. Geruisloos, half onsigbaar soos 'n swart mot in die donker, het 'n gestalte by my verbygegly. En plotseling het ek ellendig klein en eensaam gevoel in daardie wêreld van sink-en sooihutte, soos 'n muis wat in 'n vol sirkustent vasgekeer is, en ek het vinniger geloop en met huiwerige voete oor die grond van 'n land waarin ek maar een van 'n paar daklose en onwelkome gaste is.

(The little wooden gate creaked behind me and I stepped into the narrow, winding street. Around me Moroka was alive with muffled voices. The smouldering fires peered at me like red eyes through the clouds of smoke. Silently, half invisible like a black moth in the dark, a figure slipped past me. And suddenly I felt miserable, small and lonely in that world of tin and earthen huts, like a mouse who is trapped in a full circus-tent, and I walked more briskly and with uncertain feet over the earth of a country in which I was just one of a few homeless [literally, roofless] and unwelcome guests.)<sup>60</sup>

There is a density of animal imagery in this passage which culminates in the narrator himself feeling like an insignificant creature - a trapped mouse in a circus-tent. The final image of the story, a comparison of the white South African people to ' 'n paar daklose en onwelkome gaste' ('a few homeless [roofless] and unwelcome guests'), calls to mind King Lear's speech on the heath, about the vulnerability of men.<sup>61</sup> The power of this image, considered in conjunction with its echo of Lear's speech, is how Smit has suddenly overturned our expectations; it is not the impoverished slum-dwellers of Moroka here who are the homeless and unwelcome guests, but the white people of South Africa.

A further feature of this momentous and seminal story is its recognition that the art of black people can be used by them both as a vehicle for their anger and as a form of redress in the face of wrongs inflicted on them. In an exchange which clarifies the story's title, Nxumalo tells the narrator:

Dis nie dat ek die land skilder nie... Ek vat hom... Ek vat die land terug wat julle van ons gevat het. Ek loop in die mōre hier uit, ek vat 'n stuk van hom en ek bring dit in die aand na my huis toe. Dis wat ek doen.

(It's not [just] that I am painting the country... I am seizing it... I am seizing back the land which you have snatched from us. In the mornings I walk out of here, I seize a part of it and in the evenings I bring it back to my house. That's what I'm doing.)<sup>62</sup>

There are few finer accounts in South African literature than this of one of the major functions of black art in the country.

Soon after this passage, the narrator realizes further implications of the black man's art:

Ek het na die tafel geloop en weer na die doek van Moroka gekyk. En skielik het dit my opgeval dat al die eeue-oue haat in daardie enkele lyne en vlakke ingepers was. Dit was 'n visioen van 'n groot, komende wraak.

(I walked across to the table and looked again at the canvas of Moroka. And suddenly it struck me that all the centuries-old hatred had been squeezed into those simple lines and surfaces.)<sup>63</sup> It was a vision of an enormous, approaching nemesis.)

As in Mphahlele's later works, 'Mrs. Plum' and 'Grieg on a Stolen Piano', Smit describes the way in which Nxumalo's clandestine activities are not confined to him alone, or indeed to his fellow artists, but that a substantial part of the black community are engaged in similar seditious activities.<sup>64</sup> Nxumalo tells the narrator: "...ek sê jou dis nie net ek wat hierdie land onder

die witman se neus wegdra nie; baie ander doen dit ook,"' ("

...I'm telling you it's not just me who's carrying this country from under the white man's nose; many others are also doing it."').<sup>65</sup> The narrator asks how they are doing it; and Nxumalo replies:

"Hulle sluip in die donker om julle rond, hulle steel julle goed, hulle verkrag julle vroue, hulle vermoor julle. Julle dink ons weet nie wat ons doen nie. Ons weet goed wat ons doen - ons maak julle bang. Ons wil hê julle moet in hierdie land word soos 'n klein kind in die donker..."

("They slip quietly about you in the dark, they steal your property, they rape your women, they murder you. You think that we don't know what we are doing. We know very well what we are doing - we are making you afraid. We want you to become like a small child in the darkness, in this country...")<sup>66</sup>

The image of the white people, afraid and like a small child in the darkness, looks forward to the concluding lines of the story which have been quoted earlier.

Finally, 'Ek vat my Land' differs from a large number of the Afrikaans stories of the 1950' and 1960's, not only in its subject matter but also in the way that it localizes the events which take place within it. This is particularly noticeable when one contrasts it with the small number of stories which concern themselves with the issue of racial conflicts; virtually none of these are set in a clearly defined or named South African location. Smit's story, however, takes place in Johannesburg and Moroka, and its setting is described with acuity and accuracy. Here, for example, is the narrator's record of his entry into Moroka:

Die eerste ding waarvan ek bewus geword het toe ek die volgende dag Moroka nader, was die stank. 'n Swaar reuk van

asems en kos en menslike afval het opgestyg uit daardie klein stukkie aarde waarop honderd duisende mense saamgedrom was. Myle in die omtrek was die lug dik daarvan, en ek het een oomblik gewonder of die vaal rooksluiers wat oor die saamgeharkte krotjies hang nie maar die stank is wat sigbaar geword het nie.

(The first thing of which I became aware as I approached Moroka the following day, was the stench. A heavy reek of breath and food and human excrement rose out of that small patch of earth on which hundreds of thousands of people had been herded together. The air was thick with it for miles around, and I wondered for a moment whether the clouds of smoke which were hanging over the mean, congested hovels were not simply the stench become visible.)<sup>67</sup>

This kind of social realism which is then turned to the fabular, with a naturalistic preoccupation with fine detail, looks forward to the kind of prose best exemplified in Alex La Guma's stories and novels about the slums of the Cape written in the following decade.

In contrast to this form of realism Rabie's stories 'Droogte' ('Drought') and 'Die Groot Vrot' ('The Great Rot') are set in locales which are unmistakably South African, yet which are never named.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, this very lack of specificity in describing the settings forms part of the symbolic functions of these pieces. Both works however, use familiar, even archetypal, South African characters to probe aspects of the failure of the Afrikaners to coexist harmoniously with the black people of the country and ultimately with the land itself.

In 'Droogte', a white boss and his black servant build a windowless and doorless house in order to ensure the white man's security against the threat he feels emanating from the black people; however, the house becomes the white man's prison and

ultimately his grave. 'Die Groot Vrot' follows a not dissimilar pattern: it describes how the proud and defiant Afrikaners of a country town find that the land around them is putrefying. As the town sinks deep into the decayed earth and families are separated from one another, all of the characters with the exception of the young children and crippled narrator of the piece, fall into despair; they realize the irreversibility of their condition in the subterranean darkness.

Within these stories Rabie is thus dexterously playing with familiar and unfamiliar elements. The characters and their conduct are all too familiar, and even predictable. Yet the strangeness of the situations in which they find themselves is being used by Rabie precisely in order to create a distance from these stereotyped characters; as a result of this, the reader is brought to a reassessment of the characters. Stated more bluntly, Rabie has placed stereotyped Afrikaner characters in unusual situations which brings us to reconsider the way they behave in the familiar circumstances in which we know them. And the conclusion to which Rabie's essentially polemical stories leads us is to recognise the failure of the Afrikaner in his world.

There are a large number of poetic elements in these two stories, not least of which is Rabie's use of symbols. The central images of the stories - the building of the house by the black and white man which turns into the construction of the white man's prison in 'Droogte', and the putrefying of the earth in 'Die Groot Vrot'

- are such symbols. Further, Rabie uses a number of symbols of South African life and history within the stories themselves. For instance, in 'Droogte', Afrikaner history is described in terms of a series of representative images, of sailing ships arriving at the Cape, of the trek of the Boers into the interior of the country, and of their widespread migrations. There is a fabular quality to the language here:

"Lang gelede het my voorvaders oor die see gekom. Van ver het hulle gekom, in wit skepe hoog soos bome, en op die land het hulle waens gebou en met die seile van hul skepe oordek. Ver, ver het hulle gereis en hul kampvuur-asse wyd oor hierdie groot en babaarse land versprei..."

("Long ago my forefathers came across the sea. Far they came in white ships tall as trees, and on the land they built wagons and covered them with the sails of their ships. Far they travelled and spread their campfire ashes over this vast barbaric land...")<sup>69</sup>

One notices a poetic quality in the way in which the similar phrases 'Van ver het hulle gekom' ('far they came') and 'ver, ver het hulle gereis' ('Far they travelled') are placed in close relationship to one another although they describe different events. In similar vein, there is a density of imagery within these sentences. We read of 'wit skepe hoog soos bome' ('white ships tall as trees') and of 'kampvuur-asse wyd oor hierdie groot en babaarse land versprei' ('campfire ashes spread over this vast barbaric land').

Rabie uses symbols of South African life and history for satirical purposes in 'Die Groot Vrot'. Indeed, he parodies certain Afrikaner obsessions in this work. For example, early in the story, soon after the townsfolk have noticed the rotting

of the earth, we are told:

Om die monde te snoer, was die dorpsraad verplig en stel 'n kommissie aan: die Kommissie van Onderzoek na Ongegronde Gerugte oor Sogenaamde Grondveranderinge op ons Distrik se Bodem. 'n Groot plakkaat op ons stadhuis het 'n elk en 'n ieder voortaan verbied om die wolhaarstories te bespreek vóór die Kommissie sy bevindinge bekend gemaak het. Geen woord oor die aarde se wegvrot het ons vanaf naburige dorpe bereik nie; dáár ook het die mense dus die saak verswyg.

(To silence the talk, our town council resolved to appoint a commission; the Commission of Inquiry into Unfounded Rumours of Alleged Soil-Changes within our District. From then on a great poster on the town hall banned all and sundry from indulging in any wild talk before the Commission had made public its findings. From neighbouring towns no word of the earth's rotting away ever reached us; there too the people must have kept silent about the matter.)<sup>70</sup>

In this passage Rabie is not only poking fun at the mania with which Afrikaners set about preventing discussion of insistently important matters of the day, but also at the pompousness with which they effect this fixation of theirs. The inflated name and nature of the absurd commission of inquiry here accurately parody innumerable similar endeavours which the Nationalist government in South Africa have promoted. In the same way, a little later in the story, Rabie satirises what has become one of the sacred cows of Afrikaner history: the Great Trek. The two youngest children of the narrator's family, rather than giving themselves over to despair and frantic involvement in the past of their elders, have readily adapted to the new conditions of almost entire darkness. They prowl excitedly about the house exploring the dark, not with open but with closed eyes. They have made the dark into a familiar terrain. On occasions when they keep their eyes closed at table, in the sphere of light cast by the family's lone paraffin lamp, the mother scolds them. The children say

that they are playing. Playing at what, asks their mother. They replied at these times that they were either playing 'blindemol' ('blind man's buff') or: "'Ons speel toe-oog Voortrekkers. Ons ontdek.'" ('" We are playing shut-eye Voortrekkers. We are exploring."')<sup>71</sup> With this irreverant and wry reference to the Voortrekkers, Rabie is prompting us to consider critically both the nature of these Boers and their journey into Southern Africa and also to contrast them with these young children who, in defying their parents, are discovering new purpose and new realms of experience in the changed world in which they find themselves. On a more serious level, Rabie indicates, as the story develops, the folly of Afrikaner isolationism. The story hints that it is precisely this obsession with the narrow concerns of the small group that has contributed not only to the disaster facing these Afrikaners, but also to their failure to cope with their new circumstances.

One of the most effective aspects of this story is how Rabie traces, through the voice of his young narrator, the ways in which the confidence of the Afrikaners of the town slowly crumbles along with the sinking and breaking apart of their houses within the rotting earth. One can follow this process of dissolution through the language of the work. In the beginning, the narrator's voice is full of confidence and pride; significantly, he uses a first person plural mode of address in which he links himself with his fellow townfolk in a form of indentification which embodies unity and resolution:

Ons is die mense van ons dorp. Elke gebou, elke straat, elke boom, elke blomakker is na ons goeddunke beplan en opgerig; tot op die verste plase rondom het heining en kontoerwal ons heerskappy oor die aarde gevestig. Met stootskraper en gifspuit, kunsmis en geweer het ons ons gesag oor die bruin aarde gehandhaaf. Met trots kon ons sê: die aarde en alles wat daarop is, behoort aan ons.

Ons is die mense van ons dorp...

(We are the people of our town. Each building, each street, each tree, each flower-bed was intended to fit our plan. Even on the furthest outlying farms, fences and contour furrows laid down our command of the earth. Bulldozers and poison spray, fertilizer and guns maintained our authority over the brown soil. We could say proudly: the earth and everything on it belongs to us.

We are the people of our town...)<sup>72</sup>

Later, the confidence and hubris of these people falters, and they are cowed. The narrator reflects:

Ons is die mense van ons dorp... Nee, ons is nie langer trots nie! Nee, daardie dae is so verby soos Oupa se jeug...

(We are the people of our town... No, we are no longer proud! No, those days are as far past as grandpa's youth.)<sup>73</sup>

The narrator's language has lost its tone of pride and all that remains for the characters is the darkness of the new world, and the possibilities of despair or adaptation. Soon afterwards, the narrator describes, in a passage of great beauty and poetic intensity, the despair of the older Afrikaner people around him:

Die kamer is vol groot, blinde oë wat mekaar dophou. Onder die pikswart son teen die plafon bid Ousus met die brose histerie van haar stem. Die goddelike sonlig, die wonder van kleure, van goudeel blomme, die onvergeetlike spel van lig oor alles wat lewe, dit onthou Ousus sonder ophou. Lig is lewe, lig is 'n baba wat sy oë steeds vir die eerste keer oopmaak, bid sy met haar stem wat nie kan swyg sonder om te gil nie. Naby haar langs die tafle sit Moeder wat nog die meeste doen om die liefdesband van 'n familiekring teen wanhoop te handhaaf. Wanneer Ousus prewel: "Onthou Mammie nog die bewertjies wat teen die fyntuin se hek gestaan en bewe het...?" knik Moeder: "Ja, my kind." Haar stem laat my sien hoe sy knik.

(The room is full of big, blind eyes watching each other. Underneath the ceiling's pitch-black sun the frail hysteria of Ousus's voice prays on and on. The godly sunlight, the marvel of colours, of golden-yellow flowers, the unforgettable play of light over everything that lives, this Ousus endlessly remembers. Light is life, light is a baby for ever opening its eyes for the first time, she prays with her voice that cannot stop without becoming a scream. Next to her at the table sits mother who does most to uphold the love bonds of a family circle against despair. When Ousus stammers: "Mummy, and do you remember the heads of the quiver-grass trembling by the garden gate..?" Mother nods: "Yes, child." Her voice lets me see how she nods.)<sup>74</sup>

This is Rabie's vision of the proud Afrikaners of the town, the former masters of all that they beheld; now, open-eyed, they grope about in the darkness.

If Rabie uses symbolic situations in South Africa in 'Droogte' and 'Die Groot Vrot' as a means of probing some of the social problems of the country, then Abraham De Vries and Hennie Aucamp have stories which continue this kind of analysis, but are set outside South Africa, in Europe, and involve European characters. It is very rare among other African writers to set fiction outside Africa. In the case of De Vries's story 'Die Muis' ('The Mice') which was written in the early 1960's in Amsterdam, the author was purposely using European characters and settings to scrutinize aspects of Afrikaner racism and authoritarianism while strategically avoiding the possibility of having the work banned.<sup>75</sup> De Vries maintains (perhaps correctly) that if he had recast the story in an overtly South African way, with recognizable South African characters in a South African setting, the radical nature of its social criticism of the Afrikaners at the time would have ensured the work's banning.<sup>76</sup>

'Die Muisie' is, in fact, De Vries's reworking of an episode from Hitler's Mein Kampf. He retains the name Adolf for the protagonist, and this character's beloved - who, in De Vries's story is a shop mannequin - is significantly called Eva. The story describes the racist and militaristic obsessions of Adolf and how these relate to his insane pattern of behaviour. The work concludes with Adolf on the point of bringing disaster on himself and on all the people around him.<sup>77</sup> If one sees these incidents as having direct reference to events in South Africa as inevitably one must (and De Vries declares that Adolf is indeed an image of Prime Minister Verwoerd), then 'Die Muisie' becomes, like Rabie's 'Droogte' and 'Die Groot Vrot', a powerful tale of admonishment and prophecy.<sup>78</sup>

There is an equally radical quality to Aucamp's stories 'When the Saints Go Marching In' and 'Ma Petite Nègresse,' although they are more tranquil in tone and event than De Vries's story.<sup>79</sup> Like 'Die Muisie', these stories use European settings to examine an important South African issue. In both stories Aucamp is probing some of the difficulties a black person faces in a society dominated by white people. The analogy to South Africa is obvious.

'When the Saints Go Marching In' and 'Ma Petite Nègresse' were inspired during Aucamp's stay in Belgium in the mid-1960's and both stories are set in that country. The stories describe the way in which black women respond to the pressures which are brought to bear on them in Europe as a result of their colour.

Sister Gloria, in the first story, is a black American gospel singer at the end of an arduous European concert tour.<sup>80</sup> She is sensitive to feelings of racism around her in Europe. During a press interview, for example, she reflects:

'Maar nou wonder ek... nou wonder ek net: sou Europa so vriendelik gewees het as hulle nie geweet het wie ek is nie? Ek het dit al 'n paar keer ondervind, hier in Europa, op plekke waar hulle nie van my weet nie, dat ... ja, hoe om dit de sê?... dat ek nie onvriendelik behandel word nie, maar tog anders, of ek 'n ander soort mens is, nie 'n mens nie..."

("But now I wonder... Now I just wonder if Europe would have been as friendly if they had not known who I was? I have experienced it a few times [here in Europe] where they have not known who I was that.. how can one put it?... that I was not treated in an unfriendly manner, but rather differently, as if I was another sort of person [not a person].")<sup>81</sup>

The young black woman in 'Ma Petite Nègresse' has a similar sensation in that the white people about her treat her as 'another sort of person'. She describes her position as that of a 'vreemdeling' ('stranger') and 'indringer' ('intruder').<sup>82</sup>

Moreover, Aucamp describes how she is viewed by her white lover as an unspoilt black primitive; and he expects her to behave in accordance with this stereotype. This proves especially difficult for her not simply as it is a completely false representation of her nature, but also because she is being compelled at the same time to gain acceptance in circles of urbane sophistication in the Belgian society. Eventually she becomes a victim trapped between these mutually exclusive positions.

In these two works Aucamp, unlike De Vries in 'Die Muis', takes as his central concern the sensations of black people in Europe.

Their experiences of exclusion and of pressures being forced upon them by the white society have obvious parallels with those of black people in South Africa; needless to say there are significant differences between the experiences of black people in Europe and South Africa, but the sensations of exclusion and being demeaned are by and large shared ones. Aucamp's stories which reflect in this way both upon Europe and South Africa, having black people in Europe as their central characters, are as far as I can discover unique in South African short fiction since 1948. The closest parallel by a South African writer that I have found is Dan Jacobson's story 'A Long Way from London' which describes in one of its episodes the rudeness which is shown to a black Tanzanian, Manwera, during a visit to London.<sup>83</sup> Aucamp's stories, however, offer the most sustained treatment of this subject in contemporary South African short fiction.

The kind of social satire which we saw earlier in Rabie's story 'Die Groot Vrot', with its jibes at certain of the symbols and values of Afrikaner society, appears rarely in Afrikaans stories of the 1950's and 1960's. Rabie himself was virtually the only Afrikaner writer of the period to continue this strain of writing and two of his best satirical pieces of this time are 'Wit op Swart' ('White on Black') and ''n Koekie Seep' ('A Little Cake of Soap').<sup>84</sup> They take as their satirical butts two dignified supporters of apartheid. Dr. Hugo Preller, in 'Wit op Swart', is a literary academic who is preparing a speech in defence and praise of apartheid. He hopes to base his speech upon references

to letters and culture. However, this is not an easy task; and he faces an increasing array of doubts which seriously challenge the cause he is pleading. Finally, Preller gives himself over to a gargantuan midnight meal. Physically sated and yet at the same time drained of any dissenting thoughts he returns with renewed confidence to his speech. Rabie undercuts the integrity of this man's project in two ways. In the first place, he describes the growing sense of uncertainty the man comes to feel about his defence of apartheid. At one point, for example, Rabie poetically describes Preller's angry thoughts about his writing in this way: 'Dis net mooiskrywery en leuens, ek skryf wit op 'n swart toestand!' ('It's just flashy style and lies, I am writing white on a black condition!').<sup>85</sup> Preller's later suppression of his doubts (for all his declarations that one should never reveal one's fears to one's enemy) is revealed in the light of his comments to be little other than hypocrisy. Secondly, Rabie wittily uses the episode of the man's obsessive eating both as an indication of the excessive means he has to use in order to quell his doubts (his eating serves a similar function to that of a soporific drug) and as an index of the man's folly. This furtive eater appears little other than a fool at the end of the story: the last image we are given of Preller is as a 'public smiling man' at the end of his speech. Yet Rabie has shown us his hypocrisy and foolishness; and this bears directly upon the cause he is extolling and supporting.

Written ten years later ' 'n Koekie Seep' ('A Little Cake of

Soap') describes the similar situation of another hapless supporter of apartheid. He is Alexander Hertzog Fechter, a State Official. Fechter is more directly engaged in the process of bringing apartheid into practice than his literary predecessor Preller was, as he serves on a committee which dishes up to parliament reports on how the races should be most effectively kept apart. This champion of injustice, whom Rabie ironically names Fechter - fighter - is in fact a repressed individual. Like Lady Macbeth before him and the lawyer Jaggars, in Great Expectations, he finds frequent sessions of hand-washing a useful diversion from the grim set of activities in which he is engaged. The story opens and closes with Fechter busily involved in this rite of cleansing. It is interesting to reflect that there is a small clutch of this kind of story about apologists of apartheid in recent South African writing. In addition to these two pieces by Rabie, there are the English stories, 'The Living and the Dead' by Ezekiel Mphahlele and 'Black' by Peter Wilhelm.<sup>86</sup> In all of these, the wretched protagonists are subjected to discomfiting authorial scrutiny and satire. Indeed, in Wilhelm's story, the Afrikaner minister suffers the ultimate catharsis in becoming black himself.

Not dissimilar to Rabie's stories in its humourous and satirical approach to people who support and condone apartheid is De Vries's piece 'Die Meisie met die bra-pistool' ('The girl with the bra-pistol').<sup>87</sup> However, unlike Rabie, De Vries manages to introduce an element of warning into his work. The story is set

during a party at the home of a wealthy Cape Afrikaner. In this and many other aspects it is a prototype for his much later story 'Die uur van die Idiote' ('The hour of the Idiots').<sup>88</sup> There is a surrealistic feeling about this work as the narrative moves, sometimes unexpectedly, from one group of guests to another and from conversation to conversation. Periodically, one of the women guests lets out a shriek: "'Waansinnig'" ('"Insane"'). Eventually the story comes to focus on a young woman who is wearing a pistol which is attached to her brassière. The male guests make coarse remarks about this. She is pressured by the guests into demonstrating how her weapon works. There is a compelling quality to the concluding episode as the sole black guest at the party - the 'token black' - steps forward so that the young woman can reveal her accuracy and skill in firing bullets around his profile. In the last lines of the story De Vries offers a twist-in-the-tail which in turn serves as a satirical barb against the prosperous Afrikaners. Echoing the delighted cry of one of the guests who had earlier celebrated the young woman's accuracy, the black man turns to his hosts after having served as a kind of target, and with drink in hand, says: "'Op die veiligheid van die Republiek'" ('"To the safety of the Republic"').<sup>90</sup> The story then concludes with the comment: 'en sy mond glimlag, maar nie sy oë nie' ('and his mouth is smiling, but his eyes are not').<sup>91</sup>

'Die meisie met die bra-pistool' is interesting and impressive in a number of ways. Its avoidance of details about the workings of

apartheid and the pain it causes, rather than being an evasion, is its strength. As, for example, in Dan Jacobson's 'The Zulu and the Zeide' or Alex La Guma's 'A Matter of Taste' it is assumed that the reader is aware of the nature of reality in South Africa. It is from this position that these authors develop their stories. What is left out is always present and hinted at in these works, however, as an assumed reality from which the events of the stories play themselves out. And so it is with De Vries's story. There is an intriguing blend of elements in this story. De Vries touches upon themes of insanity, sexuality, might, coarse behaviour, and racial discrimination in this short work. All of these characterize certain of the dominant moods and facets of the country. In bringing these themes together in this way the <sup>writer</sup> offers an unpalatable and distressing view of this society. Indeed, the central image of the story, the young woman wearing a pistol attached to her brassière, points towards the kind of debasements which white South Africans have foisted on themselves. The presence of the black man in the story and in particular his final gesture serve as an ironic and critical reflection upon the thoughtless and self-assured behaviour of the white guests. His quiet and refined conduct is set in marked contrast to that of his white hosts; and it is he who appropriately points the warning to these people at the end of the story.

Within virtually all of the Afrikaans stories of the 1950's and 1960's (De Vries's 'Die Meisie met die bra-pistool', Smit's

'Ek vat my land' and a small number of other stories excepted), black South Africans play an incidental role, if any at all. Black people are either farm hands, domestic servants, or, far less often, menacing presences, in their stories. For the most part, black people blend into a regional landscape which is dominated either by the white farming community or by white urban dwellers. That this, in fact, is the situation in South Africa is really incidental in the face of the almost total exclusion of black characters from central roles in Afrikaner writing of the period. As we have seen, this is certainly not the case in the short fiction of their white counterparts of this period - the English writers. Indeed, in their works, almost the opposite situation occurs, where white South Africans are often displaced by the concern for black people who are most often seen either as victims or as representatives of rich cultural traditions, or both. That the Afrikaner writers remained to a large extent uninvolved and unconcerned about the place of black people in their writing and society stands as a telling indictment against themselves and their fiction. The political naiveté of these writers and the sheer force of apartheid to reduce areas of intimate and humane contact between black and white people no doubt contributed to this paucity of works dealing with black characters.

Black people play incidental roles in stories by writers such as Grové, Barnard and Aucamp which describe life in the South African countryside.<sup>92</sup> For all of these writers their black

characters comprise just one of the various elements of local colour in their stories. In Aucamp's finely written piece 'Rust-mijn-ziel: 'n aandgesang' ('Rust-mijn-ziel: an evening hymn'), for instance, the black people of the Stormberg are simply a part of the changing and vanishing rural landscape, as much as are the flowers, mountains, streams, and farmsteads of his portrait. It is interesting to contrast this situation with that in the stories of Herman Bosman which were similarly concerned with a rural district. There, as we observed, the presence of black people is often at the centre of Bosman's thematic concern even if a black character scarcely appears in a particular story. Such was the case for instance, in pieces such as 'Feat of Memory', 'Man to Man', and 'In the Withaak's Shade'. It is rural Afrikaners who occupy the front-of-the-stage position in these works, but the presence of black people and their demands make strong and unavoidable claims if not on the consciousness of the Afrikaner characters themselves then on us as readers who are subtly made aware of the wider context of Bosman's stories. In Bosman's works, one is aware that the regional portraits are really the writer's way of approaching larger national concerns, while doing this within a seemingly narrow canvas. This kind of use of the South African countryside does not arise in Afrikaans short fiction until well into the 1970's.

For all the failures of the Afrikaner writers of this period to give black characters prominence in their works, there are,

however, as in the case of works of social satire and works dealing explicitly with apartheid, a pitifully small number of stories which do concern themselves with black people. Indeed, we have already noted works of this nature by Bartho Smit, Jan Rabie, and Abraham De Vries. It is hardly surprising that of these writers it is Rabie who has the most sustained and consistent involvement with black characters in his works of this period. In his powerful story 'Jaffie Leer' ('Jaffie Learns') he describes how a young mulatto boy moves from feelings of awe and envy of white people to a bitter resentment of them.<sup>93</sup> The final image is of Jaffie balling his fists in anger outside the closed forbidding gates of a white home where he has formerly been welcomed as a friend of the white child of this family. Looking more and more like his older brother, who is a gangster, the young boy calls out: "'Ek sal djou wys!'" ('I'll show you!').<sup>94</sup> This story takes its place along with English works which describe young black boys turning desperately to anger and violence after having been rejected in some way by society. Prominent among these are Fugard's novel Tsotsi, and the stories 'Sponono' by Alan Paton, 'The Park' by James Matthews, 'Willieboy' by Richard Rive and 'The Urchin' by Can Themba.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, these works themselves form part of a wider set of works which deal with the disillusionment of black South Africans. Further examples of this thematic concern in Afrikaans writing of this period are Rabie's story 'God se Bobbejaan' ('God's Baboon') which describes the disillusionment of a black man called Swart Patta and De Vries's stories, to which I shall soon return,

'Houtbaai Blues' ('Hout Bay Blues') and 'Brood'(3)' ('Bread (3)').<sup>96</sup>

One of the main strands in Rabie's thought and one which often informs his practice as a writer is his concern about the shared cultural and linguistic heritage of black and white South Africans and in particular Afrikaners. Aside from novels of his such as those comprising the Bolandia historical series, there are a number of his stories which touch on this theme, and the best examples would be 'Die Klipblom' ('The Stone Flower'), 'Khoib en die See' ('Khoib and the Sea'), 'Winter, Onrusrivier, 1971', and 'Dies Irae'.<sup>97</sup> Written in 1964, 'Khoib en die See' is one of Rabie's most tender portraits of the historically linked destinies of white and black South Africans. The story is set early, during the time of the first contact between black and white people in the country. It describes how a Khoisan man saves a young white woman from a coastal shipwreck and cares for her with patience and love, despite the woman's lack of affection towards him and even gratitude for his efforts. Slowly the couple become united and in the final scene of the story, Rabie describes with sensitivity and pathos how Khoib, the black man, sets out in a tiny rowing boat to carry his beloved (because it is her wish) back to her home-country across the seas. As in 'Droogte' Rabie describes here the extraordinary lengths to which black South Africans go in order to maintain the affection of their white countrymen. Interestingly, in both stories, this comes to their having to carry out bizarre tasks for their white

companions: the building of the doorless and windowless house or prison in 'Droogte' and the doomed journey in 'Khoib en die See'. Rabie is doubtless pointing towards the folly of white people in either trying to cut themselves off from the black people of the country ('Droogte') or attempting a return to European countries with which they have lost contact and ceased to share many common interests ('Khoib en die See'). His observations in these stories are trenchant ones.

Some of Hennie Aucamp's earliest stories from his first collection Een Somermiddag (1963) describe the relationship between two boys, one white and one black, on a farm.<sup>98</sup> In many respects these stories conform to patterns familiar in fiction, as I have already mentioned, about colonial societies in which a young white boy and his black companion grow up together and are parted when they reach puberty, as the white boy enters secondary school and the black youth becomes a paid servant on the white estate often at about the time of his initiation into tribal manhood. Aucamp's pieces follow this predictable course with little innovation. In accord with this type of colonial fiction the white boy is the gentle dreamer, the intellectual, and the black boy is practically inclined, more ruthless, and often as in 'Een Somermiddag' ('One Summer's Afternoon') and 'Die dood van 'n tortel' ('The death of a turtle-dove'), the white boy's tempter. Aucamp succeeds especially well in revealing the kind of malicious delight with which Tatties (the black boy) leads the more innocent Wimpie into acts of mischief: these often result in

the white boy either being punished or falling into moods of remorse. However, the stories fail to develop the situation beyond this point and the figures remain static and stereotyped. Unlike Peter Wilhelm who in his story 'Seth 'n Sam', reverses events to deal with the meeting of the two protagonists in later years so as to offer a symbolic clash of representative types as well as a grim admonishment about possible things to come in South Africa, Aucamp is content to conform to established patterns of this kind of story with the result that his real interest lies in kind of bildungs approach to the white boy and Tatties is just one part of the white lad's farm background.<sup>99</sup> He returns to that syndrome in Afrikaans fiction of the 1950's and 1960's which I described earlier where the black characters are simply present as part of the local colour and as foils to the white characters.

Aucamp avoids this in a later story 'Sop vir die Sieke' ('Soup for the Sick').<sup>100</sup> Here he turns to the close relationship between two elderly women, one black and one white. This is one of the rare South African stories in which a white employer not only gets along with a black servant but in which the two people develop bonds of affection which set aside their racial and class differences. In this respect it is the polar opposite of Mphahlele's 'Mrs. Plum' or Gordimer's 'Happy Event' and has affinities with Dan Jacobson's 'The Zulu and the Zeide' and with E.M. Macphail's much later story 'Modus Vivendi'.<sup>101</sup>

Aucamp builds a twist-in-the-tail type of ending to this story

which relies on the vagaries of apartheid. When the black woman Sofietjie dies, her employer and friend, Tant Rensie, is refused permission by the local authorities and by local white pressure groups to bury her lifelong companion either in the white people's cemetery or in her own garden. Finally, Sofietjie is buried in the black people's cemetery, and when Tant Rensie dies, she stipulates in her will that the town should inherit her money in order to build a hospital; but this is on one condition, that she be buried alongside Sofietjie. Aucamp ends this rather unusual story with the following wry note:

Klipkraal het 'n mooi hospitaal vir 'n klein dorpie, maar iemand, sê die sendeling, iemand moet tog vir daardie graftes sorg.

(Klipkraal has a beautiful hospital for such a small place. But someone, the missionary says, someone should care for those graves.)<sup>102</sup>

The satirical edge to this story is rather different from that normally used by Aucamp in his stories written in the 1960's. Where he usually bases his satire upon the personal deficiencies and stupidities of his characters (for example, 'Die Hartseerwals' ('The Heartbreak Waltz'), 'Die Caledonner' ('The Man From Caledon') and 'Portret van 'n Ouma' ('Portrait of an Ouma')), here he turns explicitly to the kind of social satire more commonly used by Rabie, or indeed, which appears in his own (one might say uncharacteristic) works 'When the Saints Go Marching In' and 'Ma Petite Négrresse'.<sup>103</sup> I would suggest that 'Sop vir die Sieke' offers an index and indeed a kind of bridge to Aucamp's work of the following decade in which social satire becomes a more dominant mode in his writing. It serves as the

basis for some of his best and most original work of the 1970's and early 1980's; and it also serves as a valuable way out of a kind of familiar repetitiveness into which his story-writing of this period had begun to lapse.

I should like to conclude this discussion about stories in which black characters are given a fundamental role by turning to a handful of these type of stories by Abraham De Vries, all of which were written during the 1960's. 'Houtbaai Blues' ('Hout Bay Blues'), 'Woorde met Voete' ('Words have Feet'), and 'Brood (3)' ('Bread (3)') describe the disillusionment felt by black people.<sup>104</sup> Their central characters are black Afrikaners of the Cape who speak a dialect of Afrikaans commonly called Gammat-taal. The image which most white South Africans have and cherish of the black Afrikaners of the Cape is of a "carefree chappie" who has a song, a laugh, and bottle of wine for all season. De Vries's stories consciously set about disabusing his readers of this patronizing image of their black countrymen. To begin with the characters in these stories are shown to suffer as a result of their poverty. Life is not an everlasting Coon Carnival for them, as many white South Africans like to believe and which is an image energetically promoted in some Afrikaans poetry.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, De Vries succeeds in revealing, like many of the black writers, how there is both grief and humour in the lives of these people; this blend of experience gains ultimate expression in the resilience of the characters, and in their language. Consider the humour in this passage from 'Houtbaai

Blues'. Here, the narrator, who assumes the voice of a black Afrikaner, is describing the case of the central character's son:

Hy was 'n skollie soos wat daar nie nog 'n tweede rondgeloop het nie. Waar hy alles geleer het, dit weet net die duiwel, want hy en die duiwel, hulle was soos Dawid en Jonathan.

(He was a thug unmatched by any other on the streets. Where he'd learnt all of this, this the devil only knows, because he and the devil, they were like David and Jonathan.)<sup>106</sup>

Biblical imagery and its startling and, as in this piece, somewhat irreverent use is a feature in much of the speech in these stories. De Vries is sensitive to the way black people often refashion Biblical imagery and adapt it to their local situation. For example, again in 'Houtbaai Blues', Jan Wolfrokkie rephrases Christ's famous dictum in his reproach to his friend Makka: "Jy sien die duinegras voor my huis raak, maar jy vergeet die gwarrieboom voor jou eie." ("You see the beach-grass reaching the front of my house, but you forget the gwarrietree in front of your own").<sup>107</sup> Similarly, the narrator in 'Brood (3)' often uses Biblical notions as a means of understanding the grim world around him. Indeed, the solace he gains at the end of the work is how the world-to-come is at least a place where people do not suffer; there, finally, people have bread. It is this powerful image which rules over this very fine, dramatic monologue; the work is appropriately entitled 'Brood' ('Bread'). It is worth remarking here that 'Brood (3)' concludes a series of stories in De Vries's oeuvre during the 1960's all in the form of dramatic monologues, which variously play upon the theme suggested by the Biblical motto that man cannot live by bread alone. The speakers in the first two

'Brood' pieces are Dutch women who have been forced to compromise their values (in the first case by taking food from a child and in the other by becoming a prostitute) during the German occupation of their country in order to feed themselves and their families. In all three works, and indeed very clearly in the final piece set in the Cape, De Vries is suggesting the kind of tension, in fact the paradox, between the kind of spiritual direction for man hinted at in the Biblical idea, and the fact that the cruelties of the world either force people such as the two Dutch women or the black people of South Africa to act in ways which appear morally suspect or to have to look to the world beyond death as a source of comfort set against present hardships. In this respect, 'Brood (3)' in particular, as well as 'Houtbaai Blues' and 'Woorde met Voete', are works of temporal despair in which action against injustice and poverty have circumscribed effects. One could surmise that De Vries was unaware of the revolutionary trends beginning to flower in black society during the 1960's in South Africa; or, to look more kindly and with broader historical perspective at these works and their author, that these stories, reflect the moribund condition of the country after the bannings, purges, detentions, and racial pogroms which took place earlier in the decade. One has to wait until well into the 1970's before Afrikaans literature starts aligning itself with English writing in recognizing the power, force and optimism for social change present in the country.

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### III The Works of the 1970's and 1980's

#### a) Major Concerns - A Literature about Violence

If Afrikaans fiction of the 1950's and 1960's can be seen to be characterized by a strenuous effort on the part of its writers to modernise their prose tradition by looking outward to Europe and America for ideas, techniques, themes, and often for settings and characters as well, then the novels and short stories of the following years reveal how both the older writers and their younger counterparts have brought all of this imported baggage back to South Africa, and have now begun to base their works firmly in the country with a concern for specific local events. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the treatment of the theme of violence which dominates Afrikaans fiction of the 1970's and 1980's.

It is interesting that while official Afrikaner policy is to deny the problem of endemic violence in the country, Afrikaner writers have given it a central place in their works of the 1970's and 1980's. The writers have clearly sensed the urgency and turmoil of the times and, unlike the authorities, have done little to veil social realities from their readers. The theme of violence had already become the key concern in English South African fiction by the 1940's. Afrikaans writing which had tailed behind English writing for so long in its failure to concern itself seriously with major national issues has begun to make up this difference by degrees, since 1970. Although, as we have seen, violence in general had become a common theme in Afrikaans

short fiction of the 1950's and 1960's, by far the greatest number of these stories were either describing incidents of violence in settings which were distinguishably non-South African and most often taking place in Europe, or in settings so generalized as to pertain to any society at any historical period. A common example of the former case is the violence associated with the Second World War, in works such as Rabie's 21, Breytenbach's Katastrofes and De Vries's Dubbeldoer and Vliegoog.<sup>108</sup> However, the concern with the difficulties facing characters in these works was for the most part on a broad generalized level; explorations of a host of social ills often in the most non-specific of settings. In Katastrofes and Dwaal, for instance, Breytenbach and Barnard are concerned more with the broad condition humaine than with examining specific social abuses. There is really no solid ground for social criticism in these works; or, put more precisely, these collections avoid identifying the perpetrators of social violence and therefore remain essentially spineless and lacking in conviction. Nothing can be further removed from the exceptional stories of this period such as Bartho Smit's 'Ek vat my land' and Abraham De Vries's 'Die Meisie met die bra-pistool' and the new wave of short fiction of the 1970's and 1980's than these barely localized and consequently vapid stories of the earlier decades. Indeed, I think that the crucial point here is that one of the keys to the weakness of Afrikaans short fiction in the 1950's and 1960's was the writers' widespread refusal or avoidance of localizing their works. Interestingly, some of the best stories

of the period, apart from those which specifically confront the social problems of South Africa and with which I have dealt exhaustively earlier in this chapter, are precisely those stories that are set in an indentifiable social situation such as those which describe the violence of the Second World War. Among these I have mentioned De Vries's pieces 'Brood' and 'Brood (2)', the dramatic monologues of Dutch women who tell of their bitter experiences during that war.

I should like to argue that part of the power of literary works which describe specific and localized acts of violence lies in the fact that the readers cannot ignore the political structures which lie behind these acts. The incidents of violence and indeed their portrayal in literature are intimately bound up with the political systems which give rise to these events.<sup>109</sup> Further, in portraying violence writers are often protesting not only about specific incidents but also, by implication, about the political systems which lie behind their occurrence. The element of protest in these portraits of violence can arise in two major ways. Firstly, it can arise out of the writer's sympathetic identification with the victims of the violence. Good examples of this are Paton's stories about the black children in the reformatory from his collection Debbie Go Home; and in the Afrikaans writing of the 1970's, Piet Haasbroek's story 'Aardrykskundefes' ('Geography Lesson') which describes the murder of a black school teacher in the bush-wars and Welma Odendaal's story 'Vrheidsvegter' ('Freedom Fighter'), and her

trilogy of stories 'LM', 'Baker' ('Dry-nurse'), and 'Grens' ('Border') all of which describe the misery and deaths of people caught up in the guerilla wars in Southern Africa.<sup>110</sup> Among stories of this type by black writers are Can Themba's 'The Urchin', 'The Will to Die', and 'Kwashiorkor', as well as James Matthews's 'The Park' and Casey Motsisi's 'Boy-Boy'.<sup>111</sup>

The second way in which writers can register their protest about the violence they are describing is to lay stress upon the cruelty of the perpetrators of the violence. Most often these are individuals or groups of people who themselves are representative types. For example, the brutality of the individual white farmers and police in Paton's story 'Life for a Life' stands for the nature of the Afrikaner society's response to black South Africans.<sup>112</sup> Among the best English stories dealing with the cruelty of people are Jack Cope's 'The Bastards', and Peter Wilhelm's 'All the Days of my Death'; and in the black community, Mtutuzeli Matshoba's 'A Glimpse of Slavery', Alex La Guma's 'Out of Darkness', and James Matthews's 'Crucifixion'.<sup>113</sup> Within Afrikaans writing of the 1970's and 1980's, fine examples of this are Haasbroek's 'Anatomieles' ('Anatomy Lesson') which describes the way white soldiers mutilate a black corpse and Rabie's 'Dies Irae' describing how wealthy white Afrikaners blithely and unthinkingly appropriate the homes of dispossessed black people.<sup>114</sup>

As the wide range of these examples shows, this discussion about the way in which violence is used by writers as a means of

protest and how the violence is most often closely tied to the political system which predicates it, is crucial not only for our understanding of Afrikaans short fiction about violence but also for most of South African literature which is perforce a literature about violence.

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b) Journalistic Writing and John Miles's Lief's nie op Straat Nie

By situating their stories emphatically within South Africa, Afrikaner writers infused new vigour into works not only dealing with violence but also into all the modes with which they had experimented in the preceding fifteen or twenty years. As the 1970's unfold there is a renewal of energy in Afrikaans literature as writers discover a new commitment to their country and to its problems; and for the first time in decades, this literature shares common ground with English writing, in fact often pointing towards exciting new directions for the country's literature, as a whole.

John Miles's collection of short fiction Lief's nie op Straat nie (Rather not on the Street), published in 1970, was among the earliest works of this period to suggest this kind of change. Miles's work offers a move in the direction which most of his fellow Afrikaner writers and many of the English writers would follow in the succeeding years. The title suggests in a wry way Miles's central concern in this collection: namely, the public experience of his characters, the experiences of people on the street, and the attempt by some to divert our attention from this

sphere of incident and commotion.

Black South African literature is also pre-eminently a literature of the street. In works by black writers much of the action takes place in the public domain: if not on the street, then in crowded yards, front-rooms, shebeens, prison-cells, or on trains. Miles's stories also take place in crowded, public areas. And, they share with much of black South African short fiction a concern with violence. Unlike the works of virtually all his predecessors, Miles's stories, many of which are very short and constitute vignettes rather than extended narratives, are set in specific South African locales with their acts of violence taking place in immediately recognizable local settings. Miles is thus very specifically localizing the violence in South Africa, the malaise and the disenchantment which were also so important, but rarely localized, in collections such as 21, Katastrofes, Dwaal, Vliegog, and Duiwel-in-die-Bos. A further aspect of Miles's work which distinguishes it from these earlier collections and which I have touched upon above is how the anguish of the characters is shown to be experienced not only in a private way by them individually but also in the public sphere. In many of Miles's stories the community is drawn into the pain and outrage of the characters. For example, in 'Oom Nakkie, my Oom Nakkie' ('Uncle Nakkie, my uncle Nakkie') several people witness the murder of the central character and the entire village is drawn into speculation about this incident. Similarly, in 'Vir oulaas Lientjie' ('For the last time Lientjie'), the narrative voice is

that of a local villager who speaks on behalf of the community; it is a group of these people who discover Lientjie trapped in the clutches of her deceased rapist towards the end of this story. By contrast, in earlier collections of Afrikaans short fiction such as Grové's Jaarringe, Barnard's Duiwel-in-die-Bos, or even in Aucamp's 'n Bruidsbod vir Tant Nonnie which was published in the same year as Miles's work, the anguish of the characters was almost without exception experienced privately by them and narrated so as to reveal this. The solitary agony of Freda Martin in Grové's story 'Dood van 'n Maagd' ('Death of a Virgin') could hardly be further removed from the public exposure given to the pains and difficulties of Miles's characters.<sup>115</sup>

Although Miles's stories turn exclusively to the violence among white South Africans, there is, between his work and those of his black contemporaries, a shared vision of a society fraught with violence and viciousness. In this respect he is also offering, in common with white English writers such as Peter Wilhelm, Nadine Gordimer, and Sheila Roberts, a view of South Africa in which violence is not simply contained in the black ghettos and rural slums, but is taking place with equal savagery in the affluent white parts of the country. It is notable that Miles's stories of the late 1960's often preceded by several years works by these English writers similarly concerned with the violence facing white South Africans.

As one can expect Miles has eschewed in his collection the genial rural realism of much of earlier Afrikaans prose. What remains

is a detached, ironic, cynical view of South African society; nevertheless it is not without humour. There is a series of modern impulses and influences behind Miles's collection such as the chaotic and abrasive view of society described in Ferdinand Celine's Voyage au bout de la nuit; the dramatic quality of works by Dutch writers after the Second World War, especially Klaus and Hermanns; the American detective thriller, particularly in the hands of Ross McDonald, Dashiell Hammett, and Raymond Chandler; and the detached almost nonchalant descriptions of violence which characterize pieces in Breytenbach's Katastrofes such as 'Kersverhaal' and 'Dinsdag, 12 Maart' ('Christmas Story' and 'Tuesday, 12th March').<sup>116</sup>

More significant, perhaps, than all of these literary influences was Miles's fascination at the time with the journalistic style of the Perskor newspapers in the Transvaal: in particular, the brash and pointed way in which they described violence.<sup>117</sup> It is this preoccupation, more than the various others mentioned above, which points toward the most valuable and distinctive aspects of the collection. It is the concern with the violence most usually treated in newspapers and a manner of writing not dissimilar to that used in journalism which characterizes Miles's work. The collection is in many respects an exploration of the journalist's field, approaching this by the unusual means of an exacting literary form - the short story - which in Miles's case is compact and brief. Liefs nie op Straat nie is a sortie into the world of journalism with the express aim

of using journalistic material for Miles's own purposes, that is, as a contribution to a literary mode.

The best illustration of this process is the volume's programmatic title story. Here two friends, one a journalist and the other a literary academic, discuss their particular activities. The journalist, Stephen, puts his case most forcefully. He argues for the merits of a journalistic approach to current affairs: the style of journalistic writing in his view is best fitted to describe and characterize our harsh violent world. It is worth quoting Stephen's argument from this story in full. It begins:

Here Jan, jy weet nie wat jy ontbeer nie. Hierdie lewendige tyd waarin ons lewe. Hoeveel maal moet ek dit nie voor jou voete gooi nie. Maar dis tipies van julle literêre skool. Sit nog met 'n wêreld van toeka wat julle omgestook wil sien tot jenerewer. En dis nog nie die ergste nie. Want teen vamslewe het ek niks - ek dek met plesier stores van die plaas. Net teen julle jenerewer het ek dit...Julle jenerewer is net nie meer goed genoeg nie. Die stookproses wat julle netjies afgebaken het, is verouderd. Daár is enige koerantleser julle voor. Kyk na ons wêreld en kyk na die koerant...Jy kan net nie wegkom van die wêreld se skokke nie; daaglik word dit by jou huis ingedra... Jy weet dit dus. Maar kyk, julle kom sê amptelik: Nee, nie die rou skok vir die literatuur nie. Ter wille van wie is daardie skok nou eintlik? Dis goedkoop. Ons literêre mae kan dit nie verduur nie... Party skrywers se koerantmae skynbaar wel, maar hulle moet dit vir ons mooi netjies omwerk...

(Heavens, Jan, you don't know what you're missing. This vibrant time in which we're living. How many times do I have to fling this in your face. But it's typical of your literary school. Still sitting with a world of long ago which you want to see distilled into gin. And that's not the worst. Because, I've nothing against the farm-life - I cover farm-stories with pleasure. I'm just against your making gin of it... Your gin is no longer good enough. The distillation process which you have neatly delimited has become obsolete. In this respect, any newspaper reader is ahead of you. Look at our world and look at the newspaper. [Stephen quotes a series of racy newspaper headlines such as

'Five year old phones: Auntie come, Mommy's dead', at this point.] You just can't get away from the world's shocks; every day they are brought into your house... You know it's the case. But look, you step forward and say officially: no, no raw shocks for literature. For whose sake are those shocks, actually? They're cheap. Our literary digestions cannot bear them... Some writers' newspaper digestions appear to manage easily, but they must redraft them artfully and neatly for us...).

Stephen opens his argument by expressing his opposition to the dominant strain in Afrikaans literature (and it is Afrikaans literature in the first place to which he is referring and only secondarily, by implication, to other contemporary literatures), which treats the Afrikaner's past and in particular his rural past with veneration and nostalgia. Among modern Afrikaner writers, Aucamp, Barnard, and De Vries have all, to some extent, continued this convention of 'gilding' the rural world of the Afrikaner and his past in their stories. Stephen (and by implication, Miles) whose stories are about the violence which his character describes daily in his newspaper, favours a far more robust, more involved kind of literature. From this point Stephen develops his view of journalistic writing as that most well equipped to typify and describe the current world. It is worth considering Miles's use of language in this passage which playfully draws both on the slick cant of journalism and from the literary world itself. Apart from the tantalizing series of newspaper headlines which Stephen conjures up, his choice of language often reflects the nature of his profession. For instance, he uses anglicisms, a widespread feature in the Afrikaans press; 'vamslewe' ('farm life') rather than the more formal correct Afrikaans phrase 'plaas lewe'. Similarly, he uses

the journalistic catch-phrase 'to cover a story' in the sentence, 'Ek dek met plesier stories van die plaas' ('I cover farm-stories with pleasure'). On the other hand he describes, almost within the same breath as these phrases, the kind of literature in which his friend is involved by means of an image well-established in Dutch and Afrikaans literature and literary criticism: that of literature as a distillate, and more especially in the distilled form of gin. Miles was well aware of the way this image had been used by the Dutch writer Simon Vesdyck and later adopted by the formalist Afrikaans literary critics Merwe Scholtz and A.P. Grové (both of whom had taught him at Pretoria University); he is wittily using this image to oppose this view of literature which they were promoting.<sup>119</sup> And also, as I have suggested above, Miles is slyly pointing out the narrow divide between journalistic images and style and more formal literary views of the world.

The argument in favour of using a journalistic style and approach both as the best way of reflecting the troubled nature of our contemporary world and as a method to be appropriated in literature requires careful consideration.<sup>120</sup> It is worth mentioning that in Miles's story Jan accedes to the merit of Stephen's argument, yet characteristically carps not so much at its content but rather at the way in which his friend has expressed himself. Sadly, Miles has not returned to writing stories since Lief's nie op Straat nie, but his subsequent novels have all followed the trajectory established by this collection

in their commitment to the rough-and-tumble public world of their characters and to a style close to journalism which also has affinities with the popular form of the detective thriller. Miles's collection was written at exactly the time when, in America, writers such as Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer were similarly beginning to explore the field traditionally given over to journalism.

What journalism and more specifically journalistic writing entails is worth considering in some detail. In the first place when one thinks about the characteristic qualities of this style of writing, one generally associates it with a type of writing which is spare, terse, and often brusque: digressions are kept to a minimum and the writing strives to be both informative and yet somehow startling, often shocking. Journalistic writing is in many ways a sophisticated form of titillation in which the reader is cajoled by means of the brief, suggestive style of the writing. When one turns to the major areas of journalistic concern there is a remarkable congruity of style and content. Journalism draws the reader into a world of violence, crime, political intrigues, sexual misdemeanours, wars and wide-ranging exposés about individuals and groups of people. It functions in much the same way as a roman à clef, to stimulate both our interest and stir our passions, yet on a more compact scale. Leaving aside this conscious literary parallel one can nevertheless see that there is nothing essentially different between the journalist's field of activity and that traditionally

assigned to the literary author: the differences are more superficial than deeply ingrained and not only is it possible for a literary writer to use the subjects and narrative standpoints common to journalism but also its particular stylistic and formal features. Indeed, works by writers which have been cast as New Journalism are simply appropriating central features of journalistic writing and remoulding them in literary forms such as the novel and short story. As I have suggested, what they are carrying over into these forms are the stylistic features of journalism such as its terseness, brevity, and its ability to shock and act suggestively on the reader, as well as the range of concerns and themes most commonly used in newspapers and tabloids. It is worth recalling the end of Stephen's argument in 'Liefs nie op Straat nie' in which he talks about writers blending the subjects ('the shocks' is his term) of journalism artfully into their literary works. This, in essence, is the achievement of Miles's collection and of a large number of literary works of the 1970's and 1980's. As we have seen, it is an approach which white English writers in South Africa as diverse as Nadine Gordimer, Christopher Hope, Sheila Roberts, and Peter Wilhelm have adopted in a number of their stories and indeed, in certain of their novels. This is also the case in Afrikaans writing where writers such as Miles, Piet Haasbroek, Welma Odendaal, and Elsa Joubert had often produced novels and stories of this type before similar works by their English-writing colleagues appeared. In the case of the bush-wars of Southern Africa, Afrikaner writers have uncovered an

entirely new and valuable terrain for the country's literature. Finally, one can see in the patterns of South African fiction of the 1970's and 1980's an answer to the issue I posed earlier in this section: namely, that a journalistic approach in literary works is particularly well-suited to describe a society undergoing violent changes. It has certainly become popular among South African writers and has been handled with considerable skill and success.

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c) A Literature about Violence - A Society at War and in Prison

Afrikaans fiction of the 1970's and 1980's has turned increasingly to topical events in Southern Africa for its subject matter. As a result we find a significant number of novels and stories variously concerning themselves with the bush-wars of the region, racial conflicts arising out of apartheid, experiences of political detainee in prisons, and more generally, with the series of crises which have threatened Afrikaner identity during this period. It is the first of these subjects (the bush-wars of Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, Zaire, and Zimbabwe) which has received the most sustained attention and in many respects is the area in which Afrikaans writing has excelled itself. Interestingly, it is a field of regional experience which has barely been explored by English writers. Gordimer's stories 'A Soldier's Embrace' and 'Oral History' and Peter Wilhem's 'LM' are among the few English works which deal with the wars of the subcontinent in a realistic way, although these two writers as well as John Coetzee have in recent years turned towards future

projections of South Africa during or after the wars of liberation.

The Afrikaans writer par excellence on the bush-wars is P.J. Haasbroek.<sup>121</sup> In all of his collections there are stories about these wars and while each of these works register a similar kind of protest at the excessive violence and needless waste of these engagements, there is nevertheless a notable diversity of subjects and fictional approaches among them. Let us consider some of his best pieces about South Africa's wars in neighbouring countries.

Although many of Haasbroek's stories describe the crudity and viciousness of white South African soldiers, 'Twee Terroriste' ('Two Terrorists') from his first collection Heupvuur (1974) (Hip-fire) is his most powerful work about the hatred white and black people on opposing sides of the conflict feel towards one another.<sup>122</sup> This short work falls into two parts, the first entitled 'Willem Pieterse' and the second 'Die vrolike musiek-maker' ('The Cheerful Music-maker'). Both episodes involve the same white characters: three Afrikaner soldiers (perhaps mercenaries) who are fighting in Mozambique. In the first part they terrorize a local hitch-hiker whom they pick up in their powerful European car; in the second, they are blown apart by a bomb planted by a black man who had previously entertained them with his guitar playing and singing; this man is 'the cheerful music-maker'. This story, as its title and the titles of its two parts suggests, is about two terrorists, Willem

Pieterse and the cheerful music-maker. There is an element of shock as we realize that both men, one either side of the war, are being described by precisely the same term and that the episodes of Haasbroek's story entirely support this identification.

However, there is a contrast between the two men of this story who are certainly being used by Haasbroek as representative types of the warring factions. Willem Pieterse and his colleagues are crude, unrefined men who behave in crass ways. They treat the hitch-hiker with a mixture of viciousness and bravado; Pieterse is a man who, as the saying goes, enjoys the sound of his own voice and whose character is defined as much by his volubility and the crudity of his language as by his actions. The cheerful music-maker, on the other hand, is a shadowy figure, both appealing and precise in his manners and actions. Unlike Pieterse and his friends who act unnecessarily and wastefully, especially in their treatment of the hitch-hiker who eventually escapes from their car, the black musician's movements are deft, considered and well-executed: both his music and his execution of the bombing are adroitly performed. It is one of the fine ironies of the story which describes Pieterse and his friends enjoying the man's music and then patronizingly tossing him one of their almost empty beer-bottles, only to be blown apart shortly afterwards by this man's bomb: the final twist to Haasbroek's story being the man's use of the empty beer-bottle for the petrol bomb itself.

The qualities which characterize Haasbroek's stories about the bush-wars are among those identified earlier in the discussion about journalistic writing: namely, the use of a spare almost terse narrative which sets out to shock the reader and act upon him in a persuasive and suggestive manner. I should like to isolate the quality of suggestiveness and consider the way in which it operates in 'Twee Terroriste'. This story is, in my view, more than simply a record of two related incidents in the war in Mozambique.<sup>123</sup> It is a kind of fable about South Africa and of the relationship between its white and black people. The behaviour of Willem Pieterse and his friends typifies the way many white South Africans treat and regard black people; similarly, the cheerful music-maker's conduct indicates how black people in the country are responding to their white countrymen. Indeed, what is surprising about this story is not so much the behaviour of the two protagonists which is entirely plausible, but precisely how Haasbroek relates the two incidents to one another. As a result of this 'Twee Terroriste', not unlike Bartho Smit's 'Ek vat my Land', becomes a work of prophecy and admonition. There is an undeniable sense of justice in the work's conclusion which is suggested not only by the event of the bombing itself - the cruel men getting their just deserts, so to speak - but also by the final image of the cheerful music-maker striking up anew the appealing chords of his joyful tune on his guitar. It is worth adding that Haasbroek's most extended piece of description in this very brief story is of the man's guitar which symbolically has portrait of a dark-skinned Joseph, Mary

and the Christ Child placed at the top of its fret-board. The last phrase of the story describes the eyes of the vigilant Christ Child peering out from under the musician's moving hands. The implications of the conclusion are clear: after having disposed of the enemies of his people the black man survives cheerfully, with justice entirely on his side. Along with Batho Smit's story there is perhaps no more pointed work of short fiction in contemporary Afrikaans literature than this most compact of pieces by Piet Haasbroek.

'Afskeid' ('Farewell') from Haasbroek's later collection Verby Die Vlakte (1982) (Past the Plains) is similarly based upon a startling concept.<sup>124</sup> Here, Haasbroek takes the common-place South African phenomenon of a group of young white soldiers about to depart by train for one of the war-zones as the central episode of his story. However, as the story unfolds one gains the chilling impression from a number of references, hints, and finally symbols, that these boys are not setting out on a journey to war; they have in fact already been killed in combat and this journey is, in a cruelly ironic way, a repetition of their former one. However, their destination is now the kingdom of death. Haasbroek, however, shatters the speculative dimensions of this idea by making the journey in his story unambiguously one into the realm of death. Partly as a result of the fact that the boy's fate has already been settled Haasbroek's story is perfectly placed to examine the futility not only of their early deaths, but also of the lives they have lived. This is achieved

in the early scenes in which parents and relatives of the soldiers express their sorrow at not being able to see their young men again and later when one of the soldiers considers how their lives have been cut short prior to any of the adult experiences of life; but it is also achieved in descriptions of the boys' behaviour on the train which reveals how little they have learnt during their lives. After death, the boys behave in precisely the same crude and vicious way that they had during their lives; they drink heavily, they fight with one another, and in the final scene, they demonstrate that the hatred which they have been taught to feel for black people is as bitter after death as it had been during their lives. In this scene, the central character of the story, one of the soldiers, takes up his bayonet and angrily stabs the golliwog-doll of a fellow traveller: he and his young companions have identified the doll with their former enemy, the black terrorists. The owner of the golliwog, an older man, then offers a comment which serves as the moral of Haasbroek's disturbing story: "'Ons staan op vertrek... En jy het nou nog nie vrede gemaak nie.'" ('We are on the point of departure... And you have not yet made peace.')125

'Afskeid' not only deals with the futility of the boys' early deaths and the fact that they have learnt little during their lives, but goes on to suggest that the quality of their lives and, by implication, all the values in which they believed are seriously deficient. In this way Haasbroek's story, like his earlier 'Twee Terroriste' is a fine example of an Afrikaner

writer's protest about the values and nature of his community.

At this point I would like to concentrate on a feature of Haasbroek's stories about the bush-wars which I alluded to earlier in the analysis of 'Twee Terroriste': namely, the brevity of these pieces. In this compact form Haasbroek has produced some of the best works of short fiction in Afrikaans literature which as we have seen has had a number of practitioners of this type of very short story. This kind of compact prose work is particularly successful in accounts of violence where the brevity of the form reflects the way in which incidents of violence themselves are often of both short duration and take place with frightening unexpectedness. In concluding this analysis of Haasbroek's stories about the bush-wars, it is worth considering two very short works of his which not only exemplify these qualities, but also lend further support to my assessment that his stories of this type are among the best in Afrikaans literature.

Like all of Haasbroek's stories about the bush-wars, 'Aardrykskundeles' ('Geography Lesson') and 'Anatomieles' ('Anatomy Lesson') are works of protest about South African society and its violence.<sup>126</sup> As their titles suggest they are stories which are linked to one another. They tend, however, to register protest about violence in the two distinguishable ways which I mentioned earlier: by sympathetic identification with the victims, especially in 'Aardrykskundeles', and by laying stress on the cruelty of the perpetrators of the violence, which

is in turn most clearly described in 'Anatomieles'. Nevertheless, both works turn about the same device: the violent incidents which they describe serve as a grimly ironic comment on their titles.

'Aardrykskundefes' describes the way in which a group of soldiers suddenly enter a rural school from out of the surrounding bush and how their general guns down the children's teacher, a Mr. Enias Mukunga. Within its five short paragraphs, the story develops a series of ironies which are based upon the contrast between what normally happens at a school and what is now taking place during its armed occupation. In the second paragraph, for instance, we read how 'Die general skreeu en die kinders hou op met die melodie of hulle skielik deur meneer Enias Mukunga stilgemaak is.' ('The general cries out and the children stop their singing as if they had suddenly been silenced by Mr. Enias Mukunga').<sup>127</sup>

Haasbroek shows that with the soldiers' arrival, authority has shifted; it is no longer the teacher who controls the children, but the army general. The contrast and its attendant irony is further developed when the teacher's explanations to the general about the country and the current situation sound 'soos 'n aardrykskundefes vir die kinders' ('like a geography lesson to the children').<sup>128</sup> Then, as the children are driven into the open, 'laat dit soos speelyd lyk vir meneer Enias Mukunga' ('it seems like play-time to Mr. Enias Mukunga'), who 'nog steeds praat oor die land of hy 'n aardrykskundefes gee' ('is still

talking about the country as if he were giving a geography lesson').<sup>129</sup>

In the final sentence Haasbroek brings to a grim conclusion the central contrast of the story:

Die generaal lig sy wapen en vuur 'n kort, blaffende sarsie sodat meneer Enias Mukunga op die hardgespeeldegrond val en met sy voete lustig skop in die grond van sy aardrykskundelesse.

(The general lifts his weapon and fires a short barking volley so that Mr. Enias Mukunga falls onto the ground which has been worn hard from playing and kicks cheerfully into the ground of his geography lessons.)<sup>130</sup>

The violence and play which are set against one another here represent the two poles of contrast. As Mukunga dies he 'kicks cheerfully', like a child at play, at the ground. There is a little doubt where the story's (or for that matter, the author's) sympathy lies: Mukunga has been described as a dignified man who commands the respect of his pupils and, even in death, Haasbroek reflects his dedication to his profession by referring to the geography lessons he used to teach. Moreover, by describing the way in which his feet kicked cheerfully into 'die grond van sy aardrykskundelesse' ('the ground of his geography lessons'), Haasbroek is not only suggesting the man's obvious attachment to his country, but is also implying that this man who teaches about the land and who even while dying seems to display his love of the land is the true patriot and not the men who prowl like creatures of prey through it. Significantly, the soldiers are described earlier as looking like 'tiers' ('tigers'), destructive creatures who are aliens in Africa.<sup>131</sup>

Like other of his stories which we have discussed, 'Aardrykskundefes' contains a veiled warning to the heavily armed occupiers of South Africa.

'Aardryskundefes' turns about a surprising contrast and a horrifying act of violence; so too does its companion-piece 'Anatomieles' ('Anatomy Lesson'). However, the context in which the circumstances of the latter story take place is in fact consciously concealed by Haasbroek until well on in its course. At that moment of revelation 'Anatomieles', like 'Aardrykskundefes', becomes a portrait of cruelty and terrible violence.

The story describes the dissection of a corpse. However, this is no medical school or training hospital. As we discover late in the story, this is a dissection of a black guerrilla whom a group of South African soldiers have previously tortured and murdered. It is only when Beske's instrument of dissection is identified as a bayonet that the circumstances of the scene suddenly gain clarity and the callousness of Beske and the others becomes fully revealed. Rather than using the dissection of a human body as a means of learning more about man (and one cannot fail to call to mind and contrast this story with Rembrandt's famous painting of the same title), this 'anatomy lesson' is just part of the process of humiliation and debasement to which these white South Africans are subjecting their black enemy.

One of the achievements of the story is how, after realizing the true nature of its circumstances, one begins to reconsider its

early scenes in the light of this terrible revelation. Then one realizes how brutal Beske's indifference and nonchalant references to parts of the cadaver really are: descriptive phrases such as 'organe losruk uit hul rustige lêplekke' ('pulling loose organs from their quiet resting places') and Beske's words like '"Ek het die klein skelm vergeet, dis die galblaas!"' ('I forgot this little rascal, it's the gall-bladder!') take on an ominous and damning significance.<sup>132</sup>

As in 'Twee Terroriste', the language and behaviour of the white soldiers in this story is coarse and filled with bravado. At one point, for instance, one of Beske's friends asks him: '"Wat het van sy ballas geword?... Hou jy hulle vir 'n soewenier, Beske?"' ('What happened to his [the guerrilla's] balls?... Are you keeping them as a souvenir, Beske?').<sup>133</sup> And the final irony of this story must inevitably be the anatomy as described. The black man's body is in every respect the same as that of the white soldiers.

There are few more angry works about the conduct of contemporary Afrikaners than these two stories by Haasbroek, which give the lie to the commonly held view that Afrikaans literature is one wholly without a tradition of protest and self-criticism having little in common with English South African writing which is conversely essentially a literature of social criticism. As I have already urged, I hope to show that during the 1970's and 1980's Afrikaans fiction has begun, albeit at a late stage, to develop precisely these characteristics.

Welma Odendaal's stories about the wars in Southern Africa, from her collection Keerkring (Tropic), share the same subject and much the same kind of protest about the society and its violence as many of Haasboek's stories. Keerkring, it is worth indicating, was banned shortly after publication in July 1977 and remains the sole collection of Afrikaans short fiction still banned in the mid-1980's. There are two basic differences between Haasbroek's and Odendaal's stories. In the first place, Odendaal's works are much longer than Haasboek's and in this respect, are more conventional in form than the latter's highly condensed narratives. Further, her stories are told by first person narrators and consequently we are brought more closely in touch with the personal anguish of the main characters; this is rather different from Haasbroek's use of the third person narrative standpoint which implies a more removed, detached view of violence. Odendaal's stories are in fact explorations of the traumatizing effects of the wars. 'Vryheidsvegter' ('Freedom Fighter'), for example, is a young South African soldier's account of his experiences during war; this he is telling to an investigating board. He and two of his colleagues had left camp without permission in pursuit of a group of guerrillas in order to avenge an attack these men had carried out on a local farmstead. At the crucial meeting, the young speaker failed to kill one of the guerrillas; in his account of the incident he struggles with his own sense of self-worth at consciously not wanting to kill the man and the realization that he will be branded a foolhardy coward. Moreover, the boy realizes that he

will have to lie to his father, a stalwart veteran of the Second World War, about the incident. He tells the investigating officials: "Vir julle is dit maklik. Julle wil net die feite weet... Vir Pa, Here, vir hom sal ek dit moet anders maak" ("For you it's simple. You just want to know the facts... For Pa, God, for him I'll have to change it").<sup>134</sup> As in Haasbroek's 'Twee Terroriste' the title of Odendaal's work has a double reference to the young white boy who is fighting for his own sense of freedom and to the guerrilla, a freedom fighter in his own right, who is killed at the end of the story.

In her most ambitious story 'Baker' ('Dry-nurse'), two step-brothers meet after an absence of five years in Pretoria. During these years, Mozambique's revolution has ended in success for the FRELIMO forces and the black people of the country; South Africa has become increasingly involved in wars beyond its borders. The younger brother has recently been called up for action in the South African army and Odendaal uses the dramatic context of the meeting of one brother newly returned to South Africa from Mozambique and the other soon to set off for war, as the basis for a critical assessment of the country. These, for instance, are the older brother's impressions of his fellow countrymen on his first evening back in South Africa; he is walking through the streets of Pretoria:

Die mense drom in swart en wit bondels, skuur haastig verby.  
Ek wil elkeen voorkeer en met die hand groet. Ek wil hê  
hulle moet my op die wang soen en "welkom tuis" sê, maar  
hulle vermy my oë. Hulle dra skoon klere, ruik na parfuum  
en skeer-seep. Hulle mae is kolrond en vol ryk kosse. 'n

Wyngloed kleur hul somernat gestigte. In hul oë lê die glans van 'n goeie lewe: hul oë is helder met die glans van neonligte, winkelvensters en spieëls. Hulle verorber hulself.

(The people crowd together in black and white bundles, rub hastily by. I want to stop each person and shake him by the hand. I want them to kiss me on the cheek and say, "welcome home", but they avoid my eyes. They wear clean clothes, smell of perfume and shaving-soap. Their bellies are round patches, filled with rich foods. A wine-coloured glow daubs their faces, wet from summer heat. They glisten of the good life lies buried in their eyes: their eyes are bright with the gleam of neonlights, shop-windows and mirrors. They are consuming themselves.)<sup>135</sup>

One wonders whether Odendaal was consciously using the image of self-consumption in the final sentence of this passage as an echo of and tribute to Rabie's piece of twenty-five years earlier, 'Drie Kaalkoppe eet tesame' ('Three Bald Heads Eat Together'), in which the greed of the men leads to their actually eating themselves. Whether this is so or not, the critical view of affluent white South African society is bluntly expressed in this extract.<sup>136</sup> There are a number of similar instances of this in the story, especially during the conversations of the two step-brothers. In one particular exchange the two men consider the fearful impasse into which white South Africans have brought the country. The younger man is addressing his older brother:

"Jy was in Afrika, werklik buite hierdie noustrop-grense, Jy was daar toe LM inmeakaargestort het. God, jy moet kan sien wat gaan gebeur... Jy moet 'n antwoord, iets hê." Sy stem breek. Hy vee met sy voorarm oor sy voorkop...

"Ek ken jou vrae; ek het hulle lank terug ook vir myself gevra. Nie meer nie. Ek het geen antwoorde, geen oplossings nie. Dis te laat, honderde jare te laat om nou te begin dink aan verandering. Ons staan met ons rug teen die muur en durf nie omkyk om die skrif te lees nie."

("You were in Africa, beyond these narrow, noose-like borders. You were there when LM collapsed. God, you must be able to see what's going to happen... You must have an

answer, have something." His voice breaks. He wipes his forearm across his brow...

("I know you questions: I also put them to myself long ago. Not any longer. I have no answers, no solutions. It's too late, hundreds of years too late now to begin thinking of change. We are standing with our backs against the wall and dare not look around to read the writing.")<sup>137</sup>

There have been few debates about South Africa in Afrikaans literature as frank and as openly self-critical as in this passage. For all that, however, the arguments being brought here remain neglectful, passive, pessimistic, and uncreative. Yet, although there is something rather self-evident about the observation that the historical errors of white people in South Africa have led to their current entrapment (cf. Rabie's 'Droogte') and although there is a rather hackneyed quality to the nonetheless compelling image of white South Africans standing with their backs to the wall unwilling and unable to look at the writing just behind them, it is important to realize how revolutionary and forthright these utterances are within the context of the Afrikaans literary tradition. In this respect, my comment is double-edged: it is qualified praise of Odendaal's achievement, while also a condemnation of Afrikaans literature in coming so late in its development to issues as basic as these. As we have seen, only a small number of stories of the 1950's and 1960's alluded to or built upon these issues in Afrikaans literature. Indeed, because of the uneven development of a critical tradition in English and Afrikaans fiction it is possible, I would suggest, to find oneself in the curious position of being able to offer qualified praise to this passage

in an Afrikaans work and yet realize that its occurrence in a contemporary work of English fiction might earn it the criticism of being over-blunt and rather too obvious. This is not, as it seems, a case of critical double-standards, but rather a recognition of the uneven development of parallel literary traditions; thus, where the same feature in one literature might demand a qualified form of praise, in another it might merit some form of censure.<sup>138</sup>

This it seems to me is the case of Odendaal's stories about the wars and violence of the region.<sup>139</sup> While they are significant in terms of the development of a critical strain within Afrikaans literature, they are not free from flaws. Indeed, although they are not of the excellence of Haasbroek's pioneering works in this area and of later stories such as 'Oral History' and 'A Soldier's Embrace' by Nadine Gordimer they did in an important way consolidate the work being developed in this field in Afrikaans. Ironically, the banning of Keerkring is a tribute to the bluntness of its stories and the courage of its author.<sup>140</sup>

Alongside these works about the bush-wars, one Afrikaner writer has turned his attention to another area to violence in the country: namely, the prisons, with their enormous numbers and their grim record of hangings and, more generally, of deaths in detention. Mouroir (bespieëlende notas van 'n roman) (Mouroir: mirror notes of a novel) is Breyten Breytenbach's collection of short fiction about his seven year incarceration in South African prisons.<sup>141</sup> However, apart from two of its pieces - 'Die dubbele

sterwe van 'n ordinêre krimineel' ('The Double Dying of an Ordinary Criminal') and 'Max Sec (Beverly Hills)' - this volume has little of the merit of the large number of stories on this subject by other South African writers such as Alex La Guma, James Matthews, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Peter Wilhelm, Alan Paton, and Christopher Hope. Indeed, Mouroir fails precisely where Breytenbach's autobiographical record (True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist) about the same period in his life, succeeds: namely, with the exception of the two pieces mentioned above, the works in the collection offer so oblique a response to the experience of being in prison in South Africa that they could apply equally well to prisoners anywhere else in the world or, more seriously, to inmates of asylums of any description at any time or place in history.<sup>142</sup> In short, the collection lacks the kind of specificity one would expect from an account, albeit in fictional form, of a term spent in a South African gaol. Seen in this light, Mouroir offers little advance and, indeed, has much in common with Breytenbach's collection of nearly twenty years earlier, Katastrofes. The generalized view of violence, of a world of catastrophic possibilities, is shared in both works.

Apart from its obscure concluding passage about Hindu mysticism which, with Buddhist thought, has been Breytenbach's perpetual hobby-horse, 'Die dubbele sterwe van 'n Ordinêre Krimineel' ('The Double Dying of an Ordinary Criminal'), along with Bosman's accounts of hangings in South African prisons, is one of the best works on this subject.<sup>143</sup> Although the prison and the central

character who is hanged are never named there is an intensely realistic, even naturalistic concern about the details of prison routine in this story. Further, there is a frightening account of the way in which South African prisoners are hanged and how fellow inmates and warders respond to this frequent phenomenon. Here, for example, is the passage describing the way black prisoners act on being told of their imminent execution and how their fellows support them:

Party mense is al dood nog voordat hulle tot sterwe kom. Wanneer die Gekleurdes aangesê word, gaan hulle dadelik in sang oop, breek hulle en giet die woorde uit. Daar is 'n polsende dringenheid omtrent die gesing, so asof mens kan hoor hoe skroeiend van die lewe hulle stemme is. Al die ander gevangenes - wat buitendien self ook maar net hul eie beurt afwag - help hulle dan vanaf daardie oomblik: die basse, die tenore, die tweede stemme, die koor. Elke vlug van die aangesêdes se stemme word gedra en gesteun deur dié van die ander... Op hier die wyse, tydens die laaste week, word wat vrees en pyn en angs en lewe is gaandeweg by die monde uitgestoot. 'n Narkose. En so beweeg hulle met die laaste ligdag deur die gang soos in 'n spieël, ritmies maar in beswyming nie as enkelinge nie maar as 'n lied wat beweeg...

(Some people are dead before they even come to die. When the Unwhites are informed (when the countdown starts), they directly open up in song, they break and let the words erupt. There is a pulsating urgency about the singing, as if one can hear how scorchingly alive their voices are. All the other prisoners - in any event only awaiting their turn - help them from that instant on: the basses, the tenors, the harmonizers, the choir. Every flight of the prospective voyagers' voices is supported and sustained by those of the others... In this fashion, during the final week, that which is fear and pain and anguish and life is gradually pushed out of the mouth. A narcotic. And so they move with the ultimate daybreak through the corridor as if in a mirror, rhythmic but, in a trance, not as men alone but as a song in movement.)<sup>144</sup>

There are a number of arresting comparisons in this passage: the living force of the song, the song in movement and the way the singing serves as a narcotic for them. Moreover, there are few

other moments in Afrikaans fiction with touch so profoundly upon a theme which is common in a great deal of black writing; that of the solidarity of support black people bring to one another especially during times of crisis.<sup>145</sup>

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d) Satire

In an earlier section of this chapter I mentioned how, apart from a small number of stories by Rabie and De Vries, social satire remained a virtually unexplored area in Afrikaans short fiction of the 1950's and 1960's. However, during the following two decades many of the older writers have started to use this approach more extensively in their work. Rabie and De Vries have continued to explore this field and Aucamp too has produced a number of fine satirical stories. Nevertheless, it is significant that it is a young writer who has really dominated this area during the late 1970's and early 1980's. He is M.C. Botha. Although I shall return briefly to the satirical works of Rabie, De Vries, and Aucamp, I should like to begin by considering Botha's satirical stories, as they typify many of the central features of the satire from this period. In the first place, Botha's stories are far less covert in their references to and ridicule of the follies of Afrikaner society than the stories of the 1950's and 1960's. Unlike Rabie's use of the symbolic setting in 'Die Groot Vrot', or Aucamp's and De Vries's placement of racial conflicts outside South Africa in Europe (in 'When the Saints Go Marching In', 'Ma Petite Négrresse' and 'Die Muise'), Botha's satirical stories take place in familiar and

recognizable settings in the country. Moreover, Botha's characters and narrators show little temerity in castigating the society. Here, for example, is an extract from 'Die einde van 'n kluisenaar se lewe' ('The end of a recluse's life') which itself is more a love story than a political satire per se:

Die eerste gesprek het begin toe Zelimir my vra: "Hinder dit jou nie om 'n Afrikaner te wees nie?"

"Nee," het ek gesê, en bygevoeg, "daar is omtrent niks in my bestaan wat ek met Afrikanerskap kan vereenselwig nie"... Zelimir en ek het eenparig besluit dat, as ons swart mense was, ons 'n swart meerderheidsregering sou voorgestaan het.

(The first conversation began when Zelimir asked me: "Doesn't it bother you being an Afrikaner?"

"No," I said, and added, "there is almost nothing in my existence which I can identify with Afrikanerdom"... Zelimir and I unanimously decided that if we were black we would champion a black majority government.)<sup>146</sup>

This disaffection with Afrikaner society and values forms an important element not only in Botha's stories but also in a large number of works by other Afrikaner writers of this period. Not even Afrikaans literature goes unscathed in Botha's stories. In one, the narrator unflatteringly refers to Afrikaans literature as 'n poep uit die anus van wêreldletterkunde' ('a fart from the anus of world literature').<sup>147</sup> More substantially, however, in his story 'Die Prys wat jy moet betaal' ('The price you have to pay'), Botha offers, as we shall see later, a scathing attack on white South African writers who exploit black oppression in the country as the subject for their best-selling novels.

In what is arguably his best single work Botha creates an immensely witty fable about a white Afrikaner's disenchantment

with his society and his subsequent 'fall' and identification with his black countrymen. The eponymous hero of the story, as its opening lines suggest, is an Afrikaner Everyman:

Frans Malan is 'n Afrikaner. Hy glo in God, gaan elke Sondag kerk toe, herdenk elke jaar Geloftedag, en stem in elke verkiesing vir die Nasionale Party. Hy het 'n sagte hart en lewe gelukkig.

(Frans Malan is an Afrikaner. He believes in God, goes to church every Sunday, commemorates the Day of the Covenant each year, and votes for the National Party at every election. He has a soft heart and lives happily.)<sup>148</sup>

The story continues to inform us humorously that:

Min dinge kwel hom. Hy stel nie belang in hoeveel kernduikbote Rusland in vergelyking met die U.S.A. het nie en hy is nie werklik geïnteresseerd in wat die Eerste Minister se planne vir Suid-Afrika is nie.

(Few things worry him. He is not concerned about how many nuclear submarines Russia has in comparison with the U.S.A. and is not really interested in what the Prime Minister's plans for South Africa are.)<sup>149</sup>

'Frans Malan' tells how its likeable hero undergoes a total transformation in his life and views during the course of a single year. The story is simple, yet ingenious. Frans Malan is befriended one day by a black tramp, Antonie Spandeel.<sup>150</sup> As his friendship with Antonie grows, so his disaffection for his bad-tempered wife and his opulent life-style increases; the white hero ends up spending most of his time with Antonie and his fellow black tramps. In a remarkable about-turn Frans Malan is finally seen drinking with the tramps on the beach.

The story is a kind of satirical pilgrim's progress of the modern Afrikaner. One of its most engaging features is how Botha uses the language of the three leading characters in order to define

their changing relationships to one another. Antonie speaks the dialect of the black Afrikaners of the Cape - gammat taal. His speech is characterized by its clipped syllables, often at variance with standard Afrikaans usage. Here, for instance, are his opening words to Frans Malan:

"Middag, Maaster... Maaster sal-ie omgie as'k Maaster die hand ko gie nie?"<sup>151</sup>

("Afternoon, Maaster...Maaster doesn't mind if i co' an' gi' you my hand?")  
(My underlining to indicate variant syllables in the gammat-taal).

Most surprising, however, is that Frans's wife Susan uses a similar clipped form of colloquial speech as the black man. Nevertheless where Antonie's speech is lyrical and pleasing to the ear, Susan's speech, conversely, is rasping. Her utterances are frequently brisk and dismissive. In characteristic form, for instance, she orders Antonie to clear off their property in the following way: "Skoert hier° Waa voer biedel jy? Gat soek werk!" ("Clear out of here° Why're you begging? Go'n find work!")<sup>152</sup> (Once again I have underlined the syllables at variance with standard Afrikaans usage.) On the other hand, it is only in the final scene of the story, when Frans finds common cause with the black tramps, that we read with surprise how he lapses for the first time into their manner of speech. In this way, Botha achieves his final satirical barb largely by means of the language itself. Frans Malan turns to his friend Antonie and says: "Wi djy nie in my hys kô blyie, Maaster?" ("Don't you want t' come an' stay in my house, Maaster?"); to which Antonie responds with delight: "Daa noem Maaster my nou

Maaster... Dis dam lekke nè? Nou's ons altwie Maasters°"' ('"There, Maaster's just called me Maaster... That's damn nice, isn't it? Now we're both Maasters!"')<sup>153</sup>

'Die kort lewe van 'n gemiddelde man' ('The short life of an average man') is not dissimilar in design to 'Frans Malan'. As its title suggests it too is dealing with another Afrikaner-Everyman. The hero of this short piece is simply 'die gemiddelde Suid-Afrikaanse man, daardie vent van wie almal praat maar nooit sien nie' ('the average South African man, that chap about whom everyone talks but never sees').<sup>154</sup> It hurtles through the early life and young adulthood of this man, describing the idiocies of education and incident which occur to a white South African growing up with apartheid. The work is consciously designed as a kind of scurrilous exposé of those features of a white South African's life which many people steadfastly refuse to see and examine carefully. Here, for instance, is the racy description of the hero's earliest years:

Wanneer die arme knapie gebore is, spandeer hy die helfte van sy tyd in sy ouer se TV-kamer, waar hy verorber word deur die clichés van onoorspronklike zombies... Die ander helfte van sy tyd word verwyl in nog 'n klein kamertjie, die drie by drie meter hokkie wat die bediende se slaapplek uitmaak... Wanneer sy ouers nie TV kyk nie gaan hulle na vriende, die Kitsch intellectuals, en Sophie word sy tweede moeder... Sophie is sy tweede moeder meer dikwels as wat sy regte ma sy regte ma is...

(When the poor little bloke is born, he spends half of his time in his parent's TV-room, where he is devoured by the clichés of unoriginal zombies... The other half of his time is whiled away in yet another little room, the three by three meter little cage which serves as the servant's bedroom... When his parents aren't watching TV they go to their friends, the kitsch intellectuals, and Sophie [the servant] becomes his second mother... Sophie is more often

his second mother than his real mother is his real mother...)<sup>155</sup>

Throughout the story Botha pokes fun at areas of accepted knowledge in white South African society. Towards the end of the piece, for example, the hero muses about terrorists:

Terroriste, hoor hy, is kommuniste. Hulle bid nie voor hulle eet of voor hulle gaan slaap nie. Hulle is niks anders as gemoderniseerde Duiwels nie...

(Terrorists, he's heard, are communists. They don't pray before they eat or before they go to sleep. They are nothing other than modernized Devils...)<sup>156</sup>

However, Botha conspires to build his conclusion around the ironic fact that terrorists are also seen by some as freedom fighters:

Party mense noem hulle vryheidsvegters. Dit klink nie sleg nie en hy wonder of hy aan die regte kant is. Vryheid was altyd sy kleindroom... Skielik is dit te laat as hy op die grens sneuwel. 'n Communiqué van Pretoria lees: "Gemiddelde wit Suid-Afrikaanse vryheidsvegter vermoor deur swart Kubaanse vryheidsvegters".

Hy was maar aan die verkeerde kant van vryheid.

(Some people call them freedom fighters. That doesn't sound too bad and he wonders whether he's on the right side. Freedom was always his dream from childhood... Suddenly it's too late as he's killed in action on the border. A communiqué from Pretoria reads: "Average white South African freedom fighter murdered by black Cuban freedom fighters".

He was simply on the wrong side of freedom.)<sup>157</sup>

The humour in this piece lies not only in the farcical nature of its incidents or in its mocking of the familiar white South African attitudes and clichés but also in the way the narrative shifts suddenly from scene to scene and from stage to stage in the hero's life. Botha keeps the language informal, almost colloquial, with a strong degree of understatement. It is a

trim, yet trenchant piece of satire.

Less elegant, yet as pointed as these two stories is 'Ongetiteld 3' ('Untitled 3').<sup>158</sup> Here Botha's central character is another familiar South African personality, the immensely successful Afrikaner, who in this case is a prosperous lawyer named Karel van Blerk. Like Rabie's characters Dr. Preller and Alexander Fechter, Van Blerk is troubled by his role in society. The story describes his internalized debate about the notion of justice. He brings up a number of exigencies in the legal process which suggest that a judicial system could on occasion be administering unjust decisions along with just ones. What, he muses, if the parliament passes fundamentally unjust laws, is the position of the judge. He chooses as an example the Immorality Act and asks 'is dit, vir die regspleging se doeleinde, noodwendig regverdig' ('is it, for the purposes of administering justice, necessarily just').<sup>159</sup> As with the earlier anomalies in the judicial system he has cited, the implied answer to his question here is in the negative. This direct kind of debate about the country's judicial system is brought to an end with his reflection:

Maar regverdigheid is 'n begrip wat die verloorders, die armes, die onderdrukte, moet formuleer. Op slot van sake, dit is net hulle wat 'n ware begrip van onregverdigheid het.

(But justice is a concept which the losers, the poor, oppressed, must formulate. Ultimately,<sup>160</sup> it is only they who have a true understanding of injustice.)

This appears a most convincing argument, coming as it does from the mouth of an expert legal man and at the end of an intricate debate. However, it is Van Blerk and people like him in South

Africa, the story is pointing out, who formulate the laws and administer justice. It is this paradox which Botha's stories illustrate most dramatically. With characteristic irony Botha describes Van Blerk's final thoughts: 'Hy dink hoe bly hy is dat hy 'n groot huis het, twee motors, geld, aansien, alles'. ('he thinks how happy he is to have a big house, two motor cars, money, prestige, everything').<sup>161</sup>

'Ongetiteld 3' is blunt, yet rather unconventional satire. The radical nature and power of the work lies in the fact that unlike Preller and Fechter who, in Rabie's stories, seek release from their guilty consciences by patently absurd and obsessive gestures (the furtive eating and the hand-washing), Van Blerk's way out is far more conventional: 'a big house, two motor-cars, money, prestige, everything'. Botha's trenchant story implies that conventional tokens of wealth veil a myriad of evils.

Alongside Botha's penchant for the humorous form of satirical writing, Hennie Aucamp has also followed this approach in a number of his later stories written in the 1970's and 1980's. His most successful collections in this vein are Wolwedans (1973) (Wolf Dance) and Volmink (1981). It is in the earlier volume, however, that he offers his most sustained humorous and satirical view of South African society. There are a number of stories here which describe the ironies facing white liberals in the country. In 'Die Bieg' ('The Confession'), for example, he deals with the guilt-complexes white liberals feel about their relationship to black people. However, his best work is the

story 'On the Rocks';<sup>162</sup> in it he looks wryly at various postures black and white people adopt towards one another. The young Afrikaner poet, Niklaas, for instance, is all for approchement between black and white people and argues that white people need to develop their relationship with Africa. Yet, Aucamp observes, in this admirable endeavour Nilaas is prepared to fawn on inferior black writers whose works are being lionized, simply because they are part of a passing fashion: sympathy for the oppressed African. It is left to the older men, the white Afrikaner writers Naas and his black counterpart David Duncan, to cut through the array of pretensions people like Niklaas display in their treatment of people of another colour. David Duncan and Naas criticize one another's work with frankness; yet Aucamp's wry conclusion is that it is only outside South Africa that their friendship can properly develop. Duncan invites Naas to visit him in London and there they will be able to eat bobotie, a regional dish of the Cape, together.

Breytenbach's piece 'Max Sec (Beverley Hills)' is a bitter satire, not without humour, of the mania South African prison officials have about security.<sup>163</sup> Brigadier-General Murphy is plagued by the thought that he will one day lose his job as governor of his prison because of the possibility of a convict break-out. Breytenbach's piece consists of a series of numbered paragraphs each of which lists the increasingly bizarre measures Murphy institutes in order to forestall such an incident taking place. We read of items 4, 5, and 6, for instance:

4. He orders, reviews, refines. Every prisoner must be escorted by a guard-with-dog at all times of the day and night.
5. No more contact between inmates.
6. The warder-with-dog shall get into the bath with the prisoner. Yes, man, of course the state will issue you with overalls for the purpose!<sup>164</sup>

In a nightmare, he envisages a break-out and adopts the ultimate measure: his charges are shot. The piece draws to an end with the ironic line: 'Now the prisoners are in maximum security, sir'.<sup>165</sup>

This strain of humorous satirical Afrikaans writing is symptomatic of the way writers have begun to challenge and pour scorn on reigning Afrikaner values and assumptions. One finds that by the early 1980's, it is a group of younger writers in particular who have consciously set out to deride traditional Afrikaner Nationalist positions in their works. Apart from M.C. Botha, who is the most eloquent of this group, there are writers such as Dan Roodt, André Le Roux, Koos Prinsloo, and André le Roux du Toit, who are similarly engaged in castigating hidebound Afrikaner positions.

There is also a more sombre vein of satirical writing in which writers, and here it is especially the older writers, describe in a sober and critical way the ravages caused by apartheid. Not surprisingly, a number of the themes in these works are common in English South African writing as well. For instance, Jan Rabie's long story 'Dies Irae' deals with the expropriation of property belonging to black people; it is a theme central to Jack Cope's story 'The Bastards', Alex La Guma's novel Time of the

Butcherbird, and Mtutuzeli Matshoba's novel Seeds of War.<sup>166</sup> As in Cope's story, Rabie takes an extravagant feast of white Afrikaners as a central event in his work in order to revile the greed of these people who have literally expelled black people from their former homes in order that they might eat, relax, and play where these people used to live. 'Dies Irae' is an angry work; Rabie's rage finds expression through his narrator's bitter comments about the blithe disregard with which the wealthy white hosts treat the black family whose house they have recently appropriated as a weekend retreat. The story ends as the former black owner of the house sets fire to it in a mood of drunken anger and despair. Indeed, earlier we had been told how another black man a week previously had suddenly tried to stab one of the new class of white weekenders in the village. In Rabie's story, black rage spills over and it is significant that this piece was completed soon after the events of 1976.

Abrahams De Vries's story 'Die Uur van die Idiotie' aligns the conduct of contemporary Afrikaners with that of their forebears at the turn of the century.<sup>167</sup> In keeping with his perennial concern about his home-district of the Klein Karoo, De Vries draws on a little-known legend of this area, using it in a way which pours scorn on his modern Afrikaner characters. In brief, during the ostrich feather boom of the 1890's, wealthy farmers of the Klein Karoo had their children intermarry in order to retain their money within a narrow group of families; idiots were born of these unions. De Vries's story, which starts as a kind of

thriller and then develops into a surrealistic narrative, ingeniously brings this incident to bear on the New Afrikaners who currently occupy the same ostrich-palaces (the opulent homesteads) of the earlier generation. In a compelling conclusion, in which De Vries shifts his narrative into his favourite realm of the surreal and the fantastic, the contemporary characters are identified with the idiots whose past they are reliving in their obsessive and relentless hold on the wealth of the country. 'Die Uur van die Idiote' takes up the oblique kind of literary approach to apartheid of many of the works of the 1950's and 1960's; yet like 'Die meisie met die bra-pistool', of which it is a kind of latter-day reworking, De Vries's story is pointed, with little ambiguity about its satirical target.

Finally, Elsa Joubert's story 'Agterplaas' ('Back-yard') deals with a theme common in many stories by Nadine Gordimer and in Ezekiel Mphahlele's novella 'Mrs. Plum': namely, the relationship between white masters and black servants.<sup>168</sup> 'Agterplaas' describes a series of episodes which arise out of the white narrator's contact with her black servants over a period of some months. There are incidents at pass offices, tales of rural dependants, and unexpected pregnancies. Yet the most compelling feature of the work is not so much Joubert's sensitivity to the myriad difficulties facing black domestic servants, but her powerful evocation of the intertwined lives of black and white people and a number of the paradoxes which this relationship involves.

The story begins with the white woman's declaration: 'My lewe beweeg op die periferie van 'n bestaansvlak wat ek nie ken nie' ('My life moves on the periphery of a plane of existence about which I have little knowledge').<sup>169</sup> Yet the narrator's life is closely bound up with that of the black people around her and she comments soon afterwards about her black servant: 'Sy is nader aan my as 'n suster, ken my intieme lewe op 'n dieper vlak as wat 'n suster my sou ken. Maar ek ken haar nie' ('She is closer to me than a sister, knowing me intimately on a deeper level than a sister could know me. But I do not know her').<sup>170</sup> It is this apparent one-way flow of knowledge and awareness which, for the narrator, represents the central ironic paradox of the story. Indeed, the work ends as it had begun, with her statement: 'Ek leef op die periferie van 'n bestaan wat ek nie ken nie' ('I am living on the periphery of an existence about which I have little knowledge').<sup>171</sup>

However, there is more to the paradox than simply this: the white woman does in fact have a knowledge of the world of her servants, which even touches on the intimacies of their lives; and her knowledge is of the most revealing kind. Yet as she realizes, there is a vital area of exclusion in her contact with the black people, not so much in terms of knowledge as she believes, but more of acceptance. Put most simply, the white woman sees and often shares the experiences of black people, yet her position in society cuts her off from any meaningful acceptance by them either as a friend or as an equal. Joubert leaves us to reach this conclusion which tantalizingly escapes her otherwise astute

narrator.

The narrator's aperçus of the black society and its relationship to her own are of the most penetrating and often poetic nature. Early in the story, for example, she describes the lives of the black servants in this way:

Dis nie 'n enkelvoudige lewe nie, dis meervoudig. Dis die eerste wat ek moet leer. Haar lewe is verbonde aan 'n ander, en hierdie tweede aan nog 'n ander, en ek deur hulle aan 'n amorfe liggaam wat my lewe binnedring. Die meeste van die tyd bult en roer dit in die kamer in my agterplaas, asof die mure beweeglik is, hulle digtheid verloor het en kan groei en inkrimp soos 'n tas van seil of sak, deur die vreemdelinge wat gehuisves word.

(Theirs is not a singular life, it's manifold. That's the first thing that I need to learn. Her life is bound to another, and this second to another, and I, through them, to an amorphous body which forces its way into my life. Most of the time it swells and stirs in the room in my back-yard [which houses her servant], as if the walls were mobile, losing their closeness and are able to grow and contract like a bag of canvas or sacking, through the [presence of] strangers who are lodged there.)<sup>172</sup>

The observation of the way the black people's presence obtrudes itself in her life is made by means of the most startling images: firstly, the swelling and stirring of it in the cramped confines of the servant's room and then this room in itself being able to expand or contract in keeping with the force of this influence. Indeed, the narrator continues to use these unexpected comparisons by referring to this phenomenon as a kind of radar. As the story unfolds, so Joubert develops the view of there being an extensive network of contact and support among black people in the country. Here, for example, is a later passage dealing with this subject:

Daar is 'n vreemde radar wat van my agterplaas na die agterplase van die huise langs my en agter my en om my loop.

Daar is 'n verbintenis wat deur die ganse voorstad loop, soos drade wat gespan is, onsigbare drade wat die een agterkamer met die ander verbind, en die een voorstad met die ander, en die voorstede met die swart lokasies. Soos 'n mens 'n spinneweb wat eers onsigbaar vir die oog was, sien wanneer die lig uit 'n sekere hoek op hom val, of stof daaraan vaskleef, of rook dit opeens swart omlyn, so kom hierdie drade te voorskyn in 'n tyd van krisis.

(There is a strange radar which runs from my back-yard to the back-yards of the houses alongside, behind and about me.

There is a bond which runs through the whole suburb, like cords which have been stretched, invisible cords which bind one back-room to another, and one suburb to another, and the suburbs to the black locations. As a person comes to see a spider's web which was at first invisible to the eye only when light falls on it from a certain angle, or when dust sticks fast to it, or when smoke suddenly outlines it in black, so these invisible cords rise into view in a time of crisis.)<sup>173</sup>

This phenomenon of widespread black contact and support is one rarely remarked on in white fiction, although it forms one of the cornerstones of black writing. However, what is even more arresting than this is the suggestive force of Joubert's imagery, linking the network of contact between black people to a spider's web which only rises into view in times of crisis. Inevitably, the image of the spider's web suggests not only contact between its various parts and extremities, but also the menace it poses for creatures in the vicinity of its mesh. Here Joubert has offered an arresting image of the black community in South Africa, as a fine inter-connected web, although fragile, able to pose a threat to those who are not a part of it - the white people of the country.

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e) The Presence of Black Characters

The presence of black people in Afrikaans stories of the 1970's

and 1980's has become a far more pronounced feature than in stories of the previous decades. In virtually all of the stories I have discussed from this period, by Haasbroek, Odendaal, Botha, Aucamp, Breytenbach, Rabie, De Vries and Joubert, black characters have played a crucial role either by direct involvement in the action or by the force of their presence within these works. Indeed, it would be fair to say that the leading Afrikaner writers of the 1970's and 1980's have brought their black countrymen and the issues posed by their presence in South Africa fairly and squarely into their best works. It is difficult to think of any major Afrikaans novel or story of this period which fails to implicate black people in one way or another in its development. Even in a story such as 'Die Uur <sup>van</sup> die Idiote' by De Vries, where black characters are excluded from its action, their overwhelming presence in South Africa and the pressure this exerts on white Afrikaners both informs the story and is very close to the core of De Vries's satirical intention in this work.<sup>174</sup>

As in the 1950's and 1960's there are a small number of stories in which dialectal forms of Afrikaans commonly spoken by black people are used. Welma Odendaal's 'One for Sorrow', for instance, is a fabular kind of story about a black Afrikaner's childhood and early adulthood.<sup>175</sup> In tone and language it is not dissimilar to De Vries's 'Houtbaai Blues' and 'Brood (3)'. Like them, 'One for Sorrow' stresses the painful and sad aspects of being a black Afrikaner. In its final sequence, for example, the

narrator Alwyn loses the girl he loves simply because of his colour. Unlike him she can pass for white and does not hesitate to do so.<sup>176</sup> The narrator's refrain 'One for Sorrow' echoes throughout this story. In the story 'Laas Somer' ('Last Summer'), Odendaal describes the relationship between two tramps, a black man and his white female companion.<sup>177</sup> Their speech is a form of street patois with close affinities to gammat-taal. Indeed, it is interesting how many of Odendaal's stories involve characters from the lower classes in South Africa; in many of these she uses their forms of colloquial speech.<sup>178</sup> In this respect, her stories have a close affinity with those of Barney Simon and especially those of Sheila Roberts with whom she shares a concern both for working class people and particularly for women from this class.

M.C. Botha's 'Uitspraak Voorbehou' ('Reserve Judgement') is a rather unusual story, consisting of a black man's defence plea to a court; he is compelled to make this in Afrikaans, a language strange to him. Consequently, Mphage Mabobo's speech is fragmentary, often ungrammatical, apart from the fact that he is under severe emotional stress. Botha captures this man's strange, often deeply moving, speech. Here, for instance, are his final words denying the charge of having wilfully killed his wife during a domestic quarrel:

"Ek het nie plan gehad nie vir my eie vrou by die dood te bring nie. Nou my hart hy is baie seer. My kinders hulle sit nou daar alleen by die huis en weet nie van 'n ma nie."

("I had no plan to bring my own wife to death. Now my heart

he is very sore. My children, they are now sitting there alone at home and do not know a mother."<sup>179</sup>)

Besides the characteristic error of many vernacular speakers in South Africa concerning the use of the pronoun ("Nou my hart hy is baie seer" ("Now my heart he is very sore")), there is a fine sensitivity to and revelation of the man's grief in the unusual phrase, "My kinders... weet nie van 'n ma nie" ("My children... do not know a mother"). These stories give further evidence of the Afrikaner writers' sympathetic identification with black people and people of the lower classes during this period and the growing need they have felt to incorporate them within a previously circumscribed fictional frame of reference.

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(f) The Writer's concern about his Craft and Developments within the Rural Short Fiction

Two fields of interest in Afrikaans writing of the 1950's and 1960's were the author's self-reflexive concern about his craft and the involvement in the rural world of South Africa.<sup>180</sup> Both of these have been developed in the following years. The most successful stories about the practice of writing are those of M.G. Botha. In works such as ' 'n Storie in wording (die werklikheid ontleed)' ('A story in the making (analyzing reality)'), 'Die Prys wat jy moet betaal' ('The Price you have to pay'), and 'Oor Skryf' ('About writing'), he not only offers humorous and ironic views of the craft of writing but also looks critically at the state of contemporary Afrikaans writing.<sup>181</sup> In this respect his stories are far more ambitious than those of established writers such as De Vries, Aucamp and Grové. Botha's

works surpass those of these writers precisely because he is considering the writer and his work in relation to their specific South African context. De Vries, Aucamp, and Grové were consciously building upon the European tradition of the Künstlerroman in stories such as 'Terug na die Natuur', 'Armed Vision', and 'So vroeg-vroeg in die môre'. Botha, on the other hand, has expressly brought this tradition to bear on local issues.

'Die Prys wat jy moet betaal', for example, is a wide-ranging work of satire. In the first place, Botha is satirizing its chief character Lukas who selfishly sets aside his personal responsibilities and any expression of gratitude to his wife and children, in order to pursue his career as a writer relentlessly. Further, the story uses a barely disguised situation in which only names of places are omitted in order to satirize the South African political condition: a white nation is oppressing the black people within its borders in a most brutal fashion. Botha ingeniously links these two themes in the final episodes of the story in which Lukas writes his great novel based upon the suffering of the black people. The novel turns out to be a series of edited transcripts of the tapes of interviews with impoverished black people Lukas had recorded in one of the rural slums. Lukas's creative role in this work is minimal; he is little other than a glorified sub-editor. Nevertheless, Botha records with great satirical humour the tumultuous reception the work is given by the white South African public:

Die Groot Boek is gepubliseer en het 'n storm ontketen. Elkeen wat dit gelees het, was getref deur die lyding van die swart volk. Al die temas wat deur die eeue gebruik is, ...het die lesers se belangstelling tot die uiterste geprikkel, en omdat Lukas slim was, en soveel in sy lewe al gelees het, was die kommentaar wat hy as skrywer in die boek gehad het skerpinnig, omvattend, en selfs filosofies. Die ellende van die swart volk is soos 'n bord smaaklike kos opgedis vir die wit man om te verorber. Hy het homself knuppeldik geëet en nog vetter geword.

(The Great Book was published and unleashed a storm. Everyone who read it was struck by the suffering of the black people. All those themes which have been used through the centuries... stirred the readers' concern to the extreme and because Lukas was clever, and had already read so much in his life, the commentary which he offered as the writer in the book was penetrating, exhaustive, and even philosophical. The distress of the black people was dished up to the white man like platter of delicious food for him to devour. He stuffed himself to bursting point and grew even fatter).<sup>182</sup>

As it is well-nigh impossible to avoid seeing the story as anything other than a satirical account of South African society, so too it is difficult not to recognize, individually and as a type, the South African writers and kind of works to which the story is referring, and indeed the kind of reception which has been given to these works. By the end of the 1970's the suffering of black people had become a popular theme in fiction by white writers, many of whom were reaping, like Botha's character Lukas, handsome dividends from these projects.<sup>183</sup> Botha's story is a timely caution about the unscrupulousness of these writers and their adulatory critics as well as the gullibility of their reading public. As the work's title suggests, there is ultimately a price (if only in moral terms) one has to pay for this kind of exploitation.<sup>184</sup>

It remains one of the ironies about 'Die prys wat jy moet betaal'

that Andre Brink wrote effusively about the volume in which it appeared as the title story, yet failed to remark in any way whatsoever on the satirical implications of this piece.<sup>185</sup> The studious avoidance of one of the major themes of the collection's title story seems to be more than simply a case of Brink's embarrassment at being found out. It serves to recall here one of Swift's aphorisms in the Preface to The Battle of the Books: 'Satyr is a sort of Glass, wherein Beholders do generally discover everybody's Face but their Own; which is the chief Reason for that kind of Reception it meets in the world, and that so very few are offended with it.'<sup>186</sup>

Brink's response typifies, in my opinion, the evasiveness of Afrikaner academics have shown in facing up to the increasingly critical nature of their literary tradition. In this respect, they have done a great disservice to Afrikaner writers.<sup>187</sup>

In a similar way to that followed by M.C. Botha in his stories about writers and their craft, during the 1970's and 1980's a number of writers have regenerated a familiar kind of Afrikaans story: namely, the farm or countryside story.<sup>188</sup> Here too incidents in the countryside have been shown to have an intimate connection with contemporary events in South Africa. No longer is the countryside simply the site of youthful memories and the domain where Afrikaners rule unchallenged over all that they see. The crises that concern society in general are now also those of its backwoods.

The case of Hennie Aucamp is most instructive in this instance. Where virtually all of his rural stories until the 1970's were bitter-sweet reminiscences of the Stormberg, from this date on the perspectives of this world begin to change in his short fiction. The whimsical return of the narrator to the farm of his youth is given an added dimension. In pieces such as ' 'n Skryn Langs die Pad' ('A Shrine by the Wayside') and 'Jamestown: 'n herinnering' ('Jamestown: a reminiscence'), the idea of loss is developed by Aucamp: that is, the loss of a world which has been completely transformed by the migration of white people to the towns and cities and by the forced eviction of black people from the farms.<sup>189</sup> And further, unexpected violence is now taking place in the Stormberg. For instance, in 'n Stillewe met Blomme' ('Still life with flowers'), the narrator's return to his parent's farm, far from being a tranquil respite from the pressures of city-life, becomes an experience replete with crude violence.<sup>190</sup> His sister would be open to sexual abuse if she were to work in the local hotel and in the central event of the story the elderly black maid-servant of their farm is raped by a young black man who later commits suicide. Similarly, in 'Vir Vier Stemme' ('For Four Voices'), Aucamp describes, from a variety of narrative standpoints, a series of grotesque events which arise in a remote Afrikaner farming community.<sup>191</sup> In the end, a young Scottish visitor to the district takes his own life. There is a suggestion that the events in this story stand partly as a critique of the Afrikaners' isolation: that it is this fact of isolation among the white people of the story which gives

macabre viability to the grim events which take place among them. In this way, 'Vir Vier Stemme ' becomes a kind of admonishing fable, not unlike short pieces by Herman Bosman such as 'Day of Wrath', 'Man to Man', and 'Feat of Memory'.

The violence of society has become a feature of works set in the countryside. Barnard's short and pungent story ' 'n Onverwagte Nattigheidjie' ('An Unexpected Bit of Moisture'), for example, describes how a peaceable black man, Pakas, and his family are killed on the national road while trekking by donkey-car from their home in the small town from which they have been expelled by the laws forbidding black people to live in close proximity to white people.<sup>192</sup> Similarly, De Vries's story 'Raam' ('Frame'), which is in part a work dealing with the author's own process of writing, describes how one of the young black boys on the farm dies largely as a result of the woefully inadequate medical facilities available to black people in rural areas.<sup>193</sup>

Finally, Haasbroek's story 'Die Akkoord' ('The Accord') is a disturbing fable about South Africa.<sup>194</sup> In brief, Hans and Kato are poor Afrikaner farmers, renting their land from a rich man of the district. Though childless, they have raised a black girl Motetsie as a foster-daughter; she will be their comfort in old-age. Hans is an inefficient farmer, desperately in need of money for the hire of his land. A business-minded stranger, Kirstein, arrives and proposes a financial deal to Hans. Hans will graze Kirstein's sheep on his land and after the subsequent sale of the sheep they will divide the profits gleaned at their

sale. All of this takes place, except that Kirstein refuses to pay up. Finally, however, he offers Hans his rightful share of the profit on condition that he be allowed to spend the night with Motetsie. Hans and Kato agree and Motetsie is led to her room wondering whether she is really helping her foster-parents or not.

'Die Akkoord' is an unambiguous fable about the exploitation of black people under the guise of white custodianship. Hans and Kato are representative of poor Afrikaners who have made good in recent times largely at the expense of black people. Kirstein is the New Afrikaner with few scruples in his relentless drive for profit and personal enjoyment. The satirical thrust of Haasbroek's work lies mainly in how the exploitation of Motetsie is inevitably going to bring about misery for her foster-parents, either by losing Motetsie's comforting presence entirely or at least by alienating the girl. One way or another their domestic harmony, albeit in straitened circumstances, will prove preferable to their temporary condition of wealth without any of their former accord. 'Die Akkord' implies that because of their lack of moral concern for their black countrymen and because of their short-sighted greed, Afrikaners have forgone the possibility of living in harmony in South Africa. By having sold their black compatriots short, they have condemned themselves to a future, by now a certainty in the country, of attrition and ultimately of defeat.<sup>195</sup>

It is this point which Haasbroek's story and much recent

Afrikaans short fiction is making, not only insistently but also with inventiveness. It remains an irony of history that politicians, and in the case of Afrikaans fiction, literary academics as well, are so inattentive to the warning calls being issued by writers. Indeed, the works of these writers have been doomed to the same fate as the prophecies of Cassandra: words of truth to be ignored as the ramparts burn and fall.

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#### IV Conclusion

During the 1940's, Herman Bosman, a man whose works straddle both Afrikaans and English writing traditions of the country, wrote persistently about the need for South African writers to root their works in local soil.<sup>196</sup> Where in his view Afrikaans writing, although admittedly not of 'a very high inspirational level', had surpassed English works was precisely in its commitment to South African matters and history.<sup>197</sup> He cautioned that European and American literatures, although of great inspirational value for South African writers, should not be slavishly aped by local authors.<sup>198</sup> Ironically, in the years which followed these essays of the 1940's, a kind of reversal of positions arose in South African literature. Afrikaans writing during the 1950's and 1960's abandoned its commitment to local issues. On the other hand, white English literature in South Africa, which had previously looked keenly to Europe for its values and inspiration and was regarded as a distinctly provincial and inferior tradition, began turning more emphatically towards the pressing affairs of the country.

Bosman's own works and Alan Paton's Cry, the Beloved Country (1948) were crucial early indicators of this trend which, in persisting, has brought strength and autonomy to this stream of South African writing. The Afrikaner writers, however, felt (and with hindsight we can see the flaws in their decision) that their literary tradition needed an infusion of new life from outside. A largely rural, unadventurous and old-world literature, (one scarcely fifty years old) required, in their view, modernizing. In this endeavour many Afrikaner writers not only imported a large number of the prevailing European and American subjects and themes into their works, but also leant heavily upon formal features currently favoured by writers of these two continents. Seen in terms of the development of the Afrikaans literary tradition this move, while understandable and in certain respects successful (it certainly did bring a refinement of formal techniques to the prose), also carried within it a number of liabilities. Contemporary Afrikaans criticism has adequately stressed the merits of this movement and has implied that the Sestigers formed a kind of transition between the rustic literature of the earlier decades and the major works of the 1970's and 1980's; but, it has scarcely addressed itself to the failings and problems bound up with the Sestiger endeavour. Most seriously, Afrikaner writers of the 1950's and 1960's deflected interest and concern away from grievous aspects of apartheid which their community leaders were eagerly advancing as essential for the good of the nation. For instance, apart from Jan Rabie and to a lesser extent Abraham De Vries in the field of

short fiction, there were no other Afrikaner writers of this time addressing themselves in any consistent or sustained way to the enormous social suffering being caused by the policies of the Afrikaner government: this pressing area of interest was left almost exclusively to white and black writers in English. Moreover, while there were several individual works of undeniable formal excellence during this period, certain of the stories by Barnard, Breytenbach, and De Vries for example, the preoccupation with issues and crises germane to a European reader seemed to have little relevance for an Afrikaner audience in South Africa only marginally involved in these distant affairs. The literature seemed to be promoting the idea that Afrikaners and the problems facing them were in some kind of way adjunct to those taking place in Europe and America: a provocative but ultimately unsatisfactory thesis.

It is interesting and not entirely an idle fancy to surmise what Afrikaans literature and, indeed, the cultural atmosphere of the country would have been like, if these writers of the 1950's and 1960's, instead of looking outward to non-South African cultures, had instead turned, like their fellow English writers and the generation of writers from the 1970's onward, to local issues; in this instance apartheid, of course, would have dominated their works. Certainly, Afrikaans literature and its writers would have become more politically involved and the critical qualities which emerged in works of the 1970's would have appeared and would have been developed much earlier. In

short, the literature might have been not only a thorn in the community's conscience and a critical spur for change and reforms, but might have produced a far larger range of memorable works from these two decades than we have now. For these reasons I would argue that the Sestiger literature was to a very large degree an unfortunate and wasteful phase in the country's writing. There are few major works from this period.

Things began to change in Afrikaans literature by the end of the 1960's. A younger generation of writers emerged who were openly critical of Afrikaner nationalism, and with them the older writers began, in increasing numbers, to question hitherto sacrosanct areas of the country's history and social policies. If the government was facing rising opposition and resistance from within and without the country, then many leading Afrikaner writers joined this body of criticism and rejection. Their works range from oblique satires of apartheid to outspoken condemnations of the system.

I would be committing a serious error of omission in this analysis of recent Afrikaans literature and in particular its short fiction if I were not to comment upon the critical reception of this writing since 1948. Unlike English South African literature which has always had an overseas readership and has received critical attention in journals in at least Britain and America, Afrikaans literature has an audience limited to South Africa. There are very few Afrikaans literary works in translation and its critical reception (apart from the rare

column in a Dutch or Belgian journal) has been confined to reviewers in South Africa. And, as with English writing, these South African critics have not always been of a very high calibre. Where works of English South African writing face the appraisal of foreign critics and of South African reviewers abroad and are assessed in relation to other works of world literature, Afrikaans writing has had little or no critical reception outside the country. The literature and its writers have suffered as a result of this. There are several consequences. There has been a notable insularity in Afrikaans criticism, despite many critics' eager search for foreign influences and allusions especially in the works of the Sestiger writers. Like the writers, many of the critics of the 1950's and 1960's scarcely paused to consider the ramifications and problems attendant upon the works of these decades. Further, there has been a steadfast avoidance by Afrikaner critics to set the literary works in a wider context than the narrow confines of Afrikaans literary history itself. Afrikaans literary works have therefore scarcely ever been assessed in relation to patterns in South African history and in comparison with works written in English. The scant evidence of a comparative analysis of these works has been mainly in relation to European and American literatures, with Afrikaans literary works being fashionably aligned with prevailing trends in these continents.<sup>199</sup>

Afrikaans literature of the 1970's and 1980's has suffered lamentably as a result of these shortcomings among its literary

critics. The critical qualities and energy of much of this writing itself has scarcely been remarked on. The case of P.J. Haasbroek and M.C. Botha is especially instructive in this instance. These two writers have produced a small number of outstanding stories of social criticism and satire which have received little more than the briefest of comments in the reviews of their short story collections.<sup>200</sup> Unlike the writers, Afrikaner critics have been exceptionally loath to involve themselves in critical debate about those issues in the country which have increasingly come to dominate the literature. Indeed, it is almost without exception that some of the best criticism has come not from the critics but from the writers themselves. Essays by Chris Barnard, Hennie Aucamp, Breyten Breytenbach, and M.C. Botha have been at the cutting edge of literary debate in this community.<sup>201</sup> Indeed, it is telling that one of the most valuable works about recent Afrikaans literature was written in English by Jack Cope and was consciously designed by him not to be too scholarly or academic in approach.<sup>202</sup>

This situation is regrettable for all concerned. There are indications, however, that younger critics such as Gerrit Olivier and Ampie Coetzee are emerging who are doing much to redress the damage and to correct the omissions which have dominated contemporary Afrikaans literary criticism. Certainly, the writers deserve this. Afrikaans literature, and its short fiction which is one of its most successful forms, is more than simply a cultural wing of Afrikaner nationalism. Its literary

history, although of limited age, is filled with fascinating works and debates, not least of which is the longstanding and developing tension between the writers and their community. It is high time that critics addressed themselves more seriously to this literature which is intimately bound up with the destiny of South Africa and is increasingly finding common cause with its companion literature in the country, that of the black and white English writers.

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NOTES

1. These are the conventions which I have followed in this chapter. In all quotations from Afrikaans stories the Afrikaans original precedes the English translation which follows it in parentheses. In most cases there are no published translations of Afrikaans stories and the translations here are my own. Where there are translations these have been quoted and they are recorded in the appropriate footnotes. In the case of quotations from works of Afrikaans criticism I have translated the relevant passages which appear in the text and the original and its source is given in the corresponding footnote.
2. The issue of black South African writers using English as the language for their literary works is fully discussed on pp. 371 and pp. 394 - 5 of this study.
3. On the urban migration of the Afrikaners see F.A. Van Jaarsveld's essay 'Die Afrikaner se Groot Trek na die Stede 1886 - 1976' (in Die Kultuurontplooiing van die Afrikaner, ed. P.G. Nel (Pretoria & Cape Town, HAUM, 1979)). A further seminal essay on Afrikaner history is Herman Giliomee's 'The Development of the Afrikaner's Self-Concept' (in Looking at the Afrikaner Today. Views of Compatriots and Foreigners, ed Hendrik W. Van Der Merwe (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1975)).
4. Interview with Abraham H. De Vries in Cape Town, 16th March 1983. A number of the Afrikaner writers whom I interviewed concurred with this view of the Sestiger writers and their political outlooks, and the changes these underwent towards the end of the 1960's and during the 1970's. In particular, the interviews with Jan Rabie, Hennie Aucamp, and Chris Barnard, which were held in Cape Town and Johannesburg in March and April 1983.
5. A number of the major crises and scandals facing the National Party government during the 1970's and early 1980's have been first and foremost, the growing involvement in bush-wars, most of which were being fought on foreign territory; the Information Department scandal; the Salem oil scandal; the emergence of right wing Afrikaner political parties and para-military groups breaking away from the fold of the governing party; a series of exposés about the Broederbond; the Seychelles invasion which turned into a gross fiasco; irregularities in the figures of Nasionale Pers, a large government-controlled media and publishing corporation; and, finally the débâcle surrounding Breyten Breytenbach.
6. The term 'gemoedelike lokale realisme' ('genial local realism') was used by Van Wyk Louw in his Dutch radio talks of 1957 - 1958 and was further developed in his crucially important survey of Afrikaans prose Vernuwing in die Prosa (Cape Town, 1961).
7. Hasek, Jaroslav: The Good Soldier Schweik (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1983). The Schweik stories were written from 1920 until 1923.

8. Rabie, Jan: 'Drie kaalkoppe eet tesame' from 21 which is included in his Versamelerhale (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1980, p. 9). The English translation is Rabie's and is drawn from an unpublished manuscript of the story 'Three Bald Heads Dine Together', which he kindly passed on to me.

9. Rabie, Jan: 'n Vlermuis in die Park' (from 21 in the collection Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 19 -20).

10. Rabie, Jan: 'Skelle Modder' (from 21 in the collection Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 26 & 27).

11. Brink, André: Jan Rabie se 21 (Blokboek No. 23, Pretoria & Cape Town, Academica, 1977, p. 9). Jan Rabie's 'La promenade en chien' is from 21 and appears in his Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 20 -21.

12. Epigraph of Katastrofes by Breyten Breytenbach (Johannesburg, Afrikaanse Pers-Boekhandel, 1964; new edition by Human & Rousseau, Cape Town & Pretoria, 1981 - all page references are to the new edition, p. 5.)

13. Breytenbach, Breyten: 'Opsomming van 'n toeris se verslag by sy tuiskoms' (from Katastrofes, op. cit., pp. 77 and 78).

14. Barnard, Chris: 'Woestyn' from the collection Dwaal (Johannesburg, Afrikaanse Pers-Boekhandel, 1964, p. 11).

15. Barnard, Chris: 'Meineed' from Dwaal, op. cit., p. 144.

16. See Brink's account of Duiwel-in-die-Bos in his essay 'Die Prosa na 1900' ( in Inleiding tot die Afrikaanse Letterkunde, ed. Ernst Lindenberg (Pretoria & Cape Town, Academica, 5th edition of 1973, especially p. 118).

17. Barnard, Chris: 'Die Swaar Vrou' from the collection Duiwel-in-die-Bos (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1968, p. 43).

18. 'Passenger in Transit' appears in De Vries's collection Vliegoog (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1965, pp. 43 - 52).

19. The final line of the story is the landlady's reply to Walter's lady-friend: "Meneer was vannag weer op reis" ("Sir was away again on a journey"), Vliegoog, op. cit., p. 52.

20. De Vries's collection of sketches about the Little Karoo of the 1960's is his Dorp in die Klein Karoo (Johannesburg, Afrikaanse Per-Boekhandel, 1966).

21. 'Troebel dobbelsteentjies' appears in Breytenbach's collection Katastrofes, op. cit., pp. 75 - 76.

D.J. Opperman, the Afrikaans poet and critic, wrote incisively of Katastrofes in 1965:

'One of the notable features in this work of Breytenbach's is, as is frequently the case with painters, the partiality for self-portraiture. These self-portraits differ essentially from the narcissism of the Dertigers [the Afrikaner writers of the 1930's], and perhaps come somewhat closer to the self-mockery of Peter Blum [poet of the 1950's]. It is clearly not an end in itself: the self-portraiture has become here a means of depicting human deficiency, human self-conceit, and human insignificance. It's an egocentric portrayal which perceives us and the contemporary world intelligently, with strong sensory perception, with rich imagination, wittily, but also with sympathy.'

Opperman's original text reads in Afrikaans:

'Een van die opvallende eienskappe in hierdie werk van Breytenbach is, soos dikwels by skilders, die voorliefde vir selfportrettering. Hierdie selfportrette verskil wesentlik van die Dertiger se narcissisme, kom miskien effens nader aan Peter Blum se selfspot. Dis duidelik nie 'n doel op sigself nie, die selfportrettering het hier middel geword tot uitbeelding van menslike tekort, menslike eiwaan, en menslike onbeduidenheid. Dis 'n egosentriese tekening wat óns en die tydgenootlike wêreld intelligent, sterk sintuiglik, verbeeldingryk, geestig maar ook simpatiek sien.'

This passage is drawn from Opperman's statement about why he, as one of the judges of the 1965 APB Prize, had chosen Breytenbach's works (Katastrofes and Die Ysterkoei moet Sweet) as the best Afrikaans literary works of 1964. (From Verspreide Opstelle by D.J. Opperman (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1977).

22. 'Terug na die natuur' appears in De Vries's collection Twee Maal om die Son (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1969 pp. 67 - 79).

23. 'Armed Vision' appears in Aucamp's collection 'n Bruidsbed vir Tant Nonnie (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1970 pp. 83 - 90).

24. Grové, Henriette: 'So vroeg-vroeg in die Môre' from the collection Jaarringe (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1966, p. 148).

25. Grové, Henriette: 'Dow en Fransiena' first appeared in Standpunte (Vol. XX, No. 6 (No. 72), August 1967, p. 9). It has subsequently been collected in the volume Die Kêrel van die Pêrel of Anatomie van 'n Leuenaar (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1983, p. 138).

26. Ibid., p. 10 (Standpunte) and p. 139 (Die Kêrel van die Pêrel).

27. For example, the titles of all of Gordimer's story collections are drawn from individual stories within the respective volume; and, so too, with H.C. Bosman, Alan Paton, Dan Jacobson, Jack Cope, Peter Wilhelm, Christopher Hope, Barney Simon, and virtually all of the black story writers. Sheila Roberts's first collection Outside Life's Feast is a refreshing break from this rather monotonous convention among the English short-fiction writers.

28. See, for example, 'Jan Rabie in gesprek met Elsa Joubert' (in Gesprekke met Skrywers 3 (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1973, p. 80, in particular); 'Abraham De Vries in Gesprek met Chris Barnard' (in Gesprekke met Skrywers 3, op. cit.). Barnard also mentioned the influence of the surrealists on his writing of the mid-1960's in our interview, April 22nd 1983, Johannesburg.

29. cf. Jean Lombard: 'One event does not necessarily lead to the following; one thought is rather connected with another on associative grounds'. The Afrikaans original reads: 'Die een gebeurtenis lei nie noodwendig tot die volgende nie; die een gedagte word eerder op assosiatiewe wyse met die ander geskakel'. This quotation is from Jean Lombard's unpublished M.A. dissertation, Die Kort-kortverhaal in Afrikaans (University of Stellenbosch, 1979, p. 37).

30. Breytenbach, Breyten: 'Bergen' from the collection Katastrofes, op. cit., p. 16.

31. Aucamp, Hennie: 'Staalkaart: 'n denkbeeldige bloemlesing uit

die verhale van en rondom die jare sestig' ( in Kort voor Lank: Opstelle oor kortprosa tekste (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1978, p. 24).

32. Barnard, Chris: 'Hoogsomernag' from Duiwel-in-die-Bos, op. cit., p. 89.

33. Barnard, Chris: 'Bos' from Duiwel-in-die-Bos, op. cit., p.

55. Barnard refers to 'Bos' as a kind of poem in his essay, 'Die Afrikaanse Kortverhaal' ('The Afrikaans Short Story') which appears in Die Sestigters, ed. Jim Polley (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1973, p. 95).

34. Later in this chapter reference will be made to stories of this period set in Europe which establish a very palpable link with events taking place in South Africa. See the discussion (pp. 269 -272 ) of Aucamp's 'Ma Petite Negresse', 'When the Saints go marching In'. and De Vries's 'Die Muis'.

35. Aucamp, Hennie: 'Die vals noot in die Herinnering' from In Een Kraal, ed. Elize Botha (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1979, p. 31).

Aucamp's original text in Afrikaans reads as follows:

'Is daar skerper herinnerings as jehgerinnerings? Dis die ondergrond vir sovele gedagtes wat nog gedink moet word. Maar ek pleit vir groter dissipline by die herinnering, groter werklikheidsbesef. Want nostalgie kan so maklik steriel raak.'

36. 'n Brief van Giepie, Meester' appears in De Vries's collection Verlore Erwe (Cape Town & Pretoria, HAUM, 1958).

37. 'Naelstring' appears in Barnard's first collection Bekende Onrus (Pretoria, Van Schaik, 1961).

38. The most famous of this kind of narrative is Alan Paton's novel, Cry, the Beloved Country (1948); and an Afrikaans novel of this type is Frans Venter's Swart Pelgrim (1952; revised edition, 1958).

39. cf. Mbulelo Mzamane's Jola stories in his collection Mzala (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1980), which are a direct response to the 'Jim comes to Jo'burg' narratives. Mzamane's character not only survives in the city, but, after having swiftly learnt its ways, turns the experiences of the city to his rich advantage. Mzala uJola is a far cry from the pathetic figure of the 'Jim comes to Jo'burg' stories.

40. The Little Karoo of De Vries's youth features prominently in his first three collections, Hoog teen die heuningkrans, Verlore Erwe, Vetkers en Neonlig, as well as in later works such as Dorp in Die Klein Karoo, Briekwa, Bliksoldate Bloei Nie, and Die Uur van die Idiote. In Barnard's case the Eastern Transvaal countryside of his boyhood appears frequently in his Chriskras collections and in the setting of a small number of his Duiwel-in-die-Bos stories.

41. Aucamp, Hennie: 'Rust-mijn-ziel: 'n aandgesang' from the collection Hangerblom-vyf elegieë (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1972, p. 39).

42. Ibid., p. 39.

43. Aucamp, Hennie: 'Jamestown: 'n herinnering' from In Een Kraal, op. cit., p. 208.

44. 'Van die Plaas af' appears in a collection of stories written by Aucamp and Margaret Bakkes entitled 'n Baksel in die More - Boerestories uit die Stormberge (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1973).

45. Aucamp, Hennie: 'Portret van 'n Ouma' from the collection Spitsuur (Cape Town, John Malherbe, 1967, p. 11). The translation is that of Ian Ferguson in his volume of selected stories from Aucamp's oeuvre entitled House Visits (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1983, p. 30). I would suggest that the phrase 'teen wil en dank' is better translated as 'willy nilly' than Ian Ferguson's 'against my will'. ' 'n Bruidsbed vir Tant Nonnie' is the title story of Aucamp's collection of that name op. cit., pp. 24 - 31.

46. Ibid., p. 12 (Spitsuur); the translation p. 31 (House Visits).

47. See Henriette Grové's 'Aantekeninge by die toekenning van die CNA-prys' (in Standpunte, Vol XX, No. 5, (No. 71), June 1967, p. 66).

It is interesting that Herman Bosman who treated the rural world of the Afrikaner in a critical way, in many respects not unlike the approach adopted by Grové, made similar observations about the countryside as the site of complex human entanglements. See pp. 67 - 68 of this study.

48. Ibid., p. 66.

Grové's Afrikaans original reads:

'As jy oor 'n plaas skryf met waaragtige kennis, dan sal jou beeld verwikkeld wees, onsentimenteel en onretories...' (My underlining).

49. 'Die Bethlehem Ster' appears in Grové's collection Jarringe, op. cit., pp. 51 - 60.

50. 'Liesbeth Slaap Uit' also appears in Jaaringe, op. cit., pp. 21 - 37.

51. Grové, Henriette: 'Vakansie vir 'n hengelaar' from Jaaringe, op. cit., pp. 61 - 2.

52. Grové, Henriette: 'Douw en Fransiena', op. cit., p. 5, (Standpunte) and p. 129 (Die Kêrel van die Pêrel).

53. 'Dood van 'n Maagd' appears in Jaaringe, op. cit., pp. 124 - 147; 'Haar naam was Hanna' appears in Winterreis: Drie Vertellings (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1971, pp. 91 - 136).

54. It is interesting to speculate why Die Huisgenoot, a staunchly conservative journal, could have accepted Smit's powerful story of protest. I would suggest that the story was so revolutionary in Afrikaans literature that the editors of Die Huisgenoot probably accepted it on the grounds of it being a kind of fantasy work: an unreal fable!

55. 'Ek vat my Land' by Smit first appeared in Die Huisgenoot (28th September 1951). It was later collected by Hennie Aucamp in the anthology, Bolder (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1973, pp. 32 - 42). For biographical details about Bartho Smit see Kannemeyer's History of Afrikaans Literature, Vol.2, (Pretoria & Cape Town, Academica, 1983, p. 430).

56. The English version of 'Death of the Zulu' by Uys Krige first appeared in The South African Saturday Book: a treasury of

writing and pictures of South Africa, old and new, homely and extraordinary ed. Eric Rosenthal and Richard Robinow (Cape Town, Hutchinson, 1948). It also appears in Krige's collection The Dream and the Desert (London, Collins, 1953).

57. Smit, Bartho: 'Ek vat my Land' from Bolder, op. cit., p. 32.

58. Ibid., p. 37.

59. 'Die Groot Vrot' appears in Rabie's collection Die roos aan die pels (1966) which is included in his collected stories, Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 190 - 198.

Elsa Joubert's 'Agterplaas' appears in her collection Melk (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1980, pp. 59 - 69).

On the rejection of the earth motif cf. Bosman's story 'Funeral Earth' and J.M. Coetzee's novel In the Heart of the Country (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1976).

60. Smit, Bartho: 'Ek vat my Land' from Bolder, op. cit., p. 42.

61. King Lear: Act III, sc. iv.

Lear: 'Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are/That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,/How shall your houseless heads unfed sides,/Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you/From seasons such as these?'

62. Smit, Bartho: 'Ek vat my Land' from Bolder, op. cit., p. 39.

63. Ibid., p. 41.

64. See my discussion about communal theft and the way in which the white and black South African communities lie to one another in my discussion of these stories by Mphahlele, pp. 411 - 412 and p. 421 of this study.

65. Smit, Bartho: 'Ek vat my Land' from Bolder, op. cit., p. 40.

66. Ibid., p. 40.

67. Ibid., p. 34.

68. 'Droogte' appears in 21 and is collected in Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 33 - 35; it was written in December 1951. 'Die Groot Vrot' (sources given above in note 59.) was written by Rabie in September 1964.

69. Rabie, Jan: 'Droogte' from 21 which appears in Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 33 - 34. The translation is Rabie's, and his English version of this story appears in Afrikaans Short Stories. ed. F.V. Lategan, M.W. Smuts, and Hymne Weiss (Johannesbrug, Nasionale Boekhandel, 1964, p. 191).

70. Rabie, Jan: 'Die Groot Vrot' from 21 and in Versamelerhale, op. cit., p. 191. The translation, which varies in places from the text I quote, is from an unpublished English version of the story, 'The Great Rot', translated by Rabie and Jack Cope, which Rabie kindly passed on to me; p. 2. of this ms.

71. Ibid., p. 195 (Versamelerhale); the translation p. 7 (Rabie/Cope ms.)

72. Ibid., p. 190 (Versamelerhale); the translation p. 1. (Rabie/Cope ms.).

73. Ibid., p. 197 (Versamelerhale); the translation p. 9 (Rabie/Cope ms.).

74. Ibid., p. 197 (Versamelerhale); the translation pp. 9 - 10 (Rabie/Cope ms.).

75. 'Die Muise' appears in De Vries's collection Dubbeldoor (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1963, pp. 21 - 29).

De Vries mentioned his fear of having his work censored and his decision therefore to use European references as a way to avoid falling foul of the South African censor in our discussion - Interview with Abraham De Vries, Cape Town, 16th March 1983.

76. Interview with Abraham De Vries, Cape Town, 16th March 1983.

77. Anita Lindenberg has written pertinently about this story:

'Adolf's illusions are projections of problems which actually exist in South Africa. Passion for authority, coupled with the irrational impulse of racism, send him on a course of disaster. There is considerable dramatic irony in the situation: in reality there is no threat for him and his "wife", his world is pathetic rather than filled with danger, but his abnormal reaction creates the danger - for himself and for others.

The original Afrikaans of this passage reads:

'Adolf se illusies is projeksies van die probleme wat wel in die Suid Afrikaanse situasie bestaan... Magsdrif, gepaard met die irrasionele impulse van rassisme, stuur hom op 'n ramp af. Daar is heelwat dramatiese ironie in die situasie: in der waarheid is daar vir hom en sy "vrou" geen bedreiging nie, sy wêreld is pateties eerder as gevaarvol, maar sy abnormale reaksie skep die gevaar - vir hom en vir anders.'

This passage occurs in Anita Lindenberg's critical profile 'Abraham De Vries' (in Perspekief en Profiel, ed. P.J. Nienaber, Johannesburg, Perskor, 1982, p. 573).

78. Interview with Abrahams De Vries, Cape Town, 16th March 1983.

79. 'When the Saints go Marching In' and 'Ma Petite Nègresse' appear in Aucamp's collection Spitsuur, op. cit., pp. 79 - 89 and pp. 90 - 97, respectively.

80. Aucamp told me that the story was based on his visit to a concert in Belgium by the Afro-American singer, Mahalia Jackson. Interview with Hennie Aucamp, Stellenbosch, 17th March 1983.

81. Aucamp, Hennie: 'When the Saints Go Marching In' from Spitsuur, op. cit., p. 80. The translation is that of Ian Ferguson from House Visits, op. cit., p. 69. I have added in parentheses two phrases in translation which are omitted by Ian Ferguson.

82. Aucamp, Hennie: 'Ma Petite Nègresse' from Spitsuur, op. cit., pp. 94 - 96.

83. 'A Long Way from London' is the title story of Dan Jacobson's collection of 1958.

84. 'Wit op Swart' appeared in Dakkamer en Agterplaas (1957) and is collected in Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 120 - 124; it was written in April 1954. 'n Koekie Seep' appeared in Die roos aan die Pels (1966) and is in Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 177 - 182; it was written in July 1964.

85. Rabie, Jan: 'Wit op Swart' in Versamelerhale, op. cit., p. 123.

86. 'The Living and the Dead' is the title story of Mphahlele's story collection of 1961. 'Black' appears in Wilhelm's first collection, LM (1975).

87. 'Die meisie met die bra-pistool' appears in De Vries's collection Vliegoog, op. cit., pp. 25 - 31.

88. 'Die uur van die Idiote' is the title story of Die van die Idiote (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1980 pp. 9 - 17).
89. De Vries, Abraham: 'Die meisie met die bra-pistool' from Vleigoog., op. cit., pp. 25, 26 & 30.
90. Ibid., p. 31.
91. Ibid., p. 31.
92. Black characters are absent in all of Breytenbach's stories of the 1960's.
93. 'Jaffie leer' appeared in Rabie's Dakkamer en Agterplaas and is collected in Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 127 - 134.
94. Ibid., p. 134.
95. Tsotsi was written by Fugard in the late 1950's and early 1960's, but was only published in 1980. 'Sponono' appears in Paton's collection Debbie Go Home (1961); 'The Park' appeared in the anthology Quartet (1963) and is the title story of Matthews' selected stories of 1983; 'Willieboy' appears in Rive's African Songs (1963); 'The Urchin' appears in the posthumous collection of Themba's writing, The Will to Die (1973).
96. 'God se Bobbejaan' appeared in Rabie's Die roos aan die pels and in Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 198 - 207; 'Houtbaai Blues' appears in De Vries's Dubbeldoor, op. cit., pp. 61 - 73; and 'Brood (3)' is from the collection Twee maal om die son, op. cit., pp. 80 - 87.
97. Rabie's Bolandia novels are: Eiland voor Afrika (1964); Die Groot anders-maak (1964); Waar jy sterwe (1966); and Ark (1977). 'Die Klipblom' and 'Khoib en die see' are both from Die roos aan die pels and appear in Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 152 - 160 and pp. 166 - 177, respectively; 'Winter, Onrusrivier, 1971' first appeared in collection in Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 212 - 218.
98. The stories which describe the relationship between the black and white boy are 'Een somermiddag' ('One Summer's afternoon'). 'Die Dood van 'n tortel' ('The Death of a turtle-dove'), and 'Op die drumpel' ('On the threshold') from Aucamp's Een Somermiddag (Cape Town & Pretoria, HAUM, 1963); and the story 'Die Dassie' ('The dassie') from 'n Bruidsbed vir Tant Nonnie, op. cit.,
99. 'Seth 'n Sam' is from Peter Wilhelm's collection At the End of a War (1981).
100. 'Sop vir die sieke' appears in Aucamp's Spitsuur, op. cit., pp. 62 - 65.
101. 'Mrs. Plum' appears in Mphahlele's collection In Corner B (1966); 'Happy Event' is from Gordimer's Six Feet of the Country (1956); and 'Modus Vivendi' is from Macphail's Falling Upstairs (1982).
102. Aucamp, Hennie: 'Sop vir die sieke' from Spitsuur, op. cit., p. 65; the translation is from House Visits, op. cit., p. 116.
103. 'Die hartseerwals' and 'Die Kaledonner' are from Aucamp's collection Die Hartseerwals (Johannesburg, Perskor, 1965; revised edition, 1972, pp. 1 - 10, and pp. 19 - 34, respectively).
- 'Portret van 'n Ouma' is from Spitsuur, op. cit., pp. 11 - 20.

104. 'Houtbaai Blues' and 'Woorde met Voete' are from Dubbeldoor, op. cit.
105. I am thinking in particular of some of the poetry of I.D. Du Plessis.
106. De Vries, Abraham: 'Houtbaai Blues' from Dubbeldoor, op. cit., p. 64.
107. Ibid., p. 67.
108. Rabie's 'Moeder koei', 'Lied oor niemansland', and 'Die nuwe piramides' from 21; Breytenbach's 'Kersverhaal 1' and 'Kersverhaal 2' in Katastrofes; De Vries's 'Die Muis', 'Brood', 'Brood (2)', and 'In die huis van my vader' from Dubbeldoor and Vliegoog.
109. I am grateful to the Afrikaans writer Piet Haasbroek with whom I discussed a number of these ideas in our interview. It is noteworthy that Haasbroek's works, as I hope to show, exemplify many of the points which I am making in this argument. Interview with P.J. Haasbroek, Pretoria, 14th April 1983.
110. 'Aardrykskundefles' appears in P.J. Haasbroek's collection Roofvis (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1975, p. 9); Welma Odendaal's 'Vryheidsvegter', 'LM', 'Baker', and 'Grens' are from her volume Keerkring (Johannesburg, Perskor, 1977, pp. 37 - 47, pp. 51 - 59, pp. 60 - 77, and pp. 78 - 82, respectively).
111. The Can Themba stories are all from The Will to Die (1973). Casey Motisi's 'Boy-boy', which was written in the early 1960's appears in Casey & Co. (1978).
112. 'Life for a Life' is from Paton's collection Debbie Go Home (1961).
113. Jack Cope's 'The Bastards' comes from his collection Alley Cat (1973); Wilhelm's 'All the Days of my Death' is from his At the End of a War (1981); Matshoba's 'A Glimpse of Slavery' appears in Call Me Not a Man (1979); La Guma's 'Out of Darkness' comes from the anthology Quartet (1963); and Matthews's 'Crucifixion' from his collected stories, The Park (1983).
114. 'Anatomieles' by Piet Haasbroek appears in Roofvis, op. cit., pp. 29 - 30. Jan Rabie's 'Dies Irae' was first collected in Versamelerhale, op. cit., pp. 220 - 240. I shall return to these two stories later in this chapter, (pp. 309 - 310 and p. 328, respectively).
115. 'Dood vann 'n Maagd' is from Grové's collection Jaarringe, op. cit.
116. In our interview Miles acknowledged all of the influences mentioned here and also remarked on the strong impression Faulkner's novels As I Lay Dying and The Sound and the Fury had had on him while writing the stories of Lief nie op straat nie. Interview with John Miles, Johannesburg, 25th April 1983.
117. Interview with John Miles, Johannesburg, 25th April 1983.
118. Miles, John: 'Liefs nie op straat nie' from the collection Liefs nie op Straat nie (Cape Town, Buren, 1970, pp. 70 - 71).
119. These points were confirmed by Miles in our interview; Johannesburg, 25th April 1983.
120. cf. in this regard Chinua Achebe's novel A Man of the People.

121. It is interesting and indeed revealing, that Haasbroek, who of all the South African writers conveys the nature of the bush-wars most successfully and with most conviction, has never been part of these conflicts, never having served in the South African Defence Force in what is euphemistically called an operational area. His stories are based on reading and careful observation of these events and their effects. (Interview with P.J. Haasbroek, Pretoria, 14th April 1983).
122. 'Twee Terroriste' appears in Haasbroek's first collection Heupvuur (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1974 pp. 45 - 47).
123. Incidentally, the country is never named but only alluded to in the story. However, the colours of the flag of Portuguese East Africa as well as other small details suggest its location.
124. 'Afskeid' appears in Haasbroek's Verby die Vlakte (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1982, pp. 70 - 74).
125. Ibid., p. 73.
126. 'Aardrykskunderles' and 'Anatomieles' appear in the collection Roofvis, op. cit.
127. Haasbroek, P.J.: 'Aardrykskunderles' from Roofvis, op. cit., p. 9.
128. Ibid., p. 9.
129. Ibid., p. 9.
130. Ibid., p. 9.
131. Ibid., p. 9.
132. Haasbroek, P.J.: 'Anatomieles' from Roofvis, op. cit., p. 29.
133. Ibid., p. 30.
134. Odendaal, Welma: 'Vryheidsvegter' from her collection Keerkring (Johnnesbrug, Perskor, 1977, p. 37).
135. Odendaal, Welma: 'Baker' from Keerkring, op. cit., pp. 66-67.
136. cf. Peter Wilhelm's images of white South Africans in his story 'LM'. See my discussion of this on pp. 133 - 135 of this study.
137. Odendaal, Welma: 'Baker' from Keerkring, op. cit., pp. 74 - 75.
138. On the basis of this argument it is not mere condescension to see André Brink's novels of the 1970's and Elsa Joubert's Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena (1978) as major achievements within Afrikaans literature, yet of rather less merit when measured against the English literary tradition of South Africa.
139. I include within the same category as these stories, although they are of distinctly weaker calibre, the stories in J.C. Steyn's collection Op Pad na die Grens (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1976).
140. Apart from Haasbroek's and Odendaal's stories about the bush-wars there are a number of other Afrikaans works of short fiction on this subject. See, for example, J.C. Steyn's Op Pad na die Grens, op. cit.; John Coetzee's Verby die Wit Brug (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1978); the title story of Elsa Joubert's Melk, op. cit.; the title story of Etienne Van Heerden's My Kubaan

(Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1983); George Weidman's collection Tuin, van Klip en Vuur (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1983); and Alexander Strachan's collection 'n Wêreld Sonder Grense (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1984).

141. Breytenbach, Breyten: Mouiroir (bespieëlende notas van 'n roman) (Johannesburg, Taurus, 1983); and, the British edition of this collection, Mouiroir: mirror notes of a novel (London, Faber, 1984).

142. Breytenbach, Breyten: True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist (Johannesburg, Taurus, 1983; and London, Faber, 1984).

143. See Bosman's Cold Stone Jug and Willemsdorp which appear in his Collected Works (1981).

144. Breytenbach, Breyten: 'Die Dubbele sterwe van 'n ordinêre krimineel' from Mouiroir, op. cit. p. 41 (Taurus edition) and pp. 52 - 53 (Faber edition).

145. I shall consider Breytenbach's piece 'Max Sec (Beverly Hills) from Mouiroir in the following section of this chapter (p. 326 - 7).

For a similar observation about black society in South Africa see my discussion of Elsa Joubert's story 'Agterplaas' on pp. 329 - 332 of this chapter.

146. Botha M.C.: 'Die einde van 'n kluisenaar se lewe' from the collection Die einde van 'n kluisenaar se lewe (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1982, p.13).

147. Botha, M.C.: ' 'n Storie in wording (die werklikheid ontleed)' from Die Prys wat jy moet betaal (Johannesburg, Perskor, 1982, p. 8).

148. Botha, M.C. 'Frans Malan' from Die einde van 'n kluisenaar se lewe, op. cit., p. 27.

149. Ibid., p. 27.

150. The name of the black man, Spandeel, is in itself suggestive. By reversing its parts one has 'deel (van die) span' - 'part (of the) team', implying his part in the common humanity which the white South Africans ignore in their dealings with him and his like.

151. Botha, M.C.: 'Frans Malan', op. cit., p. 28.

152. Ibid., p. 30.

153. Ibid., pp. 35 - 36.

154. Botha, M.C.: 'Die kort lewe van 'n gemiddelde man' from the collection Skertse (1976 - 1979) (Johannesburg, Taurus, 1981, p. 5).

155. Ibid., pp. 5 -6.

156. Ibid., p. 8.

157. Ibid., p. 9.

158. 'Ongetiteld 3' appears in Botha's Die einde van 'n kluisenaar se lewe, op. cit., pp. 57 - 59.

159. Ibid., p. 59.

160. Ibid., p. 59.

161. Ibid., p. 59.

162. 'Die bieg and 'On the Rocks' appear in Hennie Aucamp's collection Wolwedans-'n soort revue (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1973, pp. 34 - 37, and pp. 57 - 62, respectively).

163. Although 'Max Sec (Beverly Hills)' is an English story by Breytenbach it seems more appropriate to discuss it in a chapter on Afrikaans rather than English short fiction, as the bulk of his work has been written in Afrikaans; moreover, it appears in a South African edition of Mouir containing pieces both in English and Afrikaans.
164. Breytenbach, Breyten: 'Max Sec (Beverly Hills)' from Mouir, op. cit., p. 96 (Taurus edition) and p. 110 (Faber edition).
165. Ibid., p. 97 (Taurus edition) and p. 111 (Faber edition).
166. 'Dies Irae' appears in Rabie's Versamelingverhale, op. cit., pp. 220 - 240.
167. 'Die uur van die idiote' is the title story of De Vries's collection published in 1980.
168. 'Agterplaas' by Elsa Joubert appears in her collection, Melk (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1980, pp. 59 - 69).
169. Ibid., p. 59.
170. Ibid., p. 59.
171. Ibid., p. 69.
172. Ibid., p. 60.
173. Ibid., pp. 64 - 65.
174. Interestingly, there is a glancing reference to the African National Congress in this story. One of the leading character's neighbours, Jana, had been implicated in an A.N.C. conspiracy and had appeared in court under this charge. She is now viewed by the white villagers as a strange (possibly unhinged) yet agreeably eccentric.
175. 'One for Sorrow' is the final story in Welma Odendaal's collection Getuie vir die Naaktes (Johannesburg, Perskor, 1974, pp. 73 - 79).
176. cf. a similar episode in Alex La Guma's story 'Out of Darkness' from the anthology Quartet ed. Rive (1963).
177. 'Laas somer' is from Odendaal's collection Keerkring, op. cit., pp. 15 - 25.
178. See, for example, the stories 'Die Pad noorde toe', 'Alles om die belange van Piet Koordt', 'Charlie Kruis was gewoond aan dinge hier', 'Die Pro van Wes-Ende', and 'Vir Lisa' from Getuie vir die Naaktes; and the stories 'Portret' and 'Houvrou' from Keerkring.
179. Botha, M.C.: 'Uitspraak voorbehou' from Die Prys wat jy moet betaal, op. cit., p. 69.
180. See pp. 237 - 240 and pp. 246 - 257 of this chapter.
181. ' 'n Storie in wording' and 'Die prys wat jy moet betaal' are from the collection Die prys wat jy moet betaal, op. cit.; and 'Oor Skryf' is from Die einde van 'n kluisenaar se lewe, op. cit.
182. Botha, M.C.: 'Die prys wat jy moet betaal' from Die prys wat jy moet betaal, op. cit., p. 82.
183. The concluding section of 'Die prys wat jy moet betaal' is directed most specifically against novels by André Brink and Elsa Joubert, which like Lukas's magnum opus, have stitched together episodes of black suffering. Two of the novels, Brink's A Dry

White Season ('n Droë Wit Seisoen) and Joubert's Poppy (Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena), again like Lucas's work, have received almost universal praise by white audiences and critics both in South Africa and elsewhere. One could add to the list of novels of this kind Wessel Ebersohn's barely-disguised account of the death of Steve Biko Store up the Anger and his novel A Lonely Place to Die.

184. In an article entitled 'South Africans Abroad: Black Writers/White Writers' (from Africa Events, November 1984), Lewis Nkosi deals with precisely some of the issues raised in Botha's story: namely, how white authors who have exploited black suffering in their novels are received with adulation by white readers and critics in the West at the expense of black writers who have treated the same subject with a great deal more tact and with greater skill.

185. Brink, André: Review of Die Prys wat jy Moet Betaal (in Rapport, 29th August 1982).

186. Jonathan Swift: Preface to The Battel of the Books, in A Tale of a Tub, The Battel of the Books and the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit, ed. by A.C. Guthkelch and D. NicholSmith, second edition (Oxford, 1973), p. 215).

187. See my discussion of these failings in Afrikaans criticism in the conclusion of this chapter. I might add that when I spoke to M.C. Botha he expressed a kind of glee, and yet at the same time a kind of dismay, that Brink and others had failed or were reluctant to consider the nature of his satire in any way at all in this and other of his collections. Interview with M.C. Botha, Pretoria, 21st February 1983.

188. See my discussion of Afrikaans stories of the 1950's and 1960's which dealt with the countryside on pp. 246 - 257 of this chapter.

189. 'Jamestown: 'n herinnering' appears in In Een Kraal, op. cit., pp. 203 - 208; ' 'n Skryn langs die pad' appears in Aucamp's collection Enkelvlug (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1978, pp. 44 - 48).

190. 'n Stillewe met blomme' appears in Enkelvlug, op. cit., pp. 36 - 39.

191. 'Vir Vier Stemme' appears in Aucamp's Volmink (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1981, pp. 56 - 77).

192. 'n Onverwagte nattigheidjie' appears in Barnard's Chriskras (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1972, pp. 133 - 136).

193. 'Raam' appears in De Vries's collection Die Uur van die Idioote, op. cit., pp. 45 - 52.

194. 'Die Akkoord' by Haasbroek appears in his collection Verby die Vlakte, op. cit., pp. 81 - 94.

195. Two other major stories dealing with the violence and the grotesqueries of the South African countryside are Odendaal's 'Alles om die belange van Piet Koordt' from Getuie vir die Naaktes, pp. 13 - 18; and, Haasbroek's 'Die begeerlikheid van die vlees' from Roofvis, pp. 66-76.

196. See, for example, Bosman's essay 'An Indigenous South African Culture is Unfolding' from the South African Opinion of April 1944 which is quoted in Valerie Rosenberg's biography Sunflower to the Sun (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1977, p. 168). I quote a relevant passage from this essay on p. 29 - 30 of my Bosman chapter.

197. Bosman, H.C.: 'Aspects of South African Literature' (in Trek, September 1948). This essay appears in Bosman's Uncollected Essays compiled by Valerie Rosenberg (Cape Town, Timmins, 1981, p. 101). The relevant passage is quoted on pp. 14 - 15 of my chapter on Bosman.

198. See Bosman's essay 'Edgar Allan Poe' (in Trek, February 1948). This essay is also part of Bosman's Uncollected Essays, op. cit., pp. 96 - 98. See the passage quoted from this essay on p. 29 of my Bosman chapter.

199. Among the major Afrikaans critics who have failed to consider Afrikaans literary works in relations to developments in the English writing communities of the country and who have failed to a very large extent in relating the literary works to changing patterns of history in South Africa are: Rob Antonissen, André Brink, Elize Botha. T.T. Cloete, A.P. Grové, and J.C. Kannemeyer. Indeed, it would be fair to say that these areas have been virtually ignored in Afrikaans criticism.

200. See, for example, Elize Botha's woefully inadequate assessment of Haasbroek's stories in her survey of Afrikaans prose works since 1960 in Die Afrikaanse Literatuur sedert Sestig, (Cape Town, Nasou, 1980). See also Brink's reviews of Heupvuur and Verby die Vlakte (in Rapport, 14th September 1975 and 24th October 1982, respectively); H. Snyman's article 'Die "taal-denke" by Haasbroek in Heupvuur en Roofvis' (in Tydskrif vir Letterkunde, Vol. 16, No. 3 1978); and Jan Kromhout's review in English of Heupvuur (in The Star, 30th January 1975).

M.C. Botha has fared equally badly among the critics. These are some of the characteristically abysmal reviews to which his story collections have been subjected: Brink's reviews of Die Prys wat jy moet betaal and Die einde van 'n kluisenaar se lewe (in Rapport, 29th August 1982, and 3rd October 1982, respectively); and Andre Le Roux du Toit's review of Skertse (in Rapport, 29th November 1981).

201. See Chris Barnard's 'Die Afrikaanse Kortverhaal' (in Die Sestigters ed J. Polley, op. cit.); Aucamp's essays on short fiction in Kort voor Lank, op. cit.; Breytenbach's address to the Sestiger conference of 1973, which although not included in Die Sestigters appears in English translation as 'A View from Without' (in Bolt, No. II, December 1974); M.C. Botha's 'Teorieë oor skryf bedreig die vryheid van skryf' (in Graffier, Vol 1, No. 4, August 1981; Botha uses the text of this essay in 'Oor Skryf').

202. Cope, Jack: The Adversary Within: Dissident writers in Afrikaans (Cape Town, David Philip, 1982; published in Britain by Rex Collings).

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SECTION THREE

BLACK SHORT FICTION IN ENGLISH SINCE 1948

- I. Introduction
- II. Communal Storytelling and the Value of Communalism
- III. A Language of Distinction - The Black Writers' Use of English
- IV. Humour
- V. A Literature About Violence
  - a) Racial Violence
  - b) Violence within the Black Communities
- VI. Key Stories
- VII. Conclusion

## Black Short Fiction in English since 1948

### I. Introduction

Whether written by whites or by blacks the literature of Southern Africa is committed to the notion that certain "tasks" are the legitimate function of socially responsible writers. Protest, commitment, explanation: South African readers and critics expect these qualities of their writers...

So writes Lewis Nkosi in a collection of essays about African literature. As I hope to have shown in earlier sections Nkosi's observations might serve as a useful starting point in the consideration of recent South African literature, but there is decidedly more to this writing than the performance of certain tasks. 'Protest commitment [and] explanation' may form an underlying basis from which many South African writers develop their fiction, yet what becomes interesting and valuable in their work is precisely how they build upon this basis of good social intentions. Indeed, I would argue that 'protest, commitment [and] explanation' simply mark out the initial parameters from which the leading writers have developed their works. Certainly, one of the fundamental challenges for South African writers has been to create works of fiction which do not suffer from too obvious and heavy a load of social commitment and explanation.

These comments are of special significance when it comes to black South African fiction. More so than white writers, black authors have continually had their works measured precisly in terms of these criteria of social commitment and explanation; as if the writers were politicians let loose in the house of fiction. I should like to argue that this particular means of literary

evaluation can be found wanting; there is a great deal more to black South African fiction. As one reads these works one swiftly discerns that the nature of the social portraits they are offering and the responses they call from their readers are far more than those of simple information guides to South African racism or registers of various more or less progressive political points of view. Writers might very well be offering these things; but their works rarely function solely on this level and therefore demand a form of critical assessment which sees them as something more than social documents. It is here, in my view, that the fiction and critical evaluation of it inter-relate.

The central tension in black South African writing is between the violence of the society and the sense of communalism in the black communities. There are hardly any works of black fiction in which these issues and this tension does not arise. Black writers find themselves having to deal painfully, on the one hand, with the overwhelming violence in the country and, on the other, with the attempts of black people to hold together families and communities in the face of this violence. It is rare to find works which dwell exclusively on one or other of these factors. It is the tension between them which brings much of the value and dynamism to the fiction.

Because there have been no fundamental changes for the black South African people since the 1950's other than a gradual worsening of their condition (for example, the disenfranchisement of the mixed race ('coloured') people, the relocation of millions

of people into rural slums, and so on), the literary works of this community over the past three decades reflect these essentially unimproved conditions. The uniformity in the oppressive conditions during this period has resulted in there being a remarkable sense of continuity in black literature. The banning of virtually all black literary works written prior to the mid-1960's in South Africa has not altered the fact that these works have an emphatic and distinctive connection with the black writing which has flourished since the later part of that decade.<sup>2</sup> A younger generation of writers have identified their literary inspiration in no small measure with the works of the older black writers, most of whom were forced into exile.<sup>3</sup> It remains an irony of history that black literature in South Africa since the 1950's has managed to achieve a cohesion despite and because of the means taken to extinguish it.

Facing circumstances of enormous difficulty, especially since the coming to power of the Afrikaner nationalist government in 1948, black writers have chosen to celebrate in their works those features of their community which run counter to the violence of the society. However, the sheer enormity of the violence has also meant that they have often had to incorporate it within their portrait of threatened communities. Apartheid has had a levelling effect in the black community where the educated and well-to-do face the same hardships as the poorer and less educated members of the community. This enforced parity in the black society has contributed much to the sense of racial

solidarity in this community; usual divisions such as those created by differences in education and class have to a very large degree been suppressed and minimized.<sup>4</sup> This also holds true of differences promoted by the government between black, 'Coloured' (mixed-race), and 'Indian' people. The sense of black unity overrides these dimensions.

This feature of black society has informed its literature on every possible level and is one of the major reasons for the unified literary tradition of the community. It has meant that black writers from a variety of regions and backgrounds in South Africa, with a range of different experiences and ideas about what constitutes significant literature, have harnessed their individual creative powers in an attempt to chronicle the common experience of black people living together in oppressed conditions. It is worth comparing this situation to that of the negritude writers and to early black nationalist writers for whom shared experiences meant more than ethnic, tribal or even political differences. Nadine Gordimer has commented on this phenomenon: 'It is comparatively easy to create a "people's art" - that is to say aesthetic expression of fundamentally-shared experiences of all, intellectuals, workers and peasants alike, in oppression: in South Africa, the pass laws are a grim cultural unifier'.<sup>5</sup>

However, one has to consider this notion of a unified black society with care and with certain qualifications. The black South African community is constituted in terms of different

strata variously based on wealth, education, colour-difference, and ethnic origins.<sup>6</sup> It would be unrealistic to think of the black South African society as an undifferentiated community: one has to consider the splintered allegiances and tensions which often exist between groups such as the blacks, the 'Indians' and the 'coloureds', the wealthy and the impoverished, in this society. As we shall see, some of the writers have been acutely aware of the diversity in their society and have used the differences which exist between various black characters as the basis for their exploration of a community which is both unified in its voice against apartheid and in which there are internal, fragmentary and potentially fragmenting tensions.

It is instructive here to consider the events in James Matthews's story 'A Case of Guilt'.<sup>7</sup> A wealthy black businessman is rudely awoken early one morning by the police and find himself cast into prison with common criminals. The charge of non-payment of taxes is later revealed to be bogus and his detention is shown to be part of a police procedure setting out to humiliate successful black people. The story gives us a view of the black society in which rich and poor alike suffer. During his detention, the chief character is appalled at the way certain black prisoners abuse their fellow inmates. Hence, we also see how there are divisions and tensions in this world. However, these differences can in no way mask the common lot of these people. As one character observes in this story: "We have no right in the country of our birth. Every move we make depend on the right

piece of paper in our pocket. Life is heavy, very heavy, for us with the laws of the white man".<sup>8</sup>

For all the differences which do exist between groups in the black South African society there is an overwhelming shared destiny in oppression and a resistance to it; this has tended to override in significance the divisions which do exist. Certainly, this is the kind of portrait of their community which the majority of black writers have attempted to project in their works.

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## II Communal Storytelling and the value of Communalism

Communal storytelling was an important practice in the rural black communities prior to the industrialization of Southern Africa in the later part of the nineteenth century. Its significance has been intensified through succeeding decades in the black communities of South Africa, whether in the impoverished rural slums or in the townships of the cities. Fundamental changes in lifestyle, such as the move from an agrarian to an industrial and urbanized mode of existence and the disruptive features of the migrant labour system, have done little to diminish the community's attachment to forms of communal storytelling and public debate. Indeed, as Mbulelo Mzamane has pointed out, there is a clear line of continuity from the oral traditions of the pre-industrial black societies to the written works of later generations of black writers using English as their medium of communication.<sup>9</sup>

Poetic features of black South African prose have a connection not only with the nature of the African languages of the region - including Afrikaans - but also with the rich oral tradition of storytelling in the black communities where poetic embellishment of the oral tale is a token of special merit. Ruth Finnegan writes: 'The actual delivery and treatment of the words [in an oral tale] is also relevant. Even when he does not choose to elaborate any extremes of dramatization, the narrator can and does create vivid effects by variations and exaggerations of speed, volume, and tone. He can use abrupt breaks, poignant pauses, parentheses, rhetorical questions as he watches the audience's reaction and exploits his freedom to choose his words as well as his mode of delivery. A form of onomatopoeia is often used to add elegance and vividness to the narration . A style plentifully embroidered with ideophones is one of the striking characteristics of an effective storyteller.'<sup>10</sup> Many of these features which Finnegan observes in the oral African tale also feature dominantly in many black South African short stories since 1948. Moreover, the role of the traditional storyteller or poet as the community's spokesman and as critical voice against social excesses and abuses of power has passed easily to the modern black writer who has found himself in a synonymous position to that of his non-literate forbears. It could be argued that the manifest abuse of the black people in the country has done much to bolster the black writer's sense of himself as the community's spokesman, critical voice and collective conscience. Indeed, I should like to argue along these lines, as

this view finds abundant support in the black short fiction itself.

The black writers widespread choice of English as their literary medium during this period arises in part as a gesture of protest against the State's policy of enforced tribalism in the country; and closely related to this is the writers' awareness that English is a language that transcends not only tribal but national differences, since it is an international language.<sup>11</sup> English, they have felt, is also a language which can link them to African writers in much of the rest of the continent.

With virtually all of the black writers, English is not their mother-tongue. In certain cases -Dangor, La Guma, Matthews, Rive - writers have abandoned Afrikaans for English, and in other, writers have elected to leave their African languages - Mphahlele, Themba, Motsisi, Mzamane, Matshoba, Nkosi, Ndebele - for a writing career in English. It is worth indicating how widespread this choice has been in black South African writing since the early 1950's and to emphasize how closely this decision is related to a rejection of apartheid policies. One also has to recognize that the emergence of popular black tabloids such as Drum, Zonk, and Africa in the 1950's and their demand for stories in English promoted the trend for short-fiction writing by black people in English.<sup>12</sup>

The use of English by these writers, it must be emphasized has in no way diminished their attachment to the rich oral vernacular

traditions. Indeed, a further aspect of this continuity of oral forms and practices within the written works is the frequency with which the writers either refer back to the traditional values of African society or use the past as a means of comprehending the present; in some cases (and this is most evident in the stories of Mtutuzeli Matshoba), incidents from the African past are recalled as a means of illustrating how earlier black generations acted in resistance to the social oppression of the whites. Es'kia Mphahlele makes the following crucial observation:

There is a definite line of continuity in African cultures which acts on individuals and groups like the string by which a kite is held to the ground; it tacks and weaves and noses up, a toy of the wind while it remains up there; and yet it responds to the continual tug the boy gives it toward the ground. Again, the stresses and tension and segregated existence of South African urban life have the effect of evoking the traditional African sense of community so that the individual draws strength from the group...<sup>13</sup>

In his story 'Grieg on a Stolen Piano', for example, Mphahlele gives an account of a black man who, although steeped in urban culture, often acts according to the values he has drawn from the traditional African community: 'There was in Uncle a synthesis of the traditional and the westernized African.'<sup>14</sup> Mphahlele goes on to describe the way in which Uncle had the custom of slaughtering a goat and sharing its meat with his relations during times of misfortune. His act is both an appeasement to the forces set against him at the time and an indication of the mutual care members of the family feel for one another. Mphahlele then describes the satisfaction his character derives from his actions:

After the feast, he felt peace settle inside him and fill his whole being until it seemed to ooze from the pores of his body as the tensions in him thawed... Then he would face the world with renewed courage or with the reinforced secure knowledge that he was at peace with his relations, without whom he considered he would be a nonentity, a withered twig that has broken off from its tree.<sup>15</sup>

Later in the story Uncle tells his nephew "A black man never starves if he lives among his people unless there is famine"; and in the story 'In Corner B' the narrator remarks of the spirit of concern of black people for one another: 'You are a person because of other human beings, you are told'.<sup>16</sup> Comments of this nature are plentiful in the short fiction.

In Can Themba's piece 'Crepuscule' there is a moment of reflection in which the narrator (Can Themba), who is an intensely urbanized and sophisticated man, calls to mind the way in which traditional beliefs and values offer the means for stabilizing one's life in the face of changing and bruising events:

...those of us who have been detribalized and caught in the characterless world of belonging nowhere, have a bitter sense of loss. The culture that we have shed may not be particularly valuable in a content sense, but it was something that the psyche could attach itself to, and its absence is painfully felt...<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, it is this bitter sense of loss which forms an undertow in much of Themba's writing, where the absence of traditional certainties and the forces of communal interdependence leave one open and vulnerable to the viciousness of life in the urban ghettos. Although the forces of violence in the country form the subject-matter of a significant proportion of the black stories, Themba's dark tales where the violence is unrelieved by

any spirit of communalism and traditional values are the exception. Even in Bessie Head's stories about village life, which are distinctive in the way in which they steadfastly refuse to idealize agrarian communities, there are moments where Head describes the way in which the spirit of communal aid surfaces, and people selflessly turn to help one another.

As further illustration, Mphahlele's story 'In Corner B' contrasts the violence facing the black people of the townships with the way in which people come together to assist one another. A man has been murdered in the township and droves of people flock to his wake, even from country areas, bringing comfort to the deceased man's wife, Talita. Early in the story she recalls the way in which she and her husband resolutely maintained a happy married life together in the face of the violence around them; they shared the common hardships of the black people around them and, as individuals and as a community, strove to pursue purposeful lives:

They had lived through nineteen years of married life that yielded three children and countless bright and cloudy days. It was blissful generally, in spite of the physical and mental violence around them; the privation; police raids; political strikes; and attendant clashes between the police and boycotters; death; ten years of low wages during which she experienced a long spell of ill health. But like everybody Talita and her man stuck it through. They were in an urban township and like everybody else they made their home there. In the midst of all these living conditions, at once in spite and because of them, the people of Corner B alternately clung together desperately and fell away from the centre; like birds that scatter when the tree on which they have gathered is shaken.

It is interesting to note how Mphahlele stresses the way in which communal identification with one another forms a central part of

the lives of the black people he is describing; this is achieved by the repetition of the phrase 'like everybody else' in two adjacent sentences and by the powerful images at the end of the passage comparing people clinging and falling away from a common centre to birds grouped together on a single tree.

The major structural device of this story is the way the narrative focus moves alternately from the private world of Talita's thoughts and memories to the public scenes at the wake and the funeral. Within these two domains Mphahlele succeeds in weaving a related theme: how the love people feel and express for one another is the force which ultimately brings them happiness. In Talita's private world this is expressed in the fulfilment both she and her husband derived from their marriage and also, in the end, by Marta's moving letter in which she begs Talita for forgiveness. In the public scenes it is established firstly by the way in which large numbers of people arrive to comfort Talita and also in a variety of scenes which describe both the communal participation and the sheer enjoyment the people have from being with one another.

In his novella 'Mrs. Plum', Mphahlele offers a direct view of how storytelling and the sharing of news and opinions form an important part of black social interaction. Indeed, the entire narrative is presented in a way which suggests that the black woman Karabo is telling her story to one or more black listeners. For instance, at the start of the third part of the work, Karabo makes a reference which suggests that she is talking to a black

audience: 'If any woman or girl does not know the Black Crow Club in Bree Street, she does not know anything.'<sup>19</sup> Significantly, the Black Crow Club is a black woman's social club. Karabo is presented by Mphahlele as an oral African storyteller sharing many of the qualities of her rural forebears: humour, social criticism and a delight in metaphoric and richly evocative language. Beyond this Mphahlele also illustrates the way in which Karabo has a wide range of black friends and acquaintances with whom she shares views and relates tales and anecdotes. In the third part of the novella, set mainly around events at the Black Crow Club, Mphahlele describes Karabo's education at the club under the guidance of Lilian Ngoyi - a real person who was prominent in the Congress movement. This is set in contrast to the previous part of the story where Karabo was given a series of lessons by her white employer Mrs. Plum and her daughter; most of these she rejects. Conversely, Ngoyi's instructions to the black woman, consisting largely of historical and political accounts of the country's condition, are readily accepted by Karabo and her companions. Karabo describes how she and the other women listened attentively to Ngoyi and were eager to question her about the views she was offering. The report of Ngoyi's talks are framed by Karabo's conversations with other black people. At the beginning of the section she describes the lively conversations of the black women who attended classes at the club: here, they discuss the foibles of their different white employers. At the end of it however, Karabo and a friend discuss incidents which took place around the club and pass on their

anecdotes with glee to their fellow servant, Dick. Throughout 'Mrs. Plum' there are episodes in which black characters are described as participating in a range of conversations and debates with one another.

In similar fashion, the importance of the role of storytelling and the sharing of views is highlighted in other of Mphahlele's stories. Early in 'In Corner B', for instance, we are told how people flock to console Talita and that 'all the time some next-of-kin must act as spokesman to relate the circumstances of death to all who arrive for the first time'.<sup>20</sup> The urge to share and discuss the experiences of others is shown to be of great concern to black characters, as in this extract from Themba's story 'The Suit':

Philemon considered this morning trip to town with garrulous old Maphikela as his daily bulletin. All the township news was generously reported by loud-mouthed heralds, and spiritedly discussed by the bus at large. Of course, 'news' included views on bosses (scurrilous), the government (rude), Ghana and Russia (idiotrous), Amercia and the West (sympathetically ridiculing), and boxing (blood thirsty). But it was always stimulating and surprisingly comprehensive for so short a trip. And there was no law of libel.<sup>21</sup>

Developing these concerns, the underlying notion in the stories of Mtutuzeli Matshoba is the shared destiny of the black people and their common struggle against oppression. This idea informs the very way in which Matshoba tells the stories, using a narrator (a first person narrator in all but two of his eight pieces in Call Me Not a Man and Forced Landing), who finds common cause with the black people in whatever situation he is describing. Matshoba's narrators who are very often closely

identified with himself, set out to carry the reader through experiences which are widely shared by black South Africans. In this way, each story exemplifies a particular, unsavory aspect of apartheid.<sup>22</sup> For example, 'A Glimpse of Slavery' describes the system by which pass offenders and criminals are forced into becoming farm labourers (slaves is Matshoba's term) for the duration of their sentences and the kind of horrors this involves. 'Three Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion' describes the conditions in a Bantustan, the Transkei; 'To Kill a Man's Pride' deals with the plight of the men in the Soweto hostels; and 'A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana' treats the response of the community to political detentions and the way in which the detainees react to their confinement.

Like Mphahlele's 'Mrs. Plum', Matshoba's stories are heavily reliant on the communal oral storytelling tradition. Within many of Matshoba's stories there is a direct conversational approach in which readers are familiarly addressed either as 'friends' or 'brothers and sister'. There are numerous examples of the black characters discussing matters with one another, often at great length. One notable instance occurs in 'Three Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion', where the narrator reports a long debate which takes place on a bus between a group of men and a woman about the role of women in a society where men are forced to seek work in the cities. Another feature of Matshoba's stories, and one which tends to be used somewhat ponderously, is the way he breaks the narrative flow of a story to discuss one or more

features of the country's history, politics or customs. For example, in 'A Glimpse of Slavery' there are a series of discussions (one is tempted to call these digressions) about white South Africans, black servitude, the role of the educated in society, the pleasures of cigarette-sharing, the wisdom of oppressed people, and so on. One of the significant aspects of these discussions is the way Matshoba's narrators debate the issues from the point of view of the black people, using commonly voiced opinions in the black community to impart their particular sense of history. This also arises in the historical surveys which Matshoba offers in several of his stories: in these he stresses the communal sense of oppression. For example, in 'Three Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion' we are given a Cook's tour of black South African history in which emphasis is laid on those events which have contributed to the wholesale dispossession of the black people since the arrival of white settlers in the Cape.

Matshoba also retells episodes from the past either in verse form or in prose, as he does most strikingly in 'Three Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion'. Here we have accounts of Mantatise, Matiwane (in verse), and a lengthy treatment of the incident in which the Xhosa girl of the nineteenth century, Nongqause, led her people in revolt against the white colonists. In the latter account, Matshoba significantly transforms this historical event, usually viewed by white historians as a crushing defeat of the black people, into a record of courage and a token of inventiveness in circumstances of enormous hardship.

Throughout his stories Matshoba celebrates the ways in which black people join together to comfort each other. In 'To Kill a Man's Pride' he describes how the men of the hostels come together in order to sing traditional songs and to dance:

As I continued going there, I discovered that song was the only solace of those lonely people. At least two days a week they sang traditional choral music... After an evening of invigorating talk and untainted African traditional song I went away<sup>23</sup> feeling as if I had found treasure in a graveyard.

Similarly, on a train journey to the Transkei in 'Three Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion', the narrator records how groups of passengers join up with one another to share poetry and song:

When the train pulled out we settled back in our compartment. I read Africa My Beginning aloud to my friend and I felt that I was going to 'sleep courage' that night. There was courage in other passengers too, for as we lay on our chosen bunks we heard singing in the corridor. Two or three sisters led a traditional lyric of joy, which<sup>24</sup> became movingly voluminous as brothers picked up the tune.

The mutual involvement of the black characters with one another is fittingly described as 'courage' by Matshoba in this passage.

Finally, there is the following moment in the story 'A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana' in which the narrator tells the purpose of his journey to a group of black women on a train going down to the Cape: he is going to visit his brother who is a political prisoner on Robben Island (Makana's Isle). One of the women bursts out, spontaneously, illustrating the way in which the black society has a deep sense of its history and mission:

"So he's there with boMandela le boSisulu le boMbeki? Tell him to say bayethe for us to all the great men there who have sacrificed themselves for us. Molimo! I remember the days of the Congress. I was this small then."<sup>25</sup>

As a further instance, Njabulo Ndebele's collection of stories, Fools, is a celebration of life in the black townships.<sup>26</sup> These stories are set entirely within the world of the townships and white people remain a distant, almost irrelevant presence for the black characters. There is a wide diversity of characters in these works drawn from virtually every class and sector of the black township population. For all the violence in the township (the student activist Zani is stabbed in the story 'Fools', for example, and a young boy is kicked about viciously by Church elders in 'Uncle'), Ndebele offers a view of this world which revels in its communalism and vibrancy of life.

The collection's best story 'Uncle', for example, ends with a scene of triumph in which people from all corners of the township gather together in an informal way to enjoy the music of a variety of performers. The work ends with the young narrator's delighted cry: 'Oh, Uncle, everybody is here'.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, as in many works of black fiction since the student uprising of 1976, the central characters or narrators in the majority of Ndebele's stories are young children or teenagers.<sup>28</sup> Ndebele is clearly addressing himself in the first place to a new generation of young black South Africans in this collection.

As in many other works of black fiction Ndebele's stories abound in instances of the humour of the township people. Here, for example, is a piece from the story, 'Uncle':

Sometimes we [Uncle and the young narrator] would come across men who were sitting on benches close to the walls of their houses. They would be reading the Golden City Post or

the Sunday Times. After greeting, Uncle would say: "So what does the white man say today?" "The usual thing," they would say. "So why keep on reading?" "To make myself<sup>29</sup> angrier and angrier." And the men and Uncle would laugh...

One senses throughout Fools that the small triumphs of the characters in their everyday lives against a range of hardships stand for the confidence of the black people in their greater struggle against oppression. Again, it is in the story 'Uncle' that Ndebele establishes most explicitly a connection between the actions and sayings of his characters and the broader context of the black people's lives. Uncle's statements, in particular, have a resonance for the entire community. This is especially so in his words of advice to the young people about the endeavour needed to master a musical instrument. Here is one such instance:

"You see, when you are improvising you are free. Completely free. But I'm telling you, you've got to learn to be free. You've got to struggle hard for that freedom. You see, if I can give you this trumpet and say to you: play something, you'll soon tire of playing anything, because your playing will have no direction. Unlearned<sup>30</sup> freedom frustrates; nothing elevating ever comes of it..."

It is this quiet, unobtrusive often humorous form of guidance and illumination about the black people's role in South African history and its celebration of communalism which are among the most distinctive features of Ndebele's volume of stories.

Communal storytelling and the urge people feel to come to one another's assistance especially at times of crises, take a central place in Bessie Head's volume of stories, The Collector of Treasures. Indeed, she significantly calls the stories Botswana village tales suggesting their connection with an oral

tradition of storytelling. All of these tales relate events which take place within the villages of Botswana where the community and its values play a key role in the lives of the individuals whose stories are being told. In fact, one of the central tensions described in the collection is that between the individual and the community. The tone of the volume is set in its first piece, 'The Deep River: a Story of Ancient Tribal Migration', which begins:

Long ago, when the land was only cattle tracks and foot paths, the people lived together like a deep river. In this deep river which was unruffled by conflict or a movement forward, the people lived without faces, except for their chief, whose face was the face of all the people; that is, if their chief's name was Monemapee, they were all the people of Monemapee.<sup>31</sup>

Head goes on to describe the way in which the calm of the community was disturbed by the eldest son of the chief who insisted on displaying his individuality in the face of traditional practice: his love of the deceased chief's youngest wife runs counter to a tribal taboo. Eventually, this man leaves the community with his wife and followers to form a new tribe. This kind of stress between individual need and community demands comes to characterize the entire collection and brings to it a critical dimension which is often not apparent in works by other black South African writers who have tended towards an idealization of the communalism in their society in an attempt to suggest its cohesion and unity.

However, within Head's collection there are many instances where the communal aid which black people provide for one another and

their love of discussion are treated with much respect and approval. In the piece, 'Kgotla', for instance, Head describes with humour and favour the tribal court which also serves as a forum for discussion for the villagers. We are told that although a new administrative block had taken over the running of many of the features of tribal life, it could in no way supplant the place of the Kgotla in the lives of the villager:

They [the new administration] had taken over, from the chief, the duty of land allocation, water rights and things like that, but they hadn't yet taken over people's affairs - the Kgotla was still the people's place. It was the last stronghold where people could make their anguish and disputes heard, where nothing new could be said about human nature - it had all been said since time immemorial and it was all of the same pattern, repeating itself from generation unto generation. There, at the Kgotla, it wasn't so important to resolve human problems as to discuss around them, to pontificate, to generalize, to display wit, wisdom, wealth of experience or depth of thought. All this made the Kgotla world a holy world that moved at its own pace and time...<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, in this piece, Head goes on to describe the way the Kgotla manages to resolve an embroiled family dispute and bring honour to a Sindebele woman who had been ill-treated by her Tswana husband.

The communal act of storytelling features in many of the collection's pieces. In 'Heaven is not Closed', for instance, the old man Modise tells his family and friends the tale of Galethebege and her trouble-filled life. Head interrupts Modise's narrative at certain points to emphasize the fact that this is in fact an account of a tale being told to an audience: 'The old man, Nodise, paused at this point in the telling of his tale but his young listeners remained breathless and silent,

eager for the conclusion'.<sup>33</sup> At the end of his account Head records his audiences's appreciative response and stresses the way in which past involvements feed into present debate:

The old man leaned forward and stirred the dying fire with a partially burnt-out log of wood. His listeners sighed the way people do when they have heard a particularly good story. As they stared at the fire they found themselves debating the matter in their minds, as their elders had done some forty or fifty years ago...<sup>34</sup>

The story draws to an end with the younger generation posing to themselves the self-same questions which had stirred their parents and grandparents before them.

Where Head does not use an oral story-teller such as Modise in 'Heaven is not Closed', she frequently does use the device of framing the tales about village life by an introductory passage in which she considers one or other aspect of the community's life, history or philosophy. After these introductory reflections she then sets out to illuminate them by the tale proper. In this way, there is a strong connection with the communal storytelling tradition where the publicly told story was one which often served to illustrate one or more introductory observations about life and society.

In the piece 'Life', for example, Head's opening paragraph describes how Tswana citizens flocked back to Botswana from the South African cities shortly before the country's independence. These migrant workers and people who had settled in South Africa brought back to their country of birth a large number of urban customs and affectations which had various effects on their rural

countrymen: 'Village people reacted in their own way; what they liked, and was beneficial to them - they absorbed, for instance, the faith-healing cult churches which instantly took hold like wildfire - what was harmful, they rejected.' Head brings this introductory section to a close by referring to the events which go on to form the illustrative story of this work: '...the murder of Life had this complicated undertone of rejection'.<sup>35</sup>

The story of how Life is murdered in the village serves in this way as an illustration of how the rural people collectively come to reject certain aspects of the urban culture which new settlers such as Life have brought with them. Yet Head is also concerned to indicate the way in which the rural community, with all its mutual aid, traditions and generosity, fails to accommodate this young woman from the city. Head suggests how the murder of Life illustrates a failure on both sides: firstly, of the young woman to make the adjustment to village life and also of the community to offer her any meaningful alternative to the city pleasures and values with which she has grown up. Here is a key passage in Head's account of this mutual failure:

On the surface, the everyday round of village life was deadly dull in its even, unbroken monotony; one day slipped easily into another, drawing water, stamping corn, cooking food. But within this there were enormous tugs and pulls between people. Custom demanded that people care about each other, and all day long there was this constant traffic of people in and out of each other's lives... It was the basic strength of village life. It created people whose sympathetic and emotional responses were always fully awakened, and it rewarded them by richly filling in a void that was one big, gaping yawn. When the hysteria and cheap rowdiness were taken away, Life fell into the yawn; she had nothing inside herself to cope with this way of life that had finally caught up with her.<sup>36</sup>

The complexity of Head's treatment of the village lifestyle is one which characterizes her volume of stories, bringing to it a different kind of strength, as I have suggested, often absent in stories by many of the other black South African writers who have felt the compulsion to describe black communities in a way which offers a fairly uncritical view of the forces binding black people to one another. The difference in their treatments of the black communities can I think, be ascribed partly to the fact that Head and writers such as Mphahlele, Mbulelo Mzamane, James Matthews and Mtutuzeli Matshoba are actually describing two different societies. Head's Botswana is essentially a politically stable country, where the enormous pressures of South African oppression do not have as direct an influence on the lives of the black people living there as they do on black South Africans; indeed, South Africa is always in the background of Head's stories, at the very least on an unconscious level as a formative influence on her personally. There is less compulsion on Head to portray its black communities in a way which stresses or even celebrates their inherent unity than there is upon black writers describing the lives of people in South Africa, in the face of the destructive forces of apartheid.

However, the contrast which I am suggesting must not be seen as an absolute one. There are obvious areas in which the black writers of South Africa have refused to idealize or treat uncritically aspects of their society and in which they have revealed a similar kind of rigour and complexity in social

description to that found in Bessie Head's stories. Indeed, as I shall soon show, positive views of the spirit of communalism in the black society are often set in contrast to the nature of the white society and the disruptive forces in the country.

A noticeable feature of the black short fiction which is directly related to communalism and the prominence of the storytelling tradition is that a significantly large number of these stories are set in communal or public places such as in trains, buses, yards, shebeens and even prison cells where there are a number of onlookers, some of whom are drawn into the story's action. This again implies the centrality of shared black experience in stories where the writers often set the individual and his private concerns against the wider public world around him. It is interesting to recall how the Afrikaner writer John Miles set out to explore the responses of white South Africans in similar conditions of public exposure.<sup>37</sup> Even in the most cursory reading of black short fiction, one is immediately made aware of the way in which black people are crowded together and how the public world intrudes, often brusquely into the lives of individuals.

One of the crucial ways in which black writers have offered insight into their community in their works is by setting it in contrast to the white society. Most often the writers have attempted to reveal qualities of humanism in black society which are noticeably lacking in the white communities. Central to these endeavours has been the contrast which writers have seen to

exist between the black society's sense of a communal ethic and the white society's concern for the individual and his needs. Certainly, this is not an entirely clear-cut or satisfactory dichotomy; yet what is significant is that certain black writers have used it as a stratagem by which they can celebrate features of their communities at the expense of those in the white society. One work in which this is done is Mphahlele's novella 'Mrs. Plum'. It is a work of trenchant satire revealing the gulf which exists between the white and black communities. Mphahlele contrasts the two communities through Karabo's accounts of the behaviour of the white and black people with whom she has contact. Moreover, the central interaction between Karabo and Mrs. Plum reveals as much about the black woman and her set of values as about those of her employer.

The novella opens with Karabo's humorous description of Mrs. Plum: 'My madam's name was Mrs. Plum. She loved dogs and Africans and said that everyone must follow the law even if it hurt. These were three big things in Madam's life.'<sup>38</sup> Mphahlele's portrait of Mrs. Plum is of a person who holds a jumbled and often contradictory set of beliefs and who consequently acts unpredictably. A large part of Karabo's perplexity at how the Plum's household functions arises from this fact. Mrs. Plum loves dogs and Africans: the conjunction of these two items and in this order forms a bizarre juxtaposition which points towards her muddled value system. Moreover, the fact that she 'said that everyone must follow the law even if it

hurt' throws up another set of ironies, reinforcing the view that something is seriously amiss in the way in which she responds to her world. The sense of disorder in Mrs. Plum's life is further emphasized soon after the start of the story when Karabo is told by her friend, Chimane 'how wild she [Mrs. Plum's daughter Kate] seemed to be, and about Mr. Plum who had killed himself with a gun in a house down the street'.<sup>39</sup>

Later in the story Karabo describes the way the white mother and daughter respond to one another in a time of personal crisis: 'They [Kate and Mrs. Plum] were now openly screaming at each other. They began in the sitting room and went upstairs together, speaking fast hot biting words...'<sup>40</sup> Significantly, the behaviour in the Plum household is one which repeats itself in a variety of forms in the neighbouring white homes. Karabo's confidante Chimane tells her how her white employers insist that their aged parent who lives with them prepare her own food apart from the rest of the household. On another occasion Chimane relates how the grandmother was forced to leave the room where her children were seated as there was no chair free: the only seat free was occupied by the family's pet cat and the 'madam' forbade her mother to drive the cat away. Indeed, in this novella Mphahlele wittily offers a portrait of the white community where animals are treated with more favour than people, especially if these people happen to be elderly or black. In one of the concluding scenes of the story Mrs. Plum fires her black gardener, Dick, on the basis of her fears that he would

poison her pet dogs. Earlier we learn that Mrs. Plum had similarly sacked two black gardeners as 'they could not look after Monty and Malan [the two dogs]'.<sup>41</sup> This caustic view of the white society is one also developed in stories by the white writers, as we have seen earlier.

Set against these accounts of ruptured family life and heartless behaviour in the white society is Mphahlele's portrait of the black society. Here the value of mutual aid among people is paramount. If in the white households which are described in the novella there is scant concern among family members for the one another, there is a marked contrast in the black society. For example, in the letters which Karabo receives from her parents she is told not only about the welfare of her immediate family but also about a wide network of family members and further, of friends and members of the local black communities.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, it is Karabo's desire to return home to offer comfort to a bereaved aunt and to pay her respects at her uncle's grave which brings her into conflict with Mrs. Plum. Moreover, there are a number of further instances in this novella where black characters demonstrate their active concern for one another.<sup>43</sup>

Closely related to their awareness that features of a communal ethic have survived in their own society, the black story writers contrast the vibrancy and humour in the townships with the grave stolidity of the white South African world. Notwithstanding the high levels of violence in the black society, particularly in the city ghettos and slums, this is shown to be

a far more lively and in some ways more humane community in which to live than in the sterile preserves of the white suburbs.

Ahmed Essop's collection The Hajji and other Stories, for example, celebrates the robust and colourful community life of what used to be a predominantly black zone in Johannesburg called Fordsburg. This area used to be a rich centre of Indian life and culture until its black residents were expelled. In a story significantly entitled 'In Two Worlds' Essop distinguishes two South African lifestyles. The black narrator records his responses to an affluent white suburb in this way:

Henry's parents lived in Sandown. On several occasions I accompanied him to his home, but I found the atmosphere of the suburb with its avenues of trees and solitary mansions amid acres of gardens, chilling. It lacked the noise - the raucous voices of vendors, the eternal voices of children in streets and back-yards - the variety of people, the spicy odours of Oriental foods, the bonhomie of communal life in Fordsburg. And it was not long before Henry too was attracted by our way of life...<sup>44</sup>

The 'bonhomie of communal life' which Essop and other black writers describe as being such a significant feature of their various black ghettos - Sophiatown for Themba and Casey Motsisi, District Six for Richard Rive, James Matthews, Alex La Guma and Achmat Dangor, Soweto for Matshoba and Mbulelo Mazamane - is felt by them to be absent in the white suburbs of South Africa. In Mango Tshabangu's story 'Thoughts in a Train' he establishes the contrast between the white and black suburbs by recording the reactions of two black boys while walking from a white suburb into the bustling city centre:

...Ever since they'd discovered Houghton golf course to be offering better tips in the caddy business, Msongi and Gezani found themselves walking through the rich suburbs of

Johannesburg. Their experience was a strange one. There was something eerie in the surroundings. They always had fear, the like of which they had never known... There was a time when they impulsively stood right in the middle of a street. They had hoped to break this fear... But the attempt only lasted a few seconds and that was too short to be of any help. They both scurried off...

However, we read of the change which occurs when the boys enter the busy city centre:

Why, as soon as they hit town proper, and mixed with people, the fear the like of which they'd never known disappeared. No, Msongi was convinced it was not they who had fear. Fear flowed from somewhere, besmirching every part of them, leaving their souls trembling; but it was not they who were afraid.<sup>45</sup>

The narrator continues to analyze the differences between the white and black worlds and how these have affected the way in which their inhabitants think and behave:

They did not have stone walls or electrified fences in Soweto. They were not scared of their gold rings being snatched for they had none. They were not worried about their sisters being peeped at for their sisters could look after themselves. Oh, those diamond toothpicks could disappear you know... Those too, they did not have. They were not afraid of bleeding, for their streets ran red already. On this day Msongi stared at the shut windows. He looked at the pale sullen faces and he knew why.<sup>46</sup>

Black people are portrayed here as being free from the kind of anxieties which beset their white countrymen. The neuroses which affect white characters such as Mrs. Plum in Mphahlele's novella are rarely those of the Karabos and the black characters. If this is a simplification or indeed a sentimentalization of black people it is a conscious one which serves in much the same way as the writers' celebration of black communalism: it is being used by the writers to show their unqualified commitment to qualities of value in the black society.

If communalism and its value is a central concern in most black writing it is worth indicating that it is an issue which rarely features in the works of white writers, other than when they are considering the lives of black characters and their communities or lamenting the lack of a broadly unified South African community. Indeed, for many Afrikaner writers there is an underlying conflict in much of their work (especially since the 1970's) with their own community and its values. Community values as defined through the ideology of Afrikaner nationalism hold little appeal for these writers. For most of the black writers, however, communal values are an anchor and point of security in a turbulent society.

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### III A Language of Distinction - the Black Writers' use of English

As I have already suggested, the sense of there being a difference between the white and black communities also forms part of the way many black writers use English, a language which they share with white people. A large number of the black South African story writers have adapted English to their own particular purposes and have, in a way, made of English an African language.<sup>47</sup> By doing this they have honoured the impulse which initially spurred them into using English: namely, the desire to break the shackles of apartheid and enforced tribalism.

A large proportion of the black writers who have one or other of the African languages as their mother tongues reveal their close affinity to these either by the way in which they use English in

a slightly unorthodox manner in their short stories, or by indicating how their characters would usually not be speaking English. For example, in his story 'Grieg on a Stolen Piano', there is a delightful moment where Mphahlele contrasts the attitudes of his two central characters by referring to the way in which English and an African language are being used. Uncle is telling his nephew how he had visited the judges of a beauty competition in which they are entering a young woman friend of theirs as a contestant. The nephew's sense of fair-play is outraged and he complains: "But we don't do such things, Uncle°... Talking to judges about a competition in which you have vested interests." To which his Uncle responds: "Don't talk so pompously. You're talking English. Let's talk Sesotho..."<sup>48</sup>

The most marked form of influence which the writers draw from their mother tongues is in their use of a form of English prose which, like their African languages, is rich in imagery and replete with metaphors. Added to this infusion is the fact that the experiences which they are describing are almost all related to the violence of the society. As a result of this, the violence which the writers are perceiving all about them comes to form part of their prose itself. This is nowhere better illustrated than in Alex La Guma's novella, 'A Walk in the Night', which describes the violence in the impoverished streets of District Six in Cape Town. Indeed, not only is La Guma's imagery closely bound up with acts of violence and rage, but the actual structuring of this work reflects the spasmodic and fitful

violence of the neighbourhood. The central technique of 'A Walk in the Night' is its shifting narrative focus. La Guma moves his focus from scene to scene and from one group of characters to another with rapidity. These quick shifts within a story also form a key element of Achmat Dangor's novella 'Waiting for Leila', likewise set largely within the confines of District Six. As in La Guma's work, Dangor's novella is about the fearful violence of the region. But where La Guma based his shifts within the narrative largely upon the quickly changing events which were taking place during the single night he describes, Dangor's changes of focus are more fragmentary and often relate to episodes in the distant past of either his characters or of their ancestors. For instance, there are a number of short sections which describe the servitude and struggles for freedom of the forebears of the central character, Samad. In both novellas the actual form and style of these works reflect the violence they are describing.

When one turns to examine the nature of their language more closely it is hardly surprising to discover that this too is saturated with the violence which is being recorded. Anger and fear form two of the central image-patterns of La Guma's 'A Walk in the Night'. Early in the novella we are told how Michael Adonis was 'nursing a little growth of anger they way one caresses the beginnings of a toothache with the tip of the tongue'.<sup>49</sup> Later, after being harassed by two policeman, we learn that 'deep down inside him the feelings of rage,

frustration and violence swelled like a boil, knotted with pain'.<sup>50</sup>

Soon afterward La Guma describes how Adonis 'thought about the foreman, Scofield, and the police, and the little knot of rage reformed inside him again like the quickening of the embryo in the womb'.<sup>51</sup> It is with surprise that we find these self-same images of rage being applied to another character: the white policeman, Raalt. We read how 'he sat in the corner of the van and nursed his anger'; and then 'He tried to speak casually, holding his anger from the driver, but it was there, like hard steel under camouflage paint.'<sup>52</sup>

One discerns in these descriptions La Guma's ability to use images with great precision and the way in which he links different aspects of life to one another often in most unexpected ways. One sees how he connects the rage of Adonis to various physical aspects of the body: an aching tooth, a boil, and then most strikingly, an embryo. By linking the anger of his characters with images of 'caressing', the growth of an embryo and nursing, La Guma suggests how this emotion is being nurtured by them for specific purposes. In the case of Raalt, the policeman, his suppressed anger is appropriately likened to steel beneath camouflage paint. La Guma also describes, for instance, a character who has a 'wily, grinning face and eyes as brown and alert as cockroaches'.<sup>53</sup> Further, as the police move up to Willieboy we read how 'he crouched like a fear crazed animal at bay'. When the police shoot him, 'the bullets slapped into the

boy, jerking him upright, and he spun, his arms flung wide, turning on his toes like a ballet dancer'.<sup>54</sup> There is a disconcerting beauty to this image of the boy dying in the posture of a dancer; achieving in death a kind of grace denied him throughout his whole miserable life. After the black youth is murdered the angry voices of the crowd are 'the mutter of dark water eroding the granite cliffs, sucking at the sand-filled cracks and dissolving the banks of clay'.<sup>55</sup> Here we see La Guma using metaphor rather than simile to powerful effect.

'Waiting for Leila' similarly evokes the social unrest in language which is replete with images of violence and disarray. These are a few linked passages which appear early in the novella:

Brrat-a-tat-brr. Jackhammers picking like crows at his guts. All around him they were breaking down his city, brick by brick, stone for stone... Must be six o'clock already. Brr° How cold it is. Only the skollies will be on the streets tonight. They are immune to the cold. That is what District Six does, hardens us. Hearts as empty as the shop windows in Hanover Street. In the shadow of Table Mountain, rats at the door of heaven... A dead rat somewhere, rotting. Thousands of dead rats here in District Six. I can hear their sorrowful souls rustle in the darkness, lamenting the death of their beloved city. City of a thousand nations, disgorge your stinking belly. No white man will ever build his home here. Our ghosts are ineradicable.<sup>56</sup>

There is a high concentration of metaphor and simile in these passages: jackhammers used for breaking down buildings are likened to crows picking at a person's guts; the hearts of the people left in District Six are compared to empty shop windows; the people of District Six are 'rats at the door of heaven'. This kind of density of imagery is a noticeable feature of black

South African English prose where the comparisons which are made are often unexpected and disturbing. It is worth recalling how Sestiger writers in Afrikaans also found prose which was densely packed with images and metaphors an appealing practice; yet their images were drawn from different frames of reference than in the case of the black writers.<sup>57</sup>

The use of imagery drawn from the violence and social deprivation of the society is a widespread feature of black writing. Matshoba, for instance, describes the sparse landscape of the Karoo in terms of a child suffering from a disease of malnutrition: 'I woke up to ragged and uninhabited country. It seemed that God had forgotten that part of the earth, for he had apparently sent no rain to it for centuries. The shrubs were widely spaced like the hair on the head of a black child suffering from malnutrition'.<sup>58</sup> A further instance is where Motsisi personifies Sophiatown in the opening of his story 'Mita' and compares the district to the habits of a drunk, rising from sleep and a hangover to face the new 'uncertain day':

Sophiatown might go to sleep late in the night, drunk, violent and rowdy. But in the small hours of the morning she wakes up, yawns away her hangover and prepares herself for another uncertain day.<sup>59</sup>

In a similar fashion, Richard Rive compares District Six to a prostitute in the opening of his story, 'Willie-boy': 'Here the world lives, and life wears a swagger and has an enticing suggestive laugh as if it calls you into the dim entrance of a tenement flat shamefully to feel its richness.'<sup>60</sup>

The energy and nature of the black English prose which is closely bound up with the fact that many of the writers have been first or second generation city-dwellers, brought into rough contact with the tumultuous experiences of the urban ghetto, suggests that the vibrancy and distinctiveness of their language is strongly related to a social group in a phase of rapid change and upheaval. The linguistic renewal and experimentation form part of a group's exposure to the brash and diverse forces of the city. This has spurred various critics to compare the black writing and its social context to other societies and literatures where the influences of the city were having a marked impact on writers who had witnessed the rapid urbanization of their people. The closest and most instructive parallels are with other black literatures: namely, the writing of Afro-Americans from the 1920's and 1930's onward, and the urban novels and stories of West Africa which began to appear from the late 1950's. Not only do black South African writers share many of the themes (particularly those dealing with the city) concerning West African writers such as Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Wole Soyinka, and Ayi Kwei Armah, but also their distinctive way of turning English to serve their own purposes often by means of surprising and unconventional images and metaphors. Certainly, in its turn the protest tradition of the black American writers in particular notably influenced the young generation of black South Africans who began writing in the 1950's: Mphahlele, Rive, Matthews, Themba, Lewis Nkosi, Bloke Modisane, and others. Lewis Nkosi and Anthony Sampson have also

suggested the parallels between black South African writing and its social context and that of Elizabethan England. Nkosi writes: 'Ultimately, it was the cacophonous, swaggering world of Elizabethan England which gave us the closest parallel to our own mode of existence: the cloak and dagger stories of Shakespeare: the marvellously gay and dangerous time of change in Great Britain, came closest to reflecting our own condition.'<sup>61</sup> Sampson, the young editor of DRUM during the mid-1950's, wrote:

Sophiatown had all the exuberant youth of a Shakespeare's London. It was the same upstart slum, with people coming from a primitive country life to the tawdry sophistication of the city's fringes. Death and the police state were round the corner: and there was the imminent stage direction:  
Exeunt with bodies...<sup>62</sup>

The black writer who uses English most ebulliently and often unconventionally is Can Themba. An English graduate who passed with distinction and for some years a school-teacher of English, Themba purposely used English in an intensely personal and often deviant way. His stories abound in coinages, idiosyncratic turns-of-phrase and wilful distortion of English words. For instance, early in 'The Suit' Themba describes his character's delight in serving his wife with breakfast in this way: 'To appear there in his supremest immaculacy, tray in hand when his wife comes out of ether to behold him.'<sup>63</sup> (My underlining). One notices the neologism 'immaculacy' and the unusual phrase in which Themba describes the woman awakening from sleep: she 'comes out of ether'. There is also the odd difference in verbal register between the concluding phrase 'to behold him' and the context of the black man performing this kind but rather humdrum

favour for his wife. These features recur in much of Themba's prose. Consider, for example, the narrator's description of his condition in the story 'The Dube Train': 'All sorts of disgruntledties darted through my brain...'<sup>64</sup> (My underlining). In 'Crepuscule' Themba talks of the 'horrificiency' of the law (a nice portmanteau term, horror - efficiency) and goes on to describe how the white man's disapproval and scorn of black peopled 'negatives all the brilliance of the intellect and genuine funds of goodwill so many individuals have.'<sup>65</sup> (My underlining).

One of the most startling instances of Themba playing with verbal register in direct contrast to the social world he is describing occurs in the title story of his posthumous collection of short prose works, 'The Will to Die'. Here, Themba parodies the prose style of boys' adventure stories which set out to educate their young readers morally and inspire them with records of great courage. 'The Will to Die' opens in this way:

I have heard much, have read much more, of the Will to Live; stories of fantastic retreats from the brink of death at moments when all hope was lost. To the aid of certain personalities in the bleakest crises, spiritual resources seem to come forward from what? Character? Spirit? Soul? Or the Great Reprieve of a Spiritual Clemency - hoisting<sup>66</sup> them back from the muddy slough of the Valley of the Shadow.

Themba's passage bristles with conscious clichés and hyperbolic expressions and as a result of this density of portentous phrases and concepts - 'the brink of death', 'all hope was lost', 'spiritual resources', 'character', 'soul', and so on - he undercuts a particular and widely held traditional view of the world. Our expectations as readers of the story have initially

been surprised by the shift from the work's title, 'The Will to Die', to this parodic treatment of the subject of the will to live. True to his mercurial style as a writer, Themba swiftly shifts our attention back to the story's title in the following sentence: 'But the Will to Die has intrigued me more...'<sup>67</sup> He then gives us a brief outline of what this unusual concept - the Will to Die - actually means, using the same racy, parodic style of the first paragraph and apeing all the while the breathless style of the boys' adventure story:

I have also heard that certain snakes can hypnotize their victim, a rat, a frog, or a rabbit, not only so that it cannot flee to safety in the overwhelming urge for survival, but so that it is even attracted towards its destroyer, and appears to enjoy dancing towards its doom. I have often wondered if there is not some mesmeric power that Fate employs to engage some men deliberately with macabre relishment, to seek their destruction and to plunge into it.<sup>68</sup>

Here again one notices his use of inflated expressions and clichés - 'an overwhelming urge for survival', 'dancing towards its doom', 'mesmeric power' - and his delight in an idiosyncratic coinage - 'macabre relishment'. Having created an uneasiness in our mind by the parody of the traditional values of courage and the almost universal belief in the will to live, as well as by means of the sudden shifts in subject in these opening paragraphs, Themba then describes, in the body of the story, a black school teacher who carried on his life in a way which seemed to suggest that he was impelled by an urge for death rather than life. In the final scene of the work, Themba brings his treatment of traditional values to a bitter and shattering

conclusion when he describes the way in which a group of Christian worshippers beat the main character of the story to death with their sticks. In its language and subject matter 'The Will to Die' is one of the most forceful examples of a black South African story which challenges the conventions and values of the society. Interestingly, in common with some of the finest stories about South Africa it contains barely any references to the workings of apartheid. However, these are clearly understood to lie behind and give meaning to the entire series of events which occur within it. One recalls stories of this kind by white writers such as De Vries's 'Die Meisie met die bra-pistool' and Jacobson's 'The Zulu and the Zeide'.

As with the other black writers whose language I have discussed in this section, Themba's prose is filled with simile and metaphor, a large proportion of these drawing most unusual parallels. In 'The Dube Train', for example, a man is described as looking 'like a kind of genie, pretending to sleep but watching your every nefarious intention'.<sup>69</sup> In the same story, the tsotsi's curse is described in this way: 'It was like the son of Ham finding a word for his awful discovery. It was like an impression that shuddered the throne of God Almighty. It was both a defilement and a defiance.'<sup>70</sup> There is a singular aptness in this startling comparison where the black thug's curse is likened to Ham - the supposedly black son of Noah - finding angry expression against his servitude. In the story 'The Suit', Themba also calls up a startling parallel when he describes the

shock of a man learning about his wife's infidelity in terms of a machine undergoing an internal, mechanical breakdown:

It was not quite like the explosion of a devastating bomb. It was more like the critical breakdown in an infinitely delicate piece of mechanism. From outside the machine just seemed to have gone dead. But deep in its innermost recesses, menacing electrical flashes were leaping from coil to coil, and hot viscous molten metal was creeping upon the fuel tanks...

Phillemon heard gears grinding and screaming in his head...<sup>71</sup>

Closely bound up with Themba's penchant for imagery is the facility with which he infuses poetic qualities into his prose. This is most notable in the way in which he frequently uses alliteration and assonance in his stories. In the passage describing the tsotsi's curse in 'The Dube Train', for instance, he notes how the thug 'scowled at the woman, and with gold calculation cursed her anatomically'.<sup>72</sup> (My underlining). In the same story the narrator describes his sensations on a train in this way: 'As the train moved off, I leaned out of the paneless window and looked lack-lustrely at the leaden platform...'<sup>73</sup> (My underlining). Soon afterwards there is the following description in which there is a kind of poetic overlaying of language: 'With the rocking of the train as it rolled towards the Phefeni Station, he swayed slightly this way and that, and now and then he lazily chanted a township ditty.'<sup>74</sup> One is struck by the alliteration of 'rocking ...rolled', the use of assonance in the central phrases of 'swayed...way', the rhythmical phrases 'this way and that' and 'now and then', as well as the particularly apt verbal selection of 'township ditty' at the end of the sentence.

There are also moments in his stories where Themba lapses into a

highly poetic form of imagery, relying heavily for its effect on literary echoes. In 'Crepuscule', for instance, the story's title is clarified in Themba's description of the black man's condition in the cities: 'It is a crepuscular shadow-life in which we wander as spectres seeking meaning for ourselves'.<sup>75</sup> In the same story Themba turns to reflect on the Sophiatown of his time and of the social atmosphere of the place 'before the government destroyed it'. In a richly poetic piece of writing, filled with hyperbole and grandiose contrasts, Themba writes:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us; we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way- in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on it being received for good or<sup>76</sup> for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

This poetic use of prose (and the opening words recall those in Dickens's A Tale of Two Cities), it must be emphasized, is not unique to Themba among the black story writers, but features in a great deal of other writing as well. Here, for example, is Achmat Dangor's description of the way in which Samad's grandmother buries his caul soon after his birth:

They heard her dig in the yard, groaning and gasping, but refusing all help. Thus my life was consecrated by the arthritic hands of an old harridan who buried the membrane of my miracle deep in a crypt of household ash, in a backyard beneath a tenement staircase that led above to the whorehouse of the world. And placed a rock on the membrane to prevent some hungry city dog from disinterring the spirit of my uniqueness and howling, carrying it through the midnight streets of District Six. And the membrane bled from the weight of the stone, and flowed into the dead earth, and stirred the forgotten seeds of our immortality.<sup>77</sup>

Themba is also one of the black writers most finely attuned to the township patois, commonly spoken by the tsotsis. In 'The Urchin' he describes this form of language as 'the near-animal, amorphous, quick-shifting lingo' which 'marks the city slicker'.<sup>78</sup> Themba frequently refers to tsotsis in his stories, often giving examples of their speech. In 'The Dube Train', for example, he quotes the following exchange:

"O, Zigzagza, it's how there?"

"It's jewish!"

"Hela, Thola, my ma hears me, I want that ten-n-six?"

"Go get it in hell!"

"Weh, my sister, don't lissen to that guy. Tell him Shakespeare nev'r said so!"<sup>79</sup>

For the outsider the precise meaning of this language is opaque; one has to be part of the tsotsi-world to understand expressions such as, 'Its jewish' and 'Shakespeare'. Themba conveys the confusion of the outsider to this kind of language by means of his sophisticated narrator's response to it. He describes the tsotsis' speech as a 'gibberish exchange' carried out entirely 'in exuberant superlatives'.<sup>80</sup>

In a way, Themba was a kind of tsotsi himself in his relationship to conventional society. He maintained an unusual lifestyle in the townships, heavily debauched, and because of his eccentricity he was set apart from the mainstream: for instance, among his favourite diversions was listening to classical music; this in a neighbourhood where township jazz was the accepted order of the day. Yet Nkosi wrote of him:

He lent to his thoughts the same vivid imagery, sharp staccato rhythm of the township language of the urban tsotsi, because he was himself the supreme intellectual

tsotsi of them all, always, in the words of the blues singer, "raising hell in the neighbourhood".<sup>81</sup>

However, Themba's relationship with the tsotsis and in particular, his use of township slang and the patois of the black lower classes requires deeper analysis. Indeed, aside from Themba, a large number of the black writers also draw upon these rough speech patterns in their stories. This feature is more prominent in some stories than in others. For instance, Dangor's 'Waiting for Leila' is richly infused with the dialect of the street, whereas others of his stories such as 'The Homecoming', 'Jobman', 'The Visit', and 'In the Shadow of the Paradise' are not so heavily reliant upon this particular use of language. Indeed, Mphahlele is another of the writers who has works which draw on the street patois of black people; works such as 'Mrs. Plum', and others in which these rough dialects are brought into stories which are told by a more polished narrative voice. A good example of this is his story 'In Corner B' in which the language of the township people is frequently brought into the narrative and nowhere more startling than in the conclusion which quotes in full the letter of a semi-literate black woman.

This use of township patois establishes the writers' kinship with all levels of their community. Although most of the writers are professional people, they describe and in many cases celebrate the vibrancy of this commonly used township speech. From this one can further understand how this use of language is yet another aspect of the writers' concern to convey the cohesion of

the black communities in the face of powerful forces set against any united black communal identification. Secondly, Achmat Dangor's distinction between what he calls a ghetto and a privileged style of writing in South Africa is especially relevant here.<sup>82</sup> I do not think that there is any one of the major black writers whose works have been described who does not at some point rely upon the 'ghetto style' in his prose. Even in the case of writers such as Ahmed Essop and Bessie Head, whose prose is polished and cultivated, there are aspects of style and certainly instances of direct quotation where they display their affinity with black lower class and dialectal usage of English. In this use of 'ghetto style' the black writers' stories are noticeably different from those of their white counterparts whose use of street patois is limited, to a very large degree, by their social exclusion from the black communities and consequently their only partial familiarity with this use of language. There are, of course, notable exceptions in the white South African short fiction where writers do use (to good effect) black speech patterns and dialects of the country. One recalls the Afrikaans stories of De Vries, Odendaal and M.C. Botha, for example, which dexterously use the 'gammataal' of the black people of the Cape. There are also instances of this use of language in certain of Gordimer's stories such as 'Some Monday for Sure' and 'A City of the Dead, A City of the Living'. However, it is fair to conclude that the 'ghetto style' of writing in South Africa has, hardly surprisingly, been the special preserve of the country's black writers.

Aspects of black resistance to the white society in South Africa are discernible in certain features of the black writers' use of English in their stories. As has already been suggested, a number of examples of the way in which black characters resist the white society are given in Mphahlele's novella 'Mrs. Plum'. Mphahlele shows how the white and black characters speak in ways which set them apart from one another and which emphasize the social severance between the two groups. A fine instance of this is the conversation between Karabo and Mrs. Plum's daughter, Kate. The white girl is telling Karabo about her mother's activities:

She says to me she says, My mother goes to meetings many times. I ask her I say, What for? She says to me she says, For your people. I ask her I say, My people are in Phokeng far away. They have got mouths, I say. What does she want to say something for them? Does she know what my mother and my father want to say? They can speak when they want to. Kate raises her shoulders and drops them and says, How can I tell you Karabo? I don't say your people - your family only. I mean all the black people in this country. I say Oh° What do the black people want to say? Again she<sub>3</sub> raises her shoulders and drops them, taking a deep breath.

We see here how Karabo is far from the simple-minded ingénué of her employers' conception, but rather a person of incisive wit who has the ability to reveal the shallowness of the presumptions of these white people, casting doubt on their assumptions about society and their role in it. Mphahlele conveys this by the way in which Karabo reacts to Kate's use of language: Karabo is described as probing into the way that the white girl uses expressions such as 'for your people'. Karabo's seeming misunderstanding of this term undermines the whole basis of the views the girl is trying to explain. Rather than having Kate offer Karabo, the servant, a lesson in white paternalism,

Mphahlele turns this exchange into the black woman's exposure of its very fraudulence.

The graver aspects of this difference in language usage between white and black people is further elaborated in 'Mrs. Plum' where the two groups are shown to have different and exclusive purposes for the particular way in which they use languages: from this emerges a portrait of two communities who not only fail to communicate successfully with each other but who actually lie to one another. (Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe, is also adept in dealing with this aspect of the inter-communal relations, through contrasting rituals of language, and perhaps nowhere better than in his novel Arrow of God). As Mphahlele's novella progresses we get a disquieting number of instances where the black and white characters lie to one another. Towards the end of the work Karabo comments:

Give them [the white people] any lie, and it will do. For they seldom believe you whatever you say. And how can a black person work for a white people and be afraid to tell them lies. They are always asking the questions, you are always the one to give the answers.<sup>84</sup>

And a little later, Karabo offers the following conclusion:

She [Mrs. Plum] and I often told each other lies, as Kate and I also did... I am sure that we have kept to each other by lying to each other.<sup>85</sup>

Mphahlele's accounts of the black and white characters and the way in which they interact with one another in daily life lead inescapably to this bleak view of two communities divided from one another and relating to one another on the basis of lies.<sup>86</sup>

However, what does arise from this situation, almost as a

corollary to it, is that within each of these divided communities there are distinctive kinds of communication. In the case of the black community the forms of communication which many of the writers wish to emphasize are those of storytelling and the communal sharing of views. Needless to say this is closely bound up with the black writers' commitment to a portrayal of the black society which sets up for consideration its unity of purpose rather than its fragmentation.

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#### IV Humour

On the basis of the perceived differences between the vibrancy of the black communities and the lifelessness of the white ones, it is hardly surprising to discover a richly humorous vein in much black short fiction. There is great variety in the humour of these stories ranging from the gently ironic wit of Mbulelo Mzamane's pieces about pretentious black residents of Soweto to the more caustic mood of Themba's works. Humour is variously portrayed in terms of comical characters, ridiculous situations, and the witty use of language; but what does remain a constant feature in this humorous tradition of storytelling is the satirical quality of the humour where more often than not the racial follies of the country are held up to ridicule.

Casey Motsisi is one of South Africa's most renowned humorous writers. A colleague of Mphahlele, Themba, Todd Matshikiza, Lewis Nkosi and Bloke Modisane on the staff of DRUM during the mid- and late- 1950's, Motsisi was a pioneer in the field of short

humorous fiction based upon a description of the life-styles of black people in the cities. His earliest works (1957 - 1958) were a series of witty pieces in DRUM entitled Casey's Bugs; in these he took bugs as his central characters, imaginatively using these insects who prey continually upon poor black people as his means of focussing upon various features in the society. As Bosman had earlier used the fictional device of the Voorkamer discussions as a means of treating topical events, so Motsisi took up the world of the bugs for a similar purpose. For example, in the piece 'If Bugs were Men' there are references to the country's laws which oppress certain sections of the population and to the response of other countries to this state of affairs. Two bugs are in parliament and one of them declares that if he were president he would pass 'humane and human laws'; to which his colleague replies: 'That means you will forget your bug brothers, me?' The conversation continues: "'I'll make such laws bugs will build me a monument after I'm dead for being the one bug who fought relentlessly to uphold Bug supremacy." "You wouldn't escape criticism from other democratic countries, if you carried on like that," responds his bug-companion.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, in other of the pieces about bugs Motsisi touches upon topical issues. In the pieces 'Boycott Bugs', for instance, there are references to boycotts and to tensions in the black communities of Johannesburg. Here one of the bugs sets out the advantages which exist in blood-sucking from the poor rather than the rich. His companion comments: "'Then all your bugging will be restricted to the locations and townships. You must bug people

irrespective of race, colour or creed."<sup>88</sup> In the piece 'High Bugs' one bug comments: 'When grandfather said South Africa is a bloodmine, he little realised he was making an understatement. Why the place is just overflowing with blood. Especially in the area where I've staked my claim - Sophiatown.'<sup>89</sup>

Casey's Bugs are an irreverant and bantering series of works in which, as we have seen from the examples quoted above, satire plays a significant part. Motsisi's skills as a humorous writer were further demonstrated in a series of short pieces based largely on the black shebeens of Johannesbrug. These works, which appeared regularly over a long period in DRUM magazine and in The World newspaper, were published under the title On the Beat. These pieces are a humorous record of an underworld within the city. Outlawed for many years, the shebeens have been the illicit speakeasies of the black urban community. Their place in the community is as central to the black people in the city as the club or the pub is in British society.<sup>90</sup> Just as their presence poses a challenge to the authorities who continually have them raided and closed down by the police, so too Motsisi's fictional works about the shebeens are in part a challenge to the Establishment as well as a celebration of the black people's ability and desire to outwit the white authorities.

Motsisi's On the Beat pieces have much in common with Damon Runyon's stories of the American underworld of the 1920's. As in Runyon's works, Motsisi portrays a partly threatened world, a world of heavy drinking and, most importantly, a world of

laughter and enjoyment. Through the humorously described ruses to obtain liquor and to preserve their beloved shebeens, Motsisi conveys an overwhelming sense of the black characters' indestructible zest for life. His pieces are peopled with a galaxy of underworld characters to whom he gives a series of witty names. There is Mattress, Mr. Bible-Swinger, Kid Cucumber, Kid Newspapers, and not least of all Motsisi's own appearance in these works as the character Kid Booze:

Maybe you guys catch my drift about who this Kid Booze character is. Some people who are in the know call him Casey Motsisi. But we call him Kid Booze on account the guy is always boozed up, come rain and shine. That's me, kids.<sup>91</sup>

Most of the pieces have a picaresque quality with the black characters, who are significantly called 'non-voters' by Motsisi, applying their mental energies to the continual struggle against the police and anyone else - landlords, zealous shebeen-owners - who try to curb their freedom. The following exchange in the story 'Mattress' is typical of these features in Motsisi's works:

At home Mattress asks me how the permit raids have been treating me and I tell him I just parted with another three quid. He tells me how he's been getting away with it by locking himself in from the outside with a padlock and then squeezing through the window at night. This will give the cops the impression that he has already left when they come a-raiding in the wee-small hours, he tells me. He asks<sup>92</sup> me to do likewise'. I tell him I'll die with my boots on...

The black South African writer who has taken up the tradition of humorous storytelling most directly from Casey Motsisi is Mbulelo Mzamane. As with Motsisi, Mzamane's stories are set within the black townships around Johannesburg and draw a great deal of their humour from the resilience of their black characters. The

first part of Mzamane's collection, Mzala, consists of five stories which describe various members of the narrator's family and the assorted adventures in which they find themselves. Closely based on his own family (as Mzamane tells us in his introduction to the collection), the leading character in these pieces is the Protean figure of Jola, the narrator's cousin. The stories describe how Jola swiftly adapts to the ways of the city after arriving in Soweto from the rural backwoods of the Transkei (Xhosaland). Jola is a representative figure: through his adaptability and his talent for survival in the harsh conditions of the black ghetto and in the face of the oppressive laws he stands for qualities in the black people which Mzamane clearly wishes to praise. The Jola stories are Mzamane's blunt rejoinder to the host of 'Jim comes to Jo'burg' narratives (largely written by whites) which describe a black man's fall to misery and destruction as a result of his journey to the cities.<sup>93</sup> Like Karabo and many of the black characters in 'Mrs. Plum', and indeed in a great number of black South African stories, Jola is preeminently a survivor and a person of great resourcefulness. Towards the end of the first story 'My Cousin Comes to Jo'burg' we read of his ability to switch professions according to need: 'His pass gave him a sense of space. He refused to be confined to any one job, so that in his many years in the city he's worked as a doctor, a painter, a priest and a prophet.'<sup>94</sup> One can usefully compare this account with that given of the Reverend KK in 'Mrs. Plum' who, like Jola, displays his resourcefulness in the way in which he shifts his profession:

The Reverend KK did not belong to any church. He baptised, married, and buried people for a fee, who had no church to do such things for them. They said he had been driven out of the Presbyterian Church. He had formed his own, but it did not go far. Then he later came and opened the Black Crow [Club, for black servants].<sup>95</sup>

Significantly, the Reverend KK turns his abilities to the service of his own people, yet with a keen eye for his own material advantage.

For his part, Mzamane indicates how Jola easily learns to outwit the system, turning it to serve his needs:

He's been arrested and deported to the Transkei several times. Once the police managed to guard him as far as Bloemfontein. He came back to Johannesburg on a goods train... He has remained in the township, where his wits have sharpened with exposure to the vicissitudes of life. What's more, he's lived so long under the shadow of the vagrancy laws, the Influx control regulations and the rest that he has come to consider such hazards as a shield and an umbrella.<sup>96</sup>

In a later story, 'The Pioneer's Daughter', Mzamane also indicates how one of his characters easily spurns the pressure of the laws: 'Lyllian learnt for the first time, with great shock, that she belonged to KwaZulu. But because she knew no one there she chose to remain in Johannesburg where she still lives.'<sup>97</sup>

Interestingly, Mzamane chooses, unlike many other South African writers, to reveal the ways in which his black characters cheerfully outwit the system, inverting it to serve their needs; he does this rather than describing the way in which black people are degraded and bludgeoned by the oppressive conditions in which they are forced to live.<sup>98</sup> His response is one which not only reveals the resilience of the black people but one which expressly celebrates their defiance of the laws which curtail

freedom. This is succinctly conveyed in the narrator's comment in the story 'The Party': 'There are people, I believe, who take misfortune in their stride and can turn it to their advantage, people who'll make faces at adversity and get away with it.'<sup>99</sup>

Mzamane's stories reveal their author's keen sense of the comic in all aspects of life. It is worth quoting several examples to illustrate the felicity with which Mzamane describes the life of the townships. 'My Cousin and his 'Pick-Ups' deals with Jola's sexual escapades. The opening sequences of this story, in particular, are among the most amusing in South African fiction. The narrator comments on Jola's unceasing sexual conquests in this way: 'His opportunistic pounces on deserted wives, unmarried women and widows have left a stain on our family escutcheon.'<sup>100</sup> Mzamane's use of the image of the stained escutcheon is particularly witty, setting this reference to European heraldry incongruously in relations to his modern family in Soweto. Soon after this there is the following passage, rich in comic observation and verbal humour:

At any rate, let wagging tongues continue: my family is not one to leave a kinsman in the lurch. A relation in need is to be helped, not blamed, so we have harboured Mzal'uJola whenever some woman's irritated teats and overdeveloped tummy have edged him out of bed.<sup>101</sup>

Mzamane builds the humour of the situation around figures of speech such as leaving 'a kinsman in the lurch' and the final graphic image of Jola being edged out of bed by his pregnant companion. Soon after, the narrator describes his cousin's affair with a white woman in this way:

I thought him the riskiest of daredevils the day he brought home a white lady - well, slightly off-white, but recognizably non-black all the same. An official comb placed in her curly hair would definitely have fallen if proof were ever needed of her racial origin.

The two did not seem to have heard of the Immorality Act. Neither did any of the laws of propriety restrain their recklessness. "Convention to the winds" they seemed to proclaim. I thought this intoxicated assertion of permissiveness some generations ahead of our time, and a few miles beyond the borders of our country's moral climate.<sup>102</sup>

There is an exuberance not only in Mzamane's satire of the racial taboos and bogus means of racial differentiation but also in the quality of his language: for example, there are the hyperbolic phrases 'riskiest of daredevils', 'convention to the winds', and 'intoxicated assertion of permissiveness', in this passage. The use of these slightly hackneyed phrases and vocabulary in strange combinations and in the most surprising contexts is a recurring feature of much black short fiction where English is being adapted and remoulded by South African writers. Laughing at literary conventions is part of a strategy for laughing at the society's laws. Just as Mzamane causes one to laugh at the laws in South Africa and their ineffectiveness in curbing transgression of them, so too does he ridicule the means of racial determination: 'an official comb placed in her curly hair would definitely have fallen if proof were ever needed of her racial origin.' Mzamane's narrator playfully muses about the woman's actual skin colouring - 'well, slightly off-white, but recognizably non-black all the same' - poking fun at the rigid system of racial categorization. It is worth observing that Mzamane's humorous and yet satirical response to this subject is

markedly different to Mphahlele's treatment of the same instance in his story, 'A Point of Identity'.<sup>103</sup> Mphahlele shares Mzamane's scorn for this practice; yet he describes it in a far more serious and sombre fashion, indicating the misery this process of race classification brings about. Mzamane's treatment, in fact, shares the spirit of Herman Bosman's story 'Birth Certificate'.

As these examples from his stories indicate, Mzamane has a sharp eye for humorous situations and is alert to the kind of incongruities in life which cause mirth. Here, for example, is his description of a family's musical abilities:

My family is sharply divided into two: those who can sing and those who can't. The latter group is invariably more critical than the former. Their ears are paradoxically more faultless, and their taste more cultivated. They try to hide their inability to correct any false notes they hear by producing equally off-key guffaws.<sup>104</sup>

In the second part of Mzala, Mzamane has a number of stories which treat the black petty-bourgeois class of the townships with an equal measure of humour and satire. Mzamane is concerned not so much with the possibilities of their uncertain allegiance either to the Establishment or to the black working class, but more with the hypocrisies of these characters and indeed, with how their material achievements cannot divorce them from the common hardships of their less well-to-do black compatriots. In 'A Present for my Wife' there is an account of two Soweto neighbours who are separately plagued by acquisitive wives. Mazibuko assuages his wife's greed for possessions by offering

her a large range of stolen goods. The narrator comments:

Strange thing about Meisie. She's got all the comforts you'd think a woman needs. Bedroom suite, kitchen scheme and now a fridge. She's by far the best dressed woman in our street, the first to wear an Afro wig and all that. But she won't hear of Mazibuko bringing stolen goods to her house. She knows very well that not even Mazibuko's life savings could buy her the things she has in the house. She'll accept anything as long as you tell her you bought it. But don't make the mistake of telling her you stole it...<sup>105</sup>

Mphahlele's story 'Grieg on a Stolen Piano' describes a similar situation where a husband keeps the household stocked with stolen goods: here, too, the man's wife abhors the idea of having stolen property in her house. Towards the end of the story she discovers that her husband's piano has been stolen and responds angrily. On this occasion, Mphahlele takes the comedy one step further than in Mzamane's story. He adds another satirical dimension to this situation by indicating that theft is part of the social fabric and that the black and white communities coexist on the basis of theft and lies. In Mphahlele's story, Uncle exclaims:

"She worries about a stolen piano... She forgets she sleeps between stolen sheets; every bit of cutlery that goes into her mouth was stolen by the boys from whom I bought it; her blouses are stolen goods, her stockings.. Don't we steal from each other, lie to each other every day and know it, us and the whites?... So we keep stealing from the white man and lying to him and he does the same. This way we can still feel some pride."<sup>106</sup>

Mzamane has an acute sense of the social pretensions of his petty-bourgeois characters and wittily undercuts these on many occasions. The narrator in 'A Present for my Wife', for instance, comments: 'Using [my wife's] money and using mine are

two different things. She won't part with hers to buy any of the expensive things she's always at me about, precisely because she knows they're worthless.'<sup>107</sup> In the story 'Fezile' Mzamane describes the tribulation his chief character has over his cars. Fezile suffers a series of car-thefts which eventually lead to him losing his job. The narrator comments: 'You bought your car in order to secure your job and then it almost landed you out of the same job. On the other hand, if you relied on public transport you arrive late for work so many times you ended by being sacked.'<sup>108</sup> Ultimately Fezile is forced to share the uncertain circumstances of his fellow black workers despite his comfortable income.

Finally, in 'The Soweto Bride', Mzamane wittily deflates the pretensions of certain of the central characters in a story which describes the events following a Sowetan bringing his newly married black American bride into the township. As in the story 'The Pioneer's Daughter', Mzamane satirizes a black American who holds herself above the common Soweto people. In both stories the American wives return to their countries having witnessed the death of their husbands and not having established any rapport with black South Africans. In the more sombre 'The Pioneer's Daughter' Mzamane celebrates the courage of the daughter of the marriage who chooses to remain in Soweto and throw in her lot with the working-class people of the township. In 'The Soweto Bride' there is abundant humour which arises largely out of Mzamane's account of the disparity between the snobbish American

woman and the earthy and ebullient people of Soweto. Another element which adds humour to the story is the way in which the pretentious black narrator - a friend of the husband - finds himself caught between courting the favours of the newly arrived woman and the informal demands of the Soweto scene; he finally succumbs to the latter. A good example of the story's humour is the scene in which the couple arrive at the home of the groom's parents. The narrator records:

Predictably, a woman I had recognized from the outset by her uniform - she was dressed in the red blouse, black skirt and white hat of the Methodist Mothers' umanyano - burst into an impromptu rendition of 'Lord Now Lettest Thy Servant Depart in Peace'. The house joined in. Torn between self-respect and my instinctive response, I hummed the baritone part as audibly as I could but with my mouth firmly shut to create the illusion I was silent.

The same woman of the umanyano burst into a prayer of considerable length... She rounded off her prayer by condemning contraception and wishing the couple a household of children.

"What will the American think of us?" I kept on saying to myself...<sup>109</sup>

Mzamane's stories form part of that central stream of works by black writers which set out to extol values in the black community rather than castigate this community for some of its weaknesses. There is no doubt that Mzamane's commitment at the time of writing these stories to the Black Consciousness Movement informs this vision; but what is more important is that this benign view of the black society is the dominant one in black English literature.

Besides the predominantly humorous short fiction of Motsisi and Mzamane there are an abundance of humorous stories among the

works of the other leading black writers. In Mphahlele's story 'In Corner B', which is essentially a tribute to the quality of communalism in the black township, a number of very amusing incidents are described. The events of the story take place against the backdrop of the wake and funeral of a man who has been murdered in the township. During the sad time Mphahlele describes the way in which the black people concerned maintain their good spirits and show their respect for one another even in the most trying moments: what emerges is a portrait of a people able to celebrate the life-giving aspects of existence precisely in circumstances of death and bereavement. In one incident a group of people meet in the yard of the house where the wake is being conducted to share their sorrow over a bottle of liquor:

"God's people... here is an ox for slaughter." At this point he introduced a bottle of brandy. One did not simply plant a whole number of bottles on the floor: that was imprudent. "Cousin Felang came driving it to this house of sorrow. I have been given the honour of slaughtering it, as the uncle of this clan." With this he uncorked the bottle and served the brandy, taking care to measure with his fingers.

"This will kill the heart for a time so it does not break from grief. Do not the English say drown de sorry?" He belched from deep down his stomach...

This passage offers an example of how a rural, pre-colonial practice exerts its influence after undergoing a 'sea change' to fit the mores of city people where the bottle of brandy is substituted for the traditional slaughtered animal. The continuity of African traditions from country to city and from past into present through various changes is, as we have seen, a feature of many works by black South African writers.

Can Themba is a writer with a mordant sense of humour which is often bound up with a lacerating kind of satire in his stories. This is nowhere more finely illustrated than in his piece 'Crepuscule' which describes how Can Themba - the story's protagonist - takes his white lover into the predominantly black area of Sophiatown in flagrant defiance of the legal prohibition of interracial sex. On entering a shebeen the stunned proprietress approaches Themba and his companion and asks:

'"What would you have, Mr. Themba?"' Themba then breaks his account of the events to reflect mischievously:

There are certain names that do not go with Mister. I don't have a clue why. But, for sure, you cannot imagine a Mr. Charlie Chaplin or a Mr. William Shakespeare or a Mr. Jesus Christ. My name - Can Themba - operates in that sort of class...

Aside from Themba's irreverent alignment of himself with the oddly assorted and illustrious company of Chaplin, Shakespeare, and Jesus, this passage illustrates how Themba has projected his personality directly into the heart of his story, thereby minimising the sense of its fictionality. This is especially significant when one recalls its subject-matter. Later in the story Themba confronts the group of tsotsis (street thugs) who had earlier taken the unprecedented action of advising one of Themba's aggrieved former girl-friends to report his violation of the Immorality Act to the police. They tell Themba that they object to the way in which he brings whites into Sophiatown to prey upon their black women and has now taken to bringing in his white girlfriend. Themba's reply is one of the finest humorous moments in black South African writing:

"Look boys... You don't understand, you don't understand me. I agree with you that these whites take advantage of our girls and we don't like the way our girls act as if they are special. But all you've done about it is just to sit and sizzle here at them. No-one among you has tried to take revenge. Only I have gone to get a white girl and avenged with her what the whites do to our sisters. I'm not like the guys who procure black girls for their white friends. I seek revenge. I get the white girls - well, it's tough and risky, but you guys, instead of sitting here crying your hearts out, you should get yourselves white girls, too, and hit back."<sup>112</sup>

Another piece of maverick black story-telling which invites comparison with Themba's work and which takes as one of its central concerns the taboos on interracial sex in South Africa, is Lewis Nkosi's 'The Prisoner'. Nkosi's story is built around a number of comic reversals where a former white gaoler becomes a prisoner and this man's black prisoner in turn becomes his gaoler. Much of the humour in the piece rests on the way in which the sexual appetites of the two men have become central to their condition. The white man, George, was jailed after his sexual adventures with a black woman who had been set up as his temptress by his former black prisoner. The scales have turned and the black man is now George's gaoler and has taken George's wife as his mistress. There is much verbal wit in the final lines of the story when the black narrator tells an associate from one of the State departments:

I think my position is really impregnable. Yes: I think so: impregnable. I've taken every precaution. I think I have managed to avoid every pitfall and snare which brought George Hollingworth down!

Ah, there is George's wife, Francina! Look at those gazelle limbs, the very power of those thighs. What a prize cow!<sup>113</sup>

Richard Rive is yet another writer who treats the racist practices of the country with humour. In his story 'The Man from the Board' he describes the encounter between a black ('coloured') man and an Afrikaner state official. The white man has arrived at the flat of the black man - Isaac Jacobs - on a Saturday afternoon for the purpose of serving him with notice of his impending eviction: the grounds for Jacob's removal are that he is deemed to be living in a 'white' area of Cape Town. The potential anger of the meeting is dissipated by the Afrikaner's bonhomie and blithe obliviousness to the fact that the purpose of his visit is deeply offensive to the black man. Rive describes the official's affability and how Jacobs comes to be fascinated by this and the way in which Bredenkamp (the official) conforms to a humorous stereotype of the Afrikaner. In the following exchange, Bredenkamp has noticed Jacob's television set and, as is his wont, begins a garrulous conversation about this subject:

"I must say you've got a nice set, Mr. Jacobs. Sony isn't it? You prefer it?"

"What?"

"You prefer a Sony? I'm thinking about getting one for the boys. I like the colour but my wife is worried about the small screen. Do you find it too small?"...

"Mr. Bredenkamp, please listen to me. Could you please finish your questions and leave as soon as possible?"

"Now, now, Mr. Jacobs. I'm sorry if I said anything to upset you. I was only talking about the Sony. I'm sorry to take up your time. I also have to earn my living, I really can't understand what you people can have against us."<sup>114</sup>

Rive's approach to the subject gains strength precisely because of the ironies which arise out of the way in which the Afrikaner misconstrues the black man. The Afrikaner's obtuseness is in

this way shown to be related to the folly of his entire mission.

The story 'Advance, Retreat' (earlier published in a slightly different version entitled 'Black Macbeth') offers a humorous account of the events surrounding the production of Macbeth by a Coloured Secondary school in the Cape.<sup>115</sup> Rive wittily calls the characters by their stage-names and plays upon the incongruity which arise between the behaviour of the contemporary characters and their stage personalities. This is how Lady Macbeth, for example, is introduced in the story:

There was a loud bang at his door. He looked up, straining through the dull ache, to see Lady Macbeth framed in the entrance, swinging a tennis racquet in her hand. His headache cleared slightly at the sight of her. She was the very ample gym mistress who insisted on wearing very tight tights especially when she knew that he would be around. He didn't mind that. At rehearsals they had their private little game. He would slap her backside and say, "This castle hath a pleasant seat."<sup>116</sup> She loved it.

Rive also gives an amusing account of the political tensions which surround the production. Many of the students and staff are aggrieved at the racial aspects that arise in the project. Early in the story we are told: 'There was a spirit of rebellion especially among the more radical pupils who were strongly influenced by Macduff, who taught them history. They put up notices about a darkie Shakespeare and a coon Macbeth.'<sup>117</sup> Throughout this story Rive satirizes the way in which racial categories have come to possess the thinking of his characters to such an extent that paradoxically they often become the dupes of the system they are resisting.

Dissent reaches boiling point when the school learns that the

principal - Macbeth - intends staging the production in front of a segregated white audience in a so-called white area. In a very amusing dénouement the chastened principal recants when it comes to taking the play out of the township and begs his cast to remain faithful to the production:

"Forgive me when I break down like this. It is only because I feel so strongly for you, my people. To those who accuse Retreat Senior Secondary of racialism, I say, this is not a coloured Macbeth, nor a white Macbeth," he stared pointedly at Macduff, "Nor a black Macbeth, but a non-racial Macbeth, a non-ethnic Macbeth. And a pox on him who says otherwise!"

'Advance, Retreat' is a good example from yet another black writer who has seen and is exploiting the absurdity and humour which often lies behind the racial obsessions of South Africans. In the respect, Rive's work shares much with the satirical stories of Herman Bosman and Christopher Hope.

Ahmed Essop, like Rive, has a story which describes the visit of a white official to a black household, intending to serve notice of their eviction. In Essop's story, however, Mr. Hill is only too aware of the charms of the Indian housewife. Here is Essop's wryly humorous account of the white man sprawled on the couch of the Indian household conjuring up visions of oriental delights:

He was unperturbed by Mrs. Effendi's unwillingness to succumb. Perhaps she needed a little time to adjust to this transformation from an official into a Romeo. He had the night to himself and decided not to hurry matters. He saw a bowl of fruit on the table and helped himself. He munched an apple while gazing at a silver-framed picture of the Taj Mahal. "Beautiful° Beautiful°" he whispered as a feeling of being involved in some Eastern romantic adventure - with harems of princesses, tambourines, shebert and all that -

took hold of him (he had had two double brandies in the bar shortly before his arrival). Soon a houri, clad in silk and glittering with jewels would appear before him (he had seen such things happening in films) to offer him her dusky charms. Then he ate a peach, two bananas and some grapes. After that a sense of delicious euphoria filled him. It was a sultry night...<sup>119</sup>

Essop, like many of the black writers whose works I have quoted, has a fine sense of comedy of situation. In his story 'Film', for instance, he describes how a dignified group of Muslim community leaders end up being escorted into a cinema where they are left to view the film The Prophet, against whose screening they have been protesting on religious grounds for many months. In the story 'Aziz Khan' Essop describes how the religious zealot, Khan, engages in a number of campaigns for what he sees as the moral improvement of the Muslim community. One of his disputes is with the Muslim Council on the issue of whether Muslim men should wear beards. Essop reports on the fiery exchanges between the two parties with relish, as in this extract of his version of one of the Council's pamphlets on the subject, in which there is a humorous revelry over parody of the rhetorical flourishes of the prose:

The beard has been the pillar of Islam from the beginning when Allah drove his beloved Adam from paradise to the present day when the world is infested with beardless Cafirs. Who can deny that Adam - the handsomest man in the annals of Creation - possessed a beard? We ask these hypocritical reformers this simple question: Did Adam have a razor and blades?...<sup>120</sup>

One recalls here Peter Wilhelm's and Christopher Hope's similar delight in using parody as vehicles for satire.<sup>121</sup>

One of the great strengths of Essop's writing is his talent for

characterization. He has a keen sense for the quirks and idiosyncrasies which go so far in defining a person's character. In 'Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker' he offers a lively portrait of a black man who survives all the vicissitudes of his life with panache. This is the way in which he describes Hajji Musa after the opening encounter of the story in which the Hajji has proved himself to be a persuasive quack-doctor:

In appearance Hajji Musa was a fat, pot-bellied, short, dark man, with glossy black wavy hair combed backwards with fastidious care. His face was always clean-shaven. For some reason he never shaved in the bathroom, and every morning one saw him in the yard, in vest and pyjama trousers, arranging (rather precariously) his mirror and shaving equipment on the window-sill outside the kitchen and going through the ritual of cleaning his face with the precision of a surgeon. His great passion was talking and while shaving he would be conducting conversations with various people in the yard: with the hawker packing his fruit and vegetables in the cart; with the two wives of the motor mechanic Soni; with the servants coming to work.<sup>122</sup>

Like many of the black characters we have encountered in the stories of Mphahlele, Motsisi, Mzamane and the other writers, Essop's Hajji is a resourceful individual who has managed a bewilderingly large number of professions during his life: 'At various times he had been a commercial traveller, insurance salesman, taxi driver, companion to dignitaries from India and Pakistan, Islamic missionary, teacher at a seminary, shopkeeper, matchmaker and hawker of ladies' underwear.'<sup>123</sup>

In the concluding episode of this story there is the humorous encounter between Hajji Musa and a Hindu fire-walker. The Hajji is quick to pour scorn on the Hindu man's religion and endeavours: '"There is nothing wonderful about walking on fire...

The Hindus think that they are performing miracles. Bah! Miracles!" And he exploded in laughter. "What miracles can their many gods perform, I ask you."<sup>124</sup> Finally, Hajji Musa is made to honour his taunts by showing that he can walk on the burning coals. Needless to say he is severely burnt and ends up in hospital. Nevertheless his poise and confidence are not dented in the least. The story concludes:

We went to visit him. We expected to find a man humiliated, broken. We found him sitting up on bed, swathed in bandages, but as ebullient and resilient as always, with a bevy of young nurses eagerly attending to him.

"Boys, I must say fire-walking is not for me. Showmanship... That's for magicians and crowd-pleasers... those seeking cheap publicity."

And he laughed in his usual way until the hospital corridors resounded.<sup>125</sup>

Among the distinctive qualities of Essop's humour is the way he has turned to the Islamic and Hindu communities with their religious practices as the subject and often butt of his comedies. In this respect he is unique among black South African writers, taking his lead not so much from black South African traditions but more from Indian traditions exemplified best in certain of works of R.K. Narayan or further afield in the early fiction of V.S. Naipaul.

Humour then forms an important element in the tradition of modern black South African short fiction, and, as I have suggested is closely related to the black writers' sense of their community being more convivial and cohesive than that of the whites: amidst conditions of hardship laughter rings out. Even James Matthews,

a writer who generally treats the black condition with gravity and who is deeply concerned to portray the solidarity of black people in opposition to apartheid, has a small number of humorous stories in his oeuvre. 'The Party', for example, presents a humorous and satirical account of a young black writer's experiences at a party given by liberal whites who lionize black talent. 'Mistaken Identity' turns to a series of incidents in a black area of Cape Town, relating the progress of a drunk man at a wake. This piece recalls Mphahlele's 'In Corner B' which also describes humorous events taking place at a family wake.<sup>126</sup> As with certain of their fellow white writers in South Africa, the black writers have found humour an especially effective way of dealing with the adverse conditions of the country. In their case, however, comedy and laughter have double significance: not only as a gesture of defiance but also as a token of spirited survival. In the hands of victims, satire and comedy become especially powerful means with which to strike back at the forces of their oppression.

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#### V A Literature about Violence

##### a) Racial Violence

Having understood the need and basis for a fiction which in part offers strength to the black South African community stressing aspects of its unity in the face of great hardships we can now move on to discuss those dimensions of the short fiction which most directly deal with these conditions set upon breaking apart this society; and these are set forth in the stories which

Dimensions of short fiction which deal directly with these conditions set when breaking apart this society; these are set forth in stories which

-434-

describe the violence both from within and facing the black people of South Africa. In black short fiction it is often difficult to disentangle the violence which takes place within the black slums and townships from the violence of the social system itself: for the black writers, the violence in their neighbourhoods is intimately bound up with the wider social system which subordinates black people. Without exception, all of the black writers with whom we are dealing are concerned to offer a portrait of the violence of the society and the way it has come to affect individual characters in their stories. Bloke Modisane has written: 'I am saturated with violence.. it was, and is, the expression and clarification of our society.'<sup>127</sup>

Alex La Guma is the writer whose stories perhaps describe the violence of the society with the most clarity and variety. I should like to base my analysis of the portrayal of violence in black short fiction largely on a discussion of his stories and relate some of the observations which arise from this to works by the other black writers. La Guma's novella 'A Walk in the Night' offers a model of how the violence which takes place within a black quarter of a city is closely related to the broader violence generated by the system of racial oppression. The work describes how two people are killed during a single night in the impoverished area of District Six in Cape Town. In the first incident, Michael Adonis, a young black ('coloured') man, in a fit of anger, kills the harmless old Irishman, Doughty: the second murder takes place when the white policeman Raalt shoots

the black youth Willieboy, whom he wrongly suspects of having killed Doughty. The policeman needlessly shoots Willieboy after he had been cornered and then negligently allows him to die in the back of the police-van rather than summon an ambulance.

The title of the novella and its epigraph are taken from Hamlet:

I am thy father's spirit;  
Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,  
And for the day confined to fast in fires,  
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature  
Are burnt and purged away. (My underlining.)

Like the Shakespeare tragedy, the central action of 'A Walk in the Night' turns about an act of transgression, Adonis's murder of Doughty, and the issue (suggested by the epigraph) of whether this act will be avenged in some way. One way in which it differs from Hamlet is that the murder in La Guma's work goes unavenged and rather than order being established in the end, the policeman's killing of Willieboy perpetuates the disorder and breakdown which we have come to see as symptomatic of the entire social world of the novella.

One of the major themes of the work is the hatred between white and black people. The opening images are of Michael Adonis's anger at being dismissed from his job because he had answered back in reaction to a white foreman's jibes. This is how he tells Willieboy about the incident: "[He] Called my a cheeky black bastard. Me, I'm not black. Anyway I said he was a no-good pore-white and he calls the manager and they give me my pay and tell me to muck out of it. White sonofabitch. I'll get him".<sup>128</sup>

The mutual hatred of the black and white characters is conveyed in the relationship between the police and the black residents of District Six. Significantly, the only white people who are described as entering and moving within the area are the policemen and they are viewed by the community as aliens and intruders. The two policemen who harrass Adonis early in the novella have 'hard frozen faces as if carved out of pink ice and hard, dispassionate eyes, hard and bright as pieces of blue glass. They strolled slowly and determinedly side by side, without moving off their course, cutting a path through the stream on the pavement like destroyers at sea.'<sup>129</sup> One notices here La Guma's powerful use of simile and metaphor, a quality of his language which we have discussed earlier in the chapter. Similarly, in a later passage, La Guma describes the response of the people in Adonis's tenement to the police in the following way:

A few slid quietly away into the shadows beyond the lamp-light, for there was no desire in them to co-operate with these men who wore their guns like appendages of their bodies and whose faces had the hard metallic look, and whose hearts and guts were merely valves and wires which operated robots.<sup>130</sup>

The white police are seen as inhuman figures by the black people - as robots. There are a number of occasions in which the black characters give verbal expression to their hatred of the police. La Guma establishes an ironic parallel between the police and the system of racial oppression by means of the characters' description of the police as 'the law'. After having killed Doughty, Michael Adonis reflects: 'What's the law for? To kick us

poor brown bastards around.'<sup>131</sup> A little later he muses on the police's relationship with black people: 'What's the bloody law done for them? Why, they can't have a little drink in and be found on the street without the law smacking them around.'<sup>132</sup> Towards the end of the novella Willieboy echoes Adonis's earlier thought: 'Us poor bastards always get kicked around. If it's not the law it's something else.' Indeed, Willieboy's last sad and bitter words are: '"They's always kicking a poor bastard around"'.<sup>133</sup>

If the black people are shown to hate the police - who represent white authority for them - then this hatred also governs the police's response to the black residents of District Six. For the policeman Raalt the black people are '"..effing hotnot bastards.."' and '"...a lot of bloody baboons..."'.<sup>134</sup> He recognizes the implacable hatred between the two groups:

These bastards don't like us; they never did like us and we are only tolerated here; I bet there are some here who would like to stick a knife into me right now.

Soon after this, he reflects:

They hate<sup>135</sup> us, but I don't give a bloody hell about them, anyway...

The hatred and fear blacks and whites feel for each other is a recurrent concern in the black short fiction. There is a notable tendency in the stories, however, to view the hatred and fear in the wider context of social oppression. The writers often try to show their black characters' hatred of white people not so much as personal hatred for a particular person or group of people but rather as a loathing for the system which they represent and

support. A good illustration of this is given in Matshoba's story 'My Friend, the Outcast' where a black family is being expelled from their house in Soweto. The white and black officials threaten and abuse the shocked householders and Matshoba describes the response of the grandmother of the family in this way:

Mrs. Nyembezi did not move from where she was sitting, holding her hands together and looking her persecutors in the face, no longer afraid of them but hating them - no their deed - with all her being. I say their deed because I never knew that old woman bear hatred for another human. <sup>136</sup>

An image which comes to characterize the existence of the poor people of District Six in 'A Walk in the Night' and which has enormous resonance in the novella is that these people are compared to ghosts, doomed, like Hamlet's father, to walk the night in a fearful search for release from their condition and vengeance against their wrongdoers. This image is touched upon in the fourth chapter where La Guma offers the first description of the poor people and their district away from the main commercial streets of the area:

He turned down another street, away from the artificial glare of Hanover, between stretches of damp, battered houses with their broken-ribs of front railings; cracked walls and high tenements that rose like the left-overs of a bombed area in the twilight; vacant lots and weed-grown patches where houses had once stood; and deep doorways resembling the entrances to deserted castles. There were children playing in the street, darting among the overflowing dustbins and shooting at each other with wooden guns. In some of the doorways people sat or stood, murmuring idly in the fast-fading light like wasted ghosts in a plague-ridden city. <sup>137</sup> (My underlining.)

The spectral condition of the people of District Six is again referred to in Michael Adonis's encounter with Doughty. The old

Irishman is telling Adonis of the series of failures and troubles which have beset him in his life and have reduced him from being a noted actor who played in Britain and Australia to a wreck drinking away his time in a slum in Cape Town. At one point he says to Adonis: "'We're like Hamlet's father's ghost"'. He goes on to recite falteringly from the ghost's speech: 'I am thy father's spirit...' He breaks off and says: "'That's us, us Michael, my boy. Just ghosts, doomed to walk the night".<sup>138</sup>

Images of black South Africans forced to live as wraith-like figures in a country in which they are denied a just place occurs in various places and in different forms in the short fiction. The closest parallel with La Guma's novella occurs in Themba's story 'Crepuscule' where, as has been discussed earlier, the black people are described as living a 'shadow-life': 'It is a crepuscular shadow-life in which we wander as spectres seeking meaning for ourselves.'<sup>139</sup> In Dangor's 'Waiting for Leila' we recall the resilient cry of the narrator as he sees District Six being cleared for white occupation: 'No white man will ever build his home here. Our ghosts are ineradicable.'<sup>140</sup> A little later Dangor conjures up the voices of black people ringing out of the past and into the present: 'Meester, I am coming for you...Bass - ek kom vir jou met a vengeance.'<sup>141</sup> The final scene of the novella describes the hundreds of black children, arrested after the uprising of 1976, singing freedom songs in jail. The last glimpse we are given of them is the following ghostly image: 'Beyond, beneath a pall of icy horror, the row of children seemed

like frozen effigies suspended from the wall.<sup>142</sup>

At the end of Dangor's story 'In the Shadow of Paradise', after the black man who has managed for many years to pass as white because of his light skin, shoots himself, a black onlooker calls out with 'the beginnings of a sob in his voice': '"You're one of us again, ou broer! Welcome home!'"<sup>143</sup> In the story 'Jobman' Dangor considers the place of the black people in South Africa: are they destined to be the inheritors of the land or will they remain a shadowy people bound up in heroic stories of past greatness? At the end of the work the white farmer shoots the black man and the following reflection is given on the dead man's fate:

Long after the shot had died, he [the white farmer] continued to stare at the fallen figure through the telescope, as if it was part of the landscape. Just another fallen "hotnotgot" that would become part of the pitiable legends these people created to glorify a forgotten past.<sup>144</sup>

Set against this is the white man's brief meditation earlier in the story in which he considers another and very different aspect of the black people's presence in South Africa:

In ten years he [the white farmer] had inherited a huge farm, a widowed mother, a wife and sons, and three corpses. Or had he inherited? His family had owned the land for a hundred years - his father's father, then his father, and his progeny would own it one day.

Yet they owned it like transient overlords, generation after generation passing on its ownership, while these [black] people never seemed to pass on... They would be here long after he had passed on.<sup>145</sup>

One recalls here the white narrators' sense of insecurity and impermanence in the two Afrikaans stories 'Ek vat my land' by Smit and 'Agterplaas' by Joubert.

One of the most frequent subjects in the fiction is the racial abuse which faces all South Africans. The overbearing way in which the legal system of the country affects its people is a matter of concern in many of the stories where the writers give examples of how individuals and groups of people come to be mistreated and demeaned as a result of it. One of the difficulties facing writers has been the ease with which one can be tempted to sensationalize racial violence. Early in his critical career Lewis Nkosi was especially attentive to this possibility and raged against black South African fiction of this type:

What we do get from South Africa ...- and what we get most frequently - is the journalistic fact parading outrageously as imaginative literature. We find here a type of fiction which exploits the ready-made plots of racial violence, social apartheid, interracial love affairs which are doomed from the beginning, without any attempt to transcend or transmute these given "social facts" into artistically persuasive works of fiction.<sup>146</sup>

As we have seen, one of the ways in which black writers have responded to the racial violence in their stories is to lay emphasis on the forces of unity and strength within the black community in reaction to this disruptive violence, rather than over-stressing the disruptions and pain caused by it. Nevertheless, there is a large strain of black short fiction which deals precisely with the terrible consequences of the violence. In spite of the anxieties of critics such as Nkosi that the black writers would fall into the trap of sensationalizing the racial situations of the country, many of these writers have produced stories of great merit which have

transmuted social facts 'into artistically persuasive works of fiction'. Their means of doing this have variously involved treating incidents with irony, satire, derision, pathos and occasionally humour; or indeed, a combination of several of these. There are a small number of stories of truly tragic dimensions in which fine and noble people are shown to have their aspirations and abilities crippled and wasted as a result of the racial violence of the system.

Alex La Guma's 'Out of Darkness' is a work which describes various facets of the violence and abuse to which black South Africans are subjected. It is set within a prison where the narrator tells of his meeting with a fellow black prisoner who is derisively called Ou Kakkelak, Old Cockroach, by his cell-mates. Within the few pages of the story La Guma details the way in which the black prisoners mistreat one another and also how the white warders abuse the prisoners. For example, early in the piece, we are told how the white guards lashed out at the prisoners with leather belts, calling all the while: "'Spring Bliksems! Come on, you black bastards!'"<sup>147</sup> Later a white warder peers into the cell and shouts: "'Hou julle bekke° Shut your filthy mouths, you bastards..."<sup>148</sup> Within the cell violence seethes. Men fight with one another and gangs are formed. Here is the account of the scene after the water buckets have been brought into the cell:

Men fought and clawed around the water buckets, snarling like jackals around their carrion. The cave man, Smiley Abrams, [a gang leader] hurled men from the centre of the turmoil, growling and snapping at his cringing subjects. A

man rose to challenge him. A great, clubbed fist drew back and then struck with the sound of a pick handle against a pumpkin. The rebel went down like a stricken ox and lay still, to be trampled by the others.<sup>149</sup>

La Guma is concerned to show how the prisoners are brutalized by the conditions within the prison. Old Cockroach, we are told, has become 'somewhat unhinged' as a result of the seven grim years he has spent in the terrible conditions of the prison.<sup>150</sup>

La Guma describes the scene in the cell at night:

The brawl around the water buckets had subsided, since, they both had been emptied. There would be no water for the rest of the night. Men sat around, hunched stark naked under the light, exploring their clothes and blankets for lice. The cracking of vermin between thumbnails sounded like snapping twigs... It was no better with the light turned off. The cloying heat and the stench of the latrine seemed to take advantage of the darkness... From all around us grunts, curses, and tiny cries came like suppressed voices out of hell.<sup>151</sup>

Amidst these accounts of prison violence and abuse, La Guma introduces the story of Old Cockroach's tragedy, which this man tells the narrator. During the course of the story, Old Cockroach has made several disjointed and cryptic comments to the narrator, who is curious to piece together the circumstances which have brought this intelligent and well-educated man into jail to serve a ten year sentence for having committed an act of homicide. Finally, during a hot, sleepless night in the cell, Old Cockroach talks of the past. He was a school teacher who was in love with his childhood sweetheart, Cora. They were to be married and Old Cockroach worked hard so that he could offer her a happy marriage in which she lacked nothing. Cora, however, a beautiful and light-skinned woman, found that she could mix in social circles as a white and could frequent places previously

prohibited to her as a black person, and began to drift away from Old Cockroach who still loved her. Old Cockroach tells the narrator of what happened at that stage:

"I talked to her, pleaded with her. But she wouldn't take any notice of what I said. I became angry. I wept. I raved. Can you imagine how much I loved her? I grovelled. I was prepared to lose my entire self-respect just to keep her. But it wasn't of any use. She said I was selfish and trying to deny her the good things of life. The good things of life. I would have given her anything I could. And she said I was denying her the good things of life".<sup>152</sup>

La Guma here accentuates the bitter irony of the black man's situation. Although he has done all he possibly can to offer Cora a good life, the greater material possibilities of being a white in South Africa are a lure for the woman which Old Cockroach's offer of love cannot supplant; Cora's reproach is that he was trying to deny her the good things of life. Old Cockroach's story is in many ways a variant of the sorry tale of the poor boy who cannot capture the love of his childhood beloved who has been drawn away from him by the promises of the rich prince. The irony in this story is that it is the race to which the prince belongs which puts him in a position to entice the beautiful, poor girl.

Old Cockroach continues by telling the narrator that Cora finally turned to abusing him and her terms of insult are appropriately those of a racial nature: "She slapped my face and called me a black nigger".<sup>153</sup> It is cruelly fitting that Cora curses Old Cockroach in terms of his race, that aspect of himself which he cannot change and which she sees as restricting her possibilities for social mobility and material gain. Where, for example, in

much nineteenth century fiction class or money are the barriers over which the individual has no control, in South Africa this kind of bar is often the character's skin colour.

The narrator of La Guma's piece comments: "'Then you lost your head and killed her... That's why you're here now".'<sup>154</sup> La Guma then offers an ending which is filled with pathos and which brings a wry twist-in-the-tail to the story. Rather than the expected assent of Old Cockroach to the narrator's supposition, La Guma surprises us by Old Cockroach's rejection of it:

"Oh, no," Old Cockroach answered. "I could never have done that to Cora. I did lose my head, but it was Joey whom I killed. He said I was a damn fool for going off over a play-white bitch. So I hit him, and he cracked his skull on something..."<sup>155</sup>

There are two related elements in Old Cockroache's tragedy: firstly, how a decent, hard-working man can be brought to the degrading conditions of a prison where the horrors of that life have caused him to lose his grip on sanity; and secondly, the way in which his unflinching and resolute love for Cora has brought him into jail. One of the strengths of La Guma's story is that both of these factors are shown to have their source in the country's racial violence. La Guma's story calls to mind similar works by white writers such as Paton, Wilhelm, and Breytenbach which deal with the fearful abuse of South African prisoners.

There are two other stories by La Guma, 'Slipper Satin' and 'A Glass of Wine', which treat the related theme of the pain brought about by the prohibition of love and marriage between black and

white people. I should like to concentrate here on 'A Glass of Wine' which, unlike 'Slipper Satin', surprisingly has drawn little by way of comment and assessment from the critics.<sup>156</sup> It deals with the same themes as 'Slipper Satin'; yet in this work there is a skilful blend of humour and pathos.

The story is set in the front room of Ma Schrikker's house, which appears to be a communal meeting place (as in Bosman's *Voorkamer* pieces) in which drinks are served: a kind of speakeasy. La Guma creates two humorous characters - the genial hostess, Ma Schrikker, and the tipsy and garrulous, Arthur. A young boy enters the front room and Arthur realizes that he has come to visit his girlfriend who lives with Ma Schrikker. Arthur teases the boy about the reason for his visit and when Charlette, the girl enters, he carries on his teasing and bantering with the young couple. However, something is amiss; there is more to the uneasiness of the young couple than youthful embarrassment. Particularly at the point when Arthur starts teasing the couple about how they should marry, the atmosphere becomes filled with tension. The young girl has to rebuke Arthur on two occasions before he realizes that something he has said has caused them offence. Still uncomprehending - "'What'd I do?... Now what did I do, man?'" - Arthur is hustled out of the house by his friend, the story's narrator.<sup>157</sup> Towards the end of the story the narrator explains to Arthur the reason why everybody responded in such a hostile manner to his seemingly innocent teasing: "'You and your wedding." I told him as we went up the street. " You

know the white boy can't marry the girl, even though he may love her. It isn't allowed".' Arthur then says: '"Jesus.. Jesus. What the hell".'<sup>158</sup>

The climax of the story confirms the hints made earlier that the boy and girl are of different skin colours and therefore of different racial groups. Most importantly, the course of the story brings us to sympathize with Arthur's exasperated response to the situation. Arthur is a cheerful, good humoured man whose bantering is carried out with the purest of good-tempered motives. The couple's love for one another is described with great delicacy by La Guma. For instance, the scene in which Charlette enters the front room and sees her boyfriend is described in the following way:

And looking at the girl, I saw the deep blush under her smooth beautiful skin. Her skin was the colour of amber wine, and she had dark brown eyes, bright and soft, and around her oval face her hair was very black and curly. The soft, full lips smiled shyly as she blushed. She did not look at the boy, but knew that he was there, and looking at him in turn I could see the deep flush of his own face, and the gentle lowering of the eyelids as he watched her...<sup>159</sup>

The boy himself had previously been described in most attractive terms:

He was tall and young and thin as a billiard cue, and had beautiful red-gold hair combed in a high pompadour, and a pink-white skin. He looked very young and handsome...<sup>160</sup>

Arthur had said favourably of him: '"He is an awake boy, a real smart juba, and I like him".'<sup>161</sup> The sense of waste and pain is therefore doubly grievous by the end of the story. Indeed, we come, as I have suggested, to share Arthur's exasperation at a situation which prevents the love of this young couple to grow

and develop to its natural fulfilment.<sup>162</sup>

Moving from La Guma let us consider a few other particularly fine works on the theme of racial violence by black writers. Ahmed Essop's 'The Commandment', a story of only two pages, describes the series of events which follow upon the official order that a black man leave Johannesburg and settle in a Bantustan. Moses is described sympathetically by Essop; he is an old black man who has spent many years working in Johannesburg. For the past ten years he has worked as a servant for the Rehman family in Fordsburg. In this post, 'Moses enjoyed special status and privileges not given to ordinary servants, such as being allowed to eat at the kitchen table. It was his mastery of Gujarati language (swear words and all) that elevated him.'<sup>163</sup>

Essop describes Moses as a generous hearted man who 'was generally liked and the children loved him'.<sup>164</sup> Into this harmonious situation, however, the authorities intervene and Moses and his employer are told that the black man must leave Johannesburg for the Transkei. Essop purposely adopts the cold, official language of the order at this point in the story:

According to the order Moses was contravening the law in three respects: firstly, he had no right of domicile in an area inhabited by Indians, Coloureds and some Chinese; secondly, he was no longer a productive labour unit; thirdly, he had no document to prove that he had been born in Johannesburg. The order stated that he was an "alien" and that he should "go forthwith for resettlement" to his "tribal homeland".<sup>165</sup>

We are succinctly introduced here to some of the main policies of apartheid. There are the minutiae of racial classification and

difference - Indian, Coloured, Chinese, and black. Moreover, we see how black people are considered as 'labour units' and how their residence in a particular place is governed either by the spurious notion of productivity or by the bogus criterion of their having been born or having tribal ancestry there. Essop also introduces the insidious way in which the authorities use language, grotesquely masking the realities they are referring to by pleasant-sounding euphemisms. Moses's deportation to a rural slum is described in this official language as his 'resettlement' to his 'tribal homeland'. (Essop, significantly, places these terms in quotation marks.) This euphemistic way of describing the appalling conditions of the Bantustans is shown by Essop to have an effect on Moses. He begins to soliloquize about them, not ironically in Xhosa his supposed tribal language, but in Gujarati. Essop thereby suggests the close kinship between black people of widely diverse backgrounds whom the government would gladly keep apart from one another. Moses reflects:

"They say I must go home. Home? Yes. Transkei. And do you know what I will find there? They tell me there is a city, with real streets and real buildings. There is also a hospital there for me..."<sup>166</sup>

As the certainty of his expulsion becomes imminent his soliloquies become both interminable and more voluble. Again, he reflects on the promised land to which he is going:

"They tell me I will be happy there. There are big cities there. The air is fresh too. My chief is waiting for me. O chief I am coming, O chief..."<sup>167</sup>

On the day on which he is due to depart Moses is found hanging from a roof-barn in an outside lavatory.

There are a number of ironies which Essop creates about the events of this story. The title of the piece - 'The Commandment' - has ironic reference to the black man, appropriately called Moses, as well, of course, to the deportation order. Unlike his Biblical namesake who was the bearer of God's sanctified commandments to his people and who was brought close to them in this role, this latter-day Moses faces expulsion from the people he knows and loves, and the promised land he is offered is a slum. One of the more obvious ironies of the story is how Moses, who had actually worked in his earlier years as a builder in Johannesburg, later finds himself ordered to leave the city he has helped to build. Early in the story we are told how 'in a mushrooming city he had helped to build homes, skyscrapers, apartment blocks and roads'.<sup>168</sup>

Essop traces in the story, as a kind of counterpoint to Moses's misery, the responses of the families and people around him in Fordsburg. Most significant is the shift in their attitudes towards him as his fate becomes inescapable and his solitary anguish more evident. Towards the end of the story, with Moses's anguish at its deepest, Essop observes of the people:

And then a queer thing happened to us. We began to hate him. Vague fears were aroused in us, as though he were exposing us to somebody or something, involving us in a conspiracy - he spoke our language - threatening our existence. Indefinable feelings began to trouble us. Of guilt? Of cowardice? We wanted to be rid of him as of some unclean thing. Suddenly everyone avoided him, and the children were sternly told not to go near him...<sup>169</sup>

In the shift of the people's attitude to Moses, from affection and trust to hatred and suspicion, Essop is illustrating (with an

effect not unlike that in La Guma's 'Slipper Satin'), how widespread and pernicious the effects of racial abuse can become in a community. By means of this account of the responses of the people around Moses, Essop brings an added element of complexity to his story. He draws the piece to an end by quoting one of the black man's plaintive and pathetic soliloquies about the Transkei: "There are cities there! There are hospitals there! And there are no cemeteries!".<sup>170</sup> With the ominous reference to cemeteries in our mind, Essop dexterously concludes the story with the quiet observation that on the day on which the police arrived they found Moses hanging from a beam in the lavatory.

'Gerty's Brother' by Essop is another story which deals with the theme of an illicit love relationship across the colour-bar which is brought to a sad and untimely end. Essop measures the pain and anger caused by the enforced termination of the love affair, not so much by the responses of the two lovers but by two people who are close to them. The black man Hussein starts a casual liaison with the young white girl, Gerty. We learn that she is an orphan with a young brother of seven or eight years old called Riekie, who is her constant companion. The relationship becomes more stable than a passing love interlude and Gerty and her brother become frequent visitors to Hussein's rooms. Hussein treats his lover and her brother with generosity. One day he is told that the police are watching his rooms and waiting for an incriminating moment in which to arrest Gerty and himself. Hussein sees a stranger examining the lock at his gate and,

fearing arrest, decides to end the relationship with Gerty: he leaves Johannesburg for Durban. These are the bare bones of a story which seems singularly bald and not particularly interesting in itself. However, Essop transforms this series of events into something far more arresting and touching than simply pedestrian account of a love relationship broken up by the forces of apartheid. He does this by the way in which he involves two ancillary characters in the course of its events: namely, Gerty's brother Riekie (who, significantly, gives the work its title), and Hussein's friend who is the story's narrator.

On the first night of their love affair, the narrator drives Gerty and Hussein along with Riekie to a city park where the two lovers can have sex together without fear of discovery. The narrator is assigned the task of collecting the lovers after their love-making and to look after Riekie during this time. He takes the boy to another part of the park and offers him a boat-trip on the lake there. Essop describes the scene which follows and creates a moment of poignancy as the black narrator helps the white boy on to the boat:

I asked him [Riekie] if he had ever sat in a boat. He said he hadn't... I told Riekie to jump in, but he hesitated. So I lifted him and put him into the boat. He was light in weight and I felt the ribs under his arms. A sensation of tenderness for the boy went through me. You must understand that this was the first time I had ever picked up a white child.

The fleeting contact and the tenderness of the black man toward the white child also characterizes the love relationship of

Hussein and Gerty.<sup>172</sup> Essop goes on to describe how Riekie became attached to Hussein, gratefully responding to the black man's generosity to him. Riekie becomes a familiar and well-liked little figure for Hussein and the narrator. At this point the narrator describes the police surveillance of Hussein and Gerty and the termination of their affair. Essop then concludes the story by giving an account of an incident which took place after Hussein's precipitate departure. The narrator passes Hussein's former rooms and sees Riekie clutching the bars of the gate and calling out repeatedly for Hussein. Essop adds a dramatic quality to the scene by describing how an old man who lived in the yard called out to the boy telling him to clear out: the boy's voice is 'smothered by the croaks of an old man'.<sup>173</sup> However, it is in the following paragraph of the story, which is also its conclusion, where Essop raises the quality of the entire piece:

I stood at the corner of the street, in my hand the two letters I intended to post, and I felt again the child's body as I lifted him and put him into the boat many nights ago, a child's body in my arms embraced by the beauty of the night on the lake, and I returned to my landlady's with the hackles of revolt rising within me.<sup>174</sup>

This sentence moves from the narrator's present position into the past and back again to the present, carrying with it a concluding hint at the future. The poignancy of the moment when the narrator carried Riekie onto the boat is strongly recreated; and by means of this contrast between a tenderly remembered past moment and the cruel outcome of events in the present, Essop ingeniously transfers the collective anger and pain of Gerty,

Hussein, and Riekie, to the narrator, whose final response reviews the sad sequences of events which have just been recounted. Indeed, as in the final line of La Guma's story 'A Glass of Wine', the anger of the character offers a point of emotional identification and sympathy for the reader.

Es'kia Mphahlele's story 'A Point of Identity' deals with the pain caused by the South African system of racial classification and discrimination. It is worth considering this work in some detail as it not only offers a severe castigation of this system of racial violence, but also brings a complexity of vision to its subject which turns what might have been a rather bleak piece of social documentation into a compelling and varied piece of fiction.

In the opening paragraph of the story the narrator describes the aversion black people have to the practice of classifying people according to the their racial type or the colour of their skin:

It was not until a crisis broke upon Karel Almeida that I began to wonder why he, a coloured African man, should have chosen to live in a black settlement rather than among other coloured African folk. Whoever thought up the word "Coloured" must have been one of those people who are so obsessed with the subject of "colour" that when they belch, the reek of it hits you a mile away. Left to ourselves, we should speak of Africans, whether "Coloured", "White", "Indian", or "Negro".

The anger felt by the narrator, and directed satirically against the system of racial classification remains a constant feature of the story and there are further caustic barbs as this one about people 'so obsessed with the subject of "colour" that when they belch the reek of it hits you a mile away'. The crisis which has

brought the narrator to wonder about why Karel Almeida, a man of mixed race, should have chosen to live among black people, is precisely that of the government's imposition of a system of racial classification. This likeable man has been compelled to register as a 'Coloured' and as the narrator is quick to tell his neighbour, Karel, the authorities are, as a result of this classification, soon going to expel him from the black township and force him to separate from his black wife.

Soon after Mphahlele has elaborated the crisis facing Karel as a result of his having registered as a 'Coloured', he turns the narrative to an account of how Karel began to suffer from an ailment in his leg. Karel visits the hospital regularly and is brought little relief from the pain in his leg which is becoming increasingly severe. He tells the narrator how the white doctors treated him in a perfunctory way and he resolves to consult a black witchdoctor; perhaps this will bring him the relief the white practitioners have failed to achieve. Both the narrator and Karel's wife strongly caution him against this course of action. Karel does, however, consult a witchdoctor who performs a crude incision in his ankle. Soon after this Karel dies. In the final section of the story Mphahlele returns to the theme of Karel's registration as a 'coloured' and the effects this would have had on his life. Karel's wife shows the narrator her late husband's identity card, marked 'RACE: COLOURED', and the letter he had received from the authorities informing him of his impending expulsion from the township. The narrator learns in the

end that Karel's widow will soon be forced to leave the township.

In the concluding sections of the story Mphahlele thus deftly shifts the narrative focus away from Karel's imminent removal from the township and separation from his wife to describe the course of his illness; however, in the final part of the story in which he returns to Karel's crisis Mphahlele suggests, by its placement right after the account of the illness, a connection between his character's ailment and the external tensions which have been brought to bear upon him. In this way, Mphahlele manages to achieve a portrait of a man's decline and death which is a complex result not only of a physical sickness but also of mental anguish: this anxiety has been brought about by the white authorities' system of racial abuse. It is therefore grimly appropriate that, when the narrator describes how he tried to obtain medical treatment for Karel, we are given a record of the circumstances in the township set against ensuring the efficient treatment of black people: there is only one doctor in the township; the 'white' hospital nearby refuses to treat black patients and transport to the 'black' hospital twelve miles away is unobtainable.

Mphahlele's story also offers a view of the black characters which suggests the ways in which they are influenced both by African and white culture. The narrator and Karel's wife, for instance, are strongly opposed to Karel's plan to consult a black witchdoctor. Karel's wife says:

"I would rather take him to another hospital far out of

Pretoria, borrow money somewhere, spend all my savings to pay white doctors." 176

The narrator, while reflecting on the nature of black witchdoctors and herbalists, adds the following comment which is suggestive of how African and European values can co-exist within a ghetto-community:

Most of us whether teachers or not, whether townspeople of longstanding or not, believed one way or another in ancestral spirits. The same people might at the same time renounce or tolerate the Christian faith or even think their belief in ancestral spirits reinforced it... 177

However, the system of racial violence in South Africa plays havoc with the fruitful interchange of these ideas and beliefs. Karel, for instance, is compelled to consult a backstreet herbalist after he has been shoddily treated by the white doctors at the hospital. Likewise, Karel's humane credo of "'I respect a man what respect me no matter his colour'", is shown to be hopelessly naive and idealistic in a world in which black people are treated with an indifference bordering on malevolence. 178

Finally, it is worth considering how Mphahlele treats the system of racial abuse in the early parts of the story. He describes the sudden imposition of racial classification on South Africans in this way:

If the whole thing did not begin to set members of a family against one another or individual persons against their communities, or vice versa; if it did not drive certain people to the brink of madness and to suicide; if it did not embarrass very dark-skinned people to sit in front of a white tribunal and have to claim "mixed parentage", then we should have thought that someone had deliberately gone out of his way to have fun, or create it. 179

In this long sentence Mphahlele records the situation in which

people have been humiliated and brutalized, set against the incredulity of his narrator that such a set of circumstances could have arisen against the normal design of people acting out of fun or from any creative impulse. The implication of the sentence, therefore, is to point towards the perversity and maliciousness of people who could have deliberately planned such a system. Indeed, Mphahlele continues this passage by pouring scorn on the people who have evolved this system of human degradation:

The white people who governed the country had long been worried about the large number of coloured Africans who were fair enough to want to play white, and of Negroes who were fair enough to want to try for Coloured. They had long been worried about the prospect of one coffee-coloured race, which would shame what they called "white civilization" and the purity of European blood.<sup>180</sup>

Mphahlele plays upon the racial obsession of the white people here and pokes fun at this attitude by simultaneously setting the absurd notions of 'one coffee coloured race' and of racial purity alongside one another. In the piece which follows he treats the process by which the system of different racial categories came into legal force with bathos:

So, maybe, after a sleepless night, someone ate his breakfast, read his morning newspapers in between bites, walked about his suburban garden, told his black "boy" to finish cleaning his car, kissed his wife and children goodbye ("don't expect me for supper, dear"), went to the House of Assembly and began to propel a huge legislative measure through the various formal stages to the President's desk where it would be signed as law.<sup>181</sup>

Mphahlele's way of describing this process casts derision on the designs of the white people and serves a strong satirical purpose: here, setting the trivial details of the

parliamentarian's settled domestic background against the accounts of misery which his action will cause.

Areas of social documentation in the story are not treated simply as a record of the process of what takes place in the country, but are dealt with in a satirical manner, with Mphahlele resorting to the use of bathos and scorn. Indeed, as we have seen, Mphahlele and the other writers whose stories we have considered in this section have been especially attentive to the danger that the social violence which they are recording may in some way become formulaic, and they have variously resorted to a number of stylistic and narrative techniques in order to avoid this possibility successfully,

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b) Violence within the Black Community

Often inextricably bound up with the broader patterns of racial violence and abuse, the townships, slums, and prisons in which black people are confined have become centres of terrible violence within themselves. All of the writers describe this internal violence in the black communities in their stories. Alex La Guma's 'Tattoo Marks and Nails' describe the violence which takes place among black prisoners. Like his story 'Out of Darkness', this piece describes how the prison cells come to be dominated by a gang-leader and his cowed followers. The central events of the story are two prison trials: one which is a prisoner's account of such a trial at a North African prisoner-of-war camp where he had been incarcerated during the

Second World War, and the other which describes the trial of a gang's victim in a corner of the cell. Early in the story La Guma describes the way in which a victim is tried and punished in the South African prisons:

There had been the "case" of a prisoner who had given offence to a cell-boss and his gang. It had been said that he had complained of them to a guard, an unforgivable offence. The gangsters "tried" him, found him guilty and sentenced him to.. he wasn't told. That, as some sadistic refinement, they kept secret among themselves.

The terrified man died a hundred times over before, finally, unable to hold back weariness, he was forced to lie down to sleep. As he lay shivering in some unknown nightmare, a blanket was pressed over his head and face, and a half-dozen knives driven through the one in which he slept.

La Guma continues, indicating how the authorities are powerless in the face of these prison murders:

The next morning the guards found a dead man wrapped in a bloody blanket. No trace of blood on any of the rest of the packed humanity in the cell. There was no sign of a knife. Nobody had a knife, despite searches. The prison inquiry revealed nothing.<sup>182</sup>

Accounts of the violence within the prisons occur in other black stories.<sup>183</sup> Another common scene of the violence black people carry out against one another is on the trains which carry black commuters to and from their places of work in the cities. In Themba's story 'The Dube Train', he describes a young tsotsi's abuse of the passengers on the train.<sup>184</sup> The climax of the piece is the fight between the tsotsi and a passenger who has dared to challenge the thug's disgraceful behaviour. The end of the clash between these men is described in the following way:

With a demonical scream, the big man reached out for the boy crudely, careless now of the blade that made another gash in his arm. He caught the boy by the upper arm with the left hand, and between the legs with the right and lifted him

bodily. Then he hurled him towards me. The flight went clean through the paneless window, and only a long cry trailed in the wake of the rushing train.<sup>185</sup>

Themba stresses the way the train's passengers respond to this violence. At no stage prior to this man's challenge of the tsotsi do any of the other male passengers attempt to stop the boy's abusive behaviour. Only the subdued protests of some women are recorded. After the fight no one comes to the assistance of the wounded man, but they are swift to rush to the window in an attempt to see what has happened to the tsotsi. The narrator wryly observes that for these passengers who have become 'bleared' by the frequency of the violence around them this 'was not a fight proper, not a full-blown quarrel. It was just an incident in the morning Dube train.' Indeed, the narrator goes on to remark that rather than acting in a responsible way about the matter the passengers 'were just greedily relishing the thrilling episode of the morning'.<sup>186</sup>

More complex views of the violence in the black communities are given in Themba's piece 'Kwashiorkor' and the title story of Matshoba's collection, 'Call Me Not a Man'. In 'Kwashiorkor' Themba traces the cycle of violence which envelops a black family in one of the Johannesburg townships. He describes the harsh process of adjustment which the grandfather was forced to make on arriving as a young man in the city:

First, there were the ordinary problems of adjustment; the tribal boy had to fit himself into the vast frenetic life in the big city. So many habits, beliefs, customs had to be fractured overnight.

So many reactions that were sincere and instinctive were laughed at in the city. A man was continually changing himself, leaping like a flea from contingency to contingency...<sup>187</sup>

Although Abner Mabiletsa makes the shift to city living without much hardship, with the valuable aid of transplanted boys from his home-district, and in the process fathers a daughter, his stay is not long. He is killed in a motor accident. Abner's daughter grows up fatherless and in great poverty. She leaves school at fourteen and maintains a promiscuous life among the underworld figures of the township. Soon a daughter is born and although she shows the baby much affection for a few months, the lure of her former lifestyle draws her back and the child is left with the grandmother. The impoverished old woman cannot feed the young child properly and it becomes a victim of malnutrition. Later, the child starves in one of the rural slums. At the heart of the story is the description of this infant:

There sat a little monkey on the bed. It was a two or three years' old child. The child did not cry or fidget, but bore an unutterably miserable expression on its face, in its whole bearing. It was as if she was the grandmother writ small; pathetically, wretchedly she looked out upon the world... The belly was distended and sagged toward the bed. The legs looked bent convexly and there were light-brown patches on them, and on the chest and back. The complexion of the skin was unnaturally light here and there so that the creature looked piebald. The normally curly hair had a rusty tint and had lost much of its whorl. Much of it had fallen out, leaving islets of skull surfacing.

The child looked aside towards me, and the silent reproach, the quiet, listless, abject despair flowed from the large eyes wave upon wave. Not a peep, not a murmur. The child made no sound of complaint except the struggling breathing.<sup>188</sup>

Part of Themba's concern in this story is to consider the way in which different people respond to the misery and violence which

afflicts families such as the one described here. The narrator, like Themba, is a journalist who is used to offer the response of the sensitive layman to such a situation and to record his distaste at the way in which the newspapers sensationalize issues such as infant malnutrition. Themba contrasts this with the way the narrator's sister, who is a social worker, reacts to this situation. For her, the tragedy of the the Mabiletsa family is another social statistic and is viewed in terms of professional objectivity; however, as the events continue to worsen her calm is abandoned and Themba shows how this woman comes to feel deep grief at the continual violence and misery facing these people.

Like Themba in his stories, Mtutuzeli Matshoba is as concerned with the way the black community respond to the violence around them as with violence itself. His story 'Call Me Not a Man' describes the way black police reservists abuse the people of the townships. The opening description of the story touches on a number of issues which I have mentioned earlier in this chapter; it is rich in imagery and deals with the violence in the black communities stressing all the while the kinship which exists between black people who are, in one way or another, victims:

By dodging, lying, resisting where it is possible, bolting when I'm already cornered, parting with invaluable money, sometimes calling my sisters into the game to get amorous with my captors, allowing myself to be slapped on the mouth in front of my womenfolk and getting sworn at with my mother's private parts, that component of me which is man has died countless times in one lifetime. Only a shell of me remains to tell you of the other man's plight, which is in fact my own. For what is suffered by another man in view

of my eyes is suffered also by me. The grief he knows is a  
grief that I know. Out of the same, bitter cup do we drink.  
To the same chain-gang do we belong.

Much South African literature then deals with the violence of the society. As we have seen, white and black writers alike treat various facets of this violence. There are notable areas of congruence in works by black and white writers in English in this respect. These writers have been especially attentive in their stories to the misery meted out to the black South African communities. While this concern is less common in Afrikaans short fiction, here, writers from the 1970's on have turned in particular to examine the violence of white South Africans at war and the horrors attached to the government's programme of military intervention in neighbouring countries. South African writing therefore bears eloquent and overwhelming testimony of a society deeply implicated in acts and policies of violence.

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#### VI Key Stories

I should like now to examine three major stories by black writers, each of which in their different ways touches upon certain of the major themes and aspects of black short fiction noted earlier in this chapter: namely the concern with communalism, storytelling and public debates; the way in which English has been adapted to suit the African writer's needs, often with the extensive use of simile and metaphor; humour; and the treatment of violence.

The title story of Bessie Head's volume, 'The Collector of

'Treasures' describes how a kind, good woman comes to murder her husband. This tale offers a view of a black society in Botswana, which is fraught with tensions and underlying conflicts and in which the past experiences of pre-colonial traditional society, and the subsequent colonial and independence phases, offer little in the way of resolving the problems facing individuals in these communities. As I mentioned in an earlier discussion of her short fiction the presence of South Africa always lies behind these works and one senses that Head's vision of the Botswanan society has been largely informed by her difficult South African past. Her view of the Tswana people of Botswana also has a complex significance for black South African society not simply because of the closely entwined histories of these two countries in which Botswanans have for many decades been forced into seeking work in South Africa, but also because of fundamental similarities in black communal life of the peoples of these countries.<sup>190</sup> As in other stories of the collection, Head places the broad social issues in 'The Collector of Treasures' within the pattern of the domestic lives of the characters; yet she enunciates the central issue of the story with clarity, not in this piece at its beginning, as we have observed she does in many of the other stories, but rather at the start of its second section. We noted, for example, how she used this technique in the story, 'Life', in which she offered the reflection that urban returnees from South Africa often brought with them features of the city life which were either gladly accepted and adopted by

the village communities or utterly rejected. The actual story of Life served as an illustration of the village's rejection of one of these urban practices. In 'The Collector of Treasures', the central issue is how the society in Botswana has failed, to a very substantial degree, to offer the basis upon which women could be treated as the social equals of men; rather it has forced upon women a subservient status which has ensured limitations to their freedoms of choice, action and opportunities. The tragic consequences of this state of affairs play themselves out in the story of the chief character of the piece, the woman Dikeledi Mokopi. It is worth remarking that in this volume of stories Head offers, in contrast to her later Serowe: Village of the Rain-Queen, a particularly critical view of the country which became her new home after leaving South Africa. Perhaps, this is so because she is expressing particularly in this collection her anger at certain of the ways in which black women are demeaned in Southern Africa.

Before turning to the events of the story it is worth considering in some detail the way in which Head elaborates its central social problem at the start of the work's second section. We are told:

There were really only two kinds of men in the society. The one created such misery and chaos that he could be broadly damned as evil. If one watched the village dogs chasing a bitch on heat, they usually moved around in packs of four or five. As the mating progressed one dog would attempt to gain dominance over the festivities and oust all the others from the bitch's vulva. The rest of the hapless dogs would stand around yapping and snapping at its face while the top dog indulged in a continuous spurt of orgasms, day and night until he was exhausted. No doubt, during that Herculean feat, the dog imagined he was the only penis in the world

and that there had to be a scramble for it. That kind of man lived near the animal level and behaved just the same...

One notices the smooth transition from the account of the type of man who caused misery in the society to the description of the village dogs; and flowing from this the way in which this kind of man's behaviour is boldly identified with the rutting of the male dog. It is therefore little surprise when Head concludes: 'That kind of man lived near the animal level and behaved just the same'. Interestingly, Head goes on to view social abuses as stemming mainly from the way in which women are demeaned. Finally, it is worth noting how Head draws the comparison in this passage from a common feature of the village life namely, the behaviour of its dogs.

The explanatory nature of this passage continues in the following section: 'Since that kind of man was in the majority in the society, he needed a little analysing as he was responsible for the complete breakdown of family life.'<sup>192</sup> It is worth observing that this direct form of social analysis, rather uncommon in works of fiction by West-European and American writers, has an affinity with traditional African practices of the public debate (for example, the kgotla) and of the storyteller serving the role as social critic and public conscience. As in the case of the traditional storyteller, Head's account of the society is given in very personal terms and reflects individual preoccupations which in this case are the special difficulties facing women in the black African communities.

She continues this account by following the rather unusual practice of developing an historical assessment of the forces which have gone to form the patterns of social interaction and practice in the black society:

He [that kind of man] could be analysed over three time-spans. In the old days, before the colonial invasion of Africa, he was a man who lived by the traditions and taboos outlined for all the people by the forefathers of the tribe. He had little individual freedom to assess whether these traditions were compassionate or not - they demanded that he comply and obey the rules, without thought. But when the laws of the ancestors are examined, they appear on the whole to have been vast, external disciplines for the good of the society as a whole, with little attention given to individual preferences and needs. The ancestors made so many errors and one of the most bitter-making things was that they relegated to men a superior position in the tribe, while women were regarded, in a congenital sense, as being an inferior form of human life. To this day, women still suffered from all the calamities that befall an inferior form of human life.<sup>193</sup>

Head's open antipathy and criticism of those aspects of traditional African society which she sees as standing in the way of compassion for the individual are the most striking feature of this passage. Earlier we discussed her critical stance vis-à-vis traditional African society and it is again worth remarking how she stands out among the black South African writers precisely because of the bluntness with which she criticizes features of past African history which are usually seen as ennobling and of great value by the large proportion of the other writers.<sup>194</sup> Again, the instance she perceives as the test case for the failure of a social system is the way in which men and women's roles are assigned within it. In one of the key sentences of this passage there are two occasions where Head uses language in an unorthodox way. She talks of one of the 'most bitter-making

things' of the ancestrally-governed society being the way in which it 'relegated' to men a superior position in the tribe' (My underlining). Firstly, one is struck by the unusual phrase early in the sentence and then how Head poses the way men were placed in a superior tribal position as a paradoxical and rather demeaning situation by means of her use of the word, 'relegated'. Finally, in the last sentence of this passage Head shifts the tense from the past to the present, thereby suggesting how women's subordination has remained a constant factor through to the present.

Head continues her account of the next two historical phases through which the Botswanan society passed and the effects these had on this brutish kind of man whom we have been told 'was in the majority in the society'. The periods of British colonialism which forced black men to seek work in South Africa as migrant labourers and the most recent phase of Botswanan independence are seen by Head as adding to this man's misery: these periods are described as 'afflictions' visited on this man's life.<sup>195</sup> She concludes this analysis by discussing the effects of African independence:

It provided the first occasion for family life of a new order, above the childlike discipline of custom, the degradation of colonialism. Men and women, in order to survive, had to turn inwards to their own resources. It was the man who arrived at this turning point, a broken wreck with no inner resources at all. It was as though he was hideous to himself and in an effort to flee his own inner emptiness, he spun away from himself in a dizzy kind of death dance of wild destruction and dissipation.<sup>196</sup>

Significantly, Head brings her historical overview of the

Botswanan society to a conclusion by discussing the deprivations of the three phases on domestic and personal levels: how this history has sown the seeds for family breakdown and deprived the majority of the men of the inner strength needed to maintain a stable life.

'The Collector of Treasures' continues with a brief account of one such man, Garesego Mokopi, the husband of the chief character, Dikeledi. Head then describes a kind of man who is the antithesis of the person she has been describing, a man who has 'the power to create himself anew' and who turns 'all his resources, both emotional and material towards his family life'. This man is compared to a river and is called a 'poem of tenderness'.<sup>197</sup> As she has given an example of the brazen man, so too Head mentions an exemplar of these noble qualities: Paul Thebolo, Dikeledi's neighbour in the village.

After the account of Botswanan society with its particular emphasis on the relations between men and women, Head develops the story of Dikeledi Mokopi which she had begun earlier and explains how this woman came to murder her husband. The story both illustrates and elaborates the ideas which she had outlined in her historical assessment of the country. The story, in brief, describes the wretched life of Dikeledi, who after an oppressive childhood, finds an ill-suited match with a philanderer, Garesego, who soon deserts her. In the following years she works assiduously to maintain her three young boys and finds joy both in their progress and in a friendship which

evolves with her new neighbours, the Thebolos. A crisis arrives when Garesego cruelly spreads the rumour that Paul Thebolo is Dikeledi's lover. In order to assert his supremacy in the house he had deserted eight years earlier, Garesego compels Dikeledi to prepare a meal and a bed for him. On the night of his visit Dikeledi castrates him and thereby kills him. She is sentenced to life imprisonment.

Dikeledi's life is described as an endless series of conflicts with cruel and brutal men, against whom she has little power to resist. Orphaned at the age of six she lives with an uncle who treats her harshly; her marriage, at an early age, is seen by her as a way of escaping this environment. However, Garesego proves as grim a companion for her as her wealthy uncle had been. Dikeledi has little power to check her husband's promiscuity and his later desertion of her. Similarly, toward the conclusion of the story, when Garesego sends his note to her asking her to prepare for sexual intercourse with him after his eight year desertion of her, she is powerless to resist his cruel invasion of her world. Head describes Dikeledi's entrapment at this point:

Her thought processes were not very clear to her... Her first panic-stricken thought was to gather up the children and flee the village. But where to go? Garesego did not want a divorce, she had left him to approach her about the matter, she had desisted from taking any other man. She turned her thoughts this way and that and could find no way out except to face him. If she wrote back, don't you dare put foot in the yard I don't want to see you, he would ignore it. Black women didn't have that kind of power...<sup>198</sup>

It is interesting to recall how Nadine Gordimer and Sheila

Roberts make precisely the same point about white as well as black women in their stories. Head is careful to indicate here that Dikeledi's powerlessness to resist her husband, in any reasonable way, such as by refusing to meet him on the terms that he demands, flows from the way in which black women as a group are denied precisely these channels of legitimate protest. The only resolution Dikeledi can find, aside from exposing herself and her children to further degradation, is to set aside one of the basic moral principles of the society and kill the man when he comes for sex.

As in many of the other stories we have considered, if this account of abuse and violence were the only component of the work, then it would certainly be in its own rights a compelling record of these unfortunate circumstances; yet Head does something more than this. One of the principal ways in which 'The Collector of Treasures' achieves literary merit is by setting antithetical forces, such as the generosity of the people towards one another, against this violence and cruelty in the society. Indeed, the title of the story arises from this element in the work. In the opening section of the story Dikeledi is incarcerated with four other women who treat her courteously and with kindness. The spokeswoman of this group, Kebonye, is especially solicitous about Dikeledi and talks at some length with her. Head concludes this section with the following reflection:

And so the woman Dikeledi began phase three of a life that had been ashen in its loneliness and unhappiness. And yet

she had always found gold amidst the ash, deep loves that had joined her hearts to the hearts of others. She smiled tenderly at Kebonye because she knew already she had found another such love. She was the collector of treasures.<sup>199</sup>

This image of Dikeledi as a collector of moments of kindness and treasuring these is one which recurs in the story. Indeed, at the point of crisis where she is trying to decide how to react to Garesego's note, Head includes the following sentences which record this process of shoring up the times of kindness against the abuses of the society:

Her life had become holy to her during all those years she had struggled to maintain herself and the children. She had filled her life with treasures of kindness and love she had gathered from others and it was all this that she wanted to protect from defilement by an evil man.<sup>200</sup>

One of the central events of the story is Dikeledi's friendship with the Thebolo's. Head describes this relationship with warmth, where the neighbours become 'the centre of the universe to each other'.<sup>201</sup> The two women come to have 'one of those deep affectionate, sharing-everything kind of friendships' and with Paul Thebolo, Dikeledi shares an enduring trust and respect.<sup>202</sup> The Thebolo's have a happy marriage in which mutual concern and affection play an important part. This marriage is set in contrast to Dikeledi's and to the widespread promiscuity in the village. It is hardly surprising that Paul Thebolo's house becomes a gathering place for many of the villagers, which gatherings Kenalepe Thebolo and Dikeledi eagerly used to attend, listening to the vigorous political debates taking place between the men. Later the two women would discuss these at length. It is notable that in the final moment of the story, when Paul

enters Dikeledi's hut and sees the murdered Garesego, he says to Dikeledi: "You don't have to worry about the children, Mma-Banabotho [Dikeledi]. I'll take them as my own and give them all a secondary education".<sup>203</sup>

The final point which I should like to make about this story is how, in the opening section in particular, Head suggests that the murder Dikeledi has been compelled to commit is by no means an isolated response among the black women of the society. When Dikeledi is being brought into the prison at Gaborone, Head records the following exchange: "So, you have killed your husband, have you?" the wardress remarked, with a flicker of humour. "You'll be in good company. We have four other women here for the same crime. It's becoming the fashion these days".<sup>204</sup> Dikeledi's companions in prison have all murdered their husbands. One of them, Kebonye, tells Dikeledi how she too castrated her husband. She continues to inform Dikeledi of the circumstances which brought her to carry out this act and her account offers a close parallel to the events which, we are soon to be told, forced Dikeledi to make the same decision:

"Our men do not think that we need tenderness and care. You know, my husband use to kick me between the legs when he wanted that. I once aborted with a child, due to this treatment. I could see that there was no way to appeal to him if I felt ill, so I once said to him that if he liked he could keep some other woman as well because I couldn't manage to satisfy all his needs. Well, he was an education officer and each year he used to suspend about seventeen male teachers for making school girls pregnant, but he used to do the same. The last time it happened the parents of the girl were very angry and came to report the matter to me. I told them: 'You leave it to me. I have seen enough.' And so I killed him."<sup>205</sup>

As a result of circumstances such as these, which are given further emphasis in the historical assessment of the society and through Dikeledi's case, the acts of these women, rather than appearing as acts of debasement and social violence, come to represent not only a form of redress against personal wrongs but become acts of social purgation and cleansing. Out of the troubled fabric of black community life in Southern Africa - and these village tales are of especial significance for the similarly placed black communities in South Africa - Head has created a story of tragic dimensions which, through a highly personal response particularly attuned to the abuse facing black women, offers an index to some of the broader social problems of the region.

The second story I wish to consider has some features in common with Head's 'The Collection of Treasures'. Ahmed Essop's 'The Hajji', the title story of his collection, offers a particularly sensitive treatment of the pain which the racial laws of South Africa cause within families. Like many of the best works which deal with this theme, such as Paton's 'Debbie Go Home' and La Guma's 'Slipper Satin', 'The Hajji' does not dwell at length on the sociological cause for the characters' misery; but having mentioned this early on in the work, Essop shifts his attention to the way in which the painful situation plays itself out in the lives of his highly idiosyncratic and distinctive characters.

The story's action starts with Mr. Hassen's brother, Karim, who had crossed the colour line to live with white people ten years

earlier and who is now gravely ill, telling his white lover that he wishes to return to his people and to be buried according to Muslim funeral rites within a Muslim cemetery. Hassen's response to his brother's request and to the petitions of Karim's lover and Muslim Community members that he accede to the request, provides the axis about which the rest of the story turns. In a series of incidents, Essop traces with wit and delicacy the way in which Hassen vacillates between acceptance of his brother and rejection of him because of his earlier decision to leave the family and the black community. Hassen is a partly pathetic and partly humorous figure and Essop offers a portrait of the man which is balanced between the comic and the tragic.

Hassen emerges as a wilful man, prone to emotional excesses; he is attached to indolence and easy pleasures and has an inflated sense of his personal dignity. In the opening sequence of the story Essop describes his character's slothful nature and the way he delegates even the least onerous of household tasks such as the answering of the telephone, to his wife. We are offered a delightful portrait of Hassen, seated comfortably on a settee drinking spiced tea, bellowing out vainly for his absent wife to answer the ringing telephone. When his wife returns and performs this service for him Essop describes how Hassen eventually 'descended from the settee and squeezing his feet into a pair of crimson sandals, went to the telephone'.<sup>206</sup> Our first revealing glimpse of Hassen is of a temperamental man with a high regard for self-satisfaction.

Essop presents his main character with humour, continually revealing aspects of his volatile and susceptible temperament. Later in the story, for instance, while Hassen is in the process of justifying his rejection of Karim on the grounds of his having been lured into the white society, Essop shows how Hassen himself is not insensitive to the attractions of the white woman who happens to be Karim's lover. Here is Essop's description of the car journey Hassen and Catherine make together:

He sat beside her. The closeness of her presence, the perfume she exuded stirred currents of feeling within him. He glanced at her several times, watched the deft movements of her hands and legs as she controlled the car. Her powdered profile, the outline taut with a resolute quality, aroused his imagination. There was something businesslike in her attitude and bearing, so involved in reality (at the back of his mind there was Salima [his wife], flaccid, cowlike and inadequate) that he could hardly refrain from expressing his admiration.

"You must understand that I'm only going to see my brother because you have <sup>287</sup>come to me. For no one else would I have changed my mind."

The gentle satire which emerges in this scene is one which characterizes Essop's approach in this story and he uses his satirical observation to indicate imperfections not only in the social system but also, as we see above, within the nature of his characters. One of the most telling ironies which Essop develops in the story is that Hassen's resolute refusal to accept his brother back into his life is in direct contradiction to the fact that he is a hajji: that is, a person who has recently returned from a pilgrimage to Mecca, the purpose of this journey being to obtain God's pardon for his sins. Yet Hassen cannot bring himself, as his wife and black community do, to forgive Karim.

Indeed, one of the community leaders charges him with the following statement: "Hajji, can't you forgive him? You were recently in Mecca".<sup>208</sup> Hassen fails to respond to this challenge at this point in the story, and, on a later occasion, when he is told, "But Allah is pleased by forgiveness", he again shrugs off his responsibility: "I am sorry, but in my case the circumstances are different. I am indifferent to him and therefore there is no necessity for me to forgive him". To which one of the leading Muslim figures responds firmly: "Hajji... you are only indulging in glib talk and you know it. Karim is your responsibility, whatever his crime".<sup>209</sup> From this one can see how significant it is that Essop's story is actually entitled 'The Hajji'.

At the heart of Hassen's refusal to accept his brother's request is his misconceived notion of what constitutes his dignity. Essop manages to convey this idea exceptionally well in the dramatic scene which serves as a crucial turning point for Hassen; and from which stage he sets himself against receiving his brother into his home. After this scene Hassen evolves a complex series of self-justifications excusing his stubborn behaviour, most of which touch upon his personal dignity. Early in the story, Catherine has persuaded Hassen to visit his ailing brother. During their meeting Hassen agrees to take Karim back to the black quarter of the city in which he lives. Immediately after leaving Karim's apartment in Hillbrow, Hassen finds himself in an unpleasant situation where he is abused because of

his race: he has left the flat and is waiting for the lift. At this point the doors of the lift open and Hassen finds himself facing three white youths. It is worth quoting this dramatic incident in full:

He [Hassen] hesitated. The boys looked at him tauntingly. Then suddenly they burst into deliberately brutish laughter.

"Come into the parlour." one of them said.

"Come into the Indian parlour," another said in a cloyingly mocking voice.

Hassen looked at them, annoyed, hurt. Then something snapped within him and he stood there, transfixed. They laughed at him in a raucous chorus as the lift doors shut.

He remained immobile, his dignity clawed. Was there anything so vile in him that the youths found it necessary to maul that recess of self-respect within him? "They are whites," he said to himself in bitter justification of their attitude.

He would take the stairs and walk down the five floors. As he descended he thought of Karim. Because of him he had come there and because of him he had been insulted. The enormity of the insult bridged the gap of ten years when Karim has spurned him, and diminished his being. Now he was diminished again.<sup>210</sup>

Essop uses the forceful image of the incident having the effect of a predatory animal's sudden attack on a weaker victim: Hassen's dignity is 'clawed' and his self-respect is described as being 'mauled'. However, in the paragraph which follows, Essop reveals how Hassen mistakenly sets the responsibility for this outrage, which admittedly is of fairly small proportions, at the feet of his brother: 'Because of him [Karim] he had come there and because of him he had been insulted'. Moreover, Hassen continues fallaciously to relate the boys' abusive behaviour to Karim's earlier decision to cross the colour line: 'The enormity of the insult bridged the gap of ten years when Karim had spurned

him, and diminished his being. Now he was diminished again.' Essop ends this paragraph with the observation that the attack and Karim's decision had, in comparable ways, lessened Hassen's dignity.

It is, however, significant that it is incidents related to apartheid and racial discrimination which confuse this man's sense of humanity: both blood ties and spiritual obligations are seriously upset for Hassen as a result of these incidents. Later, for example, we see Hassen increasingly at strife both with himself and with his religious community. When asked by the community leaders what it would cost him to act charitably towards Karim, he replies that it would cost him his dignity and manhood; to which they respond gently, but critically: "My dear Hajji, what dignity and what manhood? What can you lose by speaking a few kind words to him on his death-bed? He was only a young man when he left".<sup>211</sup>

Essop's language in 'The Hajji' is both strong and supple, managing to convey the inner motivations of his characters with conviction. Early in the story, for instance, there is the following paragraph describing Hassen's inner turmoil resulting from Karim's request:

Hajji Hassen had, of course, rejected the plea, and for good reason. When his brother had crossed the colour line, he had severed his family ties. The Hajji at that time had felt excoriating humiliation. By going over to the white Herrenvolk, his brother had trampled on something that was vitally part of him, his dignity and self-respect. But the rejection of his brother's plea involved a straining of the heartstrings and the Hajji did not feel happy. He had recently sought God's pardon for his sins in Mecca, and now

this business of his brother's final earthly wish and his own intransigence was in some way staining his spirit.<sup>212</sup>

Essop shifts his focus to move along with the mental processes of the character and the prose is imbued with metaphors and rather high-flown turns of phrase: we read of Hassen's dignity being trampled on; how his rejection of his brother's request involved 'a straining of the heartstrings' and a 'staining [of] his spirit'. The term 'Herrenvolk', usually used to depict German fascism, is applied in an unorthodox way, to refer to white South Africans. Further, there is the unusual phrase 'excoriating humiliation' in the passage. These sudden turns within Essop's prose bring to it one of its most distinctive qualities, not unlike that in Can Themba's writing. In the final paragraph of the story, for example, Essop describes Karim's funeral procession in this way:

The green hearse, with the crescent moon and stars emblem, passed by; then several cars with mourners followed, bearded men, men with white skull caps on their heads, looking rigidly ahead, like a procession of puppets, indifferent to his fate. No one saw him.<sup>213</sup>

In the long sentence Essop chronicles a series of impressions of the hearse and procession and draws it to an end with the arresting image of the men accompanying the hearse looking like 'a procession of puppets', and the sudden shift to Hassen: the mourners are 'indifferent to his fate'. There is almost a dramatic flourish as Essop concludes this sentence and the story with this image of Hassen being excluded from the funeral of his brother. There is a sad irony in this scene as Hassen finds himself excluded from the community which so warmly had urged him

to find common cause with his brother and accept his return. Hassen is truly the victim here.

There is a noticeably dramatic quality to Essop's prose. We have already quoted the encounter of Hassen and the white boys at the lift. Later, while Hassen is in the midst of an anguished period, disputing with himself about Karim, and painfully recalling images of their past lives together, his wife Salima returns to their flat. Hassen does not know that she has already spent many hours at Karim's bedside at the mosque. He orders her to go quickly to the mosque to ascertain the state of Karim's health. Salima simply goes to her neighbours and then returns to Hassen. The following scene then takes place:

When she opened the door her husband ran to her.

"How is he? Is he very ill? Tell me quickly!"

"He is very ill. Why don't you go and see him?"

Suddenly, involuntarily, Hassen struck his wife in the face.

"Tell me, is he dead? Is he dead?" he screamed.<sup>214</sup>

In this passage Essop swiftly manages to convey not only the fact that Salima has touched a raw nerve in Hassen when she tells him that Karim is gravely ill and by suggesting that he should visit him, but also the real anguish Hassen feels and how little able he is to contain his volatile temper in times of stress: all of these elements are of central importance for the portrait of Hassen, Essop is evolving.

As in many works by other black writers Essop is concerned to show in 'The Hajji' that there is a powerful network of support and mutual concern in the black community. Despite Hassen's

decision not to accept his brother back into his life Essop shows that the black community as a group are concerned for the welfare of others. When Catherine tells Mr. Mia, a black community leader, of Hassen's refusal, he responds in this way: "Don't worry ...I'll speak to Hassen. I'll never allow a Muslim brother to be abandoned".<sup>215</sup> Indeed, although Hassen persists in his intransigent attitude, the black religious dignitaries quickly resolve to have Karim brought into the black community and cared for at the Newtown mosque. The Muslim priest firmly tells Hassen of the religious view on Karim's position:

Although Karim left the community, he was still a Muslim. He had never rejected the religion and espoused Christianity, and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, it had to be accepted that he was a Muslim brother.<sup>216</sup>

This tolerance within the black community implies a strong criticism of the intransigence within the white society.

Essop also attempts to show how the black community is viewed as a welcoming society by Hassen. After the incident with the white boys. Hassen wanders distractedly through the streets of Johannesburg. Essop continues the account in this way:

When he reached central Johannesburg he went to the station and took the train. In the coach with the blacks he felt at ease and regained his self-possession. He was, among familiar faces, among the people who respected him.<sup>217</sup>

Throughout Hassen's dealings with the black community members he is treated with respect; and although his views obviously differ strongly from theirs and there are a number of frank exchanges between Hassen and them, he is never rejected by them and they

rather show him every courtesy they can, taking special care to keep him informed of his brother's condition. It is one of the tragic features of the story that it is largely Hassen's belligerence which sets him at odds with his community; he has engineered his own exclusion. However, it is well to recall that his misery is essentially precipitated by incidents of racialism and racial discrimination, as was earlier true for his brother.

'The Hajji' is a fine example of a South African story which manages to use the racial structures of violence in the society as the basis for a distinctive view of a group of characters and their particular tragedy. It is a very personal story which probes at the psychological nature of its characters and especially at the wayward and idiosyncratic personality of Hassen, the Hajji. In this respect Essop's story had parallels with Nadine Gordimer's 'Something for the Time Being' and 'A Chip of Glass Ruby'. 'The Hajji' also succeeds in revealing a humorous as well as a sad dimension of life, and offers a benign view of the black Muslim community.

The third story I wish to examine is Alex La Guma's 'A Matter of Taste' which is a small masterpiece of modern South African short fiction. Amidst the overwhelming proportion of stories which describe social violence and racial tensions, this work deals with a brief moment of human co-operation.<sup>218</sup> The story tells of the meeting between two black railway workers and a poor white youth. The three men share their meagre stock of coffee and cigarettes with one another and then the black men help their

newly met companion to jump a goods train to Cape Town. In itself the events which constitute the story are slight, yet it moves far beyond the merely anecdotal in that La Guma is offering us an exceptional account of white and black people happily relating to one another and bringing each other companionship and assistance; further, as we shall see, the power of this story lies in the way La Guma has fused social observation and analysis in a work which on first reflection seems to be making no overt points about social relations other than the fleeting possibility of white and black co-operation. It is interesting to observe that in the few existing assessments of La Guma's short fiction, critics have overlooked 'A Matter of Taste' and have concentrated on his more obviously political stories of apartheid, such as 'Slipper Satin', 'Out of Darkness', and 'The Lemon Orchard'.<sup>219</sup>

The image which runs throughout 'A Matter of Taste' is that of food. As we shall see, the fact that food dominates and is a common human necessity of the most basic kind is crucial to the story's success. We recall how food and eating were also of major importance in Rabie's 'Dies Irae' and Cope's 'The Bastards'. Right from the opening sentence, which compares the sunset to 'the split yolk of an egg', to the final scene where the white boy jumps on to the moving train, La Guma plays upon various accounts of food and the ways in which it is eaten. Indeed, the event which draws the boy to the two railway workers is their preparation of coffee and his desire to share this with them. The camaraderie of the three men turns around the sparse

meal they share and the various jokes and anecdotes they tell one another during its course. Much of the humour in the story arises during this meal, both from the restaurant-jokes they swap as well as the way in which the three men playfully contrast their bare repast to the kind of sumptuous feast each of them would prefer. For instance, one of the black workers, Chinaboy, talks of the coffee they are drinking - the sole constituent of their meal - as 'the turkey and green peas' and later as 'the duck'.<sup>220</sup>

Within the brief encounter which makes up the story, La Guma emphasizes certain points about his characters and about the significance of their meeting. Unobtrusively, we learn that the two railway workers and the youth are of different colour. More importantly, La Guma suggests that the three men are of a similar social station: they are poor and are, in different ways, outcasts - the black men simply because of the skin colour in South Africa and the white boy as a result of his poverty which cuts him off from the mainstream white community. In the opening account given about the youth, for example, La Guma notes both his white complexion and his poverty:

He had come out of the plantation and was thin and short and had a pale white face covered with a fine golden stubble, Dirt lay in dark lines in the creases around his mouth and under his eyes and in his neck, and his hair was ragged and thick and uncut, falling back to his neck and around his temples. He wore an old pair of jeans, faded and dirty and turned up at the bottoms, and a torn leather coat.<sup>221</sup>

Soon after they meet La Guma develops the idea of the white boy's disaffection with the society in his wish to leave the country for America.

At the heart of this story is a brief exchange between the black man, Chinaboy, and the white youth which significantly occurs virtually at the mid-point of the work. Out of this dialogue La Guma draws the story's title. Chinaboy has been telling his companions how he had once worked as a waiter in a high-class restaurant and of the exotic dishes the patrons used to order. He tells them how he would love to eat such a meal. At this point the white boy interrupts him:

"Hell," said Whitey, "it's all a matter of taste. Some people like chicken and others eat sheep's heads and beans!"

"A matter of taste." Chinaboy scowled. "Bull, it's a matter of money, pal. I worked six months in that caffy and I never heard nobody order sheep's head and beans!"<sup>222</sup>

Chinaboy's observation that it is not simply personal tastes which affect one's choices but rather one's economic position is of central significance for the story. The fact that the white boy has joined the black workers is not just a matter of preference based upon his personal likes and dislikes, but is strongly informed by the economic status of the parties. Moreover, the reason lying behind their easy friendship and co-operation with one another and the grounds for their having shared tastes is because they occupy a similar economic place in the society; they are poor. They are therefore in a position in which they can strike up a passing friendship with one another in spite of the fact that they are of different colours (races) and are usually debarred from such contact.

This story is one of the rare examples in South African literature where black and white characters co-operate with one

another. Moreover, La Guma manages in the story to offer an explanation, without obvious obtrusiveness, which goes towards clarifying the basis upon which white and black people in South Africa (and indeed elsewhere) could fruitfully co-operate with one another on warm and friendly terms. Two of the strongest features of 'A Matter of Taste' are the warmth of the contact between the black workers and the white boy and the sad realization, which is dramatically illustrated in the events of the story, that this accord is fleeting and remains a remote possibility for the peoples of South Africa, whose economic differences and divisions have largely been determined along racial lines. There is genuine sadness, as well as humour, in the final lines of the story as the black men and white boy wave farewell to one another and Chinaboy calls out, echoing the punch-line of one of the jokes they have shared: '"Why ain't the band playing? Hell!"<sup>223</sup>

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#### VIII Conclusion

Njabulo Ndebele has spoken of protest literature as 'the literature of surfaces; a literature of rejection, not of construction'. He also observed that it is most commonly a literature about helpless victims and not of the struggling people.<sup>224</sup> This seems to me to be a most useful critical summary of certain of the key features of protest literature. However, as one considers the works of the leading black South African writers one finds little in these which accord with this account of protest literature. In this respect then I depart from most

critics of black South Africa literature who see, particularly in the works of the 1950's and 1960's, a dominant tone of protest.<sup>225</sup> Anger, there is in these works: there is no doubt of it; as, indeed, there is anger in much of the writing by white writers in English. In this regard, they are certainly works of protest. Yet there is more to black writing than simply this.

Black South African writing is as much about assertion and affirmation as it is a record of hardship. The adverse conditions have served the leading black writers as the substratum upon which they have built works of fiction, a large proportion of which celebrate features of black life in South Africa. It is significant how few stories there are which end in defeat and despair for the black characters. Even among the works of Can Themba and Bessie Head, the two most astringently critical writers about black life in Southern Africa, stories of this kind are rare and are balanced by other pieces affirming the resilience of black characters and offering praise of black communal values. Their stories ultimately present a harsh view of those black people who have lost all sense of communal attachment and responsibility.

The most common pattern in black short fiction is that of black characters triumphing over difficult circumstances. If the fiction was exclusively given over to a celebration of black life in South Africa then one could legitimately expect to find the characters and world portrayed in these works to be idealized. However, this is rarely the case. The reason for this is because

of the exceptionally high levels of violence directed against the black community; and this violence has offered a crucial counter-balance to the tendency to idealize the lives and traditions of the black people. What one finds then in black writing is a critical awareness on the writers' part of people variously battling and often succeeding to maintain personal dignity, family and community life, in circumstances of enormous hardship. These efforts and the resilience of the characters are shown ultimately to be of greater significance than the grim conditions in which they live. The struggles of the characters are nevertheless viewed in a number of different ways, some of which, say in 'The Hajji' for example, are not at all flattering to the characters.

The quality and value of black South African fiction is how the writers have described not simply the rage and misery of the black people, but also, in a large number of cases, the courage of their characters, indeed, their confidence. The qualities these writers have observed in many of their characters, their confidence and strength in the face of adversity, attach as well to their fiction. Black South African fiction since the 1950's is not the writing of a defeated subservient people, but that of a nation certain of the victories that lie ahead for them.

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NOTES

1. Nkosi, Lewis: 'Southern Africa: Protest and Commitment' (in Tasks and Masks. Themes and Styles of African Literature (Harlow, Longman, 1981, p. 76).
2. There's no doubt, however, that the banning of black literary works of 1950's and 1960's has had a disruptive effect in the country. A young generation of black South Africans have found themselves cut off from the ideas of older writers simply by not having access to their works; fortunately, copies of these works have found their way back into the townships and have been widely circulated. The only writer with whom I am dealing who did not have his fiction banned at this time was Casey Motsisi.
3. Consider, for example, the personal tributes which Mzamane extends to the generation of writers somewhat older than himself in the introduction - 'I remember...' - to his story collection, Mzala : The Stories of Mbulelo Mzamane (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1980). Mzamane's own story, 'The Dube Train Revisited', for instance, is a direct echo of Can Themba's earlier story, 'The Dube Train'. Mzamane's story reflects the fact that violence in the black community has not changed much since the time of Themba's original work.
4. I use the Marxist terms of class analysis of black South African society with a small measure of caution. The universal applicability of Marxist class analysis has recently been challenged, particularly with reference to Third World countries where the historical patterns have not followed those of Europe. This suggests that Euro-centric modes of social analysis may indeed not be appropriate in these countries, or, at least, require some form of regional adaptation. In South Africa, for example, there has been an extended debate among historians dating from the early 1970's about the most suitable way of viewing the society, whether in terms of a race or a class analysis, or of a methodology which incorporates both forms of analysis. A simple class analysis of South African society encounters several major problems which points towards some of the pitfalls of this methodology. See the historical works and debates about historiography on pp. 559 - 560 of the bibliography.
5. Gordimer, Nadine: 'Apprentices of Freedom' (in 'The Arts in Adversity' section of New Society, 24/31 December, 1981 p. iv.).
6. For an interesting, if somewhat schematic, account of class formation and social stratifications in the black society with a discussion of the writer's kinship with the petty-bourgeois class of the townships, see Kelwyn Sole's 'Class, Continuity and Change in Black South African Literature 1948 - 1960' (in Labour, Townships and Protest. Studies in the social history of the Witwatersrand, ed. Belinda Bozzoli (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1979, pp. 142 - 183).
7. James Matthew's story of 'A Case of Guilt' appears in his collection, The Park and Other Stories (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983, pp. 154 - 164).
8. Ibid., p. 159.

9. Mzamane, Mbulelo: 'The Uses of Traditional Oral Forms in the Black South African Literature', an unpublished paper presented at the Conference of Literature and Society in Southern Africa, Sept. 8th - 11th, 1981, University of York, Mimeo. pp. 1 - 2, especially. This paper appears in Literature and Society in South Africa, eds. L. White and Tim Couzens (Harlow, Longmans, 1985).
10. Finnegan, Ruth: Oral Literature in Africa (Oxford University Press, 1970 pp. 384 - 385), in particular the section, Prose Narratives II, on the originality and authorship of oral stories.
11. For discussion of the reasons lying behind the black writers choice of English as their literary medium and the historical evolution of the language debate, see Ursula Barnett's A Vision of Order - A Study of Black South African Literature in English (1914 - 1980), in particular the opening chapter of this work 'A History of Black writing in English in South Africa', (pp. 9 - 16) (London, Sinclair Browne, 1983 & Amehurst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1983); and, Kelwyn Sole's paper 'Class, Continuity and Change in Black South African Literature', op. cit., particularly p. 160, where Sole writes that the English language 'as a possible cultural unifying force among urban blacks, with political and ideological implications is one which goes back to Plaatje and John Dube'. Finally, E'skia Mphahlele's The African Image, (1st ed., London, Faber, 1962, p. 193) in the chapter, 'The Black Man's Literary Image of Himself': 'Now because the Government is using institutions of a fragmented and almost unrecognizable Bantu culture as an instrument of oppression, we dare not look back. We have got to wrench the tools of power from the white man's hand: one of these is literacy --- the sophistication that goes with it. We have got to speak the language that all can understand - English...'
12. For discussions of the influence of the tabloids and, in particular, of Drum, see Lewis Nkosi's essay 'The Fabulous Decade: The Fifties' in Home and Exile, pp. 9 - 16 (1st ed.) op. cit., (2nd ed. pp. 7 - 16); E'skia Mphahlele's 'The Black Man's Literary Image of Himself' in The African Image (1st ed.), op. cit., p. 186; Mphahlele's 'Landmarks of Literary History in South Africa' and Jordan K. Ngubane's 'Forty Years of Black Writing' in The Voice of the Black Writer in Africa, eds. Ezekiel Mphahlele and Tim Couzens (Johannesburg, Senate Special Lectures, University of the Witwatersrand, 1980, pp.7 and 15, respectively.)
13. Mphahlele, Ezekiel: 'The Fabric of African Cultures' in Voices in the Whirlwind and other essays (New York, Hill and Wang, 1972, p. 156).
14. Mphahlele, Ezekiel: 'Grieg on a Stolen Piano', from the collection In Corner B, (Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1967, p. 46).
15. Ibid., p. 47.
16. Ibid., p. 50; and the story 'In Corner B', p. 109.

17. Themba, Can: 'Crepuscule', from the collection The Will do Die (London, Heinemann, 1972, p. 8.).
18. Mphahlele, Ezekiel: 'In Corner B'. from the collection of that name, op. cit., p. 110.
19. Mphahlele, Ezekiel: 'Mrs. Plum', from the collection In Corner B, op. cit., p. 172.
20. Mphahlele, Ezekiel: 'In Corner B', from the collection of that name, op. cit., p. 109.
21. Themba, Can: 'The Suit', from the collection The Will to Die., op. cit., p. 38.
22. See Michael Vaughan's comments on this point in his paper, 'Literature and Politics: Currents in South African Writing in the 1970's' (in Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 9, No. 1, October, 1982, particularly pp. 131 - 132). Vaughan writes: 'His [Matshoba's] concern [is] to produce a fiction closely in touch with popular experience... Each story has an exemplary quality: it treats the situation that is its subject matter as a model situation, from which a lesson can be derived... If we consider the significance of this collection of stories, taken as a whole rather than separately, we can see that Matshoba has given a model-like prominence to a range of situations. The stories move between town and country metropolis and homeland, romantic love and political repression. Matshoba is using his stories to evoke a map of experience.' )pp. 131 - 132).
23. Matshoba, Mtutuzeli: 'To Kill a Man's Pride', from the anthology Forced Landing Africa South: Contemporary Writings ed. M. Mutloatse (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1980. p. 123).
24. Matshoba, Mtutuzeli: 'Three Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion', from the collection Call Me Not a Man (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1979, p. 147).
25. Matshoba, Mtutuzeli: 'A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana' from the collection Call Me Not a Man, op. cit., p. 108.
26. Ndebele, Njabulo: Fools and other Stories (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983).
27. Ndebele, Njabulo: 'Uncle' from the collection Fools, op. cit., p. 123.
28. cf., for example, Mbulelo Mzamane's 'Jola' stories and his novel The Children of Soweto (1982); Miriam Tlali's novel Amandla (1982); and Mthobi Mutloatse's stories Mama Ndiyalila (1982).
29. Ndebele, Njabulo: 'Uncle' from the collection Fools, op. cit., p. 71.
30. Ibid., p. 77.
31. Head, Bessie: 'The Deep River: a Story of Ancient Tribal Migration', from the collection The Collector of Treasures and other Botswana Village Tales (London, Heinemann, 1977, p. 1).
32. Head, Bessie: 'Kgotla', from the collection The Collection of Treasures, op. cit. p. 62.
33. Head, Bessie: 'Heaven is not Closed', from the collection The Collector of Treasures. op. cit., p. 11.
34. Ibid., p. 12.

35. Head, Bessie: 'Life', from the collection The Collector of Treasures, op. cit., p. 37.
36. Ibid., p. 43.
37. See the discussion of this point about Miles's Liefs nie op straatnie on p. 292 of this study.
38. Mphahlele, Ezekiel: 'Mrs. Plum' from the collection In Corner B, op. cit., p. 164.
39. Ibid., p. 167.
40. Ibid., p. 184.
41. Ibid., p. 179.
42. For these letters, see 'Mrs. Plum', pp. 191 - 192, and p. 202.
43. Other examples of black people helping one another in 'Mrs. Plum' are Dick's financial support of his sister; her care for their parents; and the way in which Dick, Karabo, and a group of black women variously come to Chimane's aid when she is forced to have an abortion. For further critical assessment of 'Mrs. Plum' and Mphahlele's writing, see Norman Hodge's 'Dogs, Africans and Liberals: The World of Mphahlele's "Mrs. Plum"' (in English in Africa, Vol. 8, No. 1, March 1981, pp. 33 - 44; and Samuel Omo Asein's 'The Humanism of Ezekiel Mphahlele' (in The Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol. XV. No. 1, August 1980, pp. 38 - 49).
44. Essop, Ahmed: 'In Two Worlds', from the collection The Hajji and Other Stories (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1978, p. 99).
45. Tshabangu, Mango: 'Thoughts in a Train' from the anthology Forced Landing - Africa South : Contemporary Writings, op. cit., pp. 157 - 158.
46. Ibid., p. 158.
47. cf. Ursula Barnett's observation in A Vision of Order, op. cit. p. 36:  
'Writers justify their use of English also because the use of the vernacular would be tribally divisive; they have, in fact, adapted English as an African language. It is a new language with symbols and terms of its own.'
48. Mphahlele, Ezekiel: 'Grieg on a Stolen Piano'. from the collection In Corner B, op. cit., p. 54.
49. La Guma, Alex: 'A Walk in the Night', from the collection A Walk in the Night and other Stories (London, Heinemann, 1968, p. 1).
50. Ibid., p. 12.
51. Ibid., p. 16.
52. Ibid., p. 31.
53. Ibid., p. 16.
54. Ibid., p. 86.
55. Ibid., p. 87.
56. Dangor, Achmat: 'Waiting for Leila', from the collection Waiting For Leila (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1981, pp. 1 -2 ).
57. For discussion of this point in the Afrikaans section see pp. 241 - 2.

58. Matshoba, Mtutuzeli: 'A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana', from the collection Call Me Not A Man (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1979, p. 108).
59. Motsisi, Casey: 'Mita' from the collection Casey & Co, (Johannesbrug, Ravan Press, 1978, p. 72).
60. Rive, Riacherd: 'Willie-boy', from the collection African Songs (East Berlin, Seven Seas Publishers, 1963, p. 44).
61. Nkosi, Lewis: 'The Fabulous Decade: The Fifties' from the collection of essays Home and Exile, op. cit. (1st ed. p. 18; 2nd ed. p. 13).
62. Sampson, Anthony: Drum (London, Collins, 1956, p. 47).
63. Themba, Can: 'The Suit', from the collection The Will do Die, op. cit., p. 37.
64. Themba, Can: 'The Dube Train', from the collection The Will do Die, op. cit., p. 57.
65. Themba, Can: 'Crepuscule'. from the collection The Will to Die, op. cit., pp. 2 and 9, respectively.
66. Themba, Can: 'The Will to Die', from the collection of that name, op. cit., p. 62.
67. Ibid., p. 62.
68. Ibid., p. 62.
69. Themba, Can: 'The Dube Train', from the collection The Will to Die, op. cit., p. 58.
70. Ibid., p. 60.
71. Themba, Can: 'The Suit', from the collection The Will to Die, op. cit., p. 39.
72. Themba, Can: 'The Dube Train', from the collection The Will to Die, op. cit., p. 60.
73. Ibid., p. 57.
74. ibid., p. 58.
75. Themba, Can: 'Crepuscule', from the collection The Will to Die, op. cit., p. 8.
76. Ibid., pp. 5 - 6.
77. Dangor, Achmat: 'Waiting for Leila', from the collection of that name, op. cit., p. 23.
78. Themba, Can: 'The Urchin', from the collection The Will to Die, op. cit., p. 28.
79. Themba, Can: 'The Dube Train', from the collection The Will to Die, op. cit., p. 59.
80. Ibid., p. 59.
81. Nkosi, Lewis: 'Obituary', form the collection The Will to Die, op. cit., p. x.
82. Dangor pointed to this distinction in our conversation together in 1983, held in Johannesburg. Interview with Achmat Dangor, Johannesburg, Tuesday March 8th, 1983.
83. Mphahlele, Ezekiel: 'Mrs. Plum', from the collection In Corner B, op. cit., pp. 168 - 169.
84. Ibid., p. 197.
85. Ibid., pp. 200 - 201.

86. It is worth observing that when Karabo in 'Mrs. Plum' does tell her employer the truth - that her uncle has passed away several days previously and that she now wishes to go home to pay her respects at his grave and offer consolation to her aunt - this precipitates a clash with Mrs. Plum which results in Karabo handing in her notice. See pp. 202 - 203. One can surmise that if Karabo had lied in this instance - by saying, for instance, that her uncle had just died and she wished to attend his funeral - then the breakdown between her and Mrs. Plum could probably have been avoided. This, of course, goes to confirm the observation Mphahlele is making in this novella that the white and black people coexist on the basis of lies. Mphahlele's story 'Grieg on a Stolen Piano' offers further illustrations of how the black and white communities coexist on the basis of lies. See, in particular, pp. 44, 60 - 61 of that story in In Corner B, op. cit., and p. 421 of this section.

87. Motsisi, Casey: 'If Bugs were Men', from the collection Casey & Co., op. cit., pp. 2 - 3.

88. Motsisi, Casey: 'Boycott Bugs', from the collection Casey & Co., op. cit., p. 8.

89. Motsisi, Casey: 'High Bugs', from the collection Casey & Co., op. cit., p. 6.

90. Lewis Nkosi wrote in his essay recalling Johannesburg of the 1950's, 'The Fabulous Decade: The Fifties': 'The hold which shebeens have on the mind of the black South African can only be compared to the similar hold the English club has on the mind of the Englishman. This explains why shebeens are so widely celebrated in the fiction and non-fiction of black South Africans. Shebeens like the London pub, provided the focal point of city life.' From Home and Exile, by Lewis Nkosi (London, Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1965, p. 14: 2nd edition, Longman, 1983, p. 10).

91. Motsisi, Casey: 'Kid Booze', from the collection, Casey & Co., op. cit., p. 47,

92. Motsisi, Casey: 'Mattress', from the collection, Casey & Co., op. cit., pp. 18 - 19.

93. 'Jim comes to Jo'burg' narratives are discussed in more detail in the Afrikaans section on pp. 248--249.

94. Mzamane, Mbulelo: 'My Cousin comes to Jo'burg', from the collection, Mzala - The Stories of Mbulelo Mzamane (Johannesbrug, Ravan Press, 1980, p. 12).

95. Mphahlele, Ezekiel: 'Mrs. Plum', from the collection In Corner B, op. cit., p. 178.

96. Mzamane, Mbulelo: 'My Cousin comes to Jo'burg'; from the collection Mzala, op. cit., pp. 12 - 13.

97. Mzamane, Mbulelo: 'The Pioneer's Daughter', from the collection Mzala, op. cit., p. 124.

98. cf. discussion of stories by white writers in English which deal in sober fashion with the plight of black South Africans, pp. 107 - 118 of this study.

99. Mzamane, Mbulelo: 'The Party', from the collection Mzala, op. cit., p. 172.

100. Mzamane, Mbulelo: 'My Cousin and his Pick-Ups', from the collection Mzala, op. cit., p. 14.
101. Ibid., p. 15.
102. Ibid., p. 15.
103. See 'A Point of Identity' in Mphahlele's collection In Corner B, Op. Cit., pp. 62 - 79, and my discussion of this story on pp. 454 - 459 of this chapter.
104. Mzamane, Mbulelo: 'My Other Cousin, Sitha', from the collection Mzala, op. cit., p. 47.
105. Mzamane, Mbulelo: 'A Present for My Wife', from the collection Mzala, op. cit., pp. 79 - 80.
106. Mphahlele Ezekiel: 'Grieg on a Stolen Piano', from the collection In Corner B, op. cit., pp. 60 - 61.
107. Mzamane, Mbulelo: 'A Present ofr My Wife', from the collection Mzala, op. cit., p. 83.
108. Mzamane, Mbulelo: 'Fezile', from the collection Mzala, op. cit., p. 106.
109. Mzamane, Mbulelo: 'The Soweto Bride', from the collection Mzala, op. cit., pp. 130 - 131.
110. Mphahlele, Ezekiel: 'In Corner B', from the collection of that name, op. cit., p. 114.
111. Themba, Can: 'Crepuscule', from the collection The Will to Die, selected by Donald Stuart and Roy Holland (London, Heinemann, 1972, p. 5).
112. Ibid., pp. 10 - 11.
113. Nkosi, Lewis: 'The Prisoner', from the anthology African Writing Today, ed. Ezekiel Mphahlele (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967, p. 307).
114. Rive, Richard: 'The Man From the Board', from the collection Advance, Retreat (Cape Town, David Philip, 1983, p. 102).
115. 'Black Macbeth' appears in the anthology Under the Southern Cross - Short Stories from South Africa, ed. David Adey (Johannesburg, Ad. Donker, 1982, pp. 285 - 297).
116. Rive, Richard: 'Advance, Retreat', from the collection of that name, op. cit., pp. 107 - 108.
117. Ibid., p. 106.
118. Essop, Ahmed: 'The Notice', from the collection The Hajji, op. cit., pp. 110 - 111.
120. Essop, Ahmed: 'Aziz Khan', from the collection The Hajji, op. cit., p. 58.
121. See pp. 124 - 128 of this study for discussion of parody in stories by Hope and Wilhelm.
122. Essop, Ahmed: 'Hajji Musa and the Hindu Fire-Walker', from the collection The Hajji, op. cit., pp. 42 - 43.
123. Ibid., p. 43.
124. Ibid., p. 46.
125. ibid., p. 49.
126. There are other stories of James Matthews in which humour plays a significant part. 'The Party' and 'Mistaken Identity' appear in Matthews's collection, The Park (1983), op. cit., pp. 177 - 178 , and pp. 60 - 66, respectively.

127. Modisane, Bloke: Blame Me On History (London, Thames & Hudson, 1963, p. 57).
128. La Guma, Alex: 'A Walk in the Night', from the collection of that name, op. cit., p. 4.
129. Ibid., p. 11.
130. Ibid., p. 53.
131. Ibid., p. 44.
132. Ibid., p. 46.
133. Ibid., pp. 84 - 85 and 93, respectively.
134. Ibid., pp. 31 and 80, respectively. cf. Bosman's wry and ironic use of baboons in his essays and stories. See pp. 51 - 55 of this study.
135. Ibid., p. 63.
136. Matshoba, Mtutuzeli: 'My Friend, the Outcast', from the collection Call Me Not a Man, op. cit., p. 12.
137. La Guma, Alex: 'A Walk in the Night', from the collection of that name, op. cit., p. 21.
138. Ibid., p. 28.
139. Themba, Can: 'Crepuscule', from the collection The Will to Die, op. cit., p. 8.
140. Dangor, Achmat: 'Waiting ofr Leila', from the collection of that name, op. cit., p. 2.
141. Ibid., pp. 17 - 18.
142. Ibid., p. 67.
143. Dangor, Achmat: 'In the Shadow of Paradise', from the collection Waiting For Leila, op. cit., p. 140.
144. Dangor, Achmat: 'Jobman', from the collection Waiting For Leila, op. cit., p. 104.
145. Ibid., p. 94.
146. Nkosi, Lewis: 'Fiction by Black South Africans' (in Home and Exile, op. cit., 1st ed. p. 125 and 2nd ed. p. 132.) In a similar fashion, Nkosi wrote in 1962 that for the writers the 'gargantuan reality' of black South African life 'impinges so strongly upon the imagination that the temptation is often compelling to use ready-made plots of violence, chicanery and love tragedies as representing universal truth, when, in fact, actual insight into human tragedy may lie beneath this social and political turbulence'. Lewis Nkosi: 'African Fiction: South Africa: Protest' (in Africa Report), October, 1962, p. 3; quoted by Ursula Barnett in her work A Vision of Order, op. cit., pp. 180 - 181.
147. La Guma, Alex: 'Out of Darkness', from the anthology Quartet, ed. Richard Rive (London, Heinemann, 1965, p. 34).
148. Ibid., p. 35.
149. Ibid., p. 36.
150. Ibid., p. 33.
151. Ibid., p. 37.
152. Ibid., p. 38.
153. Ibid., p. 38.
154. Ibid., p. 38.
155. Ibid., p. 38.

156. See, for instance, 'Alex La Guma's Short Fiction' by Samuel Omo Asein (in Lotus: Afro-Asian Writings, No. 51, 1982, pp. 32 - 42); 'The Short Fiction of Alex La Guma' by Adewale-Maja Pearce (in The London Magazine, June 1984.) Both 'Slipper Satin' and 'A Glass of Wine' appear in Quartet, op. cit.
157. La Guma, Alex: 'A Glass of Wine', from the anthology Quartet, op. cit., p. 95.
158. Ibid., p. 96.
159. Ibid., pp. 93 - 94.
160. Ibid., p. 91.
161. Ibid., p. 93.
162. Interestingly, 'A Walk in the Night' and 'A Glass of Wine' are two of the small number of works of black fiction mentioned by Nkosi in his essay 'Fiction by Black South Africans' which he considers avoid sensationalizing the racial violence in the country. See Home and Exile, op. cit., (1st ed. pp. 134 - 135, and 2nd ed. pp. 137 - 138).
163. Essop, Ahmed: 'The Commandment', from the collection The Hajji, op. cit., p. 70.
164. Ibid., p. 70.
165. Ibid., p. 70.
166. Ibid., p. 71.
167. Ibid., p. 71.
168. Ibid., p. 70.
169. Ibid., p. 71.
170. Ibid., p. 72.
171. Essop, Ahmed: 'Gerty's Brother', from the collection The Hajji, op. cit., p. 92.
172. cf. the love and care the black servant Sam brings to his young white charge Hally in Athol Fugard's play, Master Harold and the Boys.
173. Essop, Ahmed: 'Gerty's Brother', from The Hajji, op. cit., p. 93.
174. Ibid., p. 93.
175. Mphahlele, Ezekiel: 'A Point of Identity', from the collection In Corner B, op. cit., p. 62.
176. Ibid., p. 73.
177. Ibid., pp. 74 - 75.
178. Ibid., p. 65.
179. Ibid., p. 65.
180. Ibid., pp. 65 - 66.
181. Ibid., p. 66.
182. La Guma, Alex: 'Tattoo Marks and Nails'. from the collection A Walk in the Night, op. cit., pp. 99 - 100.
183. Other stories which describe the prison violence are James Matthews's 'Baby, that's the Way It is' and 'A Case of Guilt', both from the collection The Park.
- There is, in fact, almost an entire genre of prison writing about South Africa. Other notable examples of prison writing are Denis Brutus's Letters to Martha (poems), D.M. Zwelonke's Robben

Island, as well as stories by white writers which we noted in earlier chapters such as Alan Paton's 'Sunlight in Trebizond Street', Peter Wilhelm's 'All the Days of my Death', Christopher Hope's 'Learning to Fly' and Breyten Breytenbach's 'The Double Dying of an Ordinary Criminal' and 'Max Sec (Beverly Hills)'

184. Examples of stories which describe the violence on trains are Mzamane's response to Themba's piece, 'The Dube Train Revisited', and Bereng Setuke's 'Dumani', which appears in the anthology, Forced Landing, op. cit.

185. Themba, Can: 'The Dube Train', from the collection The Will to Die, op. cit., p. 61.

186. Ibid., pp. 61 and 62, respectively.

187. Themba, Can: 'Kwashiorkor', from the collection The Will to Die, op. cit., p. 16.

188. Ibid., pp. 20 - 21.

189. Matshoba, Mtutuzeli: 'Call Me Not a Man', from the collection of that name, op. cit., p. 18.

190. Although a substantial proportion of the Tswana people live in Botswana, there are large numbers of Tswana people who live permanently in South Africa.

191. Head, Bessie: 'The Collector of Treasurers', from the collection of that name, op. cit., p. 91.

192. Ibid., p. 91.

193. Ibid., pp. 91 - 92.

194. See earlier discussion of this point on pp. 387 - 388.

195. Ibid., p. 92.

196. Ibid., p. 92.

197. Ibid., p. 93.

198. Ibid., p. 101.

199. Ibid., p. 91.

200. Ibid., p. 101.

201. Ibid., p. 93.

202. Ibid., p. 94.

203. Ibid., p. 103.

204. Ibid., p. 88.

205. Ibid., pp. 89 - 90.

206. Essop, Ahmed: 'The Hajji', from the collection of that name, op. cit., p. 1.

207. Ibid., p. 4.

208. Ibid., p. 8.

209. Ibid., pp. 10 - 11.

210. Ibid., p. 5.

211. Ibid., p. 10.,

212. Ibid., p. 2.

213. Ibid., p. 13.

214. Ibid., p. 10.

215. Ibid., p. 7.

216. Ibid., p. 8.

217. Ibid., p. 6. For a similar incident cf. Tshabangu's story 'Thoughts in a Train' from the anthology Forced Landing, op. cit.

218. In this respect, compare Alan Paton's story 'A Drink in the Passage' and Dan Jacobson's 'The Zulu and the Zeide'.

219. This is the case in both Samuel Asein's and Adewale Maja-Pearce's essays on La Guma's short fiction, op. cit.

220. La Guma, Alex: 'A Matter of Taste', from the collection A Walk in the Night, op. cit., pp. 127 and 129, respectively.

221. Ibid., p. 126.

222. Ibid., p. 128.

223. Ibid., p. 130.

224. Ndebele, Njabulo: 'Fiction writing in South Africa', an address given by Ndebele at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, on 29th October 1984. The text of Ndebele's speech has not been published.

225. This is the case in the critical writings of Ezekiel Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi, and Richard Rive, among other critics.

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CONCLUSION

## CONCLUSION

'Apartheid was a white idea but it has become a "truly African" subject of our time', observes Nadine Gordimer.<sup>1</sup> The literature about apartheid has been created and developed both by black and white writers. Indeed, 'South African literary consciousness has been formed by black and white, and this is unique in African literatures.'<sup>2</sup>

Apartheid as a theme in African literature and its development by black and white writers poses a number of implications for writers of the continent. In the first place, literary treatments of apartheid have kept alive in the minds of African writers and readers some of the terrible conditions and consequences of white colonial rule. It has also been an often unpalatable reminder of how post-colonial systems of government in Africa have retained traces of the orders they have replaced. In a positive way, South Africa and its literature serves as a model of the courage and determination of people to resist and even overthrow an oppressive regime. There is scarcely any African political thinker or writer who has not been influenced by the South African case.

Apart from these shared areas of concern and involvement between South African and other African literatures, there are a series of more specific parallels which arise especially between black South African and other African literatures. Like many of their fellow Africans black South African writers have used a European

language as the medium for their literary works. The European language becomes in their hands a vehicle for African expression. In the case of black South African, West African, and East African writers the English language has been appropriated and transformed by them into something distinctly different from the kind of English used by writers of the United Kingdom or even writers elsewhere in the Commonwealth. The rich infusion of metaphor and the density of imagery, often unconventional and startling, which one finds in the English prose of black South Africans is also a feature in works by other English writers elsewhere in Africa. Similarly, on a thematic level, the black South African writers' concern about communalism and storytelling, and their unshakeable belief in the value of communalism and their sense of grief at its dissolution are almost universal in African writing.

What one discovers then is that South African literature has a series of intimate links with writing from other parts of Africa. Not only is apartheid and the struggle for Southern African liberation an integral part of the terrain of African literature, but there are further thematic, stylistic, and linguistic bonds between these literatures. Yet the fact that the literature of apartheid has been written both by black and white people poses in my opinion an intriguing challenge to widespread notions that African consciousness is synonymous with black consciousness. South African literature and history suggest that racial exclusivity stands firmly in opposition to notions of African

humanism. The South African model indicates that if one defines African consciousness or African literature in racial terms one is heading for enormous difficulties. This charge applies, for instance, to two major surveys and assessments of African literature, Toward the Decolonization of African Literature and A New Reader's Guide to African Literature, which exclude white South African writers from their sphere of consideration, suggesting that African literature is defined and characterized by the blackness of its writers. This is unacceptable in my view and does a great disservice to the continent's traditions and literature.<sup>3</sup>.

How can one assess recent South African literature on a broader, more international scale of reference? South African writing of recent decades is overwhelmingly concerned about apartheid and offers a range of responses to this dogged and brutal system of oppression. There is a startling diversity in this literature. It is not simply a literature of protest and sorrow as one might superficially expect. Humour and satire abound and there is much that is assertive and optimistic in the writing: out of a confined set of circumstances imagination has triumphed. When one looks at other areas of the globe and considers the nature of literary responses to similar types of oppressive circumstances, one discovers that South Africa's writers have done exceptionally well. There are, for instance, interesting and instructive parallels between the writing of Latin America and that of South Africa with writers such as Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Ariel

Dorfman, Pablo Neruda, and Mario Vargas Llosa similarly concerned in many of their works with the civil liberties and personal lives of people in the face of desparately harsh social conditions. South African literature of the kind considered in this study has been at the vanguard of writing that is fully committed to the overthrow of oppression.

The South African literary tradition, as was noted in the introduction of this work, is markedly different from those of England, the United States and Western European countries in that the mainstream of this tradition in South Africa is deeply peoccupied with the central political events of the country. Consequently, one has little sense in recent South African literature that its authors have shied clear of social and artistic responsibility in their works. By the 1970's virtually every major South African writer had in one way or another committed themselves to writing about the issues affecting all of their countrymen. Whether one could say, perhaps rather cynically, that this had become unavoidable for them (and comparison with other literatures suggests that this is not universally the case), these writers demand respect for their courage and resolve at least as much for the purely 'artistic' elements of their writing.<sup>4</sup>

It must be admitted that when considering the genre of this study, short fiction, there is little sense that South African writers have broken any new ground in terms of formal approaches to the story. However, it should be noted that a radical form

need not imply a radical content.<sup>5</sup> This would certainly be true with reference to the works of the black South African writers, formally conservative one would say in their social realism yet most piercing in their observations and their implications for change in society. Among the most striking areas of formal experimentation in South African short fiction are the very compact prose works of the Afrikaner writers Jan Rabie, Breyten Breytenbach, John Miles, and P.J. Haasbroek. Among the works of English writers such as Herman Bosman, Christopher Hope, Barney Simon, and Dan Jacobson there are fabular tales which are often used by them as a means of prophetic admonition about the country. In the case of works by black writers there is often a fascinating interplay between features of oral storytelling traditions and those of a literate urban society.

Nadine Gordimer has observed that 'if we are to talk meaningfully about the future of South African literature... we must do so in the context of a self-liberating and dynamic force for all South Africans'.<sup>6</sup> (My underlining) That is, a literature whose themes are those concerning the mass of the people and not simply a privileged élite. There is a growing sense of this happening in the writing, particularly since the 1970's. Even Afrikaans literature, which until this time had been a narrowly-based tradition given over almost exclusively to the concerns of privileged white Afrikaners, has swung discernibly much closer in its subject-matter and its sympathies to those of the black and white writers in English. Recent South African literature

strongly suggests how writers are preparing the grounds for the new political alignment which will follow the ultimate collapse and defeat of Afrikaner nationalism. Both in the black and white writing communities there is a mood of ferment: satirical writing, tales of social chaos and uncertainty, and works about the sense of independence black people are feeling in the townships, all abound. As the era of white colonialism draws to its violent end in South Africa, whatever the future may hold, one can reflect about the strength of writing now drawn from grim circumstances and dealing with a painful phase of history.

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NOTES

1. Gordimer, Nadine: 'From Apartheid to Afrocentrism' (in English in Africa, Vol. 7, No. 1, March 1980, p. 48). The text of this essay formed the basis on an address given by Nadine Gordimer at the University of Duban-Westville in July 1979.
  2. Ibid., p. 45.
  3. A New Reader's Guide to African Literature ed. Hans Zell, Carol Bundy and Virginia Coulon (London, Heinemann, 1983) and Toward the Decolonization of African Literature by Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike (Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980). Interestingly, two reviewers of A New Reader's Guide, Christopher Hope in the Times Literary Supplement and Adewale Maja-Pearce in the New Statesman, are troubled precisely about this issue of white writers being excluded from the canon of African literature.
  4. The respect shown to South African literary works has been clearly demonstrated by the large number of accolades and awards which South African writers have received, especially since the 1970's. Aside from the Nobel Prize which has so far eluded a South African author these writers have on two occasions won the Booker Prize - Nadine Gordimer's The Conservationist (1974) and J.M. Coetzee's Life and Times of Michael K (1983) and once the Whitbread Prize - Christopher Hope's Kruger's Alp (1984). In addition, Christopher Hope's collection of stories, Private Parts won a PEN international award in 1982, and Njabulo Ndebele's collection Fools won the Norma Prize in 1984.
  5. Perhaps the most famous critical debate of this issue is given in Georg Lukács's work The Meaning of Contemporary Realism (London, Merlin Press, 1962) where he pits modernist works against those of critical realism. Lukács is of no doubt that works of critical realism are far more deeply engaged in the social worlds they describe than those of modernism.
  6. Gordimer, Nadine: 'From Apartheid to Afrocentrism', op. cit., p. 49.
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APPENDIX

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

## APPENDIX - BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

The information in these biographical notes has been culled from a number of sources: the writing of the individual authors, personal interviews with writers, and a number of literary histories and guides. In the case of the black writers I consulted the following works: A New Reader's Guide to African Literature, ed. Hans Zell, Carol Bundy, et. autres (London, Heinemann, 1983); Who's Who in African Literature: Biographies, Works, Commentaries, ed. Jaheinz Jahn, et autres (Tübingen, Erdmann, 1972); and African Authors: A Companion to Black African Writing, Vol. 1, 1300 - 1973 ed. Donald E. Herdeck (Washington D.C., Black Orpheus Press, 1973). As for Afrikaner writers I referred to: Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur Volume 2 by J.C. Kannemeyer (Pretoria & Cape Town, H&R Academica, 1983); Perspektief en Profiel - 'n Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Letterkunde ed. P.J. Nienaber with the collaboration of G.S. Nienaber, Rob Antonissen, André P. Brink, and a number of leading Afrikaner critics (Johannesburg, Perskor, 1982 - 5th edition); and Die Afrikaanse Literatuur Sedert Sestig ed. T.T. Cloete with the collaboration of A.P. Grové, J.P. Smuts, and Elize Botha (Cape Town, Nasou, 1980). Finally, I was also assisted in these notes by a number of press cuttings on the individual writers which were kindly sent to me by the Centre for South African Literature Research (GENSAL) and the National English Literary Museum (NELM).

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### HENNIE AUCAMP

Born in 1934 in the Eastern Cape, Hennie Aucamp is, along with De Vries, the most consistent short fiction writer in Afrikaans since the early 1960's. The major part of his oeuvre consists of short stories and his collected essays about short fiction, Kort voor Lank (1978), is one of the best critical examinations of the form by a South African writer. Aucamp grew up in the Stormberg region which has the same kind of fascination for him as the Little Karoo has for De Vries.

He was schooled in Jamestown and in 1952 started studies at Stellenbosch University. In 1959 he was awarded an M.A. in

Afrikaans for a study of the poetry of Ernst Van Heerden. Thereafter he held short-term teaching and lecturing posts in Stellenbosch, Cape Town, and Cradock. In the early 1960's he left South Africa for Europe where he studied teaching techniques of literature for secondary schools at the University of Leuven in Belgium. Since mid-1964 he has served as a lecturer and now as head of the department of education at the University of Stellenbosch. He has made several overseas trips, notable among which was a study-trip to Columbia University in 1979.

Aucamp has been highly acclaimed by Afrikaner critics for his short fiction and has received two major awards, the W.A. Hofmeyer (1974) and Hertzog Prizes (1982), for his work. He was never really part of the core-group of writers who comprised the Sestigers (Brink, Breytenbach, Barnard, Rabie, Small, Leroux, Van Niekerk, and De Vries, are the key figures) and has remained an outside figure among the writers and debates associated with the Skrywersgilde of the 1970's and 1980's. His most significant statement about his craft and his views is his introductory essay to Kort voor Lank. Here Aucamp take up a position against those writers who argue for a South African literature of engagement in social issues. He contends against the idea of a prescriptive literature and most especially against an exclusive commitment in one's work to aspects of apartheid and social injustice. These, Aucamp argues, are bound to fashions and passing phases. Constancy can be found in the "private aches" and personal difficulties of individuals. (Kort voor Lank, pp. 4 - 5). This

is a highly controversial argument in which certain of Aucamp's distinctions, especially between a literature of social commitment and one of the "private ache", are somewhat smudgily defined. Although one might sympathise with his sentiments about literary strait-jacketing, his stance against a literature about apartheid can clearly be seen as reactionary. Ironically, some of Aucamp's best works are precisely those stories and dramatic sketches which satirise the follies of apartheid and point to the misery it has caused. In this case, Aucamp's practice has surpassed his otherwise acute theoretical grasp of literature.

CHRIS BARNARD

Chris Barnard was born in the Nelspruit district of the Eastern Transvaal in 1939. He was schooled there and in the late 1950's completed a B.A. degree at Pretoria University in Afrikaans and the History of Art. He began writing young and his first published works Bekende Onrus and Die Houtbeeld (both 1961) were written during his late teens.

From 1961 until 1964 he worked in Pretoria and Johannesburg as an arts-journalist for the Afrikaans newspaper, Die Vaderland. During 1964 and 1965 he visited Europe and spent time with Breytenbach in Paris where he encouraged him to collect and publish his first stories and poems. He researched aspects of contemporary European theatre during his stay overseas. His collection Dwaal (1964) reflects Barnard's growing concern with the Absurd and Existentialism. After returning to South Africa he worked first as a publisher (1965 - 1967) and then as a

journalist and editor (1967 - 1978) of the tabloid Huisgenoot. In 1968, his story collection Duisel-in-die-Bos won a literary award in South Africa. Along with this collection, his novel Mahala (1971) gained him the major Afrikaans literary Hertzog Prize in 1973. During these years Barnard wrote plays for the stage and radio. The best of these are Pa maak vir my 'n vlieër, Pa (1964), Die rebellie van Lafras Verwey (1971), and Taraboemdery (1977). Many of his dramatic works reveal a kinship to the writings of Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter, and Sartre. Since 1978 Barnard has worked as a freelance writer, mainly for radio and television. He currently works in Johannesburg at a television studio and also runs a small farm north of that city.

Barnard was one of the key figures of the Sestiger movement, and like many of its members began to shift his concern away from overtly European literary concerns and techniques during the 1970's. His address to the Sestiger conference in 1973 is memorable for its insistent call to the writers to commit themselves more fully to the problems of the country. Sadly, his output of works in this area has been very small.

#### M.C. BOTHA

M.C. Botha was born in Pretoria in 1954 where he was schooled. Unlike most of his fellow Afrikaner writers Botha is not a university graduate and after school he took up a variety of jobs: clerk in a court, journalist, photographer, farm manager, and a wine-maker. At present he lives in the Cape where he writes on a full-time basis. All the stories in his first three

collections were written before 1980 while he was in his early twenties: these collections are Die Hartklop van Gevoel (1980), Skertse (1976 - 1979), and Die Prys wat jy moet betaal (1982). During the late 1970's Botha visited Europe for a short time. His stories of the early 1980's were collected in the volume Die einde van 'n kluisenaar se lewe (1982). He is one of the leading Afrikaner satirical writers and while his collections have been praised by critics, little attention has been paid to the nature of his satirical imagination. Along with Haasbroek he is the finest short story writer in Afrikaans to have emerged in recent years.

#### BREYTEN BREYTENBACH

Breyten Breytenbach was born in the small Cape town of Bonnievale in 1939. He was schooled in this area and matriculated at the Afrikaans High School of Wellington. He studied Afrikaans and Fine Art at the University of Cape Town during 1958 - 1959. He left South Africa in 1960, and like his friend Jan Rabie before him, worked and travelled his way around Europe. He settled in Paris in 1961, where he began his career as a painter. In the following year he married a Vietnamese, Hoang Lien (Yolande). His first collections of short fiction and poetry, Katastrofes and Die Ysterkoei moet sweet, were published in South Africa in 1964, through the active encouragement and involvement of Chris Barnard. These caused an immediate stir in the Afrikaner literary scene, because of their experimental approaches and their appropriation of European literary techniques and themes.

In 1965, these two works won a leading Afrikaans literary award. During this year Breytenbach's request for a visa for his wife to visit South Africa with him was refused and this marked the start of his opposition to the South African government. His protests about apartheid were taken up in some of his poetry and painting of the late 1960's and early 1970's. Despite this, he was accorded great acclaim by Afrikaans literary critics. Breytenbach was seen as a figure in the vanguard of the Sestiger movement. In late 1972 and early 1973 Breytenbach and his wife finally did visit the country together. During his stay he addressed a conference of leading Afrikaner literary figures in Cape Town. Here he castigated apartheid and called for greater commitment on the part of writers to the pressing South African issue of racial oppression. In August 1975 he was detained by the security police after having entered South Africa in possession of a false passport. He had spent several weeks attempting to rally support among his white friends for an anti-apartheid organization called Okhela. During this time the police had watched him closely and during his trial it was Breytenbach (not the police) who incriminated a large number of the people he had contacted. He volubly recanted his anti-apartheid position during his trial, yet was sentenced to nine years in prison: he was released in December 1982 after having served seven of these years. The prison-years offered Breytenbach a rich store of experiences for his writing, and he has culled a large number of works from this period of his life. So far, three volumes of poetry, an autobiography, and a

collection of short fiction, Voetskrif, Eklips, Yk, The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist, and Mouroir (respectively), have stemmed from these years he spent in prison. More works on this theme are promised.

Breytenbach is a charismatic individual who is regarded by many as the finest Afrikaans poet since the early 1960's. His prose writing, however, is not of the same standard as his poetry. He has been a controversial figure in South African writing whose personal adventures have claimed at least as much attention as his creative writing. Breytenbach typifies in certain ways some of the changes in Afrikaans literature since the late 1950's. Experimental and avant-garde approaches to European society and contemporary fashions have, during the late 1960's and 1970's, given way to a more direct concern with South African issues, although he has retained many European vogues in his later works. He is at present living in Paris.

#### JACK COPE

Jack Cope was born in Natal in 1913 where he was schooled. He began his career in the 1930's as a journalist and in 1935 moved to London as a correspondent for the South African Morning Newspapers Group. He spent four and a half years in England, during which time he joined the Labour Party and associated himself firmly with left-wing groups of the time. He began fiction writing seriously during the 1940's on a novel The Fair House; it is based around the Bambatha rebellion of the 1906 and 1907 in Zululand. During the 1940's he lived in the Cape where

he wrote frequently for left-wing journals such as The Guardian, Advance, and The Herald. In the early 1950's he was named as a communist, had his passport withdrawn, and was banned for three years, from 1951 to 1954. From this point on Cope began to channel his anger and opposition to apartheid into his creative writing. Harper's published his first major short story 'The Tame Ox' in 1955, and since that time his novels and story collections have been published in a wide range of countries and in a number of languages.

The Tame Ox, his first story collection, appeared in 1960, and since then two collections The Man Who Doubted (1967) and Alley Cat (1973) have also been published. Cope spent the 1960's and 1970's in the Cape and was closely associated with Afrikaner writers such as Ingrid Jonker, Uys Krige, and Jan Rabie. He was the founder and editor for many years of the literary magazine Contrast. This journal became, in his hands, one of the most respected South African literary magazines: it has published stories, poems, and articles by some of the country's best writers. Among prominent story writers, Richard Rive, Sheila Roberts, Ahmed Essop, and Mbulelo Mzamane all had dealings with Cope (while he was editor of Contrast) and were given much in the way of encouragement and instruction by him. Cope's contact with Afrikaner writers led to his admirable study of Afrikaans literature, The Adversary Within: Dissident Afrikaans Writers (1982). In early 1981 Cope left South Africa for England where he now lives and writes.

ACHMAT DANGOR

Achmat Dangor was born in 1948 in Johannesburg where he was schooled. He has lived in various parts of South Africa - Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Beaufort West. Dangor's home language is Afrikaans and although his stories are written in English many of his poems are in Afrikaans. He has a strong interest in South African history and has carried out research into black slave communities at the Cape during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: he passed his material onto the historian, Anna Boeseken. In the early 1970's Dangor met the poet Don Mattera who introduced him to African and Third World Literatures. Dangor was banned by the government between 1973 and 1978: during this period he began story writing. In 1980, his stories won the Mofolo-Plomer Prize for South African literary works and in the following year they appeared in the collection, Waiting For Leila. Dangor is one of South Africa's most promising young poets and his first collection, Bulldozer, with poems in English and Afrikaans, appeared in 1983. At present he lives in Riverlea, Johannesburg, and is working on his first novel which deals with the early history of Johannesburg.

ABRAHAMS H. DE VRIES

Abrahams H. De Vries was born in the district of Ladismith (Cape Province) in 1937. After completing his schooling in Ladismith, he studied Afrikaans-Nederlands at Stellenbosch University from 1955 until 1958. After working for a while at the Provincial Library in Cape Town he left South Africa for Holland. He

studied Afrikaans and Nederlands as well as journalism at the Gemeentelijke University of Amsterdam where he was awarded a doctoral degree in these subjects in 1963. He returned to South Africa and from 1963 until 1965 was arts editor of Die Vaderland newspaper in Johannesburg. Thereafter he held short-term lecturing posts in Afrikaans at Port Elizabeth and Rhodes Universities. Since 1969 he has held lecturer posts, first at Natal University in Pietermaritzburg and then in Durban.

De Vries is pre-eminently a short-fiction writer and more than ten individual collections of his stories have appeared since his first in 1956 when he was only nineteen years old. His first collections of the late fifties were closely bound up with his home district of the Little Karoo.

After his residence in Holland during the early 1960's his range of subjects increased dramatically. Dubbedoor (1963) and Vliegoog (1965) are two key collections of the Sestiger hey-day. De Vries has returned time and time again to the Little Karoo for inspiration in his stories and he has offered a wide range of treatments of this district. It is interesting to compare his stories of this region to those of Pauline Smith who wrote about the region some thirty or so years before him. De Vries has edited two important anthologies of Afrikaans stories Kort Keur (1977) and Die Afrikaanse Kortverhaalboek (1978; revised edition, 1982), as well as a short critical commentary on the stories included in these entitled, Kortom (1983). De Vries, like his friend Rabie, has been a prominent figure in the Afrikaanse

Skrywersgilde and in recent years has campaigned energetically against apartheid and censorship.

AHMED ESSOP

Ahmed Essop is a short story writer and a novelist. He has Indian ancestry and most of his stories focus upon the lives of characters in the South African Indian communities. Essop is a teacher by profession; but, like Mphahlele before him, he has run into difficulties with the education authorities because of his opposition to the Bantu Education system. From 1974 until 1977 he was laid off work, largely as a result of these views. He lived for over ten years in Fordsburg, Johannesburg, before being evicted along with hundreds of other black people from this area to the distant ghetto of Lenasia. Essop began writing stories in 1969 and these were variously published in journals such as Contrast, Purple Renoster, and later in Staffrider. Most of the stories of his collection The Hajji (1978) are set in Fordsburg, as is his novel The Visitation (1980). His most recent novel is The Emperor (1984). Essop's fiction has been warmly received: Nadine Gordimer, for example, has been one of his admirers. In 1979, the English Academy of Southern Africa awarded him the Olive Schreiner Prize for his story collection.

Essop is a richly humorous writer, whose work has much in common with that of the great Indian writer R.K. Narayan, whom Essop warmly admires. New collections of stories and novels by Essop are in the process of being written and published and these are

eagerly awaited by readers who have enjoyed the promise of his earlier works.

HENRIETTE GROVÉ

Henriette Grové was born in the Western Transvaal in 1922 and was schooled in the town of Potchefstroom. Between 1939 and 1942 she studied Afrikaans and English at the university there. Thereafter she taught at various schools for several years. During this time she married the Afrikaner literary academic A.P. Grové. They moved to Pietermaritzburg, Natal, in 1949 where her husband held a lecturing post for ten years. Since 1960 they have lived in Pretoria where her husband is head of the Afrikaans department of the university in that city.

Grové's major literary works are her short stories and her radio dramas. Five of her early stories were collected with those of three other Afrikaans women writers in 1957 in a volume entitled, Kwartet. Since then she has published the short story collections Jaarringe (1966), Winterreis (1971), and Die Kêrel van die Pêrel of Anatomie van 'n Leuenaar (1983), as well as a volume published under the nom de plume, Linda Joubert, called Roosmaryn en Wynruit (1962). Her major dramas are Die Onwillige Weduwee (1965), Toe hulle die Viekleur op Rooigrond gehys het (1975) and Ontmoeting by Dwaaldrif (1980). In 1981 she was awarded the Hertzog Prize, the premier Afrikaans literary accolade.

Like Aucamp, Grové has had little association with the Sestiger writers and her works display little of the common concerns of

these writers. Her stories are, for the most part, set in the rural parts of South Africa and explore the foibles of Afrikaner characters. She brings to her portraits of the countryside and its characters a penchant for satire and an unerring eye for the frailties as well as the hypocrisies of the characters.

P.J. HAASBROEK

P.J. Haasbroek was born in Pretoria in 1943. He grew up in Florida (Transvaal) and Petrusburg (Orange Free State). After military training in 1962 (most of which he spent hunting and relaxing in the Caprivi Strip) he began studying economics and political science at the University of the Orange Free State where he gained honours and masters degrees in economics. After graduating in 1968 he began a career as an academic firstly at the University of Pretoria, then at the University of Zululand, and finally back at Pretoria, where he is now senior lecturer in economics. He has recently completed a doctoral thesis in his field which is capitalism and its effects and practice in the South African economy.

Haasbroek was drawn to writing by Abraham De Vries who encouraged him to write out his various stories. His first story collection Heupvuur (1974) won the Eugène Marais Prize and since then three volumes of his short fiction have appeared: Roofvis (1975), Skrikbewind (1976), and Verby die Vlakte (1982). Roofvis was the subject of scrutiny by the South African censors and although not banned, Haasbroek is an outspoken critic of censorship. His stories are among the best of the 1970's and 1980's and he is at

the forefront of a younger generation of Afrikaans writers who have set out to examine critically the failure of their society. Haasbroek's especial concern is the unbridled violence which characterizes the present situation and it is not surprising that a number of his stories describe incidents in the bush-wars, urban terrorism, and racial conflict. He is frequently served with the sobriquet "writer of sex and violence"; yet the nature of his satirical and critical short fiction is barely considered in any reasonable measure. Along with M.C. Botha he is the writer to have suffered most lametably at the hands of Afrikaner critics who have scarcely accorded his work the attention it is due.

#### BESSIE HEAD

Bessie Head was born in Pietmaritzburg, Natal, in 1937 of mixed parentage. She suffered a difficult and at times traumatic youth, living with foster parents, being sent to Mission School and constantly living under the pressures brought to bear on a young person born of a miscegenous relationship in South Africa. She trained as a teacher and taught for four years; thereafter she served on the staff of Drum magazine as a journalist. An unsuccessful marriage, together with involvement in the trial of a friend, led her to apply for a teaching post in Botswana: citizenship was granted to her in Botswana in 1979. Unlike most of the black South African literary exiles who settled in European or American cities, Bessie Head has chosen to live in an agrarian African society. For some years she was part of the

refugee community based at the Bamangwato Development Farm. During this period she began writing fiction and three highly acclaimed novels have appeared during the 1970's; When Rain Clouds Gather, Maru, and A Question of Power. In 1977, her volume of stories, The Collector of Treasures appeared; like the novels, the story collection is set in Botswana and explores the tension in this black society, with a strong suggestion that its problems are closely bound up with and have relevance to the South African society which Head has left, but never forgotten. In recent years, Head has lived in Serowe and worked on a development scheme in the community, called the Swaneng Project. In 1981, she published Serowe: The Village of the Rainwind, which explores, by means of interviews with the people of the village, aspects of this community's history and how the past has come to effect its present position. Head's works offer variation within the strongly urban-orientated tradition of recent black Southern African writing and indicates areas of value, as well as of difficulty, within African agrarian communities.

#### CHRISTOPHER HOPE

Born in Johannesburg in 1944 Christopher Hope grew up in Pretoria where he attended the Catholic Christian Brothers School. His experiences at that school have served as a rich source of material both in his stories and novels. After school, he completed a degree in English at the University of the Witwatersrand and some years later an M.A. at Natal University. Hope's first genre was poetry and in 1974, after a short period

in England, his collection Cape Drives was published by the London Magazine. By the early 1970's he had begun writing stories and in 1975, on his permanent move to England with his family, he also began work on his first novel, A Separate Development. This appeared in 1980 and a collection of his stories Private Parts and Other Tales followed in the the next year. Other works of his include the volumes of poetry In the Country of the Black Pig (1981) and Englishmen (1985); the novel Kruger's Alp (1984) and two books for children.

Hope has been one of the most astute commentators on the South African literary scene during the 1970's and 1980's and he writes regularly for the Times Literary Supplement and the London Magazine. A collection of his critical reviews, letters, and articles is scheduled for publication during 1986. He has gained a number of prestigious literary awards for his works and is one of South Africa's most consistently excellent writers producing work of high standard in a wide range of forms. Much of his writing is characterized by a wry satirical form of humour and after Bosman, Hope has been the most sustained and successful South African satirist.

#### DAN JACOBSON

Dan Jacobson was born in Johannesburg in 1929, but grew up and was schooled in the diamond-mining town of Kimberley in the northern Cape. He returned to Johannesburg for his university education and then spent some time in Israel and England during 1949 and 1950. After his return to South Africa, he spent a

short time in Johannesburg and then moved back to his family home in Kimberley for four years. During this time he began writing stories and his first works were published in the America-Jewish journal, Commentary. Jacobson left South African for England in 1954 and has continued his career in Britain as a writer, publisher, and university teacher. Aspects of South African life dominate his early novels and most of his short stories. His two story collections A Long Way from London (1958) and Beggar My Neighbour (1964) have a large number of pieces which cast back to the South Africa of his youth and particularly to the world of Kimberley, which town he calls Lyndhurst in his stories. A selection of his stories entitled Inklings appeared in 1973. He is at present a lecturer in the English Department of University College, London.

ELSA JOUBERT

Elsa Joubert was born at Paarl in the Cape in 1922 where she was schooled. She studied at the Universities of Stellenbosch and Cape Town and after teaching for a short period joined the staff of Die Huisgenoot for two years. After her marriage to Klaas Steytler, himself a writer, she has lived in Johannesburg and now resides in Cape Town. From the late 1940's on she has travelled widely not only in Europe and the Far East, but significantly in Africa. Not only in novels and short stories, but also in travel journals she has expressed her kinship to the continent. Joubert is one of the rare Afrikaner writers to have written continuously, from early in her career, about Africa and

the diverse peoples and problems of the continent. Most of her fiction is set in Africa and her major novels are Ons wag op die Kaptein (1963); translated as To Die at Sunset in 1982), Bonga (1971), and Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena (1978; translated as Poppy in 1980). For the last novel, which has received international acclaim, she has won three South African literary awards as well as the Royal Society of Literature Prize from Britain. Her stories appeared in a collection entitled Melk in 1980.

Joubert's works stand out among those of her contemporary Afrikaans writers in their commitment to Africa; her novels, for instance, are variously set in Angola, Mozambique, and South Africa. In 1974 she wrote an impressive article for Standpunte, the leading Afrikaans literary journal, stressing the Afrikaner's bonds to Africa and to African literature. Perhaps she alone, among the Sestiger generation, was most acutely aware of the place of white South Africans on a continent which required more than simple entrenchment and cutting oneself off from its people.

#### ALEX LA GUMA

Alex La Guma was born in Cape Town in 1925 into a family with a high level of political awareness and commitment. His father, James La Guma, was a leading figure in the Communist Party of South Africa. La Guma was educated at Trafalgar High School and the Cape Technical College. During the years which followed he worked as a clerk, book-keeper, factory hand, and journalist in the Cape. La Guma joined the Communist Party as a young man and

was involved in drawing up the Freedom Charter of 1955. In 1956, he was among the 156 people arrested in the so-called Treason Trial. In the following decade La Guma and his family were frequently detained or placed under house arrest. From 1960 till 1962 he worked as a journalist for the progressive newspaper, New Age. He began his creative writing during periods of detention and house arrest and his first stories were published outside South Africa, in the journal Black Orpheus. In 1962 Mbari Publications of Ibadan issued his novella, 'A Walk in the Night'. This appeared with six other of his stories in the Heinemann African Writers Series in 1963. Four of his stories appeared in the anthology, Quartet, in 1963. La Guma's first full-length novel, And a Threefold Cord, was written during a time of house arrest and published in East Germany in 1964. With all of his writing banned in South Africa and he himself under constant threat of detention or house arrest, La Guma and his family left South Africa for Britain in 1966. In 1967, his novel about South African prison life, The Stone Country, appeared. In 1972 his strongly political novel In the Fog of the Season's End was published and, in 1979, the novel Time of the Butcherbird appeared, dealing with the enforced resettlement of black people in South Africa and the tensions of the period. Throughout the time of his exile he has maintained a prominent role in political activities and in anti-apartheid movements. He has edited an anthology of essays on South Africa entitled Apartheid (1971) and in 1978 an account of his travels in the USSR appeared, entitled A Soviet Journey. La Guma is at present the African National

Congress representative in Cuba.

E.M. MACPHAIL

E.M. Macphail was born on a farm not far from Soweto. She grew up in a series of small towns and farm districts of the Transvaal. She has lived with her family in Johannesburg since the mid-1960's and began story writing in the early 1970's. Lionel Abrahams has been an influential figure in her writing career encouraging her to publish her early works. Her collection of stories Falling Upstairs appeared in 1982 in South Africa. The tone of this work is subdued with a gentle strain of humour and satire characterizing some of its best stories. Although the affluent white suburbs are the usual setting for most of these stories the awareness of a broader South African reality underlines much of her writing about this enclosed society within a society.

MTUTUZELI MATSHOBA

Mtutuzeli Matshoba was born in Soweto in 1950. He grew up in Mzimhlope, Soweto, and was schooled in Soweto, Evaton, Lovedale College in the Cape, and Inkamana High School in Vryheid, Natal. He continued his studies at Fort Hare College where he met people such as Steve Biko, Strini Moodley, and Harry Nengwekhulu. He graduated from Fort Hare, after an interrupted period of studies, in 1977 with a B. Com. (Law) degree. Matshoba had begun story-writing at school and his first published pieces appeared, years later, in the journal Staffrider. Matshoba is perhaps the leading writer to have emerged from the pages of Staffrider.

His collection of stories, Call Me Not A Man (1979), is one of the strongest volumes of black short fiction, with a powerful involvement in aspects of South African life which debase black people, and, at the same time, a celebration of black unity in the face of these hardships. This work was banned in South Africa shortly after its appearance. In 1981, his first novel, Seeds of War, was published by Ravan Press.

#### JAMES MATTHEWS

Born in Cape Town in 1929, James Matthews is the eldest son of a large family. During the 1950's he contributed to the journals Drum and Africa South. Matthews's stories and poems have throughout offered a strong tone of protest: his three verse collections - Cry, Rage, Pass Me a Meatball, Jones, and No Time for Dreams - which contain some of the most robust and angry South African poetry of the past four decades have all been banned. In 1974 Matthews published a selection of his stories, The Park, under the imprint of the publishing house, Blac, which he founded. In 1983, a fuller collection of his stories was published by Ravan Press, using the same title, in their Staffrider Series.

#### JOHN MILES

Born in Port Elizabeth in 1938, John Miles grew up in the Eastern Cape and began his schooling at King William's Town. He matriculated at Bronkhorstspuit in the Eastern Transvaal. In 1956 he began studying at Pretoria University where he completed a master's degree in sociology, earlier having graduated with an

honours degree in philosophy. After these degrees he read Afrikaans at the same university and gained an honours degree in this subject in 1964. From 1964 he served for two years as a lecturer in Afrikaans at the University of Natal. He visited Europe during 1967 and 1968 for three months. Since 1968 he has been a lecturer in Afrikaans at the University of the Witwatersrand. In the late 1960's Miles was one of the editors of the literary magazine KOL which published works by many of the Sestigers, including Miles's first stories. In 1975, Miles, along with two fellow academics, Ernst Lindenberg and Ampie Coetzee, founded the independent publishing house Taurus, which set out to publish works which the more established publishers might have turned down for fear of their being banned after publication. Taurus is one of the bravest independent publishers in the country and has published fiction by Gordimer, Brink, and M.C. Botha.

Miles's story collection Liefs nie op straat nie appeared in 1970. Since then he has published three novels, Okker bestel twee toebroedjies (1973), Donderdag of Woensdag (1978), and Blaaskans (1983). The stories and the novels deal with violence; yet the characteristic quality, especially of the novels, is satire. Miles's works pour scorn on the Afrikaner establishment (albeit obliquely) and Donderdag of Woensdag was banned from 1978 until 1983; so too, his children's book, Stanley Bekker en die Boikot (1980). Miles has a wry, often anarchic sense of humour, which frequently appears in his fiction. Since his first stories

Miles's works have constantly overturned prevailing expectations and he is one of the country's most innovative (and mischievous) writers.

#### CASEY MOTSISI

Casey Motsisi was born in Johannesburg in 1931. He was educated in Johannesburg and Pretoria, and in the middle of his education at the Pretoria Normal College in the early 1950's left for a job on Drum magazine in Johannesburg: the post had been procured for him by his former school teacher, Can Themba, then assistant editor of the journal. Motsisi soon emerged as a writer-journalist of great wit. Casey's Bugs and On the Beat, two humorous columns, appeared in Drum and later in The World newspaper. Motsisi was one of the rare black writers of his generation who was not forced into exile. His humorous writing endeared him to a generation of black readers and he was fondly known as The Kid to thousands of township readers. After his death in 1977, Mthobi Mutloatse edited a selection of his writings entitled, Casey & Co. (1978).

#### ES'KIA MPHAHLELE

Es'kia (Ezekiel) Mphahlele was born in the Northern Transvaal in 1919. He grew up in the slums of Pretoria and was fortunate in receiving a good secondary school education. He trained as a teacher, but in the early 1950's found himself banned from his profession because of his opposition to the new State system of Bantu Education. He spent several uneasy years working as a journalist and literary editor for Drum. In 1957, Mphahlele

decided to leave South Africa with his family, and so began a period of twenty years of exile. During this time he produced his best work as an essayist, autobiographical writer, poet, and fiction writer. His autobiography, Down Second Avenue (1959), met with critical acclaim and offered readers a moving account of what it is like for a talented young black person to grow up in South Africa. His critical essays on African society and literature, The African Image (1962, 2nd edition, 1974) and Voices in a Whirlwind (1972), were topical and provocative. Although he has produced two novels The Wanderers (1968) and Chirundu (1979), it is arguable that his finest fictional works are his stories. After two rather unexceptional collections, Man Must Live (1947) (one of the earliest published story collections by a black South African in English) and The Living and the Dead (1961), In Corner B (1967) brought together Mphahlele's best fictional works in a collection of great quality: this volume was published in Kenya. Mphahlele lived variously in Africa (Nigeria, Kenya, Zambia), Europe (France), and in the United States (Denver, Pennsylvania) during the years of his exile from South Africa. As a teacher, editor and critical writer on African literature he has been one of the major figures in bringing its claim to an international audience. In 1977 he returned with his wife to South Africa where he has continued his academic career - he had previously been professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania - and soon after his arrival accepted a post at the African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Mphahlele is now professor of

African and Comparative Literature at this university. [A personal account of Mphahlele's life is given in N. Chabani Manganyi's work, Exiles and Homecomings: A Biography of Es'kia Mphahlele, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983).]

MBULELO MZAMANE

Mbulelo Mzamane was born in Brakpan on the East Rand in 1948. The son of an Anglican priest, Mzamane spent his childhood in various townships around the Witwatersrand. He was sent to Swaziland for secondary schooling where he was free to read South African literary works which had been banned in South Africa and establish a direct link with the generation of black writers who had come before him. During this period he met and was taught English by Can Themba who was in exile in Swaziland. He received an M.A. in English from the University of ROMA in Lesotho and a doctorate at the University of Sheffield. Mzamane is one of the small group of black South African literary critics and his critical essays have been published in journals in South Africa and elsewhere. His story collection Mzala appeared in 1980, revealing his strong kinship with earlier traditions of black humorous and satirical storytelling. His first novel, The Children of Soweto (1982), deals with the period of the children's uprising in 1976 in the black townships. He is at present a lecturer of literature at Amadou Bello University, Nigeria.

NJABULO NDEBELE

Njabulo Ndebele grew up in Western Native Township, Johannesburg, and later in Charterston Location, Nigel. His experiences

particularly in Charterston Location strongly inform the stories of his collection Fools. This work appeared in 1983 and won the prestigious Noma Prize for African writing. Ndebele holds an M.A. in English from Cambridge and a Ph.D. from the University of Denver. He currently lectures in literature at the University of Lesotho. Ndebele has been an active contributor over several years to the influential journal Staffrider.

#### WELMA ODENDAAL

Welma Odendaal was born in Pretoria in 1952. After school she trained in fine arts and worked for several years as a theatre designer and then as an animation artist for the National Film Board. Her first story collection Getuie vir die Naaktes (1974) was followed by Keerkring in 1977 and this second story collection was swiftly banned. From 1976 until 1978 she edited, in association with Peter Wilhelm and Mbulelo Mzamane, a journal for young South African writers called Donga. During 1977 two individual issues were banned and then, in the following year, the entire journal was banned from appearing again. At about this time (November 1977) she was suddenly dismissed from her post as sub-editor in the news-room at the South African Broadcasting Corporation: the connection between her dissidence and her dismissal seems assured. After a short trip to Israel in 1978 she returned to South Africa where she now works on the editorial staff of The Cape Times. Sadly, since the banning of Keerkring in 1977 Odendaal has not published any of her fiction. Her story collections bore witness to a writer of energy and

promise who was among the leading young Afrikaner writers in protest against apartheid. Indeed, Keerkring and her editorship of Donga brought Odendaal into the mainstream of writers castigating apartheid and the violent excesses it has produced. One hopes that further works of hers will appear, to develop the impressive start she made as a young writer.

#### ALAN PATON

Born in 1903 in Pietermaritzburg, Natal, Alan Paton has spent most of his life in his home province. He was schooled, received university education, and started his career there. After graduating with a degree in mathematics and physics from Natal University College he spent eleven years during the 1920's and 1930's teaching science at schools, first in Ixopo and then in Pietermaritzburg. In 1935 he became principal of Diepkloof Reformatory (near Johannesburg) where he introduced an enterprising programme of liberal and enlightened education for the young black boys of the institution. In 1946 and 1947 he set out on a study of prisons and reformatories in Europe and North America. During this time he wrote his novel Cry, the Beloved Country which appeared to international acclaim in 1948. Paton's novel opened an international readership's eyes to the evils of racial discrimination in South Africa. In 1948 he resigned from Diepkloof Reformatory partly as a result of opposition to his policies there by the government. Dr. Verwoerd closed the institution down in 1953.

From 1948 to 1953 Paton lived mainly on the south coast of Natal

where he wrote his second novel Too Late the Phalarope (1953) and many of the Diepkloof stories which were to appear later in Debbie Go Home (1961). In May 1953, Paton was one of the founder members of the Liberal Party of South Africa which was eventually forced to disband fifteen years later in 1968 by a government act (the Political Interference Act) proscribing black and white membership of the same political party. Paton became chairman of the Liberal Party in 1956, and in 1958 national president, a position he held until the party was dissolved. His political essays of this time were collected in The Long View (1968) ; a biography of Jan Hofmeyer appeared in 1964 and his short writings about Christianity, Instrument of Thy Peace, appeared in 1968. In 1960 his passport was withdrawn by the government only to be reissued to him ten years later in 1970. Since 1968 Paton has devoted himself full-time to writing. In 1969 Kontakion for you Departed, his tribute to his first wife appeared, and in 1973 his biography of Archbishop Geoffrey Clayton, Apartheid and the Archbishop. Knocking on the Door, his selected writings (including several fine uncollected stories), appeared in 1975. The first volume of his autobiography Towards the Mountain (1980) and his novel Ah, but your Land is Beautiful (1981) are the most recent books by this venerable figure of South African letters and politics. Paton's political involvement, his education project at Diepkloof, and his writings all bear witness to this courageous and talented man's struggle against oppression and social injustice in South Africa.

JAN RABIE

Jan Rabie was born in the Cape Province, at George in 1920. He grew up in a variety of small Cape towns and districts where his father served as a teacher. He studied Afrikaans at the University of Stellenbosch from 1937 until 1939 and completed a teachers' diploma there in the following year. From 1941 until 1943 he taught at schools in Umtata and Knysna. Thereafter he moved to Johannesburg where he began full-time writing. He completed an M.A. in Afrikaans at Stellenbosch in 1945. During these years he produced little writing of any great merit, but in 1948, after moving to Europe, he began producing prose works of singular quality. Rabie remained in Europe, based mainly in Paris, for seven years. During this time he wrote the series of short prose works which were later to make up his collection 21. This collection was a major event in Afrikaans literature as Rabie's pieces propelled literary interest to Europe and beyond the narrow domain of realist and rural prose writing. On his return to South Africa in 1955, however, Rabie became increasingly concerned with the effects of apartheid and abandoned almost entirely his overt preoccupation with surrealism and existentialism, which were key features of 21 and his novel Mens-alleen. His novel Ons, die Afgod (1958) dealt explicitly with the hardships foisted on black people in South Africa. Subsequently, his four novels, Eiland voor Africa (1964), Die groot anders-maak (1964), Waar jy sterwe (1966 - translated by Rabie as A Man Apart in 1969), and Ark (1977), formed a series of works exploring some of the historical roots of racism and social

division in the country. During the 1960's and 1970's he wrote a number of stories, most which touch upon the history and racial conflicts of South Africa. On his sixtieth birthday, in 1980, a collection of his entire short-fiction oeuvre appeared.

Throughout the major part of his career Rabie has campaigned against apartheid. Aside from his novels and stories on this subject he has written a number of polemical papers, reviews, and articles on this question. On his return from Paris in 1955, Rabie worked for two years for the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Since 1957, he has worked as a full-time writer. In the late 1960's he left South Africa with his wife, Marjorie Wallace, on a Carnegie Travel Grant for America, Britain, Western Europe, Israel, and finally Crete, where they lived for three years. Since 1970 he and his wife have lived in the small Cape coastal town of Onrusrivier, the home of writers Uys Krige and Jack Cope (till 1981), who are Rabie's close friends.

During the 1970's Rabie was a key figure in founding the Afrikaans Skrywersgilde (Afrikaans Writers' Guild), an organisation whose members include leading English and Afrikaans, black and white, writers. Rabie has been one of the guiding lights of the Skrywersgilde.

In many respects Rabie is a pioneer in recent Afrikaans literature. He led the Sestiger move to a concern for European literary and social trends, especially with 21; and when on his return to South Africa he swiftly turned to writing almost

exclusively about apartheid, this tendency was to be even more widely followed by Afrikaner writers, although not until the 1970's. Rabie's has thus been a catalyst for many of the developments in contemporary Afrikaans literature, not only through his works, but also by his contacts with a wide range of South African writers and his commitment to seeing the end of apartheid in the country. [I consulted J.C. Coetzee's monograph Jan Sebastian Rabie (Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Natal, Durban, 1979) for some of the information mentioned in this biographical account.]

#### RICHARD RIVE

Richard Rive was born in 1931 in District Six, Cape Town. He was schooled in District Six and later graduated at the University of Cape Town in English; he trained as a teacher at Hewat Training College, Cape Town. Subsequently, Rive gained degrees from Columbia and Oxford Universities: his Oxford doctoral thesis was on the works of Olive Schreiner. Rive wrote stories during the 1950's which were published in journals in South Africa and overseas; in 1963, a collection of these, African Songs, appeared. He edited an anthology of South African stories, Quartet, in the early 1960's, which featured his own stories as well as those by Alex La Guma, James Matthews, and Alf Wannenburgh. In 1964, he edited an anthology, Modern African Prose, and his novel set in the time of the crisis after Sharpeville, Emergency, appeared in that year. His first story collection and novel were banned in South Africa. In 1977, his

Selected Writings were published in South Africa and his autobiography, Writing Black, appeared in 1983. In 1983, a revised edition of his earlier stories along with several new pieces appeared under the title, Advance, Retreat. Rive is now the head of the department of English at Hewat Training College in Cape Town.

#### SHEILA ROBERTS

Sheila Roberts was born in Johannesburg and grew up in Potchefstroom in the Western Transvaal. Like Barney Simon, Roberts grew up in a working class environment; her father was a miner who later worked at the military camps of Potchefstroom.

She left school early and later resumed her studies graduating with degrees from the universities of South Africa and Pretoria. Her first short stories appeared in Contrast during the late-1960's and a collection of stories entitled Outside Life's Feast appeared in 1975. This won the Olive Schreiner Prose Award of that year. After lecturing in English at Pretoria University, Roberts left South Africa for a lecturing post at Michigan State University during 1977. She is now associate professor of English at that University. Since her first collection of stories she has written two novels, He's my Brother and The Weekenders, a further collection of stories, This Time of Year, and a critical study of Dan Jacobson's writing.

#### BARNEY SIMON

Barney Simon was born in 1933 in Johannesburg. He spent his

early years in Troyeville, a semi-slum section of Johannesburg which had, at the time, a diverse population drawn from a variety of nationalities. Simon's parents were Lithuanian Jewish immigrants to South Africa. Like Herman Bosman, Simon went to Jeppe High School and his earliest stories were published in the magazine Trek, along with early works by Gordimer and Cope. Trek was closely associated with the works of Bosman. The young Barney Simon became friendly with Lionel Abrahams who at the end of the 1940's was being coached in writing by Bosman.

Simon spent most of the 1950's in London in a number of jobs. He had the good fortune of working in the theatre with Joan Littlewood. He returned to South Africa in 1959 and soon after his return became associated with Athol Fugard and theatre groups in Johannesburg. He worked as a copywriter during most of the 1960's while pursuing at the same time his interest in directing drama. He became associate editor of The New American Review in 1968 and in the early 1970's founded a theatre group called The Company in Johannesburg. Barney Simon is one of the most highly regarded theatre directors in the world and his productions have been seen in many countries to great acclaim. He has had a long and highly productive relationship with Athol Fugard, many of whose works he has directed. Although theatre has been Simon's greatest interest he has also written a number of fine stories. His early stories have been collected by Lionel Abrahams and Patrick Cullinan and appeared under the title Jo'burg Sis! in 1974. A number of these take the form of dramatic monologues,

specially written by Simon for actors of his theatre group in Johannesburg. Several of these have been performed both in Johannesburg and London. Simon spends most of his time in Johannesburg at The Market Theatre.

CAN THEMBA

Can Themba was born in Marabastad, Pretoria, in 1924. He was schooled in Pretoria and Pietersburg. In 1947 he graduated with distinction in English from Fort Hare University College where he studied on a Mendi Memorial Scholarship. He taught English at Western Native Township for several years and, after a story of his won a competition in Drum magazine in 1953, he started work as a journalist for that journal and the tabloid, Africa. Themba eventually became an associate editor of Drum and The Golden City Post. He was a figure of influence among fellow journalists and writers and his magnetic personality brought him into contact with a large number of major young black South African writers of the period. Themba was a witty, urbane man, with an insatiable appetite for drink. He wrote pungent critical pieces about the racial system in South Africa and his journalistic writings often exposed some of the more heinous aspects of apartheid to a local and international readership. Themba eventually lost his job on Drum and taught for a period at an Indian high school in Fordsburg. In 1963 Themba left South Africa with his family for Swaziland where he remained in exile until his death in 1968. His writing was banned in South Africa in the early 1960's and this had a strongly disturbing influence on him. A posthumous

collection of his work, The Will to Die, was published by Heinemann in 1972, and this work was finally released from banning in South Africa in 1982.

PETER WILHELM

Peter Wilhelm was born in 1943 and has spent most of his life in Johannesburg. Although trained as a teacher, his profession is journalism. He was on assignment in 1974 in Mozambique at the time of the MFM uprising. Since that time he has worked as an economic journalist on The Financial Mail in Johannesburg where he now holds a senior position. His first story collection LM appeared in 1975 and he has subsequently produced two novels The Dark Wood and An Island Full of Grass: the latter won the Mofolo-Plomer Prize of 1976. He has also had a collection of poetry entitled White Flowers published and has recently completed a book for children entitled Summer's End. Wilhelm was involved in the establishment of the Artists' and Writers' Guild of South Africa during the 1970's and was one of the editors of Donga (along with Welma Odendaal) before its banning. His most recent collection of stories At the End of a War appeared in 1981.

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## SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

This Select Bibliography is not a complete list of all the works consulted and referred to in this study, yet represents a record of all the major works which have gone towards its making. For instance, I have omitted from the section of individual short story collections most of those works which were written before the period of the study and some later collections of which I am nonetheless aware.

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